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**Huguenot poor relief in Hanoverian London:
assistance to widows in the period
1735-1750**

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He koha aroha teenei.

Introduction

By the end of the seventeenth century London's French Protestant community numbered over 20,000, constituting some five per cent of the capital's population.¹ Many had come during the 1680s and 1690s, fleeing from religious persecution in Louis XIV's France and arriving destitute, thus creating extra demands for poor relief.² The present research investigates what assistance was still needed some two generations later when the community might be thought to have settled down after the turmoil of the refugee period.

Little work has so far been done on immigrant populations in eighteenth-century England, and the women of immigrant communities have received even less attention.³ The category of widows is used as a sample for this study because they form an identifiable group of manageable size within the female Huguenot population. Widows also figure prominently as recipients of poor relief under the old English Poor Laws, so there is a rich store of comparative literature.

Many of the mid-eighteenth century Huguenot widows appear to have been elderly, and knowledge about relief to the elderly poor is particularly lacking for the Early Modern period, "the most neglected era of this generally neglected subject".⁴ Furthermore, this study examines relief provided through a number of channels: the French Protestant Church (which could be approximated to parish relief in the host community); Royal Bounty payments; the French Protestant Hospital; a charity soup kitchen; and one of the community's benefit societies. This facilitates an analysis of what has been called the "mixed economy of welfare" and permits a contribution to the debate on both parish relief and voluntary charity - debates

¹ Robin D. Gwynn *Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of the Huguenots in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1985) p.36

² Poor relief provided to widows of this community (both newly-arrived and longer-established) during the period 1681-1695 has already been the focus of a previous study: Eileen Barrett "Poor Relief Provided to Huguenot Widows, 1681-1695, through the French Church of London: a Preliminary Study" (Unpublished BA Hons research essay, Massey Univ., 1996)

³ Anne Laurence *Women in England 1500-1760: a Social History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994) p.25

⁴ Lynn Botelho "Aged and Impotent: Parish Relief of the Aged Poor in Early Modern Suffolk" in Martin Daunton *Charity, Self-interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London: UCL Press, 1996) p.93

which are all too often conducted in isolation from each other.⁵ The study will also contribute to a knowledge of the London Huguenot community in the eighteenth century, a period which has been virtually ignored in Huguenot research to date.

The documents which form the basis of this research [see table following p.4] are largely in manuscript form. The largest body of material comes from the archives of the French Church of London. This church, situated at the time in Threadneedle Street and the oldest of the French churches in the capital, also had the largest membership, and was seen as the principal source of church relief for Huguenots in the London area. The contributing manuscripts include the Deacons' accounts of money disbursed to the poor, and the records of their deliberations on poor relief.⁶ The latter documents [Mss 58 and 59] are especially interesting because they often give some clue as to why a pension rate changed or a particular grant was given, specifying for example that the recipient was now very old, or had fallen sick, or that her children had left home. The financial accounts themselves are exemplary in their fullness and indicate a familiarity with accounting and administrative practice on the part of those who had put the systems in place - a legacy, no doubt, of Huguenot involvement in London's financial and commercial community.⁷ In addition to 'case-books' [Mss 83 and 81] which record information under a person's name, there are day-books [Mss 110-113 and Ms 309] which record, by date, the distribution of monies, and monthly accounts [Mss 120 and 121] which show income as well as outflow. Thus, although some parts of one manuscript may be faint or damaged, it is generally possible to retrieve the missing information through recourse to one or more of the other documents.

