The Huguenot Legacy

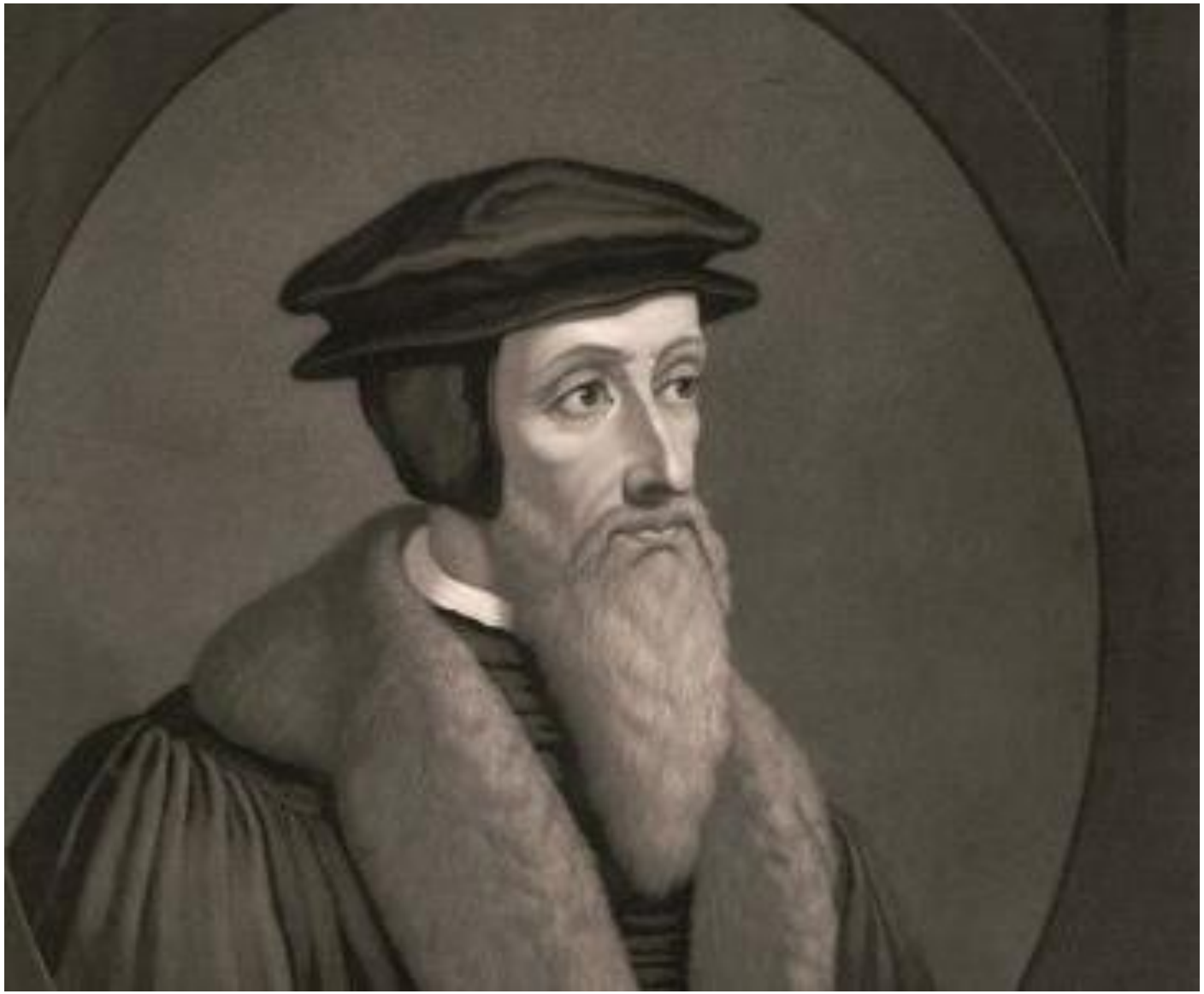
Why did the Huguenots leave France and what did they bring to the countries where they settled?

Background: The Protestant Reformation

Martin Luther (1483-1546), a German teacher and a monk, began the Protestant Reformation when he challenged the Catholic Church's teachings, starting in 1517

Luther’s Successor – John Calvin (1509-64)

Born in France, John Calvin was Martin Luther's successor as the preeminent Protestant theologian. It is known that Calvin admired Luther although the two men never met and had their theological differences.



