

Echoes Through Time: The Story of Care

FOUNDLING HOSPITAL FACT SHEET

Coram's play *Echoes Through Time: The Story of Care* draws on the lives of real children who grew up at the Foundling Hospital in the 18th and 19th centuries. This Fact Sheet provides links to contextual information about the Foundling Hospital and to the full stories of several Foundlings featured in the play. It contains short biographies of other Foundlings and the mothers who appear in the play.

TOPICS

History of the Foundling Hospital

- Documentary film about the Foundling Hospital: <https://coramstory.org.uk/no-place-like-home-the-story-of-the-foundling-hospital/>
- Short written history of the Foundling Hospital: <https://coramstory.org.uk/corams-history/the-foundling-hospital>
- Story of Care Timeline: <https://coramstory.org.uk/the-story-of-care>

Admission, petitions, tokens, and claiming of children

- Admission system: <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/admissions-to-the-foundling-hospital/>
- Tokens: <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/article/foundling-hospital-tokens-collection/>
- Claiming children: <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/claiming-children/>

Life at the Foundling Hospital

- Nurses and inspectors (early form of foster care): <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/nurses-and-inspectors-at-the-foundling-hospital/>
- Education: <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/article/education-at-the-foundling-hospital/>
- Apprenticeships: <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/article/apprenticeships-and-the-foundling-hospital/>
- Music: <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/article/music-at-the-foundling-hospital/>
- Disability: <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/article/disability-at-the-foundling-hospital/>

FOUNDLING BOYS who appear in the play

John Brownlow (no. 18607), later Secretary of the Foundling Hospital

Read his story at <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/johns-story/>

John Crowdhill (no. 624)

Read his story at <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/john-crowdhills-story/>

George Grafton (no. 16644)

Read his story at <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/eleanor-weathers-and-george-graftons-story/>

Samuel Inman (no. 17859)

Read his story at <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/samuels-story/>

Thomas Waugh (no. 9853)

Read his story at <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/thomas-waugh-and-john-coldfields-stories/>

Augustus Browne (no. 19958)

Augustus Browne was admitted into the Foundling Hospital on 27 May 1837. His mother was Eleanor Lyns, a house servant at a ladies seminary, and his father was a butcher's apprentice who was forced to leave his position due to his conduct around women.

At the Foundling Hospital, Augustus was an original member of the boys' band established by John Brownlow, the Hospital's Secretary, in 1847. Augustus played trombone and clarinet.

In March 1852, Augustus was apprenticed to furrier Edward Waine. Within three months, Waine wrote to the Hospital: 'The boy was industrious and otherwise well conducted but had not sufficient capacity to acquire a knowledge of his business of a Furrier. ... Every thing he does he spoils and that I cannot let him do, in fact the boy never will earn his living at fur, for he cannot learn it'. Therefore, Augustus returned to the Hospital until another apprenticeship could be found for him.

In August 1853, Augustus was accepted into the army band of Her Majesty's 38th Regiment of Foot. He was stationed in Chatham, Kent, where he often corresponded with John Brownlow and Miss Soley, the principal of the girls' school. Many of his letters survive in Coram's Foundling Hospital Archive, including the one with the poem quoted in the play script ('There is a little parting word...'). The poem is printed on the writing paper, which Augustus would have bought especially for his 'good-bye' letter to the Foundling Hospital staff before he set off for the Crimean War in 1854.

His regiment was sent to the Siege of Sebastopol, where Augustus died on 31 January 1855 from a disease spreading around the military camp. To honour his memory, John Brownlow requested the army to send him Augustus's campaign medal to display in the Hospital's museum. The funds from his estate were donated to the Hospital's Benevolent Fund for Foundlings who had fallen on hard times after leaving the Hospital.

FOUNDLING GIRLS who appear in the play

Eleanor Weathers (no. 13621)

Read her story at <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/eleanor-weathers-and-george-graftons-story/>

Mary Apsley (no. 17845)

Mary Apsley – sometimes referred to as Mary Aspley in the Foundling Hospital records – was admitted in March 1783, aged 3 months. In her petition letter, her mother, Elizabeth Walker, described herself as ‘exposed to want’, with no support from the father.

In 1797, aged 14, Mary was apprenticed to Mr May, a ship-builder in Deptford, London, to be trained in domestic service by his wife. However, in 1800, Mary appeared before the Hospital’s Sub-committee after Mrs May complained about her conduct. Consequently, Mary was transferred to an apprenticeship with John Du Croy of Clerkenwell, who had a much more favourable opinion of her.

Mary was in his service for three years until she finished the full period of her apprenticeship in 1803, at which point she was awarded a gratuity of three guineas by the Hospital. Unable to keep her on as a paid employee, Du Croy recommended her for a ‘more eligible situation’ in another household.

