

CHORD WORKSHOP – ‘BEYOND THE SHOP, 1500-2000’ - 2 April 2008

*On the margins of the book trade in
early modern England*

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The proposed paper will look at how books and other texts were distributed in ways that were separate from the mainstream book trade. The activities of chapmen, book pedlars and news-men, and their sources of supply, will be outlined. The various reasons for marginal or even secret distribution of texts will be considered, along with the relationship between the book trade ‘proper’ and people working on its fringes.

The paper will then move on to a case study of two ‘underground’ pedlars of Catholic books and artefacts apprehended in Leicester in the early seventeenth century. One of them, Richard Crosland, is a particularly interesting case because the record of his interrogation in 1604, and the list that was made of his books and pictures, have survived in the Borough Records of Leicester – rare evidence for this kind of activity. A second case, Widow Stanley (1616), is also discussed. In addition to books and devotional items, she was carrying letters and messages, which suggests that such pedlars formed part of a vital underground communication network for the beleaguered Catholic community of Jacobean England.

John Hinks is an Honorary Fellow at the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, where he is researching networks and communities in the British book trade. At the University of Birmingham he is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of English, where he edits the British Book Trade Index website and teaches on the MA Text and Book, and also a Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Modern History, where he teaches a course on the cultures of print and performance in early modern England.