Who were the Huguenots?

- Huguenots were French Protestants who followed the teachings of John Calvin
- Calvinism taught that only God can lead his church and that there was no need for the intermediary nature of the Catholic Church.
- These Calvinist ideas which were the foundations of Huguenot communities had a broad appeal. French elites, nobility, military officers, and middle class artisans were all drawn to Calvinism and Huguenot churches.

- French Calvinists adopted the Huguenot name around 1560, but the first Huguenot church was created five years earlier in a private home in Paris.
- The origin of the name Huguenot is unknown but believed to have been derived from combining phrases in German and Flemish that described their practice of home worship.
- By 1562, there were two million Huguenots in France with more than 2,000 churches.

Hostility between Catholics and Huguenots

As Huguenots gained influence and more openly displayed their faith, Catholic hostility grew. A series of religious conflicts followed, known as the French Wars of Religion, fought intermittently from 1562 to 1598. Between two and four million people died from violence, famine or disease directly caused by the conflict. There were atrocities committed by both sides.

King Henry IV – King of France from 1589-1610

Henry, originally a Huguenot, converted to Catholicism in a bid to unite the country. During his reign, the Edict of Nantes was published (1598) which brought the Wars of Religion to an end and granted official tolerance to Huguenots. For the next 80 years or so, the Huguenots thrived.

Louis XIII (1610-1643) and his first Minister, Cardinal Richelieu

Henry's successor, Louis XIII, and his First Minister, Cardinal Richelieu, were far less tolerant of the Huguenots, destroying their strongholds and breaking up their military organization. The siege of La Rochelle effectively ended the Huguenot rebellion against the French crown.

Louis XIV and the Huguenots

When Louis XIV finally took control of his throne in 1661, he vowed to make France a wholly Catholic country and wipe out the ‘false religion’ of Protestantism. **In 1685 he revoked the Edict of Nantes** which had protected the Huguenots for so long and set about making life intolerable for them unless they converted to Catholicism.

Restrictions put on the Huguenots

Unless they denied their faith, Huguenots would forfeit their property, be unable to practise their professions and their children would be removed from them to be brought up as Catholics. They were banned from holding gatherings and their churches were destroyed. Their pastors were expelled from France but the laity were forbidden to leave.

Fleeing the Country

The King did not want to lose the skills of these talented and hardworking people. Although they were forbidden to leave, many Huguenots did. Flight became fraught with danger.

Penalties if caught trying to leave France

If Huguenots were caught trying to flee, men were sent to row in the galleys or executed, women imprisoned, and children sent to Catholic institutions

Bribes, spies, safe-houses and the Mereaux

Smugglers caught helping Huguenots escape were executed. Sea captains were bribed to take Huguenots to safety, soldiers were rewarded for finding escaping Huguenots. Méreaux coins acted like a password to exclude infiltrators who may have wished to spy on a congregation.

Where did Huguenots go?

About 200,000 Huguenots left France, settling in non-Catholic Europe - the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland - in England, Scandinavia, America and Africa as well as in Russia, where Huguenot craftsmen could find customers at the court of the Czars.

Huguenots acceptance in England

For the most part, Huguenots fleeing to England had to leave all their belongings behind and many arrived entirely destitute. It soon became clear that substantial aid would need to be dispensed.

At the time of the Revocation (1685) James II was King (the last Catholic to sit on the English throne.) He was not a popular monarch and his reign only lasted from 1685-1688. However, James did welcome the refugees and initially ordered collections to be carried out in Anglican churches for the benefit of Huguenots.

James was finally deposed and replaced by his Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch husband, William of Orange.

James eventually fled to France to the court of his cousin Louis XIV.

Support for Refugees

A more structured way of providing for the refugees directly from funds from the Civil List was then created by joint monarchs William and Mary, in 1689: The Royal Bounty. On 5 May 1689, William III issued a declaration encouraging Huguenots to make their way to England and promised them protection and support.

Where did Huguenots settle in England and what did they do?

50,000 Huguenots settled in England. In London the majority of Huguenots settled in areas outside of the jurisdiction of the City and the Livery Companies. In Spitalfields (silk weavers), Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Whitechapel and Mile End. They also settled in Soho, working as goldsmiths, silversmiths, tailors, clock and furniture makers.

