

# A History of the London French: A Temporal and Spatial Mapping of the French Presence in the British Capital from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Day

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# Overall Description and Aims of the Project

A social/cultural history of the French in London exploring the multiple ways in which their presence has contributed to the life of the city with a dual historical and contemporary focus:

- Historical traces of the French in London (for example, the capital as a place of refuge for various émigrés and exiles);
- Insights into the contemporary French population (particularly young French people seeking new opportunities in the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries);

The marks the French have made historically and continue to make on the contemporary life of London (in the arts; business; industry; education; the leisure and creative industries, etc.

# Project Objectives

- Review/undertake new research into the historical legacies of the French in London from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- Survey/analyse the impact of the French on contemporary London (from 1980s to present day);
- Provide for the first time a comprehensive social/cultural history of the contributions made by the French to London

# Context of the Project: Why Us and Why Now?

- The work of the 'Culture F-B' Network of British and French scholars working on Franco-British cultural relations in the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries ([www.culturefb.org](http://www.culturefb.org); previous work includes conferences and publications on the centenaries of the Entente Cordiale and of the White City Franco-British Exhibition);
- The French Consulate estimates that around 300-400,000 French citizens reside in the UK (majority in London/South-East);
- Numbers large enough for Sarkozy to campaign in London in January 2007 urging 'France's Children' to return home;
- Little or no consistent documentation concerning the impact and experiences of a substantial migrant community from UK's closest European neighbour (does the community itself and/or its host consider it be 'migrant'?)
- Focus across a range of disciplines – sociology, history, human geography, cultural studies, postcolonial studies – on migration as a social, political, cultural and material process

# Possible Research Questions

Recognition that migration brings about a fundamental transformation in spaces and places that are linked to the social and cultural meanings of 'home' and 'belonging'

- Have 'France's Children' been, and/or they now 'at home' in London?
- What has been/is the real and symbolic impact of their presence on the life of the capital in social, cultural, political and economic terms?

Analysis of a migrant community not normally conceived as such may throw into relief those migrant communities which do receive considerable political. Media and academic attention;

Contribution also to the current political debate and research into French national identity (conducted by French government)

# Possible Methodology

- Workshop Series to bring together contributors of various types together for discussion/involve potential readers and users;
- Established scholars working on chapters dedicated to their specialist areas;
- Surveying/Interviewing contemporary residents across generations/ across employment sectors/ across social sectors;
- Advisory Group to include, for example, representatives of the French Embassy/Consulate; French Associations in London; French Press in London; Educational Institutions; Museum of London; French Chamber of Commerce; Alliance Française; BBC; Cultural Organisations; Community Representatives; French Religious Communities; other French Studies specialists

# A Timely Project

- Centenary of the Institut Français du Royaume Uni;
- Recent 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of de Gaulle's 'Appel du 18 juin' and the presence of the Free French in London in the Second World War (other commemorative events to follow in the months to come);
- Publication of book envisaged for late 2012 following the London 2012 Olympics (re-established in their modern form by the Baron de Coubertin with emphasis on French language enshrined in its Charter);
- Wide potential readership – students, scholars and researchers in history, sociology, cultural studies, politics and international relations, diplomacy, modern languages, migration studies, urban studies; general readership of Francophile British and wide-range of French residents in London (past and present) for professional and personal interests;
- Contemporary section will provide information on the economic, social and cultural contributions of the French to London (of interest to businesses and governments)

# Possible Book Proposal

Chronological structure beginning with brief historical contextualisation of Franco-British political, social and cultural relationships to the 17<sup>th</sup> century where main focus will begin:

- 17<sup>th</sup> century London and the Huguenots (tracing presence to present day);
- Exiles/Refugees in 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries and their legacies;
- Cultural and Artistic Exchanges in 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup>/Early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and their legacies
- First World War and Early 20<sup>th</sup> century;
- Interwar Years;
- Second World War and the Free French;
- Cultural and Artistic Exchanges in Post-War London (1950s, 60s and 70s)
- London as a City of Opportunity in 1980s and 90s to contemporary early 21<sup>st</sup> century young French/Francophone migrants



# Possible Book Proposal (cont.)

Chronological mapping will be intersected by a number of themes, for example: exile/refuge; gastronomy; fashion; education; art; literature; music; leisure/pleasure; entrepreneurship; business; and above all **place/space**

From Hampstead in the north to Spitalfields in the east, from Soho in the centre to South Kensington and beyond in the south-west, the physical and symbolic traces of the French presence in London are many and varied, and are manifest in diverse ways and in diverse institutions

‘It is space not time that hides consequences from us’ John Berger

‘The spatial is precisely one of the sources of the temporal [...] the spatial is integral to the production of history [...] just as the temporal is to geography’ Doreen Massey

# Previous Research

Examples:

T. Murdoch (ed.), *The Quiet Conquest: Huguenots 1685-1985* (1985)

T. Murdoch with R. Vigne, *The French Hospital in England. Its Huguenot History and Collections* (2009)

R. Gwynn *The Huguenots of London* (1998)

Henri Goiran, *Les Français à Londres* (1933)

K. Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution. Emigrés in London 1789-1802* (1999)

F. Bensimon, 'The French Exiles and the British' in Freitag (ed.), *Exiles from European Revolutions. Refugees in Mid-Victorian England* (2003)

Numerous articles and book chapters on 18<sup>th</sup> /19<sup>th</sup>/ early 20<sup>th</sup> century French exiles and refugees/French writers and painters who visited London

Numerous studies on La France Libre and memoirs by the Free French in London in the Second World War

N. Atkin, *The Forgotten French: Exiles in the British Isles 1940-1944*

A. Favell, 'London as Eurocity: Free French Movers in the Economic Capital' in Smith and Favell (eds), *The Human Face of Global Mobility* (2006)

A. Favell, *Eurostars and Eurocities* (2008)

D. Block, 'French Foreign-Language Teachers: Culture-Shock and Shifting Pedagogic Cultures' in D. Block, *Multilingual Identities in a Global City: London Stories* (2003)