This recipe book was created to coincide with an exhibition at the Foundling Museum

Feeding the 400
23 September 2016 – 8 January 2017

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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’. The Hospital was supported throughout its history by an extraordinary array of enlightened practitioners in the arts and sciences, and continued to care for children until the 1950s.

One of the priorities of the Foundling Museum is to bring alive for visitors the everyday experiences of the children. In 2015, the Museum commissioned new research into the food of the foundlings culminating in a special exhibition, *Feeding the 400*. The project used food as a lens to investigate the lives and experiences of the foundling children, revealing previously unexamined detail about the kitchens, dining rooms, kitchen gardens, mealtimes and food practices experienced from the beginning of the institution in the 1740s until its closure in the 1950s.

The diet tables and the cook’s and steward’s records of ingredients coming into the kitchens are so detailed and specific that it is possible to derive recipes from them. We can work out just how thick the breakfast porridge or gruel was from the ounces of oatmeal and milk specified for each child, and exactly how much bread or meat was allowed at each meal.

Thinking about these records of basic foodstuffs from the perspective of the cook and the diner can help bring the diet tables alive. Somehow, smelling, tasting, or even just visualising the food on the plate emphasises how wholesome the foundlings’ food was – but also how relentlessly repetitive. A foundling could spend their entire childhood eating exactly the same food at exactly the same time on every day of the week.

It also becomes clear that this repetition continued not only within individual foundlings’ lives, but also across decades. While the diet tables were revised periodically, no dramatic changes were made. The food served to a foundling in 1890 would have been entirely recognisable to a child living in the institution in 1790. In many cases, the dishes are familiar to people educated and fed school dinners in the twentieth century.

We hope that you will try some of these recipes at home and share a picture and your thoughts about the dishes with us. What memories do they bring up for you? How do twenty-first century children respond to this kind of food? How has eating some of their food made you feel about the lives of the children of the Foundling Hospital?
GOVERNORS’ GRUEL (BARLEY GRUEL)

This rich and delicious barley gruel from Mary Kettilby’s Collection Of Above Three Hundred Receipts in Cookery, Physick, and Surgery (1734) uses pearl barley and is recommended as ‘a wholesome spoon-meat for suppers’. It makes a sophisticated alternative to a rice pudding.

**Ingredients**

- 90g (3oz) pearl barley
- 1140ml (2 pints) water
- 115g (4oz) currants
- 3 egg yolks
- 285ml (½ pint) wine or dry-medium sherry
- 285ml (½ pint) cream
- Rind of 1 lemon
- Soft light brown sugar to taste

**Method**

Bring the pearl barley to the boil in the water, skim, cover with a lid, reduce to a very gentle simmer and cook for approximately 40 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the lid, add the currants, and simmer for 15 minutes. Add the white wine and simmer for 5 more minutes then remove from the heat.

Beat together the egg yolks and cream and stir in to the cooked barley, along with the finely pared lemon zest. Add a teaspoonful of sugar – or more if you wish, to taste. Return to a very low burner and heat gently, stirring until it has the consistency of thick cream. Do not allow to boil or it will split. Serve.

Our contemporary ideas about gruel have been shaped by the powerful writing of Charles Dickens, whose depiction of the thin, watery, starvation rations fed to Oliver Twist in the workhouse continue to resonate as the very definition of this foodstuff. But not all gruels are created equal: the porridge in your bowl would vary widely according to your social situation. The workhouse gruel that Dickens described was indeed a truly meagre dish of meal cooked with water. Foundling gruel was different: oatmeal cooked with whole milk, it was a richer and more nutritious breakfast porridge. Gruel could also be made with grains other than oats such as wheat, barley or rye.

For the middle classes, gruel appears in cookbooks as smooth, digestible invalid food, nicely seasoned and enriched with butter to stimulate the appetite; and as egg-thickened creamy dishes flavoured with wine and lemon rind for tempting suppers. This is the kind of gruel that a Foundling Hospital Governor or the health-conscious Mr Woodhouse in Jane Austen’s Emma might have had in mind as a late-night restorative.
Our ideas about bread are highly subject to fashion. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, white bread was the elite, aspirational, more expensive bread while the darker, cheaper breads were considered the best food for the labouring classes. Right into the twentieth century the officers and servants of the Foundling Hospital were allowed white bread, but the children were given cheaper, lower status brown bread.

In the 1790s, as part of the nationwide drive to find cheaper and nutritious alternatives to wheat flour, Foundling Hospital Treasurer Thomas Bernard developed a rice bread recipe, which results in a very white loaf, even when made with darker ‘household’ flour. The more standard bread delivered in vast quantities to the Hospital was the assize-controlled ‘quartern’ loaf, a light brown loaf made with wheaten flour.