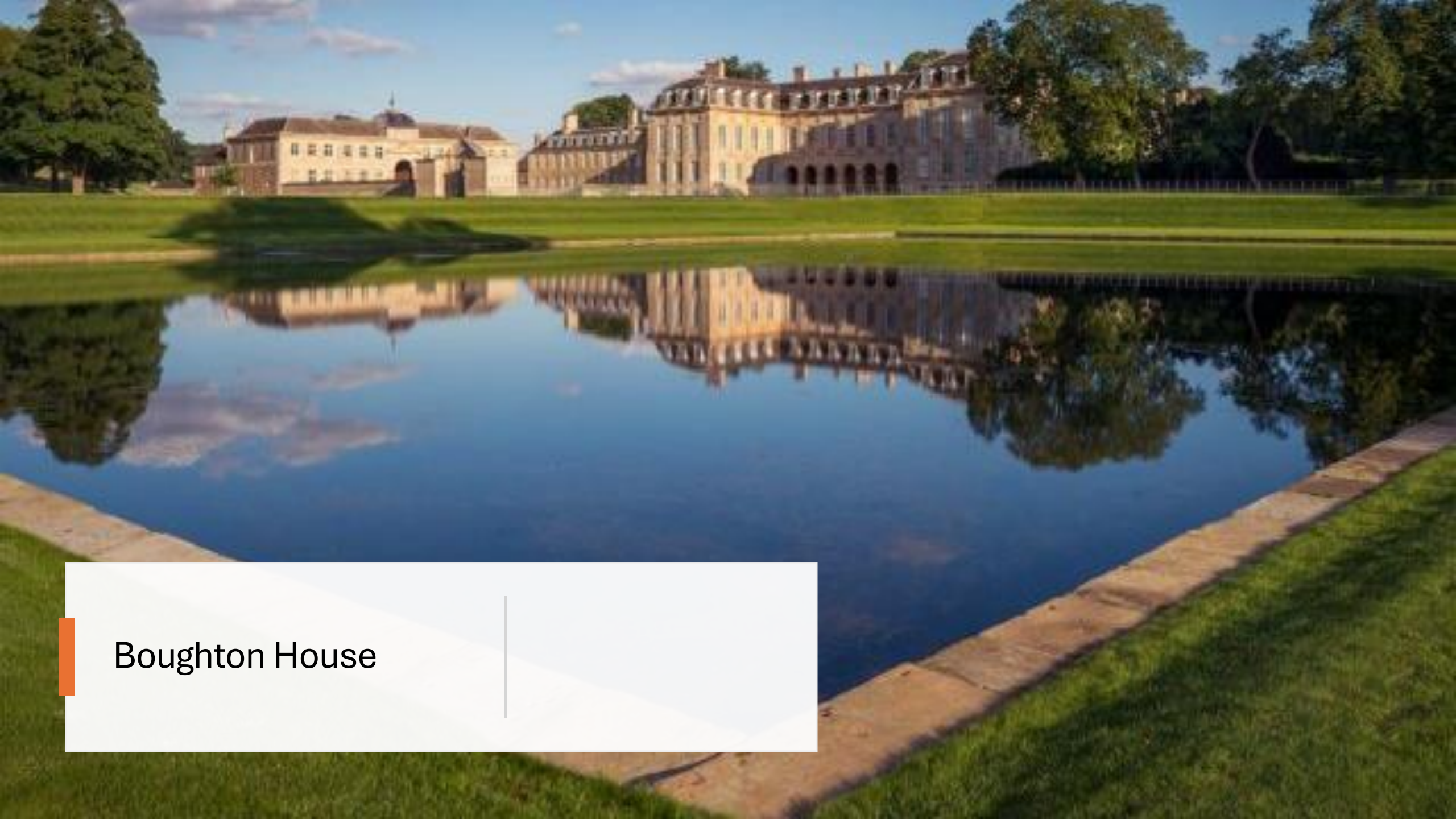
Among other places, there were established Huguenot communities in Canterbury, Sandwich, Faversham, and Maidstone.

The refugees introduced new ideas about food, horticulture and medicine, skills in banking and finance, books and teaching, industry and the army, architecture and building as well as talents that appeared in art, music and on the stage.

What skills did the Huguenots bring to England?

Huguenots are associated with the London goldsmiths' and silk weaving trades, but their contribution to banking, commerce, art, education, decorative painting, engraving, sculpture, woodwork, furniture, upholstery, jewellery, clock and watch-making in this period is less well known.

