

Abstract

The French imperial family sought refuge in Britain after defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. This event is accepted at face value by biographers and, broadly speaking, ignored by historians. This is surprising since it is not immediately apparent why Emperor Napoleon III, who had been so distrusted by the British for the expansionist ambitions of the Second Empire, chose to reside in a quiet village in Kent. However, analysis of the advantages of political asylum in nineteenth-century Britain, compared to elsewhere in Europe or America, show that there were many varied and practical reasons for him to have done so. These included geographical position; Britain's liberal, unilateral stance on refugees; freedom of movement and of the press; and the emperor's relationship with Queen Victoria.

Although Louis Napoleon died in Britain in 1873, many contemporaries had regarded his exile as a temporary state, envisaging his return to power in France. Therefore, it is the extent to which he was perceived capable of restoring the imperial throne which is pivotal to our understanding of the issues arising in the host country as a result of his asylum. Diplomatic relations between Britain and France were strained because the latter's new government was suspicious of the exiled imperialist enclave in Chislehurst. In particular, French politicians were irritated by both the hospitality afforded to the imperial family, especially the private friendship of the queen, and the popularity of these high profile refugees with the British public, as reflected in numerous newspaper articles and journals of the day. British politicians' adherence to protocol and their regard for the precedents set in respect of France's previous fallen rulers did not necessarily satisfy the officials of the French republic. The underlying tensions which resulted from this situation were to have wider implications, too, impacting on the expatriation of French communists after the Paris Commune and creating a heightened atmosphere in which to conduct negotiations for the continuation of the commercial treaty between the two countries.

Why did the French imperial family seek refuge in Britain after the Franco-Prussian War and what issues did its exile raise in the host country?

Introduction and background

Napoleon III died in exile on 8 January 1873 in the unassuming, Kent village of Chislehurst. It was ironic that this man, who had ruled over France with ostentatious, imperial majesty and influenced the balance of power in Europe, should die and be buried in Britain, with quiet dignity and in relatively modest surroundings. France was, after all, the traditional enemy of Britain and Louis Napoleon had personified the ambitions of the Second Empire.¹ Indeed, a mere fourteen years earlier, the perceived threat of a Napoleonic invasion had resulted in the zealous formation of volunteer rifle corps. The spirit of their patriotic call to defend national interests against the French 'despot' was captured in Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem with its rallying cry of 'Riflemen form!'² And there was to be a further twist in this extraordinary saga when the Prince Imperial, serving with the Royal Engineers, was killed fighting the Zulus in 1879. He, too, was buried in Chislehurst.³

The exile of the French imperial family was a remarkable event and this dissertation explores why, after six months in Prussian captivity following defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the French emperor⁴ chose to reside in Britain. His decision raised a number of issues for the host country, not least concern that a Bonapartist plot might be hatched on British soil. Unfortunately, gathering reliable source material relating to any such political activity in exile is extremely difficult, if not impossible to do; by their very nature, these actions would have been concealed (often through a web of underground agents) and rarely documented, with the tracks then covered by careful destruction of the evidence. This is certainly true of Napoleon III, a romantic figure of political intrigue whose life, like that of his uncle, Napoleon Bonaparte, is shrouded in myth. There appears to be no hard evidence of him plotting a return to power, but much was surmised and rumoured. This study, however, does not attempt to prove whether or not there were concrete plans to restore the Second Empire. Instead, the objective is to analyse what the French imperial family's long term refuge in Britain tells us about its relationship with the British government and the British public, and how this affected Britain's interaction initially with Germany, but most importantly with France.

The approach of some biographers has been simply to accept the period of exile as Napoleon III's twilight years and to shift analysis away from the broader European perspective by which they considered his imperial rule. As such, events after the emperor's overthrow have been interpreted from a narrow viewpoint, presupposing both a decline in his health and ambition and an inevitable resignation to life in the shadows. These works, therefore, fall into the common trap of reading history backwards. They fail to acknowledge the instability of the New Defence Government in France as it struggled to contain the explosive, political forces unleashed by military defeat and the severity of war reparation imposed by the Prussian victors. In these turbulent and unpredictable times, restoration of the imperial throne became a real possibility. Because of this, the dynamics of European politics should be regarded by biographers and historians as more, rather than less, relevant to the French imperial family after its flight to Britain. It should be remembered, too, that Louis Napoleon's death resulted from unsuccessful operations to remove a stone in his bladder, a condition which, although debilitating, was not thought to be terminal. With an average mortality rate of four percent for this type of operation, it was most likely to have been 'an unnecessary death' brought about by medical incompetence.⁵ Consequently, there needs to be revision of this period, refocusing on the extent to which the emperor was perceived to be a political player during exile and the plausibility of reviving the empire for either himself or his son. This is pivotal to understanding the situation.

¹ John Bierman, *Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire* (St Martin's Press, 1988), 391.

² This poem, simply entitled 'The War', was published in *The Times*, 9 May 1859.

³ Later his remains and those of his father were laid to rest in a grand mausoleum which the Empress Eugène had built at Farnborough in Hampshire.

⁴ Louis Napoleon is referred to as emperor and not ex-emperor throughout the dissertation. This was the term of address used by Queen Victoria from 1852 until his death in 1873.

⁵ Fenton Bresler, *Napoleon III: a life* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 404-415.

Also of relevance is the general attitude towards exiles in Britain at this time. Clearly, there were difficulties for the British government which, while keeping to its non-interventionist foreign policy throughout the conflict, permitted unconditional safe harbour to all shades of political refugee during much of the nineteenth century. The fall of the Second Empire and the unification of Germany upset the status quo and yet Britain continued to hold its impartial stance in Europe. Accordingly, its diplomats walked a tightrope; from the autumn of 1870, they faced the challenge of forming a workable relationship with the new, fragile, French government, while developing a good rapport with the formidable power of a united and dominantly Protestant Germany, their more natural ally. Concern for the continuation of trade and commercial links remained of the utmost importance throughout this period of change. It was, therefore, necessary to act in a way which limited the effects of, and the reaction to, the French imperial family's decision to settle in Britain. In order to do so, there were many ambiguities and complexities to overcome. First, the offer of asylum and freedom of movement was a matter of national pride for many Britons.⁶ Moreover, the press was free to report as it wished on the activities of those who sought refuge in the country, irrespective of the embarrassment that this might cause the government of the day. Secondly, following the uncompromising military bombardment of French territory by the Prussians, public opinion appeared to be at variance with the government's policy of neutrality. The growing animosity against the Germans was such that their emperor wrote to Queen Victoria in January 1871 of 'the signs of ill-feeling which are arising between England and Germany'. He warned that 'anti-German meetings which are on the increase in England are a display which can only augment the irritation of the German people.'⁷ Therefore, one should consider whether this period was a turning point in public attitude if, as Linda Colley argues, 'Britishness' had been 'forged above all by war' with France and defined as the nation against 'an obviously hostile Other'.⁸ Alternatively, it may have been no more than the innate sympathy of Britons for the underdog which led to the marked increase in compassion for the French imperial family after its downfall and for the Parisians under siege. A further issue was that Louis Napoleon was not related by blood to European royalty and yet maintained a friendship with Queen Victoria, which, arguably, was more open than her government would have liked. This was problematic for the queen, too, from the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War because her daughter, Vicky, was the Crown Princess of Prussia. The German lands of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld had also been the home of her beloved, late husband, Prince Albert. As a result, any political activity undertaken on British soil by, or on behalf of, the emperor, had it become known, could potentially have comprised the queen's position with her German counterparts as well as with French republicans. Finally, the British government had to balance its lack of official recognition of the emperor, so as not to offend the nascent, French government, with an appreciation that he could be returned to power if the Third Republic was toppled.

Given the complexities of the situation, the lack of historiographical analysis of Napoleon III's exile in Britain is somewhat surprising. In fact, there is little scholarship on asylum in Victorian Britain generally. Sabine Freitag edited a collection of papers following an international conference at the German Historical Institute in London in July 1999, entitled *Flotsam of Revolution: European Exiles in England after 1849*. The resulting articles, although focusing on the aftermath of the 1848 Revolutions, tackle issues arising throughout much of the nineteenth century from Britain's policy of offering refuge to all. This was a period when other European countries, such as Belgium, France and Switzerland, were increasingly less likely to facilitate extradition.⁹ Bernard Porter is a contributor to this collection, and his own book, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Britain*, is a definitive text. It predominantly concentrates on the Orsini Affair in 1858 which, he argues, 'marked the end of the refugee question as a serious diplomatic issue between Britain and the continent: the last brilliant flash of the meteor as it sped across the Victorians' sky.'¹⁰ That said, Porter does not conclude that the matter was fully resolved in that year, with the final chapter of his book analysing the aftermath of that crisis. Nevertheless, his interpretation has the effect of downgrading the significance of reaction to exile in Britain after the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune. Consequently, work specific to Napoleon III's exile is limited to that of biographers, despite the scope of historical research being far greater than this narrow genre allows. When analysed from a broader basis, the bizarre outcome of Britain's stance on asylum

⁶ Bernard Porter, *The refugee question in mid-Victorian Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1.

⁷ The German Emperor to Queen Victoria, Versailles 14/1/1871, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 110.

⁸ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (Vantage, 1996), 7.

⁹ Sabine Freitag, *Exiles from European Revolutions: refugees in mid-Victorian England* (Berghahn Books, 2003), Introduction, 2.

¹⁰ Porter, *The refugee question*, 200.

becomes apparent, too. For instance, Karl Marx and Napoleon III were in exile at the same time, living only a few miles apart; one seeing opportunity in the Paris Commune, the other horrified as Parisian palaces burned to the ground. It also becomes clear that Britain was regarded simply as a waiting room or place for those in limbo, with individuals sailing back and forth across the Channel at each change of regime in France. Victor Hugo is, perhaps, the best known example of the period. His exile in Jersey allowed him to be very vocal in his criticism of the French emperor, who, in turn, was granted the very same freedoms as a political refugee in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, Hugo returned home in 1870 to be elected to the National Assembly and the Senate. This ever changing population of distinguished exiles undoubtedly brought France's political experiences closer to the British public, but the effect of this has yet to be properly researched. Additionally, by expanding the time period being studied beyond that of a biography, the legend of Napoleon Bonaparte comes into play. Bearing in mind that Napoleon III had deliberately revived the grandeur and spectacle of that age, it was not unreasonable for contemporaries to believe that he would follow in his uncle's footsteps, planning a dramatic and extraordinary return to power, equivalent to the 'One Hundred Days'.

