Forced Migration: Exiles and Refugees in the UK and the British Empire, 1815–1949 **(Brill Academic Publishers)**

Chapter 4: Thomas C. Jones, 'Asylum and Historical Memory in Victorian Britain'

'Asylum and Historical Memory in Victorian Britain'[1]

Thomas C. Jones, University of Buckingham

Fig. 1 – 'French Huguenot Refugees Landing at Dover in 1685. After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes', by Godefroy Durand. From Thomas Archer, 'The Huguenots in England: A Narrative Commemorating the Bicentenary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, October 22nd, 1685', *Graphic*, October 24, 1885, 461.

On 10 December 1853, Charles Dickens's weekly journal *Household Words* printed the article 'Traits and Stories of the Huguenots' by the acclaimed novelist Elizabeth Gaskell. Gaskell, who claimed she had 'always been interested' in these early modern French Protestants, regaled her readers with dramatic stories of the flight of religious refugees from France to Britain after Louis XIV in 1685 revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had hitherto guaranteed religious toleration to the Huguenots. She also celebrated the

[1] The terminology surrounding forced migration has evolved considerably since the nineteenth century. Throughout this chapter, I will follow Victorian usage, employing the terms 'refugees' and 'exiles' relatively interchangeably to describe those seeking safe haven from political and/or religious persecution. 'Asylum' and 'refuge' were likewise loosely used to describe the provision of that haven, although exactly what such asylum should entail could be hotly contested. For Victorian debates on the nature of asylum, see Thomas C. Jones, 'Définir l'asile politique en Grande-Bretagne (1815-1870)' *Hommes et migrations,* 1312, 2018, 13-21 and Caroline Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.

economic contribution of the perhaps 50,000 Huguenot exiles to their new host society, especially in textiles and the luxury goods trades, as well as the continued prominence of the descendants of these 'active, strong men, full good sense and practical talent' such as the economist and author Harriet Martineau and the lawyer and politician Samuel Romilly.[2]

This episode of refugee history held a direct relevance for Gaskell's Victorian contemporaries. In the same year that she wrote 'Traits and Stories', *Household Words* also published an investigation by George Augustus Sala of Britain's current exile population, which had recently grown to about 7,000 refugees after the collapse of the revolutions of 1848. Sala marvelled that 'refugees from all quarters of the world, and of characters, antecedents, and opinions pointing to every quarter of the political compass' flocked to Britain, and especially to London.[3] This remained true in the decades that followed, as Britain continued to act as one of the surest refuges for frustrated European revolutionaries, toppled monarchs and their courts, escaped slaves from the Americas, and Jews driven from the Russian Empire and Romania by pogroms and crippling economic restrictions. In doing so, it acquired a reputation, widely if not universally celebrated amongst its citizens, as a uniquely universal land of asylum, open to all refugees regardless of their political, national, or religious backgrounds.[4]

---

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, 'Traits and Stories of the Huguenots,' *Household Words*, 10 December 1853, 348-53.

[3] George Augustus Sala, 'Perfidious Patmos,' *Household Words*, 12 March 1853, 25.

[4] The historical literature on refugees and asylum in nineteenth-century Britain asylum has grown rapidly in recent years. An incomplete list of significant twenty-first century works in English includes: Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2013; Constance Bantman & Ana Cláudia da Silva, *The Foreign Political Press in Nineteenth-Century London: Politics from a Distance*, Bloomsbury, London, 2018; Matthew Brand, 'Right-Wing Refugees and British Politics, 1830-1871', PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2016; David Burke, *Russia and the British Left from the 1848 Revolutions to the General Strike*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2018; Laura Forster, *The Paris Commune in Britain: Radicals, Refugees, and Revolutionaries after 1871*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, forthcoming 2024; Sabine Freitag, *Exiles from European Revolutions: Refugees in mid-Victorian England*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2003; David Glover, *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012; Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009; Thomas C. Jones, 'French Republican Exiles in Britain, 1848-1870', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010; Christine Lattek, *Revolutionary Refugees: German Socialism in Britain, 1840-1860*, Routledge, London, 2006; Pietro di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880-1917)*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2013; Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe, *Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats*, Royal Historical Society, London, 2018; Tom Stammers, 'From the Tuileries to Twickenham: The Orléans Exile and Anglo-French Liberalism, c. 1848-1880,' *English Historical Review*, 133(564), 1120-54.

Historians have offered a variety of explanations for this openness. Bernard Porter in his influential *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics* associated it with the wider ascendancy of a self-confident, laissez-faire liberalism that eschewed immigration restrictions, of which there were nearly none from 1826 to 1905, and saw the curtailing of foreign nationals' civil liberties as unworthy of a free people.[5] Caroline Shaw's *Britannia's Embrace* has emphasised the growing ethic of humanitarian voluntarism across the century, which greatly contributed to the welcome afforded to refugees and shaped debates about the appropriate levels, types, and sources of relief that they should receive.[6] My own work has examined the emergence of the widely held conviction that the British constitution contained an inviolable 'right of asylum' for all who touched British soil. Informed by the constitutionalism and exceptionalism prevalent in nineteenth-century political culture, this idea took shape in the 1810s and 1820s as debates raged over the renewal after Waterloo of the 1793 Aliens Act, legislation that had placed restrictions on and allowed the deportation of foreign nationals as war broke out with revolutionary France. After the Aliens Act fully lapsed in 1826, the idea of a constitutional 'right of asylum' began to become orthodox.[7]

But historical memory also played a central role in shaping Victorian attitudes to refugees and asylum, to a degree not yet given adequate attention or recognition. In this era of rapid and self-evident change, historical knowledge and comparisons between past and present gained increased cultural currency, and, as elsewhere, the subject became increasingly professionalized in the final decades of the century.[8] Gaskell's Huguenot article was therefore part of a much wider outpouring of historical works, memoirs, biographies, novels and artworks that illustrated Britain's refugee history and its bearing on contemporary society. Though the Huguenots were the most famous and popular of the country's past refugees, attention was also paid to sixteenth-century Protestants fleeing political and religious repression in the Spanish-controlled Netherlands, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews escaping persecution in Western and Eastern Europe alike, Enlightenment figures who fell foul of the censorship of absolutist governments,

---

[5] Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in mid-Victorian Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979.

[6] Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace*.

[7] Thomas C. Jones, 'Establishing a constitutional right of asylum in early nineteenth-century Britain,' *History of European Ideas*, 46(5), 2020, 545-62.

[8] Studies on the cultural importance of and professional turn in history include: Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000; J.W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981; John Clive, 'The Use of the Past in Victorian England,' *Salmagundi*, 68/9, fall-winter 1985-6, 48-65; Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, 216-21; Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1985.

and the *émigrés* of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Such historical accounts helped to create a widespread conviction in Victorian Britain that, as the hugely popular author Samuel Smiles put it, the country had 'from the earliest times' been a 'country of refuge' for the 'proscribed of other lands'.[9] This history had in fact defined the nation, with refugees making formative and invaluable contributions to Britain's economy, culture, and politics. Memories of these contributions of past refugees and of the very fact of providing asylum over several centuries led many to conclude that Britain should remain open to new refugees. Conversely, historical memory could be used to contest this consensus, especially as immigration restrictionism waxed at the end of the century, in response to racialised fears of Eastern European Jewish migration and horror at the perceived terroristic nihilism of anarchist exiles. Past refugees could be held up as models up to which no new exile could hope to measure. Refugees themselves also recognized the terms of these debates and produced their own analyses of Britain's history of asylum, to which they could make reference if their own safe refuge seemed in danger. For supporters of both open and restrictive approaches to asylum and for Britons and foreign nationals alike, asylum in the Victorian era was understood with reference to the pre-nineteenth century past.

