

Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us - Policies, Perceptions and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England

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In writing about alien immigrants to England and their reception in the sixteenth century Laura Yungblut has identified a subject that has long cried out for further study, both detailed research into particular features of immigrant communities and broader overviews to incorporate the accumulated wisdom of specialised journal articles, articles often unavailable even in many university libraries. There is a yawning chasm here rather than a gap in the literature and a new contribution in this field is most welcome.

The last full blown study of this topic, itself focusing largely upon the late Medieval and early modern periods, is Cunningham's *Alien Immigrants to England*, which dates back to 1897.⁽¹⁾ The fact that this book was reprinted in 1969 after more than seventy years speaks volumes, but although this reprint claims to be a second edition the only novelty is a short introduction by Charles Wilson.⁽²⁾ Wilson is, of course, a most appropriate editor, for both in specialist articles and in the general theme of his important text book he has made a notable contribution to our understanding of the relationship between England and the continent in the early modern period.⁽³⁾ Although his focus is upon the seventeenth century rather than the sixteenth, it is surprising to find no mention of his work either in Yungblut's historiographical survey or her bibliography, whereas a textbook by Holderness, which contains but sparse reference to immigrants, is mentioned in both.⁽⁴⁾ It was also surprising to see no reference to Scoville's, *The Persecution of the Huguenots and French Economic Development* or to Ormrod's *The Dutch in London*.⁽⁵⁾ Notwithstanding such omissions, Yungblut is surely right to emphasise both the dated nature of the more general surveys and the limited scope of some

of the more recent publications. (6) This said, no-one would want to undervalue the importance of two recent monographs by Gwynn and Pettegree. (7) Gwynn covers considerable ground, and Yungblut merely states the obvious when writing that "even this valuable work could not cover everything", whilst it might seem unfair to describe it as "somewhat limited by its primary focus on the Huguenots" when that is its professed subject matter. (8) Pettegree, in a remarkably readable book, concentrates upon the stranger churches in London, but again ranges more widely to examine economic impacts, social regulation, and the reception of foreigners, and again it is surely unfair to describe these discussions as no more than "an offshoot of his examination of the churches' activities". (9) Nevertheless, plenty of scope remains for work in this field, and Yungblut's call for additional scholarship is justified and welcome.

This is also a topic for which original source material is readily available. Immigration in the sixteenth century was a highly emotive topic, arousing considerable comment, concern and controversy which has left a firm imprint in the historical record. Any scholar who has scanned the *Calendars of State Papers Domestic* or *Acts of the Privy Council* cannot have failed to notice the numerous entries under this head, entries whose promise is so often fulfilled rather than disappointed when one turns to the original documentation amongst the public records. Local research is equally rewarding, for here the concern was sharpened by the immediate impact that the tide of immigration had. Furthermore, local and national concern interfaced at many points, and hence local concerns and aspirations find reflection in the records held centrally, whilst government concerns and edicts were acted upon locally. In many sources of a general administrative nature that survive - subsidy lists, local rates and poor law records, occasionally parish registers and so forth - aliens are separately identified, an example of such documentation being included by Yungblut at Appendix A of her book in the form of an extract from the Colchester Contribution Book to the Poor of 1582-92. Given this it is surprising to find that Yungblut's justification for focusing mostly on London is "owing to data availability and the fact that most policy making was centred there". (10) Data is readily available on both London and the provinces, it is to be discovered in both national and local archives, and if policy making *took place* in London it was *enacted* locally and reflected the aspirations and concerns of both the provinces and the capital.

