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The Trade in Illicit Books: A Study of English Mercantile Influence in the 1520s

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A study of English mercantile influence in the 1520s

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Contents

Abbreviations

LJH	E. F. Rogers (ed.), *The Letters of Sir John Hackett, 1526-1534* (Virginia, 1971)
LP	J. S. Brewer, (ed.) *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII: preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum, and elsewhere in England*, Vol. IV, (London, 1875)
ROLLCO	The Records of London's Livery Companies Online http://www.londonroll.org/
TNT	E. Arber (ed.), *William Tyndale; The First Printed English New Testament* (London, 1871)

Introduction

In December 1525 Edward Lee, Almoner to the King, wrote to Henry VIII warning him of a plot led by Tyndale to organise an influx of his English New Testament into the country. He wrote:

> an Englishman, your subject, at the solicitation and instance of Luther, with whome he is, hathe translated the Newe Testament in to English, and within a fewe dayes entendethe to arrive with the same emprinted in Englond. I neede not advertise your Grace what infection and daunger may ensue heerbie, if it be not withstonded.[1]

The New Testament in English posed a unique threat to the Church in England. While foreign printers had produced books in the English vernacular since 1483, the New Testament in English had an appeal far wider than biblical commentaries and polemical texts.[2] The extent of the appeal of the English New Testament was such that in 1526, George Spatalin noted in a diary entry that; 'the English indeed have such a desire for the gospel, although the king opposes and dislikes it, that they say they would buy a New Testament, even if each copy cost 100 000 of money'.[3] The perceived danger posed by the New Testament in English led to extensive operations from the 1520s to halt the influx of this and other harmful literature into England.[4] First Cardinal Wolsey and then Thomas More undertook large-scale operations to prevent the movement of heretical literature from the Continent and remove it from English hands.[5] Nevertheless, the presence of illicit texts in the country persisted and helped to encourage a reformation discourse. It is the continuing influx of English New Testaments and other reformist literature throughout the 1520s that will be of interest in this essay. While the role of Thomas More in battling reformation literature has received much attention from historians, probably due to his more violent and hands-

[1] H. Ellis (ed.), *Original Letters Illustrative of English History including numerous letters; from autographs in the British Museum, the State Paper Office, and one or to other collections*, Third Series, Volume ii (London, 1846), 74.
[2] E. G. Duff, *A Century of the English Book Trade: Short Notice of All Printers, Stationers, Book-Binders and Others Connected with it from the Issue of the First Dated Book in 1457 to the Incorporation of the Company of Stationers in 1557* (London, 1905), xi-xii.
[3] TNT, item no. II.i 18-24.
[4] H. W. Winger, 'Regulations Relating to the Book Trade in London from 1357 to 1586', *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community and Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (July, 1956), 166-9.
[5] In particular, see LP, item no. 995, 434.

on approach, Wolsey's engagement with heretical literature has received less interest.[6] Likewise, much work has been undertaken to investigate the distribution of literature within England and the printing of literature abroad but has failed to acknowledge those who physically transported copies of such books overseas. Works investigating the so-called 'Christian Brethren' have searched intensively to establish networks of internal English distributors.[7] Equally, most reformation historians at least mention the role of reform communities on the Continent including polemics and their printers, yet the intermediaries between these two groups are largely ignored.[8]

As early as 1905 Duff suggested that interest in the smuggling of illicit texts should be distinct from the study of the licit book trade.[9] Indeed, the majority of known cases of smuggling of illicit texts involved merchants whose primary trade was in textiles, wine and other conventional produce, rather than the trade in books or paper. In recent years, the topic of merchants and smuggling has received increasing attention from historians. The works of Carus-Wilson and Laurence Stone on the establishment of organized companies of merchants and their interaction with the Crown has substantially increased our knowledge of the merchant community.[10] Since these early works on the subject much more has been established yet merchants remain an elusive

[6] W. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535* (London, 1964), 277-83; D. Ginsberg, 'Ploughboys versus Prelates: Tyndale and More and the Politics of Biblical Translation', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), 45-61.

[7] These include; S. Brigden, 'Thomas Cromwell and the 'brethren'', in C. Cross, D. Loads and J. Scarisbrick, *Law and Government under the Tudors, Essays Presented to Sir Geoffrey Elton* (Cambridge, 1988); J. Davis, 'The Christian Brethren and the Dissemination of Heretical Books', in R. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and the Book; Papers Read at the 2000 Sumer Meeting and 2001 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Suffolk, 2004) 190-200; A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558* (London, 1959), esp. 11-25; A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation; Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988).

[8] E. Arber, 'Introduction' in E. Arber (ed.), *William Tyndale: The First Printed English New Testament* (London, 1871), esp. 28-41; Davis, 'The Christian Brethren', esp. 190-3; I. Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (New York, 2000); J. N. King, and M. Rankin, 'Print, Patronage, and the Reception of Continental Reform: 1521-1603', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1/2 (2008), 49-67; C. S. Meyer, 'Henry VIII Burns Luther's Books, 12th May 1521', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* Vol. 9, No. 2 (Oct, 1958), esp. 173-5.

[9] Duff, *A Century of the English Book Trade*, xii.

[10] See, for example; E. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (London, 1967); E. Carus-Wilson, 'The Origins and Early Development of the Merchant Adventurers' Organisation in London as shown in their own records', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Apr. 1933) 147-76; L. Stone, 'State Control in Sixteenth-Century England', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1947), 103-20.

group.[11] Successful merchants could create vast wealth and come to own much property though which to trade and network. They were also generally better educated than other internal traders, they were often literate and many could speak numerous languages.[12] Moreover, aside from their elite standing as rich and educated men, they were also granted significant political weight through the powerful guilds and companies they created. In addition, many occupied the positions of Mayor, Alderman and Sherriff, and the merchant community made up the electorate for such posts.

Recent study has also come to reveal large levels of corruption among some merchants. Since Ramsey first acknowledged the extent of the international smuggling trade in 1952, many others have sought to do the same.[13] Indeed, it has been demonstrated that smuggling may have played a significant role in many merchants' income, at least in the regions that have been more intensively investigated.[14] However, despite an increase in interest in the smuggling trade, the involvement of merchants in the smuggling of illicit texts has been largely overlooked. Until Fudge's recent overarching work that broadly outlined the known cases of merchants trading in illicit texts, only vague suggestions had been made as to the extent of merchant involvement.[15] Winger has suggested that traders of illicit texts were no more than 'poor scholars, obscure peddlers and aliens', and Meyer has proposed that English merchants traded in Lutheran texts to contribute to their income.[16] Yet neither of these studies has provided much in the way of solid evidence, and until Fudge's work few historians had attempted to give a narrative account of such events.