The French imperial family in Britain

The incongruity of the emperor living as a political refugee, with little recognition and none of the splendour of his former status, is one of the most fascinating aspects of this study. The dramatic contrast between imperial rule and lowly exile was made poignantly at the time of his death when *The Times* wrote: 'Once the Ambassadors waited in anxiety for a word from those lips. Once Europe could hardly hold Caesar and his fortunes; and now, a narrow room, a narrow bed, a narrow coffin.'¹¹ Yet, after the humiliation of military defeat and imprisonment by the Prussians, albeit in luxury, it could be argued that a relatively modest life in Britain actually offered Louis Napoleon a degree of dignity. Such a period of exile had become the custom of fallen French rulers in the nineteenth century, the precedent having been set by the Bourbon Kings of the French, Charles X (1824 to 1830) and Louis Philippe (1830 to 1848). Both had fled revolution in their turn and sought refuge in Britain. But their situation differed somewhat from that of Louis Napoleon; a long, royal bloodline gave them the legitimacy which the Napoleonic dynasty lacked. Nonetheless, the emperor benefitted from many of the advantages enjoyed by his exiled predecessors.

The most obvious of these was geographical, with Britain close to mainland Europe and yet separated from it by sea. For political refugees, it offered a place of asylum from which they could return to their country of origin in less than two days of travel, should the situation there alter suddenly.¹² This was likely in France, which was especially susceptible to revolution. Again, *The Times* captured this point, rather poetically, within its columns: 'France is the political volcano of the Continent, and Paris is its crater. The expulsion of dynasty after dynasty has been more regular than the eruptions of Vesuvius.' It continued, 'Ruler has followed ruler at intervals almost as stated in their periods as that of the falling stars that appear every November.'¹³ Therefore, his choice may indicate that the emperor regarded exile as a temporary state; only those who had grown weary of fighting their cause and wished to be permanently expatriated moved further away.¹⁴ America, for example, would have been a suitable destination had Louis Napoleon intended to leave the political scene. Certainly, it was a realistic option since he had been well received in New York in 1837.¹⁵ Yet he, more than most, appreciated the huge distance which would then have separated him from his homeland, for that same year he suffered the torture of a lengthy journey back to Europe to be with his dying mother, Hortense.

As an island, Great Britain also provided a physical barrier between the exile and the regime he had fled that was more robust than land borders on the Continent, which shifted with political change. Thus, it was considered a safe location. The effectiveness of this divide of water had been proven at the start of the nineteenth century when, unlike much of Europe and despite the Continental System,¹⁶ Britain remained free from the hegemony of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was ironic, therefore, that some fifty or so years later, it was the nephew of the first emperor of the French who positively valued the integrity of Britain's coastline. It gave him protection as a refugee, overawed as he was by mighty Prussia and the resulting turmoil in France. Neither the seriousness of the situation in which Louis Napoleon found himself after the Franco-Prussian War, nor the urgent need of the French imperial family for asylum, should be underestimated. Queen Victoria said that the news of defeat at Sedan and the surrender of the emperor had taken her breath away.¹⁷ She later commented, with much foresight, that 'from the length and bloodiness of the contest, this bitterness and hatred of the two countries will make matters worse than before.'¹⁸ This turn of events was yet another indicator of the dramatic

¹¹ 'The Late Emperor Napoleon', *The Times*, 14 January 1873, 5.

¹² Freitag, *Exiles from European Revolutions*, 2.

¹³ *The Times*, 8 March 1871, 9.

¹⁴ Porter, *The refugee question*, 1.

¹⁵ Louis Napoleon was deported to the United States by Louis Philippe's government after his failure to rally troops in Strasbourg to his cause.

¹⁶ This was an economic blockade during the Napoleonic wars under which France attempted to destroy Britain's ability to trade with Europe.

¹⁷ From the Queen, Balmoral, 6 September 1870, *Your Dear Letter: Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the Crown Princess of Prussia 1865 -1871* (Evans Brothers Limited, 1971), 297.

¹⁸ From the Queen, Windsor Castle, 10 December 1870, *Ibid*, 311-312.

changes occurring to the balance of power in Europe: having unified German lands, Prussia's rulers held significant influence over their neighbours, as evidenced by their insistence on the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. Moreover, Austria had already been cowed by military defeat in 1866. On the other hand, the separation by sea did not hinder the easy access and exchange of news, or prevent visitors from abroad. The empress' secretary, Augustin Filon, wrote that there were so many visitors 'who succeeded each other without interruption' in the years 1871 and 1872 that it was impossible for him to list them all.¹⁹ Those from France could inform the emperor of the situation at home and return with his clandestine messages and instructions. In this way, it would have been possible for him to manipulate the situation in France from a distance. This explains why spies were stationed in a windmill on Chislehurst common, close to the house occupied by the exiled imperial family, reporting to a vulnerable and suspecting French government.²⁰

Another noteworthy advantage was Britain's liberal stance with regard refugees, which put it at odds with much of Europe during the nineteenth century. No one was refused entry or expelled between 1823 and 1906. By the 1830s, Britain was alone in allowing exiles to continue with their political activities, without fear of extradition.²¹ As a result, many took up exile there through lack of choice; no other European country was prepared to take them in on similar terms.²² In view of this, Napoleon III's arrival in Dover on 20 March 1871 was, perhaps, rather predictable. This unquestioning right to asylum had also been demonstrated forcefully, if humiliatingly, to him in 1858 by the Orsini affair. Then he had been unable to obtain from Britain the extradition of exiles believed to be responsible for making bombs with which to assassinate him. Consequently, on his release from Wilhemshohe, Louis Napoleon would have been certain that, despite the embarrassment his high profile exile might cause, he would be accepted unconditionally as a political refugee in Britain. One can only speculate whether other European governments would have been prepared to offer him such refuge. France's new, republican government, fearful of his intentions, was likely to have applied political pressure on them not to do so or, at the very least, to both limit his freedom of movement and monitor his actions. The reason was obvious: it would have been easier for the emperor to amass troops on the land border of a neighbouring country, in order to directly initiate a political uprising in France, than it would to sail secretly from Britain with the forces necessary for the same purpose. In fact, the exiled ruler himself knew this only too well. In 1840 he had attempted to seize power in France, sailing from Gravesend to Boulogne with only fifty-five men in a pleasure steamer, chartered under the guise of taking a tourist party on a cruise. His attempted coup was a disastrous failure that resulted in six years of imprisonment in Ham fortress in northern France. Thus, in 1871, the emperor understood that his choice was limited. He possibly could have chosen Switzerland, which had been sympathetic to refugees in the past. This option was discussed in the contemporary press, with a report in a Swiss newspaper that the empress' furniture had been sent from St Petersburg to a chateau at Arenenberg, suggesting she might settle there.²³ This was plausible since that property, in which Hortense had died, was owned and had been restored by the French imperial family. Moreover, Prince Napoleon Joseph Bonaparte²⁴ took up refuge in Switzerland after the Franco-Prussian War. However, in reality, there appears to have been little alternative to Britain; otherwise it seems unlikely that so many exiles, including the French imperial family, would have moved to a country whose climate they hated with a passion. Many recorded in their diaries complaints of the depressing fog and of feeling homesick for the Continent.²⁵ The empress' maid-of-honour wrote: 'The days were sad indeed under the misty sky in that great kingdom of fog and rain. By degrees, we began to rasp on each other's nerves.'²⁶ For the empress, with her Spanish roots, this must have been especially trying, although relieved by a trip to her native land in the autumn of 1871.

¹⁹ Augustin Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie* (Gassell, 1920), 239.

²⁰ Bresler, *Napoleon III*, 401.

²¹ Andreas Fahrmeir, 'British Exceptionalism in Perspective' in Sabine Freitag ed., *Exiles from European Revolutions: refugees in mid-Victorian England* (Berghahn Books, 2003), 37.

²² Porter, *The refugee question*, 24.

²³ 'Incidents of the War', *The Times*, 9 November 1870, pg. 8; Issue 26903; col A.

²⁴ Louis Napoleon's cousin, nicknamed Plon-Plon.

²⁵ Porter, *The refugee question*, 19.

²⁶ Garets, Marie, Comtesse des. *The Tragic Empress* ed. Marie-Louyse des Garets, trans. Helene Graeme. (Skeffington & Son, 1930) cited in Bresler, *Napoleon III: a life*, 398.

An additional benefit of Britain's liberal attitude towards refugees was the freedom of movement afforded them within the country. Louis Napoleon had personally experienced this in the late 1830s, when he was pretender to the French imperial throne and an exile in Britain. At that time, Lord Malmesbury explained to the French ambassador that the government could not restrict the prince's freedom of activity. There was no law in place to do so.²⁷ During his final period of exile, Napoleon III travelled unhindered to Torquay, Bath and the Isle of Wight, while Eugenie and their son also visited Scotland for a holiday. When rumours abounded that the French imperial family would visit the Channel Islands, the response of government officials was simply that, if the rumours proved correct, the expatriates should be shown 'every reasonable attention' but no official notice made of their presence.²⁸ Furthermore, exiles were rarely under rigorous surveillance from the police, unless British interests appeared to be threatened. This was, in part, due to the outcry over the so-called 'post office espionage' of 1844, when the mail of Giuseppe Mazzini, a leading proponent of the Italian Risorgimento, was opened. The information it contained had then been passed to the Austrian ambassador. This incident highlighted the concern of the British public that the rights of all individuals, including politically active refugees, be upheld under the law. At the time, it caused the home secretary, Sir James Graham, significant political damage; the press was quick to criticise the practice of secretly intercepting letters as a bad habit of foreign governments that did not fit well with English values. Against this background, mid-Victorian governments were wary and selective with regard to exercising powers of surveillance.²⁹ The events of 1858, in reaction to French pressure to hound out alleged terrorists in Britain after the Orsini affair, had a similar effect. In that year Lord Palmerstone failed to get his 'Conspiracy to murder' bill passed by parliament. Also, Simon Bernard was acquitted by a jury at a court trial for his role in the assassination plot of the French emperor. The British public, although not necessarily sympathetic to refugees, was again demonstrating that the principle of asylum was sacrosanct.³⁰ In view of this, and as illustrated by the French spies in the Chislehurst windmill, exiles were concerned more about those employed to report on them by their native governments than of harassment by the host country.³¹ This is borne out by a memo to the British home secretary in 1871: it stated that French agents were deliberately observing English detectives going about their business of tracking leaders of the French communists in exile. Even more absurdly, these English detectives were known by those whom they pursued, so that the latter broke up their own meetings or disguised proceedings, as the occasion required.³² Information is scant, but, from the few surviving records on this type of police work, it would seem that British surveillance of refugees was far less organised and effective at this time than it had been in the 1850s.³³

Louis Napoleon also favoured Britain because he knew and understood the lifestyle of its people. There was comfort in familiarity for he had been exiled there twice before in the years 1838-40 and 1846-1848. Then he had been seeking ways in which he might rise to power in France and deemed it useful to court both the popularity of the middle classes and the mood of the day. For example, he became a citizen policeman to assist in the suppression of British Chartists.³⁴ By 1871, he was, in addition, able to draw on the more favourable experiences shared by Britain and the Second Empire. In fact, their relationship had not been as antagonist as was first feared in December 1851, when a Bonaparte again seized the reins of power, for, by this time, there was a mutual desire to avoid isolation in Europe. Britain's foreign policy with regard to France had been ambivalent, rather than hostile, from the early 1850s to the fall of the Second Empire: a period when, it is argued, Britons enjoyed self-confidence brought about by stability and economic prosperity.³⁵ Unlike many Europeans, they had been spared the destruction of revolution and could proudly boast that their constitution had withstood the latest wave of radicalism to sweep the Continent in 1848. W.L.Burn describes it

²⁷ Franklin Charles Palm, *England and Napoleon III* (Duke University Press, 1948), 6.