The foundlings ate approximately 285–420g of bread every day, equivalent to between one third and just over half of a large standard supermarket loaf (or all of a small to medium-sized one). Both of these breads toast brilliantly – although as you crunch through a slice you should remember that only the staff and officers were lucky enough to have toast.
QUARTERN LOAF

The quartern loaf was one of the household breads on the government-regulated assize table, probably made with ‘household’ flour that looks almost white and bakes into a loaf with a light brown crumb. Foundling Hospital records in 1813 show that the baker was expected to supply loaves weighing 8lb (3.6kg), and was reprimanded for supplying below-weight loaves. Other sources suggest that quartern loaves weighed 4lb, so if you cannot manage such a large dough, or eat historic portions of bread, simply halve the quantities below.

Method

Put all of the flour and salt into your biggest bowl. I need to use my preserving pan: this is a very large quantity of dough. Put the yeast in a measuring jug and fill with warm water to 250ml. Stir well to dissolve. Make a well in the centre of the flour and pour in the hydrated yeast and about 400ml more of the water – you are aiming to use about half the total liquid. Mix enough of the flour into the liquid to make a thick batter in the centre of the rest of the dry flour, and sprinkle a little of it over the top. This is a sponge. Set aside in a warm place until you can see the flour crack on the surface of the batter as the yeast starts to act. Add the remaining water and mix the sponge into the rest of the flour to form a dough. There is no need to work this dough a great deal: knead it just enough to make it smooth and elastic, probably around 10 minutes. Set aside in a warm place, covered with a damp cloth or cling film, until it has risen to about double its size.

While the dough is rising, you can pass the time making a bread stamp to mark your bread. Cut a large potato in half and carve a pattern into it. You need the design on the stamp to stand out by 2-3cm, so don’t try to make your design too complicated.

Heat the oven to 180°C. If you have a baking stone, place it on the middle shelf.

Flour your work surface and tip the risen dough onto it. Gently de-gas it by folding over a few times and form into a neat, round loaf. I usually do the final shaping on a large, floured metal baking sheet. Set aside to prove for about half an hour.

Press your potato stamp into the bread, leaving a bold imprint. If you don’t have a stamp, slash the loaf a couple of times across the top and slide the loaf onto a baking stone or place the metal baking sheet in the hot oven.

Bake for 1 hour or until fully baked. It should be nicely risen and brown, and sound hollow and bouncy when you rap your knuckles on its base. Remove from the oven, and leave to cool thoroughly on a rack before cutting.

Ingredients

2.5kg (5lb 8oz) Lammas Fayre ‘wholesome white flour’
OR
1.8kg (4lb) white flour
700g (1lb 8oz) wholewheat flour
1.4l (2½ pints) water
25g (1oz) dried yeast
25g (1oz) salt

Optional
1 large potato
(to make a bread stamp)
RICE BREAD

This recipe has been worked out from the notes made in 1795 by Sir Thomas Bernard, Treasurer of the Foundling Hospital. His work on rice for the Hospital, also published in the 1796 Annals of Agriculture, was one of many experiments conducted at the time to find economical and tasty substitute ingredients for wheat when prices increased during a time of poor harvests and European conflict.

These instructions make one loaf in the size recommended by Bernard. Because of the cooked rice, it is relatively wet dough. This makes it, from a baker’s point of view, close to a ciabatta loaf in terms of handling, but the baked result has a somewhat denser crumb structure. Bernard recommended leaving it for two days before eating. This suspicion of too-fresh bread was typical of the time, but it is actually very good if left until the next day before cutting, and it keeps well for many days.

Method

Bring the rice and water to a simmer in a small saucepan, cover tightly, and cook gently for approximately 20 minutes until the water is absorbed and the rice is cooked. Leave to cool. Alternatively, weigh out 275-300g of leftover cooked white rice.

Mix 55ml of warm water and 55ml milk in a small bowl and sprinkle over the dried yeast. Whisk together and set aside for 15-20 minutes in a warm place until the surface is bubbling.

Weigh the flour into a large bowl, mix together with the cooked rice, and add the yeast liquid along with 70ml of warm water and the remaining 15ml milk. With an electric mixer, mix on medium speed with a dough hook attachment for 8-10 minutes, by which time the dough should have become a smooth, elastic mass. Add the remaining 15ml water and the salt, and continue to mix as before for 3–4 minutes.