So what is Yungblut's own contribution? Whilst the dust-jacket emphasises the contemporary relevance of the book (it "provides important insights in the history of immigration and the search for a balance - as relevant today as it was in the sixteenth century"), the author is aware that she is writing a history. Despite her historiographical discussions, her own agenda is a strictly limited one, and is defined by the book's subtitle: the numerical *presence* of alien immigrants, the *perceptions* of them by the indigenous population and their consequent reception, and the *policies* towards them pursued by Elizabeth and her governments. In so doing she claims that the study "uses documents not previously analyzed as well as making new use of more familiar materials", "raises new questions, and questions some accepted theories" and "provides new insights into the social and governmental impact of the arrival of the aliens". (11)

After the introductory sections Chapter 1 provides some background and some quantification, indicating that whilst the alien presence in England was far from novel the scale of settlement was of an entirely new magnitude after the mid- sixteenth century. Pettegree, it is argued, has exaggerated the numbers in London at the end of the reign of Henry VIII. (12) The Low Countries and France replaced Germany and Italy as the most prominent source of immigration, the immigrants coming for both religious and economic reasons, and this combination of factors resulted in "the comparative floodtide of immigration which characterized the 1560s and 1570s". (13) Despite this, "the sustained size of London's alien population remained between 4,000 and 5,000 for most of Elizabeth's reign". (14) This of course creates either a paradox or a contradiction, explained here in terms of the government's policy of dispersing "substantial numbers" of aliens to other locations, the effects of return migration and the impact of the high death rates found in early modern cities. Regardless of the exact numbers, there was clearly a *perception* that the level of immigration was exceptional, resulting in more frequent and extensive enquiries being ordered by the Crown, and this perception was heightened by their tendency to concentrate in specific (generally poorer) areas within the capital. (15) In the provinces the south-east was overwhelmingly the favoured area of settlement, the communities, it is suggested, were generally smaller than that in London, and "easily the most important" of

the provincial settlements was that in Norwich. (16)

Although it is useful to have various estimates of the size of the London and provincial alien communities collected together, there is little here so far to surprise the historian of Elizabethan immigration, and little new research. Furthermore, the quantitative information that is presented and its interpretation is open to question on a number of grounds. Pettegree's figure of 5,000 or 6,000 is based upon a very sensible adjustment of the 1541 subsidy list, whilst Yungblut's decision to employ that of 1549 to produce a figure of 3,000 appears designed merely to create scope for the subsequent "floodtide".(17) The figure she cites for 1567, 3,324 is substantially *lower* than the 4,534 found in 1562/3, and one wonders why the higher earlier figures have been omitted from Table 2.(18) It is clearly true that different surveys were conducted on different bases, that some sources (possibly the subsidy of 1549?) may be less complete than others and that the number of aliens in the capital fluctuated quite markedly over time. But if the "sustained size" of the alien presence was 4-5,000, a figure similar to that found in the early 1540s, then it is difficult to accept that this Elizabethan immigration "dwarfed the immigration of previous eras", except perhaps for very short periods of time.(19) Nor will Yungblut's attempt to resolve the 'paradox' do. High death rates were most unlikely to have been new to London after 1558, there had long been a return flow of immigrants to the continent, and one would need more concrete evidence that aliens were removed to provincial communities in large numbers before attributing the fall off in the number resident in London substantially to this factor. Perhaps Pettegree was right to argue that "reports of enormously inflated numbers of strangers in the capital should be seen more as indications of concern than realistic estimates of the extent of the immigration", at least before the late 1560s.(20)

It is clearly wrong to claim that the provincial communities were invariably smaller, for that in Norwich stood at between 4,000 and 4,700 during the 1570s and 1580s, making it similar in size to the "sustained" number in the capital, and *far* higher, at roughly one-third, as a proportion of the town's population. Nor was Norwich "easily the most important", given that Canterbury contained over 3,300 in 1592 out of a population of 9,000.(21) At the very least, there is clearly scope for more careful consideration of the extant quantitative evidence, as well as for further enquiry into the causes of apparent fluctuations over time.

Chapter 2 turns to English attitudes towards aliens. Here Yungblut develops her central theme of a traditional English "xenophobia", omnipresent but intensifying at periods of actual or perceived distress, and resulting in "a rising tide of anti- alien expressions" during Elizabeth's reign.(22) Governments, however both national and local, more commonly sympathised with the aliens, because of their religious identity and the economic benefits they brought, producing a more coherent and consistent policy in place of the more *ad hoc* approaches adopted previously. Nevertheless, the strangers had to be controlled and regulated, corporation officers needed frequent reminders from central government of their duties towards them, and even the Queen and Privy Council harboured secret suspicions beneath their public support. Attitudes frequently shifted from "eager invitation and warm welcome to bitter disputes and deepening hostility" whilst "distrust of foreigners was not limited to the lower classes".(23) At the root of resentment at the local level lay jealousy of the economic success of the aliens, of the privileges they were granted to encourage them to settle and suspicion that they favoured their own community and failed to share their skills with the indigenous population.

