



The Huguenot Society

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FAQs for family historians

1. Who were the Huguenots and when did they come to Britain?

See <http://www.huguenotsociety.org.uk/history> for a general introduction to the Huguenot background.

Although strictly speaking the term refers to French Calvinists, it is very broad in relation to the information the Library covers - there are resources relating to other Protestant refugees settling in this country and elsewhere, such as the Walloons and the Waldensians. French Protestants started leaving France in the sixteenth century (the earliest church - Threadneedle Street, now Soho Square - was established in 1550) and continued until 1787, when an Edict of Toleration was passed. Any Protestant leaving France during this period because of their religion can be considered a Huguenot.

2. I have been told my surname is Huguenot. How can I find out? Is there a list of names?

Contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing as a Huguenot surname, although the term tends to be used as shorthand for the names of people who have been shown by the historical records to have been Huguenots. However, as religious belief is a matter for the individual, it would be very risky to assume that all bearers of the same name shared the same religion. It should also not be assumed that all bearers of the same name belong to the same family.

Because of this, and because of the number of names which have Huguenot connections, the Library does not produce a list.

3. My family's name sounds/looks French. Would they have been Huguenots?

Not necessarily. People have emigrated from France to Britain for various reasons, not just religious, and at various times. French families moved over here both before and after the Huguenots.

4. How can I find out if I have Huguenot ancestors?

First of all, you should trace your family back as far as you can using the central records. If you are new to tracing your family history, the National Archives at Kew is a good place to start. They have a website at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/frc Civil registration started in 1837 - to trace your family before this you will need to use parish records. Try to work back to around 1800 at least, as this should bring you within the

range of the main bulk of Huguenot records (see **Question 6**) and you can start checking the sources used by family historians to investigate a possible Huguenot connection.

Different dates apply to Irish records – the General Register Office holds records from 1864 (non-Catholic marriages from 1845). Please see their website (www.groireland.ie) for more information. The National Archives of Ireland also holds genealogical information (www.nationalarchives.ie/).

5. I have been told that my family is Huguenot but our name doesn't sound French! How can we be Huguenots?

There are lots of variations in French names, and these are due to several factors. There was no standardized spelling, so clerks would write the name down as it sounded, thus giving an English spelling to a French name. Families also anglicized their name in order to assimilate more easily, and sometimes even changed their name to the English translation e.g. Blanc to White. See pp. 221-223 of *Huguenot Heritage* by Robin Gwynn (Sussex Academic Press, 2001) for more information about the problems with Huguenot names.

6. Where did the Huguenots settle in Britain?

Huguenot settlement was concentrated in London and the south, East Anglia and the Fens, and churches and other institutions were established to serve the communities in those areas. There was also a Huguenot presence in Edinburgh. However, individual Huguenots could settle anywhere in the country if they chose not to belong to a Huguenot community. This makes it more difficult to identify them as Huguenots, as they will then not appear in the records for Huguenot institutions, which is the usual means of identifying them.

7. What records have survived that I can use to trace Huguenots and what periods do they cover?

The main records are the registers for the Huguenot churches, most of which have survived. These have been published as part of the Quarto Series, so take a look at the list of volumes to see what is available. Most of the registers record baptisms and marriages only, with funerals taking place elsewhere. A few Huguenot churches recorded burials, but these are a minority.

The original manuscripts of the church registers are kept at the National Archives and have been scanned (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) if you wish to consult them online. The Huguenot Library holds a list of the registers and their National Archives catalogue reference (classmark: **E Nat (PAM)**).

Another important set of records are those for the French Hospital. Details of all inmates up to 1957 are available in volumes 52 and 53 of the Quarto Series. Other records include Lists of Aliens (foreigners resident in Britain), Letters of Denization and Acts of Naturalization (granting foreigners rights of residence or allowing them to become British citizens), records of poor relief distributed to Huguenots, and occupational records, especially for guilds and societies for trades and industries in which Huguenots were prominent.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Huguenot communities were gradually assimilated into mainstream society and the churches began to close as congregations dwindled and Huguenots chose to worship at the local parish churches instead, so the period the registers cover vary.

8. What is the Quarto Series and where can I find it?

The Quarto Series is the name given to the volumes published by the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland which transcribe primary sources relating to Huguenot history. Most of them are church registers, but there are also other types of records as described in the answer to **Question 6**. The full list is at www.huguenotsociety.org.uk/publications/quarto.html.

As well as the Huguenot Library, various libraries around the UK and across the world hold some or all of the Quarto Series. You may find the volumes on library catalogues under their old name *Publications of the Huguenot Society*, or with separate records for each volume, or under the Society's former name of Huguenot Society of London, but in any case you should check with the library beforehand if you are planning to visit.

The Quarto Series/*Publications of the Huguenot Society* volumes are not part of *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (formerly of London), which is the Society's journal and an entirely separate publication. Issues of *Proceedings* dating from 1885 to 2007 are available online for members of the Society to consult.

9. What trades and occupations were Huguenots particularly associated with?

Weaving (particularly silk), gold- and silversmithing, clockmaking, furniture making, printing and bookbinding, papermaking. Huguenots also made important contributions to the fields of science and medicine, politics, law and the military. See chapters 4 and 5 of *Huguenot Heritage* (2nd edition) by Robin Gwynn (Sussex Academic Press, 2001) for more information.

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