²⁸ Mr Bruce to Earl Granville, 16 October 1872, PRO 30/29/65.

²⁹ Emiliana P. Noether, "'Morally Wrong' or 'Politically Right'? Espionage in Her Majesty's Post-Office, 1844-45', *Canadian Journal of History*, 22:1 (1987:Apr.), 45 & 56-57.

³⁰ Fabrice Bensimon, 'The French Exiles and the British' in Freitag, Sabine ed., *Exiles from European Revolutions: refugees in mid-Victorian England* (Berghahn Books, 2003), 94 and 98.

³¹ Freitag, *Exiles from European Revolutions*, 14.

³² Earl Granville to Mr Bruce, 10 August 1871, PRO 30/29/65.

³³ Porter, *The refugee question*, 209.

³⁴ Palm, *England and Napoleon III*, 18.

³⁵ J.P.Parry, 'The impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society Sixth Series*, Vol. 11 (2001), 147.

as 'the age of equipoise', when the mid-Victorian generation, faced with 'the old and the new, the elements of growth, survival and decay, achieved a balance which most contemporaries regarded as satisfactory'.³⁶ Yet this collective self-belief and growing sense of superiority belied the reality that Britain had only modest sway over European affairs. Instead, the British government had little choice but to work with Napoleon III in order to preserve the status quo and encourage trade.³⁷ The two countries had been allies in the Crimean War against Russia from 1854 to 1856 and joined together in a free trade treaty of commerce in 1860. Therefore, age-old enmity and habitual mistrust were tempered by the pragmatism of mid nineteenth-century politics. France, for its part, had played a similarly vague role, with the emperor keen not to provoke Britain unnecessarily, as his uncle had done.

This ambivalent relationship was turned to advantage by the exiled imperial family, especially the link with British royalty, which had been cultivated over the previous two decades. For diplomatic reasons, Queen Victoria had not hesitated to address Napoleon III as 'my good Brother' when he was proclaimed 'Emperor of the French' in 1852.³⁸ Thereafter, he had been keen to promote friendship between them, both privately and publicly. This paid dividends from 1870, for the queen did not withdraw her goodwill with the fall of the Second Empire. She visited the emperor and empress in Chislehurst and they paid their respects to her at Windsor Castle. Although unofficial and private, these occasions were effectively of a semi-public nature since the reception at the railway stations, to meet the royal or imperial entourage, attracted large, cheering crowds. Moreover, because the visits were reported in the British press, the general public was made aware of the queen's constancy of feeling towards the French imperial family and her sympathy for its predicament. The royal connection thus provided the ex-ruler of France with useful publicity which associated the Napoleonic dynasty with the solid, respected institution of British monarchy. Yet, as the queen remarked in her journal after a private visit to Chislehurst, it was in 'fearful contrast' to 'the state and pomp, wild excitement and enthusiasm' of 1855.³⁹ Indeed, the public had enjoyed little of such pageantry since the death of Prince Albert and there was some criticism of the queen's seclusion in widowhood, with her life deliberately conducted away from the public gaze as much as possible. Therefore, on their arrival, the French imperial couple, who had dazzled the world with ostentation and glamour, was certain to evoke the curiosity of those hungry for spectacle. In October 1870, the empress' residence in the country was said to be 'the favourite topic with the dining-room, smoking-room, and boudoir quidnuncs of both sexes.'⁴⁰ In fact, the empress continued to arouse interest because, in stark contrast to the queen (who was short, plump, middle aged and permanently dressed in mourning clothes), she was elegant, sophisticated and famous for her style and fashion. The *Daily News* described her influence as being 'over an empire whose frontiers extended far more widely than those which the most enthusiastic German would have claimed for the Fatherland - the Empire of Fashion.'⁴¹ Minute detail of her dress was described in the popular press and appeared to be of more appeal than the political situation. For example, an article entitled 'An interview with the Empress Eugenie' in October 1870, while the Franco-Prussian War dragged on, was no more than a description of her outfit, with such comments as 'a simple little jacket, fitting her lovely shoulders most perfectly, slashed at the sides and back, and trimmed all round with one row of velvet ribbon an inch and a half wide.'⁴² But such attention was understandable for Eugenie had been credited with popularising the crinoline skirt not only in France but also abroad. In addition, she had become well known for her patronage of the English couturier, Charles Frederick Worth. The latter, Joanna Richardson argues, was a reflection of the 'cordial cross-Channel relations' during the Second Empire and demonstrated the 'genuine *entente cordiale*' which then existed. Furthermore, Richardson suggests 'Anglomania' in France extended to the employment of English nannies, with the Prince Imperial being

³⁶ W.L.Burn, *The Age of Equipoise*, (Unwin University Books, 1968), 17.

³⁷ Parry, 'The impact of Napoleon III', 147.

³⁸ Theo Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, (Cassell & Company Ltd., 1972), 11.

³⁹ Extract from the Queen's Journal, 5 December 1870, *QVL*, 2nd ser., II, 92-93.

⁴⁰ *Daily News* article 'The Queen and the Empress Eugenie' reproduced in *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London) 5 October 1870.

⁴¹ *Daily News* article 'The Empress Eugenie and her influence' reproduced in *The Preston Guardian* (Preston) 10 September 1870.

⁴² *Scotsman* article 'An interview with the Empress Eugenie' reproduced in *The Hampshire Advertiser* (Southampton) 26 October 1870, 4.

brought up by a devoted Miss Shaw.⁴³ Her interpretation, however, is based on a narrow selection of examples and so her conclusions may overstate the broad level of understanding between the two countries. This is not to say that an exchange of cultural ideas and tastes did not take place. This was of benefit to the imperial exiles for whom expatriation might otherwise have been a less welcoming experience. They may also have felt more isolated were it not for such a positive appreciation of national differences. The British fascination with Napoleon Bonaparte and the legend he had created similarly assisted the French imperial family at this time. The popularity of his shrine at Madame Tussaud's waxworks exhibition in London was to last into the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ The Duke of Wellington was also known to have admired his greatest adversary and acquired several portraits of him, together with an enormous sculpture by Canova, for his residence, Apsley House.⁴⁵ The Second Empire had consciously played on these alluring aspects of the dynasty, thus continuing to attract inquisitive attention.

Whether the French imperial family's chosen residence, Camden Place in Chislehurst, was particularly significant is debatable. Many biographers merely note that the house, with a Catholic church close by, was conveniently located for the railway to London and links to the Continent. Fenton Bresler's book differs in this respect; he argues that Louis had secured the property himself, in advance, as 'a comfortable refuge' and that from 1871 'he may have been in exile but he was under his own roof.'⁴⁶ If true, this is the clearest demonstration of the emperor's confidence in his relationship with Britain and the simplest explanation of why his family chose to settle in Britain in 1870. The question is whether he prudently had arranged a bolt hole for himself, aware that Britain would feel no obligation to assist financially a man who had taken power by a coup d'état.⁴⁷ The answer is that one might expect the politically astute ruler of turbulent, nineteenth-century France to have a safe haven abroad, yet its existence would have been a carefully guarded secret, with arrangements concealed through agents. Possibly only the most trusted of the emperor's entourage would have been aware of any such plans, and their loyalty to the imperial family could explain why their memoirs are vague in this regard. However, it may instead signify that they were not party to any clandestine plans and did not consider the choice of house in exile worthy of note. Alternatively, it could simply reflect that there was no prearranged retreat. Nevertheless, the available evidence and many coincidences do support Bresler's conclusion.

Most compelling is that the property owner, Nathaniel Strode, was the trustee of estates for Louis' former mistress, Elizabeth Howard, and had been paid 900,000 francs from the emperor's civil list. Strode purchased Camden Place in 1860 and immediately began to transform it into a French style country seat. Two wings were added and panelling from the Chateau de Bercy was installed. In addition, wrought iron gates from the Paris Exposition of 1867 were purchased and erected to create an impressive entrance to the park.⁴⁸ Clearly, this was no ordinary refurbishment of an English country house. Filon wrote that 'for such a home the rent of 6,000 francs was ridiculous'⁴⁹ but insisted that Strode was 'a name quite unknown to the empress'.⁵⁰ This possibly was true, but there were others who may have been better informed of the emperor's contingency plans. Dr Evans, an American dentist who assisted the empress in her flight from Paris, wrote unconvincingly that he 'discovered' Camden Place 'by a fortunate accident'. Recalling his search for a property for the imperial refugees, he described how he was advised by an unnamed gentleman of a pleasing residence in Chislehurst. Although informed that it was not to let, Evans, nevertheless, set off for Camden Place and was admitted by

⁴³ Joanna Richardson, 'Hunting, fishing and cricket', *Anglomania under the Second French Empire*, *History Today*, 21:4 (1971:Apr.), 239-242.

⁴⁴ Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks*, (Hambledon and London, 2003), 118.

⁴⁵ Julius Bryant, *Apsley House: the Wellington Collection*, (English Heritage guidebooks, 2005), 8.

⁴⁶ Bresler, *Napoleon III: a life*, 391-393.

⁴⁷ Charles X, for example, had been permitted to take up residence at the royal palace of Holyrood in Edinburgh and Louis Philippe was aided financially with £1000 taken from secret service funds. John Saville, '1848 – Britain and Europe' in Freitag, Sabine ed., *Exiles from European Revolutions: refugees in mid-Victorian England*, (Berghahn Books, 2003), 22.

⁴⁸ T.A. Bushell, *Imperial Chislehurst*. (Third Edition Baron Birch, 1997), 75.

