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The Royal Bounty Archive: a guide for family historians

This archive is fully described in Quarto Series volume 51 by Raymond Smith.¹ The Royal Bounty consisted of annual grants paid from the Privy Purse by monarchs from James II to George III² to assist poor Huguenot refugees. The first grant was made in 1686, and from 1804 grants were sanctioned by Parliament and awarded only to existing pensioners. When the last one died in 1876 the Bounty ceased. The annual grant was paid in two instalments.

There is an index of the names of recipients, but this is incomplete. It was undertaken as an external project and some of the references may not be the same as those used in the Library catalogue. To locate records of payments to an individual you will need to know the name you are looking for, the approximate date and the area they were living in. Then use QS volume 51 to work out which documents should be consulted – this is essential as the Royal Bounty is a large archive consisting of many individual manuscripts.

Administration

For most of its life this was in the hands of the English Committee and the French Committee. The money came via the English Committee to the French Committee, the latter composed of highly respected members of the Huguenot community. At the end of each year the French Committee produced detailed accounts of the distribution which were then scrutinized by the English Committee. When the latter was satisfied, the accounts went to the Treasury. For some of the early years, 1703-1729, a printed version of these accounts has survived. Some are in the Huguenot Library, while others are in the British Museum, the archives of the French Church of London in Soho Square, Lambeth Palace Library and the London Metropolitan Archives.

Distribution

The Bounty was not just for London Huguenots; the French Committee sent money to needy refugees wherever there were Huguenot settlements, including the Channel Islands. Another sum was allocated to an Ecclesiastical Committee for the support of poor Huguenot ministers.

In London distribution was effected through two sub committees, one for west London (usually called the Department of Westminster and Soho), and the other for east London (usually called the Department of London and Spitalfields). Each department, for each distribution, had to draw up a schedule of people deserving financial support and, after the distribution, to produce accounts showing to whom the money had been paid and how much.

¹ R. Smith, *Records of the Royal Bounty and connected funds, the Burn Donation, and the Savoy church in the Huguenot Library, University College, London*, Huguenot Society Quarto Series, 51 (1974).

² For further information on the Royal Bounty see K. Le May, 'London records of Poor Relief for French Protestants, 1750-1850', *Huguenot Society Proceedings*, 26 (1994), pp. 71-82.

Within the department accounts, most citizens are divided into groups according to social status using varying terminology, but beginning with the highest: Noblesse or People of Quality, the Bourgeoisie or People of the Middling Sort and the Common People. Within each group, regular and occasional payments are often distinguished. Following these lists come lists of orphans and payments to proselytes (former Roman Catholic priests preparing to become Protestant pastors), a surgeon or apothecary and a schoolmaster. Each department provided medical support and a charity school.

The accounts of the two departments were brought together by the French Committee and individual names of recipients in alphabetical order are stated in very many cases. Sometimes they are omitted from the Common People and the subsidiary groups. Further details may include name of wife, address, details of children and ages of recipients.

Other documents in the Archive which may be of interest to family historians are the signed receipts from the provincial Huguenot churches, and the large collection of individual signed receipts from London recipients.

Sadly for the French Committee and the beneficiaries, the monarch was usually a bad time keeper; money was invariably paid late, sometimes by some months. The total of the grant was also reduced.

As usual with an archive, this one is not complete. Sometimes an account for part of a Department survives with its *raison d'être* unknown.

However, with a surname and a likely date span, and QS volume 51 to hand, patient research should soon reveal the surname if it is there.