

The Lost Words

19 January - 6 May 2018



The relationship between language and the living world is celebrated in this exhibition of poetry and illustration

The Lost Words is a unique collaborative project between the award-winning author Robert Macfarlane, and acclaimed artist and author Jackie Morris, that seeks to reconnect people with the natural world. Originated by Compton Verney, the exhibition presents a new series of poems and accompanying illustrations that conjure the beauty of nature, for visitors young and old.

The Lost Words is a response to Macfarlane and Morris's belief that nature is in retreat from our children's stories and imaginations. In 2002 the results of a Cambridge University survey, published in *Science*, found that British schoolchildren were able to identify Pokémon far more accurately than species of common UK wildlife. In a 2008 National Trust survey, only a third of primary age children could identify a magpie, though nine out of ten could name a Dalek. A later Wildlife Trust survey focused on adults found that a third of participants were unable to identify a barn owl, three-quarters unable to identify an ash tree, and two-thirds feeling that they had "lost touch with nature".

This exhibition summons this vanishing wildness back into existence in a joyful celebration of nature words and the natural world they invoke.

Robert Macfarlane has created twenty acrostic poems or ‘spells’ focused on common nature words that are fading from use as the species themselves decline, while Jackie Morris, inspired by her lifelong passion for Britain’s landscapes and wildlife, has painted beautiful, iridescent watercolours that capture first the absence of the plant or creature within its habitat and then its return. Together these works take viewers on a journey in which the familiar is magical once more.

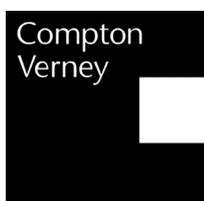
The Lost Words explores the widening gulf between childhood and the natural world in the 21st century, but also speaks to an important aspect of the Foundling Hospital’s ethos. With its physical presence in the countryside, and its practice of sending children to be fostered by rural families for the first five years of their lives, the Hospital maintained the importance of children’s relationship with the natural world, and the links between outdoor play and wellbeing. Items from the Hospital archive that relate to the importance placed on fresh air and the children’s education, such as reading games and aids, some with lost or archaic vocabulary, are displayed alongside the artwork, demonstrating the institution’s forward-thinking health and education practices. Not only does the exhibition evoke the Hospital’s history, but it also demonstrates the power of illustration and words to spark imagination and delight, much like nature itself.

Kathleen Palmer, Curator: Exhibitions & Displays at the Foundling Museum said: ‘*The Lost Words* embodies the idea, fundamental to the Foundling Hospital’s story, that the power of creativity can achieve real good in the world. Its emphasis on the wellbeing, education and inspiration of children through the natural world makes the exhibition a perfect fit for the Foundling Museum.’

Robert Macfarlane said: ‘I am thrilled the exhibition will be moving to the Foundling Museum. For it to show at one of the most important museums of childhood in the country - and in the middle of a city - is deeply exciting.’

Jackie Morris said: ‘It’s such an honour to be invited to exhibit at the Foundling Museum amongst so many stories and a wealth of art. There are echoes of profound sadness around the Museum which will add another deep layer to our project about wild things.’

The exhibition is accompanied by *The Lost Words: A Spell Book*, a beautifully illustrated hardback book, published by Hamish Hamilton, which captures the irreplaceable magic of language and nature for all ages. *The Lost Words* is supported by The Ernest Cook Trust and The 1739 Club. The exhibition is organised by Compton Verney.



Lucky Button

On the first floor of the Museum a series of original illustrations by award-winning illustrator Michael Foreman are displayed, produced for *Lucky Button*, a new book by children's author Michal Morpurgo, a long-time collaborator and Foundling Fellow. Inspired by the history of the Foundling Hospital, the book tells the moving story of a lonely boy struggling to cope with school bullies and caring for his mother, until a mysterious encounter reveals life in the Foundling Hospital in the eighteenth century and unravels a touching tale about the power of music. Presented amongst the Museum's historic Collection, the display celebrates the power of illustration to make creative links across the centuries, and offers the chance for illustration fans to come face-to-face with original artwork from one of today's foremost practitioners.

Press Enquiries

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Notes to Editors

Robert Macfarlane is a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and the author of a number of bestselling and prize-winning books, including *The Wild Places*, *The Old Ways*, *Holloway* and *Landmarks*. His work has been translated into many languages and widely adapted for film, television and radio. The American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded him the E.M.Forster Award for Literature 2017. He is a word-collector and mountain-climber – and he has three young children, who have taught him more about the world than any book.

Jackie Morris grew up in the Vale of Evesham and studied at Hereford College of Arts at Bath Academy. She has illustrated for the *New Statesman*, *Independent* and *Guardian*, collaborated with Ted Hughes, and has written and illustrated over forty books, including beloved classics such as *The Snow Leopard*, *The Ice Bear*, *Song of the Golden Hare*, *Tell Me a Dragon*, *East of the Sun*, *West of the Moon* and *The Wild Swans*. Jackie Morris lives in a cottage on the cliffs of Pembrokeshire.

Michael Foreman was born in Pakefield, a fishing village in Suffolk, and grew up during the Second World War, an experience which has had a lasting and creative influence on his work. His illustrated biography *War Boy* has shaped a new generation's understanding of war-time life. Foreman studied painting at the Lowestoft School of Art and then Graphics at the Royal College of Art from where he received a travelling scholarship to the United States. He then travelled worldwide as a travel illustrator. These journeys have provided inspiration and locations for many of his children's books which frequently promote peace and concern for the environment, and he has won many awards including the

Kate Greenaway Medal (twice). His career has spanned over fifty years and nearly 300 books including collaborations with many eminent authors, from Shakespeare and Dickens to Michael Morpurgo.

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 Frederic 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

Visitor Information

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

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

Admission: £11 adults / £8.25 concessions (incl Gift Aid), free for children, Foundling Friends & National Art Pass holders

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