

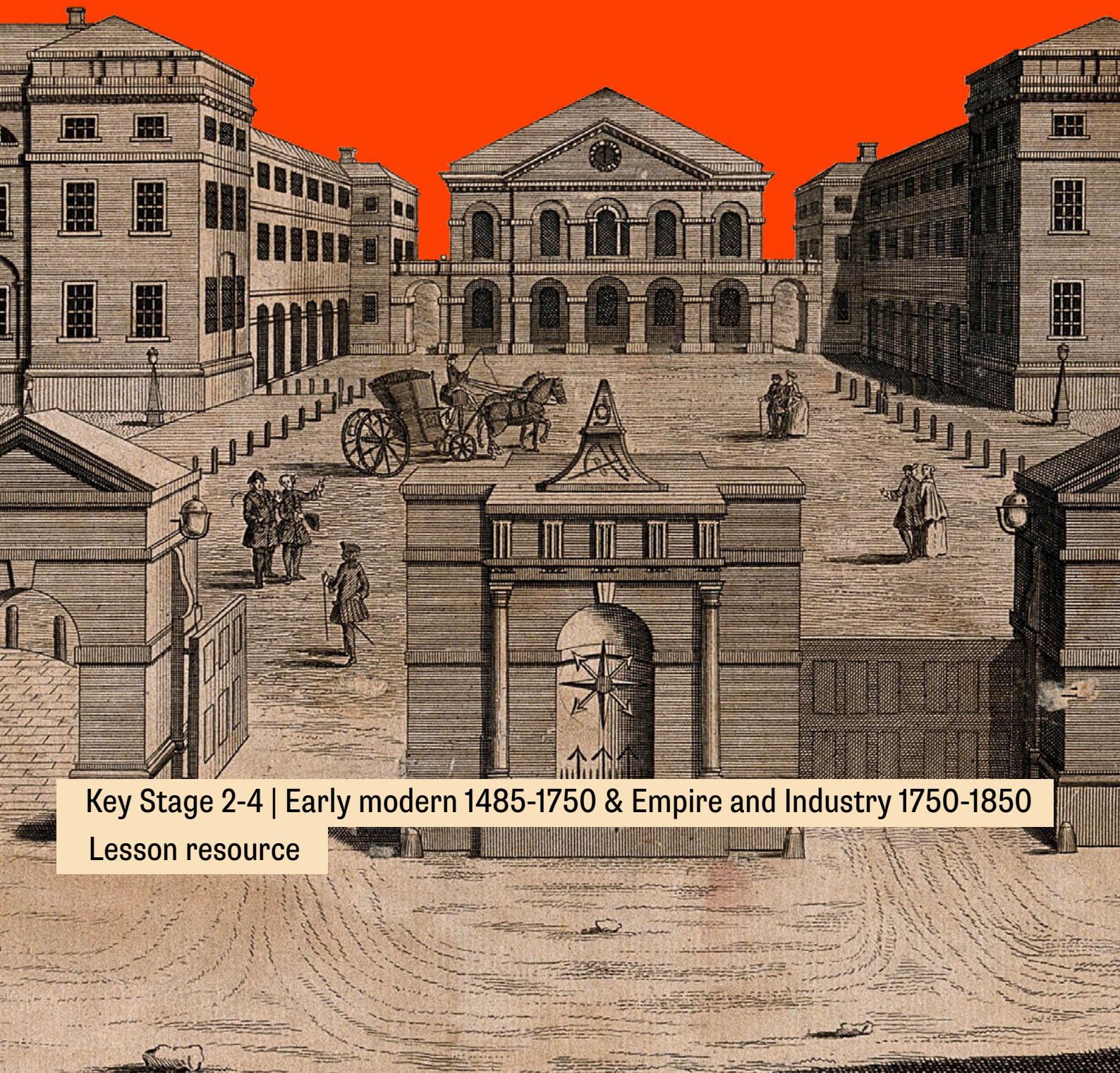
THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

Foundling Hospital

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



Key Stage 2-4 | Early modern 1485-1750 & Empire and Industry 1750-1850

Lesson resource

Introduction

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](https://www.coram.org.uk/)¹.

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.

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. Use this lesson to find out about what it was like to be a child in the care of the Foundling Hospital in the late Georgian era.