Histories of Asylum in Victorian Britain

Historical representations of asylum and refugees began to permeate British culture in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Much of this came through the immensely popular literary genre of historical fiction. Authors of such novels quickly recognized the dramatic potential of what Caroline Shaw has called the 'refugee narrative'.[10] Stories of valiant heroes suffering tragic defeats in exotic settings before finding salvation in Britain made for exciting and nationally self-satisfying reading. One of the first novels of this type, which did much to shape the genre as a whole, was Jane Porter's 1803 *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. After the failed 1794 uprising in Poland against Russian and Prussian rule, Porter had seen 'hapless' Polish exiles 'wandering about St. James's Park' and used the rebellion's leader Tadeusz Kościuszko as the basis for her protagonist Thaddeus Sobieski.[11] The novel sees Thaddeus vainly struggling against the Russian armies in Poland before he escapes to Britain to make a new and happy life for himself. Immediately popular, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* remained in print throughout the century and established some key tropes of historical fiction, including thick description of real historical events and using genuine historical figures as background characters to fictional protagonists, years before these were utilized in Walter Scott's more

[9] Samuel Smiles, *The Huguenots: their Settlements, Churches, and Industries in England and Ireland*, John Murray, London, 1867, v.

[10] Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace*, 75.

[11] Jane Porter, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, Colburn and Bentley, London, 1831, viii-x.

famous *Waverley*.[12] Other novelists followed suit in reconstructing the refugee past. Fanny Burney's *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties* (1814) depicted Juliet, an exile from the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, as she escaped to England and faced numerous challenges both as a refugee and as a woman. The plot drew on Burney's intimate knowledge of the exiles of the French Revolution – she had married the *émigré* Alexandre D'Arblay in 1793, and Juliet was probably at least partly based on her friend Germaine de Staël.[13] The Spanish liberal Joseph Blanco White, himself an exile in England since 1810, published *Vargas: A Tale of Spain* in 1822. A complicated narrative of late sixteenth-century Spain in the grips of the Inquisition, its title character Bartolomé Vargas flees to England where he finds not just physical but also spiritual safety by converting, like Blanco White himself, to Anglicanism.[14] But the sub-genre of refugee historical fiction found its most persistent iteration with stories of the Huguenots, with an early and typical example appearing in George Payne Rainsford James's 1839 work *The Huguenot: a Tale of the French Protestants*, in which a Protestant noble attempts to balance his loyalties to king and faith after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, while England stands in the background as a haven of last resort to which some of the characters escape.[15]

Important non-fictional works on the history of asylum were appearing at the same time. In 1812, Oxford's Clarendon Press began reissuing works by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historian John Strype. The first of these was Strype's influential biography of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, who had personally invited many refugee Protestant theologians to England during the early Reformation and had played a key role in the foundation of the 'Strangers' Church' in 1550, a refugee congregation of Protestants from the Low Countries and France allowed to follow liturgy and profess doctrine distinct from those of the Anglican church.[16] Strype's *Ecclesiastical Memorials* and *Annals of the Reformation*, republished from 1822, contained transcriptions of documents regarding this church and the dozens that were set up along similar lines for refugees in England and Scotland during the Elizabethan and Stuart eras.[17] Voluminous and containing otherwise rare sources, Strype's reprinted works were widely used by

---

[12] Thomas McLean, 'Nobody's Argument: Jane Porter and the Historical Novel,' *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 7(2), Fall-Winter 2007, 88-103.

[13] Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties*, Margaret Drabble (ed.), Pandora, London, 1988.

[14] Martin Murphy, *Blanco White: Self-Banished Spaniard*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1989, 120-2.

[15] George Payne Rainsford James, *The Huguenot: a Tale of the French Protestants*, Longman, London, 1839.

[16] John Strype, *Memorials of the Most Reverend Father in God Thomas Cranmer, sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1812.

[17] John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials, Relating Chiefly to Religion, and the Reformation of IT, and the Emergencies of the Church of England, under King Henry VIII., King Edward VI. and Queen Mary I*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1822; and *Annals of the Reformation and*

later historians of early modern refugees. The Huguenots received further scholarly attention from William Shergold Browning, uncle of the poet Robert Browning, who worked with French documents while employed as a merchant in Paris to write a *History of the Huguenots during the Sixteenth Century* in 1829 and *History of the Huguenots from 1598 to 1838* in 1839. Both volumes focused primarily on the Huguenots in France, but Browning referenced England's role as a refuge during France's sixteenth-century wars of religion and after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.[18] More recent historical exiles were given popular biographical sketches by Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*. Writing for Dionysius Lardner's renowned *Cabinet of Biography* series, Shelley depicted the lives of Voltaire, Madame de Staël, and the Italian poet and revolutionary Ugo Foscolo, all of whom spent time in exile in England.[19]

But interest in refugee history exploded in the 1840s and 1850s. This sprang in no small part from the success of Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *The Huguenots*, based on the infamous events of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, in which thousands of Huguenots were murdered across France, precipitating one of France's many wars of religion and the flight of thousands of exiles to England and elsewhere. Making its English debut in Covent Garden in 1842, *The Huguenots* ran almost continuously for the rest of the century and featured as the opening performance at the new Royal Italian Opera House in 1858.[20] The opera provided inspiration for John Millais's 1852 masterpiece Pre-Raphaelite painting *A Huguenot, on St. Bartholomew's Day*. Exhibited alongside *Ophelia* at the Royal Academy of Arts, *A Huguenot* aided Millais's 1853 election to the Royal Academy, was lucratively licensed for engraving in 1856, and was later cited as an important non-textual source for Huguenot history.[21] As *The Huguenots* garnered audiences and acclaim, Alexandre Dumas, author of the recent hits *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, published his novel *La Reine Margot*. A fast-paced tale of murder and romantic intrigue set around St

---

Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England, during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1824.

[18] W.S. Browning, *The History of the Huguenots during the Sixteenth Century*, Pickering, London, 1829; and *History of the Huguenots, from 1598 to 1838*, Pickering, London, & Girard, Paris, 1839.

[19] Mary Shelley, *Lives of the Most Eminent of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain, and Portugal*, 2, Longman, London, 1835; and *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France*, 2, Longman, London, 1839.

[20] Tessa Murdoch, *The Quiet Conquest: The Huguenots, 1685 to 1985*, Museum of London, London, 1985, 316.

[21] John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of John Everett Millais*, Methuen, London, 1899, 135-41, 146-9; Malcolm Warner, 'Millais, Sir John Everett, first baronet (1829-1896), painter', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004; W.S. Kershaw, *Protestants from France, in their English Home*, Sampson, Low Marston, Searle & Rivington, London, 1885, 144.

Bartholomew's Day Massacre, it was immediately translated into English with the 1846 version, *Maguerite de Valois: An Historical Romance*, continuing to serve as the text for the novel's modern editions.[22]

Also published in 1846, but much more staid, was John Southerden Burn's *The History of the French, Walloon, Dutch, and other Foreign Protestant Refugees Settled in England, from the Reign of Henry VIII to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*. Burn had served in 1836-41 as secretary for a royal commission investigating the historical registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials not conducted by the Church of England. This gave him 'the records of most of the Refugee congregations' founded in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Burn used these documents to compile factual sketches of these congregations, sometimes using Strype's works to provide context. Although Burn's *History* was less analytical and extensive than he had initially hoped, it was the most thorough account of these refugees to date and thus became a key point of reference for historians the following decades.[23] So too did the French historian Charles Weiss's major study of the Huguenots in France and in exile across Europe and the Atlantic world. With a large section dedicated solely to the refugees in England, Weiss's work quickly made an impact in Britain, where it was translated in 1854 as *History of the French Protestant Refugees, from the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to our Own Days* and reviewed in several of the country's major periodical publications.[24]

Refugee-focused literature and history remained popular through the rest of the century. Autobiographies of European political exiles and escaped American slaves found wide audiences and inspired fictionalized accounts of current exile populations after the revolutions of 1848 and the passage of America's Fugitive Slave Act in 1850.[25] Huguenot historical novels enjoyed a boom with the 1885 bicentenary of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Thomas Archer's *By Fire and Sword. A Story of the Huguenots*, for example, resuscitated the tropes of the genre for this anniversary, with its protagonist family

---

[22] Juliette Atkinson, "Alexander the Great': Dumas's Conquest of Early-Victorian England', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 106(4), December 2012, 417-47; Alexandre Dumas, *La Reine Margot*, David Coward (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

[23] J.S. Burn, *The History of the French, Walloon, Dutch, and other Foreign Protestant Refugees Settled in England, from the Reign of Henry VIII. to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, Longman, London, 1846, vi; E.I. Carlyle & Nilanjana Banerji, 'Burn, John Southerden (1798-1870), antiquary', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004.

