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Robin Gwynn, *The Huguenots in Later Stuart Britain. I, Crisis, Renewal, and the Ministers' Dilemma*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2015. xviii + 458 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$140.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-184519-618-9.

Robin Gwynn, *The Huguenots in Later Stuart Britain. II, Settlement, Churches, and the Role of London*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2018. xx + 313 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, appendices, and index. \$170.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-84519-619-6.

Review by Philippa Woodcock, University of the Highlands and Islands.

In late seventeenth-century London, denizens of Spitalfields complained that the preponderance of newly arrived Huguenot refugees was having a noted and unwanted impact upon the area. Indeed, due to their “living much upon cabbage and roots,” one could identify the French presence by the smell of “a very noisome water” (II, p. 256). Indicative of the sheer preponderance of Huguenots in the city, the sentiment also illustrates the clearly established general Francophobia joined with contemporary, if in this instance misplaced, anti-Popery. But if this was typical of English xenophobia, why did so many Huguenots choose to come to the British Isles in general and London in particular?

This question sits at the heart of Robin Gwynn’s two volumes, while a projected third volume will discuss the influence of the Huguenots on Britain’s economy and society. Volume one concentrates on the history of Huguenot congregations and ministers in Britain prior to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, exploring Stuart (and Commonwealth) policy from Charles I to James II towards the dispersed early congregations, and the rising tide of ministers, the “jetsam of the revocation” (I, p. 163). It establishes the relationships of the Huguenots to other foreign churches, and lays down the central importance to Huguenot identity of conformity and non-conformity, that is, whether or not a minister or congregation was willing to accept the doctrine of the Anglican Church, translated into French. In London, Huguenot non-conformity was led by the church at Threadneedle Street, which traced its roots back to the mid-sixteenth century. In contrast, the most noted conformist congregation was principally associated with the church at the Savoy. Finally, it provides a biographical dictionary, almost a *Who’s Who* of ministers known to have been active in Britain from 1640 to 1713, detailing where possible their origin in France and their education. It also illustrates their varied careers, from Reformed ministry to Anglican ordination in the British Isles, minutely cross-referenced with archival material, and the major secondary authorities in Huguenot research (e.g., Schickler, Minet, and Mours). The “ministers’ dilemma” is shown to have been a tricky path to negotiate. They had to forge a compromise between a state which was in general more accommodating to those who

sought ordination in the Anglican church and their mission to serve refugee congregations, zealous to maintain the Reformed discipline which they had fled France to preserve. Should a minister think of his career or calling?

Volume two turns to the congregations themselves. In contrast to the substantial work on sixteenth century Huguenot congregations—for example work on Southampton by Andrew Spicer and Andrew Pettegree’s study of London—Gwynn intends this volume to address persistent “widespread ignorance” (II, p. 2) about the extent, timing, personnel, and location of Huguenot congregations.[1] This evidence is organised by English regions and the two capitals of Edinburgh and London. Using the data of surviving relief records and evidence of Huguenot employ in a huge range of occupations, from cat-gut lute stringer to gunpowder master, the heterogeneous social status and paths to assimilation demonstrate that there was no single Huguenot trajectory, although “there is strong evidence of substantial and persistent poverty amongst refugees” (II, p. 9). Collectively, through the methodical interrogation of surviving church and relief registers, with figures adjusted for problematic record-keeping and army enlistment, Gwynn proposes a new figure of between 45,000 and 60,000 Huguenots present in the British Isles at this period, overturning prior estimates (II, p. 199). Likewise, although discounting many claims to the existence of some churches, from his forensic archival knowledge he establishes compelling proof for others, taking the number of conformist and non-conformist churches in the British Isles beyond that of the Netherlands. Thus, Gwynn overturns accepted conclusions (proposed for example by Samuel Mours) that “the Netherlands were the ‘great ark’ of the refugees” (I, p. 10, pp. 171-72).[2] Instead, he argues that “by 1700 it was actually England that had emerged as the principal home of the Refuge” (I, p. 10).