Boughton, the Northamptonshire home of the Duke of Buccleuch, is known as the English Versailles. It is home to a stunning array of Huguenot paintings, furniture, maps, armoury, porcelain, music and silver, many of which were commissioned by Ralph, the 1st Duke of Montagu in the 17th and 18th centuries.



Boughton House

Huguenot influence in the City

Several men of Huguenot descent were among the founder directors of the Bank of England including Sir John Houblon (1632-1712) who was the Bank's first Governor(from 1694-1697) and was elected as Lord Mayor in 1695. He also served as Lord of the Admiralty. His image was on English £50 notes during the 1990s.

The Houblon Family

The Houblon family were Huguenot refugees from Lille. Sir John Houblon had nine brothers and three sisters. John's younger brother, Abraham, was also a Bank of England Governor, from 1703 to 1705. A daughter of Abraham Houblon, Anne, was married to Henry Temple, later Viscount Palmerston. His older brother, James, an influential merchant and Member of Parliament for the City of London, was also a director of the Bank of England. Four other of his brothers were prosperous merchants.

Samuel Pepys and the Houblon family

Sir James Houblon (1629-1700) was firm friends with Samuel Pepys, having first met him through business transactions when Pepys hired ships owned by the Houblon family.

In 1679 Pepys was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London charged with piracy and treason. The Houblons came to his assistance by putting up bail.

Pepys' wife, Elizabeth St. Michel, was of French extraction and Pepys regularly attended the French church in Threadneedle Street where Sir John Houblon was an elder.

Paper for Banknotes

Before the Huguenots arrived, most white paper had to be imported from the Continent but in 1686 James II granted a patent to the White Paper Makers Company. Henri Portal, a Huguenot who worked for the company, had contacts at the Bank of England and went on to form his own company and manufacture a stronger, watermarked paper for their bank notes.

His company also invented the metallic thread incorporated into the paper. The same company has been providing paper for English banknotes right up to the current day. Although the firm was sold to De La Rue in 1995, for nearly 200 years the business was handed down from father to son, almost unique in the history of English manufacturers.

The Portal brothers

Henri Portal and his brother Guillaume, escaped from France with their father Jean Francois. It is said that the children's old nurse hid the children in an oven so that the soldiers would not find them and that they were hidden in wine casks and were smuggled on a small fishing boat to Southampton.

Life Assurance

Several Huguenots became mathematicians, inventors and members of the distinguished Royal Society. Abraham de Moivre left the Champagne area of France in around 1685 and settled in St. Martin's Lane. He worked with the astronomer Edmund Halley and became a friend of Sir Isaac Newton. It was he who created the formula for calculating life annuities and life assurances.

Attorney General/ Master of the Rolls

Samuel Romilly (1758-1818) was the son of a Huguenot Frith St jeweller. Romilly became the Attorney General and then Master of the Rolls.

It was due to his campaigning that the National Archives at Kew came into being. Romilly was also notable as an anti-slavery campaigner and for abolishing hanging, drawing and quartering. His nephew Peter Mark Roget, the Physician, wrote the famous Thesaurus.

A Shocking Bank Bailout

Due to the campaigning of Romilly and many others, The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 formally freed 800,000 Africans who were then the legal property of Britain's slave owners. Merchants and others of Huguenot descent were among these slave owners.

What is less well known is that the same act contained a provision for the financial compensation of the owners of those slaves, by the British taxpayer, for the loss of their "property".

The compensation of Britain's 46,000 slave owners was the largest bailout in British history until the bailout of the banks in 2009. Not only did the slaves receive nothing, under another clause of the act they were compelled to provide 45 hours of unpaid labour each week for their former masters, for a further four years after their supposed liberation. In effect, the enslaved paid part of the bill for their own freedom.

Stock Exchange

The Huguenot Philip Cazenove founded Cazenove & Co., which by the 20th century had become one of London's leading stock-broking firms and now is part of J.P. Morgan.

Pepys' friend, the Huguenot Sir James Houblon (1629-1700) also had a close connection with the Stock Exchange and was known by his fellow merchants as 'Father of the Stock Exchange'.

Jonathan's Coffee House in Change Alley in the City, was the original site of the London Stock Exchange. In 1698, it was used by the Huguenot broker, John Castaing, to post the prices of stocks and commodities, the first evidence of systematic exchange of securities in London.

