INTRODUCTION
Display 1: World War I

The Foundling at War archive display focuses on the Foundling Hospital pupils who served in World War I. This display is one of four displays at the Foundling Museum focussing on the topic ‘Foundlings at War’. Future displays will explore themes on Military Bands, The Napoleonic Wars and Through the Ages. According to Coram’s Book of Remembrance, 32 men and 1 woman were killed in action from the Foundling Hospital in World War I.

This display will highlight:
• How the war affected admissions to the Foundling Hospital
• Individual former pupils’ experiences of the Great War
• How their institutionalised life at the Hospital prepared them for military action
During World War I and its aftermath, admissions to the Foundling Hospital increased, causing the Governors to report that ‘never since the early days of the Hospital have so many applications been received’. Whilst history was written on the battlefields of the Somme, Ypres and Passchendaele, individual, personal tragedies were unfolding at home.

The stories within this display speak of the fear and hope of the soldiers and the women they left behind, trying to deal with an unexpected pregnancy in the turbulence of wartime Britain. Each letter gives varying circumstances of why these women petitioned for their child’s admission into the Hospital. Some women had fallen pregnant by childhood sweethearts, had affairs with soldiers or were due to be married: all had been affected by the War. There was a negative stigma to becoming pregnant if you were unmarried, and as a pregnant woman it would have been likely that your family would have disowned you. As a mother, to gain entry for your child into the Foundling Hospital you would have to prove that you were of good character and moral grounding. This would mean sending all evidence such as letters from the father or even documents from the war office to support your petition for admission. The Governors were looking for evidence that you were a respectable woman and these personal documents showing the relationship between the petitioner and their partner would have been the perfect evidence that marriage or a promise of a relationship was proposed. You would have had to give these letters permanently to the Foundling Hospital as evidence to support your petition.

In the letter from Eddie to Madge (on display) the mother Madge had met Eddie whilst he was recovering from injuries in a London Hospital.

Transcript of one of the letters from Eddie to Madge on Display:

1918
Dear Madge
Just rec. your card & you say you have not rec. my letter I wrote you last Friday. You must have it by now, I also told you to send enclosed a slip regarding our marriage. I forgot to put it in but you will find it this time, I have just been to see the Commanding Officer & he has rec. Rev ---- ‘s letter & you will have to see the Doctor & get a certificate as to your state of health. Will you do this Madge right away & forward everything to me as soon as possible because I can’t get permission without same. Be wise & not let him know anything about your condition if possible. Excuse short letter. Bye Bye for now dear, love and kisses always yours Eddie

Ans.[answer] soon soon
Xxxxxxx all for you dear

Letter from Eddie to Madge, 1918 © Coram
In the Museum or back at School:

**Discuss:**
- Discuss with your group the ethical guidelines for objects in museums – how would you feel if your letter was on display?

**Activities:**
- Draw a picture to your mother or father from the perspective of a child being submitted into the Foundling Hospital
- Create a role play around a couple separated by war
- Write your own love letter – Consider your options as a mother or a father in World War I either dealing with an unexpected pregnancy or losing a child
- Prepare a monologue of a mother or father whose child had been accepted or rejected by the Foundling Hospital

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**LOVE LETTERS AND ADMISSIONS**

Madge became pregnant following their brief affair. Despite the promises of affection in this letter and many others, and a ring that was sent to her by Eddie, he returned to Canada and soon married someone else. Madge tried to get in contact with Eddie and asked the Canadian Discharge Depot to help her. In one of the letters to Eddie they write:

‘It was bad enough getting her into trouble my lad, but leaving her afterwards without any provision, is surely not worthy of a man and a Canadian soldier.’

After many failed attempts to get in contact with Eddie, Madge eventually petitioned to the Foundling Hospital to have her child accepted so she could return to work. In 1920 the General Committee minutes noted that the secretary had applied to the Canadian and Australian Governments for financial help because colonial soldiers fathered many Foundling children during the war. The Canadians did donate some money to the Foundling Hospital. In the year of 1918, 75 petitions from mothers were put to the Governors of the Hospital, of which 50 were accepted. There are many stories of mothers just like Madge within the Hospital archives that date within 1914-18. The letters between the petitioners and the fathers in this display come from the closed section of Coram’s archives. We have been given special permission to include these items in the display but we are purposefully not disclosing all the details in line with Coram’s ethical guidelines. During World War I, the birth rate dropped but in the years after 1918-1920 there was a surge in births after soldiers returned from the Front. These years are still one of the highest records of births to this day.

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**STATISTICS FOR 1918.**

| Children received under six months of age | 29 |
| " over six months " | 21 |
| Girls placed out in domestic service | 23 |
| Children restored to their Mothers | 5 |
| Boys enlisted into Army Bands | 16 |
| Children died in the country—under one year | 3 |
| " " " two years | 3 |
| " " " three " | 1 |
| " " " five " | 1 |
| " " " eight " | 8 |

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Page from the 1918 Annual Report of the Foundling Hospital © Coram  
Exterior View of the Foundling Hospital in the early twentieth century © Coram
During World War I life at the Hospital remained mostly unaffected. The Foundling Hospital was still based at the London site in Brunswick Square (the building was demolished in 1926), and although there were a number of air attacks in the area (Queens Square and The Dolphin Pub off High Holborn were struck) none significantly affected the Foundling Hospital. When an air raid was imminent, the Foundlings and staff went to the cellars of the building to prepare for a suspected attack. On the 26 June 1918 the Queen made a surprise visit to the Hospital, probably on one of her many visits to institutions to raise morale.

