Back in England, Thomas Coram saw lots of orphans living on the streets, and realized London was a very unsafe and scary place for children. There was no clean water, food, social care, education or housing for the poor.

When Jacqueline Wilson wrote Hetty Feather, she did lots of research about the Foundling Hospital to make sure her story was based on historical fact. We suggest you do some research before starting your story or illustration, as this will help spark your imagination. Here are some Hospital history tips to help you get started.

HOSPITAL HISTORY TIPS

The Foundling Hospital was set up in 1739 by Thomas Coram.

Thomas Coram was a shipwright, who sailed to America building ships. On his travels, he saw very few orphaned children living on the streets. Instead they lived in children’s homes.

Back in 1740, children’s homes were known as Hospitals.

When the Foundling Hospital opened its doors, there was a long queue of mothers, waiting to give up their babies.

Back in England, Thomas Coram saw lots of orphans living on the streets, and realized London was a very unsafe and scary place for children. There was no clean water, food, social care, education or housing for the poor.

Thomas Coram decided to set up a children’s home -The Foundling Hospital. It took 17 years to get the kings permission.

Mothers who gave up their babies probably thought they were giving their child a chance of a better life.

Unfortunately, if a mother had no money, job or husband (they may have died or gone to war), then they did not have many options.
At the Hospital, mothers were taken to the Court Room and asked to take a ball out of a bag of coloured balls. A white ball meant their baby was accepted into the Hospital, a black ball meant their baby was rejected and a red ball meant they were on the waiting list. This must have been very stressful for the mothers.

All babies had a medical test and their acceptance was subject to this.

Once babies were accepted, they were given a number disc to wear around their neck. The foundlings wore this all the time.

Each token was wrapped in a sealed envelope called a billet, with a description of the child’s features and clothing.

When mothers gave up their babies, they left a token. The tokens were a way of linking each baby with its mother. This was in case a mother returned to reclaim her child. Sadly, this hardly ever happened!

Babies were christened and given a new name by the governors. This was to give them a fresh start.

Then babies were fostered by wet nurses - often in the countryside. Wet nurses looked after babies until they were 4 or 5 years old, when they were returned to the Hospital.

One of the first foster mothers was called Francis Flint. She fostered three children, Alice aged 9 plus James and Maria aged 2.

Once at the Hospital, foundlings wore a uniform. Girls wore a brown serge dress; a white apron and a bib called a tippet. Boys wore a brown suit and waistcoat. All children were given a haircut.

Boys and girls lived, and were educated in separate wings of the Hospital. They met in the Chapel once a week.

Foundlings had to wear their school uniforms every day, including Sundays.
The children were very well educated. They were all taught maths, English and prayers and sang in a choir. Girls learnt sewing, darning and cooking. Boys learnt rope making, marching and to play a musical instrument.

Boys helped to grow vegetables in the kitchen gardens, for the children’s meals. When they left, some of them became gardeners.

The dormitories were run by nurses, who looked after the children. Matron was in charge of the nurses and the school master was in charge of the stewards and the children’s learning.

When girls left the Hospital, they mostly became maids and cooks. When boys left the Hospital, they became servants, tradesmen or joined the military.

The first Hospital doctor was called Dr Mead. If the foundlings became unwell, they were sent to the sick bay.

From 1741 when the first babies were admitted, to 1954, when the Hospital closed, the Foundling Hospital cared for around 25,000 children.

Foundlings ate a nutritious but repetitive menu.

The children slept in identical beds, in big impersonal dormitories.

The foundling’s ate in silence. Matron banged her mallet to silence the children!

HOSPITAL HISTORY TIPS

If you click on this link https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/about/our-history to the Museum’s website you will find more information and pictures of the Foundling Hospital.