Suitable for:

KS 2-4

Time period:

Early modern 1485-1750,
Empire and Industry
1750-1850

Connections to the Curriculum:

Key stage 2:

Significant people:
(Thomas Coram for example)

Key stage 3:

Party politics, extension of the franchise and social reform 1745-1901

Key stage 4:

AQA GCSE History:
Britain: Health and the people: c1000 to the present day. (The Foundling Hospital role in children's health and social care).
OCR: GCSE History: The People's Health, c.1250 to present. (The Foundling Hospital role in children's health and social care).

¹ <https://www.coram.org.uk/>

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Teachers' 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 first two sources allow them to explore the original guidelines for running the hospital. Further sources include a plan of the hospital and dietary list for food given to the children. All documents are provided with transcripts. Students can work through the questions individually or in pairs and report back to the class.

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 and find out more about the life of Thomas Coram and his supporters.

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.'

External links

- [Coram and the Foundling Hospital](https://www.coram.org.uk/about-us/our-heritage-foundling-hospital)¹, the story of the Hospital, told by the charity itself.
- [The Foundling Museum](https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/)², London, explores the history of the Foundling Hospital.

Related resources

- [Georgian Britain: age of modernity?](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/georgian-britain-age-modernity/)³ A collection of 56 documents from the era, including three documents relating to the Foundling Hospital.

¹ <https://www.coram.org.uk/about-us/our-heritage-foundling-hospital>

² <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/>

³ <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/georgian-britain-age-modernity/>

Tasks

Source 1

Extract from a handbook for staff of the Foundlings hospital, 1817-1850, Catalogue reference: CHAR 2/384

- 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 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 2

Extract from guidelines for how children were to be cared for whilst at the hospital, between the ages of five and fifteen, 1817-1850, Catalogue reference: CHAR 2/384

- 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 3

A plan of the hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children. 1817-1850, Catalogue reference: CHAR 2/384

- 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?

Source 4

A table listing the food and drink given to each child in a year. Catalogue reference: CHAR 2/384

- 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 5

Guidance given to Hospital staff on how to apprentice a child. Catalogue reference: CHAR 2/384

- 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?

Source 1: Extract from a handbook for staff of the Foundling hospital. Catalogue Ref: CHAR 2/384

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.

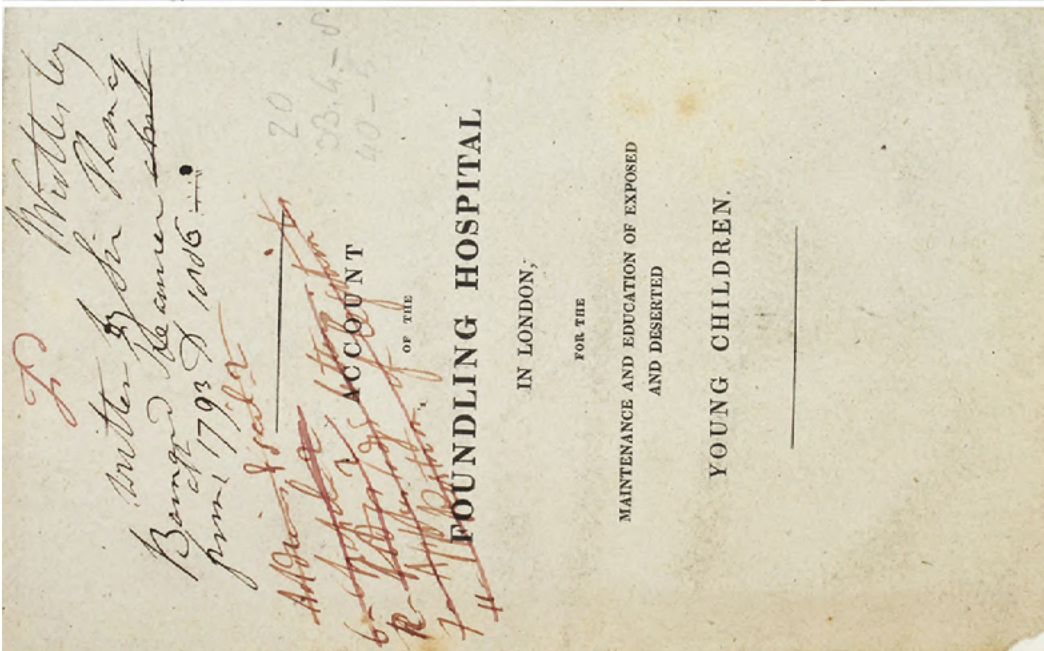
Of the Numbering and Registering of the CHILDREN.

