

**'EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS WORK':
SOME HUGUENOT INFLUENCES IN 18th-CENTURY LONDON**

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Introduction

Practical dentistry prior to the mid-seventeenth century had been restricted to the basics of cleaning and extracting, although filing, ligaturing of loose teeth and the occasional transplantation were not unknown. Much of the cleaning had been carried out by the barbers, who also undertook extractions (since this was one of the minor surgical skills still permitted them) together with the surgeons and barber-surgeons, and the toothdrawers. The replacement of missing teeth was rare in England at this stage. Although the literature of the late Tudor and early Stuart period contains some quite well-known references to teeth, as evidence they are frankly insecure. Of more relevance is Peter Lowe's quite detailed description of artificial teeth, since it ends with the remark: 'I am not mindful to insist in this practicke as I might, because it is seldome practised'.¹

With the collapse of Laudian censorship, the onset of the Civil War and liberation from the restrictive regulations of the College of Physicians, there were many changes in the medical field. The influx of European itinerant healers (predominantly German and Italian) into the very fluid health-for-sale medical market of the 1650s and 60s was to generate a shift in the scope and provision of dental services. Whilst some of the visitors gained their main income from selling therapeutic nostrums, they nevertheless offered limited clinical services, including the provision of artificial teeth, the earliest known advertisement for which is dated 1649.²

Currently available evidence suggests that it was these continental visitors who brought the provision of artificial teeth into greater public awareness and thereby stimulated demand. The indigenous operators could hardly have escaped the effects of such demand, so to remain competitive they would either have had to introduce replacement teeth into their range of preferred treatments, or else improve their own product quality in order to attract custom away from the increasing number of opportunities and charlatans.

As wealth increased, prompting the first stirrings of consumerism, French influences

in dress were accompanied by an increase in the use of cosmetics. Whilst some of the excessive decoration of ribbons, hair-pieces and paint may have derived from over-reaction to previous austerity, this reflects an increasing concern, by both sexes, with the pursuit of youth and beauty. In a pale, apparently flawless face, blackened teeth, stumps or gaps would have been as offensive to the eye as they were to the nose. There was thus a ready market for any person willing to meet the rapidly growing demand for artificial teeth.

The Revocation

The relative quietude in France after the wars of religion and the Edict of Nantes (1598) lasted only until 1661, when a steady erosion of privileges commenced; after 1679 the Calvinists became excluded from service in the royal household, public office and several of the professions, and the particularly vicious *dragonnades* began.

The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 resulted in the trickle of emigrés becoming a flood and then a raging torrent. Between the late 1670s and about 1710, some 40-50,000 Huguenots are estimated to have settled in England, although their main influx here occurred some while after the Revocation.

Once in England, the majority settled in London where they formed two quite distinct communities. The eastern group were centred around the Spitalfields area, being predominantly associated with the silk trade, while the western group were centred around the Leicester Fields/Soho area and were generally professional families, goldsmiths and other artisans. They brought skills and business contacts with them, even though many arrived penniless. Since they were traditionally industrious this was much to the benefit of the host nation, although the host nation was not always appreciative of the fact, and Huguenots were frequent targets of criticism.

The medics in this wave of immigration had less immediate impact upon medical science in England than had the earlier Huguenot refugees at the beginning of the century, when men such as Sir Theodore de Mayerne and Gideon de Laune had established the independence of the Apothecaries and the Chamberlens had brought with them the secret of the obstetric forceps. Nevertheless, the very numbers in this second influx must have been a useful injection of competently-trained men. Some chose to work predominantly within their own community in London, but others assimilated very promptly or moved further afield.