In addition to their obvious utility to the community of Huguenot researchers, the two volumes enrich the wider scholarly debate on the Huguenot desert and assimilation. Gwynn is convinced that the history of the Huguenots in the British Isles cannot be properly understood without a re-examination of the issue of conformity from the Huguenot point of view. He rejects a priori lazy assumptions for the post-Revocation period concerning the financial benefits of conformity, Anglican preferment for ministers, and generational shift, all factors which have been assumed to have persuaded many Huguenots into the Church of England within a generation of the Revocation. Gwynn amply demonstrates, however, that the pressure to conform and assimilate predated the Revocation by at least forty years, spanned generations, and was not specific to late Stuart London. In the 1630s, the reaction of elders and ministers to the politico-religious dilemma of Laudianism and the British civil wars perpetuated schism over the essential issue of loyalty to the crown in relation to Huguenot discipline. Conformist and non-conformist congregations glared at each other over the question of the Commonwealth, and then the political reversal of the Restoration. In each case, some ministers, elders, and individuals were prepared to cut their cloth to political circumstances and to see opportunity in a new settlement, while others were not.

Gwynn also credits royal policy with a decisive influence on population patterns, especially in London. By encouraging conformity through ordination and more generous relief, it is no coincidence that the most significant London conformist congregation settled in the West End, at the Savoy, with a congregation formed of the “wealthier sort,” including nobles, army officers, and tradesmen servicing the court. Moreover, Gwynn contends that the shift in policy with James II’s Declaration of Indulgence (1687) and the change in regime in 1688 were the main reasons that the British Isles overtook the Netherlands as the natural refuge for the Huguenots. There

was no compulsion towards conformity, a crown-sponsored “Bounty” provided some support to the destitute, and successive governments after 1688 were welcoming to Protestant refugees. Yet, the continued divide between the two threads, conformist and non-conformist, was perpetuated by more than royal policy. Gwynn’s careful delving into their records illustrates geographical, economic, and social pressures sustaining a rift beyond 1687.

At this point, he is perhaps needlessly brutal in his dismissal of the argument that economic opportunity could have been as important as religious faith, as advanced most recently for the Dutch context by David van der Linden (II, p. 8).^[3] (This work is even omitted from the bibliography). Gwynn is perhaps right to stress that *most* British-bound Huguenots left France to protect their faith, rather than to expand their businesses. His exploration of the pressures on the fabric trade is particularly striking, for not only did these immigrants come to a foreign land, the weavers found themselves in a highly pressured market with little room for the unskilled, and highly resented by those who had served long apprenticeships. That said, volume two’s exploration of congregations across the country still paints a picture of trade-oriented, protectionist communities, willing to engage in a variety of economic opportunities discovered in England. Equally, churches fostered skilled groups. Non-conformist Threadneedle Street included elders highly placed in the Company of Weavers, and symbiotically, its strength and long-term survival in some cases depended on the weaving community in London’s East End, with annexes serving Spitalfields. Finally, his argument that religion was paramount is undercut by the narrative of those ministers who came to England as the continental jobs market was simply overcrowded (I, p. 175).

Nonetheless, Gwynn shows that Huguenots did come to London for the people and not the jobs. The city offered them the chance to re-establish themselves in their own relatively monolingual communities. And the members of these congregations are perhaps the greatest joy of Gwynn’s work. Their world enriches depictions of the chaos and intrigue of late Stuart London. Alongside Compton, the accommodating bishop of London, enthusiasts and enablers of Huguenot settlement such as Thomas Firmin and jealous English Nonconformists are a cast of stock comic and sadly tragic characters, drawn from the world of Piers Tempest’s *Cries of London*. Among the ministers alone we have aptronymic characters like Du Desert Dieu (II, p. 74), busybodies-cum-turncoat soldiers who died fighting for Louis XIV’s France (I, p. 87), martyrs, bigamists (I, p. 46), and corrupt proselytes complaining “of the Huguenots even while living off charity intended for their maintenance” (I, p. 156). Hérault, minister at Threadneedle Street in the 1640s, had an “unintelligible, broken voice, which was sadly just one of his perceived defects” (I, p. 103). The congregations also burst out into grotesque Hogarthian life. For example, in 1682 the Threadneedle Street consistory prohibited packed lunches in church “because this offended the English” (I, p. 56), while fifteen years later a Huguenot soup kitchen paid Marsillac the carpenter 2s 6d to install an anti-cat device to their meat counter, fitted out with 500 nails (II, p. 216).