Maps

The Huguenot Jean Rocque began selling maps in Great Windmill Street, Soho. The first map he produced was in 1734. He then began mapping London, producing 24 highly detailed and accurate maps, which remain as a fascinating record of the mid-18th century capital. In 1750 he was appointed topographer to the Prince of Wales.

Westminster Bridge

The original Westminster Bridge (opened in 1750) was designed by the Huguenot Swiss-born expert in land-drainage Charles Labelye, with the help of a pile-driver fellow Huguenot James Vauloué.

Textiles

- Textile manufacturing, in particular silk weaving, formed the largest single occupation for the French refugees.
- This work was concentrated in Spitalfields, and a substantial number of large workshops were established. These employed many hands and made their owners extremely wealthy.
- The Courtauld family, descendants of Huguenot refugees, were originally renowned as metalsmiths working in both silver and gold but in the 18th century Samuel Courtauld (1793-1881) developed a textile business. By the 20th century it was Britain's leading manufacturer of synthetic fabrics.

Huguenot silk pattern design

William Hogarth’s portrayal of the Industrious Apprentice and the Idle Apprentice

Hogarth learned his skills from an engraver with Huguenot connections.

The moralistic engravings depicted here follow the progress of two Huguenot apprentice silk weavers. One industrious, one idle.

By 1747 Hogarth depicted his “Industrious Apprentice”, Francis Goodchild, entrusted with a large silk-ribbon manufactory in Spitalfields, on his way to becoming Lord Mayor of London.

This reflects both the wealth of the silk weaving community and its increasing importance to the broader London society and economy.

The idle apprentice resorted to a life of crime and was condemned to death.

Hogarth’s engraving of the Industrious Apprentice, Francis Goodchild, depicted as High Sheriff of London

And here, Hogarth imagines that the Industrious Apprentice has become Lord Mayor of London

Hogarth’s imagined Lord Mayor’s Procession

The procession has emerged from St. Paul's Churchyard and will subsequently turn up King Street to the Guildhall. Visible in the coach holding the Sword of State is the Marshal of the City.

The stand on the left has been erected by the Company of Pin-makers. The banners bear the insignias of various London guilds including the Tiler's Company and the Stationers' Company. Soldiers from the City Militia are also present

Goldsmiths

Huguenot Goldsmiths and silversmiths were attracted to Britain not only because of religious persecution but also for economic reasons. They were having difficulty obtaining their raw materials because Louis XIV needed silver and gold to pay for his wars.

Pierre Harache came to London in 1681. His work was described as being of the highest standard in both design and execution. He used cut card work and applied decoration as well as engraving. He enjoyed the patronage of the greatest clients of the day and was rivalled only by his fellow Huguenot David Willaume.

Initially Huguenot gold and silversmiths moved to London's centre of the trade, in the City around the Goldsmiths' Company, but the existing English members closed ranks against the newcomers. The immigrant craftsmen therefore moved elsewhere, to Soho

David Willaume - Goldsmith

Paul de Lamerie Silversmith

Appointed Silversmith & Goldsmith to George III in 1716, Paul de Lamerie (1688-1751) had his workshop at 40 Gerrard St and his trade card was designed by William Hogarth. The Victoria and Albert Museum describes him as the “greatest silversmith working in England in the 18th century”

Huguenots in medicine

There were distinguished Huguenots in the field of medicine. Dr. Andrée was one of the founders of the London Hospital at Whitechapel and Colonel Peter Lekeux served as a governor. William Chamberlen and his family, who fled to England in 1569, were the inventors of forceps used in childbirth.

Peter Chamberlen was appointed surgeon to Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I. Hugh Chamberlen was the author of the first textbook on midwifery in 1673. Sir Theodore de Mayerne was Chief Physician to both James I and Charles I and who in his case reports was one of the first to list all the physical signs of illnesses. Gideon de Laune was apothecary to Anne of Denmark, wife of James I, and successfully petitioned the King to incorporate the Company of Apothecaries by royal charter in 1617.

James Six was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in recognition of his invention of the thermometer.

Optics

The Huguenot weaver John Dollond, a refugee from Normandy, studied mathematics, optics and astronomy, for which he was awarded a medal by the Royal Society.

He joined his son Peter at an optical workshop in Spitalfields in 1750 and created a popular telescope. In 1761, Dollond became the optician of King George III.

