

Feeding the 400

23 September 2016 – 8 January 2017



Exhibition reveals new research on life at the Foundling Hospital, examining the impact of food on children in its care

Feeding the 400 considers a fundamental yet little-examined aspect of life at the Foundling Hospital – food. Based on new research, guest curator Jane Levi presents the multi-faceted impact that food and eating regimes had on children at the Hospital from 1740 to 1950. This fascinating story is explored through art, archival material, photographs and the voices of former pupils, whose memories of food are captured in the Museum’s extensive sound archive.

Feeding the 400 explodes myths and misconceptions around eating at the Hospital, demonstrating how the institution’s food choices were far more than just questions of economy, nutrition and health. Working with historians, scientists and cultural practitioners, the exhibition brings alive the connections between what, when, where and why the foundlings ate what they ate; the beliefs and science that underpinned these decisions; and their physiological and psychological effects.

The meticulously detailed diet tables from the Foundling Hospital steward’s book are a central motif in the exhibition and the four staple food groups – bread, milk, meat & vegetables and sugar – form a springboard for exploring two centuries of varied and fascinating food-related stories, including the supply, preparation and serving of the food;

THE FOUNDLING MUSEUM

the running of the Hospital's kitchen gardens; and the revelation of a great milk scandal.

In addition to the physical realities of food at the Hospital, *Feeding the 400* considers its social context, the children's experience of eating, and testimonies from former pupils. Providing a focus for this exploration and suggestive of the many ambiguities around foundlings' experiences of food and eating is Frederick Cayley Robinson's monumental painting, *Orphan girls entering the refectory of a hospital* (1915). Hanging above the original Foundling Hospital refectory table, Robinson's work is accompanied by a newly commissioned, immersive sound work which evokes the experience of communal eating. Conjuring both the familiar and unusual sounds common to the Hospital's dining rooms, visitors can enter the imaginative space of a Foundling child at their Sunday dinner being watched by fashionable visitors to the Hospital.

Feeding the 400 includes materials from the Foundling Hospital archives, tableware from the Foundling Museum collection and testimonies from former pupils, alongside paintings, prints and objects from the Wellcome Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum, V&A, Royal Horticultural Society and the Science Museum, as well as private collections.

Curator Jane Levi said: "Far from the miserable gruel of the stereotypical workhouse, the foundling children ate three balanced meals a day (including vegetables from their own kitchen gardens) off Spode china. However, they had to eat in silence; their Sunday dinners were often open to spectators; and the quality of the ingredients the staff fed them was not always exactly what the governors had in mind. Their food helps us to understand many of the complexities of growing up as a foundling."

Caro Howell, director of the Foundling Museum, said: "Our visitors are endlessly curious about what life was like at the Foundling Hospital for the children, particularly what they ate. The power of the school dinner to generate memories of love and loathing is something that links us emotionally to the foundlings across two centuries. This exhibition has given us the opportunity to undertake new archival research and uncover fascinating and unexpected facts."

A programme of events will accompany the exhibition including a performance from anarchist cook George Egg, a hands-on dining event, a programme of food-related short films and a panel discussion considering the development of taste in children.

Feeding the 400 is curated by Jane Levi in collaboration with the Foundling Museum's curatorial team. The exhibition is supported by a Wellcome Trust People Award.



Press Enquiries

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Notes to Editors

The Foundling Museum explores the history of the Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity and first public art gallery, and through a dynamic programme of exhibitions and events celebrates the ways in which artists of all disciplines have helped improve children's lives for over 275 years.

The Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram, was established in 1739 by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram, as 'a hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children'. Instrumental in helping Coram realise his vision were the artist William Hogarth, who encouraged leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frideric Handel, who gave annual benefit concerts of his Messiah. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way in which the arts can support philanthropy.

Coram has been creating better chances for children since 1739. They help children and young people today through their pioneering work in adoption, parenting support, housing support, alcohol and drug education, creative therapies and championing legal rights in the UK and overseas.
www.coram.org.uk

Dr Jane Levi is a researcher, writer and consultant specialising in the history of food and utopianism. A visiting research fellow in the history department at King's College London, she helped found and teaches with colleagues on the 'Food, Politics & Society' course in the Politics department at Birkbeck, University of London, now also the title of a co-authored book to be published by University of California Press in 2017. Jane is currently working with several interdisciplinary teams of artists and academics on exhibition projects, including for Somerset House's Utopia 2016, Delfina Foundation and the Science Gallery at King's. She is Chair of the Sophie Coe Prize in food history and former trustee of the Oxford Symposium on Food & Cookery.

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Visitor Information

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foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Open: Tuesday - Saturday 10:00 - 17:00, Sunday 11:00 - 17:00, Monday closed

Admission: Permanent collection + exhibition: £10.25 adults / £7.50 concessions (incl Gift Aid), free for children and Foundling Friends

Tube and train: Russell Square, King's Cross St Pancras and Euston