

# Luxury and licentiousness: funding the Foundling Hospital, London, 1739 – 1760

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*A concert ticket from 1750 for a performance of Handel's Messiah at the Foundling Hospital represents the appeal to private sponsors through music and art. Later, when the hospital is supported through taxation, a pamphlet, Candid Remarks on Mr Hanway's Candid Historical Account of the Foundling Hospital (1760) expresses resentment at public money being spent on what are seen as the immoral purposes of the Hospital. Ultimately, neither private nor public funding provided a complete answer to the problem of the vast number of unwanted babies in the eighteenth century.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Foundling Hospital at Coram Fields in London, established in 1739, was in its first decades an enormously popular venture. Its founder, Thomas Coram (1668-1751), the doughty and determined seaman from humble origins, so eloquently portrayed in William Hogarth's painting of 1740, won over the ladies of the aristocracy with his genuine love and pity for the abandoned babies that he witnessed every day along his walk into the City.<sup>1</sup> Run as a private enterprise on the joint stock model,<sup>2</sup> the Hospital attracted funding from royalty and from 'private subscriptions and legacies of benevolent individuals'.<sup>3</sup> From its inception, it worked to present itself as a fashionable charity and drew on the generosity of artists and musicians to appeal to wealthy patrons. The elegant architecture, paintings and rococo decoration of its public rooms were the setting for 'the most fashionable morning lounge of the reign of George II'.<sup>4</sup>

However, as demand grew to accept ever greater numbers of babies, the Hospital was forced in 1756 to seek assistance from the government. Funded through taxation, the General Reception was a radical attempt to admit all babies presented at the Foundling Hospital. However, the task was simply too great and became open to corruption and exploitation.<sup>5</sup> Resentment and moral outrage against the public financial support of immoral lifestyles were expressed against 'This F.H. [Foundling Hospital] Idol, which had so long been worship'd' and the subsidy ceased in 1761.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Brownlow, *The History and Objects of the Foundling Hospital: with a Memoir of the Founder* (London: C. Jacques, 1865), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1703-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Brownlow, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Betsy Rodgers, *Cloak of Charity: Studies in Eighteenth Century Philanthropy* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1949), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Brownlow, pp. 10-15.

<sup>6</sup> David Stansfield, *Candid Remarks on Mr Hanway's Candid Historical Account of the Foundling Hospital* (London, 1760), p. 7.

This article will look at two artefacts relating to the Foundling Hospital, a concert ticket and a pamphlet, in order to explore the contrast between the exclusive image needed to attract private donations and the disquiet at the public funding of 'Vice, Disorder, Licentiousness, Depopulation and Ruin'.<sup>7</sup>

## LUXURY

The ticket (Fig.1) is for a performance at the Chapel of the Foundling Hospital of a sacred oratorio composed by George Frederick Handel. A hugely popular composer, Handel wrote music for Queen Anne, George I and George II, and was responsible for the creation of the new form of music, the English oratorio.<sup>8</sup>