⁵ Joanna Innes "The 'Mixed Economy of Welfare' in Early Modern England: Assessment of the Options from Hale to Malthus (c.1683-1803) in Martin Daunton (ed.) *Charity, Self-interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London: UCL Press, 1996) p.141

⁶ In the Huguenot church, Deacons were lay-people who had particular responsibility for poor relief. As the organisational rules of the "Église Française de l'Artillerie de Londres" state: "l'Office de Diaconat ... consiste à recevoir [sic], et à distribuer les deniers des Pauvres, des Prisonniers, et des Malades, de les visiter et d'en avoir soin". *Register of the Church of the Artillery, Spitalfields, 1691-1786* edited by Susan Minet [Quarterly Series of the Huguenot Society (hereafter HSQ), vol.XLII] (London, The Society, 1948) p.xii

⁷ For Huguenot/Walloon involvement in finance and, particularly, the founding of the Bank of England, see (e.g.) A.C. Carter *Getting, Spending and Investing in Early Modern Times: Essays on Dutch, English and Huguenot Economic History* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975); F.M. Couzet "Walloon, Huguenots and the Bank of England" in *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society*, vol.XXV, no.2 (1990), pp.167-178

The manuscripts recording the relief known as the Royal Bounty payments to poor French refugees [B.Mss 54-57] are generally well-preserved but are often less detailed, particularly with regard to payments to the 'common people'. They also include payments made to people outside London, so for the purposes of this study information from this source has been used only when it can be tied with some certainty to London residency.⁸ This may have resulted in greater emphasis on relief in the eastern end of the area because, while 'Spitalfields' is generally mentioned specifically, no place of residence is entered for those within the City area so that, unless recipients can be identified as London residents by other sources, they have not been included in this research. Furthermore, Bounty records contain numerous amendments and annotations, many of which are undated. These factors combine to limit the usefulness of the documents, although much can still be gleaned.

The records of two benefit societies - namely the *Société de la Province de Normandie*, founded in 1703, [NS.Ms D2] and *Société de Poitou et du Loudunois* [H/M1/Mss 1-4] - offer similar difficulties. Use of the former had to be discounted, owing to the very sketchy nature of the records for the period in question, but the latter manuscripts, while lacking in detail on many of the recipients of relief, have nevertheless yielded information which is particularly important given that this type of assistance was in its infancy at the time.

Apart from these manuscript sources, two other primary sources have been used: the case book of the 'Maison de Charité de Spittlefields' for the period 1739-1741, which has been published as volume LV of the Quarto Series of the Huguenot society,⁹ and extracts from the archives of the French Protestant Hospital and the

⁸ 'London', for the purposes of this research, includes what might be termed the 'eighteenth-century greater London area' - that is, it is not limited to those parishes covered by the 'Bills of Mortality' or bounded by the city walls.

⁹ HSQ, vol.LV: *The Case book of 'La Maison de Charité de Spittlefields' 1739-41* edited by Charles F.A. Marmoy (London: The Society, 1981)

Coqueau Charity, also published in the Quarto Series.¹⁰

The study does not include any consideration of payments made by royal warrant. Nor does it include any detailed discussion of poor relief provided by the various trade organizations and livery companies. It seems unlikely, however, that the London companies played a large part in the provision of assistance to the Huguenot community given that most admitted few foreign members at this time.¹¹ Also omitted is poor relief administered through any French churches other than that in Threadneedle Street. It should be noted that this last omission may have further biased the results in favour of relief in the eastern part of the greater London area, since although the church was geographically situated in the City, it had an annexe in the east and its poor relief activities were weighted towards that end of town.¹²

¹⁰ HSQ, vol.LII: *The French Protestant Hospital: Extracts from the Archives of 'La Providence' relating to Inmates and Applicants for Admission 1718-1957 and to Recipients of and Applicants for the Coqueau Charity 1745-1901: vol.I; entries A-K* (London: The Society, 1977); HSQ, vol.LIII: *The French Protestant Hospital: Extracts from the Archives of 'La Providence' relating to Inmates and Applicants for Admission 1718-1957 and to Recipients of and Applicants for the Coqueau Charity 1745-1901, vol.II: entries L-Z, appendices* (London: The Society, 1977)

¹¹ The Weavers' Company, for example, had an active programme of assistance to its members and, given the importance of weaving in the Huguenot community, one might expect it to be a major provider of poor relief to them. However, foreigners were at first admitted only to the lower orders of membership, and it was not until August 1740 that any French liverymen were elected. [Alfred Plummer *The London Weavers' Company 1600-1970* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) pp.16 & 126] Significantly, there are scarcely any French names appearing among its lists of pensioners in the period 1735-1750 and, of those that do, only three are women. [Personal communication from John Chapman, London]

¹² In confirmation of this, the Deacons' records show that the majority of the church's poor relief districts were on the eastern side of the city. [See page 30 for more detail.]

