

# THE FRENCH HOSPITAL IN ENGLAND

*Its Huguenot History and Collections*



*Tessa Murdoch  
Randolph Vigne*

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Tessa Murdoch and  
Randolph Vigne

This history marks the tercentenary of Jacques de Gastigny's founding bequest for La Providence, the French Hospital for the Huguenot community in England. Its survival and continuing existence today bear witness to the tenacity of the community of Huguenot refugees and their descendants.

Chapters on the successive phases of its history are illustrated with portraits of directors and officers, and the silver and furniture associated with them. The book traces the history of this institution from the original hospital buildings in the parish of St Luke's, Finsbury, and the granting of the Royal Charter by George I in 1718 to the construction of a new building in Victoria Park, Hackney, in the 1860s designed by Robert Roumieu, an architect of Huguenot descent. Following bomb damage, the hospital moved briefly to Sussex after the Second World War before settling into its ideal present location in Rochester, Kent. La Providence continues to provide sheltered housing for elderly people of proven Huguenot descent.

Daily life is illustrated with documents from the Huguenot library including trade cards of suppliers of groceries, linen and domestic hardware and portraits and photographs of the inmates and the hospital staff. The diaries kept by an 18th-century steward throw light on the behaviour of the inmates. The hospital



(Cover) *The French Hospital, Old Street, Finsbury*, oil on canvas, artist unknown, c. 1860

(Above) *Jacques de Gastigny* (d. 1708), oil on canvas, circle of Pierre Mignard, c. 1680

(Overleaf) Communion cup used by the French congregation at Canterbury Cathedral, silver (sterling standard), London, 1631/32, mark IT, inscribed: 'I<sup>B</sup>M L'eglise vuallonne de Cantorbery 1632'

doctor's niece, referred by her uncle, subsequently bequeathed her luxurious damasks to a favourite maid. In stark contrast, another inmate hid over half a hundredweight of the hospital's coal supply under her bed.

Although early directors were integrated into English society, they freed time from their busy lives as bankers, craftsmen, merchants and soldiers to devote themselves to the welfare of those Huguenot descendents who had fallen on hard times. The French Hospital was one of the earliest foundations to provide sympathetic treatment for the mentally ill, at a time when visiting the lunatics at Bedlam was deemed entertainment. In 1737, when the goldsmith Jacques Ray was admitted to the hospital, Paul de Lamerie, the most celebrated London goldsmith of his day, indemnified him for £1,000 worth of potential damage to the hospital fabric. No longer able to cope with the daily demands of his trade, Ray had taken to wandering the streets crying 'Oranges and Lemons'.

A catalogue featuring more than a hundred specially commissioned photographs of the French Hospital collections provides a unique visual record, while a transcription of the inventory compiled in French in 1742 sheds light on contents still in use today, such as the silver forks used at directors' lunches. Heraldic shields and bookplates record many of the principal Huguenot families who have served as directors over the last three hundred years. Although the hospital's proceedings have been held in English since the 1830s, the Court prayer and toasts are still made in French.

This richly illustrated account sets the hospital in the context of the history of care for the sick and elderly in England from the 18th century onwards. It will appeal to a wide audience including art and social historians and all who are interested in Huguenot heritage.

*The Laundry,  
The French Hospital,  
Victoria Park,  
Hackney,  
photograph 1907*



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Tessa Murdoch and Randolph Vigne

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