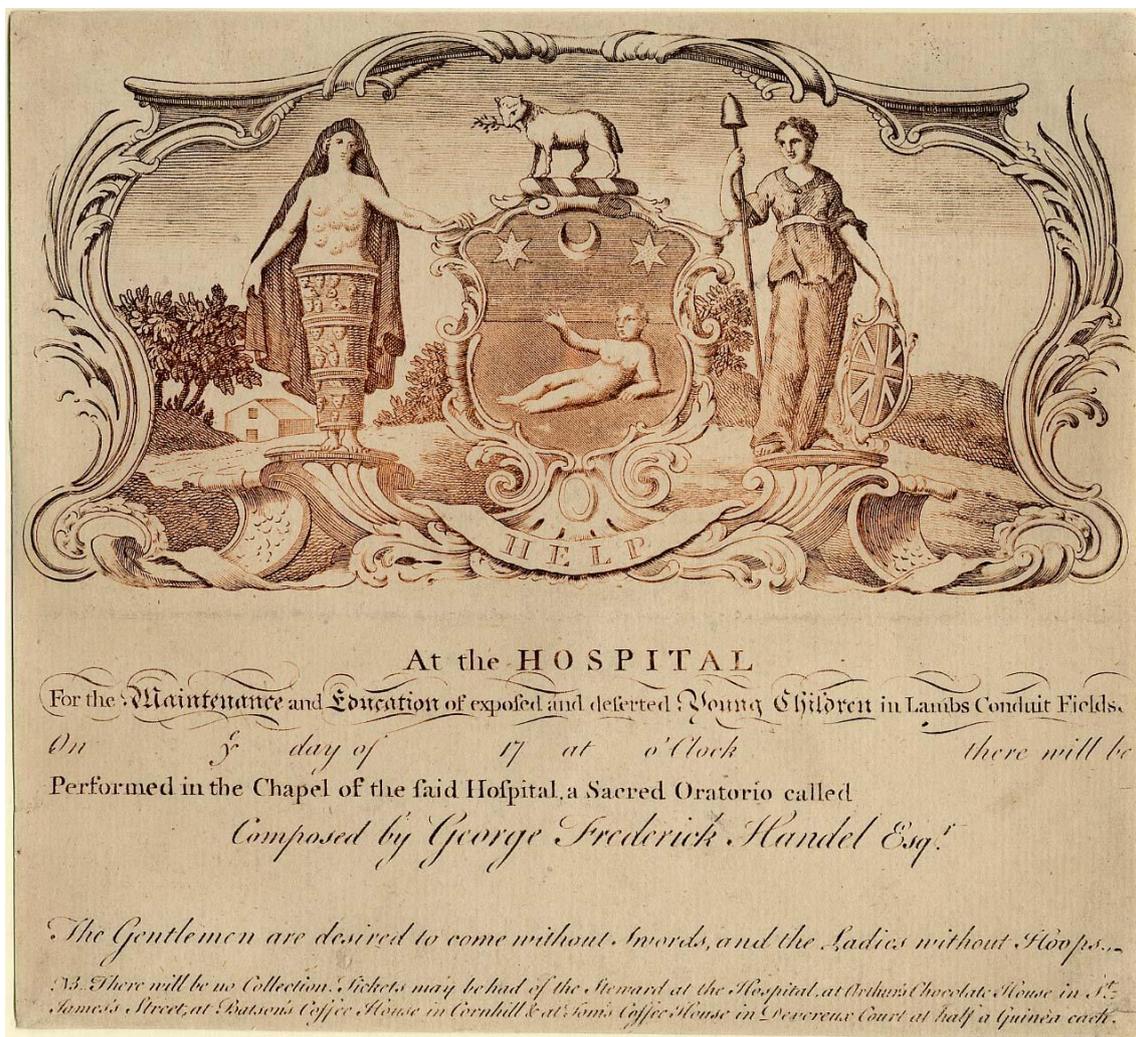


Figure 1: Arms of the Foundling Hospital with an admission ticket (1750), paper, 19.7 cm × 21.4 cm (British Museum, London; © Trustees of the British Museum)

<sup>7</sup> Stansfield, *Candid Remarks*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music*, ed. by Simon Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 541-542.

The ticket was printed in red but now appears dark brown, with pink-brown in the shading of the picture.<sup>9</sup> On fairly thin buff-coloured paper, rather than thick card, it leaves blank spaces for the date so that the same printing plate could be used over many years without re-engraving. The Hogarth scholar, Ronald Paulson, considers that although the design of the admission ticket is based on Hogarth's 1747 sketch for a coat of arms for the Hospital (Fig.2), he himself did not make the engraving.<sup>10</sup>