Chronology of manuscript coverage

	1735	1736	1737	1738	1739	1740	1741	1742	1743	1744	1745	1746	1747	1748	1749	1750
Mss 58, 59 - Decisions on grants	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mss 83, 81 - Reg. of poor + relief granted	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mss 110-112 - Monies disb. to poor refs	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•				
Mss 309, 113 - Monies disb. to poor refs												•	•	•	•	•
Mss 120, 121 - Mnthly csh a/cs, poor rlf	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
B.Ms 54 - Pymts to gentry & bourgeoisie		•	•	•	•	•	•	•								
B.Ms 55 - Pymts to refs in Wmnstr/Soho							•	•	•	•						
B.Ms 56 - Pymts to common people										•	•	•	•	•	•	•
B.Ms 57 - Pymts to gentry & bourgeoisie											•	•	•	•	•	
H/M1/Mss 2 and 3 - Soc. Poitou a/cs	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
'La Soupe' case book [HSQ, vol. LV]					•	•	•									
'La Providence' [HSQ, vols LII & LIII]	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Coqueau Charity [HSQ, vols LII & LIII]											•	•	•	•	•	•

Chapter 1: The London Huguenot community, and factors affecting poverty in the mid-eighteenth century

When the flood of refugees had arrived in the 1680s and 1690s, they came to a city that already had a settled French-speaking community. There were families whose ancestors had arrived as early as the mid-sixteenth century, and they included those of Walloon as well as French descent - although the community became more French and less Walloon as the seventeenth century progressed.¹ Many were now well-established and respectable citizens, holding positions of influence in the financial and commercial world or with reputations as skilled craftsmen. They were scattered all over London but there were particular concentrations in the west around Leicester Fields/Soho and in the east towards Spitalfields, the former involved more often (but not exclusively) in the luxury trades, the latter in textile production and especially silk weaving.

While some had doubtless intermarried with the host population and lost their close ties with the Huguenot community, many seem to have maintained their French identity. A significant factor in this was probably the founding of French Protestant churches in London - firstly the French Church of London in Threadneedle Street in the sixteenth century which, retaining the Calvinist liturgy, was described as 'nonconformist', and later (in 1661) the church usually known as 'the Savoy', which used the Anglican liturgy translated into French and which was therefore termed 'conformist'.

With the arrival of so many new refugees in the late seventeenth century, keen to continue practising the religion for which they had sacrificed so much, more places of worship were needed and new churches and chapels soon sprang up in and around London. Initially, the new congregations were entirely nonconformist in Spitalfields but predominantly conformist in the Westminster area. However, the last decade of the century saw the establishment of additional nonconformist churches in the west so that by 1700 it was the Calvinist liturgy that predominated.

¹ Robin D. Gwynn *Huguenot Heritage ...* p.33

In total, at least twenty-eight French congregations existed in and around the capital as the new century dawned, including one each at Greenwich and Wandsworth, although by 1730 the number had settled to about twenty.² Services at all of them were conducted in French.

The reason for such a decline in the number of congregations between 1700 and 1730 is not clear. At least one historian has suggested there was rapid assimilation into the host community during the eighteenth century,³ so it is possible that many Huguenots were now attending English churches. It is also possible, given the waning importance of religion in the lives of many eighteenth-century English people,⁴ that the Huguenot population had simply lost its enthusiasm for church attendance, but this seems extremely unlikely given the hardships and dislocation that refugees had endured precisely in order to maintain their faith.