Agnes Harvey (no. 19915)

Ann Corfield, a housemaid, met a painter called William Griffiths in Boulogne in 1835, when the family she worked for was visiting from London. When Ann fell pregnant, William refused to support her, despite having said he would marry her. Soon after, she returned to London with her master and mistress. Her daughter was born in July 1836 and admitted to the Foundling Hospital two months later.

In September 1851, 15-year-old Agnes Harvey was apprenticed in domestic service to a wine merchant. It seems that this did not go well because only a few months later, in May 1852, she was transferred to the household of a banker’s clerk. Agnes was unhappy there, however, complaining about her mistress in a letter to John Brownlow, the Hospital’s Secretary, who subsequently brought her back to the Hospital. Agnes never completed her apprenticeship period; instead, she emigrated to Australia in November 1853.

Almost 20 years after Agnes was admitted, her mother, Ann, wrote to the Hospital confessing that she had lied about being unmarried when she had given up her child. In reality, on her return to London in 1836, she had married a footman called Theodore Corfield in an attempt to salvage her reputation. Still unable to support her daughter, Ann was forced to lie about her marital status, as a child of a married woman would be refused by the Hospital. Ann’s letter revealed that she was widowed with one surviving child of five. She expressed an interest in contacting Agnes, but it was too late. Agnes had left England.

Rachel Symonds (no. 19849)

On 28 March 1835, an unmarried 16-year-old named Elizabeth Patience Runting gave birth to a baby girl at her mother’s house in Whitechapel, London. The baby’s father had abandoned her soon after discovering she was pregnant, and she was unable to support the child. Elizabeth petitioned the Foundling Hospital to accept her daughter, who was admitted on 17 May 1835.

On 10 March 1851, just before her 16th birthday, Rachel Symonds was apprenticed to a merchant, Mr Gabain, in Stoke Newington to be trained in domestic service by his wife. Rachel was unhappy with her mistress’s treatment of her and wrote letters to Hospital staff asking to be transferred. She was not

transferred, but the situation improved after her mistress died. Upon finishing her apprenticeship, Rachel was awarded a gratuity of five guineas by the Foundling Hospital, and Gabain kept her on as a paid member of his household staff.

In September 1855, however, Rachel emigrated to Australia. Two years later, she married William Lewis, a landscape gardener born in Norfolk, who had emigrated in 1850. He became an eminent Justice of the Peace. The couple went on to have six daughters and a son. They were married for 51 years. Rachel died in 1929, at the age of 94.

Mary Wentworth (no. 19960)

Mary's mother, Louisa Garnham, was 18 and single when she gave birth to her daughter at the Malling Union Workhouse, Kent, in December 1836. She had met the baby's father, Thomas Kingsland, two years earlier when they were both working in domestic service. Although he initially said he would marry her, he changed his mind when he learned she was pregnant. Louisa was unable to support her daughter and petitioned the Foundling Hospital to accept her. The Hospital admitted the baby on 28 May 1837.

In March 1852, aged 16, Mary Wentworth was apprenticed to Alexander Fraser, a Justice of the Peace for Charlwood, Surrey, to be trained in domestic service by his wife. However, Mrs Fraser died the following year. Mr Fraser wrote to John Brownlow, the Hospital's Secretary, in October 1853 complaining about Mary's conduct and her temper. She in turn wrote complaining about his treatment of her. Mary was transferred to another mistress, in London, but left without permission soon afterward. She was determined 'to go upon my own hands' and discharged herself from the Hospital's care.

In January 1854, Mary found employment as a servant for Mrs Hall, the daughter of her former wet nurse. The Halls lived in Watlingbury, Kent, less than four miles from Mary's birthplace. In the ensuing years, Brownlow heard reports of Mary's bad temper and her falling out with the Halls. But she seemed to have turned things around because in May 1857, the Foundling Hospital awarded her a gratuity of 2 guineas for having been a satisfactory hired servant for three years.

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The Foundling Stories Hub on the Coram Story website
has many more stories about individual Foundlings.

Find them here:

<https://coramstory.org.uk/corams-history/foundling-stories>

FOUNDLINGS' MOTHERS who appear in the play

Mothers 'petitioned' the Foundling Hospital to admit their child. In the 18th century, mothers wrote a petition letter explaining their circumstances, and in the 19th century, mothers reported in person to the Hospital to give a statement. Employers and family members would support their petition by giving them a character reference. The play script quotes from real petition letters and character references.

The mothers' stories below demonstrate the high rate of infant mortality in these centuries. Between 1739 and 1954, the Foundling Hospital admitted 27,000 children. Although they had a higher rate of survival than poor children in the general population – because of the Hospital's care – they still died of childhood diseases. In the 20th century, advances in medicine enabled doctors to cure many childhood illnesses.

Mary Hall (mother of Mary Hatton, no. 17094)

Petition quoted in the script: 'I, Mary Hall, humbly beg you will be so good as to take into your charity ...'