Their level of skill is reflected in the frequency with which Huguenot names occur in the lists of Households appointments, Paul Buissière and Claudius Amyand being probably the best known. Buissière attended Queen Caroline in her last illness, despite his advanced age. His greatest contribution, however, may have been the establishment of the earliest private school for anatomy, in response to the growing dissatisfaction of the surgeons with the constraints of the medical monopolies and the inadequacy of professional training.³

In company with the other professional families, these second-wave medics were concentrated in the western community but centred around the Savoy area. The involvement of the general surgeons with dentistry is poorly documented, although David Perronet (son of a Huguenot pastor who had fled to Switzerland) advertised dentifrices and a remedy to help in the cutting of teeth.⁴

The Huguenots and dental practice

Two of the post-Revocation exiles are certainly known to have earned most if not all of their livelihood from the practice of dentistry: Peter Hemet and Estienne Baron-Dupont. Peter Hemet was 17 years old when he arrived in London in November 1687 with his parents, so he should have been still in the middle of his professional education. No record has survived of his father Adrien's occupation, but it is highly likely that he was from a professional or at least a well-educated background.

In September 1702, Peter Hemet was granted a bishop's licence to practise surgery, so his basic training must have been in this field and to a reasonable degree of competence, since episcopal licences were generally only granted after the submission of a statement of peer approval. The reasons behind his decision to concentrate on practical dentistry remain unknown, so that the balance between a genuine interest in the teeth and dental ills and an entrepreneurial awareness that there was a profitable new field opening up cannot be precisely determined. Whatever his motives, there can be no doubting his professional skills. He was sworn in as Operator for the Teeth in Ordinary to her Majesty on 31 March 1707 and was to continue in the service of the Household, subsequently serving both George I and George II, until his death in May 1747. Aged 77, he was rather too old on the face of it to be practising efficiently, so it may well be that the rapid assumption of his eldest son Peter to the father's post (less than a week after the latter's death) was merely a regularizing of an existing unofficial arrangement.⁵

Estienne Baron-Dupont followed his sister from Paris to London in 1702, at the age of nineteen. Here there was early certitude in his choice of career, since his marriage entry two years later states quite clearly 'opérateur pour les dents'.⁶ The majority of his education must have been undertaken in Paris, even if it had to be completed in London, so his skills would have been well in advance of most of the indigenous operators in London.

Despite the 13 years between Hemet and Dupont, there must have been some contact between them, although it can be no more than surmise that it was Hemet who was responsible for the younger man's dental training or who influenced him to this end. Their respective needs to establish themselves and earn a living might suggest a possible element of rivalry, but there would have been no shortage of individuals requesting their services, particularly if their skills were such as to be highly sought after. Their success would have been influenced not only by their clinical skills but also by the degree of their integration into the host community. Both men quickly anglicized their names, the younger adopting the shortened form of 'Stephen Dupont', and Hemet was an active member of the parish of St. Clement Danes. Few details of Dupont's professional life have survived, although he followed the widespread practice of promoting his own particular lotions and medicaments. In view of the very small number of indigenous operators at this period, Dupont and Hemet must have made a considerable contribution to the dental scene in London in the early decades of the eighteenth century (Dupont died in 1744 and Hemet in 1747), raising the profile of the operators for the teeth and paving the way for the acceptance of later French practitioners.

The first generation of descendants from the post-Revocation exiles also contained two men of note: Peter Hemet junior, and Paul Jullion. The former is a more shadowy figure than his father, even though he was to succeed him in post as Operator for the Teeth to George II in 1747. This appointment was comparatively short-lived however as, despite a further warrant dated January 1754, he was to die the following December. One of his trade-cards describes him as Operator for the Teeth to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales; this card probably preceded the Household appointment, and declared him to be 'most expert in Drawing & Clensing [*sic*] of Teeth, Setting Artificial Ones and Performing all other Cures therunto belonging'.

Paul Jullion came from a family of good birth and education, which included several watchmakers. Whether he was initially trained in this field remains unknown, as also does

his clinical education, but it is probable that he spent some time in Paris. If so, his expertise would have been far more advanced than that of many on the contemporary London scene, so it is unsurprising to find that within a week of his death in February 1766, the 26-year old Thomas Berdmore (just appointed as Operator for the Teeth to George III) advertising that he performed 'all operations upon the teeth, gums, sockets, and palate, upon the late Mr. Jullion's principles'.⁷