Indeed, new refugees were still arriving: although the flow had stemmed significantly in comparison with the great flood of the 1680s and 1690s there was nevertheless a constant trickle, and occasional larger influxes such as that caused by the renewed persecution of 1724. In that year the Duc de Bourbon was appointed Regent to the young Louis XV and a new edict was issued imposing life imprisonment on all who attended conventicles. It also declared marriages of Huguenots illegal, denied Protestants the rites of Christian burial, made Catholic baptism of infants compulsory within 24 hours of birth, and condemned Protestant preachers to suffer death by hanging. As a result of such measures, the next two years saw the flight of an estimated 10,000 more Protestants from France - although not all sought refuge in England.⁵

² Robin D. Gwynn "The Distribution of Huguenot Refugees in England, II: London and its Environs" in *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society*, vol.XXII, no.6 (1976), pp.561-567

³ Peter Clark "Migrants in the City: the Process of Social Adaptation in English Towns 1500-1800" in Peter Clark and David Souden (eds.) *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) p.275

⁴ Peter Earle *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750* (London: Methuen, 1994) pp.177-178; George Rudé *Hanoverian London, 1714-1808* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971) pp.105-106

⁵ David Ogg *Europe of the Ancien Régime, 1715-1783* (London: Fontana, 1965) p.258; also Arthur G. Browning "The Early History of the French Protestant Hospital (La Providence), Continued from the Death in 1737 of Philippe Menard, the First Chaplain and Secretary, to 1760, the End of the Reign of George II" in *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society* vol.VII, (1901-1904) p.200

While it is true that not all the new arrivals in London remained in the city - some moved on to other towns or even other countries - the Huguenot population in the capital cannot have diminished to any great extent if one judges by the number of people seeking poor relief. In the restricted study carried out in 1996, some 350 widows were identified as receiving assistance through the Threadneedle Street Church in the period 1681-1695.⁶ Bearing in mind that, in the late seventeenth century, the French Church of London was, if not the only, then certainly the *main* source of assistance to those in need, and that the study examined records dealing with both the settled and the refugee poor, it seems unlikely that this figure would represent less than half the total number of widows in receipt of relief.⁷ In the present study, some 1,200 widows are found to have been receiving help, from various Huguenot sources, between 1735 and 1750. This suggests that the population identifying as Huguenot had certainly not diminished and that their poor relief needs may have been greater than ever - in corroboration of which, other research has pointed to a large increase in people receiving money, through the French Committee, from Civil List funds, with numbers assisted almost tripling between 1696 and 1721.⁸

What, then, were the factors affecting the need for poor relief in the first half of the eighteenth century? While there were no longer huge numbers of totally destitute new arrivals, especially in the period 1735-1750 on which this study principally focuses, there were other adverse conditions that came into play. Most notable of these, especially in their effects on the eastern districts, were the over-supply of weavers and the decline in the demand for traditional textiles such as wool and silk. Many of the refugees that had fled France were weavers by trade (although not all of them silk-weavers as is sometimes implied⁹), and they obviously sought to earn a living from their skills in their new-found home - mostly gravitating to the eastern suburbs such as Spitalfields where there was a very high density of them. There

⁶ Eileen Barrett 'Poor Relief Provided ...' pp.9-10

⁷ The French Church of London was responsible not only for the distribution of its own funds but also, in conjunction with the Savoy, the money collected through the royal briefs.

⁸ Roy A. Sundstrom "French Huguenots and the Civil List, 1691-1727: a Study of Alien Assimilation in England" in *Albion* vol.8, no.3 (1976) p.233

⁹ Although the main centre of silk-weaving in France was Lyons, Poitou also had a silk industry and was far more important as a source of Huguenot refugees to London. The textile industry in Normandy, an equally important source of refugees, was based not on silk but on fibres such as linen and wool, and on the production of fine lace.

were soon complaints to the Weavers' Company about the "excessive numbers of strangers" in the industry¹⁰ and, although 'strangers' was used to mean anyone from outside the parish, it does show that contemporaries felt there had been a sudden and uncontrolled increase in numbers. Indeed, in silk production alone, there were over 7,000 independent masters by 1700¹¹, yet the records of the Weavers' Company show that membership (presumably from all branches of weaving) never exceeded 6,500¹², which indicates how much the guild system was breaking down and how unregulated the weaving industry was becoming.