The material contained in this chapter is once again either entirely unremarkable, or questionable and even contradictory. The existence of an ambivalent response to alien immigrants, with both local and national authorities more commonly appreciative of the benefits they brought and inclined to protect them, is both well established and unsurprising.(24) It is also well known, and equally unsurprising, that resentment increased at times of economic distress.(25) Popular attitudes were often far less favourable, and any attempt to play this down would fly in the face of all the evidence of previous research as well as that presented here, which so frequently refers to resentment and hostility from "the poor tradesmen", "the meaner people", or the "clerks and apprentices", even if urban authorities occasionally took the side of the poor and represented their complaints to the Privy Council.(26) The one example of Sir Nicholas Bacon is a wholly inadequate basis for the extension of the purported xenophobia of the English into the realms of the upper social orders. Indeed, the whole notion of xenophobia is itself questionable, given the ambivalence of attitudes, the paucity

of evidence of concerted hostility, the general absence of violence, frequent expressions of support for the alien communities, the evident sympathy and financial support following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, and the manner in which immigrant families quickly became established and integrated with the indigenous population, the latter being a topic that clearly deserves fuller investigation.(27) Nor can the notion of a "rising tide" of hostility be sustained, for this is contradicted by Yungblut herself, both for Norwich and Canterbury.(28) Nor does such a pattern fit the town of Colchester, where disputes in the early seventeenth century appear to indicate growing confidence amongst native bay and saymakers rather than a continuous escalation of jealous hostility.(29) Finally, this all needs to be placed within the broader economic and social context of a growing population, escalation of urban poverty and vagrancy and enhanced migration to towns from the English countryside as much as from overseas. To argue that the alien searches assume significance because "no corresponding record was made of the native populace"(30) completely ignores the growing tide of concern over urban immigration in general in the later sixteenth century, which in some cases did indeed lead to the taking of either comprehensive or partial surveys.(31) Nor can the particular difficulties caused by four successive harvest failures in 1593-7 be ignored. In this context resentment of successful aliens is hardly surprising, and nor is it surprising to find hostility reaching a peak, at least in London, in the troubled 1590s.(32) The periodic 'scapegoating' of aliens is not, however, a sufficient basis for the identification of either an underlying xenophobia nor a "rising tide" of resentment.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover government policy towards aliens, with twenty-four pages - over 20% of the length of the text of the entire book - dealing with the pre-Elizabethan era. Government policy was informed by a number of concerns: fear of social disorder and the spread of plague, religious sympathy, the possible threat to national security, the requirements of international diplomacy and the perceived economic benefits that immigration would bring. Together this produced a dichotomy in government attitudes, generally publicly supportive, encouraging and protective, though more covertly suspicious, particularly at times of political intrigue such as 1571, these suspicions gradually subsiding as the aliens became more integrated and as any potential threat failed to materialise. All of this is unexceptionable if mostly well known though one might have expected to see some reference to fears that the Dutch and French churches might be serving to encourage English religious radicalism in the 1570s.(33)

