
Foreword

Throughout history many different nationalities have arrived on the shores of the British Isles. Down the ages they have come, the Romans, the Vikings and the Normans, to name but a few, to conquer; others such as Fleming and Jewish communities to trade. Each of these groups left a legacy that illustrates their settling here; whereas others such as the Huguenots have left a wonderfully rich and varied mark on the histories of countries that they eventually settled in - especially here in Britain - that today unknowingly enhances our lives.

Whilst writing my previous book I unearthed an immense amount of information relating to the Huguenots and felt their story should be told. They brought their skills and faith to our shores so they could work and practice their religion without fear of oppression and paid us back tenfold with their diligence, professional skills, forward thinking and hard work.

There is an old saying ‘your loss is my gain’ and that is certainly true of the Huguenot exodus from France which realised too late what a valuable resource these people had been to the French economy but fortunately France’s loss was most definitely the Huguenots’ adopted countries gain.

The Huguenots were the first ‘*refugees*’¹ – the word became part of the English language in the 1680s to describe the French speaking Calvinists who came to these shores. Their arrival spanned a long period of time starting in the reign of Henry VIII but it was a peaceful invasion, they left France to start a new life in many countries across the world, including South Africa, America, Canada, Holland, Germany and Belgium but the majority of these ‘refugees’ chose Britain.

The origin of the term ‘Huguenot’ is uncertain although there are several suggestions; one plausible explanation is that it may derive from the German word ‘Eidgenosse’ meaning companion, comrade or partner who has sworn an oath. In Swiss-German ‘Eidgenosse’ translated into ‘Eignot’ and thereon translated into French as ‘Huguenot’, a term applied to French Protestants. Other possible contenders for the source of

¹ From the French word réfugié(e)

'Huguenot' include a derivation of the Swiss politician Besancon Hugues who was one of the leaders of the Geneva Eidgenossen. A further option is that the name 'Huguenot' was taken from the famous King Hugo whose haunted tower in Tours was a popular meeting place for Huguenots.

This book is in three parts, the first telling the story of how the Protestant religion grew in France, the eight Wars of Religion, the League Wars and the persecution suffered by Huguenots for their faith; the second part then focuses on the Huguenot exodus from France particularly those who came to Great Britain including the Channel Islands with particular reference to the many who eventually settled in London, and finally, the third part describes their story of innovation and integration within British society including some of the many fields in which the Huguenot legacy enriches our daily lives.

In 1517 Martin Luther had nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the castle church at Wittenburg, thus paving the way for the Reformation across the continent. In France in the same year Jacques Le Fevre wrote *Sancti Pauli Epistolae* - a doctrine held to be a cornerstone of French Protestant faith. This new faith quickly spread across many regions of France.

During the early years of the burgeoning new faith known as Protestantism, people of many different walks of life, from the titled nobility to the skilled artisan, chose to adopt this new form of worship and as their numbers grew, Huguenots were becoming an influential group within France; however, within just a few years the new religion had claimed its first martyr when in 1523 Jean Valliere was burned at the stake in Paris for heresy, his crime being 'blasphemy' against the Virgin Mary. The year before his martyrdom the first Protestant refugee, Lambert of Avignon, had fled across the border to Switzerland. This was a time when a person's priority in life was their soul and how during their lifetime they could prepare for and attain salvation at the end of their life. They had begun to question the Catholic church and its teachings just as others before them had done.

The French king Francis I, having alliances with Protestant German princes, was assumed to be tolerant of this new religion although the king gave no clear indication of his support at that time. Many high-ranking members of the nobility, including the king's sister, Marguerite of Angouleme, were in favour of tolerance towards this new religion but there were still many who were against the spread of Protestantism. Thus King Francis I was often swayed towards leniency then away from it.

Two events in 1534 caused Francis I to give his whole-hearted support to the Catholic faith when an agreement with the Pope was reached whereby France would be allowed to recover Milan if the French king agreed to stamp out heresy, i.e. Protestantism, in France. The other incident was the nailing of one of the Huguenots' infamous placards to his bedroom door so angering him that he resolved to deal severely with the non-conformists.

Many leading Protestants including John Calvin fled abroad as the repressive measures came into force. In 1536, whilst living in Switzerland, John Calvin - inspirational to those following the new religion - had his now famous book *Christianae Religionis Institution* first published from which French Protestantism gained its ideological basis.