[24] Charles Weiss, *History of the French Protestant Refugees from the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to the Present Time*, Frederick Hardman (trans.), Blackwood, Edinburgh & London, 1854; 'Weiss's History of the French Protestant Refugees', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 74(453), 1-22; 'History of French Protesant Refugees', *Edinburgh Review*, 99(202), 454-93.

[25] Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace*, 75-86.

again finding safety in England.[26]Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Refugees, a Tale of Two Continents* and George Alfred Henty's *Saint Bartholomew's Eve. A Tale of the Huguenot Wars* followed a similar pattern in the 1890s.[27] Even after the turn of the century, novelists continued to mine Britain's refugee history for plot material, including Emma Orczy's tales of a daring English aristocrat rescuing French *émigrés* in the *Scarlett Pimpernel* series and Joseph Conrad's gloomier depiction of fin-de-siècle London and the intertwining of anarchist exiles and British and international intelligence agencies in 1907's *The Secret Agent*.

In 1867, the most popular non-fictional refugee history, Smiles's *The Huguenots: their Settlements, Churches, and Industries in England and Ireland*, was published. Smiles had come to the idea for this work as he compiled his most famous book, the 1859 celebration of industrious self-reliance *Self-Help*. Researching the biographies of 'many celebrated inventors and mechanics' Smiles 'was struck' by finding 'so large a number of inventors with French names'. This in turn led him to investigate the 'free asylum' that exiles enjoyed in the British Isles and the economic activities of those he thought were characterised by 'unusual virtue' and 'unusual vigour and determination'.[28] The result was a triumphal hagiography that made frequent reference to works like Weiss's. Huguenot history became more specialized in the following decades, with monographs on subjects like the failed Protestant rising in the Cevennes led by Jean Cavalier, who would ultimately escape to Britain where he was decorated and served as Lieutenant Governor of Jersey,[29] on the relationship between the exiles and the Church of England,[30] and on important Huguenot military leaders like the Marquis de Ruvigny and the Duke of Schomberg.[31] By the end of the 1870s, the field was scattered enough between 'polemic and anecdote' written 'homiletically, statically, genealogically' that Reginald Lane Poole, a future Oxford don and editor of the *English Historical Review*, was awarded the Lothian prize for his synthesis of the subject.[32] Beyond the Huguenots, important biographical works appeared in the 1870s on

---

[26] Thomas Archer, *By Fire and Sword: A Story of the Huguenots*, Cassel, London, 1885.

[27] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Refugees. A Tale of two Continents*, Harper, New York, 1893; G.A. Henty, *St. Bartholomew's Eve. A Tale of the Huguenot Wars*, Scribner, New York, 1894.

[28] Samuel Smiles, *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles*, Thomas Mackay (ed.), John Murray, London, 1905, 265, 273. The phrase 'free asylum' appears in Smiles, *Huguenots*, 65, 75, 177, & 276 as one of several similar descriptions of the welcome accorded the Huguenots.

[29] Anna Eliza Bray, *The Revolt of the Protestants of the Cevennes, with Some Accounts of the Huguenots of the Seventeenth Century*, John Murray, London, 1870.

[30] Kershaw, *Protestants from France*.

[31] David Agnew, *Protestant Exiles from France in the Reign of Louis XIV*, Reeves & Turner, London, 1866, 1871, & 1874.

[32] Reginald Lane Poole, *A History of the Huguenots of the Dispersion at the Recall of the Edict of Nantes*, Macmillan, London, 1880, v.

the Scottish refugee reformer John Knox and on Voltaire.[33] In 1897, the Cambridge historian William Cunningham produced a broad social history of immigration which included the Protestant exiles of the sixteenth century, the Huguenots, the 'Poor Palatine' refugees who fled invasion and persecution in southwestern German in 1709, and the *émigrés*.[34]

Historical societies also promoted awareness of the refugee past. The Parker Society's reprinting in the 1840s of letters by key figures of the early Reformation, including exiles and their supporters in England, provided a trove of sources still used by historians of early modern asylum.[35] Similarly, the Camden Society in 1862 published material taken from archived state papers to produce lists of the names, occupations, and residences of exiles in seventeenth-century England.[36] The Huguenot Society of London, founded in 1885 to mark the bicentenary of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, had as a primary object the study of Huguenot exiles, 'particularly those in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Channel Islands, and the resulting effects of those Settlements upon the Professions, Manufactures, Commerce, and Social Life' of their host countries.[37] In 1893, the Jewish Historical Society of England held its inaugural meeting. Its founder Lucien Wolf, himself the son of a Bohemian political exile from 1848, made a 'plea for Anglo-Jewish history', emphasising the importance of Anglo-Jewry not just to Britain's history, but to international Judaism.[38] Both societies established journals that continue to publish their proceedings and papers. There was thus a consistent production of historical works on these communities, with the Huguenot Society initially concerned with commemorating the French Protestant exodus of 1685 and reprinting the documents of Huguenot and other Protestant exile churches, and many of Wolf's and others' early articles establishing the means by which Jews, many of them Sephardic exiles of the Inquisition, were readmitted to England by Oliver Cromwell and the commonwealth of the 1650s, centuries after their expulsion by Edward I in 1290.

---

[33] Peter Lorimer, *John Knox and the Church of England*, King, London, 1875; John Morley, *Voltaire*, Macmillan, London, 1872.

[34] William Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants to England*, Sonnenschein, London, 1897.

[35] *The Zurich Letters: Comprising the Correspondence of Several English Bishops and Others, with some of the Helvetian Reformers, during the Early Part of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, Hastings Robinson (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1842-5; and *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation: Written during the Reigns of King Henry VIII., King Edward VI., and Queen Mary*, Hastings Robinson (ed.).

[36] *Lists of Foreign Protestants, and Aliens, Resident in England 1618-1688*, William Durrant Cooper (ed.), Camden Society, London, 1862.

[37] 'Bye-Laws, 1885', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, 1, King, Lymington, 1887, 1.

[38] Lucien Wolf, 'A Plea for Anglo-Jewish History', *Transactions: The Jewish Historical Society of England*, 1(1), 1893-4, 1-7.

The History of Asylum and the Victorian Present

This prodigious material resonated with popular and specialist audiences in a variety of ways. It was for many a source of national pride. Historical refugees were generally presented as morally upstanding, industrious, and deserving of the asylum that they had received. As such, their salvation redounded to the benefit of all of humanity. For believing Protestants this could seem self-evidently true of Cranmer's sheltering of theologians or of England saving the worthy Huguenots. In a more secular vein, Smiles celebrated the ground-breaking work of exiled scientists like Denis Papin, Jean-Théophile Desaguliers, and Abraham de Moivre. The Liberal John Morley, a disciple and biographer of William Gladstone, could point to the impact of British exile on Voltaire and his championing of free thought and expression: 'Voltairism may be said to have begun from the flight of its founder from Paris to London'.[39]

But more immediately, histories of asylum and refugees gave insight into Britain's present. Part of this was simply genealogical. Weiss and Smiles, for example, each dedicated entire chapters of their books to enumerating the accomplishments and continuing prominence in Britain of eminent Huguenot families. The Huguenot Society's second object was to 'form a bond' among those 'who desire to perpetuate the memory of their Huguenot ancestors'.[40] Importantly, by the middle decades of the nineteenth century, this history was slipping from living memory. Romilly's posthumous 1840 life and letters showed the last glimpses of a Huguenot family fully assimilating into English culture and abandoning the use of the French language at home.[41] Similarly, Burney's memoirs, published in 1842, just two years after her death, gave insight into the now-passing generation of the *émigrés*.[42] The Norwich Walloon church, the first to have its records published catalogued by the Huguenot Society, dissolved in 1832.[43] In 1841, the French church at Threadneedle Street, where a refugee congregation had met almost continuously since 1550, closed its doors, with its congregation moving to the West End and its minister giving a retrospective sermon based significantly on Strype's writings.[44] Forty years later, the first president of the Huguenot Society, the former archaeologist and Liberal MP Austen Henry Layard bemoaned that 'it was daily becoming increasingly

---

[39] Smiles, *Huguenots*, 230-5; Morley, *Voltaire*, 44.

[40] 'Bye-Laws', 1.

[41] Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly*, John Murray, London, 1840.

[42] Fanny Burney, *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, London, 1842-6.