Compounding the problems created by this over-supply of weavers in the capital was the decrease in demand for silk and (to a lesser extent) woollen cloth, as the new printed cotton calicoes came into fashion - fabrics which, when not imported, were increasingly produced in areas such as Lancashire rather than in the workshops of London. The new tastes had already begun to make an impact at the end of the previous century but "the great calico controversy" reached its height between 1719 and 1721. In June of 1719 there were riots in Spitalfields which soon spread to neighbouring districts. Women wearing calicoes were attacked and insulted in the streets. Bills were posted, asking "Must the poor weavers starve?" and "Shall the Ingy [East India] calicoes be worn whilst the poor weavers and their families perish?"¹³ A Calico Bill was introduced into parliament at the end of 1719 but was not approved by the House of Lords before parliament rose and had to be re-introduced at the next session. When it at last passed into law it forbade "the use or wear in Great Britain, after Christmas Day 1722, of all printed, painted, stained and dyed calicoes (but not linens) in any garment, or apparel, or on any bed, chair, cushion, under-cushion or other household purpose".¹⁴ It is evident, however, that the wearing of the forbidden fabrics still continued and, indeed, it even seems that a few of the more opportunist Huguenots may themselves have been involved in the production of the new cloth: the Royal Bounty records for 1740 list two widows in the Westminster/Soho area whose late husbands are described as having been

¹⁰ G.E. Mingay *Georgian London* (London: Batsford, 1975) pp.101

¹¹ Lee Davison, et al. (eds.) *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992) p.xxiv

¹² Alfred Plummer *The London Weavers' Company* ... p.32

¹³ George Rudé *Hanoverian London...* p.186

¹⁴ Alfred Plummer *The London Weavers' Company...* p.305

'imprimeurs de toile'.¹⁵ Even as late as June 1745, the Weavers' Company felt it necessary to set up a special committee to combat the problem, with powers to act on information received and to press prosecutions, at the Company's expense, against the sellers and wearers of printed calico.¹⁶

That problems in the weaving industry were causing real stress amongst the workers is evidenced by petitions submitted to the Weavers' Company. In July 1728, a crowd of journeymen had presented a petition arguing that the recession in trade and the mounting unemployment of the previous three years had left them in the utmost poverty and want, and asking "what will it be when the Winter comes on?". In the middle of 1745 journeymen were still petitioning for action, complaining that they were truly in danger of starving.¹⁷

The reference to winter underlines how critical the weather could be to the needs of the poor (and even the not-so-poor). Those involved in outdoor occupations such as building were frequently unable to work when the weather was bad, and it must not be forgotten that there were a significant number of people in the capital whose livelihoods depended on the sea.¹⁸ Even indoor workers could be affected: tailors, silkweavers and shoemakers could not work when temperatures were very low, because the silk deteriorated and the wax and glue used by the tailors and shoemakers froze.¹⁹ Land transport was also affected by adverse weather conditions, and this in turn affected supply and demand for all sorts of commodities. Orders often dwindled because of difficulties in communication, and goods that had been produced could not be despatched. At the same time, household expenditure increased because food prices were higher and there was a

¹⁵ The husbands of Marie Maillard [B.Ms 55, f.23] and Elizabeth Launay [B.Ms 55, f.20]. Other calico-printers are noted by Natalie Rothstein in her article "The Successful and the Unsuccessful Huguenot, Another Look at the London Silk Industry in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries" *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society* vol.XXV, no.5, (1993) p.446-447

¹⁶ Alfred Plummer *The London Weavers' Company...* pp.307-308

¹⁷ Alfred Plummer *The London Weavers' Company...* pp.307-308

¹⁸ Several of the widows in this study had husbands who were described as 'maître de vaisseau' or 'capitaine de vaisseau'.

