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Independent review into governance arrangements at the Foundling Hospital with regard to its procurement of milk

A report for
The Foundling Hospital

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This report is a supplement to the Foundling Museum's current exhibition: "*Feeding the 400*".

Guest-curator Jane Levi discovered an intriguing report while conducting research for the exhibition. It was included in one of the bound collections that John Brownlow put together. Brownlow was a foundling, baptised at the hospital in 1801 and was also its secretary from 1849 until he retired in 1872. In total, he was associated with the organisation for 72 years.

Jane found one sub-committee report in the collection particularly interesting. It was undated, but she estimated it was written in 1813 - the period Brownlow was a child living at the hospital.

The paper revealed evidence of fraudulent activity in the management of the hospital's milk supply, dating as far back as the eighteenth century. The report says that for several years, despite the hospital's governors paying for the procurement of whole milk for the foundlings, skimmed milk was delivered to the hospital instead.

Jane found the report interesting, so to obtain a contemporary perspective on this curious scandal, to provide some historical context about the hospital and about the production of milk at the time, she forwarded the archival materials to Verita Consultants LLP, a founding corporate member of the Foundling Museum.

The Foundling Hospital's general committee became aware in about 1813 that for several years, the milk delivered to the hospital did not comply with contractual arrangements.

Thomas Harrison of Grove Farm, Kentish Town supplied skimmed milk to the hospital between 1755 and 1816.

The general committee was the main management body at the hospital. A general court and various sub-committees oversaw various other matters in the hospital. The hospital's governors made up the bulk of personnel in all these groups.

The governors were drawn from a list of 375 candidates that Thomas Coram, the founder of the hospital, aggregated. A month after King George II had signed a royal charter for the hospital in November 1739, Coram officially handed the charter to 170 governors at a ceremony in Somerset house. One of the governors was the hospital's first president, the Duke of Bedford.

Shortly after the ceremony, the hospital's general committee formed. Sir Hans Sloane, the speaker of the House of Commons was one of its members. The committee members set themselves the task of investigating the organisation of similar hospitals abroad, such as the hospital for foundlings in Paris, which George II's wife Queen Caroline was keenly interested in. The committee also began fundraising activities and to look for a building to house the hospital.

As the hospital developed, the committee met on a regular basis to discuss governance issues. One issue was the weekly inspection of many of the hospital's food supplies such as bread, cheese and meat. Interestingly, the supply of milk did not seem to undergo such regular quality control.

A set of archival records, akin to modern job descriptions reveal that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the hospital's matron, steward, secretary and cook were all responsible for overseeing the supply of milk and food to the hospital's 400 children. The matron and steward in particular were responsible for ensuring that the children's meals were in accordance with the nutritional balance that the hospital's diet tables prescribed. The hospital created the diet tables to ensure children ate and drank healthily. The quality of milk supplied to the hospital was important to the governors, who were heavily involved in the creation and review of the diet tables. They specifically ordered the supply of whole milk because it was nutritionally richer than skimmed milk.

The matron was responsible for reporting deviation from these tables to the general committee. Records show that when she was asked whether she had noticed anything untoward about the supply of milk, she said the quality of milk had been consistent ever since the start of her employment at the hospital in 1773. She believed the governors were aware that the milk they procured for the children was skimmed and felt that the price they paid for it was not her business. Interestingly, she also said that whole milk was supplied for consumption by the officers and servants of the hospital.

The steward was responsible for examining the hospital's provisions and stores and was accountable for receipts. He was not supposed to receive goods on behalf of the hospital without proper invoices or instruction from the committee. The steward was also not to receive gratuity, fee or reward from the hospital's contractors or sub-contractors. It is possible that the explicit inclusion of this stipulation in the steward's job description resulted from prior incidents of fraud against the hospital.

Records show that the steward - who had only recently been appointed to the job at the time the report was written - knew not only that skimmed milk was being delivered, but

also the price the hospital paid for it. This would have presumably put him in a position to see a mismatch between cost and quality.