[43] William John Charles Moens, *The Walloons and their Church at Norwich: their History and Registers, 1565-1832*, King, Lymington, 1887-8.

[44] P.L.C. Baup, *Discours historique prononcé dans l'Église française protestante de Londres en Threadneedle Street, le 3 janvier, 1841*, London, 1842.

difficult for descendants of the Huguenot Refugees into this country to trace back their pedigrees'.[45] With this emphasis on ancestry, it is unsurprising that Burn opened his history by acknowledging the 'admixture of French blood in our veins' or that Cunningham struggled to 'draw a line between the native and the foreign elements' of the nation.[46]

More particularly, and importantly for the godly Victorians, the religious exiles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had shaped Britain's religious development. Strype's works and the collections produced by the Parker Society made clear that the theological content of England's Protestant Reformation, under Henry VIII and especially Edward VI, had been influenced by the exiled theologians invited to the country by Cranmer, including the German Martin Bucer, the Italian Peter Martyr, and the Pole John à Lasco. Peter Lorimer's histories of the Scottish Reformation argued for the importance of early Scottish Protestants like Alexander Seyton, John Willock, George Wishart, and John Knox finding refuge in Henrician and Edwardian England. There they further developed their religious thought, theologically arming themselves before returning to Scotland at the 1559-60 religious revolution that overthrew the Catholic order.[47] Wolf argued that Jewish Hebraic scholars that came to England after the readmission of 1655 increased general knowledge of the Old Testament, to the enrichment of Protestant interpretations of the Bible.[48] Meanwhile, the fact that most of the Strangers' Churches retained their own liturgies outside of the state churches meant that a blueprint existed for religious non-conformity and a de facto religious pluralism, even before the official toleration of Protestant dissenters in 1689 in England and Wales and 1712 in Scotland. For Cunningham, pointing out the continued marginalization of Catholics in Britain and Ireland, this remained the only toleration worthy of the name until the end of the eighteenth century. The 'boasted toleration of Locke and the Whig statesman did not extend beyond the limits which had been practically forced upon them by the Walloon and Huguenot refugees'.[49]

All of this religious history was of immediate political and theological importance. The Parker Society was formed to combat the pro-Catholic influence of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England, and its publications were intended in part to demonstrate the thoroughly Protestant nature of the English church. Similarly, in 1857, the evangelical clergyman George Gorham collected letters sent

---

[45] 'Inaugural Meeting', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, 1(1), 1887, 8.

[46] Burn, *History*, v; Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants*, 3.

[47] Peter Lorimer, *The Scottish Reformation: A Historical Sketch*, Griffin, London & Glasgow, 1860; and *Knox*.

[48] Wolf, 'Plea', 4.

[49] Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants*, 247.

between early English Protestant churchmen and continental theologians, including exiles like Bucer, Martyr, and Lasco, to show the long history of Sacramentarian Anglican theology and thus vindicate his own religious views in a high-profile clash with the more conservative bishop of Exeter.[50] Lorimer, meanwhile, was an Edinburgh-born and London-based minister of the Presbyterian Church of England keen to emphasise the similarities of the religious culture and establishments north and south of the Anglo-Scottish border. He referred to Knox as 'this grand old father and founder of English and Scottish Puritanism' and claimed that the history of the Scottish exiles in England showed that 'a series of reciprocal good offices between the two British kingdoms' had 'ended in consolidating and securing the foundations of the Reformed Church in both parts of the Island'.[51] And Wolf celebrated Anglo-Jewry's construction of an 'enlightened and progressive orthodoxy' and communal identity 'without restricting our…activity as British citizens', precisely at a time of rising British xenophobia in response to new Jewish refugees arrived in London, Manchester, and Leeds from pogroms in Eastern Europe.[52]

Refugees had had an even stronger impact on the country's economic development, where they were credited with laying the foundations for Victorian Britain's industrial might and commercial wealth. The textile industry, so central to Britain's global economic position in the nineteenth century, had been transformed in the sixteenth century as exiles from the Low Countries imported knowledge and expertise in weaving the 'new draperies' of mixed fabrics that were lighter, softer, and more appropriate for international exportation than traditional English woollen textiles. A number of cities and towns therefore requested that exiles be allowed to settle in their midst and practice these new industries. This was most famously the case in Norwich, where in 1565 the crown provided letters patent for Dutch and Walloon refugees to establish churches and practice industries 'as hath not bene used to be made within this our Realme', especially the 'new draperies'.[53] At the end of the seventeenth century, silk-weavers from southern France were likewise responsible for establishing the silken textile industry of Spitalfields which remained important into the nineteenth century. Cities like Southampton, Canterbury, Maidstone, Yarmouth, Glastonbury, Colchester, Sandwich, Leith, and others also saw textile manufacturing founded by refugees in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

---

[50] George Cornelius Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears, during the Period of the Reformation in England and of the Times Immediately Succeeding: A.D. 1533 to A.D. 1588*, Bell & Daldy, London, 1857.

[51] Lorimer, *Knox*, 243; and *Scottish Reformation*, 61.

[52] Wolf, 'A Plea', 6.

[53] Letters patent quoted in Moens, 245. This also included an exposition on the trades of the exiles in one of his introductory historical chapters.

Beyond textiles, Victorian historians emphasised the array of skilled and often luxury trades imported or improved in Britain by refugees. These included glassmaking, glove and hat making, wire drawing, sail manufacturing, watch and clock making, dyeing and calico printing, paper manufacturing, gunsmithing, silver and goldsmithing, as well as the draining of fens and wetlands.[54] Moreover, wealthy exiles brought capital and often played a decisive role in the budding commercial economy of the late seventeenth century. Some founded or joined great merchant houses, banks, and insurance establishments, where their families prospered for generations. Famously John Houblon, a descendant of a prominent Huguenot family, was named the first governor of the Bank of England in 1694.[55] Refugee workers, meanwhile, were credited with forming the first friendly societies. These stemmed from the models used by Elizabethan exiles to financially support their own poor and blossomed into institutions emulated by 'native Englishmen' in the eighteenth century. By the Victorian era 'the Friendly Society, with its offshoot the Trades Union' were considered 'characteristically English' institutions, despite their refugee origins.[56] Wolf similarly pointed to the history of the Rothschild family and the emergence of charities among the early Ashkenazi population in London in order to emphasise the Jewish influence on Britain's economic development.[57] Jan Hendrik Hessels, who in the 1880s and 1890s compiled and published the documents of the London Dutch church at Austin Friars marvelled that his subjects had 'increased [England's] population, introduced into it many new trades and manufactures, employed many of the English poor, and by their industry, talent, and wealth considerably revived and improved England's existing commerce, trades and manufactures'.[58] All told, Burn concluded, Britain's refugees had introduced 'into the Realm those sources of industry, talent, and wealth, which even to the present day, constitute much of its prosperity, honour, and happiness'.[59]

As they enriched and developed the British economy, refugees also made decisive contributions in the conflicts that reshaped the British state and established the country's position as a major European

---

[54] For such lists, see: Burn, *History*, ch. 12; Weiss, *History*, book 3 ch. 3; Smiles, *Huguenots*, ch. 15; Poole, *History*, ch. 8; Cunningham, chs. 4-6.

[55] Smiles, *Huguenots*,

[56] Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants*, 186-7.

[57] Lucien Wolf, *Essays in Jewish History*, Cecil Roth (ed.), Jewish Historical Society of England, London, 1934. See the included papers 'Rothschildiana' and 'Early Ashkenazic Charities in London', first given in 1892 and 1895, respectively.

[58] Jan Hendrik Hessels, *Ecclesiae londino-batavae archivum. Tomus secondus. Epistulae et tractatus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1889, xiv.