This oversight in the historiography is partially a result of a lack of written evidence. Not only are we attempting to assess illicit activity that is, for obvious reasons, largely

[11] See, for example; R. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653*(Cambridge, 1993); E. Hunt, and J. Murray, *A History of Business in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550* (Cambridge, 1999); J. Kermode, *Medieval Merchants* (Cambridge, 1998).
[12] J. Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1960), 9-11.
[13] For example, see; P. Croft, 'Trading with the Enemy, 1595-1604', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 32 (1989), 281-302; E. T. Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy; Reconstructing the Smugglers' Trade of Sixteenth Century Bristol* (Farnham, 2012); G. D. Ramsey, 'The Smugglers' Trade: A Neglected Aspect of English Commercial Development', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 2 (Jan. 1952) 131-57.
[14] P. Musket, 'Smuggling in the Cinque Ports in the Sixteenth Century', *Cantium*, Vol. 2 (1970), 9-15; Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy*; N. Williams, 'Francis Shaxton and the Elizabethan Port Books', *English Historical Review*, Vol. LXVI (1951), 387-95.
[15] J. D. Fudge, *Commerce and Print in the Early Reformation* (Boston, 2007).
[16] Winger, 'Regulations Relating to the Book Trade', 167; Meyer, 'Henry VIII', 173.

unrecorded, Rode has demonstrated that even the licit trade in books was ineffectively recorded until the later sixteenth century.[17] As with any new trade, regulation is often slow to form and records lack detail. Rode's explorative study is the most comprehensive of the licit book trade at the present time and has minimal detail.[18] Nonetheless, Government records of those caught dealing in illicit texts do exist in volume and have been demonstrated by reformation historians to be most useful in analysing the internal English trade in illicit texts. It is through court cases, examinations and Government documents such as letters, proclamations and depositions that this essay will attempt to better trace merchant involvement in the spread of reformation books. While numerous cases of merchants having been caught dealing in illicit texts exist, they rarely resulted in legal pursuit of the accused and even less frequently resulted in punishment.[19] Of the ten individual merchants that will be of interest here, all were quite clearly involved to varying degrees in the smuggling of illicit texts. Yet none were successfully prosecuted for their part in the trade before the fall of Thomas Wolsey in 1529. Six of these were never pursued in spite of clear involvement and four were absolved of their roles.[20] As such, the historiography has largely overlooked their involvement. This essay will attempt to counteract this trend and suggest that the lack of harsh treatment of these merchants was not the result of limited involvement, but rather a result of a blind-eye culture to mercantile corruption. The involvement of merchants in the movement of illicit texts has been well established by Fudge, as such while the known cases will be addressed here, they will not take a narrative form but rather be presented as part of a wider suggestions of mercantile corruption. [21] Croft and Jones have demonstrated extensive corruption in various merchant communities and this essay will expand on such works through the specific smuggling of reformation texts.[22] We will address some of the reasons that this was possible and suggest that their political, social and financial standing played a significant role in the authorities overlooking their involvement.

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[17] Y. Rode, 'Sixty-Three Gallons of Books: Shipping Books to London in the Late Middle Ages', in E. Cayley and S. Powell (eds.), *Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, 1350-1550: Packaging, Presentation and Consumption*, (Liverpool, 2013), pp. 68-84.
[18] Rode, 'Sixty-Three Gallons of Books'.
[19] See appendix 1 for a full list of the men that will be discussed here.
[20] See appendix 1; JA, TD, TE, WG, RHal and JS were never pursued. WC, WD, RHar and HM were pursued but never successfully prosecuted.
[21] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*.
[22] Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy*; Croft, 'Trading with the Enemy', 281-302.

Chapter I: Politics; Influence abroad

In August 1525, Sir Robert Wingfield wrote to Wolsey from Holland to report that the country was 'largely infect[ed]' with Lutheranism, and specifically that the city of Antwerp was 'marvellously corrupt'.[23] This, and concern from diplomats in other European countries, led to Wolsey placing investigators on the continent from the early 1520s.[24] Many of the investigators reported back with fears that heretical books could not be contained to the large European centres such as Antwerp and Paris, and would find their way into England.[25] Such concerns appear on numerous occasions, yet the investigators proceeded to primarily target printers and resorted to buying up copies of heretical literature to remove it from circulation. In 1527 and 1528 Hackett and Rinck both resorted to buying 'vp all the fors[ayd] bookes and [sending] them to your Grace there to burne', rather than perusing other buyers who may have been looking to move them into English territory.[26] Moreover, while polemic writers on the Continent were the focus of several large-scale legal operations, merchants who were clearly involved in the distribution of their texts avoided attention.

John Hackett's pursuit of Richard Harmon is a lengthy story but a good demonstration of merchant influence abroad preventing the pursuit of prosecution by the English Government. Richard Harmon was a London merchant who was also a *poorter* of Antwerp.[27] It is likely that the authorities first noticed him in around 1526 through his connection to Simon Fish, to whom he supplied English New Testaments for distribution in and around London.[28] Harmon seems to have been involved in some kind of distribution network, transporting English New Testaments from the Continent to specific distributors stationed in England.[29] In a letter written to the Emperors

[23] LP, item no. 1549, 696.
[24] These included Sir John Hackett, Sir Herman Rinck, John West and Sir Robert Wingfield; Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 144-8.
[25] LP, item no. 1549, 695-6; item no. 1802, 805; item no. 1803, 805; item no. 4407, 1930-1; item no. 5094, 2220-1; TNT, item no. III.ii 25-6; LJH, item no. 33, 72-6; item no. 24, 43-6; item no. 33, 72-6; item no. 37, 80-3.
[26] LJH, item no. 31, 68; item no. 78, 173-5; TNT, item no. IV.iv 32-6.
[27] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 163.
[28] E. Hildebrandt, 'A Study of the English Protestant exiles in Northern Switzerland and Strasbourg 1439-47 and their role in the England Reformation', PhD Thesis (Durham University, 1982), 8; TNT, item no. V.vii, 43-4.
[29] LJH, item no. 79, 175-7.

