

London Metropolitan Archives

Information Leaflet Number 33

Finding Your Foundling

A guide to finding records in the
Foundling Hospital Archives



Introduction

This is a quick guide to tracing a foundling in the records of the Foundling Hospital held at London Metropolitan Archives.

The 'System' for care of foundlings was as follows:

- **Admission:**

Children under 12 months were admitted subject to regulations set down by the General Committee.

The mother had to present a petition explaining the background; these were not always accepted.

Once admitted, the children were baptised and renamed, each being identified by an admission number.

- **Nursing:**

The children were despatched to wet or dry nurses in the Country. These nurses were mostly in the Home Counties but could be as far away as West Yorkshire or Shropshire.

The nurses were monitored by voluntary Inspectors.

- **School:**

Once the children had reached the age of between 3 and 5 they were returned to London to the Foundling Hospital.

Apart from reading classes, there were practical tasks, music classes and sewing projects.

- **Apprenticeship:**

Children were apprenticed to trades or services, or enlisted to serve in the armed forces, (especially later on in the nineteenth century, when the hospital's musical tradition was well known).

Sources

When foundlings were admitted to the Hospital, they were baptised and given a new name. The most important pieces of information you need to find a foundling are the child's number and the child's name. Armed with these you can find out quite a lot about each child.

The most rewarding sources are:

1. Apprenticeship Registers (A/FH/A12/003/001-007)

These cover the period 1751-1951 and are indexed alphabetically. They are available for consultation until 1891. Most children were apprenticed at age 14 years but it is worth checking between the ages of 12 and 15 (especially in the period 1756-1774).

From this you can obtain the child's number.

For children apprenticed 1751-1851 see microfilm X41/5A (references A/FH/A12/003/001-002).

2. General Registers (A/FH/A09/002/001-006)

These cover the period 1741-1950 and are available for consultation on microfilm until 1880. Once you have the child's number you can consult the General Register which is in number order.

For children numbered 1-9103 see microfilm X41/3 (references A/FH/A09/002/001-002 for admissions 1741-1758).

For children numbered 9104-21812 see microfilm X41/4 (reference A/FH/A09/002/003-005 for admissions 1758-1880).

3. Billet Books (A/FH/A09/001/001-203)

These books are arranged by child's number. They cover the period 1741-1814 (Nos. 1-19086). They sometimes contain information about the mother, and some contain tokens left with the children. See list for detailed references under A/FH/A09/001/001-203.

IMPORTANT ACCESS INFORMATION: In order better to protect the billet books, access to these fragile and very special volumes is now by prior appointment only in our conservation studio. This is at the request of the record owners, Coram. To enquire about making an appointment to view the billet books please contact ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

4. Petitions: Admitted (A/FH/A08/001/002/001-127)

These petitions are bound or bundled in date order. They cover the period 1763-1918 and are available for consultation until 1900. They contain details of fathers and information about the mother. See list for detailed references under A/FH/A08/001/002.

5. Baptism Registers (A/FH/A14/004/001-002)

These cover the period 1741-1757, 1760-1885 and are copies of the originals which are at The National Archives for 1741-1757 and 1760-1838 (Class RG4/4396, 4238). There are gaps. Children were baptised soon after admission date.

6. **Nursery Books (A/FH/A10/003/004-007)**

Otherwise known as Disposal Books. These cover the period 1756-1812 (Nos. 1385-18991) and record children sent out to nurse.

7. **Inspection Books (A/FH/A10/004/001-002)**

Children sent to nurse under inspection by volunteer Inspectors covering the period 1749-1764: see microfilms X41/1, X41/2.

See also Rough Inspections Books 1741-1838 (reference A/FH/A10/003/001-003).

8. **Country Hospitals (A/FH/A10/006)**

Registers of children sent to Country Hospitals include :

- a. Ackworth - 1757-1772 see A/FH/A10/006/001 and A/FH/Q/01/064.
- b. Shrewsbury - 1759-1771 see A/FH/A10/007/001
- c. Westerham - 1760-1769 see A/FH/A10/008/001
- d. Chester - 1763-1767 see A/FH/A10/009/001

9. **Claimed Children**

Some children were claimed by relatives:

- a. Register 1764-1765 see A/FH/A11/001/001.
- b. Petitions claiming children 1758-1796 see A/FH/A11/002/001-020.

10. **Parish Children**

From 1767 to 1793 the Hospital took in children on behalf of London Parishes.

These children were recorded separately in a 'Parish Register' 1767-1798 see A/FH/A09/003/001.

For records less than 110 years old it is advisable to contact Coram Community Campus, 49 Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N 2QA, 020 7520 0300, www.coram.org.uk. Coram has requested that registers containing personal information about named individuals should remain closed for 110 years. Coram still undertakes to give counselling and advice to relatives of former foundlings.

Bibliography

Nichols, R.H and Wray, F.A. *The History of the Foundling Hospital*. 1935 (20.751 NIC)

McClure, R.K. *Coram's Children : The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century*. 1981 (20.751 MAC) 1768. 1994 (20.751 CLA)

Clark, G. *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors in Berkshire 1757-68*

Barret-Ducrocq, F. *Love in the Time of Victoria*. 1992 (40.45 BAR)

Camp, A. *Reclaimed Foundlings*. Family Tree Magazine June 2000 (61.2 FAM)

Levene, Alysa Childcare, *Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital 1741-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) (20.751 LEV)

Pugh, Gillian *London's Forgotten Children: Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007) (20.751 FOU)

Allin, D. S. '*The Early Years of the Foundling Hospital, 1739/41-1773*' (20.751 ALL)

Allin, D. S. '*Taylor White (1701-1772 : treasurer of the Foundling Hospital, 1746-1772*' (20.751 WHI). Both titles by D. S. Allin can be consulted on The Foundling Museum website.

Web Links

- The Foundling Museum: www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk
- The Coram Family: www.coram.org.uk

Published in December 2000 (rev. Nov 2008, Mar 2010, Mar 2017) by
London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, London, EC1R OHB

5

Telephone: 020 7332 3820

Fax: 020 7833 9136

Email: ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Web: www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma

© London Metropolitan Archives

Except as otherwise permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the London Metropolitan Archives at the above address.