⁴⁹ Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie*, 237-8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

the lodge keeper only because he spoke French.⁵¹ This account is barely believable and Evans' involvement with the imperial family may be less spontaneous than his memoirs infer. Sir John Burgoyne wrote that plans for the empress' flight from Paris were carried out skilfully by Evans,⁵² implying he was already a confidant. Moreover, Filon gave a different account of Strode as being one among many who made kind offers of residence to the empress whilst in Hastings.⁵³ As for Strode, little is known except that he was a financier and intended to live at Camden Place, acting as host.⁵⁴ This begs the question: was Strode merely being an attentive and hospitable sympathiser of the French imperial cause or did his behaviour result from a sense of obligation to the emperor? We may never know the answer. A further consideration is that Camden Place was already familiar to the emperor for he had been 'a frequent visitor' during a previous exile. In those happier times, the property was owned by Mr Rowles and Louis had proposed marriage to his daughter.⁵⁵ But, however persuasive all of the above appears to be, the apparent speed with which the property was acquired in September 1870⁵⁶ may, instead, have resulted from urgent need. Filon wrote, 'We were eager to leave the Marine Hotel, where we were very uncomfortable and where we suffered a good deal from the curiosity of the ill-mannered.'⁵⁷ Such a lack of privacy at the seaside resort was wholly inappropriate for the empress, who technically remained regent of France at this time. The situation was described more plainly by Queen Victoria, who had received an account from Lady Ely: 'She [the empress] is in an uncomfortable, smelling hotel at Hastings with hot, disagreeable rooms.'⁵⁸ Camden Place, by comparison, was relatively secluded, standing on the edge of Chislehurst common, and without the attention that would have been attracted by a prestigious London address. Despite this, the exiles' new accommodation was soon known, with an advert in *The Times* on 1 Nov 1870 for another Chislehurst property, stating 'in the vicinity of the empress'.

To contemporaries, the way in which members of the French imperial family portrayed their lives in the quiet, Kent village, and how this was reported in the British press, was more important than the reason for occupancy of Camden Place. It has been argued that Louis Napoleon was viewed as being 'everything to all men – including the English'.⁵⁹ He knew how to use publicity and spectacle at home and abroad and, to a large extent, his leadership had been based on the clever political manipulation of image.⁶⁰ Once in exile, his wily awareness of both the power of publicity and the freedom of the British press would be turned to his advantage. He portrayed himself as a respected country gentleman and the head of a model Victorian family. Photographs show him in smart civilian clothes, some with top hat and cane, arm in arm with the empress; others seated, with his son affectionately by his side. The contrast to the military uniforms and ceremonial pomp of the Second Empire, as caricatured in cartoons of the day (when the emperor was 'playing soldier' and evoking the powerful national memory of his uncle),⁶¹ is marked. For example, in 1860, an illustration in *Punch* depicted Louis Napoleon, who was characterised by his distinctive, long moustache and full military dress, with his sword drawn. The weapon was being used to knock away the French bayonets which were said to support the temporal powers of the Papacy. This was a fairly common representation of the emperor whose ambitions for French expansion and interference in the question of Italian independence had caused much disquiet in Britain.⁶² And so, arguably, his change of image on becoming a refugee was deliberate: it was a mask by which to hide political activity and thus ease the diplomatic embarrassment of the British government brought about by his exile. Put simply, it was the acceptable face of a high profile immigrant who was conscious of the difficulties his presence gave to his hosts. Indeed, Louis successfully adopted a character which was popular with the British public and tapped into their sympathy. This even extended to watching local cricket matches

⁵¹ Thomas W. Evans, *Memoirs of Dr Thomas W Evans: the second French Empire* ed. Edward A Crane (D Appleton and company, 1905), 396-397.

⁵² Sir John M Burgoyne to Colonel Ponsonby, 15 September 1870, *QVL*, 2nd ser., II, 68-70.

⁵³ Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie*, 233.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵⁵ Sir William Fraser, *Napoleon III (My recollections)* (Sampson Low, 1888), 3.

⁵⁶ The empress moved into Camden Place a mere sixteen days after landing in Britain.

⁵⁷ Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie*, 75.

⁵⁸ From the Queen, Balmoral, 3 October 1870, *Your Dear Letter*, 301.

⁵⁹ Palm, *England and Napoleon III*, 4.

⁶⁰ Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fete Imperiale, 1849-1870* (Oxford University Press, 1997), preface.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

⁶² *The Political Life of the right Hon. W.E. Gladstone*, Volume 1 (Bradbury, Agnew, & Co. Ltd.), 116-117.

and becoming part of the community, as in April 1871 when it was reported that he helped put out a fire on Chislehurst common.⁶³ But the quiet existence also allowed him time to recuperate from the physical and mental strain of the Franco-Prussian War. This had clearly taken its toll. Queen Victoria wrote of the emperor, 'He is grown very stout and grey and his moustaches are no longer curled or waxed as formerly'.⁶⁴

Eugenie, too, had a role to play in this charade of Victorian domesticity and she was most careful to avoid publicity with political connotations. She made light of her role as regent. A statement printed by the British press on 26 December 1870, said to be from 'a reliable quarter', stressed that she had 'constantly rejected every proposal to interfere in the affairs of France' and placed emphasis on her life of 'complete privacy'.⁶⁵ Similarly, a letter published in *The Times* on the same day advised that, although the empress approved of relief for French prisoners in Germany, she was reluctantly declining to be patroness of the charity. It was said that 'the elevation and noble delicacy of her motives are worthy of the Empress and of the woman'.⁶⁶ Steadfastly maintaining this respectful, non-political position, it was reported the following October that the empress had invited those responsible for the soldiers' subscription fund to Chislehurst so as to personally thank them.⁶⁷ In a similar vein, she made afternoon excursions to various places, including Woking prison where she obtained the release of an old French soldier.⁶⁸ Her image was thus created from 'the politics of sincerity', which Matthew Truesdell argues she had used effectively under the Second Empire. Then she had undertaken many charitable works, such as visiting cholera sufferers in hospital. This was drawing on the concept of separate, gendered spheres, whereby men occupied the public world of work and politics and women the domestic space of home and charity.⁶⁹ As in France, so in Britain, Eugenie attempted to portray herself solely through the virtues and qualities of a caring wife and mother in the private sphere, although the reality was somewhat different. *The Times* candidly commented that it was 'no secret' that she had headed up the 'war party' within the imperial palace, and that Eugenie, 'to whom France and Italy owes the prolonged occupation of Rome, has obstinate sympathies and antipathies on certain questions'.⁷⁰ This representation was likely to have been closer to the truth. After all, the empress had been granted the powers of regent on two separate occasions prior to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the extent of her political influence was understood in diplomatic circles. It was also known that she had written to the emperors of Russia and Austria shortly after her arrival at Hastings⁷¹ and was visited in Chislehurst by General Bourbaki, the commander of the Imperial Guard, in connection with the peace negotiations. Her political ambitions, however well camouflaged they may have been, were certainly of concern to the British government and just one of a number of issues which the exile of the French imperial family raised in the host country.

⁶³ *The Times*, 18 April 1871, 11.

⁶⁴ Extracts from the Queen's Journal, 27 March 1871, *QVL*, 2nd ser., II, 124-127.

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 26 December 1870, 3.

⁶⁶ 'French Prisoners in Germany', *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 03 October 1871, 10.

⁶⁸ Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie*, 249-250.

⁶⁹ Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics*, 135.

⁷⁰ 'French opinion and the war', *The Times*, 28 September 1870, 4.

⁷¹ Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie*, 171.

Britain's reaction to the French imperial Family in exile

It was inevitable that such a conspicuous character as Napoleon III would arouse interest and his exile provoke reaction. His contemporaries did not expect him to shyly retire to the wings, with *The Times* describing his arrival at Dover on 20 March 1871 as 'an incident that will take a prominent place in history'. Indeed, the French imperial family was received at the docks by a crowd of 'vast proportions', which enthusiastically rushed forward, curious to see the reunion and to cheer the 'illustrious exiles'.⁷² This was the same day that the German emperor returned to his capital in triumph and only two days after the insurrection of Paris by political radicals. The British government was, therefore, faced with a difficult task in attempting to minimise the impact of their residence in Britain, for the sake of diplomacy and trade with France. As we shall see, the fact that it did so successfully was due to its adherence to protocol and regard for the precedents already set in respect of exiled rulers. In particular, there was a lack of recognition of the French imperial family by those acting in an official capacity. However, it was while Prussia was still at war with France that the situation was most complicated. At that time Queen Victoria wrote, 'Germany resents our neutrality and ... would never hear of our interfering with the terms of Peace.' She strongly urged her government not to alienate Germany by its actions.⁷³ Fortunately, Earl Granville, the foreign secretary, was 'the epitome of tact'. He carried out his role in such a way as 'to offend no one'⁷⁴ and to ensure the government would not become embroiled in mediation. It is the effect of this policy of neutrality with regard to the French imperial family during their initial period of exile that we turn first.

The future status of Napoleon III, his wife and son was unclear amid the chaos of September 1870. In some newspapers, there was concern that the empress did not receive the sympathy she deserved on landing in Britain and a call to recognise her presence in the country.⁷⁵ With comparison to the tragic figure of Princess de Lamballe, Eugenie's bravery in fleeing the brutality of the Parisians on the streets was championed in a letter to *John Bull*. Readers were reminded of the atrocities during the French Revolution, when the mob had paraded heads on pikes as trophies.⁷⁶ Despite such criticism and dramatic reporting in the popular press, there was no formal gesture of welcome from the British government. Instead, in official circles, there was a consciousness of the political embarrassment brought about by the regent empress' presence on British soil. Sir John M Burgoyne, who had brought her from Deauville in his ship, the *Gazelle*, was keen to demonstrate that he was 'not mixed up in foreign complications'. He immediately contacted Colonel Ponsonby, the queen's secretary, to justify his actions and to explain that his part was 'entirely from accident'. 'I fear', he wrote, 'an impression has got abroad that I was in Deauville Harbour 'waiting events'' and continued to stress this was not so for he had been detained at port by bad weather. Moreover, the empress had no luggage whatsoever, proving the unplanned nature of her journey.⁷⁷ This was the crux of the matter: it was a wholly unexpected turn of events and concern lay in the uncertainty of the situation. Granville made the point succinctly to the queen: 'The diplomatic difficulty is great. If Prussia adheres to her determination to consider the Empress as the only legal government of France, how is it possible to conclude a peace with a refugee at Hastings? On the other hand it is difficult for them to recognise a Government which is self-constituted and received no sanction from the country.' He continued, 'But again, if they ignore the present Government, which, however advanced, is composed of men of some ability and character, will they do better if they have to deal with a Red and Anarchical Government?'⁷⁸ The latter was an issue not only for Prussia but also for Britain, who did not want France to fall in to revolution. Fear of radicalism and the disruption this would cause between the

⁷² 'Arrival of the Emperor Napoleon', *The Times*, 21 March 1871, 10.

