

RESEARCH GUIDE

Foundling Hospital Archives

LMA Research Guide 33: Finding Your Foundling - A guide to finding records in the Foundling Hospital Archives

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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:

Apprenticeship Registers (A/FH/A/12/003/001-007)

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 1751-1891 see microfilm X041/005A and X041/005B (references A/FH/A/12/003/001-003).

General Registers (A/FH/A/09/002/001-006).

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 X041/003 (references A/FH/A/09/002/001-002 for admissions 1741-1758).

For children numbered 9104-21812 see microfilm X041/004 (reference A/FH/A/09/002/003-005 for admissions 1758-1880).

Billet Books (A/FH/A/09/001/001-203)

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/A/09/001/001-203.

Important Access Information: In order to protect the billet books, access is now provided in our conservation studio by prior appointment only. To make an appointment please contact ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

Petitions: Admitted (A/FH/A/08/001/002/001-127)

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/A/08/001/002.

Baptism Registers (A/FH/A/14/004/001-002)

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.

Nursery Books (A/FH/A/10/003/004-007)

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

Inspection Books (A/FH/A/10/004/001-002)

Children sent to nurse under inspection by volunteer Inspectors covering the period 1749-1764: see microfilms X041/001, X041/002.

See also Rough Inspections Books 1741-1838 (reference A/FH/A/10/003/001-003).

Country Hospitals (A/FH/A/10/006)

Registers of children sent to Country Hospitals include:

- Ackworth - 1757-1772 see A/FH/A/10/006/001 and A/FH/Q/01/064.
- Shrewsbury - 1759-1771 see A/FH/A/10/007/001
- Westerham - 1760-1769 see A/FH/A/10/008/001
- Chester - 1763-1767 see A/FH/A/10/009/001

Claimed Children

Some children were claimed by relatives:

- Register 1764-1765 see A/FH/A/11/001/001.
- Petitions claiming children 1758-1796 see A/FH/A/11/002/001-020.

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/A/09/003/001.

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

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

- Clark, G. Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors in Berkshire 1757-68
- Levene, Alys Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital 1741-1800 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) (20.751 LEV)
- McClure, R.K. Coram's Children : The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century. 1981 (20.751 MAC) 1768. 1994 (20.751 CLA)
- Nichols, R.H and Wray, F.A. The History of the Foundling Hospital. 1935 (20.751 NIC)
- Pugh, Gillian London's Forgotten Children: Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital (Stroud: Tempus, 2007) (20.751 FOU)

Web Links

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

DOCUMENTS

Browse a list of all the documents mentioned in this guide.

[A/FH](#); [Apprenticeship Registers](#); [General Registers](#); [Billet Books](#); [Petitions](#); [Admitted and Rejected](#); [Baptism Registers](#); [Nursery Books](#), [Inspection Books](#), [Country Hospitals](#); [Claimed Children](#); [Parish Children](#)