Council at Machlyng, Harmon admitted to transporting Lutheran books but merely denied that they were produced in Antwerp.[30] He was likely a supporter of the Lutheran cause and was also accused of sheltering Lutherans in his home.[31] In mid-1528 he was looking for a buyer for three hundred New Testaments in English and likely sold these to Simon Fish.[32] From around this time, Harmon became a priority target for Sir John Hackett and over the next year Hackett attempted to have Harmon arrested against a swell of political and bureaucratic landmines. While Hackett was able to take Harmon prisoner on 14th July 1528, by 31st December Harmon was walking free and in April 1529 the Antwerp authorities had instead arrested Hackett himself following an implication by Harmon.[33] Hackett was of course granted diplomatic immunity from the charge that he had caused Harmon to 'suffyrt in presson', yet this flexing of a political muscle by Harmon demonstrates the weight of his influence in Antwerp's political circuit.[34] Harmon's influence in the political sphere was such that despite solid evidence that Harmon was involved in large-scale illicit text distribution, and multiple pleas from Hackett for aid, the English Crown refused to step in and allowed an English ambassador to be arrested by a foreign force. This case alone demonstrates the extensive political authority Harmon was allowed to exact abroad, and helps to explain why English authorities might have been somewhat apprehensive about pursuing powerful merchants on the Continent.

Moreover, Harmon's case may be extreme but is not unique. In December 1528 Friar West, another investigator on the Continent, wrote home to England that he was 'so dessolatte that with owt your [ie. the English Crown's] helpe that I myght com to the speche off my Lordes Grace, they wyll put me in prysson'.[35] In this case, the man being hunted was not a merchant, but rather polemical writer William Roye. Nonetheless, this again demonstrates the precarious position of Government agents searching for those involved in the illicit book trade on the Continent. Certainly the War of the League of Cognac played a role in the threat of arrest in the case of West, but it seems evident that Harmon was 'throwing his weight' in politics when he 'cawssyt [Hackett]

[30] LJH, item no. 70, 161; item no. 71, 162.
[31] TNT, item no. V.iii, 39.
[32] TNT, item no. V.vii, 43-4.
[33] LJH, item no. 68, 156-7; item no. 80, 177-81; item no. 95, 199-202; item no. 111, 232-40.
[34] LJH, item no. 111, 232-40.
[35] LJH, item no. 94, 197-9.

to be arestyth'.[36] While West was still undercover and feared arrest in a general sense, Hackett believed himself to be safe on his return to Antwerp in 1529 and was specifically imprisoned for his pursuit of Harmon.[37] Fudge places blame for Hackett's arrest on a lack of interest by Wolsey in the case of Richard Harmon.[38] However, Wolsey's specific call to have Harmon arrested and his encouraging letters to Hackett suggests that Wolsey was in fact keen to have Hackett under lock and key, but was unable to do so in the political circumstances.[39] Claire Cross has explored the lives of exiles on the Continent and demonstrates the relative safety of their operations there.[40] The intervention of the Antwerp Government on behalf of a man evidenced to have committed heresy and perhaps even treason is stark example of this. Reformers considered the Continent a safe haven and merchants were particularly well equipped to embrace the possibility of help abroad.

[36] LJH, item no. 111, 232-40.
[37] LJH, item no. 94, 197-9; item no. 111, 232-40.
[38] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 167-70.
[39] P. Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey* (London, 1992), 491-3.
[40] C. Cross, 'Exiles in the English Reformation, 1520-1570', *History Review*, Vol. 32 (Dec., 1998).

Chapter II: Politics; Influence at Home

Having looked briefly at the influence of merchants on the Continent, this chapter will explore the possibility that English merchants were able to avoid the interest of the authorities due to their political position at home in England. The establishment of powerful guilds and companies and the political weight of merchants as Mayors and Aldermen will be addressed as an explanation for the oversight of merchant involvement in the smuggling of illicit texts. For example, while the case of Richard Harmon took place largely on the Continent, the evidence his operation provides can also illuminate much about politics within England. In 1528, a search of Harmon's Antwerp home revealed a series of four letters from correspondences in England. These were from four English merchants; John Saddler; Thomas Davy; John Andrews; and Richard Halle.[41]

Richard Halle specifically requested two English New Testaments to replace those he had already sold. Saddler and Davy wrote to warn Harmon of new proceedings against English New Testaments in England and Andrews wrote of unspecified 'matters consernyng the New Testament in Ynglysche'.[42] Of these four men, Hackett specifies that Halle was an Ironmonger and Saddler was a draper.[43] A letter from Sir Edward Guldeford to Wolsey in May 1528 reveals that Andrews was also a draper.[44] While Davy was very likely the same Thomas Davy that appears in the London livery company listings as becoming a Mercer freeman in 1529, under an especially wealthy Cheapside merchant named Richard Colyer.[45] Certainly Halle's letter should have provided enough evidence for the English authorities to legally pursue him on grounds of breaking the 1521 and 1526 proclamations against the import of Lutheran texts.[46] Indeed, in February 1526 a book burning at St. Paul's specifically condemned German and English vernacular New Testaments and threated harsh penance against the owners of such texts.[47] Equally, a level of evidence similar to that implicating Davy,

[41] LJH, item no. 78, 173-5.
[42] LJH, item no. 78, 173-5.
[43] LJH, item no. 78, 173.
[44] LP, item no. 4287, 1886.
[45] ROLLCO, 'Davy, Thomas'.
[46] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 76-81.
[47] LP, item no. 1962, 884-6.

Andrews and Saddler had, in early 1528, been satisfactory to establish a large-scale operation against scholar Thomas Garrett of Oxford University for the distribution of Lutheran texts within England.[48]

While Andrews appears to have already been in Fleet prison when the letters were found, it is unclear why he was there and there is little evidence to suggest that him or any of the other four were the focus of any kind of legal pursuit as a result of their connections to Harmon's operation.[49] All four of these men were members of some kind of guild or company and owned significant property and wealth. In addition, Saddler was later made an Alderman of London.[50] This chapter will suggest that such privilege placed merchants in a position of power and made them risky targets for the Government in England. It will suggest membership of guilds as well as influence in local Government as Mayors and Aldermen could deter the authorities from legally pursuing influential merchants.

Guilds and Companies

It has been convincingly argued that London's livery companies were able to enjoy considerable political weight from around the twelfth century onwards.[51] Kahl has gone so far as to suggest that such organisations constituted 'the cornerstone of the Government of London', with the Mercers' and Drapers' Companies holding the most political and economic authority.[52] Liverymen were granted influence as the electorate for the city's Mayors and Aldermen, as well as through their contribution to society, the national economy, and direct financial contribution to the King's coffers.[53] Of the ten men recorded here, at least nine were associated with a London guild or company; three of the Drapers' Company; five of the Mercers' Company; and at least two of the

[48] LP, item no. 3962, 1762; item no. 3968, 1764; item no. 4004, 1778-9; item no. 4017, 1784.
[49] LJH, item no. 78, 174.
[50] A. Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London; Temp. Henry VIII-1912* (London, 1908), 30.
[51] See; W. Kahl, *The Development of London Livery Companies; An Essay and a Bibliography* (Massachusetts, USA, 1960); P. Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community; the Grocers' Company and the Politics and Trade of London, 1000-1485* (London, 1995).
[52] Kahl, *Development*, 20.
[53] Kahl, *Development*, 17-21.