[59] Burn, *History*, vi.

power. In 1688, a significant portion of the army that accompanied William of Orange in his expedition to oust James II from the English throne was made up of Huguenot regiments. Led and trained by the experienced exile officers the Duke of Schomberg and Marquis de Ruvigny, Victorian historians argued that they were the 'flower' of William's army whose importance it was 'hard to overstate'.[60] Desiring revenge against their persecutor Louis XIV, the Huguenots were thought to be among the most motivated and effective forces in the Nine Years War and War of Spanish Succession that followed the 1688 Revolution and which pitted England, then a unified Britain, and its allies against France. This was most obviously true in the 1689-90 campaign in Ireland, where Schomberg was killed at the decisive Williamite victory at the Battle of the Boyne. Huguenot contributions to William's successes were recognized by those who did not specialise in exile history, including Thomas Babington Macaulay who argued that the 'dislike with which the most zealous English Protestant regarded the House of Bourbon and the Church of Rome was a lukewarm feeling when compared with that inextinguishable hatred which glowed in the bosom of the persecuted, dragooned, expatriated Calvinist of Languedoc'.[61] After the Williamite conquest of Ireland, Huguenot veterans were rewarded with estates, the Marquis de Ruvigny became the Earl of Galway, and Huguenot colonies were established in communities like Portarlington, Waterford, and major cities like Cork and Dublin. Nineteenth-century British historians chronicling these communities tended to view them less as an aspect of British imperial subjugation of Ireland and a buttress of the Protestant ascendancy in that country and more as smaller scale versions of the refugee communities in England and Scotland, centred around independent churches and attempting to introduce key industries to Ireland's economic life. For Smiles, it was 'to be regretted' that the refugee settlements in Ireland 'were generally so much smaller' than in England, 'otherwise the condition of that unfortunate country would probably have been very different from what we now find it'.[62] The role of the Huguenots and of early eighteenth-century refugees from the Palatinate and Salzburg in populating Britain's American colonies was treated in a similar fashion, with emphasis placed not on their being agents of colonial expansion, but on the exiles' economic innovations, cultural contributions, and ultimate prominence in the American Revolutionary movement and early United States.[63] Britain's growing imperial power, its dominion over Ireland, and the military

---

[60] Smiles, *Huguenots*, 185; Poole, *History*, 103.

[61] Thomas Babington Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James II*, 3, Longmans, London, 1853, 426.

[62] Smiles, *Huguenots*, 303. See also Poole, *History*, 109-13.

[63] Weiss, *History*, book 4; Gaskell, 'Traits', 352-3. Conan Doyle's *Refugees* could be seen as a literary version of this. There was also an American interest in Huguenot history that crested at a similar time to that in Britain. See Charles W. Baird, *History of the Huguenot Emigration to America*, Dodd, Mead, New York, 1885; and Henry Martyn Baird, *History of the Rise of the Huguenots of France*, Scribner, New York, 1879; *The Huguenots and Henry of Navarre*, Scribner, New York, 1886; and *The Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, Scribner, New York, 1895.

success it would continue to enjoy over France through the eighteenth century were therefore all owed at least in part to its refugee population. For Weiss, it was clear that of 'all the services rendered to England by the refugees, the most important was the energetic support they gave to William of Orange against James II'.[64]

In rendering that service, the exiles had also helped to permanently shape Britain's domestic constitutional and political order. Historians emphasised that the exiles who arrived in large numbers in the early 1680s, as Louis XIV took increasingly harsh measures against French Protestantism before banning it entirely in 1685, were key in transforming English political culture on the verge of the Revolution of 1688. Huguenot accounts of repression in France enflamed anti-Catholic sentiment in England, increasing opposition to the Catholic James II, whose efforts to encourage Huguenot exiles to conform to the Anglican church seemed to many to be an early step in a policy of total religious conformity that would end with the re-Catholicisation of the country. This in turn unified orthodox Anglicans and dissenters in their resolve to oust James II and invite William and Mary to take the throne.[65] Thus, according to one speech read at the bicentenary of the revocation of the Edict Nantes that cited Weiss, Burn, Macaulay, and Smiles, welcoming Louis XIV's victims had 'aided our country in attaining the greatest and most beneficial of all our political changes, the Revolution of 1688, which established the Protestant succession to the Crown, and gave to England the Bill of Rights, and terminated the ecclesiastical struggles of the 17th century by the Act of Toleration'.[66]

These constitutional benefits bestowed by the refugees in 1688 were matched by their subsequent impact on political culture, where they thereafter provided 'a powerful impulse in the path of civil and religious freedom'.[67] Portrayed as pious, industrious, and grateful for the asylum they received, the Huguenots were a ballast to peaceful, reformist, constitutional government. For Weiss, they helped to keep Britain, as well as the Netherlands and America, 'in the political path that has so long preserved them from despotism' as well as 'from the dangers of anarchy' and 'assures them the inestimable benefit of institutions at once stable and liberal.'[68] Smiles declared more pithily that they 'supplied that enterprising and

---

[64] Weiss, *History*, 231.

[65] Smiles, *Huguenots*, 181-3.

[66] Canon Fremantle, 'The Bearing of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes on the English Revolution of 1688', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society*, 1(1), 1887, 82-3.

[67] Ibid., 83.

[68] Weiss, *History*, 586.

industrious middle class which gives stability to every state'.[69] Similarly, seventeenth-century Jewish exiles had impacted British political culture by imparting Biblical learning and elucidating the political principles and structures of ancient Israel and the covenant between God and his chosen people. This provided a religious basis for understanding and justifying liberty and rights and later provided a 'religious defence' against the 'rationalist inspirations' of eighteenth-century continental philosophy. Under mutual influence, Britain and its Jewish exiles had therefore developed a 'spirit of progressive Conservatism' or 'cautious Liberalism, which so eminently characterises the intellectual atmosphere of this island'.[70] More generally, the very experience of providing asylum to some refugees had the effect of making Britain tolerant of others. This was perhaps most striking with the largely Catholic *émigrés* of the 1790s. Their presence 'did not produce a distaste for the alien immigrant', but instead prompted humanitarian concern. This carried over into the nineteenth century, as Britain welcomed the 'political fugitives' of post-Napoleonic Europe, showing that 'the English sympathy for fugitive strangers had come to be deeply rooted and widely spread'.[71]

Britain's history of asylum had therefore substantially contributed to what Victorian Britons tended to regard as quintessential about their own nation, including its tolerant if unmistakeably Protestant religiosity, its industrial and commercial might, its imposing geopolitical standing, and its stable, liberal, and constitutionalist political order. The difference between this latter quality and the history of continental despotism and revolution seemed proof positive of the beneficial effects of Britain's history of receiving refugees. Spain's long decline could be linked 'in a very direct way to the expulsion [of the Jews] of 1492'.[72] Its subsequent persecution of Protestants in the Low Countries and enforcement of religious uniformity and political absolutism at home meant that the 'Inquisition flourished but the life of the nation decayed'.[73] Historians of the Huguenots similarly insisted that the persecution of 1685 led directly to the French Revolution of 1789. By driving out the French Protestants, Louis XIV had crushed his own country's incipient industrial and commercial development, leaving a haughty aristocracy domineering over an impoverished peasantry. The pursuit of religious homogeneity led not to a genuinely held Catholic faith, but to cynicism and a turn to the irreligion of the *philosophes*. This meant that when the 'storm' of revolution 'burst upon the French monarchy', it had no reliable pillars of support, as the 'educated middle society

---

[69] Smiles, *Huguenots*, 341.

[70] Wolf, 'Plea', 5, 6-7.

[71] Cunningham, *Alien Immigrant*, 260.

[72] Wolf, 'Plea', 6.

[73] Smiles, *Huguenots*, 331.

which should have tempered the shock had long ceased to exist'.[74] If it had existed, France might have been able to produce a constitution 'distant alike from an exaggerated democracy and an unbridled despotism', the conflict between which continued to afflict it into the latter decades of the nineteenth century.[75] The contrast between Britain's stable, representative, and reformist polity and the cycles of revolution and reaction seemingly endemic on the continent was widely interpreted by the Victorians as both indicative and constitutive of their own national character.[76] Therefore, it was not just, as Smiles concluded, that 'England has no reason to regret the asylum which she has in all times so freely granted'.[77] Asylum and Britishness itself were intertwined.

Historical and Contemporary Asylum

These ideas help to explain asylum's sharp contemporary political salience to the Victorians. Historical memory generally was central to Victorian political debate, averse as it often was to 'metaphysical abstraction' and with a scattered and contested, rather than uniformly codified political constitution.[78] Evoking the past gave meaning to present events, and description or interpretation of history could provide a normative blueprint for responding to current crises. Punctuated as the Victorian decades were by the arrival of new groups of exiles, and with the history of asylum seen as so crucial to Britain's cultural, economic, and political development, the 'refugee question' was particularly rife for historical analysis. Whether it was by supporters of an open approach to asylum, by immigration restrictionists, or by exiles themselves, new refugees were consistently compared with those from centuries past and debates over the desirable extent of British asylum were couched in historical terms.

