

Tiny Traces: African & Asian Children at London's Foundling Hospital

30 September 2022 - 19 February 2023

Discover a richer history of London life in the eighteenth century, through newly uncovered stories of African and Asian children in the care of the Foundling Hospital.

The Foundling Museum is proud to announce *Tiny Traces: African & Asian Children at London's Foundling Hospital* running from 30 September 2022 until 19 February 2023.

The exhibition sheds important light on untold stories, including those of more than a dozen children from the African and Asian diasporas who were taken into the care of the Foundling Hospital, from its foundation in 1739 to 1820. During this period, there were an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 African people living in Britain, as well as a growing Asian population including servants brought to Britain by returning East India Company officials. Some of the women amongst them, as well as white women engaged in relationships with the men, sought help from the Foundling Hospital.

Until now, researchers have made accidental discoveries of references to African and Asian children in the Hospital. Now, after three years of methodical research into the Foundling Hospital archive by exhibition curator, Hannah Dennett, a much broader and richer set of stories have been uncovered. Through personal letters, employment notes, court reports and Hospital records, we can follow the lives of children such as Christopher Rowland, Jane Friend and Miles Cooke – who provide us with new perspectives on both the world of the eighteenth century and of today.





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As well as tracing the lives of the children, the exhibition explores their parents' circumstances and what brought their mothers to the Foundling Hospital. People from the African and Asian diasporas, both free and enslaved, could be found throughout eighteenth-century Britain, but especially in London. Closely tied with Britain's expanding colonial reach in the Caribbean and the East Indies, the growing presence of these populations was evident in the ranks of domestic servants and sailors working in the Empire's trade routes. Through the Foundling Hospital admission process, mothers also came into contact with the Hospital's wealthy Governors and benefactors. The exhibition explores the connections of these men to colonial Britain, showing how the threads of Empire and slavery converged within the life of the institution, binding society's wealthiest and most desperate citizens together.

From a mother's initial petition for her child's acceptance into the Hospital's care, through to that child's education, apprenticeship and adulthood, *Tiny Traces* reveals new perspectives and deepens our understanding of children from the African and Asian diasporas at the Foundling Hospital, during the eighteenth century. Through personal items, artefacts, identifying 'tokens', works of art and archival documents, the exhibition sheds light on their distinctive circumstances and sometimes characterful lives.

The children whose stories are featured have been discovered through brief, fleeting, yet insightful references in the archive. Yet their faces will never be known to us. To enable visitors to explore the less tangible human realities and emotions which arise from the archive expansively, the exhibition includes works by leading contemporary artists, such as Zarina Bhimji and Hew Locke. Running as a parallel thread throughout the exhibition, these contemporary works form a dialogue with the historic narratives, asking questions about the past, present and future.

'*Tiny Traces* addresses a gap in our knowledge of an important part of London's history – it's always been there, but never told', says exhibition curator Hannah Dennett. 'This is our history, and I'm delighted that we can share it and offer access to the fascinating stories uncovered.'

'This new research enables us to make a significant step forward in telling a more complete story of the Foundling Hospital, its place in eighteenth-century London and the wider world', says Museum Curator, Kathleen Palmer. 'It has taken us from tantalising glimpses to a far richer understanding of the presence and experience of Black and Asian children in the institution. We are thrilled that our collaboration with the University of Warwick's Centre for Global History and Culture has enabled Hannah Dennett's ground-breaking work.'

Tiny Traces: African & Asian Children at London's Foundling Hospital is supported by the 1739 Club.

Press enquiries

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Notes to editors

The **Foundling Museum** tells the story of the Foundling Hospital, founded in 1739 as a home for children whose mothers couldn't keep or care for them. It was the UK's first children's charity.

Artists made it London's most fashionable cause and destination as well as the UK's first public art gallery. William Hogarth donated many of his own works and persuaded other artists to do the same. George Frideric Handel conducted benefit concerts of *Messiah* in the chapel and Charles Dickens was a supporter too. Their astonishing generosity and determination show that art transforms lives and encourages philanthropy. Taking a lead from Hogarth and keeping his innovative and disruptive spirit alive, we don't believe our museum should be a static display of things. We use our art and objects to unravel the past and keep its stories alive and relevant. Through our Foundling Fellows, we also drive projects with outstanding creative individuals to continue transforming young lives. Fellows include: Sir Quentin Blake CH CBE, Lily Cole, Sam Lee, Grayson Perry CBE, Lemn Sissay OBE, Yinka Shonibare MBE, Jonny Banger and Dame Jacqueline Wilson DBE.

Always ground-breaking, today our training and mentorship programme for care-experienced young people stay true to our pioneering story. Using creative action to improve the lives of children and young people, our artist founders set the pattern for our campaigning projects today. Proud to be the first, we continue to take the lead.

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. coram.org.uk

Hannah Dennett is a History PhD candidate at the University of Warwick. Her project, *Forgotten Foundlings: Black Lives and the Eighteenth-Century Foundling Hospital* is an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award funded by Midlands4Cities, and in collaboration with the Foundling Museum. Her research seeks to address the absence of understanding about the experience of children of the African and Asian diasporas taken into the care of the Hospital during the long eighteenth century. Before starting her PhD project, Hannah gained her BA (Hons) and MA in history from Nottingham Trent University. Her interest in the Foundling Hospital started after discovering her great-grandfather was a foundling.

Visitor information

Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ
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foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Admission: Adults £10.50 with donation, Concessions £8.25 with donation

Free for 21 & under, Foundling Friends & National Art Pass holders