We found no evidence presenting the views of the cook, but she would have been well aware of the differences between skimmed and whole milk, including the inferior quality, nutritional and calorific values of skimmed milk. We believe the evidence of the cook may have been excluded because her role as a servant, rather than an officer, meant she had no entrusting responsibility.

The exact duration of the fraud was not known, but the report estimated the difference in cost between whole and skimmed milk was about £200 a year. This would be equivalent to over £12,000 today.

In 1801 the general committee requested that Thomas Harrison delivered milk in covered pails secured with padlocks to eliminate the possibility that agents from outside the supply chain could tamper with the milk. However, this practice continued for only a short period because the locks “became faulty” and it seems no alternative safeguard was sought or put in place. This suggests the hospital was aware of the potential for misconduct related to milk supply.

The historical context of milk production gives some clues about why Thomas Harrison, perhaps in collusion with hospital staff, may have sought to improve his profit margins. Between the early 19th century and the 1870s, London’s milk supply was produced largely in the city, by cowmen like Thomas Harrison. Cows were originally grazed in the open fields of Camden, Kentish Town and Islington. However, as urbanisation spread, cows were increasingly kept in restrictive, dank and insanitary cowsheds in the expanding built up areas of the city and in new areas some distance from traditional pastures. Cowmen’s options for grazing their herds were reduced.

Cattle disease further reduced milk production in the city in the 19th century. In the latter half of the century a rinderpest epidemic (an infectious viral disease of cattle) afflicted the trade, undermining profitability. In the mid-19th century, competition against London’s cowmen increased because milk brought by rail from the Brentwood and Romford districts of Essex regularly supplied London in times when rinderpest epidemic caused shortages.

From the 1860s, milk imported from the country increasingly became the mainstay of the milk trade, allowing London’s inhabitants to buy better and more affordable milk than before. When the first fresh milk was brought in by rail from the countryside, it was

transported in open trailers and had often turned and become 'like dirty cheese'¹ by the time it reached the city. But by the end of the 1860s, a new mechanical cooler had been developed. Soon after this metal churns full of quick-cooled milk markedly improved the city's milk supplies from the country.

The hospital could have taken several actions to obstruct Thomas Harrison's dishonest behaviour. The practice of delivering milk in pails secured with padlocks should have been resumed. The hospital could have developed a 'whistleblowing policy' so that staff members such as the secretary could raise concerns about a mismatch between cost and quality. In the hospital's melting pot of classes, where governors, staff and foundlings interacted, this could have supported individuals to report misconduct, irrespective of their status. Finally, the general committee should have included milk in its regular quality controls as it did for bread, cheese and meat. In general terms, the Thomas Harrison case suggests the hospital should have had more checks on its contractual and procurement arrangements.

¹Tannahill, R, 1988. The food supply revolution; The scientific revolution. In: *Food in history*. London: Penguin Group, 1988, 306-308; 332-333

Documents reviewed

Reports

- “On Milk’ circa 1813, in John Brownlow Papers Vol. 41. (LMA: A/FH/M/01/022)
- Matron’s Reports on Children at Nurse in the Country, 1798 Oct - 1807 Jan (LMA: A/FH/A/29/003/001)

Rules and regulations

- *Rules and regulations of the Foundling hospital relating to domestic management.* London: C Jaques, 30, Kenton street, Brunswick Square, 1869. (LMA: A/FH/A/07/003/005)
- Rules For Conduct Of Individual Officers: The Treasurer, 1912 (LMA: A/FH/A/07/003/007/001); Rules For Conduct Of Individual Officers: The Secretary, 1912 (LMA: A/FH/A/07/003/007/008); Rules For Conduct Of Individual Officers: The Office Of Matron, 1912. (LMA: A/FH/A/07/003/007/015); Rules for Conduct of Individual Officers: The Steward, 1912. (LMA: A/FH/A/07/003/007/026)
- Rules For Conduct Of Officers: 'Directions To The Officers, Nurses And Servants Of The Foundling Hospital', 1790 Aug.(LMA: A/FH/A/07/003/001)
- *Foundling Hospital Officers' Rules 1879-1914.*(LMA: A/FH/M/03/008)
- *Rules And Regulations Of The Foundling Hospital Relating To Domestic Management, 1869.* (LMA: A/FH/A/07/003/005)

