Foundling Hospital

What were conditions like for children in the care of the Foundling Hospital?
What were the conditions like for the children in the care of the Foundling Hospital?

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Background

This lesson gives you the chance to look at primary sources from the Foundling Hospital which are held at The National Archives in Kew, London. The Hospital began in 1741 and although it is no longer open, the charitable work continues to this day under the Coram foundation.

The Foundling Hospital was started by Thomas Coram, a philanthropist who was appalled to see children and babies dying on London’s streets. The word ‘hospital’ implied the hospitality shown to children in their care, rather than a place for the sick. Mothers brought their babies to the Hospital, where they would be given a new name. However, mothers left a token with the hospital, such as a scrap of fabric or a coin, so that the child could be identified if the mother enquired about or wanted to claim the child. Examples of these can be seen in the online exhibition Threads of Feeling.

The first children were admitted in 1741. In 1745 their purpose built children’s home was opened in Bloomsbury, London, which at that time was surrounded by fields. By the early 19th century, the hospital mainly wanted to help illegitimate children: ‘the design of the founder... being twofold- to hide the shame of the mother, as well as to preserve the life of the child’ (CHAR 2/384). Children had to be under 12 months of age, and were admitted after the mother had been interviewed and deemed to fit the criteria set out by the hospital. Once they had been accepted, children were registered, and were sent to live with a ‘nurse’ or foster family in the country. When they reached four or five years of age, children were sent to live at the Foundling Hospital in London, where they received schooling until they were 15 years old, and then were apprenticed, usually to work in domestic or military service.

These documents come from the early 19th century, when the hospital was well established. Have a look at the sources below to find out about what it was like to be a child in the care of the Foundling Hospital in the late Georgian era.
What were the conditions like for the children in the care of the Foundling Hospital?

**Teacher’s notes**

This lesson encourages students to think about what life was like for a child being cared for by the Foundling Hospital, by looking at original sources held at The National Archives. The Hospital was founded during a time of great social and political change, during which it became desirable for the wealthy and influential to be seen as philanthropic. To gain insight into this period, students may want to look at our document collection, Georgian Britain: age of modernity?, which includes three more documents on The Foundling Hospital. Teachers may wish to construct similar lessons on different Georgian topics.

This would be a useful resource for anyone studying the history of social care and development through time (KS3). It would also tie in with SHP Medicine Through Time module (also KS3) because of the Foundling Hospital’s role in children’s health.

**External links**

**FOUND**
(http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/events/found/)
An exhibition at the Foundling museum until September 2016, examining the theme of 'found'.

**Coram and the Foundling Hospital**
(http://www.coram.org.uk/about-us/our-heritage-foundling-hospital)
The story of the Hospital, told by the charity itself.

**The Foundling Museum**
(http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/)
London, explores the history of the Foundling Hospital.

**Threads of Feeling**
(http://www.threadsoffeeling.com/)
An online exhibition of 18th century textile tokens left with abandoned babies at the London Foundling Hospital.

**Sources**

All sources can be found under catalogue reference CHAR 2/384, which contains documents about the hospital dated between 1817 and 1850. This lesson contains extracts from:

- ‘Regulations for managing the hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children.’
- ‘Account of the Foundling Hospital in London, for the Maintenance and Education of exposed and deserted young children.’
- ‘Plan of the hospital.’
Tasks

Source One: Questions

What does this show about how the hospital was run, in terms of the registration, organisation and the leaving of children at the hospital?

What was the first thing that happened to the children when they were admitted?

What could mothers leave at the Hospital with their child?

Where did the children go after they had been registered?

What was the mother given by the Hospital?

How do you think a mother feel about leaving her child at the hospital?

How could the mother of a ‘foundling’ keep informed of how her child was?

Why would the Hospital need such a handbook?

Source Two: Questions

What happened to children when they reached the age of five? What do you think this would have been like for them?

Were girls and boys treated equally at the Foundling Hospital? Why did they have these different duties?

How is this different to your experience of school?

How much time did children spend learning, playing or worshipping each week?

Children were kept separate for the purposes of their education. Why do you think this was?

Why was there so much emphasis on religion and attending church?

How did the hospital view the future for these children?

Source Three: Questions

Who do you think might have used the waiting rooms?

What provisions were made for the children to play?

Where did boys and girls eat?

Why do you think they had a chapel?

Why do you think the boys had a summer dining room?

What might the Sunday office have been used for?
What were the conditions like for the children in the care of the Foundling Hospital?

Source Four: Questions

Is there anything missing from this diet?

Does anything surprise you about the children’s diet?

How does this compare to modern day food?