Merchant Adventurers of London.[54] While there is not space here to discuss the general influence guilds and companies were able to exact on the Government, it is possible to suggest that the involvement of our merchants in smuggling illicit texts was overlooked due to their membership of livery companies. Many of the merchants who were clearly involved to some degree in the transport of such texts, were high ranking in their respective companies. Moreover, Wright has suggested that 'members of London's livery companies showed much interest in the ideas of Luther', creating 'secret cells' of Lutheranism which were most notable within the Mercers' Company.[55] This claim is certainly plausible considering the large number of guild members, particularly mercers and drapers, known to have been involved to varying degrees in the trade of illicit texts. This section will suggest that such activity was possible due to the high social and economic standing of guilds and their members.

In an account from early-1528, Robert Necton, a mid-size distributor of English New Testaments in East Anglia, implicated a number of men as part of his text distribution network.[56] The circle Necton revealed consisted of many members of a group Davis has termed the 'Christian Brethren'.[57] This group grew in the halls of Oxford University but encompassed a range of people from different parts of society who, Davis argues, were central to the internal distribution of Lutheran texts.[58] Among this group, Necton revealed Richard Harmon as being the sole supplier to Simon Fish, as well as implicating two other English merchants – Thomas Elderton and William Gibson.[59] The case of Richard Harmon has already been addressed and clearly the legal pursuit of Harmon failed due to his political position in Antwerp. While Elderton and Gibson both bought only one New Testament in English each, they were not pursued even for this crime, which was itself banned under the earlier proclamations and likely would have

[54] See appendix 1; JA, HM and JS were associated with the Drapers' Company; WC, WD, TD, TE and WG were associated with the Mercers' Company; and WD and RHar were members of the Merchant Adventurers of London.
[55] S. Wright, 'Dauntsey, William (c.1480-1543)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2006), last accessed 04/04/2014 from http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/95064.
[56] TNT , item no. V.vii, 43-4; Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 188-9. Necton seems to have had a large network of men he had contact with and supplied many copies of the New Testament in English. However, when he was offered 300 New Testaments to sell by a Dutch seller, he refused and instead forwarded his trade to Simon Fish. While he was significant as a seller, he did not reach the same level of sales as some of his contemporary counterparts.
[57] Davis, 'The Christian Brethren', 191.
[58] Davis, 'The Christian Brethren', 192.
[59] TNT , item no. V.vii, 43-4.

been solved by a simple paying of penance or public book burning.[60] While Necton was let off in exchange for his confession, many he implicated were not so lucky.[61] Fish and Constantine were hotly pursued by the authorities for their part in writing and distributing heretical texts and forced into exile on the Continent in 1527 and 1528.[62] Equally, Robert Forman, Rector of All Hallows Honey Lane, and his servant Geoffrey Usher, were on the authorities' radar after their implication by Necton. In March 1528 Forman appeared before Bishop Cuthbert Tunstal who vigorously examined him for his ownership of Lutheran texts.[63] Indeed, other examples could be given and the 'blowing apart of the Oxford trade in heretical books' in early 1528 resulted in numerous arrests and abjurations.[64] However, as far as the evidence provides Elderton and Gibson avoided all attention from the authorities. Despite Necton revealing them as part of the circle, they were seemingly let off the hook.

Gibson was a member of the Mercers' Company who gained his freedom in 1504, however little more is known about him.[65] Nonetheless, more can be determined about Elderton from the records of the Court of the Mercers' Company. Elderton was a fishmonger of considerable wealth who was able to forge wider links to the Mercers' Company and occupy a privileged position among its membership.[66] Robert Necton described Elderton as a 'merchant man of Saynet Mary hill parishe'.[67] This can be qualified with documents of the Court of the Mercers' Company that show that he was granted ownership of a large property, and number of surrounding properties, of Corbettes Quay in London by the Company in 1523.[68] Moreover, not only was Elderton allowed to occupy Corbettes Quay, he was also granted freedom of 'Rent or ferme', and was absolved of the duty to pay 'Custumable tythes' to the 'Parson of the parisshe

[60] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 76-81.
[61] TNT , item no. V.vii, 43-4.
[62] J. Helt, 'Fish, Simon (*d.* 1531)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), last accessed 01/04/2014 from http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9486; A. Hope, 'Constantine, George (*b. c.*1500, *d.* in or before 1561)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), last accessed 01/04/2014 from http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6118.
[63] C. D'Alton, 'Cuthbert Tunstal and Heresy in Essex and London, 1528', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Summer, 2003) 221.
[64] D'Alton, 'Cuthbert Tunstal', 221.
[65] ROLLCO, 'Gibson, William'.
[66] L. Lyell and F. Watney (ed.), *Acts of the Court of the Mercers' Company, 1453-1527* (Cambridge, 1936), 562-4.
[67] TNT , item no. V.vii, 44.
[68] Lyell and Watney, *Acts of the Court*, 562-4.

churche'.[69] The fact that the Company granted ownership of this property free of rent to a non-mercer demonstrates his wealth and influence. Indeed, the privileged position of his gravestone in Walberswick church, bearing the merchants' mark plays creed to his political position.[70] His position in the Company as well as his wealth may well have influenced the decision by the authorities to overlook the involvement of Elderton and Gibson in the movement of illicit texts. The strength of the Mercers' Company alone would likely have made Elderton and Gibson undesirable targets, regardless of their level within the Company. However, Elderton's particular importance likely made him even better connected and a riskier mark. As we shall see later, the Mercers' Company in particular had, in recent years, been pivotal in providing loans to the Crown as well as bringing economic prosperity to the country. Connection to such a politically significant group was certainly likely to play a role in the desire of the Crown to avoid a costly and disruptive legal battle.