The family continued in the optical business through the generations and in 1927 joined with the Aitchison company, the business continuing on Britain's high streets as Dollond & Aitchison.

State coach (Speaker's Coach)

Huguenot Designer Daniel Marot left Paris and followed William of Orange to England, where he undertook work at Hampton Court Palace.

He also designed the royal state coach first used by Queen Anne who gifted it to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Aside: *Speaker of the House of Commons Sir Lindsay Hoyle welcomes the State Coach back to Westminster for the Coronation of King Charles III*

Steam engine/air conditioning

Denis Papin, was born in Blois and arrived in England in 1675. While working for the chemist and physicist Robert Boyle, he invented the pressure cooker and the first steam engine with a piston.

John Theophilus Desaguliers became an assistant to Newton and designed and installed the first air-conditioning system for the House of Commons in 1723. He was also the first to create a machine to establish the exact distance between planets.

Clockmakers

The collection of Huguenot clocks at London's Science Museum includes more than 600 watches, 90 clocks, 30 marine chronometers and a number of fine sundials and examples of hand engraving, mapping the history of innovation in watch and clock making in London from 1600 to the present day.

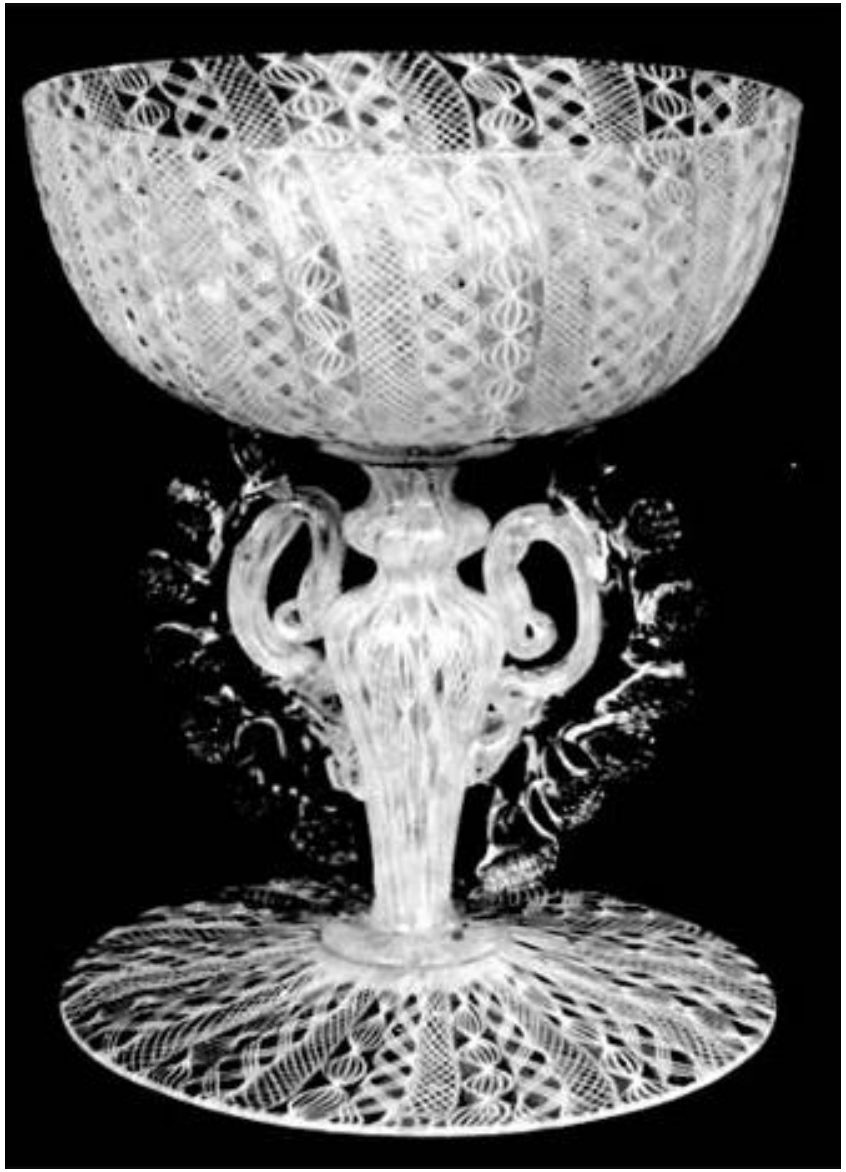
The Cabrier family were a celebrated dynasty of Huguenot clockmakers who settled in London. Three generations of Charles Cabriers became well known for their beautiful clocks.