⁷³ Memorandum by Queen Victoria, Balmoral 9/9/1870, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 62-63.

⁷⁴ Richard Millman, *British Foreign Policy and the Coming of the Franco-Prussian War* (Oxford University Press, 1965), 226.

⁷⁵ *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), 5 October 1870; Issue 1761.

⁷⁶ *John Bull* (London, England), 17 September 1870, 650; Issue 2,597. *New Readerships*.

⁷⁷ Sir John M Burgoyne to Colonel Ponsonby, 15 September 1870, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 68-70.

⁷⁸ Earl Granville to Queen Victoria, London 12/9/1870, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 65.

countries explains why the cabinet was so keen to mention, at the first opportunity, its readiness to recognise the new, French government, when established.⁷⁹

The queen did, however, ensure a message was sent to the regent empress, as soon as practicable, to convey the sentiment that she 'was not insensible to the heavy blow which had fallen on her, nor forgetful of former days.'⁸⁰ On 30 November 1870 she also visited Eugenie in Chislehurst, accompanied by Princess Beatrice, but this contact was of a private nature. From her journal, it is clear that the queen appreciated the changed circumstances; it seems likely that her conversations with the empress were not only to extend courtesy and friendship, but also to gauge the situation first hand. For example, on 5 December 1870 at Windsor Castle, the queen enquired of Eugenie's visit to her husband in captivity, made some weeks before and most certainly for political purpose.⁸¹ The royal connection was more sensitive at this time because the queen's daughter, Vicky, was married to the German Crown Prince. As such, even this private friendship with Eugenie and her son potentially could have caused diplomatic issues while the Franco-Prussian War continued. This was borne out when Vicky wrote to her mother in January 1871, stating that she wished to send a parcel containing the screen from Eugenie's boudoir at St Cloud, which had been saved from fire by a Prussian soldier. The German Crown Princess wanted her 'dearest Mama' to restore the screen to 'the poor Empress' at a suitable time. She noted, 'of course I cannot offer it as a present whilst we are at war' but 'I do not wish to have anything in my possession which had belonged to the Empress, who has always been so kind to me.'⁸² Her request was made without the knowledge of anyone at Versailles. Granville, who was ever mindful of how things might be viewed by the French government, was quick to warn that 'it would be difficult for your Majesty to receive as a present something which is known to have been taken from the palace of a State with which your Majesty is in friendly alliance.'⁸³ Moreover, the screen could be regarded as plunder; this well publicised habit of the German army was detested by the British public. Ponsonby, conscious of newspaper reports should the story emerge, advised that 'ill natured distortions of a well-meaning act might rouse the angry feeling in England against the Crown prince, and attempt to associate with it your Majesty's name'.⁸⁴ Therefore, despite the innocuous proposal, it was simply too problematic for the screen to be accepted.

There was also some confusion as to whether it was the regent empress in Britain or her husband in Wilhemshohe who was negotiating on behalf of the imperialist cause. Lord Lyons, the British ambassador to France, wrote to Granville to warn him of what he had heard: Bismarck had suggested 'bringing back the Emperor at the head of the captive army' and would 'make some concessions to the Emperor to render his return to France palatable to the Nation'. If true, Lyons supposed that Belgium and Holland might be 'in danger' for Bismarck would then have 'an understanding with France, through the Emperor ... dealing with the small States just as he pleases.'⁸⁵ The implications of this suggestion should not be underestimated; concern for Belgium had dominated British foreign policy for much of the nineteenth century and especially from 1866 to 1871.⁸⁶ Thus, the regent empress sheltering in Chislehurst while the emperor was rumoured to be negotiating an agreement which would have been so abhorrent to Britain, added to the delicacy and complexity of the situation. Moreover, Lyons was not dismissive of the story, commenting, 'it must not be forgotten that the peasants are still Bonpartists and that a Plebiscite in favour of the restoration of the Empire might be managed.'⁸⁷

With peace terms finally signed on 10 May 1871, the situation became less contentious, at least as far as Germany was concerned. For the French government, however, the imperial family residing in Britain remained a constant threat. Much of the French government's annoyance stemmed from the hospitality afforded to these high profile refugees and their status in exile. In these circumstances, Britain relied on past

⁷⁹ Prime Minister Gladstone's report to Queen Victoria on Cabinet proceedings, 15 February 1871, CAB 41/3/7.

⁸⁰ Extracts from the Queen's Journal, 5 September 1870, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 58.

⁸¹ Extracts from the Queen's Journal, 5 December 1870, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 92-93.

⁸² The German Crown Princess to Queen Victoria, London 4/1/1871, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 104-5.

⁸³ Earl Granville to Queen Victoria, London 8/1/1871, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 106.

⁸⁴ Colonel Ponsonby to Queen Victoria, London 8/1/1871, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 106.

⁸⁵ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 7 January 1871, PRO 30/29/85.

⁸⁶ Millman, *British Foreign Policy*, 3.

⁸⁷ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 7 January 1871, PRO 30/29/85.

precedents to reassure Adolphe Thiers that Napoleon III would not receive special favour or, indeed, political recognition. *The Times*, on 8 March 1871, shortly before the emperor's release from captivity, made this very point: 'we have had too large an experience in the reception of potentates whose power has passed away to be embarrassed'. The newspaper confidently forecast that 'The House of Commons will not think it necessary to pass a Resolution of sympathy and welcome, nor will the Head of State recognize him officially as one of the Brotherhood of European Sovereigns.' These statements proved to be correct because, as had been the case with the empress, there was no formal acknowledgment of the emperor's arrival or residence in the country. To further justify the impending situation, it was said that British actions would simply extend 'personal courtesy' whose rules were 'as clear and binding as those enforced by the comity of nations'. But *The Times* pertinently added that this appropriate response would be dependent upon Camden Place not being made 'the focus of plots against the Government established in France.'⁸⁸ It was important that Europe did not regard Chislehurst as the French imperial court in exile, engaged in menacing political activity. As we have seen already, the emperor appreciated his part in this, on a superficial level at least, but it was the British government which was most wary of inflaming the situation. It acted in such a way as to minimise the impact of playing host to the latest deposed ruler of France.

In this regard, useful data as to the actual state of affairs can be gleaned from the 1871 census of England.⁸⁹ It provides evidence that Camden Place and several nearby properties formed a French enclave. The main household was made up of thirty-two people and the imperial family consisted of the emperor; his wife; his son; his nephew, Prince Murat Joachim; and two nieces, the Duchesses of Galistes and Montoro. Of their servants, the overwhelming majority were French. Louis Napoleon's entourage included his physician, aides de camp, secretaries and a treasurer, with many of this group living in neighbouring houses. For example, Count Clary resided at Oak Lodge at the entrance to the park, while others lived in accommodation above the stables.⁹⁰ As such, it was not simply a quiet retreat for the fallen emperor and his close family. Furthermore, the true character and intent of this small French colony may have been revealed by Louis Napoleon's stated occupation, 'Emperor of the French', on the census return. This was a title that he could not claim to use legitimately following the establishment and recognition of a new government in France. It was against protocol to do so; neither Louis Philippe nor Charles X, having been deposed from the throne of France, had been announced as 'King of the French' during their respective periods of exile in Britain. Similarly, Louis Napoleon generally was referred to as either Emperor Napoleon III or the ex-Emperor by the British press, once in exile. That said, the census returns were not available for public scrutiny and so very few people would have been aware of this controversial entry. Nonetheless, it illustrates both the mindset of the exiled imperial family, for whom the Napoleonic dynasty was far from being a spent force, and the ambitions of their loyal supporters in Britain. It also helps to explain why there were no official, and very few private, visits to Camden Place by those in positions of authority. Filon, in his memoirs, complained that 'Government circles, however, stood somewhat aloof, and Mr Gladstone waited a long time before he paid his first visit to Camden Place.'⁹¹ But, for political reasons, one can understand the prime minister's reluctance in this regard and it was certainly a deliberate choice on his part; occasionally he enjoyed the weekend with the Cavendish family in Chislehurst and, therefore, would have had the opportunity to make a private visit to the imperial exiles, living nearby, had he so wished. In fact, he only 'waited on the Emperor' because, as he noted in his diary, he 'fell in with him ... accidentally at the Station'. It was a strange coincidence that the ex-emperor of the French and the present prime minister of Britain should initially meet in public and this unintentional incident clearly forced Gladstone's hand. The next day, at Camden Place, Louis Napoleon demonstrated his continued interest in politics by asking Gladstone for a copy of the Ballot Bill, which was duly sent to him. Despite Gladstone describing his host's conversation as 'very becoming', it was then a further year before he called again. On the second occasion, it was to visit the empress.⁹² And it was not only Gladstone who kept his distance, as the notes of a cabinet meeting, held shortly after the emperor's death, show. To avoid any doubt, and in response

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 8 March 1871, 9.

⁸⁹ Noting that Napoleon resided in Chislehurst for only twenty-one months, it is very fortunate that his period of exile spanned the census of England in 1871. Data analysed for households 264, 373 and 381 ancestry.co.uk.

⁹⁰ Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie*, 238.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁹² H.C.G. Matthew, ed. *The Gladstone Diaries with cabinet minutes and Prime-Ministerial correspondence Volumes VII (1869-1871) and VIII (1871-1874)* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 2 July 1871 and 7 July 1872.

to the queen's suggestion that respect be paid to the imperial family, these papers state: 'it may be right to mention that various members of the Cabinet have not at any time had personal relationships with the Emperor Napoleon III.'⁹³ The significance here is not simply that the cabinet felt it was necessary to make such a declaration; it further highlights the striking difference between politicians and royalty in their approach towards the French imperial family at this time. Filon observed that neither politicians nor the aristocracy, 'who had not the same need for caution', showed sympathy with the exiles and this 'in spite of the example given them by the Queen, who in this case, as in all others, displayed...her moral steadfastness.'⁹⁴ In reality, it was this behaviour by the queen, which neither broke the rules of protocol nor went against precedents already set, that nevertheless resulted in many diplomatic difficulties for Granville and Lyons.