Various Officers’ Bonds of Fidelity

- Bond of Fidelity: Mr Lievesley Bound As Secretary, 1799; 1804(LMA: A/FH/A/07/001/001 & A/FH/A/07/001/002)
- Draft Bond For Treasurer, 17xx (LMA: A/FH/A/07/001/010)
- Bond of Fidelity: Elizabeth Leicester bound as Matron, 1759 (LMA: A/FH/A/07/001/004/005)
- Bond of Fidelity: John Edmonds bound as Steward, 1762 Nov (LMA: Reference A/FH/A/07/001/004/004)

Registers

- *Servants Register, 1758-1771.* (LMA: A/FH/A/07/002)

Meeting minutes

- Transcribed letters and resolutions in Minutes of meetings of July 1813, April 1815, January 1816 in Sub-Committee Minutes Vol. 29, 1812 Feb-1816 Jan. (LMA: A/FH/A/03/005/029).

Correspondence

- Letter from Thomas Harrison to The Steward of the Foundling Hospital, 7th July 1813 in *Correspondence: Surnames Starting With H*, 1813. (LMA: A/FH/A/06/001/071/008)
- *Letter from Thomas Harrison to The Committee of the Foundling Hospital, 6th January 1816 in Correspondence: Surnames Starting With H, 1816.* (LMA: A/FH/A/06/001/074/008)

Other archival material reviewed

- *Expenses of diet for the children of the Foundling hospital, 1787*
- Parliamentary Acts: An Act For Better Governing And Employing The Poor... Within The Parishes Of St Giles In The Fields And St George, Bloomsbury. 14 Geo III c. 62, 1774. (LMA: A/FH/A/22/005/001)
- Bills paid to Harrison, 1814 in Select Committee Minutes, 1800 - 1816 (LMA: A/FH/A/03/014/001/001); General Committee Minutes 1812 May - 1814 Mar (LMA:A/FH/K/02/032); General Committee Minutes 1814 MaR - 1816 Jun (LMA:A/FH/K/02/033).
- Cash accounts, 1812- 1813 in General Committee Minutes 1812 May - 1814 Mar (LMA:A/FH/K/02/032).
- Account of provisions eaten in a quarter, with list of servants discharged, circa 1780. (LMA: A/FH/M/01/005/110-117)
- 'Cost of provisioning each child in the Hospital per annum at present prices the quantities being agreeably to the Dietary', 2nd November 1836 in *Memoranda Book: Miscellaneous Notes And Reports*, 1836-1844. (LMA: A/FH/A/06/011/001)
- Special Committee for carrying into effect the resolutions of General Committee respecting proclamation concerning possible alterations in diet, 1800 Dec (LMA: A/FH/A/03/014/001/004)
- Committee of Accounts minutes 1814 May - 1818 Nov (LMA: A/FH/A/03/012/007)

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- Tannahill, R, 1988. The food supply revolution; The scientific revolution. In: *Food in history*. London: Penguin Group, 1988, 306-308; 332-333
- Steward's Order Book: Milk, 1926 Apr-1928 Nov. (LMA: A/FH/A/17/014/029)
- Wilson, B, 2008. *Swindled. From poison sweets to counterfeit coffee- the dark history of the food cheats*. In: London: John Murray, an Hachette Livre UK company, 2008, 114-119, 152-167
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http://www.history.ac.uk/sites/history.ac.uk/files/ds_allin_foundling_hospital_early_years.pdf

Image on front page of report

- *Frederick Cayley Robinson, Orphan girls entering the refectory of a hospital, 1915* © Wellcome Library. Licenced under CC by 4.0