In March 1776, single mother Mary Hall petitioned the Foundling Hospital to admit her six-month-old daughter. Mr. Tranter, the Beadle of St. Sepulchre's Parish, provided a character reference for her. He and his wife vouched that Mary was 'a sober honest poor person & not able to provide for her Child'. Mary was invited to attend the Foundling Hospital's Ballot Day on 3 April 1776 and successfully gained admission for her daughter, who died just over a month later.

Margaret Cooper (mother of Elizabeth Harding, no. 17093)

Petition quoted in the script: 'Your petitioner was promised marriage...'

In March 1776, when Margaret Cooper petitioned the Foundling Hospital, she was in a state of extreme poverty. She had been employed for a number of years as a boot-binder, during which time she met the father of her child, a journeyman shoemaker at the same employer. According to her petition, the father deserted her to travel abroad after she found herself pregnant. Left alone in 'very low and miserable circumstances', she was forced to sell most of her clothes to support herself and her baby. Her petition states that both she and her child would 'perish for want of common necessities' if the Foundling Hospital did not accept the baby girl. Mr. Arnold, her employer, gave her a character reference. In April 1776, the Foundling Hospital accepted her 6-month-old child, who died in January 1777.

Sarah Bailey (mother of Thomas Nichol, no. 19441)

Character reference quoted in the script: 'The unfortunate young woman is sister to my wife...'

Sarah Bailey was living with her sister and brother-in-law, a farmer, near Maidstone when she met John Pellett, a tradesman who often came to the house during the shooting season. He promised marriage, but deserted her to emigrate to America. She later discovered that she was pregnant with his child. Sarah's sister wrote to the Foundling Hospital to support her petition, revealing that Pellett's business had fallen on hard times and he had left the country to seek his fortune overseas. Sarah's brother-in-law was unwilling to house her after she became pregnant, and so she moved to London for her lying-in period (preparing to give birth). He said that if the Foundling Hospital admitted her baby, he would support her while she attempted to get a situation, possibly in needlework. Her three-month-old son was admitted to the Foundling Hospital on 21 December 1822 and died in May 1823.

Jemima Busby (mother of Robert Addison, no. 18947)

Character reference quoted in the script: 'Mrs. Mayhew would gladly retain her...'

Although Jemima Busby had been a good and honest servant to Mrs. Mayhew, she was abruptly turned away by her mistress when her pregnancy became known – for fear she would be 'a bad example to the other servants'. The father of her child was a footman from the same household named William Jones, who pursued her for six months under a promise of marriage. He had already been dismissed from the household when she found out she was pregnant. She never saw or heard from him again.

Jemima left Mrs. Mayhew's house and gave birth at her brother's lodgings, where she went by the name Mrs. Jones. A month later, she petitioned the Foundling Hospital to accept her baby, stating that Mrs. Mayhew had promised to help her find a new position if she was relieved of her child. Her son was admitted on 23 March 1811, aged 5 weeks, and died later that year.

Jane Ann Allen (mother of Kate Ainger, no. 21667)

Character reference quoted in the script: 'The circumstances of her fall raised the suspicion that she was somewhat of a loose character...'

Jane Ann Allen was a 'modest and well-conducted girl', according to her mother, until she left her role in service and began sitting as an artist's model at the Royal Academy. In the summer of 1876, at the age of 18, Jane met 21-year-old Frederick Garrett, who was preparing to enter the army. Their relationship seemingly lasted only a few weeks. By the time Jane found out she was pregnant, Frederick had disappeared. Jane's mother enlisted the help of the parish clergy, who wrote imploring him to provide maintenance for his child. He refused, stating that he met Jane 'in circumstances which induced him to believe she was a prostitute' and soon after left for Germany with the army.

Jane's petition to the Foundling Hospital includes nine letters Frederick wrote to her from Stuttgart (July-December 1876), and these paint a different picture of their ongoing relationship. His letters, addressed affectionately to 'My Darling Violet', all express delight at finding 'your letters waiting for me', tell how 'I am longing so to see you', and sign off 'your ever loving F.M. Garrett'. He even enclosed stamped envelopes so that she could reply without 'having to spend any money on my account'. The pair also agreed multiple times to meet each other in September 1876, but it appears that although Frederick waited for her, Jane never turned up. She gave birth to their daughter at the St. Pancras workhouse on 4 April 1877. The child was accepted into the Foundling Hospital in July 1877 and died seven years later in May 1884.

Mary Stephens (mother of William Browning, no. 20253)

Character reference quoted in the script: 'The conduct of the Petitioner previously to this event was exceedingly correct – in fact, a better girl never lived.'

Read the full story of Mary and her son William here:

<https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/finding-my-foundling-william-browning/>

This Fact Sheet is part of the resource pack for the play *Echoes Through Time: The Story of Care*, produced by Coram in 2024 as part of the Voices Through Time: The Story of Care programme, made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Find out more at the [Coram Story website](https://coramstory.org.uk/).

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