If you don’t have an electric mixer with a dough hook, you can simply combine everything by hand for a few minutes. The final bread will be heavier but it will still be good.

Cover the bowl and leave to rise in a warm place for 1–1½ hours. The dough should double in size.

Gently deflate the dough by folding it over itself a few times in the bowl, and form into a ball shape, still in the bowl. Re-cover and leave to rest for 20 minutes.

Flour a metal baking sheet well, and gently tip the dough out of the bowl onto the sheet. Handling as little as possible, form into a longish loaf shape. Set aside to prove for 1 hour.

Place a deep roasting tin filled with water on the floor of your oven, and put a baking stone (if you have one) on the middle shelf. Heat the oven to 200˚C. Once the dough is proved, open the oven door (being careful not to get a face full of steam) and slide the loaf onto the baking stone or place the baking sheet on the shelf. Bake for 35-45 minutes until done.

Remove from the oven when nicely browned and sounding hollow when tapped on the bottom, and cool on a rack.
Count Rumford is famous for his various technical achievements such as redesigning the domestic fireplace and developing new, efficient ovens and kitchen stoves. A friend of Hospital Treasurer Sir Thomas Bernard and a fellow founder of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor, Rumford also redesigned the Foundling Hospital kitchen in the late eighteenth century. From a detailed description published at the time we know that he oversaw the installation of his most cutting-edge, fuel efficient roasting ovens and steam boxes on a scale that could cope with the huge volumes of food cooked at the Hospital every day.

When Rumford was working in Bavaria in the 1790s, he also developed a nutritious yet economical soup for feeding the poor in workhouses and soup kitchens. Rumford’s soup became a famous dish throughout Europe, admired and emulated by many philanthropic societies. It bears a striking resemblance to ‘Hessian soup’ which appears in many late eighteenth-century British cookery and manuscript books. Rumford served on the loyalist side in the American War of Independence, where the British deployed thousands of mercenary troops from Hesse in Germany. It is tempting to speculate that Rumford’s soup owes at least part of its origin to the Hessian soldiers’ rations during the American revolution.

Whatever the origins of the recipe, every Thursday for many decades the foundlings ate an economical soup made of dried split peas and vegetables, thickened with flour. It was made with the broth from the previous day’s boiled mutton, which may not be easy to obtain: substitute lamb or beef stock for an excellent result.

This makes about eight foundling-sized portions of 145ml (5 floz) each; or four to six adult portions. It tastes and smells like an institutional classic.

**Ingredients**

- 125g (4½ oz) dried split peas (yellow or green)
- 1000ml (1¼ pints) water
- 175ml (½ pint) mutton broth; or lamb or beef stock
- 1 large onion, chopped
- ½ head celery, chopped
- Salt to taste
- 30g (2oz) flour

**Method**

Soak the split peas in water overnight. You can go ahead and cook them if they haven’t been soaked, but the soaking will reduce the cooking time.

Drain the peas (if soaked) and place them with all the ingredients apart from the flour in a large pan. Bring to a boil, turn down the heat and simmer, covered, until the peas are cooked and disintegrating, and the total volume is reduced to about 1 litre (1¼ pints). This will take at least 1 hour, and up to 2 depending on how dry your peas are (also, in my experience green ones seem to take longer).

About 15 minutes before the end of the cooking time, measure 30g flour into a small bowl, slowly add a ladleful of liquid from the soup, whisking constantly to make a smooth paste. Add the paste to the pot of soup, stirring thoroughly to ensure no lumps form. Finish cooking and serve the soup hot, with bread.
The children’s meat was usually beef, and most often boiled. Though the butcher’s delivery records don’t specify whether their beef was salted or not, it is likely that for at least some of the year the children were served salt beef.

Though a plain dish, when made with quality ingredients it is very good, its simplicity being part of its charm (though perhaps less charming if eaten four times a week). Since a wide variety of herbs and vegetables were grown in the Hospital’s gardens, I have assumed these were added to the children’s meat for added flavour and bulk. The meat was always served with seasonal greens – tens of dozens of cabbages of all colours were grown in the Hospital’s kitchen gardens – and either mashed potatoes or bread.

The same approach can be taken to cooking mutton, served to the foundlings on Wednesdays.

**Method**

If using salt beef, soak in cold water for a few hours (according to your butcher’s advice) before cooking.

Lightly coat the whole beef brisket with some flour seasoned with a little salt and white pepper. Put it in a large saucepan with a tight-fitting lid along with the onion and herbs, and add water until just covered. Gradually bring to a boil, skim the surface scum, turn down the heat and simmer gently for 1½ - 1¾ hours. Half way through the cooking time add the rest of the vegetables (leek, carrot, celery) and turn the meat over.