Source Five: Questions

Why might the child’s parents be forbidden from knowing where their child was serving as an apprentice?

Why would the wife of the household be required to approve a child to be an apprentice?

Why were children not apprenticed to lodging houses?

When did children fully leave the care of the Foundling Hospital?

Why did the Hospital apprentice the children? What might have happened if the children weren’t apprenticed at all?
What were the conditions like for the children in the care of the Foundling Hospital?

Source One - Extract from a handbook for staff of the Foundling hospital.

Of the Numbering and Registering of the Children.

Before the Children are sent into the country, they are to be numbered and registered in the following manner.

The Secretary, immediately upon the reception of each Child, is to affix the number; which is to be done by writing the number of the Child on a slip of parchment, and sewing it to its clothes.

The numbers are to follow each other in succession, and great care to be taken that the number always remains fixed to the dress of the Child during its continuance at nurse.

The Secretary, after the child is received, enters in a register set apart for that purpose, the day, month and year of its admission: the name of the mother, the sex and age of the child, the name by which it is baptized in the Hospital, the number of the child, the private mark attached to the certificate of its admission given to the mother, and the name of the nurse, and place to which it is sent in the country; together with the name and residence of the Inspector or Inspectress who superintends it.

This Register being the only means which can enable the Governors to identify the Children, in case they should be enquired for, is to be kept with great secrecy and care under lock, and is never to be opened but by order of a Vice-President, the Treasurer, and Committees; or by the Secretary (and in his absence, the Treasurer’s Clerk), on such days as are appointed for the Mothers of children to enquire after their health.

Any remarkable token, or writing, left with a Child, is to be marked and enclosed in the Petition of the Mother for its admission.

To the mother is given a Certificate of the reception of the Child, with a private mark upon it; by the production of which she can always ascertain whether it still lives; or in what state of health it is, if in London, or was, at the last Report from the Inspectors or Inspectress in the country.
Of the numbering and registering of the children

Before the children are sent into the country, they are to be numbered and registered in the following manner.

The Secretary, immediately upon the reception of each Child, is to affix the number; which is to be done by writing the number of the Child on a slip of parchment, and sewing it to its clothes. The numbers are to follow each other in succession, and great care to be taken that the number always remains fixed to the dress of the child during its continuance at the nurse.

The Secretary, after the child is received, enters in a register set apart for that purpose, the day, month and year of its admission: the name of the mother, the sex and age of the child, the name by which it is baptized in the Hospital, the number of the child, the private mark attached to the certificate of its admission given to the mother, and the name of the nurse, and place to which it is sent to the country; together with the name and residence of the inspector or inspectress who superintends it.

This Register being the only means which can enable the Governors to identify the Children, in case they should be enquired for, is to be kept with great secrecy and care under lock, and is never to be opened but by order of a Vice-President, the Treasurer and Committees; or by the Secretary (and in his absence, the Treasurer’s Clerk), on such days as are appointed for the Mothers of children to enquire after their health.

Any remarkable token, or writing, left with a child, is to be marked and enclosed in the petition of the mother for its admission.

To the mother is given a Certificate of the reception of the Child, with a private mark upon it; by the production of which she can always ascertain whether it still lives; or in what state of health it is, if in London, or was, at the last Report from the Inspectors or Inspectress in the country...
'At the age of five years the children are returned to the Hospital. They are then placed in the schools; where they are gradually accustomed to regular and early habits of order and attention...

The boys make and mend their own clothes, and are taught reading, writing, and accounts, according to the system of Dr Bell. The girls are also taught to read and write on the same principle...

The boys and girls are kept entirely separate. The elder girls are employed in household work, and assist as servants in the kitchen, laundry, and other rooms in the eastern wing of the Hospital...

The returned Children are to be clothed immediately in the dress of the Hospital. Prayers to be read in the School in the morning and in the evening. At eight o’clock the Children are to breakfast; one hour being allowed them for that purpose.

The rest of the morning till twelve, is to be spent in their labour, or at school.

From twelve to two is allowed for dinner, diversion, and rest; at two, they are to return to their work, or to school, till five in the summer, and till it is dark in the winter.

From that time till supper, which is to take place at six o’clock in the evening, the Children may play in the open air, or in the covered buildings.

No boy is to be suffered to go out of the Hospital gate on errands, without permission of the Committee.'
Guidelines on how children between the ages of five and fifteen were to be cared for whilst at the hospital.

‘On Sundays, and other days appointed for public worship, they are to be instructed in the principles of religion and morality, to attend at Chapel, to be taught the catechism used by the church of England, or heard to read such parts of the Holy Scripture as are most suitable to their understanding.