Jullion's advertisements were vigorous, with an appeal to vanity. Acutely aware of the differences in facial profile between a dentate young adult and the collapsed contours of the edentulous, he juxtaposed these images to promote his clinical services and particularly his artificial teeth. He ran his dental practice at the Sign of the Deficient and Rectified Heads in Coventry St., near Piccadilly on efficient business lines: half the money agreed to be paid for artificial teeth was to be deposited in his hands at the time they were bespoke, and persons were firmly requested to keep their time of appointment!⁸

The third generation of Huguenots includes Jacob Hemet, grandson of Peter snr., and Paul Euralius Jullion, son of Paul Jullion, both of whom were to become expensive and exclusive operators in the closing decades of the century. Jacob Hemet did not set out initially to follow his illustrious forebears. It seems that he was designed for a mercantile life, but this early training was far from wasted. While he followed the usual pattern of concocting and promoting his own mouthwashes and dentifrices, he was unusual in that he was one of the very few who took the trouble to patent them. Subsequent advertisements for Hemet's Essence of Pearl and Pearl Dentifrice can be found not only in the London press but in many provincial newspapers. His marketing zeal extended to a visit to Boston, New York and Philadelphia in 1772, but there is no evidence that he practised there.⁹

Earlier in June 1766, he had been made Operator for the Teeth to H.M. Queen Charlotte, which appointment was subsequently extended to include the Princess Amelia and the Prince of Wales. He trained his youngest half-brother, George Francklin, who, on becoming a partner at the age of 22, decided to adopt the Hemet name, presumably because of its professional standing. This was the same year that Jacob went over to America to pursue his advertising campaigns, so in his absence the practice could have been left in safe, reliable hands.

The Huguenot contribution to the dental scene was not confined solely to those who had received clinical training. The developing field of the provision of artificial teeth also

attracted the attention of craftsmen such as goldsmiths and watchmakers, who felt that their dexterity could be put to good use, particularly since the provision of what were little more than simple strips of ivory that were ligatured into place between the remaining anterior teeth did not really demand a high degree of clinical knowledge or expertise.

The goldsmith Alexis Pilleau had come to London from Le Mans in 1688. As his advertisements are traced in the press from 1696 onwards, his early offers to make artificial teeth which any operator may buy ready-made at a reasonable price are overtaken by his decision to fit these himself. As his clinical confidence increased, he then offered to clean natural teeth, and by 1719 he was prepared to tackle that most difficult of appliances for the early prosthetists, the upper complete denture. He died in 1730, leaving his London business to his son Alexis Pez , who had been apprenticed as a goldsmith to the famous Jean Chartier.¹⁰

The son's dental training must have come from his father rather than his master. The importance of his contribution to dental prosthetics may be seen in a letter written by him in 1733, in which he instructed those of his patients who lived away from the city to mould a piece of wax into the shape of a horseshoe and to press it down onto their gums so that the standing teeth pierced the wax and recorded an impression of the gums on either side of the teeth.¹¹ This sort of mail-order dentistry was not unknown at this period, but it is the reference to wax that this is unexpected, and important.

Paris was generally regarded as a centre of excellence for dentistry, yet there is no mention of wax impressions in the texts of the period. It was not until 1756 that the first printed reference occurs (in Prussia) to the use of wax in order to obtain an impression of the teeth from which a plaster positive could be obtained. Such use of wax in France seems to have occurred remarkably late in the century, and even the French themselves were unsure who had first used it. The precise pathways of the spread of impression-taking techniques across Europe have still to be fully elucidated, but it would certainly seem that there was some early independent development in England; it also seems quite possible that Alexis Pez  Pilleau was involved in this, whether or not he was the originator of the idea.

References

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8. Wellcome MSS: Spec. Coll. 63518, ff.71v & 72.
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10. For further details of Alexis Pilleau's London activities, see A.S. Hargreaves, 'The Pilleau family: Huguenot goldsmiths in London', *Dent. Historian*, 19 (1990), pp. 9-15.
11. Cited by L. Lindsay, *A short History of Dentistry* (London, John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, Ltd., 1933), p. 47. The original letter is proving untraceable.

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