



Briefing Note 2—The Bookshop Story

Gay's The Word is London's lesbian and gay community bookshop. The shop was set up in 1979 by a small group of gay people to provide a central reference point for gay and feminist writing of all kinds. It exists as a specialist bookseller, and has always been regarded by those involved as a gay community resource, as it does not operate at a profit in the conventional commercial sense—no payments of any kind are made to the directors, shareholders, or anyone other than the shop workers. Expenses for directors attending meetings, operating bookstalls (at conferences etc.), or helping out in the shop itself are not paid.

The Books

Over the last five years, Gay's The Word has grown from a bold experiment into an established resource for all lesbians and gay men, carrying a current stock of well over 2000 titles (both new and second-hand), pamphlets and periodicals on all facets of gay experience—novels, biographies, autobiographies, poetry, plays, history, politics, humour, guides, handbooks. Over the last decade the gay movement—both inside Britain and abroad—has stimulated an immense amount of vital and important literature; it has produced formidable new writers; and it has generated an important new interest in gay authors of both the distant and recent past. These works are rarely reviewed in the national press, and few bookshops stock more than a fraction of this output, so even recent titles can be very difficult to find. They could be discovered spread among the nation's booksellers, but Gay's The Word has drawn them all together into a

comprehensive central reference point for the gay community, and is also a supplier of this specialist work to both public and institutional libraries.

The Name

The forthright name 'Gay's The Word' was deliberately selected as a statement of openness and honesty from the gay movement. It has the further benefit that no-one can have any doubt or be in any confusion about the nature and the orientation of the books on sale.

A Community Centre

From the very beginning, the shop premises have been used as a community and information centre for lesbians and gay men. A seating area has always been provided where customers are welcome to linger, to talk, argue, and debate current issues. A tea-pot and coffee dispenser are always on the go. There is a large noticeboard offering space for any member of the gay community wishing to offer or obtain information, accommodation or merchandise. Leaflets and posters promoting gay and lesbian organisations and events are displayed and distributed. No charge for the use of the shop in this way is made.

The shop premises are also made available, out of business hours, to various community groups for their meetings and other activities. Organisations regularly using this facility include the Gay Black Group, the GTW Lesbian Discussion Group, and Gay Icebreakers. Other frequent events in-

clude book launches, readings, and open discussions with contemporary gay authors and writers. No charges are made, even for overheads, and all such groups are warmly welcomed.

Expansion Postponed

Plans to expand every aspect of the bookshop service, by moving to larger (and more expensive) premises, originally scheduled for 1984, have now had to be indefinitely postponed as a direct result of the actions of HM Customs and Excise.

The bookshop is affiliated to the Booksellers Association of Great Britain, the International Gay Association and the NCCL.