Cabrier Clocks

Glassmakers

Most notable among the Huguenot glassmakers in England were members of all four of the families who had been granted noble status, the *Gentilshommes Verriers* of the Lorraine.

They were a major factor in making glassmaking a solid English industry.



Other Huguenot trades of note

Other Huguenot trades of note included furniture-making, engraving, architecture, wood-carving and ceramics.

Jean Tijou produced the grillwork for Sir Christopher Wren's design of St. Paul's Cathedral, which can still be seen there today.

There were also Huguenot woollen weavers, gunsmiths and stocking and glove makers.

All these skills where very welcome in the countries they fled to and helped support the families in their new locations.

Jean Tijou’s work in St Paul’s Cathedral

Huguenots in Wandsworth

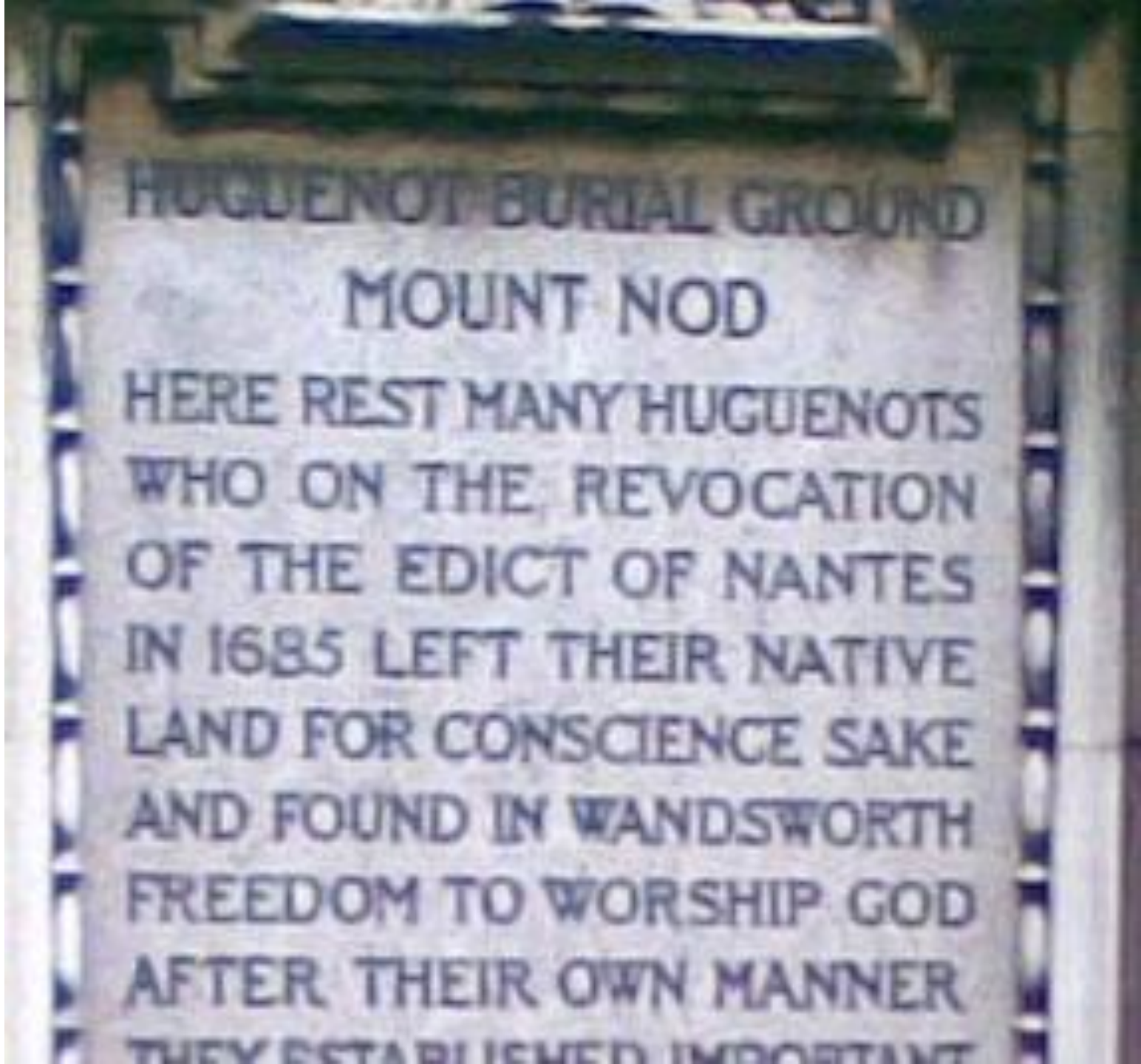
By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Huguenots made up five per cent of London's population. Some of them headed to the small village of Wandsworth.