Furthermore, in 1529 a similar case occurred whereby the Crown declared mercers William Dauntsey and William Clay wanted for their roles in the distribution of illicit texts. However, while West and Wolsey described Dauntsey as a 'rebellyos ffugytyv', his political position continued to rise.[71] In 1507 Dauntsey was elected to the Court of Assistants of the Mercers' Company, in 1509 he was chosen to ride on the funeral procession of King Henry VII and by 1510 he had been appointed as one of the four auditors of the accounts of the treasurers of the Merchant Adventurers.[72] Dauntsey also owned much property and just two years before the call of his arrest, he was granted lordship of Kennington Manor in Surrey.[73] While to Wolsey and West, Dauntsey constituted a considerable threat to the country, his existing political authority outweighed the strength of his crime and by 1532 he was made Master Mercer, becoming Alderman of Farringdon Without in 1536.[74] Moreover, he continued to trade

[69] Lyell and Watney, *Acts of the Court*, 563.
[70] F. Girling, 'Merchants' Marks in Suffolk', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, Vol. XXIX, Part 1 (1961), 121.
[71] LJH, item no. 109, 228-30.
[72] Wright, 'Dauntsey'.
[73] Wright, 'Dauntsey'.
[74] Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London,* 337.

extensively and despite nearing the end of his life and having political commitments in London, he owned at least nine properties and was an active trader in Calais.[75]

Equally, Dauntsey's counterpart William Clay was likely granted some degree of political privilege due to his master William Buttry.[76] Buttry was particularly significant within the Mercers' Company and was, in 1503, granted the privilege of arranging Sir Richard Gardiner's funeral cloak.[77] By 1527, Buttry and Dauntsey were both Wardens of the Mercers' Company and may have together influenced the decision of the authorities to allow Dauntsey and Clay to continue to trade and gain political influence.[78] Like Elderton, Dauntsey was not only part of a powerful company but also exacted significant power within the organisation. It is perhaps even clearer in Dauntsey's case than in Elderton's situation that his political sway influenced his ability to avoid capture. The speed at which he was able to achieve power having a warrant issued for his arrest is quite remarkable and demonstrates the dominance merchants were able to hold over the Government. Not only were Dauntsey and Clay in a more precarious legal position than Elderton and Gibson, Dauntsey also achieved even greater political power in spite of his being wanted by the authorities.

Mayors and Aldermen

A significant part of the Guilds' power came from their role as the electorate for the Mayors and Aldermen of London. If a merchant with an interest in protecting the illicit trade was given office not only could he divert the Governments attention from such behaviour but he could also make efforts to protect specific individuals and of course gain personal protection from Government interest. Jones has demonstrated that such power could, in Bristol and in terms of wholesale goods such as grain or leather, allow the merchant community to influence the appointment of customs officials.[79] While the situation in London could not necessarily allow this type of interference, it is also notable that customs officials were not necessarily the largest obstacle in preventing

[75] Wright, 'Dauntsey'.
[76] ROLLCO, 'Clay, William'.
[77] Lyell and Watney, *Acts of the Court*, 263.
[78] Lyell and Watney, *Acts of the Court*, 766.
[79] Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy*, 138-145.

the influx of illicit texts. Since the trade in printed books and the production of Lutheran tracts were new developments, the censorship of intellectual works required learned and well-informed agents. Ordinary customs officials, semi-literate and likely to be unlearned in theology, were largely unable to determine for certain, at a glance, the types of texts that the proclamations against heretical books decreed illegal.[80] As such, censorship occurred largely via Government agents such as Tunstal, Fisher and Warham.[81]

While the position of Mayor and Alderman could not function in the same way as they did to prevent the smuggling of wholesale goods, they were able to occupy a political position that made them, to some degree, immune from Government interference. Interference by Aldermen and Mayors in the larger Government machine was more important in terms of moving illicit texts than it was to ensure that customs officials were open to bribery. Mayors and Aldermen could instead function to help those specifically caught out by Wolsey's agents. Of the ten men recorded here, three occupied the position of Alderman, and two of sheriff.[82] While each of the three men gained their positions after having avoided skirmishes with the law, their ability to continue to gain further political advantage, having been involved in the movement of illicit texts, demonstrates the internal political strength of the merchant community. Indeed, their ability to gather political momentum may well have stemmed from their influential roles in their respective guilds and from their significant wealth.

Having already discussed the political privilege of William Dauntsey, we shall but briefly touch again on his ability to overcome legal pursuit. As already mentioned, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Dauntsey and Clay in 1529. Dauntsey's rapid escalation from wanted man, to Master Mercer, to Alderman, demonstrates his existing political sway. We have already demonstrated that his position was significant enough to overcome Wolsey's bid for prosecution. Furthermore, if we turn to another Alderman, Humphrey Monmouth, a similar pattern emerges. In May 1528, Monmouth was caused to answer 24 accusations concerning the funding and distribution of

[80] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 70-4.
[81] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 77-8.
[82] See appendix 1. WD and HM both retained the positions of Alderman and Sherriff, JS was also an Alderman.

Lutheran texts. In his questioning, Monmouth made several dubious defences against the accusations he faced. These included the claim that £150 paid to William Tyndale was for prayers, and that he 'cannot tel' how English Lutheran works came to be found in his house.[83] Such claims seem insufficient considering that in 1526 four Hanse merchants were forced to attend a humiliating book burning and pay penance for the crime of owning German Lutheran texts.[84] Monmouth will be of greater interest later but it is clear that he must have held some degree of political influence at home, as six years after his skirmish with the law he was also made an Alderman of London.[85]

Nine years after his implication through Harmon's letters, John Saddler was also given the privilege of the post of Alderman.[86] Of course, within nine years much could have changed in the political circuit of London's court. However, in the time between his implication in Harmon's circle and his being granted the position of Alderman, his political influence must have been growing rather than depleting. Indeed, in the years between 1538 and his death in 1560, Saddler was granted the position of Master Draper on seven occasions, giving him significant authority as part of the Company as well as through his position as Alderman.[87] As the Court of Aldermen retained the right to reject nominations from the ward and to fill the position with their own men if necessary, it is clear that London's powerhouse must have considered Monmouth, Saddler and Dauntsey suitable candidates.[88] Their political influence as guild members went further than merely being a significant part of an influential organisation, and they in fact constituted legitimate components of Government in England. The civic positions received by men known to have been involved in the movement of illicit texts demonstrates the wider political significance of the merchant community in the running of London as a port and as a capital city.

Through this lens it is possible to understand how the political element of the mercantile experience could lead the Government to be cautious in their legal pursuit of the merchant community. In the next chapter we shall address the likely explanation

[83] TNT, item no. I.iii, 13-4.
[84] LP, item no. 1962, 884-6.
[85] Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, 341.
[86] LJH, item no. 78, 173; Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, 341.
[87] Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, 30.
[88] Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, xx.

that economic contribution to the state allowed the merchant community the influence it was able to exact. Nonetheless, through whichever means they were able to hold political sway, it is clear that the men discussed here were granted significant authority and were able to deter potential legal threats. While men such as the Oxford circle were easy targets for legal pursuit, the merchant community represented a bigger risk. As we shall see next, their ability to lend to the Crown, contribution to the creation of a buoyant economy and significant contribution to the fleet of Naval vessels made them almost impossible targets for legal exposure.