When the meat is cooked, check the seasoning, adding salt to taste (probably not required if you started with salt beef) and a little white pepper. Remove the meat from the pan, place on a deep serving plate with the vegetables, and serve in thick slices accompanied with boiled cabbage and mashed potatoes. The broth the beef was boiled in would have been saved to serve to the foundlings the following day, but you may like to use it as gravy with the meal.

**Ingredients**

- 1kg (2lb 3oz) beef brisket or silverside (either salted or not)
- Plain flour
- 1 large onion, chopped
- Thyme
- Parsley
- Bay leaf
- 1 leek, sliced
- 500g carrot, sliced, or 250g carrot and 250g swede or turnip
- ½ head celery, chopped
- Water
- Salt
- White pepper

**Optional**

- ½ tsp English mustard powder
Every October, to celebrate Charter Day, the foundlings were given Charter Pudding. While I am yet to find an official Charter Pudding recipe in the archives, it seems likely from the records of ingredients coming into the kitchens that this was a traditional light ‘plum’ pudding, which, confusingly, contains no plums but rather currants or raisins. It does not seem to have been served with custard, but that would be an obvious accompaniment. Alternatively, Eliza Acton, whose recipe in Modern Cookery for Private Families (1845) this is adapted from, recommends a ‘very sweet sauce’, since the pudding itself has no added sugar apart from the dried fruit. Try a syrup sauce, or a spoonful of golden syrup.

### Ingredients

- 100g (4oz) fine breadcrumbs
- 140ml (5 floz) milk
- 170g (6oz) suet
- 280g (10oz) raisins or currants, or a mixture of the two
- ¼ tsp nutmeg, grated
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- ⅛ tsp ground mace
- A pinch of salt
- Grated rind of 1 orange
- 2 eggs
- 1 additional egg yolk
- 50g (2oz) plain flour
- 1 large pudding cloth
- String

### Method

Prepare your pudding cloth by soaking it in boiling water. Separately, bring a large pan of water to the boil and reduce the heat to a simmer.

Weigh 75g of the breadcrumbs into a small bowl. Bring the milk to the boil and pour over the breadcrumbs. Set aside to soak and cool down. Mix the remaining 25g of breadcrumbs, the suet, salt, spices, raisins and orange rind together in a mixing bowl. In another bowl, beat together the two whole eggs plus one yolk. Mix the wet ingredients into the dry ones with a wooden spoon, stirring and beating for about 5 minutes.

Remove your pudding cloth from the water, wring it out, and lay flat on a kitchen surface. Tip 50g flour into the centre of the cloth and using the back of a spoon spread it out in a large circle over the surface of the cloth using a circular movement.

Spoon the pudding mixture into a rough ball shape in the middle of the cloth. Bring the corners together and pull the cloth around the pudding making a ball shape. Leave the mixture a little room to expand, while making sure it is tight enough to keep a good shape, and tie the neck closed with string.

Put the pudding in its cloth into the simmering water and simmer the pudding for 2 hours, topping up the water in the pan as needed. When ready, take the cloth out of the water (using rubber gloves), untie the string and carefully turn the pudding out onto a warmed plate. Serve hot, with your chosen sauce.
Though not specified by name on the nineteenth-century diet tables, it is clear from photographic evidence and former pupils’ memories that spotted dick was a much-loved pudding served to the children. We can also see that it uses the same ingredients – suet, sugar, raisins or currants – that came into the Hospital’s kitchens.

Although lots of contemporary recipes propose making this pudding in a basin, traditionally it is a long, ‘roly-poly’ type pudding and that is the version here. If you feel like a change from currants or raisins you can use the same method to make a jam, treacle or syrup roly-poly pudding instead – just replace the dried fruit with whatever else you’d prefer.

Method

Sieve together the flour, salt and baking powder (if using) and mix in the sugar, suet and dried fruit. Gradually mix in the cold water until it comes together in a firm paste – you might not use all the water.

Place the dough on a floured work surface and roll out into a large square (approximately 35cm). If using jam or syrup instead of the fruit, spread it over the surface of the dough up to about 2cm from the edges. Fold two of the sides – left and right - into the middle of the dough (so that they meet in the middle but don’t cross one another) and then roll the pudding up from front to back.

To cook, either wrap in buttered baking parchment and steam over a double boiler, or roll up in a floured cloth (see Charter Pudding) tied at each end and simmer for 1½ hours.

Alternatively, you could bake it in the oven: heat the oven to 200˚C, place the pudding on a lightly greased baking tray and bake on the middle shelf for about 40 minutes.

