

Searching in France for Huguenot ancestors who arrived here after 1710

If you have found your ancestor and the area he/she came from in Huguenot records in the UK, and it seems that he/she came here after about 1710, it is unlikely that that person's name would appear in surviving records of the French Huguenot churches in France (often called temples), because these were ordered to be destroyed in 1685.

Huguenots who did not flee abroad either converted to Roman Catholicism, or attended the local Catholic church just enough to satisfy the village priest whilst secretly worshipping in their Calvinist tradition. Groups of them would go into the fields and woods at night to sing psalms and pray. However, they believed it was better to be baptised and married by the Catholic priest than to have neither of these sacraments. So the place for you to look is the village or town Catholic church registers.

If these have survived, they will probably be in either the village mayor's office (la Mairie), the town hall (la Mairie or l'Hôtel de Ville) or the Archives Départementales (the equivalent of our county archive or county record office). Sometimes registers are split between two of these repositories.

If you decide to visit personally, remember that many public offices are closed in August and that throughout the year most research places are closed at lunch time. Because of the language problem for most of us, you need to have names, dates and places written down clearly on a piece of card so that you can present it to the mayor's secretary or the archivist. Knowing just a little French is a great help. Equip yourself with a large scale map of the district so as to save time locating the place you are seeking

If you prefer to write to France for help, address your letter to the Mairie of the town or village and the département it is in, or to the Archives Départementales and the name of the département. It is no use writing Picardy, for instance, because that is an old name for a chunk of northern France covering a number of départements. Your local library should be able to help you find the full address including the post code. Include with your letter a self-addressed envelope and at least three international reply coupons, obtainable from post offices. These should cover the cost of return postage and, hopefully, a copy of a baptism entry. Allow two or three weeks for a reply.

If you do write to France for help, keep it simple but give all the relevant information you have. You could use the following as a guide, and add any other details:

Monsieur/Madame,

Je crois que mon ancêtre, (his or name), était originaire de (name of village or town).

Il (elle if it is a woman) est arrivé(e) en Angleterre vers (date e.g. 1725) et il (elle if it is a woman) est né(e) vers (date of birth e.g. 1713).

Si vous avez les registres paroissiaux de (name of place), j'aimerais savoir si le registre contient l'enregistrement du baptême de (name of the person you seek). Si vous le trouvez je vous serais très reconnaissant(e) de bien vouloir m'en envoyer une copie.

Veillez trouver ci-joint trois CRI et une enveloppe pour votre réponse.

Mes meilleures salutations,

(Your signature)

(Your full name in capitals)