This kind of detail does, however, lead to some occasional frustrations. So many references are made to the question of language among the ministers and their English interlocutors that one wonders if Gwynn could systematically answer as to whether assimilation also depended on language, and what formal or informal tuition was available? Some ministers arrived dextrous in English, capable of conversing with high prelates in Latin, while others needed interpreters (I, p. 182). Christophe Cisner from Heidelberg was fully impeded, where his “command of French and English alike was unsatisfactory” (I, p. 37). Some Huguenots refused to learn English, envisaging instead a return to France (I, p. 181, p. 198), while others such as Jacques du Qua

refused to let language be a barrier, marrying “a young English girl to whom he cannot speak” (I, p. 64). Records also speak to this problem, with names irregularly anglicised—and then lost to the sight of the researcher—or changing in their format, dependent on “the whim of the scribe” (II, p. 161). This matter of the ability to converse, dispute, and establish a new linguistic identity begs further exploration.

While the detail is undoubtedly monumental, there is also a missed opportunity to systematically reconstruct some of the networks which bound ministers together. Their dispersal into countryside Anglican parishes is buried, and it would be satisfying to see among the analysis illustrative material demonstrating links to fellow Huguenots, through education, region, ordination, and relief patterns. Furthermore, the far-flung Edinburgh French church is dealt with somewhat briefly. While Gwynn does connect with scholarship on the social history and urban expansion of London, the role of women in the community and Huguenot story is barely touched upon, but may perhaps be considered in the third volume. Furthermore, occasional biographical inconsistencies may be apparent to those familiar with particular stories. For example, Gwynn’s account of the family and journey of François Loumeau Dupont appears not to agree with the documentary record (I, p. 277 and II, p. 94). However, when working with so many biographies, such minor details can be forgiven.

These thoughts aside, the two volumes represent generationally significant scholarship on Huguenot immigration to the British Isles from the 1680s-1710 and are “the first to tackle its story as a whole” (II, p. 158). Indeed, as Gwynn explains in the preface, the two volumes represent a lifetime’s development of his doctoral research. Although sporadically referencing the key authorities of London’s social and religious history, the two volumes principally contribute the Huguenot perspective to existing histories of London through their control of the archival record. To return to Gwynn’s question, the Huguenots came to London as it provided a home, co-religionists, economic opportunity, and a negotiable political context. Yet, beyond these themes is the author’s striking exploration of the history of sensibility and emotions, a strand of history rarely applied to the Refuge. Rather than casual xenophobia, Gwynn’s work identifies a real sense of sympathy in London—and England—for the plight of the Huguenots. For Gwynn, this is a precursor to the public outcry aroused a century later for slaves, and is evidence for predated arguments regarding the history of popular sentiment. Moreover, the echoes of current refugees trying to cross the Channel and their welcome in the British Isles gives the work extra importance for our understanding of the history of a multi-cultural London, a city which grumbled about the migrant influx, but was essentially a place of greater safety.

NOTES

[1] Andrew Spicer, *The French-speaking Reformed Community and their Church in Southampton, 1567-c.1620* (London: Huguenot Society, 1997); Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[2] Samuel Mours, “Les pasteurs à la révocation de l’édit de Nantes,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 114 (1968): 67-105, 292-316, 521-4.

[3] David van der Linden, *Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680-1700* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

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