The Huguenots were attracted to Wandsworth by an already existing community of French and Dutch emigres. The first refugees to arrive were employed by existing local industries including frying pan making, calico printing and market gardening

In the early eighteenth century, Wandsworth's market gardens supplied Covent Garden and other markets

Eventually, the Wandsworth Huguenots became renowned for their hat-making skills, having imported their own formula of felting, the process of removing furs from the skin. This involved the use of mercury which could lead to erethism, most commonly referred to as 'mad hatter's disease' which could lead to madness and death.

Mount Nod Huguenot Burial Ground in Wandsworth



Huguenot churches in England

The Huguenots wasted no time in setting up their own churches. The first French church in Threadneedle Street was founded in 1550, burnt down during the Fire of London and rebuilt by its congregation within three years. 'The Strangers Church' in Soho soon followed.

After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, thirty French churches in London were founded, with ten elsewhere in England.

Due to quick assimilation of the refugees many churches were to close. At the beginning of the 19th century only three French churches were left in London and a few in Canterbury and Brighton.

The only French Protestant church currently left in London can be seen in Soho Square.

Carving of Huguenots fleeing France above the entrance to The French Church in Soho Square

Assimilation of Huguenots in the Workplace

Although there was initial fear that the refugee artisans would put the locals out of work, by and large, Huguenot crafts people integrated well.

Their Calvinest work ethic and their willingness to pass on their skills and knowledge to their English colleagues, no doubt helped them to do so.

The Huguenots were, however, not welcomed by everyone. Some London citizens blamed them for an outbreak of plague in 1593 and attacked their homes. In the 1680s English weavers and metal-workers in London, who had to compete with the highly-skilled newcomers, threatened violence against French immigrants. Charles II ordered troops to be stationed in nearby locations as a deterrent.

The French Hospital

The **French Hospital** was founded in 1718 in Finsbury on behalf of poor French Protestants and their descendants residing in Great Britain. In the 1860s it moved to Hackney, then in the 1940s moved out of London to Horsham, West Sussex. Since 1959 it has been located in Rochester, Kent and today provides accommodation for descendants of Huguenots.

Huguenot Museum, Rochester

Museum focusing on history of the Huguenots through paintings, crafts, silks and other artefacts.

Famous descendants of the Huguenots

Joseph Bazalgette, who created London's sewer system during the Victorian era, was the grandson of a Huguenot immigrant.

Many well-known talents of British stage, screen and music are descendants of Huguenots, from David Garrick in the 18th century to Laurence Olivier, Jon Pertwee, Judy Garland, Derek Jacobi, Eddie Izzard and Simon Le Bon in more recent times.

Notable figures from politics with Huguenot roots who have left their marks include Alexander Hamilton, Al Gore, George Washington and Winston Churchill

In fact it is no exaggeration to state that the world as we know it would look very different if it were not for the astonishingly widespread influence of the Huguenots

A Personal Note

For several years, I have been researching my own Huguenot ancestors, Lydia and Samuel La Fargue and it has been an intriguing story to discover more about them. The La Fargues were Huguenot lawyers and doctors, banned from practising their professions and forced to flee their home in SW France near Bordeaux. Visiting their properties and walking in their footsteps has been a humbling and enlightening experience and their story is told in my book The King's Command. Although their story is fictionalized, it is based on fact.

Samuel died in mysterious circumstances and Lydia, her widowed mother and her three children, arrived in London in 1692 and settled in 'the quiet village of Hammersmith'. Two of Lydia's children predeceased her and I am a direct descendant of her surviving son, Elias.

‘One of the very best historical novels I have ever read’
Sandra Robinson, Huguenot Ancestry Expert

‘Vivid and compelling page-turner with a brilliantly evoked historical setting’
Katherine Mortlock, Historical Writer