

Charity Shops

Posted by Peter on 3 October 2007

In many towns in England, the main shopping street is called "High Street". We often use the expression "high street" to mean the main shopping street of any town or suburb, no matter what its real name is. Or we talk about "the high street" to mean shopping facilities generally, particularly shops that people use every day like food shops. So, when a newspaper writes about "high street prices", for example, they just mean the prices of everyday things that people might buy in high street shops.

And we often complain that high street shops are the same boring shops everywhere in England. Many high street shops are branches of big national [chains](#). For example, there is Next, and Marks and Spencer, which sell clothes; and WH Smith, which sells stationery, books and magazines; and Boots, the chemists; and Woolworths, where you can buy almost anything, provided that it is cheap and made of plastic. You can find these shops in most high streets in England. In most high streets, too, you will find one or more [charity shops](#). Charity shops are shops which are run by [charities](#) to help them raise money. People bring things that they no longer want, and the charity shop sells them to other people. What sort of things? Clothes, shoes, hats, bags, children's toys, books, CDs, [crocker](#)y, kitchen things, mugs commemorating the wedding of Charles and Diana - all sorts of things, in other words.

The first charity shop was set up in 1947. Since then, charity shops have become very successful in England. There are over 7000 of them altogether. They raise well over Â£100 million each year for the charities that own them. They are cheap to run. Often they occupy shop [premises](#) that no-one else wants, and where the rent is low. Most of their staff are volunteers. The shops do not have to pay tax on their profits. The charity OXFAM, which helps people in developing countries, has the best-known charity shops in England, but there are many others, including shops run by small local charities.

I enjoy visiting charity shops. They are all different, unlike the big high street shops. There is always a chance that I will find something really interesting or unusual. Here are some of the things I have learned about charity shops:

- >> they have a special smell, of old clothes.
- >> women are much more likely than men to give used clothes to a charity shop, and more likely to buy clothes there.
- >> people who bought CDs of really bad bands ten years ago eventually give the CDs to a charity shop.
- >> if you go to a charity shop in an area where [well-off](#) people live, you can often find expensive designer clothes at bargain prices.
- >> it always takes three charity shop volunteers to operate the [till](#).

Finally, here is another way in which charity shops are really useful to busy families in modern Britain. Your children arrive home. They tell you proudly that they are in a play at school. And they need [costumes](#) - before tomorrow. No problem. Give them Â£5 and send them to the nearest charity shop. They will come back with some amazing rubbish. They will take it to school next day to wear in the school play. Everyone will say they look wonderful. And when they come home again - why, you can take it all back to the charity shop, of course.

Photo of charity shop window by [World of oddy/flickr](#). There is a mug commemorating the wedding of Charles and Diana at the front of the window! Picture of Oxfam bookshop by [Gary Thomson/flickr](#)

This is the text of the podcast at <http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=333>,