On public holidays, and at play hours, they may be allowed to divert themselves with such exercises, as will increase their strength, activity, and hardiness; but are never to be allowed to play at games of chance.

The girls are to be kept in wards, entirely separate from the boys, to be dressed plain and neat, to rise at the same hours with the boys, to clean the house, make the beds, and do the household business till the hour of breakfast; after that to be employed in school, or in making linen or clothes, or such other labour as is suitable for their age and strength...

The body linen of the Children is to be changed twice a week, and they are to have clean sheets once a month. Strong drink, coffee, and tobacco, are never to be permitted to be used by any Child in the Hospital...’
Foundling Hospital

What were the conditions like for the children in the care of the Foundling Hospital?

Source Three: A plan of the hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children.

References

A chapel  B Sunday office  C Steward’s store room  D Boy’s winter dinner room  E Vestibule
F General court room  G Committee room  H Secretary’s office  J Boy’s summer dinner room
K Waiting rooms  L School mistress’s room  M Matron’s store room  N Girl’s dinner room
O Stone hall  P Treasurer’s apartments  Q Staircases  R Vestry  S Porter’s lodge  T Girl’s schools
U Boy’s school  V Tailor’s shop  W Alcoves  X Play-places  Y Drying room  Z Wash house + Drying ground
**Source Four:** A table listing the food and drink given to each child in a year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>292/1 lbs of Bread</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110/1 lbs of Meat</td>
<td>6/1</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 lbs of Butter</td>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 lbs of Potatoes</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 lbs of Suet</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 lbs of Flour</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 lbs of Oatmeal</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Gallons of Milk</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 lbs of Rice</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 lbs of Sugar</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb 10 oz of Treacle</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Gallons of Beer</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Cost:** £17.5

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Foundling Hospital: What were the conditions like for the children in the care of the Foundling Hospital?
Foundling Hospital 2 Nov 1836

Cost of provisioning each child in the Hospital per annum at present prices, the quantities being agreeably to the dietary.

292½ lbs of Bread at 12d the 8 pound loaf 1,16,6
110½ lbs of meat at 6½ 2,19,7
13lbs 4oz of butter at 10d ½ 0,11,6
52lbs of Potatoes 0,2,8
4lbs 14oz of suet 0,2,8
24lbs 6oz of flour 0,4,0
9lbs 12oz of oatmeal 0,2,0
32 Gallons of milk 1,12,0
15lbs 7oz of rice 0,2,6
2lbs 7oz of sugar 0,1,6
1lb 10oz of treacle 0,0,6
3 Gallons 1qt of beer 0,0,2
7,17,5

Questions: Is there anything missing from this diet?

Does anything surprise you about the children’s diet?

How does this compare to modern day food?
At fourteen or fifteen years of age, the children are apprenticed to housekeepers; a very strict inquiry being previously made as to situation and character. No girl is apprenticed to an unmarried man, nor to a married man, unless the wife has seen the girl, and has expressed her concurrence in the application. Except in a few very particular cases, the girls are never apprenticed to any family that lets lodgings, nor unless there is an established servant regularly engaged in the house.

During the time of apprenticeship the children are attended to; and frequently visited; the girls by the matron, and the boys by the schoolmaster. The general committee is always ready to interfere in matters between the apprentice and the master or mistress; their duty as guardians not being considered as discharged, until after the termination of the apprenticeship at the age of twenty-one years.

Upon the expiration of their apprenticeship, those young persons who have served faithfully and honestly, on application at the Hospital, have blank certificates given to them for their respective masters or mistresses to fill up, with an account of their conduct and behaviour:

No Child’s parent is to be informed where a Child is apprenticed without the order of the Committee, made after the Master and Mistress have been previously consulted. When the Children are of a proper age to be apprenticed, the Committee direct the Schoolmaster, Steward or Matron to look out for proper Situations, and due enquiry is made into the Characters of the Persons to whom they are apprenticed.

In case of any of the Girls from necessity being returned into the Hospital from any places where they may be apprenticed, they are to be employed in the laundry or the kitchen, or in other house-work of the Hospital, till otherwise disposed of.

All persons desirous of taking an apprentice out of the Hospital, are to set forth to the Committee,

- Their name, trade, business and place of abode.
- If house-keepers, and of the protestant religion.
- If married, and whether they let lodgings, and of whom enquiry may be made as to character, &c.
REGULATIONS
FOR MANAGING THE HOSPITAL
FOR THE MAINTENANCE AND EDUCATION
OF
EXPOSED AND DESERTED
YOUNG CHILDREN

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If married, and whether they let lodgings, and of whom enquiry may be made as to character etc.