The annual summer camp was extended by one week as there was a restricted use of the Hospital grounds due to military occupation, during this time soldiers and horses used the front of the hospital and the colonnades as a training space. After military occupation the front of the Hospital had to be re-tarmacked due to substantial damage at a cost to the Foundling Hospital. The heavy cost of food and clothing during the war years was an anxiety for the governors of the Foundling Hospital. Weekly meals included meat, potatoes, dairy and bread and the governors put great efforts to ensuring the freshness and quality of the food. During World War I, there was a problem with meat supply for the Foundling Hospital, but arrangements were made with the food controller and they made their way through the war without any serious shortages. Throughout World War I, the strict regime of the Foundling Hospital remained relatively the same, although the children would undoubtedly have been affected by the War.

In the Museum or back at School:

Discuss:
• Why did life at the Foundling remain relatively the same despite the World War I?
• How should the Foundling children have felt having their grounds occupied by troops?
• How would a life of a Foundling during the First World War compared to a regular child?

Activities:
• Look at the menu from the Foundling Hospital in the Introductory Gallery. Draw one of their meals on a plate or using your imagination design them a new menu – it could be a Foundling Feast!
• During World War I the Foundling Hospital had a visit from the Queen. Imagine what this experience would have been like for a Foundling? Write the Queen a letter or draw her a picture from the perspective of a Foundling. What would you want to tell her?
In the annual report of 1918, 80% of boys leaving the Foundling Hospital had enlisted into the Army Bands. Joining the military had always been a pathway for boys leaving the Foundling Hospital but the need for soldiers to sign for World War 1 directed more boys down this route. Most boys leaving the Foundling Hospital would have been between the ages of 14-15 years old, joining Army bands initially and later becoming stretcher bearers on the front line. As the boys grew up within the military they would have transferred into different regiments.

Life at the Foundling Hospital would have prepared the boys for military service. Through strict regimented institutional care, the Foundling’s were used to having limited personal belongings, being in uniform and having little privileges. The Governors endeavoured to keep in touch with all Foundlings that saw military action, some former pupils were wounded, killed and some received special distinction. Through the Benevolent Fund, the governors kept seven boys who were Prisoners of War in Germany supplied with food and other necessities. Amongst the boys that joined the military from World War 1, three boys from the Foundling Hospital were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, three were mentioned in Despatches (an official report written by a superior officer and sent to the high command, in which is described the soldier’s gallant or meritorious action in the face of the enemy) and one gained the King’s Medal for saving life at sea.

**FORMER PUPILS AT THE FRONT**

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**In the Museum or back at School:**

**Activities:**
- The design of The Next of Kin Memorial Plaque was chosen through a competition in the UK and the British Empire. The winner was Mr. Edward Carter Preston and his design of Britannia was used to commemorate fallen service men in World War 1. In groups discuss the images on the plaque and there meanings. Think about designing a contemporary Memorial Plaque for modern day Military Service men and women, what imagery would you include? Draw a design for your plaque and present it to the rest of the class.
FOUNDLING IN FOCUS: GEORGE ONSLOW

George Onslow (b.1891, d. 31 October 1914) was a private in the 5th Dragoon Guards. He was killed in action in October 1914 at the battle of Ypres, aged 23. His name is listed on the Menin Gate memorial and he is one of the former pupils on the Foundling Hospital Roll of Honour for the World War 1. The next of kin memorial plaque otherwise known as a ‘Dead Man’s Penny/Widow’s Penny’ on display would have been sent to relatives of those whose deaths were caused by the World War I. As we believe George did not marry, the Foundling Hospital would have been registered as his next of kin. They would have had to apply as George’s next of kin to receive this plaque.

In the Museum or back at School:

Discuss:
• Why may institutional care have helped Foundling boys be prepared for life in the military?

Activities:
• During World War I, soldiers sent and received many letters to and from home. These letters boosted moral amongst the troops. Write a letter, poem or draw a picture from the perspective of a Foundling on the front line in World War I to send back to the Foundling Hospital. Think about:
  • How would you feel?
  • Would you send it to your birth parents, the Foundling Hospital or maybe a friend?
  • How would you feel compared to the other soldiers?
  • Would you be happy to be away from the Hospital and serving your country?
The Roll of Honour was donated by a former pupils of the Foundling Hospital who wanted to ensure that their predecessors who had died in active service were properly recognised. After World War 1 was over the fallen from were commemorated in a memorial service on the 2 February 1919 in the Foundling Hospital Chapel.

In the Museum or back at School:

Discuss:
- Look at the way the world is commemorating World War I from 2014-2018, looking at things that are going on in your local area
- Look at the poppy as a symbol of commemoration and discuss why it is used.

Activities:
- Design your own commemorative plaque or badge for the First World War and leave on the railings of your school or at the Foundling Museum
- Design a roll of honour to commemorate the soldiers from World War I
- Find a soldier from your own local area to research or research a Foundling from the Foundling Hospital to present to your class.
- Design and present a monument to commemorate fallen soldiers in World War I to place in your school or public place in your community.

Remembrance Day is also known as Poppy Day, because it is traditional to wear an artificial poppy. The poppy remains a humble, neutral and universal symbol of Remembrance and hope. They are sold by the Royal British Legion, a charity dedicated to helping war veterans.