For many in a position to define Victorian Britain's approach to asylum, the rich dividends that past refugees had repaid to their country of asylum was a strong argument for receiving modern refugees. Such thinking had already appeared in the 1810s, when MPs advocating an end to the Aliens Act pointed

---

[74] Poole, *History*, 182

[75] Weiss, *History*, 590.

[76] See, for example, Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: 'Habits of Heart and Mind'*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, especially introduction and chs. 1, 3, & 6; Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: the History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2006, chs. 2-3; Bernard Porter, "Bureau and Barrack': Early Victorian Attitudes towards the Continent', *Victorian Studies*, 27(4), 407-33; Georgios Varouxakis, *Victorian Political Thought on France and the French*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002.

[77] Smiles, *Huguenots*, 342.

[78] Hawkins, *Political Culture*, 2-4.

to the 'industry and skill' of the early modern exiles and protested that immigration restriction 'discourages the employment of foreign capital, and the exercise of foreign ingenuity, in our country'.[79] By the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848, such arguments were therefore well rehearsed. In 1852, in response to Austrian demands that Britain clamp down on its resident political exiles, the Liberal MP Richard Monckton Milnes responded that the right of asylum was 'dear to the hearts of the English people' because it was 'connected with some of the most important portions of our history'. The 'great Protestant divines' invited by Cranmer had helped to 'confirm the Reformation here', the Huguenots had established 'those silk manufactures in Spitalfields which had since become one of the most beautiful and most celebrated of our commodities', the Palatine refugees of 1709 could still be detected 'in certain districts' of Ireland and *émigrés* 'of the first great French Revolution' had contained 'the best, the most gifted, and most learned of men' who 'were received with a cordiality and a kindness' that would reverberate in French memory for many years to come.[80] Such historical rosters could be updated over time. By the fin-de-siècle period, similar assessments were being made about the exiles of the early Victorian years. Charles Dilke, a vocal opponent of proposed restrictions on 'pauper immigration' from Eastern Europe, recalled of the French 'Socialistic refugees of 1848' that despite being 'destitute aliens when they came', they had 'founded in this country many important trades' including 'English electro-plate work and many branches of the Birmingham hardware and jewelery trades'. Meanwhile, many similarly impoverished Germans and Hungarians 'became most distinguished scholars, decorators, and artists'.[81] To close the door on Eastern European Jews in the 1890s would therefore be to cut Britain off from similar possible enrichment in the future.

More generally, the mere precedent of past asylum was in itself a powerful inducement to accept new refugees and afford them wide latitude. When the Post Office controversially opened some of the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini's correspondence in 1844 at Austria's request, George Grey declared that this was an intolerable act since it 'has always been the pride and boast of this country to receive' exiles 'with hospitality and kindness'.[82] It seemed evident that that history should guide current policy, as *The Times* asserted in 1850 in response to continental complaints about the growing revolutionary refugee population of London: 'England will continue to be, what it has ever been, the asylum of nations'.[83] For many, the long historical practice of welcoming refugees meant that the universal practice of asylum was

---

[79] Jones, 'Establishing', 556. Protest entered in Lords Journal, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 38, 2 June 1818.

[80] Richard Monckton Milnes, *Parliamentary Debates*, third series, vol. 120, 1 April 1852, 485-6.

[81] Charles Dilke, *Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, vol. 8, 11 February 1893, 1192-3.

[82] George Grey, *Parliamentary Debates*, third series, vol. 75, 24 June 1844, 1302.

[83] *The Times*, 19 September 1850, 4.

now embedded in the very character of the nation. The radical MP David Urquhart called it a 'natural impulse of the national mind and national character' to offer 'in all time' an 'unstinted hospitality to the unfortunate of all countries'. Abandoning the practice now would be a 'falsification of that character'.[84] Viewed in this light, even seemingly minor legal changes could take on enormous significance, if they seemed to touch on the rights of refugees. When several exiles based in Britain narrowly failed to assassinate Napoleon III in 1858, the British government responded by attempting to transform conspiracy to murder from a misdemeanour to a felony. But the Conspiracy to Murder Bill was interpreted by many as an abridgement of the ancient right of asylum that was being shamefully undertaken at the request of a despotic foreign power. Thus, John Roebuck proclaimed that Britain 'owes her position in the world, in a great measure' to its treatment of refugees, including those from the recent past like Napoleon III himself. To 'change the law on this occasion' would therefore be to 'violate the first principles of our constitution', to 'degrade ourselves before the world' and to be 'no longer the English people that our forefathers were'.[85]

But those who wished to restrict the activities or entrance of new refugees also made appeals to the past. In the last two decades of the century, anxieties about relative British economic decline, about new immigrants' impact on housing and working conditions in British cities, and an increasingly racialized conception of national identity all fuelled support for immigration restriction.[86] Those conversant in refugee history, including Conan Doyle in a preface to *The Refugees*, sometimes pointed to the Protestantism of the Huguenots as having facilitated their assimilation in ways unavailable to the largely Jewish new arrivals.[87] That new migrants also tended to be poor and engaged in lower wage work such as tailoring, furniture-making, and laundering meant that they could not be compared to former exiles, who had economically benefitted the country. Arnold White, one of the key proponents of immigration restriction in this period, made the comparison starkly. Since 'Mazzini, Kossuth, and Orsini brought with them money in their pockets to pay their hotel bills' and the early modern Protestants brought 'skill, character, and at least one new trade', presumably textiles, providing asylum in earlier eras had brought 'material profit and pecuniary advantage to the commonwealth'. But now 'the traditions of England' were 'maintained at the expense of the English working girls' who were made 'involuntary hostesses' to 'maintain the national

---

[84] David Urquhart, *Parliamentary Debates*, third series, vol. 98, 1 May 1848, 579-80.

[85] John Roebuck, *Parliamentary Debates*, third series, vol. 148, 5 February 1858, 765.

[86] David Feldman, 'The Importance of Being English: Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England,' in *Metropolis – London: Histories and Representations since 1800*, David Feldman & Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), Routledge, London & New York, 1989; Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905*, Heineman, London, 1972; Glover, *Literature.*

[87] Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace,* 222-4.

reputation for bluff and open hospitality'.[88] Some historians agreed. In his work, Cunningham contrasted the 'destitute' Palatine exiles of 1709 and the *émigrés* of the 1790s, respectively a 'grievance' and a 'tax' to the nation, to the 'undoubted gain' of the 'Walloon and the Huguenot artisans'. This analysis made him cautious about expecting an economic boon from newer arrivals. Rather than conclude that 'the experience of the past' showed that 'permitting the immigration of aliens' always produced economic benefits, he thought that the context had greatly changed and that nineteenth-century Britain did not require the same level of industrial tutelage from foreigners as had sixteenth-century England. At any rate, he concluded, 'we have not much to gain from imitating the institutions of the Polish Jews'.[89] As is well known, such assessments would play a major role in the passing of the Aliens Act of 1905, which placed restrictions on the entry of 'undesirable' aliens.

New refugees were also denounced as beyond the pale for their political beliefs and actions. In the aftermath of 1848, some suggested that the revolutionary exiles were too radical to deserve an asylum. The Conservative MP James Stuart-Wortley urged the government in 1851 to adapt legislation that would allow it to deport the leaders of the Central Committee of European Democracy, a republican organization bringing together exiles from across Europe under the joint leadership of the Polish Arnold Darasz, the Hungarian Lajos Kossuth, the French Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, Mazzini, and the German Arnold Ruge. Since they worked for 'the subversion of the Governments of Central Europe' and advocated 'insurrection against and the extermination of the existing sovereigns', they should not receive an asylum.[90] Similarly, as Britain entered the Crimean War in alliance with France and with Austria as a friendly neutral, Robert Peel, the son of the famous prime minister, was outraged that Kossuth and Victor Hugo, 'foreigners who found a safe asylum in this country' continued to criticise the Austrian and French governments that had driven them into exile and called on the government to 'put a stop to it'.[91] The argument that current refugees were politically unworthy of the asylum enjoyed by previous exiles could be repeated in each generation, especially as the ideological profile of revolutionary exiles in Britain shifted in a more radical direction in the second half of the century. Somewhat controversial in their own day, exiles like Mazzini and Kossuth were later widely remembered as heroes whose causes had been vindicated by the ultimate unification of Italy and Hungarian autonomy within the Habsburg Empire. By contrast, the anarchists of the 1890s seemed to some to be an altogether different and essentially criminal breed, particularly as fears arose of

---

[88] Arnold White, 'The Invasion of Pauper Foreigners', 23(133), 415-6.