Chapter III: The Impact of Wealth

Much of the political influence discussed in previous chapters would have been impossible without a merchant class that was wealthy. Influence abroad and at home stemmed to some large degree from their bringing economic prosperity to the country and cash to the Crown. In this chapter, we will discuss the specific ways in which wealth could influence the authorities' decision to target or avoid certain people known to have been involved in the movement of illicit texts. Though wealth certainly had an overall impact on the political bearing of the merchant class, it could also benefit individuals in more specific ways. In fact, while the characters discussed in the last two chapters had a general political influence, some of them also exploited specific economic factors that could discourage attempted prosecution.

An Economy dependent on Merchants

In his work studying Tyndale's English New Testament, Arber has suggested that famine in 1527 followed by an influx of corn from the Continent may have facilitated the import of English New Testaments.[89] The underlying implication of this suggestion may have been that the benefits merchants were providing to the country outweighed the Crown's desire to prohibit the influx of illicit texts. To punish the merchant community at a time when they were saving the Crown from population depletion and potential civil unrest would likely have been to risk social and political instability. In an account from 1527, Member of Parliament Edward Halle praised the 'gentle marchauntes' for their providing food in a time of dearth.[90] The extent of the King's desperation to end food shortages is demonstrated when it is revealed that he personally lent one thousand quarters of grain to the City of London.[91] Moreover, the Crown also established for the first time, a commission to investigate and find solutions for the shortage of food crops.[92] Bisman notes that the Corn Commissions constituted a

[89] TNT, item no. V.i, 37.
[90] TNT, item no. IV.iv, 37-8.
[91] TNT, item no. IV.iv, 38.
[92] J. Bisman, 'Budgeting for Famine in Tudor England, 1527-1528: Social and Policy Perspecives', *Accounting History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2012), 105.

'unique English public policy innovation'.[93] Such actions were costly, time consuming, and demonstrate a particularly fierce effort to overcome famine. Praise for the merchants' role in increasing food supplies, as well as the Crown's heightened effort to counteract food shortages suggests that famine could have decreased the Crown's desire to target merchants for illicit activity. Targeting those central to creating social wellbeing would likely have been a politically precarious move and it is easy to see why targeting non-merchants might have been a less-risky option.

This point can be further demonstrated with greater investigation into the case of Humphrey Monmouth. Aside from his existing political influence on the Government in London, in his denial of the accusations against him, Monmouth saw fit emphasis his economic significance. He pleaded that;

> I occupy with divers clothe-men in Suffolk, and in other places. The which have wekely some of them, as they send up their clothes, most have their mony. And yf they fail of their monye, they say, they cannot set the poore folks aworke. There is divers clothe-men, the which I buy al their clothes that they make. And yf they should go offer them to sel to other men now at this time, they wold bid them go and sel where they were wont sel, when the sale was good; and so the poor men should have great loss. I was wont to sel for most part every yere iiii or v hundred clothes to strangers, which was worth to the Kindes Gr. in his customes, more than though I had shipped over myself five times so many.[94]

Monmouth here raises several interesting points about the leverage he was able to hold over the Government in England. As we have already addressed, Monmouth's defence of the accusations against him was relatively weak, and the likelihood that he was heavily involved in the regular movement of illicit texts was great. He perhaps lacked faith in his existing political position and feared he would likely be found guilty of the charges against him. As such, Monmouth sought to emphasise his importance in local and national trade, social prosperity and financial contribution to the Crown.

Monmouth emphasised that the 'poor men should have great loss' if his trade was unable to continue and that innocent men would also suffer if charges were pressed against him.[95] Like the situation in 1527, Monmouth hoped that the Crown's desire to

[93] Bisman, 'Budgeting for Famine', 113.
[94] TNT, item no. I.iii, 14.
[95] TNT, item no. I.iii, 14.

retain social stability within the community would overcome its desire to halt the influx of illicit texts. Equally, Monmouth specifically indicated that his downfall would be a threat to the economy on a local and national level. Not only did he suggest that cloth sales would halt between local traders, but he also emphasised his commercial relationship with 'strangers'.[96] With cloth becoming an increasingly important commodity in English exports, overtaking wool in the fourteenth century, a threat to the domestic sales and export of cloth would have caused significant concern for government officials.

Furthermore, Monmouth goes so far as to specifically emphasise his contribution to the Crown. This demonstrates vividly the point he was trying to make. Monmouth wished to highlight that the economy could not function without him - the local economy would collapse, the national economy would take a hit and the King would lose substantial funds in the form of customs fees. In taking the problem to a national level, and emphasising his contribution to the Crown, Monmouth perhaps overstates his importance in a bid to avoid legal constraints. Nonetheless, the passage is effective in emphasising his economic significance, and the bid clearly worked as he was allowed to continue to trade and gain political influence. This flagrant attempt to deter the Crown from prosecution highlights further the privileged position merchants were able to hold. The ability of merchants to manipulate the Crown was specifically related to the role they played in maintaining economic, political and social balance. Not only were they granted political weight via their positions in court, but they could also seek to specifically highlight their economic contribution.

Lending to the Crown

In addition, Kahl has noted that during the 'Tudor and Stuart periods, the Civil War and the Commonwealth the livery companies constituted one of the principal financial resources of the Government'.[97] While this is a bold statement, it is certainly true that during the reign of Henry VIII both individual merchants and guilds supplied significant funds to the Crown. The Gresham family, for example, famously rose through the Court

[96] TNT, item no. I.iii, 14.
[97] Kahl, *Development*, 21.

due to their significant lending to the Crown. At the times of their deaths John and Thomas Gresham had both amassed huge riches and significant political authority.[98] As master warden of the Mercers' Company, the funds lent to Henry VIII by John Gresham may well have placed the Company in good standing with the King, and placed the authorities in a dubious position to start prosecuting key members.[99] Equally, the Mercers and Drapers as companies also contributed significant wealth to the Crown, particularly at times of war. In 1488 the Mercers contributed almost one fifth of the finance needed to fund war with France, with the Drapers contributing almost one ninth of the total.[100] Again, in 1522, the Mercers' Company contributed one sixth of a £20,000 bill to maintain the costs of war.[101] In addition to the general economic prosperity they bought, and the funds provided in the form of customs fees, they also provided a more personal contribution in the form of loans. Again, in an even more direct way, the merchant community made itself an undesirable target for Crown prosecution. Aside from the threat of economic decline and depletion of customs fees, the threat that merchants could spontaneously call in their loans must have played on the minds of the men attempting to pursue them.