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 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



Source 1: Transcript

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Source 2: Guidelines on how children aged 5-15 were to be cared for whilst at the hospital. Catalogue Ref: CHAR 2/384

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. They

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.

iii. 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.

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 to 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.

Source 2: Transcript

'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.

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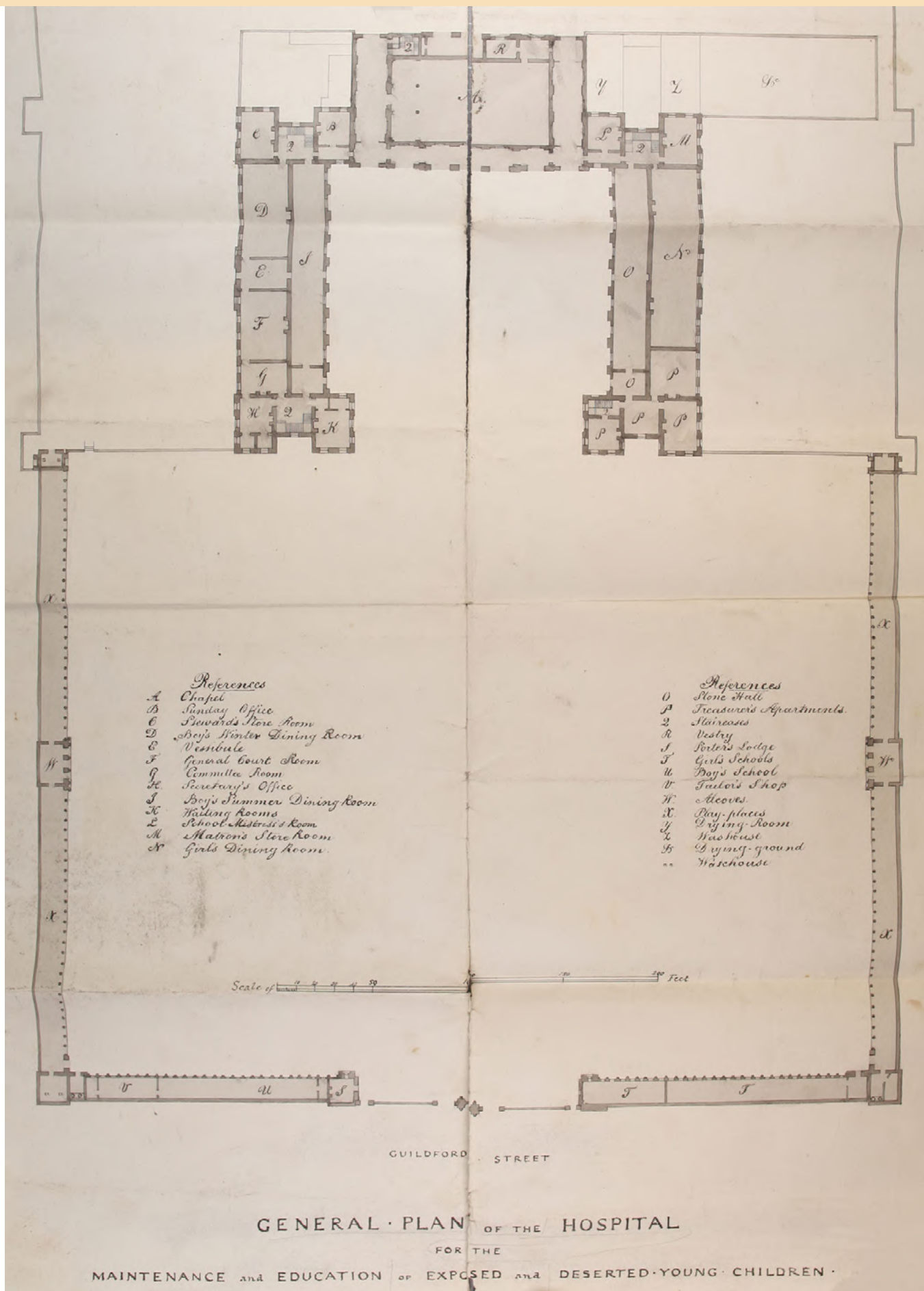
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The body linen of the Children is to be changed twice a week, and they are to have clean sheets once a month. Strong drink, coffee, and tobacco, are never to be permitted to be used by any Child in the Hospital...

