

Finding your foundling

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 and a token left by the mother.

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).

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/A12/003/001-003)

These are indexed alphabetically and are available for consultation until 1891.

Most 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/A09/002/001-005)

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/A09/001-203)

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 tokens. See list for detailed references under A/FH/A09/001/001-203.

4. **Petitions : Admitted**

(A/FH/A08/001/002/001-127)

These petitions are bound or bundled in date order. They cover the period 1763-1880. They contain details of father and information about the mother and tokens. 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 :

Ackworth 1757-1772 see A/FH/A10/006/001 and A/FH/Q/064.

Shrewsbury 1759-1771 see A/FH/A10/007/001

Westerham 1760-1769 see A/FH/A10/008/001

Chester 1763-1767 see A/FH/A10/009/001

9. **Claimed Children**

Some children were claimed by relatives :

Register 1764-1765 see A/FH/A11/001/001.

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

Bibliography

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Clark, G. *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors in Berkshire 1757-1768*. 1994 (20.751 CLA)

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)

Web Links

The Foundling Museum
www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk/

The Coram Family
www.coram.org.uk/

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London Metropolitan Archives
40 Northampton Road
London
EC1R 0HB

Telephone 020 7332 3820
Fax 020 7833 9136
Email ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk
Web www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma

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