This point is exemplified further in the case of William Dauntsey. In 1536 John Gostwick cited 'Daunsy the Alderman' as one of the 'greedy persons' he had to repay loans to on behalf of the Crown.[102] While it is unclear how much Dauntsey had lent the Crown or over what period of time, he is the only lender mentioned by name, suggesting particular significance. Wright has suggested that lending to the Crown helped Dauntsey to overcome his brush with the authorities and allowed him to gain the position of Alderman in London.[103] Indeed, the political status he was able to achieve may well have been a result of his role as a merchant bringing trade to the country, and as a lender providing funds to the Crown. Dauntsey was a significant legal contestant as he held political and economic sway. While this is also true of the other

[98] C. Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of Credit; Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (Cranbury, New Jersey, 2002), 176.
[99] ROLLCO, 'Gresham, John'.
[100] J. Watney, *An Account of the Mistery of Mercers of the City of London, Otherwise the Mercers Company* (London, 1914), 128.
[101] Watney, *An Account*, 128.
[102] J. Gairdner (ed.), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII: preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum, and elsewhere in England*, Vol. XI (London, 1888), item no. 1220, 492.
[103] Wright, 'Dauntsey'.

merchants here discussed, the direct link between Dauntsey and the Crown made him a particularly dangerous target.

Supplying the Navy

In addition to providing economic prosperity and loans, Stone has demonstrated that Crown favour to the livery companies and to individual merchants can be considered to some degree a result of the country's reliance on merchant ships in times of war.[104] While Henry VIII increased the number of purpose-built warships over his reign, the Crown of the 1520s relied heavily on merchant ships that were 'fit… for the defence of the Realme'.[105] With European powers frequently locking horns, it is hardly surprising that the merchant community would be granted additional leeway for their services to the Crown during times of conflict. Again, like the threat of loss of economic prosperity, providing a significant proportion of the countries' defences acted as a warning to leave the merchant community in peace. Not only were they vital to the integrity of the country's economic interest, as well as the King's own coffers, they were also essential the physical protection of the country's coastline. When this is considered it is easy to see why merchants were granted so much political authority and how they were able to overcome legal threats. In a choice to pursue a merchant Alderman or an Oxford academic, the academic was likely the easier target. Monmouth's suggestion that targeting him would cause economic and social upheaval seems slightly more realistic when all of these factors are considered. Local, national and Crown stability could be placed at risk by disrupting the merchant community.

[104] Stone, 'State Control', 109-12.
[105] Stone, 'State Control', 111.

Chapter IV: Community Interference

In his book 'Inside the Illicit Economy', Evan Jones has brought to light instances in Bristol where merchants had used their local influence to prevent the discovery or prosecution of the smuggling of illicit goods. Jones has demonstrated some cases in which illicit trade was able to continue to operate through the intervention of the local community.[106] In this chapter, this essay will attempt to expand to a limited extent on this idea and demonstrate through the trade in illicit books that friends could step in to help. The work in this essay on intervention by the local community is in its very early stages. It will briefly cover just one case that it is suggested could be an example of other similar circumstances. As such, it is not the purpose in this chapter to come to final conclusions on this subject. Instead, this author hopes that more might be done in the future to lead to greater solidity in such matters. This chapter must be taken in its rawest form and be seen, unlike previous chapters, as a preliminary research suggestion.

For this, we move back to the Continent, turning again to Hackett's pursuit of Richard Harmon. As has been mentioned previously, during 1528 Hackett sent aide John Style to search Harmon's house for evidence of his involvement in smuggling English New Testaments. On the 2nd September 1528 Style wrote to Hackett complaining that 'there hathe byn many crafty delayes vsid here by some of this towne, to th'entent that no suche bokes or writeynges shuld be vewid or seyn'.[107] While Hackett did eventually gain access to the documents in Harmon's home, it is very possible that local intervention helped to prevent the successful prosecution of Harmon by the government in England. For at least five days local townspeople had prevented access to Harmon's property while Style had attempted to gain political support from England to pressure the Antwerp authorities for help.[108] Moreover, by the time he was able to enter the house, 'the sealles were pluckid of and of semlitude the dorre had byn openyed of late byfore'.[109] Not only had the locals broken in and taken evidence, they

[106] Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy*, 114-83.
[107] LJH, item no. 79, 175-7.
[108] LJH, item no. 79, 175.
[109] LJH, item no. 79, 176.

also refused to allow Style to take the letters with him for further reading.[110] As some of the letters he found were in Dutch and he was unable to remove them, he remained uncertain of their content 'otherwise by the report of the Scowte'.[111] It is evident in this case that local contacts as well as broader overarching factors could have aided the prevention of Harmon's arrest.

Fudge has convincingly argued that this incident was a result of community animosity to interference by a foreign power.[112] Indeed, the motivation behind their interference may well have been discontent with foreign intervention. Nevertheless, the outcome was undoubtedly to make the process of tracking the movement of illicit books even more difficult for the authorities in England. Previous chapters have already suggested that there were benefits to merchants trading illicit texts if they had friends or guild colleagues with political sway, here it can be seen that it was also possible for the general locality to intervene on behalf of the merchant community. Jones has demonstrated that similar instances occurred in sixteenth-century Bristol, and Harmon's case suggests that such examples might also be found beyond the West Country. With further investigation it could well become clear that the influence of the merchant community went beyond Government influence, and stemmed into influencing the wider community.

[110] LJH, item no. 78, 174.
[111] LJH, item no. 79, 177.
[112] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 169-72.

Conclusion

On 14th May 1530, the Bishop of Norwich wrote that 'the gentlemen and commonality in this diocese are not greatly infected [with Lutheranism], but only the merchants an those who live near the sea'.[113] Indeed, Fudge has demonstrated that merchant involvement in Lutheran dissemination was significant, and that many English merchants were involved specifically in the import of reformist books from the Continent.[114] In this study, we have focused in on ten cases of merchants known to have been involved to varying degrees in the trade of illicit texts. Each of the men studied here were implicated in such trade, yet none were punished for their actions. While several were pursued for their part, they were never prosecuted. This essay has suggested that the authorities in England were reluctant to legally pursue merchants caught up in the trade of illicit texts for a number of reasons. Largely, they were concerned that such actions would disrupt the community on a local, national and sometimes even international level. Moreover, in some cases, merchants seem to have had some kind of political immunity due to their political standing abroad or within local English Government and guilds.

