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Debra Kelly and Martyn Cornick, eds., *A history of the French in London: liberty, equality, opportunity*. London: University of London School of Advanced Study, Institute of Historical Research, 2013. xxvi + 488 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-905165-86-5.

Review by James Smith Allen, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

The French have never been known for a diaspora of their own, however far-flung their imperial aspirations, but sizeable, identifiable groups did leave France under familiar historical circumstances: the Huguenots at various times, from the age of religious wars to that of the absolutist state; royals and nobles in the 1790s; Bonapartists in 1814–1815 and 1870; another round of royals and nobles in 1830 and 1848; ardent republicans in 1848 and 1851; communards in 1871; anarchists in the 1890s; the Free French in the 1940s; and many young, ambitious *émigrés* today courtesy of the European Union's more flexible immigration policies. As the closest important city to France, London has been the chief beneficiary of these out-migrations. By one estimate—that of the Maison des Français à l'Étranger—more than 250,000 French citizens live in greater London now, the latest manifestation of a long, rich legacy, one well-traced by the contributions to the present book.

Nineteen collaborators have produced what the volume's editors assert is “a history” (pp. 2, 431), that is, a coherent, continuous narrative for the many documented activities of a singular community. At first blush, there would seem to be little to unite such disparate actors, other than the accident of their birth in France and their presence in Britain's capital, at one time or another, since the Protestant Reformation. The book does have an interpretive frame, however, which is derived vaguely from theories of the recent spatial turn from cultural-studies approaches to the past. Writes Máire Cross on behalf of her fellow contributors, “...cultural history alone is not sufficient to contain the experience of the French in London.... The opinions of French visitors were informed as much by bricks and mortar as they were by people and ideas” (p. 135). Clearly, not every essay here has so firm a fix on London as “space and place”[1], but this theoretical trope offers some modicum of unity to a wide range of topics—from haute cuisine to Montagu house—each essay with its own useful map of the town to orient the reader. Like Peter Ackroyd's thematic “biography” of London, the topography is actually a means to study certain aspects of the city's history.[2]

Besides the unevenly developed narrative, the volume classifies the French in London variously by the duration and purpose of their stay. These special denizens were tourists, visitors, students, soldiers, ambassadors, attachés, spies, agents, bankers, *restauranteurs*, chefs, artisans, shopkeepers, prostitutes, indigents, artists, and performers, all with cause to reside in town, but they were also exiles, *émigrés*, expatriates, immigrants, migrants, and, yes, even residents, who had less apparent reason to their presence. The ebb and flow of the French in their different roles abroad were remarkable, and so they frustrate our sense of their community. Given the diversity of their socio-economic and political identities, it might be best not to think of the French in London as a monolithic colonial outpost. The dispersal of their neighborhoods suggests as much: Soho, Fitzrovia, Somers Town, Bloomsbury, South Kensington, and now the fashionable East End. Religious and political dissidents may have stayed the longest, but their influence is not as compelling as the writers who recounted their own experiences in London and who provided the sources for these studies: personal and official correspondence, account

books, travelogues, tour guides, gastronomic texts, newspaper and journal articles, novels, speeches, memoirs, surveys, interviews, radio and TV broadcasts, websites, and political campaign appeals. The later the period of study, the more extensive use that the volume's contributions make of this varied source material.

The essays develop four closely related themes, namely, the motivation, identity, context, and influence of the French historical presence in London. Each of them deserves some discussion with examples drawn from the contributions to the book.

Over the centuries, the expressed motives for people arriving in the British capital are numerous and complex. The push of events in France, such as religious persecution, political repression, military defeat, and ethnic discrimination, certainly moved many natives towards a more welcoming haven like London. Such was the case for the Huguenots, the victims of revolution and counter-revolution, the refugees from the German occupation and Vichy regime, and the peoples from France's decolonizing empire. It should be noted, however, that the editors subtitled the volume *liberty, equality, opportunity*, whose deliberate omission of *fraternité* from the well-known republican slogan suggests a neo-liberal pull, as well, to the migrants' choice of London over the other major cities they could have called home: Brussels, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Geneva, Barcelona, Milan and, still further afield, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Dublin, New York, and France's former colonies. London was closest to the metropole, but it had other attractions—a larger measure of tolerance, individualism, and commerce—that drew French *émigrés* over the years. At least, these reasons are what the French Londoners themselves reported, even if the volume does not draw specific comparisons with what French *émigrés* elsewhere wrote.

How British did the French consider themselves? Much of their national identity in London depended upon the prospects of a return to France. The Huguenots, for example, had no expectation of repatriation under the absolutists' *une foi, un loi, un roi*, so they assimilated quickly to a new culture. Their descendants such as David Garrick and their institutions such as La Providence hospital are now woven into the fabric of British history. On the other hand, political refugees, like Germaine de Staël, Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, and Louise Michel, merely bided their time until a regime change, an amnesty, or a better legal defense brought them home again. Many did not learn English, much to the dismay of their immediate neighbors, leading to predictably negative ethnic stereotypes of the cowardly, lascivious, and dishonorable French. As Londoners from France become more numerous and more attuned to the amenities of London life, they earned favorable reputations as chic, urban trend-setters. Their identity is with a cosmopolitan city rather than with a conservative state; they carry an EU passport to facilitate weekend travel to France to visit with friends and family. Largely bilingual, they have their own radio station (French Radio London) and prefer local brews at a pub to French wines in a café. Consequently, President Nicolas Sarkozy's appeals in 2007 for their return to France fell on deaf ears; fewer than 20 percent of eligible voters in London made it to the French polls in 2012.

