



Researching an ancestor you believe may be Huguenot

It's important to understand the history and the 'Huguenot diaspora' at the start of your research and to know the dates when the bulk of Huguenot émigrés relocated to Protestant states such as the Dutch Republic, England and Wales, Protestant-controlled Ireland, and Scotland.

In France the term Huguenot was used to denote French Calvinist Protestants, a first synod of church reformers in Paris in 1539 constituted a Reformed Church, *Eglise réformée*, on Calvinist lines whose adherents became known as Huguenots and they grew to become a significant minority in many areas of Catholic France and in January 1562 they were granted state recognition as a cult for the first time and the French extended a degree of tolerance to French Protestants however, the period of 1562 to 1598 is known as the Wars of Religion in reference to a series of eight civil wars in which the kingdom of France was divided on religious lines as warring noble families fought for control of the crown. Catholic France allied itself with Savoy, Spain, and the papacy to form the Catholic League; the Huguenots received support from England, the Netherlands, and the German Protestant states. During this period the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre occurred in 1572: beginning in Paris, thousands of Huguenots were murdered; in the following days thousands more were killed in Aix, Bordeaux, Bourges, Lyon, Meaux, Orleans, Rouen, Toulouse, and Troyes.

This period formally ended with the Edict of Nantes in 1598 which restored tolerance to the Huguenots and emigration pressure lessened though persecutions continued. Persecution began to build again and in 1685 the Edict of Fontainebleau revoked the Edict of Nantes and ordered the closure of Huguenot temples and schools: the Reformed Church was made illegal in France and her colonies. Whilst some Huguenots converted to Catholicism, many thousands fled to Britain especially the southeast of England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Prussia, Cape Colony (South Africa) and the North American colonies.

With this emigration to Britain, French churches were already established in London, Canterbury and Norwich by the time of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in **1572** which prompted the first great wave of refugees to Britain. Increasing persecution from 1661 which culminated in the **1685** Revocation of the Edict of Nantes led to the second great wave and it is estimated that some 40,000-50,000 Huguenots settled in England, mostly in London.

Strictly speaking the term Huguenots refers to French Calvinists, in English the term embraces Walloons and Dutch refugees from the Low Countries and it is important to recall that not all French Protestants were Huguenots, and as the Lutheran church; *la Confession d'Augsbourg* was tolerated in Alsace, with their church registers dating back to 1525, if you have protestant ancestors from Alsace, it is important to know if they were Lutheran or Huguenot.

After centuries, most Huguenots have assimilated into the various societies and cultures where they settled, the Huguenot diaspora in England and Australia, all still retain their beliefs and Huguenot designation.

The Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland, in London have an excellent library of records and information on other institutions where records can be researched; they also have available guidance notes for family historians, and a list of family names; the '*Family Research Files*'
<https://www.huguenotsociety.org.uk>

When you have researched your parish records as far back to 1572, the first wave of Huguenot diaspora, you should consult the Huguenot society list of family research files to explore for your ancestors...

More information on Huguenot records are available at -

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

<https://www.cyndislist.com/huguenot/>

Recommended Book

- Kathy Chater, *Tracing Your Huguenot Ancestors: A Guide For Family Historians* (2012, Pen and Sword) ISBN: 9781848846104