[89] Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants*, 250-1, 260, 266.

[90] James Stuart-Wortley, *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time*, third series, vol. 115, 1 April 1851, 883.

[91] Robert Peel, *Parliamentary Debates*, third series, vol. 136, 13 December 1854, 127-8.

the political assassinations and terroristic bombings of civilians enacted by some anarchists who espoused the theory of 'propaganda by the deed'. Thus, the prime minister Lord Salisbury attempted to bring in an Aliens Bill that would have allowed the deportation of those thought likely to commit crimes following the assassination of the French president Sadi Carnot. He dismissed the objection that such legislation would have denied asylum to the exiles of 1848. '[E]verything has changed since the days of Kossuth, Mazzini, and Garibaldi. It is no longer a case of liberty against despotism. It is no longer a question of giving a harbour of safety to those who, in the vicissitudes of politics, have failed to carry their own ideals into effect. You are now dealing with men for whom any such excuse is impossible, and would be almost disgraceful. You are dealing with men who commit crimes.'[92] Past asylum for previous exiles could be an effective measure by which to find current refugees wanting.

Finally, refugees in Britain noticed the importance of the historical memory of asylum. Indeed, depicting and analysing that history was an important aspect of refugee writing on Britain. Blanco White's *Vargas* contrasted the asylum, and Protestantism, offered by sixteenth-century England to the persecution of Inquisitorial Spain. A decade later, the Italian liberal and nationalist Giuseppe Pecchio, who fled the collapse of the Italian and Spanish revolutions of the early 1820s, published his *Semi-Serious Observations of an Italian Exile during his Residence in England*. Pecchio contextualized his own time in London in the wider arc of Britain's history of asylum, referencing the Huguenots, *émigrés*, and others. He attributed British asylum to the country's long history of parliamentary government and in particular its tradition of 'loyal opposition' which ensured that governments did not deteriorate into tyranny and had a ready-made replacement when exhausted. As a constitutional state, Britain upheld this principle on the international stage and functioned in Europe as "'the Opposition" which always throws its weight into the scale on the side of the weak and oppressed, in order to preserve the equilibrium', making it the 'asylum for all the unfortunate'.[93] Interest in Britain's history of asylum was evident even amongst exiles not writing for a British audience. The exiled French republican Théodore Karcher, in his *Études sur les institutions politiques et sociales de l'Angleterre*, explained to his French readers that refugees' right to asylum in Britain was embedded in the country's constitution. Basing his interpretation of Britons' 'fundamental rights' on a reading of the eighteenth-century jurist and constitutional analyst William Blackstone, Karcher concluded that a few specific disabilities notwithstanding, 'Non-naturalized foreigners enjoy all essential rights, and England has

[92] Lord Salisbury, *Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, vol. 27, 17 July 1894, 142.

[93] Pecchio, *Semi-Serious Observations of an Italian Exile, during his Residence in England*, Wilson, London, 1833, 145, 148-9, 154.

therefore always had the honour of being the land of asylum par excellence', a constitutional analysis very similar to that of many Victorian radicals, Whigs, and Liberals.[94]

Exiles also invoked Britain's history of asylum when they feared that their own refuge in the country was threatened. In 1855, the Jersey-based exile newspaper *L'Homme* printed a speech by the refugee Félix Pyat, accusing Queen Victoria of sacrificing her honour by appearing publicly with Napoleon III on a recent state visit to Paris. After an indignation meeting held against the paper attracted two thousand attendees, the lieutenant-governor of the island, Sir James Frederick Love, ordered the expulsion of the paper's editor, Charles Ribeyrolles, its proprietor Luigi Pianciani, and its vendor Alexandre Thomas. They were followed by Victor Hugo and several dozen other exiles who bitterly denounced the expulsions in a subsequent issue of *L'Homme*.[95] To protest his expulsion, Piancini canvassed the liberal and radical press in Britain and compared his treatment in Jersey, where his private home had erroneously been identified on anti-*L'Homme* placards as the newspaper's office, to the persecution of the Huguenots. '[M]ore was not done', he wrote in an allusion most Britons were sure to recognize, 'at the massacre of St. Bartholomew, when they marked the house of Huguenots with a red cross'.[96] His claim may well have had some influence, since British protest meetings that were soon held against the expulsions also referenced the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre.[97] The agitation against the Jersey expulsions failed in the short term, though the expelled exiles were able to relocate to the British mainland and to Guernsey, and their banishment from Jersey lapsed in 1859. A more successful exile appeal to the history of asylum occurred when the French exile Simon Bernard was tried as an accessory to the attempted assassination of Napoleon III in 1858. Bernard chose an all-English jury to flatter the nation's pride, despite his right as a foreign subject to have one half his jurors be fellow aliens. His defence counsel then offered the jurors a patriotic recapitulation of Britain's refugee history, including the Dutch Protestants who had 'conduced to the more firm establishment of Protestantism in this country' and the Huguenots who had given us the venerable 'Saurins, the Romillys, and the Laboucheres'. He successfully urged for acquittal, arguing that conviction would, 'at the bidding of a neighbouring despot, destroy the asylum which aliens have hitherto enjoyed'.[98]

---

[94] Thédore Karcher, *Études sur les institutions politiques et sociales de l'Angleterre*, Librairie Internationale, Paris, 1867, 219. This is my own translation from the French. On this view of asylum and the constitution, see Jones, 'Establishing'.

[95] Thomas C. Jones, 'A 'coup d'État in Jersey? Rethinking the Jersey Expulsions of 1855', *Diasporas*, 33, 2019, 137-57.

[96] Luigi Pianciani, 'The Exiles from Jersey. To the Editor of the People's Paper,' *People's Paper*, 20 October 1855, 5 and 'M. Pianciani's Statement. To the Editor of the Daily News,' *Daily News*, 22 October 1855, 3.

[97] 'The Jersey Exiles,' *Daily News*, 13 November 1855, 5.

[98] *Life of Dr. Simon Bernard, with Judgment and Extracts from the Press on his Trial*, Watts, London, 1858, 12.

Nearly half a century later, anarchist exiles and their allies continued to employ similar rhetorical tactics. In 1892, France requested the extradition of several anarchist exiles in connection with a bombing at the Café Very in Paris earlier that year. Extradition for 'political crimes' were expressly forbidden under the law, so British magistrates ruled that the bombing of civilian sites were criminal, rather than political, offences, and that anarchism itself could not be considered a genuine political ideology, since it rejected the state altogether. This of course imperilled the asylum of anarchist exiles and in 1892 the Committee for the Defence of the Right of Asylum, consisting of prominent anarchist exiles like Peter Kropotkin and Louise Michel as well as their British supporters, was formed. The Committee issued 'An Appeal on Behalf of the "Right of Asylum" in England' which opened with the by now familiar historical claim that 'For many generations England has been the hereditary home of the political refugees of all countries, and the protection it has offered to them has always been considered in this country as one of her chief glories'. It urged Britain not to abandon this 'ancient and humane policy' and to resist French demands for extradition.[99] Though the Committee was unsuccessful in preventing the extraditions, concern over the right of asylum, even for anarchists, played a major role in the successful resistance to Salisbury's 1894 Aliens Bill.[100]

Conclusion

Historical memory continued to play an important part in shaping attitudes to asylum into the twentieth century. Historical fiction, like that of Orczy and Conrad, remained popular in the first decade of the century and, as the voluminous literature on the 1905 Aliens Act has shown, concern to protect the age-old 'right of asylum' was crucial in securing protections for political and religious refugees in Britain's first modern immigration legislation. Memory and politics also intersected during the First World War. The arrival in 1914-15 of more than 200,000 Belgian refugees fleeing from German invasion seemed to show the justice of the Allied cause and helped to stiffen the British population's resolve for war, as was depicted in H.G. Wells's novel *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*.[101] The Belgians were also explicitly compared to previous generations of refugees. In August 1915, to commemorate the anniversary of the St Bartholomew's Day

[99] 'An Appeal on Behalf of the 'Right of Asylum' in England', London, 1892.