In the economic sphere Elizabeth and Cecil continued the policies of extending a welcome to skilled refugees and periodically inviting specific craftsmen to settle, simultaneously protecting them from periodic local opposition, regulating their activities and taxing them to the full. Their key contribution was the introduction of the 'new draperies', notably at Norwich, Colchester and Sandwich. Other trades were also either newly planted or transformed, including threadmaking, needle-making, silk, glassmaking, the extractive industries, gunpowder, steel, paper manufacture, printing, sugar-refining, saltpetre, starch manufacture, market gardening "and many others".(34) Such a list might have been gleaned from Cunningham.(35) No substantial new research informs this section of the book, there is no attempt to consider possible theories of diffusion,(36) and there is a particular gap with respect to the economic activities of aliens in London, just now being filled in a Ph.D. thesis which is on the point of completion.(37) There is also a tendency to overstate the economic problems of mid-century.(38) The inherent difficulty of quantifying the alien contribution is noted, though at this point no reference is made to one of the few articles that attempts to do just that.(39) Nor does the author appear to be aware that some scholars have attempted to play down the alien contribution, with greater or lesser justification.(40) Again little is added to what is already known, and one is left feeling that an opportunity has been missed.

There are a number of stylistic, presentational and technical aspects of this book that could be improved. At one end of the spectrum, there have been some type-setting or proof reading difficulties that have led not only to the omission of a number of full stops but also to the transposition of the titles of Maps 2 and 3.(41) The use of the first person singular intrudes at many points, and the book is riddled with repetition. Textbooks are frequently cited in preference to more specialist literature, whilst occasionally journal articles are cited for their background discussion rather than for their specialist contribution. There are a number of long sections of potted history, and excessive background material for a book of this length. The Appendices are problematic for three reasons. First, it is not clear at all why these particular documents have been

reproduced in preference to others. Second, they are not discussed in the text, let alone fully analysed. And third, the transcription of the Colchester Contribution to the Poor Book is simply inaccurate in a number of respects, ranging from a misreading of particular characters, to separating entries that should be bracketed, the complete substitution of some names for the true entries and the omission of other entries entirely.

This is a book that falls between two stools. It is neither detailed enough nor informed by enough new research to make a significant contribution to the specialist literature, nor is it broad and comprehensive enough to replace the older, more general studies that are available. Despite the promises made in the introduction, much of the documentation employed is familiar, most of the discussion merely reiterates what can be found in the secondary literature, and where the conclusions reached have a greater claim to novelty they are generally highly questionable. It is welcome nevertheless, for it will hopefully achieve two goals. First, it can only serve to draw attention to the opportunities that still exist for more detailed research into alien immigration to England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for both sources and topics for further exploration are clearly available in abundance.⁽⁴²⁾ Second, by arguing firmly for particular perspectives on aliens and their reception in sixteenth century England it will undoubtedly generate the type of debate or even controversy that is so commonly crucial to the progress of historical understanding. Indeed, in this latter respect it already has already begun to achieve its goal.

Notes

1. W. Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants to England* (London, 1897).[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. W. Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants to England*, 2nd edition with an introduction by Charles Wilson (New York, 1969).[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. C. Wilson. "Cloth Production and International Competition in the Seventeenth Century", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 13 (1960); C. Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship 1603-1763* (1st edn. London, 1965, 2nd edn. London, 1984).[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 4-6; B.A. Holderness, *Pre- Industrial England: Economy and Society 1500-1750* (London, 1976).[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. W.C. Scoville, *The Persecution of the Huguenots and French Economic Development, 1680-1720* (London, 1960), has numerous English references; D. Ormrod, *The Dutch in London*(London 1973), is a slim but useful pamphlet. See also W.C. Scoville, "Minority Migrations and the Diffusion of Technology", *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 11 (1951); Scoville, "The Huguenots and the Diffusion of Technology", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 60 (1952).[Back to \(5\)](#)
6. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 4-5.[Back to \(6\)](#)
7. R.D. Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of Huguenots in Britain* (London, 1985); A. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth Century London* (Oxford, 1986).[Back to \(7\)](#)
8. Yungblut, *Strangers*, p.5.[Back to \(8\)](#)
9. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 5-6.[Back to \(9\)](#)
10. Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 6.[Back to \(10\)](#)
11. Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 8.[Back to \(11\)](#)
12. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 12-13.[Back to \(12\)](#)
13. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 18-19.[Back to \(13\)](#)
14. Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 21.[Back to \(14\)](#)
15. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 23-9.[Back to \(15\)](#)
16. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 29-35.[Back to \(16\)](#)
17. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, pp. 16- 17; Yungtblut, *Strangers*, p. 13.[Back to \(17\)](#)
18. Yungblut, *Strangers* pp. 18,21,22.[Back to \(18\)](#)
19. Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 21.[Back to \(19\)](#)
20. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, pp. 17, 279-80.[Back to \(20\)](#)
21. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 30-4.[Back to \(21\)](#)
22. Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 41.[Back to \(22\)](#)
23. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 45, 52.[Back to \(23\)](#)

