

Voices Through Time: The Story of Care



Established by Thomas Coram as The Foundling Hospital in 1739, Coram is the UK's oldest children's charity and has been supporting children for 280 years.

Voices Through Time: The Story of Care is a four-year programme run by Coram and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, revealing untold stories about the lives of children and young people who lived at the Foundling Hospital.

On the programme an ambitious project is taking place to digitise and transcribe 25% of Coram's Foundling Hospital archive, about 112,000 pages of records.

By being digitised and transcribed, these records will be preserved for the future. They'll be available to access on our website, free for anyone to use, anywhere.

Join us



Visit our project:

[Voices Through Time](#)

Transcribe with us:

[Become a Transcriber](#)

Visit our website:

[Coram Story](#)

Read all about the Foundling Hospital and our archive below.

The Foundling Hospital



*Pupils singing and baking, circa 1933, at the Foundling Hospital when it was located in Redhill, Surrey.
Coram and London Metropolitan Archives, City of London Corporation.*

The Foundling Hospital, which opened its doors to admissions in 1741, was the first UK home for children whose mothers were unable to care for them.

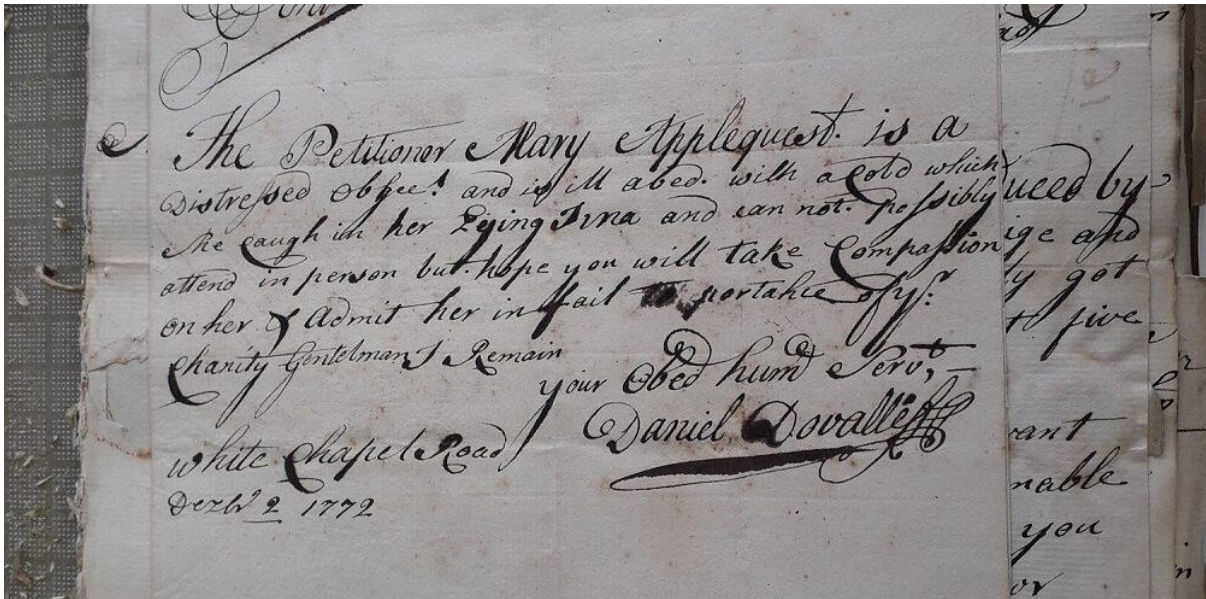
In London in the eighteenth century, babies of unmarried mothers or very poor parents who could not care for them were frequently abandoned or left to die. A huge amount of stigma and shame was attached to women who became pregnant outside of marriage and there was nothing in the way of support for them. Campaigner Thomas Coram wanted to do something about this. He started campaigning to be allowed to establish a place that could care for these children, whilst also educating them and providing training, so that they could then go on and gain employment once they left the care of the Foundling Hospital at the age of 21.

In 1739 Thomas Coram was granted permission to establish such a place, the Foundling Hospital. The word Hospital, originating from the Latin “hospes”, which meant a guest or visitor, was used in this sense, to indicate the hospitality of looking after children there.

The first admissions happened in 1741. Once a child was admitted into the care of the Foundling Hospital, they would be baptised and given a new name. This was done in order to protect the identity of the mother. The Hospital would then arrange for foster families, outside of London, to care for the babies and young children until the age of five. At this age, they were brought back to live and be educated in the Foundling Hospital until the age of 14 or 15. Many were trained for domestic or military service and took up apprenticeships until the age of 21.

Read all about the Foundling Hospital [here](#)

The amazing archive



Petition Letter, reference A_FH_A_008_001_001_003-10

Throughout its operation, the staff at the Foundling Hospital kept meticulous records of the everyday running of the place, creating a record of the Foundling Hospital and Coram charity that is unbroken from the 1700s up to the present day.

The entire collection of records consists of over 800 linear feet of shelving, an estimated 8 tons of paper, and over 1,000 plans.

The archive of records is held at London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) and much of it is in a fragile and vulnerable condition, in part due to its status as one of the most popular holdings there. Because of the condition of many of these records, it's not currently easy for people to access them.

Once digitised and transcribed, the records we are working with will be made available for free public access on our website.

Records include, but are not limited to: letters from mothers seeking admission for their child; tokens left by mothers with their child; entrance registers; medical records, minute books detailing decisions made, and matters dealt with, by those running the hospital; and records relating to branch hospitals that opened in the 1750s.