¹⁹ L.D. Schwarz *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) p.111

need to purchase supplies of fuel for heating. More babies were abandoned during the winter (although this involved a variety of factors),²⁰ and more people died.²¹

Such difficulties were to be expected every year, but the winter of 1739/40 was exceptionally cold. The first frost came in December and, to make matters worse, a severe wind storm struck a few days later, damaging houses and wrecking moored ships, many laden with corn and coal, not to mention sinking numerous smaller craft.²² With the severe cold, the Thames froze over and remained solid throughout January and February, while on land the ice in St James' Park reached ten and a half inches thick.²³ The price of butter rose from 2¹/₂d to 7d a pound, potatoes from 2s 6d to 10s the load, and the Assize price of a peck loaf increased from 23d to 39d. Coal was selling at 70s the chaldron instead of the 25s of previous months.²⁴ To make matters worse, the particularly severe winter was followed by a very cold summer so that food supplies were affected the following winter as well.²⁵

Ongoing in the background, throughout the whole of the period 1735-1750, was the problem of drink. Beer had long been consumed in large quantities in England, and in the 1730s nearly 2 million barrels of ale per year were being sold in London.²⁶ On an individual basis, that meant amounts such as the 28 pints a week that were allowed to each of the Greenwich pensioners.²⁷ However, for many the problem was not beer but spirits. The production of spirits, and notably gin, from home-grown wheat and barley had first been promoted by William and Mary, and was further encouraged under the Hanoverians, as a way of utilising surplus grain. By 1743, the output of British spirits had reached over eight million gallons per

²⁰ Valerie Fildes "Maternal Feelings Re-assessed: Child Abandonment and Neglect in London and Westminster, 1550-1800" in Valerie Fildes (ed.) *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England* (London: Routledge, 1990) p.149

²¹ John Landers *Death and the Metropolis: Studies in the Demographic History of London 1670-1830* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) p.264

²² Arthur G. Browning "The Early History ..." pp.198-199

²³ L.D. Schwarz *London in the Age ...* p.112

²⁴ John Burnett *A History of the Cost of Living* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969; repr. Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993) p.138

²⁵ John Landers *Death and the Metropolis...* p.278

²⁶ George Rudé *Hanoverian London ...* p.70

²⁷ Richard B. Schwartz *Daily Life in Johnson's London* (Madison, Wisconsin: Univ. Wisconsin Pr., 1983) p.74

year,²⁸ and in some districts of London one in every five houses contained an outlet of some sort for gin, be it a dram shop or a chandlers.²⁹ Indeed, chandlers, as small stores that stocked necessities such as candles, soap and cheese, were particularly important in spreading the gin habit because they were frequented on a daily basis by housewives and maidservants, and it has been noted that women were prominent in the gin trade both as vendors and consumers. Significantly, the other main group of consumers were men involved in more sedentary trades such as weaving - heavy labourers retaining their preference for beer.³⁰ Gin's main attraction was that it was cheap, and oblivion was thus easily attainable by even the poorest. A Bow Street tavern even advertised that "Here you may get drunk for a penny, dead drunk for twopence, and get straw for nothing."³¹ Unfortunately, the heavy drinking also tended to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

This, then, was the background against which poor relief to widows of the Huguenot community will be examined. The various sources of relief, and the use made of them, will each be investigated in turn, and an attempt will then be made to synthesise an overview and to draw some conclusions.

²⁸ T.S. Ashton *An Economic History of England: the 18th Century* (London: Methuen, 1955, repr. 1961) p.243

²⁹ M. Dorothy George *London Life in the XVIIIth Century* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925; repr. London Sch. of Economics and Political Science, 1951) p.40

³⁰ G.E. Mingay *Georgian London ...* p.134-135

³¹ George Rudé *Hanoverian London ...* p.70