

Lesson 3: Huguenots worksheet

Enquiry question:

Why was Britain a safe haven for the Huguenots in the early 1700s ?



French Huguenots arrive on the beaches of Britain in 1685

Huguenot London

Huguenots were French Protestants forced to leave France from the 16th century in order to practise their religion freely. The word refugee originates from the Huguenot exodus from France.

When the Huguenots left, the French lost thousands of talented businessmen and craftworkers, often called artisans. The Huguenots brought their skills to London, settling primarily around Spitalfields and Shoreditch.

Despite a general welcome, they suffered from the occasional hostility of other craftsmen, who saw them as an economic threat. Due largely to their higher skill levels they were welcomed by the upper classes.

However, by the end of the 18th century they had assimilated into the general population. They gave up speaking French and of 23 Huguenot churches in existence in 1700, only the French Church in Soho Square survives today.

The French communities in the capital differed a lot from one another. The largest, in Spitalfields, depended heavily on the weaving trade. The most remote, at Wandsworth, was notable for its hatmakers. The common factor bringing them together was their market. The English gentry coming to Parliament or the royal courts welcomed the opportunity to acquire the latest in French fashions.