The first such difficulty arose when the French imperial family paid a visit to Windsor Castle on 27 March 1871 and the queen, accompanied by Prince Leopold, returned the courtesy the following week, travelling by train to Chislehurst. Lyons reported back to London that 'Favre attacked me last night about the reception of the Emperor, in England.' The ambassador's response to this criticism was robust and would be repeated many times over the coming months. 'I hope I made him a little ashamed,' he wrote to Granville, 'for I told him that he was showing just the small susceptibility that the Imperial Government had shown about the Orleans Princes. I said that the Queen had done no more than good feeling rendered necessary, and that I could not listen to any idle stories he had heard about Her Majesty's Reception of the Ex-Emperor.'⁹⁵ It was a similar situation when, on 27 February 1872, the queen invited the imperial couple to see the procession set out for a day of national thanksgiving for the recovery of the Prince of Wales. The Duke de Broglie, the French ambassador, protested to Granville that 'he had been rather surprised when he heard of the Emperor and Empress having been at Buckingham Palace on so public an occasion as that of last Thursday'. Broglie's complaint was not only that the French imperial family attended so prestigious an event, but also that he had not been told by Granville that they would do so. This raised several significant issues which required Granville's skilful management to overcome. First, it demonstrated the vulnerability felt by the French ambassador. He was concerned as to the effect that reports of the occasion might create in France, especially if he had not been able to prepare the ground before the story broke. In this respect, the foreign secretary insisted that he had been unaware of the invitation when he previously met with Broglie, but that if he had known he probably would have mentioned it. Secondly, it highlighted the need to counterbalance fairly the private friendships of the queen with her official relationships because, as Broglie pointed out, there were 'few opportunities which he as Ambassador had of seeing the Queen' which 'made any attentions to the Emperor on public occasions more marked.'⁹⁶ To smooth the situation, Granville arranged for Broglie to accompany him to an evening reception at Windsor the following month, commenting in a letter to Lyons that the queen liked the French ambassador.⁹⁷ However, with regard to the queen's decision to invite the emperor and empress to the palace at short notice, Granville could do no more than revert to past precedents in his defence, explaining that 'it was an act of courtesy of the Queen and those with whom she had been in friendly relation, and that it was analogous to many acts of courtesy shown by the Queen to the Orleans Princes.'⁹⁸

It should also be noted that the queen was not the only member of the royal family who maintained a friendship with the exiled imperial family, thus creating tensions with the new, French government. The Prince of Wales' behaviour caused diplomatic concern, too. He had made the impulsive gesture of offering the empress Chiswick House when she first arrived in Britain. It was most indiscreet of him, especially with the empress technically still the regent of France, and a relief to British diplomats when Eugenie politely and sensibly declined the offer.⁹⁹ Subsequently, it was the prince's visits to France which had to be managed by Lyons to ensure that 'touchy' French dignitaries did not feel publicly snubbed. The prince had already objected to calling on Thiers at Versailles during a short visit in September 1871.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, in March 1872, when he stayed two whole days in Paris and was making visits to other people, Lyons warned that 'great offence would

⁹³ Prime Minister Gladstone's report to Queen Victoria on Cabinet proceedings, 24 January 1873, CAB 41/5/3.

⁹⁴ Filon, *Recollections of the Empress Eugenie*, 240.

⁹⁵ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, Versailles, 10 April 1871, PRO 30/29/85.

⁹⁶ Earl Granville to Lord Lyons, 1 March 1872, PRO 30/29/109.

⁹⁷ Earl Granville to Lord Lyons, 20 March 1872, *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Earl Granville to Lord Lyons, 1 March 1872, *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 138-139.

¹⁰⁰ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 8 September 1871, PRO 30/29/86.

be taken if His Royal Highness did not call also on the President of the Republic.' He explained to Granville, 'In fact not only is M. Thiers himself a little more sensitive on such matters than a Chief of a State should be under ordinary circumstances but the French in general are unusually susceptible and prone to imagine that their defeats, they are not treated with as much consideration as they used to be.' But, to a certain extent, this French sentiment was understood by the experienced ambassador; he noted that since the present government had been established the only royal or imperial personages to have visited France were the Emperor and Empress of Brazil. Accordingly, he successfully steered the Prince of Wales into a meeting with Thiers, where 'the conversation was lively and pleasant on both side, and no allusion was made to politics'.¹⁰¹

It was the proceedings for the emperor's funeral, however, that showed the true extent of these diplomatic difficulties. Three of the queen's sons, Bertie, Affie and Christian, went to Chislehurst to pay a last mark of personal respect to Louis Napoleon, as he lay in state. This was with the queen's blessing for a man whom she described as 'excessively kind to them always' and 'a faithful ally of England'. Yet, as she informed the German Crown Princess, 'it was thought better, for fear of political demonstrations, that the brothers should not attend' the funeral the next day. Instead, all sent gentlemen as their royal representatives.¹⁰² Further, the queen's journal of 12 January 1873 makes it clear that this course of action resulted from a change of mind and that she had been in discussion with her government ministers regarding the matter.¹⁰³ 'Contrary to my original desire', she wrote, 'I now thought and Lord Granville and others were of the same opinion that it would be better he [Bertie] should not attend the Emperor's funeral.' This outcome allowed Granville to placate M. D'Harcourt, the French ambassador in London at that time. The latter was worried that the occasion would be used by those sympathetic to the imperial dynasty who wished to influence the future political course in France. If these fears had become reality, then, for French officials, the presence of members of the royal family might have been viewed as support for the display of sentiment against the French government. Yet, D'Harcourt also showed a degree of pragmatism and reasonableness, stressing that he understood 'the desire expressed in this country to pay respect to the remains of a sovereign with whom the relations of the country had always been good, and who died here in exceptional circumstances.' With the change of plans, Granville was able to truthfully declare to the French ambassador 'that the court mourning and the non-attendance of the Princes excepting by their royal representatives was in accordance with the precedent of Louis Philippe.' He also reasoned with D'Harcourt that 'it appeared to be more dignified for both countries' if he were to say that the decision to which he had come 'was in accord with our desire to observe the precedent and was not owing to any communication from the French Government'.¹⁰⁴ Thus, based on the assumption that it was valued traditions that were being upheld, the British press could report that the French government would not interfere with the funeral services of Napoleon III, providing they did not 'degenerate into political manifestations in public places'. Moreover, it could announce that the Third Republic had given its permission for all officers of the military household of the emperor to attend the funeral, should they wish to do so.¹⁰⁵ This compromise suited all, for Thiers remained sensitive to the imperial family's standing in Britain. He expressed his hope that the emperor's death would bring to an end the public sympathy shown towards these ill-fated exiles. After the funeral, he spoke to Lyons of his satisfaction, noting how few military officers with links to the imperial family had actually requested leave to go to Chislehurst.¹⁰⁶ In reality, of course, the small number prepared to make such a stand was not unexpected. The military now danced to the tune of the new regime, so it would not have been prudent for any individual officer to publicly demonstrate his continued loyalty to the Second Empire.

This is not to say that the funeral was poorly attended. More than two thousand French people followed behind the cortege and large, respectful crowds lined the route from Camden Place to St. Mary's church. The occasion also attracted many newspaper and journal articles as well as illustrations, speedily produced using the latest technology, to feed the curiosity of the British public. Yet, compared to his status in life, Napoleon III's funeral was a modest affair. A women's publication remarked 'it was entirely a walking funeral, no

¹⁰¹ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 7 and 11 March 1872, PRO 30/29/86.

¹⁰² From the Queen, Osborne, 14 January 1873, *Darling Child: Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the German Crown Princess 1871-1878* (Evans Brothers Limited, 1976), 74.

¹⁰³ Extracts from the Queen's Journal, 5 December 1870, *QVL*, 2nd ser., II, 237.

¹⁰⁴ Earl Granville to Lord Lyons, 14 January 1873, PRO 30/29/109.

¹⁰⁵ 'The Emperor Napoloen', *The Times*, 13 January 1873, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 10 and 16 January 1873, PRO 30/29/87.

carriages appeared.' The church service, too, was reported to be 'in no sense grand – indeed for a 'High Mass' nothing could have been more simple' and comparison was made to many Anglican churches where the regular Sunday celebration of Holy Communion was conducted with more grandeur.¹⁰⁷ Queen Victoria, who privately paid her respect a week later, similarly commented on the unassuming 'small Roman Catholic Chapel of St Mary', which she described as 'a pretty, rural little place, quite a village church, a good deal smaller inside than Whippingham.'¹⁰⁸ That the emperor's funeral could be held there with little criticism was, for the most part, due to the French imperial family being of Roman Catholic faith in a Protestant county. Otherwise, there may have been calls for the service to be conducted in a more prestigious church which better befitted his status. Indeed, the contrast between 'the smallest space possible' for the emperor's earthly remains¹⁰⁹ and his extravagant wedding in the cathedral of Notre Dame twenty years earlier could not have been more dramatic. But these unpretentious proceedings would have been a relief to the British government. *The Times* noted, there were parallels with the Louis Philippe's funeral arrangements, with 'two churches, or rather two small wayside chapels, on English soil' becoming the burial places for two of France's ex-rulers.¹¹⁰ As such, the simple and humble ceremony which surrounded the emperor's death typified the lack of official recognition shown to all exiles. This was very different to the reaction of other European states. In Milan, the first city freed from Austrian control by Louis Napoleon's forces, subscriptions flooded in for a monument to the deceased emperor and there was to be a 'solemn funeral service...celebrated in the Cathedral.' Venice opened a national subscription for a monument, too, while the Municipal Council of Rome voted an address of condolence with the Empress Eugenie. The Austrian court went into twelve days of mourning.¹¹¹

In view of the above, the French government had, in reality, little about which they could seriously protest, for British diplomats never wavered in their mission not 'to do or say anything which could be misconstrued'.¹¹² Likewise, the queen's relationship with the imperial exiles, which appeared to be the main cause of contention between the two countries, was always conducted in a private capacity. A gift of the emperor's bedside clock, which the empress asked the queen to accept as a souvenir after Louis Napoleon's death, illustrates the personal nature of their relationship.¹¹³ The public welcome afforded reigning foreign monarchs and dignitaries also marks out the reception of the French imperial refugees as being low key. When the German Empress visited Britain in May 1872, for example, there was a Guard of Honour and Sovereign's Escort.¹¹⁴ This comparison helps to put French objections into perspective, too; their insecure government was irritated simply by the interest and support of the British public and the reports in the British press on the private, as well as the official, engagements of the queen. However, it could not complain legitimately that the French imperial family received preferential treatment whilst refugees in Britain. As continually quoted to them by British diplomats, the friendship shown to the imperial exiles was no different to that offered to the Princes of Orleans. In fact, it was a good deal less than that shown to those of a royal bloodline. The queen had been 'much attached' to Louis Philippe's family for the past twenty-three years, and his son, the Duke de Nemours, was invited to luncheon privately at Windsor Castle in June 1871. With the situation still uncertain in France, despite the law of exile having been repealed there, she allowed the duke to remain at her house at Bushy for as long as he liked. Her comment was that it would be 'unwise...if all the members of the family did not keep some pied a terre in England.'¹¹⁵ The Bonaparte family were not offered the same practical assistance and their financial situation was dependent on supporters and sympathisers. Their uncertain money situation is borne out by advertisements carried in *The Times* over the period of the emperor's exile for the sale of saddle horses, as well as the empress' jewels, imperial fans and water colour paintings.¹¹⁶ Many biographers have

¹⁰⁷ *The Treasury of Literature and the Ladies' Treasury* (London, England) Saturday 1 Feb 1873.

