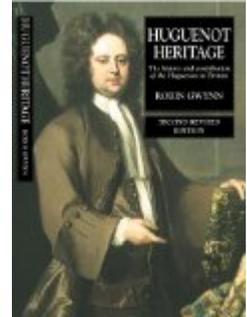


Robin Gwynn. *Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of the Huguenots in Britain.* 2nd edition. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2000. 232 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-902210-34-6.



Reviewed by Mary K. Geiter

Published on H-Albion (May, 2002)

This revised second edition of Gwynn's book incorporates the latest scholarship, particularly for the late sixteenth century and the later Stuart period. Gwynn gives a convincing account of the contribution of the Huguenots to Britain. Gwynn organizes his work by first discussing the Huguenots' origins and then examines their migration to England. By focusing on their contributions in the trading world, Gwynn ably shows the interplay between the foreigners' skills and the political exigencies of the English government. This led the English policy makers to provide a substantial amount of protection for these craftsmen in a time when other dissenters were being persecuted in the localities. At the same time, the government was aware of the importance to placate the concerns of the native population and so required the refugee tradesmen to employ at least two Englishmen in order to instruct them in the new techniques. The reason for this protection, according to Gwynn, was Huguenot economic viability. For instance, in the period when old markets were on the wane, the Huguenot tradesmen and craftsmen were able to exploit new ones. By developing newer lighter woolen blends, demand

in the warmer areas of the Mediterranean were opened.

There were watersheds in the development of the French reformed church and the Restoration of England's Charles II gave impetus to a rethinking of the church's doctrinal stand. It had to live down its "Cromwellian past," as Gwynn puts it, and so doing, a new conformist church emerged. Exempted from the 1662 Act of Uniformity, however, its preachers had to be ordained through the established Church of England. Although the church showed a tremendous amount of flexibility in its approach, it did so under pressure to survive. It was aware of the suspicion on the part of the public toward any potential disruptive influence in the wake of the civil wars.

Gwynn takes issue with the view that James II's toleration policies were less political and more ideological. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 resulted in Huguenots escaping to the Dutch Republic and attempting to get to England. Gwynn rightly notes that James both prohibited English ships from transporting refugees to English shores and praised Louis XIV's dedication to

the Catholic cause. Further, Gwynn states that it was not until 1687 and James's Declaration of Indulgence that we see the peak period for Huguenot migration to England. However, this view must be balanced against what James said and what he actually did behind the scenes. In his recent *James II* (2002), Bill Speck argues that the prevailing view of James's relationship with Louis XIV needs to be put into perspective. While James was feeding platitudes to the French ambassador, Barrillon, for Louis's consumption, he was assuring William of Orange that he disapproved of the French king's behavior. Moreover, while in Paris, James's ambassador, William Trumbull was aiding the Huguenots' escape out of France.

Gwynn's chapter on the Huguenots' contribution to the defeat of Louis XIV in the eighteenth century argues that while there can be no quantitative argument linking the defection of Huguenots to France's enemies, there is a qualitative case to be made. The importance of the defection of trained soldiers to England and the Dutch Republic was not lost on William III and the duke of Marlborough. There was another element in the significance of these Huguenot soldiers and that was their motivation. Gwynn stresses that it was their persecution under the French government which gave them "extra zeal and determination when confronted by French dragoons and their allies" (p. 186).

The final chapter brings the Huguenot heritage up to the present. Although they have migrated to the far reaches of the globe, Gwynn argues that the process of assimilation was tempered by regionalism or provincialism, that is, they tended to settle where an existing group, often from their own province, had already settled. This seems to fit the general pattern of migration. However, the question becomes why do some groups make a bigger effort to keep their identity for a much longer period (which is what the author is arguing) when others tend to blend into their new society more successfully? Here, Gwynn

speculates on some possibilities, starting with language and generational reasons, which provokes further thought, not just for the Huguenots, but for the broader social spectrum.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-albion>

Citation: Mary K. Geiter. Review of Gwynn, Robin. *Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of the Huguenots in Britain*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. May, 2002.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6281>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.