Events in France have much to do with French life in London. Perhaps the best example is World War II. After the collapse of French forces in June 1940, there was an influx of political and military rank and file to the British city, almost all of whom repudiated Philippe Pétain's armistice with Germany. Just two days after Vichy's call for peace, Charles de Gaulle vowed on the BBC to continue the war with the resources of the French empire. And so began a major redefinition of the French community in London, now the staging point for a massive return to the homeland for its liberation. No one, much less the family members of the Free French forces, expected to remain in London indefinitely, as the US and the USSR joined Britain to turn the tide against the Axis powers. The volume dedicates three full essays to the French efforts to recapture direction of the conflict that had brought them to London in the first place: Kelly's mapping of French wartime spaces and images, Cornick's account of the organized Resistance's early years, and David Drake's study of Raymond Aron's independent war-time politics. Unlike anything before or since, this interlude in the history of French London may have been short-

lived, but it changed dramatically both sides of the English Channel long after nearly all these French had left for home.

So why did the French matter to London? Or, to flip the coin, why did the French in London matter to France? These questions are more difficult to answer. Long the best of enemies, France and Britain learned to accommodate their differences after the second hundred years' war and its Napoleonic apotheosis. Each distinctive wave of French *émigrés* demonstrated the possibilities for cooperation, first the monarchs and emperors, then the republicans and socialists, whose leadership came and went in a predictable cycle attuned to nineteenth-century French politics. As the Third Republic survived its many challenges, its "cultural diplomacy," as Charlotte Faucher and Philippe Lane term it (pp. 281-98), resulted in the Institut Français du Royaume-Uni (IFRU) and the coordination of other local French associations, which strengthened the Entente Cordiale into World War I and beyond (much to de Gaulle's good fortune). It is hard to imagine the modern history of either Britain or France being quite the same without the ongoing presence of French nationals in the British capital, now the fifth largest francophone city in the European Union. The pervasiveness of spoken English in Paris owes much to this legacy of French spoken in London.

For scholars and their students intrigued by these phenomena and much of what led to them, I heartily recommend Kelly and Cornick's collection of essays. The contributions suggest further research on precisely how London became the magnet it did for French religious and political dissidents, relative to other cities where they could have gone, and to the change in perceptions that the French and British now have of each other as consequence of the European Union. One wonders, as well, about the parallel waxing and waning of two extensive empires as manifested by Anglo-French relations in London; the contributors have little to say about this fascinating topic. Rivalries aside, the ties between the two capital cities have never been quite as rich to study. "With the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Agincourt and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Waterloo approaching in 2015," concludes Kelly, "perhaps a more fully rounded counter-discourse of Anglo-French co-operation and of long-established and enduring cultural, social and economic exchanges may yet emerge to challenge old perceptions with new realities, and with London providing a site of evidence" (p. 447). This volume, based on seminars and workshops sponsored by the IFRU in Spring 2011, is a promising start to that important research agenda. [3]

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## NOTES

[1] See, for example, Ralph Kingston, "Mind Over Matter? History and the Spatial Turn," *Cultural and Social History* 7/1(2010):111-21, cited at 111; and the useful reviews of the historical literature: Beat Kümin and Cornélie Osborne, "At Home and in the Workplace: A Historical Introduction to the 'Spatial Turn'," *History and Theory* 52/3(2013): 305-318; and Jo Guldi, "What is the Spatial Turn? The Spatial Turn in History," *Spatial Humanities: A Project for the Institute for Enabling Geospatial Scholarship* (undated) at <http://spatial.scholarslab.org/spatial-turn/the-spatial-turn-in-history/index.html>, accessed January 3, 2015.

[2] Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000).

[3] Many of the volume's contributions were part of larger projects, e.g., Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Fabrice Bensimon, *Les Britanniques face à la révolution française de 1848* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); Kirsty Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution: Emigrés in London, 1789-1802* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1999); Maire Cross, *The Letter in Flora Tristan's Politics* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2004); Helen Drake, *Contemporary France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2011); Debra Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005); Philippe Lane, *Présence française dans le monde. L'action culturelle et scientifique* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2011); Philip Mansel and Torsten Riotte, *Monarchy and Exile: The Politics of Legitimacy from Marie de Médicis to Wilhelm II* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan 2011); Michel Rapoport, Diana Cooper-Richet, and Robin Adams-Mayhew, eds., *L'Entente Cordiale. Cent ans de relations culturelles franco-britanniques 1904-2004* (Paris: Créaphis, 2006); and Robert Tombs and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

James Smith Allen  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
[jsallen@siu.edu](mailto:jsallen@siu.edu)

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