¹⁰⁸ Extracts from the Queen's Journal, 5 December 1870, *QVL*, 2nd ser., II, 243.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* St Mary's church was too small to house a permanent shrine to the emperor and Queen Victoria was shown the plan for a small private chapel which was to be added on.

¹¹⁰ 'The Late Emperor Napoleon III', *The Times*, 16 January 1873, 9.

¹¹¹ 'The Emperor Napoloen', *Ibid.*, 13 January 1873, 5.

¹¹² Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 10 April 1871, PRO 30/29/85.

¹¹³ Empress Eugenie to Queen Victoria, Chislehurst 25/1/1873, *QVL*, 2nd ser., II, 237.

¹¹⁴ From the Queen, Windsor Castle, 4 May 1872, *Darling Child*, 40.

¹¹⁵ Extracts from the Queen's Journal, 5 December 1870, *QVL*, 2nd ser., II, 138-139.

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, advertisements carried in publications on 28/12/1871, 21/6/1872, 5/2/1872, 06/07/1872 and 19/08/1871.

assumed that the emperor relied on the proceeds from property abroad and it was also likely that Eugenie's mother assisted them financially.

In addition to the diplomacy required to manage the British sovereign's relationship with the emperor, the education of Louis, the Prince Imperial, also needed careful consideration. He was only fourteen years of age when escorted incognito from the battle zone of the Franco-Prussian War to safety in Britain. The question then was how should this boy, who had been brought up as the next ruler of France, be tutored in exile? Sir William Fraser recollected that the emperor consulted with experienced men in this regard, anxious to make the right decision.¹¹⁷ It was a concern for the British government, too, which was, in effect, not only offering safe harbour to the emperor, but also protecting the future of the imperial dynasty through his son. Contemporaries certainly viewed the situation in this way, with cries of 'Vive Napoleon IV' after the emperor's funeral.¹¹⁸ Queen Victoria also believed 'it would be best if the Prince Imperial was *ultimately* to succeed.'¹¹⁹ And so it was that, towards the end of 1872, after a short period at Kings College, the Prince Imperial entered the Royal Military College at Woolwich as a cadet. Most biographies make no comment regarding this fact, except to point out that this was suitable training for a Bonaparte. However, for the British government, it undoubtedly posed an issue to provide military instruction to Napoleon III's heir. In these unusual circumstances, the War Office looked to Granville for reassurance, stating that it had no objection to Louis entering the military academy if this was the recommendation of the Foreign Office. Its communication also made it clear that Prince Arthur was the only person whom they believed to have become a cadet at Woolwich without entering the academy in the usual way.¹²⁰ There was further unease within the military establishment itself, especially when the request was made for Louis' friend, the son of Dr Conneau, to be enrolled, too. The matter of foreigners joining the academy was said to be 'assuming serious proportions'. This was an exaggeration because only one young Japanese man's admittance had, thus far, been sanctioned by Edward Caldwell, the secretary for war, and he had subsequently been encouraged to defer joining until he was better acquainted with the English language. Despite this, senior military staff regarded the matter as an experiment that had yet to be tried, with different manners and customs possibly affecting discipline. The advice from Woolwich was that none should be admitted 'unless for political reasons it was considered desirable for British interests that this favour should be granted'. Thus, it was with great reluctance that M. Conneau was accepted as a cadet. The reason given was that the emperor had been so anxious that the boy accompany the Prince Imperial that it had been difficult to refuse the request. Certainly, Louis Napoleon's direct involvement demonstrates that there were real challenges in getting both his son and friend into military training. The emperor went so far as to suggest that the two boys shared a room, so that there could be no objection 'on account of want of accommodation'.¹²¹

It was while British officials grappled with such problems, specific to the French imperial family in exile, but brought about by the blanket acceptance of foreign refugees, that the French government turned this proudly upheld British principle to their advantage. In the spring of 1872, a significant number of French communists were transported to Britain, often arriving at its ports in a destitute state. This was believed to be with the connivance of the French government: the British vice-consul at Dieppe reported that twenty French communist prisoners had been 'forcibly embarked' for England and that their passages had been paid by the French authorities.¹²² A statement from a steward on board a French mail-packet, ironically named 'Prince Imperial', provided further evidence of such proceedings to British officials. Isaac Cady confirmed that 'eighteen Frenchmen...came on board, at Calais, in charge of a police officer, and I collected their police passes on board.'¹²³ But it was no coincidence that these events occurred at a time when relations between British and French politicians were coming under strain. As already discussed, there was often irritation in the diplomatic exchanges which took place, arising from the thorny issue of the hospitality perceived to have been extended to the exiled emperor. This was true particularly during the early part of 1872, when British

¹¹⁷ Fraser, *Napoleon III*, 197.

¹¹⁸ 'The Late Emperor Napoleon III', *The Times*, 16 January 1873, 9.

¹¹⁹ Queen Victoria to Mr Theodore Martin, Osborne 19/1/1873, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 237.

¹²⁰ War Office to Earl Granville, 30 April 1872, PRO 30/29/53.

¹²¹ Memorandum Royal Military College at Woolwich to Colonel Biddwell, 3 July 1872, PRO 30/29/53.

¹²² Earl Granville to Lord Lyons, 4 March 1872, PRO 30/29/245, no.1.

¹²³ Statement of Isaac Cady, Steward on board the French Mail-Packet "Prince Imperial", Inclosure 2 of Stillwell to Earl Granville, 16 May 1872, *Ibid.*, no. 26.

newspapers again reported on the queen's relationship with the imperial family, including another visit to Chislehurst. There had also been complimentary comment in the press on the Prince Imperial, who celebrated his sixteenth birthday in March of that year. It was said that from 'a slight and somewhat effeminate lad', the prince had, in England, grown into a 'strong, healthy, well-conditioned youth, fond of outdoor sports and exercises, an excellent horseman'.¹²⁴ It is the resentment of the French government to this situation which helps, in part, to explain its decision to expatriate French communists in such a confrontational way. Details of these occurrences at the ports quickly found their way in to the newspapers, too, fuelling the already smouldering antagonism. A letter to the editor of *The Times* informed readers of how French officials had 'unceremoniously ejected' communists from their country, without allowing them to draw any assistance from friends for their needs in England. Most arrived 'without a sou in their pocket' and were entirely ignorant of the language. The writer believed this to be an 'unfriendly act on the part of M. Thiers' and enquired whether the British government was to allow this exodus to continue until 'we get the full benefit of the lowest scum of Montmartre and La Villette'.¹²⁵ Thus, this issue, which could quickly have become a political crisis, demonstrates that there were wider implications to the underlying tensions resulting from Napoleon III's refuge. The queen, on being informed of the situation, approved of her ministers continuing to pursue the matter with their French counterparts and was anxious that the subject should not be allowed to drop.¹²⁶ In spite of this, the outcome of British diplomatic activity was disappointingly frustrating. Justifications given by the French made it impossible for the British government to do more than remonstrate; ultimately it took no action. Lyons was told plainly by the French Foreign Office that 'no constraint was put upon the persons sent to England; that on the contrary it was at their own request that they were sent thither; that being sentenced to banishment from France, they themselves had selected England as the country to which they wished to go'.¹²⁷ Thiers went further with his explanation, insisting that the hands of the French authorities were tied. He said, 'The law required that these persons [the transported communists] should be sent away from France, but it did not empower the Government to determine for them the place to which they should go.' Then, skilfully making use of Britain's stance on political refugees, on which he himself had been lectured so often, he accounted for the present situation by reasoning that since 'all the continental neighbours of France refused to receive, the French Government could not either let them be at large in France or keep them indefinitely in prison, and it had been hoped that a refuge for them might be found in England, whose institutions and habits had always sanctioned the largest possible hospitality towards political emigrants'.¹²⁸

The tables had been turned and it was British ministers who now felt irritated and restricted by the effect of their country's liberal policy on asylum. Granville could do no more than protest that a European nation should not conduct banished criminals to 'the frontiers of other friendly nations and there turn them adrift' and make the grand statement that this was 'a serious breach of international comity'.¹²⁹ But his words were futile; Mr Bruce, the home secretary, advised the only effective means of checking the situation was to refuse permission for the communists to land. However, that would be illegal and, therefore, not a recommended course of action.¹³⁰ In a similar vein, the opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor General was that, as the country could not be made 'a penal settlement for France', the French government be asked to alter its laws or it would be 'essential that England should alter her laws, so as not to remain the only European country open to the incursion of dangerous pauper French men'.¹³¹ Yet, as Porter argues,¹³² the foreign secretary's threat 'to enact such laws as would prevent its right of asylum being abused'¹³³ was exactly what the French government wanted. Indeed, the distrust resulting from Britain's unilateral and unyielding policy on expatriation was at the heart of this particular episode. (It was also the cause of much of the diplomatic wrangling discussed throughout this study.) Lyons made that very point at the time. 'The French', he wrote, 'are very apt to make

¹²⁴ 'Birthday of the Prince Imperial, *The Times*, 18 March 1872.

¹²⁵ 'Expatriated Communists', *The Times*, 15 May 1872, 10.

¹²⁶ Colonel Ponsonby to Earl Granville, Balmoral 22/5/1872, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 206.

¹²⁷ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 24 May 1872, PRO 30/29/245, no. 39.

¹²⁸ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 27 May 1872, *Ibid.*, no. 44.

¹²⁹ Earl Granville to Lord Lyons, 25 May 1872, *Ibid.*, no. 41.

¹³⁰ Mr Liddell to Mr Hammond, 27 May 1872, *Ibid.*, no. 49.

¹³¹ Opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor-General, Inclosure of Mr Liddell to Mr Hammond no. 52, 31 May 1872 PRO 30/29/245.

¹³² Porter, *The refugee question*, 213-214.