The case of Richard Harmon has helped to demonstrate a number of methods through which merchants could avoid prosecution. Through his political authority in Antwerp, not only was Harmon able to prevent his own arrest, he was also able to ensure the arrest of Government representative John Hackett. Moreover, despite Hackett pleading with the authorities in England for aid and Wolsey displaying significant interest in assuring the arrest of Richard Harmon, Government in England refused to step in and support Hackett's attempts. The political weight of Harmon abroad, despite him being an English merchant, and the English authorities' unwillingness to step in demonstrates a degree of political leeway on the Continent. In addition, the case of Richard Harmon also allows us to suggest that the local community could, on occasion, step in to help the cover-up of illegal activity. While Harmon's friends in Antwerp eventually had to allow John Style access to Harmon's home, they first ensured evidence was removed and that the letters that implicated Harmon stayed in their

[113] LP, item no. 6385, 2867.
[114] Fudge, *Commerce and Print.*

possession. This case, alongside those revealed by Evan jones, might suggest the existence of further examples of community interference on behalf of merchants, although more research must be undertaken.[115]

Aside from influencing the political circuit abroad, we have also seen that English merchants could be granted significant political authority at home in England. In forming powerful guilds and occupying positions in local Government, merchants could exact political power and rely on their guild for protection. We have seen that many of the merchants discussed here were significant within their guilds, and that their authority continued to rise after having been implicated in the distribution of illicit texts. This included being elected to the positions of Alderman and Sheriff, despite being the focus of legal attention by the Crown. Humphrey Monmouth, William Dauntsey and John Saddler were all implicated for their role in the movement of illicit texts yet all went on to become Aldermen.[116] The rapid political escalation of these men suggests that they were significant in local Government before their accusations and that being accused was not adequate to halt their rise to greater political authority. Not only were they granted leeway due to their membership of guilds, many occupied significant positions within them, and within local Government. This ensured that their pursuit could be potentially politically precarious.

We have seen that a lot of the power merchants were granted came from wealth. Ensuring economical prosperity, providing customs fees and supplying a naval force to the country granted merchants overarching political authority. Humphrey Monmouth brought many of these concerns together in his 1528 plea. On the surface his plea seems rather dramatic, but with further investigation, the issues he raised were likely significant concerns of the Government in England.[117] Moreover, by individual merchants and guilds providing loans to the Crown, the merchant community placed themselves in a greater position to avoid prosecution. In addition to risking social, economic and political instability, the threat of the recall of loans made merchants undesirable targets for Crown prosecution.

[115] Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy*, 114-83.
[116] Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, 337, 341.
[117] TNT, item no. I.iii, 14.

Each of these factors placed the Government in England in a precarious position to legally pursue the merchant community on the grounds of distributing illicit texts. Prosecution of important merchants could create a swell of bureaucratic landmines, disrupt the local and national economy, prevent the payment of customs fees and prompt the recalling of loans. On the other hand, the prosecution of those distributing such texts within England – such as the so-called 'Christian Brethren' – provided less political and social disruption. Through this lens it is possible to understand why merchants known to have been involved in the trade of illicit texts avoided significant legal exposure. Simply put, the risk to the local and national community through reform literature was less than the risk posed by a disrupted merchant community, especially when they could instead focus on easier internal targets.

This essay has attempted to bridge the gap in reformation histories, by focusing on a group that have thus far been largely overlooked in their role in the spread of reformation literature. In addition, it has expanded on the work of more recent studies, which attempt to better understand the politics of the smuggling trade. In doing so, it has also bridged a gap between reformation and trade histories. This writer would suggest that greater interaction between social, political and economic historians is of paramount importance in order to move forward in these respective fields. It is misguided to believe that these fields do not have an impact on each other. Understanding of reformation politics cannot be considered separate from trade histories of the same period, and likewise economic histories cannot be considered immune from the impact of reformation and pre-reformation politics. This current work must be considered the first small step in linking two previously separate fields and providing greater clarity of the role of merchants in pre-reformation culture.

Word count: 9774

Appendices

Appendix 1

Although all of the men in this list will be discussed at length throughout this essay, it is useful to have an index of names for reference. These ten men were all directly involved in the trade of illicit text and were at some point noticed by the authorities for their involvement.

Surname, forename (abbreviation)	**Occupation**	**Basic information**
Andrews, John (JA)	Draper	Member of the Drapers' Company; made apprentice 1498, made freeman 1503.[118]
Clay, William (WC)	Mercer	Member of the Mercers' Company; made freeman 1532.[119]
Dauntsey, William (WD)	Mercer	Member of the Mercers' Company; made freeman 1504.[120] Member of Merchant Adventurers of London.[121] Sheriff of London 153 and Alderman of London 1536-43.[122]
Davy, Thomas (TD)	Mercer	Member of the Mercers' Company; made freeman 1529.[123]
Elderton, Thomas (TE)	Fishmonger	Associated with the Mercers' Company and received benefits from them, yet does not appear as a member of the company in the livery company listings.[124]
Gibson, William (WG)	Mercer	Member of the Mercers' Company, apprenticed 1504 and made freeman 1504.[125]
Halle, Richard (RHal)	Ironmonger	Described by Hackett as an Ironmonger, but little more is known.[126]
Harmon, Richard (RHar)	Merchant (?)	Member of the Merchant Adventurers of London. English merchant largely based in Antwerp. Also a *poorter* of Antwerp.[127]

[118] ROLLCO, 'Andrews, John'.
[119] ROLLCO, 'Clay, William'.
[120] ROLLCO, 'Dauntsey, William'.
[121] Wright, 'Dauntsey'.
[122] Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, 337.
[123] ROLLCO, 'Davy, Thomas'.
[124] Lyell and Watney, *Acts of the Court*, 562-4.
[125] ROLLCO, 'Gibson, William'.
[126] LJH, item no. 78, 173.
[127] Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 164-5.

Monmouth, Humphrey (HM)	Draper	Member of the Drapers' Company; apprenticed 1495 and made freeman 1503.[128] Sheriff of London in 1536 and Alderman of London 1534-7.[129]
Saddler, John (JS)	Draper	Member of the Drapers' Company; made freeman 1516.[130] Alderman of London 1538-46.[131]

[128] ROLLCO, 'Monmouth, Humfrey'.
[129] Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, 341.
[130] ROLLCO, 'Sadler, John'.
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