24. For example, N. Goose, "The 'Dutch' in Colchester: the Economic Influence of an Immigrant Community in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 1 (1982), pp. 269-70.[Back to \(24\)](#)
25. Goose, "The 'Dutch' in Colchester", p. 271; Ormrod, *The Dutch in London*, no pagination; Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, p. 291; Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 40.[Back to \(25\)](#)
26. Yungblut *Strangers*, pp. 43, 44, 47.[Back to \(26\)](#)
27. A start is made in Goose, "The 'Dutch' in Colchester", p. 272. On support after 1572: Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, pp. 269-70.[Back to \(27\)](#)
28. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 56, 59.[Back to \(28\)](#)
29. Goose, "The 'Dutch' in Colchester", p. 270.[Back to \(29\)](#)
30. Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 80.[Back to \(30\)](#)
31. N. Goose, "Household Size and Structure in Early-Stuart Cambridge", *Social History*, Vol. 5 (1980), pp. 349-57 and sources therein; P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1988), pp. 65-6, 71-80, 88 fn.52.[Back to \(31\)](#)
32. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, p. 291.[Back to \(32\)](#)
33. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, pp. 274- 5.[Back to \(33\)](#)
34. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 106-111.[Back to \(34\)](#)
35. W. Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants to England*, *passim*. Cunningham, however, singularly failed to emphasise the key importance of the innovations in textiles.[Back to \(35\)](#)
36. E.g. D. Ormrod in A. Armstrong (ed.), *The Economy of Kent 1640-1914* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 97-8.[Back to \(36\)](#)
37. L. Luu, "Skills and Innovation: a Study of the Stranger Working Community in London 1550- 1600", PhD thesis, Inst. Hist. Res., London University, 1996 (forthcoming); see also her "Migration and Change: Religious Refugees and the London Economy, 1550- 1600", *Critical Survey*, Vol. 8 (1996), pp. 93- 102, and "Assimilation or Segregation: Communities of Alien Craftsmen in London in the Sixteenth Century", in *The Strangers' Progress: Integration and Disintegration of the Huguenot and Walloon Refugee Community, 1567-1889. Essays in memory of Irene Scouloudi*.[Back to \(37\)](#)
38. Few would accept that Cecil was "faced with crippling economic circumstances": Yungblut, *Strangers*, p. 101.[Back to \(38\)](#)
39. Goose, "The 'Dutch' in Colchester", p. 267. See also Goose, "Tudor and Stuart Colchester: Economic History", in J. Cooper (ed.), *The Victoria County History of Essex, Vol. IXII* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 81-3.[Back to \(39\)](#)
40. E. Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1985), pp. vii-ix, presents an extreme denial of the importance of alien contributions, and D.C. Coleman, "An Innovation and its Diffusion: the 'New Draperies'", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 22 (1969), pp. 417-29 remains the better balanced exposition. For a reassessment of the importance of home-grown innovations relative to the German contribution in the metal mining industries see R. Burt, "The Transformation of the Non-ferrous Metals Industries in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 48 (1995), pp. 23-45.[Back to \(40\)](#)
41. Yungblut, *Strangers*, pp. 31, 33, 81, 86, 93.[Back to \(41\)](#)
42. The need for more research has been emphasised quite recently elsewhere: N. Goose, "Urban Demography in Pre-industrial England: What is to be Done?.", *Urban History*, Vol. 21 (1994), pp. 283-4. A collection of essays on various aspects of immigrant communities in England in the sixteenth century, to be edited by Nigel Goose and Lien Luu, is at an advanced stage of planning.[Back to \(42\)](#)

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