Source 3: A plan of the hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children. Catalogue Ref: CHAR 2/384



Source 3: Transcript

References

- A chapel
- B Sunday office
- C Steward's store room
- D Boy's winter dining room
- E Vestibule
- F General court room
- G Committee room
- H Secretary's office
- J Boy's summer dining room
- K Waiting rooms
- L School mistress's room
- M Matron's store room
- N Girl's dining room

References

- 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
- X Drying ground
- Guildford street

GENERAL PLAN OF THE HOSPITAL

FOR THE

MAINTENANCE AND EDUCATION OF EXPOSED AND DESERTED YOUNG CHILDREN

Source 4: A table listing the food and drink given to each child in a year. Catalogue Ref: CHAR 2/384

Foundling Hosp.^d 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 12 ^d the 8 pound loaf	1..16..6
110½ lbs of Meat 6½ ^d	2..19..7
13 lbs 4 oz of Butter at 10½ ^d	0..11..6
52 lbs of Potatoes	0..2..6
4 lbs 14 oz of Suet	0..2..8
24 lbs 6 oz of Flour	0..4..0
9 lbs 12 oz of Oatmeal	0..2..0
32 Gallons of Milk	1..12..0
15 lbs 7 oz of Rice	0..2..6
2 lbs 7 oz of Sugar	0..1..6
1 lb 10 oz of Treacle	0..0..6
3 Gallons 1 qt of Beer	0..2..2
	<hr/> 7..17..5

Source 4: Transcript

Foundling Hospital 2 Nov 1836

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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	0,2,2
7,17,5	

Source 5: Guidance given to Hospital staff on how to apprentice a child. Catalogue Ref: CHAR 2/384

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 housework 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.

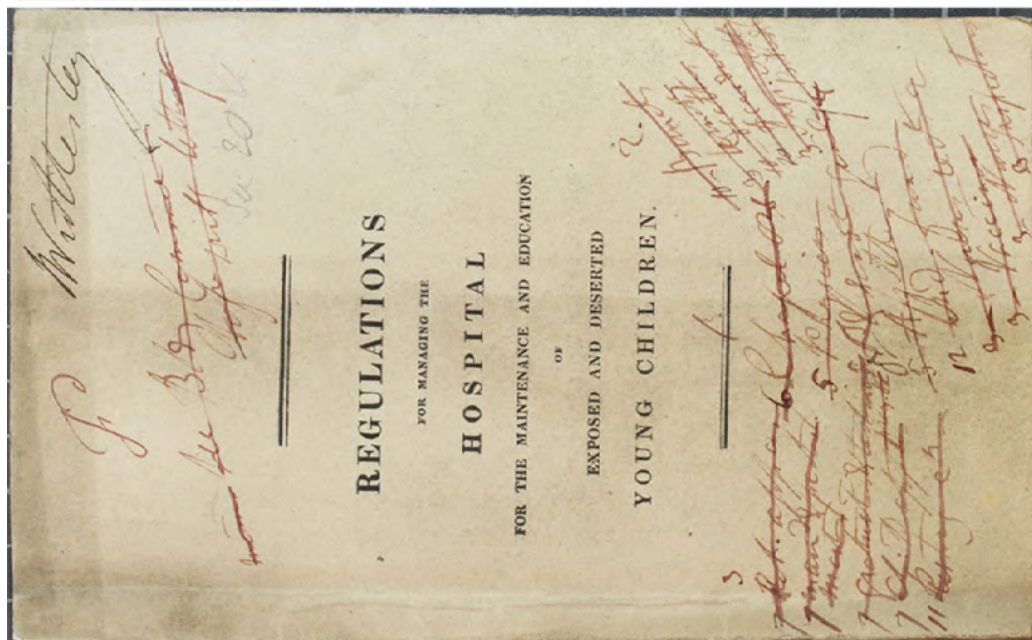
If married, and whether they let lodgings, and of whom enquiry may be made as to character, &c.

At fourteen or fifteen years of age, the children are apprenticed to house-keepers; 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:



Source 5: Transcript

REGULATIONS FOR MANAGING THE HOSPITAL FOR THE MAINTENANCE AND EDUCATION OF EXPOSED AND DESERTED YOUNG CHILDREN

At fourteen or fifteen years of age, the children are apprenticed to house keepers; 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 [p60] 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, not unless there is an established servant regularly engaged in the house.

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If housekeepers, and of the protestant religion.

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



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

Find out more:

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