[100] Bantman, *French Anarchists*, ch. 5; and Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, chs. 7-8.

[101] H.G. Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*, Cassell, London, 1916. For a good summary of the Belgian exiles and their effect on Britain, see Pierre Purseigle, "A Wave on to Our Shores': The Exile and Resttlement of Refugees from the Western Front, 1914-1918,' *Contemporary European History*, 16(4), 427-44.

Massacre, the *Graphic* proclaimed a 'religious link with our Allies' by comparing the current Belgian refugees with the Walloon and Huguenot religious exiles of the sixteenth century. Declaring that since 'time immemorial England has offered sanctuary to the exiled and the persecuted', the paper included a historical précis of the Strangers' Churches and illustrations of modern worshippers in the still-active Huguenot chapel in Canterbury Cathedral.[102] Refugees also continue to invoke these memories. In 1916, when plans surfaced to require Russian-born, mostly Jewish, residents of Britain to serve in the tsar's armies, a Foreign Jews Protection Committee against Deportation and Compulsion was quickly formed and urged the government not to violate 'the right of asylum which has made Great Britain a nation honoured above all others'.[103] Many liberal and radical British figures supported the Committee, including the Liberal peer Lord Sheffield, who defended the rights of this population with reference to Britain's 'boast for centuries' of providing 'refuge for those who flee from other lands', including the Huguenots, Mazzini, and Victor Hugo.[104]

But the war represented an important turning point in how Britain remembered asylum. The twentieth century produced its own series of new and daunting refugee crises. Memories of Dutch Protestants, Poor Palatines, and counter-revolutionary *émigrés* faded, replaced over time by the children of the 1938-9 *Kindertransport*, Hungarians who resisted Soviet domination in 1956, or the Ugandan Asians expelled by Idi Amin in 1972. The interplay between British identity and asylum increasingly revolved around these groups, though the Huguenots, the largest and most constant exiles of the early modern era, were not forgotten.[105] Moreover, Britain turned in a decisively restrictionist direction after 1914. The nationalist animus released by the war and the fears enflamed by the outbreak of revolution in Europe from 1917 meant that the protections for political and religious refugees embedded in the 1905 Aliens Act were scrapped. Henceforward asylum was selectively given, rather than universally applied. Historicised injunctions were less frequently made to welcome new refugees than to negatively compare them to those

---

[102] 'A Religious Link with Our Allies', *Graphic*, 28 August 1915, 272-3, 284.

[103] 'The Fate of the Foreign Jew,' *East London Observer*, 5 August 1916, 5.

[104] Lord Sheffield, *Parliamentary Debates*, fifth series, vol. 22, 27 July 1916, 984-5. On the complex issue of Russian-born Jews and military service see Sascha Auerbach, 'Negotiating Nationalism: Jewish Conscription and Russian Repatriation in London's East End, 1916-1918,' *Journal of British Studies*, 46, July 2007, 594-620; Julia Bush, *Behind the Lines: East London Labour, 1914-1919*, Merlin Press, London, 1984, ch. 6; Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution*, Frank Cass, London, 1992, ch. 5.

[105] On that interplay, see Becky Taylor, *Refugees in Twentieth-Century Britain: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021.

consigned 'safely in the past'.[106] Much had changed since the days when the founders of the Huguenot Society had published the 'French Refugee' song, featuring the chorus:

Hey! For our land, our English land,
The land of the brave and the free,
Who with open arms in the olden time
Received the refugee.[107]

Select Bibliography:

Auerbach, Sascha, 'Negotiating Nationalism: Jewish Conscription and Russian Repatriation in London's East End, 1916-1918', *Journal of British Studies*, 46(3), 2007, 594-620.

Atkinson, Juliette, '"Alexander the Great": Dumas's Conquest of Early-Victorian England', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 106(4), 2012, 417-47.

Bantman, Constance, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation,* Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2013.

Bantman, Constance and Ana Cláudia da Silva, *The Foreign Political Press in Nineteenth-Century London: Politics from a Distance,* Bloomsbury, London, 2018.

Brand, Matthew, 'Right-Wing Refugees and British Politics, 1830-1871', PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2016.

[106] Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2006, 19.

[107] 'The French Refugee', words by Samuel Byles, music by Windham Ryves. This version is from an 1857 typescript copy sent by Byles's family to Arthur Giraud Browning, a founder of the Huguenot Society on 31 July 1876. It was then printed with somewhat altered lyrics as 'The Huguenot Refugee'. Both versions and the accompanying correspondence are in London, The National Archives, Huguenot Library, HJ 86. The 1857 version was reprinted with some minor alterations in Murdoch, *Quiet Conquest*, 318.

Burke, David, *Russia and the British Left from the 1848 Revolutions to the General Strike,* I.B. Tauris, London, 2018.

Bush, Julia, *Behind the Lines: East London Labour, 1914-1919,* Merlin Press, London, 1984.

Carlyle, E.I. & Nilanjana Banerji, 'Burn, John Southerden (1798-1870), antiquary', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004.

di Paola, Pietro, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880-1917),* Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2013.

Feldman, David, 'The Importance of Being English: Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England', in David Feldman & Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), *Metropolis – London: Histories and Representations since 1800*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, 56-84.

Forster, Laura, *The Paris Commune in Britain: Radicals, Refugees, and Revolutionaries after 1871*, Oxford Uni Press, Oxford, forthcoming 2024.

Freitag, Sabine, *Exiles from European Revolutions: Refugees in mid-Victorian England*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2003.

Gainer, Bernard, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905*, Heineman, London, 1972.

Glover, David, *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act*, Cambridge Uni Press, Cambridge, 2012.

Hawkins, Angus, *Victorian Political Culture: 'Habits of Heart and Mind'*, Oxford Uni Press, Oxford, 2015.

Isabella, Maurizio, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era,* Oxford Uni Press, Oxford, 2009.

Jones, Thomas C., 'A coup d'État in Jersey? Rethinking the Jersey Expulsions of 1855', *Diasporas*, 33(1), 2019, 137-57.

Jones, Thomas C., 'Establishing a constitutional right of asylum in early nineteenth-century Britain', *History of European Ideas*, 46(5), 2020, 545-562.

Jones, Thomas C., 'French Republican Exiles in Britain, 1848-1870, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010.

Kadish, Sharman, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution,* Frank Cass, London, 1992.

Kushner, Tony, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now,* Manchester Uni Press, Manchester, 2006.

Lattek, Christine, *Revolutionary Refugees: German Socialism in Britain, 1840-1860,* Routledge, London, 2006.

Mandler, Peter, *The English National Character: the History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2006.

McLean, Thomas, 'Nobody's Argument: Jane Porter and the Historical Novel', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 7(2), 2007, 88-103.

Murdoch, Tessa, *The Quiet Conquest: The Huguenots, 1685 to 1985,* Museum of London, London, 1985.

Porter, Bernard, "'Bureau and Barrack": Early Victorian Attitudes towards the Continent', *Victorian Studies*, 27(4), 1983-84, 407-33.

Porter, Bernard, *The Refugee Question in mid-Victorian Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979.

Shaw, Caroline, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief*, Oxford Uni Press, Oxford, 2015.

Sutcliffe, Marcella Pellegrino, *Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats,* Royal Historical Society, London, 2018.

Purseigle, Pierre, "'A Wave on to Our Shores": The Exile and Resettlement of Refugees from the Western Front, 1914-1918', *Contemporary European History*, 16(4), 2007, 427-44.

Stammers, Tom, 'From the Tuileries to Twickenham: The Orléans Exile and Anglo-French Liberalism, c. 1848-1880', *English Historical Review*, 133(564), 2018, 1120-54.

Taylor, Becky, *Refugees in Twentieth-Century Britain: A History*, Cambridge Uni Press, Cambridge, 2021.

Varouxakis, Georgios, *Victorian Political Thought on France and the French*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002.

Warner, Malcolm, 'Millais, Sir John Everett, first baronet (1829-1896), painter', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004.