Serve with custard or jam.

**Ingredients**

- 485g self-raising flour (or 450g flour plus 30g baking powder)
- A pinch of salt
- 60g white sugar
- 170g suet
- 285ml cold water
- 200–250g raisins or currants, or a mixture
THOMAS BERNARD’S RICE PUDDING (1795)

In his document ‘On the Use of Rice’ Sir Thomas Bernard suggested replacing the wheat flour usually used in the children’s puddings with rice, noting with mild surprise that the children seemed to prefer it. We probably feel less surprised than he did: it is hard to imagine a flour pudding being anything but gluey, whereas this raisin studded rice pudding is an appetising pale gold colour, nicely textured and not too sweet.

Method

Heat the oven to 150˚C.

Weigh the rice into a large (1.25 litre capacity) ovenproof dish. Stir in the milk and sugar, and grate a little nutmeg on the top. Place in the oven and bake for about 2 hours. Serve hot, perhaps with a spoonful of jam.

If you prefer a thinner skin on your pudding you can stir half way through the cooking time. If you plan to do this, grate the nutmeg over the surface after you’ve stirred the pudding, instead of as it goes into the oven.

Ingredients

115g (4oz) short grain (pudding) rice
60g (2oz) raisins
25g (1oz) brown sugar
1150ml (2 pints) full cream milk
Nutmeg

ANOTHER FOUNDLING HOSPITAL RICE PUDDING

Nineteenth and twentieth-century reports on Foundling Hospital rice pudding always describe it as sweetened with treacle instead of raisins and sugar. This gives it a mid-brown colour and a mildly treacly, molasses flavour that is slightly, but not very, sweet.

Using treacle would have reduced the price per portion quite considerably. Some of the published recipes also suggest soaking the rice in water overnight first. Doing this reduces the quantity of milk needed when baking the pudding, bringing further economy.

This version gives the relative luxury of a full quantity of milk. If you’d like a taste of a more frugal version, soak the rice overnight in cold water, drain, and proceed as below using 820ml of milk instead of the full quantity specified.

Method

Heat the oven to 150˚C.

Gently warm the milk in a pan and stir in the treacle until it’s completely dissolved. Remove from the heat. Weigh the rice into a 1.25 litre capacity ovenproof dish and pour over the milk and treacle mixture. Stir and place in the oven. Bake for approximately 2 hours.

If you prefer a thinner skin on your pudding you can stir half way through the cooking time if you wish.

Ingredients

115g (4oz) short grain (pudding) rice
1150ml (2 pints) full cream milk
30g (1oz) treacle
Thomas Coram is supposed to have walked around with pockets full of gingerbread, which he would give to the foundlings. There are many forms of gingerbread, ranging from soft and sticky cakes to crunchy biscuits. Given Coram’s habit of keeping it in his pockets, it seems most likely that his gingerbread was one of the more robust, biscuity kinds. This recipe is a deliciously spicy and crisp one from Hannah Glasse’s *Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* (1747). You may adapt the spice quantities to your taste and leave out the candied peel if you wish – though it is unexpectedly delicious and children love it.

**Method**

Sift the flour, spices and candied peel (if using) into a bowl. Melt the butter, treacle and sugar together in a saucepan over a gentle heat. Allow to cool and pour into the dry ingredients, mixing together to form a stiff paste. Wrap the dough and allow it to rest for 1 hour in the fridge (you can also freeze this dough to bake at another time).

Pre-heat the oven to 180°C. On a lightly floured surface roll out your dough to ½ cm thick, and cut into whatever shapes you like, freehand or with cutters. Lay the biscuits on a piece of parchment paper on a metal baking sheet and bake for 10-12 minutes, being careful not to overcook or burn them. The gingerbread will be slightly soft when it comes out of the oven and will harden up as it cools down. Leave to sit for a few minutes then using a metal spatula transfer the biscuits carefully from the baking sheet to a wire rack to finish cooling.

This gingerbread can be decorated with royal icing if desired. It is an excellent version to use for building projects (ideal for a gingerbread house) and can also be used to make tree decorations: simply punch a hole in the biscuit shapes before baking them so that you can feed a piece of ribbon through and hang them up.

**Ingredients**

- 500g (1lb 1oz) flour
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp ground mace
- ¼ tsp grated nutmeg
- 115g (4oz) dark brown sugar
- 150g (5oz) butter (preferably unsalted)
- 315g (11oz) treacle
- 50g (2oz) candied peel, finely chopped (optional)
Have you tried any of these recipes at home? Share the results with us