¹³³ Earl Granville to Lord Lyons, 16 May 1872 PRO 30/29/245.

the absence of laws, enabling the Government to regulate the right of asylum, a subject of reproach against England.' He believed that 'the French authorities might, therefore be glad to seize hold of any expression on which they might found an appeal to the British Government to establish such laws.'¹³⁴ The result was that the British government was caught between the obstinacy of the French, determined to deport its trouble makers across the Channel, and the intransigence of the British public, which would not deny any refugee the right of entry, whether he be an ex-ruler or a poverty-stricken communist. This illustrates that, contrary to Porter's hypothesis, the 'refugee question in mid-Victorian politics' had not abated at all. Instead, it was as politically frustrating and controversial as ever. Just as Thiers could do little, except complain of the emperor's treatment, so Granville was restricted to hollow words of protest with regard to these unwanted immigrants. Yet, so as to be seen to have exhausted all avenues, the foreign secretary sent a circular to British ambassadors around the world, requesting information as to 'special laws and regulations' which existed in each country, 'concerning the debarkation or entry of political convicts, or paupers, or infirm emigrants.'¹³⁵ However, it resolved nothing and so, in these trying circumstances, the queen had to be satisfied that Granville's strong remonstrances would prevent further deportation of convicted men to Britain, with the connivance of the French government. Mr Bruce also gave comfort to the sovereign by noting that the French communists already in England were 'occupied in obtaining the means of mere subsistence to have much time or spirit for propagandism'. He further commented that political discontent had no firm basis in the country.¹³⁶ The French government could not be so confident in respect of Bonapartist intentions.

It was against this backdrop of annoyance and suspicion that negotiations took place for the continuation of the commercial treaty between Britain and France. In fact, trade with France was a primary reason for the patient diplomacy of the British government, as described above. However, from as early as March 1871, Lyons was warning that the commercial treaty was 'in the greatest danger'. He advised that it would be 'strange if we hold our own about the Treaty or a liberal tariff in France' because there was 'popular feeling hostile to free trade and not in good humour with England'.¹³⁷ By October of that year, the process was floundering, as evidenced by a draft document which Granville presented to the cabinet, detailing the difficulties of accepting the latest French proposals.¹³⁸ Thiers, in Lyons' opinion, was bitter about the Second Empire, 'as if he were afraid of it', and his 'touchiness' extended beyond the hospitality then offered to the exiled emperor to include the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of 1860. On account of the latter, Lyons would not demur, fully admitting to Thiers that 'the Emperor's Free Trade principles were better liked in England than the Protectionist views of the President of the Republic.'¹³⁹ Again, the fragile relationship between the two countries was being severely tested. The situation was made more uncertain by the progress of Bonapartists in France and the call from shopkeepers and workers in Paris for the resumption of trade and great public works which they had enjoyed during the imperial reign. Rumours were rife that the military would restore Napoleon III to power.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the antechamber of Eugene Rouher, who had signed the trade treaty in 1860, was said to be 'as crowded as it used to be when he was Imperial Prime Minister.'¹⁴¹ By March 1872, indications were that the situation was deteriorating so much that the British foreign secretary could do more than advise Broglie that the government expected the terms of the 1860 treaty to be strictly observed as long as the treaty remained in force and even after its expiration, where the National Assembly had not specifically altered them.¹⁴² The following year, the queen wrote that the British people were 'too disgusted' with the French, whom she noted had 'behaved very ill' over the commercial treaty, to wish for a 'rapprochement' with them. She observed there was a choice between supporting Protestant Germany or Roman Catholic

¹³⁴ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 26 May 1872, Ibid.

¹³⁵ Responses were received from far and wide: for example Lisbon, Brussels, The Hague, Tangier, Athens, St Petersburg, Rio de Janeiro, Peking, Washington and many other places. PRO 30/29/246 section 2

¹³⁶ Mr Bruce to Colonel Ponsonby, Aberdare 25/5/1872, QVL, 2nd ser., II, 207-208.

¹³⁷ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 22 March 1871, PRO 30/29/85.

¹³⁸ Prime Minister Gladstone's report to Queen Victoria on Cabinet proceedings, 31 October 1871, CAB 41/3/42.

¹³⁹ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 8 December 1871, PRO 30/29/86.

¹⁴⁰ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 12 December 1871, Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 26 March 1872, Ibid.

¹⁴² Earl Granville to the Duke de Broglie, 25 March 1872, PRO 30/29/244.

France.¹⁴³ This was just two months after the emperor's death and highlights the shifts in mood in Britain over the turbulent period since the latter part of 1870.

¹⁴³ From the Queen, Windsor Castle, 22 March 1873, *Darling Child*, 81.

Conclusion

Analysis of the advantages of exile in Britain, compared to elsewhere in Europe and America, assists in understanding why Napoleon III chose long term refuge in this country. Otherwise, on a superficial level, it appears most bizarre that a Bonaparte, whose intentions were never wholly trusted by the British, especially with regard to French expansionism, should himself have decided to settle in a quiet corner of Kent. The issues for the host country, arising from his decision, have also been shown to have been of significance and to have had wider implications than those inferred by biographers. As such, the paucity of British historiography in respect of Louis Napoleon, subsequent to the fall of the Second Empire, is both unexpected and disappointing. His failure to restore the imperial throne after 1870 and the premature death of his son in 1879, which ended the hopes of the Napoleonic dynasty, appear to have lessened historians' interest in the period March 1871 to January 1873. Yet, to contemporaries, the unstable situation was one of excitement and bewilderment; it gave rise to many political difficulties as well as a popular curiosity for a glamorous couple who had revived the grandeur experienced under France's first emperor.

This study highlights the difficulties which were faced by those engaged in diplomacy at that time, resulting from Britain's unilateral policy towards exiles during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Reaction to the French imperial family's residence in Chislehurst shows that tensions between European powers and Britain with regard to asylum continued to exist long after the Orsini affair. This was because friction most often occurred when other nations felt threatened by political activists sheltering in Britain; challenges generally arose at times of uncertainty and vulnerability. The end of the Franco-Prussian War was such a period. As France struggled to constitute a new, stable government, its politicians remained deeply suspicious of a Bonapartist coup, possibly with some justification. Lyons commented on this instability in February 1872, almost a year after Louis Napoleon's arrival at Dover: 'We are supposed to be on the eve of a crisis and it may be a nasty one. The fact is that all parties are so frightened by the progress of the Imperialists, that they feel that the moment is come for each to try and set up a government of its own. What will come of the squabble which seems likely to ensue, I do not pretend to foretell.'¹⁴⁴ The consequences of this precarious state should not be underestimated. It posed significant problems for the British government, which wished to both appear neutral in foreign affairs and continue trade and commerce with its Continental neighbours. Harbours the deposed emperor only added to the obstacles to be overcome to achieve this goal. From this perspective, it is easy to understand why the plausibility of reviving the Second Empire is pivotal to our understanding of the situation.

There has also been a tendency to see Napoleon III as simply another of France's ex-rulers seeking refuge on British shores. To a certain extent, this is true. However, the lack of a royal bloodline made the situation somewhat different and, as this study illustrates, the reliance on past precedents did not necessarily satisfy the French government. In particular, this research draws out the problems faced by British politicians and officials, who themselves maintained a dignified distance from the fallen emperor. It was, instead, the queen's private friendship with the French imperial family which was most problematic for them. This was because newspaper reports made the relationship appear more open than it was in reality. Consequently, it was a struggle for the British government to convince its French counterparts of its disinterest in the imperial dynasty while the latter received such positive attention from the British monarchy and the British public.

It is only when diplomatic relations are viewed in this light that the expatriation of communists to Britain in 1872 can be properly understood. The influx of unwanted political refugees was a deliberate act by the French government; its patience was being tested by Britain's determination to offer comfortable exile to a man who potentially threatened its very existence. There was an underlying irritation in the intense flurry of diplomatic activity which accompanied the crisis and this was, in part, born of the hospitality given to the emperor and his family.

¹⁴⁴ Lord Lyons to Earl Granville, 20 February 1872, PRO 30/29/86.

Interestingly, the difficulties and ambiguities brought about by Louis Napoleon's twenty months of exile have not fully receded in to the depths of history. In 1970, the Conservative Group for Europe¹⁴⁵ enquired whether 'the opportunity might be taken to cement Anglo-French relations by offering them the remains [of Louis Napoleon] from Farnborough mausoleum to complete their collection at Les Invalides.' This was the centenary of Napoleon III's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Noting that 1870 was not the happiest year for France to commemorate, Her Majesty's embassy in Paris did not give the proposal further consideration.¹⁴⁶ Subsequently, in 2007, the French junior minister for overseas territories visited St Michael's Abbey for what was thought, at the time, to be the start of a campaign for the return of the remains of France's last emperor and first president. Certainly, Christian Estrosi's visit was made for personal advantage; Napoleon III was regarded as 'a local hero in Nice among the right' and thus useful to Estrosi, who hoped to be elected as mayor of the city. The minister was unsuccessful in his mission, but the occurrence demonstrates the continuing, political controversy which surrounds Louis Napoleon in death, as it had in life. And so, to this day, the remains of the emperor are held in the crypt of a Benedictine monastery in Hampshire: a place which *The Times* describes as having been 'a little and devoutly Catholic corner of France in England for many decades'.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Napoleon III's obscure, final resting place, outside of France, is in vivid contrast to that of his uncle, whose ring he wears on the little finger of his left hand.¹⁴⁸ Yet, this incongruent conclusion seems rather fitting for a man whose life was a series of contradictions.

Finally, although it may be argued fairly that the legend of Napoleon Bonaparte has overshadowed the history and legacy of his nephew, the implications of Louis Napoleon's exile in Britain were far from inconsequential. This fascinating episode in Britain's history most definitely deserves more attention than it is currently afforded by local historians alone. The quaint, tiny Roman Catholic church of St Mary's still stands on Chislehurst common and Camden Park is now the grand clubhouse of the Chislehurst golf course, but these tranquil settings belie the controversies and dilemmas brought about the French imperial family's refuge in a quiet, Kent village.

¹⁴⁵ Edward Heath was the President of the organisation set up to promote good relations.

¹⁴⁶ Conservative Group for Europe to Anthony Royle, 22 December 1970 and Royle's reply of 12 January 1971, FCO 33/1373.

¹⁴⁷ Ruth Gledhill and Charles Bremner, 'Monks fear Napoleon campaign', *Times Online*, 10 December 2007, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article3030826.ece>, 19 September 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Famously, Napoleon Bonaparte's mortal remains were brought from St Helena, his place of exile, to Paris in 1840, amid much pageantry, and with the intention of boosting the image of the July Monarchy under King Louis Philippe. Ironically, Thiers, who so mistrusted Louis Napoleon's intentions in exile, was instrumental in this episode of political theatre.

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