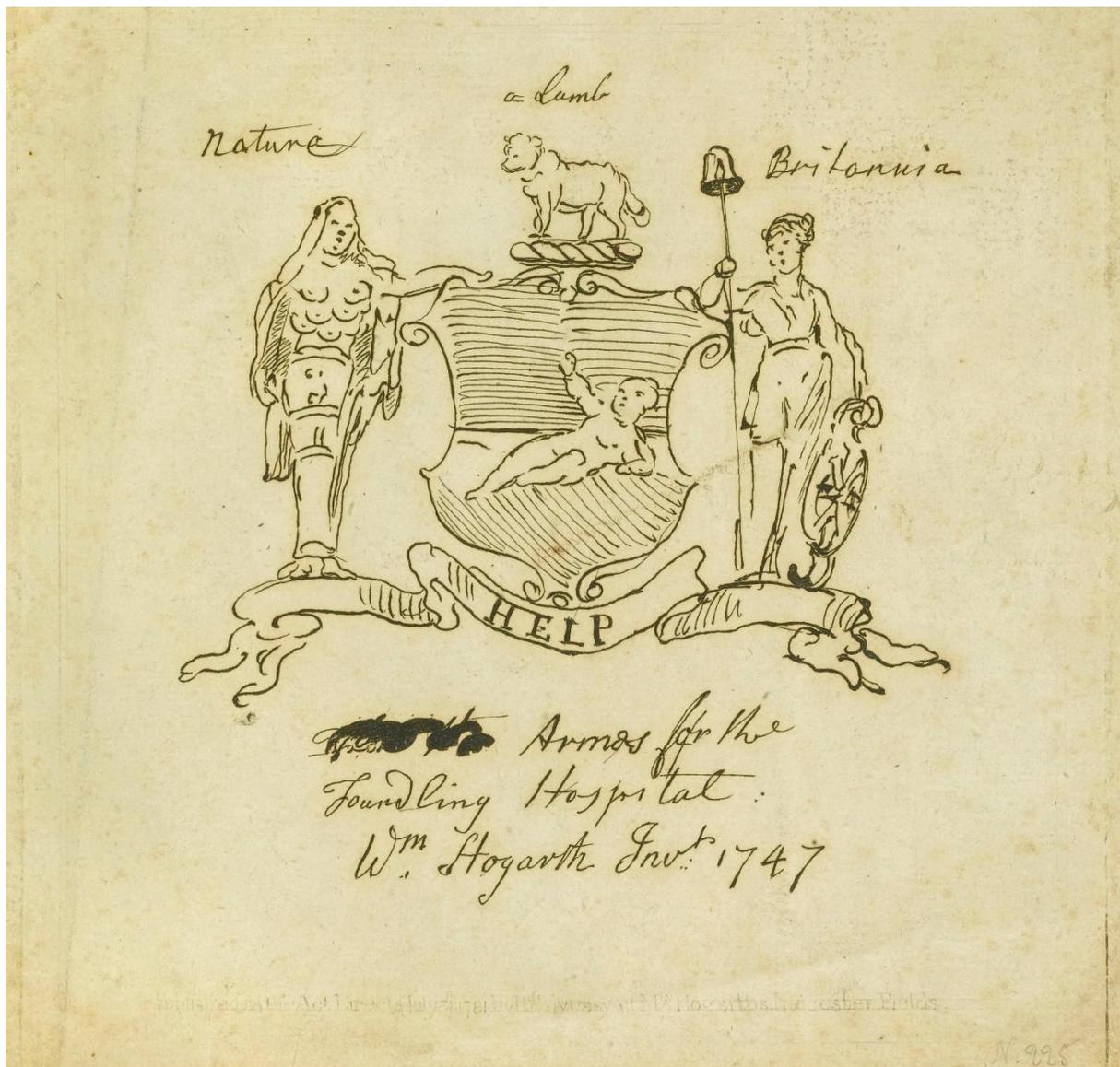


Figure 2: William Hogarth, *Arms for the Foundling Hospital* (1747), ink on paper (Foundling Museum, London; © Coram in the care of the Foundling Hospital)

In his sketch, Hogarth labels the figures 'Nature', 'a Lamb', and 'Britannia'. The many-breasted Nature represents the care given to the babies. On the right, Britannia holds the cap of Liberty in her right hand

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works* (London: The Print Room, 1989), p. 192.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

and in her left, a shield with a Union Jack for the relatively recently united country. The inclusion of Britannia on the ticket demonstrates a pride in national charity, and an appeal to the aristocracy to prove their Britishness by becoming involved in good causes.<sup>11</sup> Whilst Foundling Hospitals had been established as religious foundations in Rome in the thirteenth century, in Florence in 1419 and Paris in 1670, this was the first Foundling Hospital in Britain.<sup>12</sup> Earlier efforts had included those at Christ's Hospital in London in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century; proposals by Mrs Elizabeth Collier to King James II in 1687; and by merchants to Queen Anne; or by Elihu Yale or Robert Nelson in 1711. All had foundered on the grounds of moral objections and cost.<sup>13</sup>

The design of the ticket itself is grander and more baroque than Hogarth's simple sketch, placing the figures in an elaborate cartouche and rococo frame. It adds the semi-rural setting of the Hospital in Lambs Conduit Fields, with the house on the left perhaps representing home. At the same time, it retains the message of assistance and nurture for abandoned babies. In both the sketch and the ticket, the simple word 'Help' in the centre, under the naked baby, constitutes both an aim and a plea.

The intended audience for the event, the upper classes of society, is apparent from the text. Men are asked to come without swords and women without hoops. This was no doubt so that as many people as possible could be accommodated, but the request also indicates the usual style of the anticipated attendees. Tickets were half a guinea each. Presumably, demanding a high set price was considered more profitable than relying on generosity in the collection: the ticket states that one will not be held, in a *note bene* in small writing at the bottom. It adds that:

Tickets may be had of the Steward at the Hospital, at Arthur's Chocolate House in St James's Street, at Batson's Coffee House in Cornhill & at Tom's Coffee House in Devereux Court, coffee and chocolate houses being the haunts of fashionable men about town.

The date has not been written on this particular ticket but the first performance at the Hospital took place in May 1749. A report in the *Gentleman's Magazine* describes the magnificence of the event.

The Prince and Princess of Wales, with a great number of persons of quality and distinction, were at the Chapel of the Foundling Hospital, to hear several pieces of vocal and instrumental music composed by George Frederick Handel, Esq., for the benefit of the foundation. 1<sup>st</sup>. The music of the late Fire Works, and the anthem on the Peace; 2<sup>nd</sup>. Select pieces from the oratorio of Solomon,

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<sup>11</sup> Colley, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup> Brownlow, p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 8-9.

relating to the dedication of the temple; and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Several pieces composed for the occasion, the words taken from Scripture, applicable to the charity and its benefactors. There was no collection, but the tickets were at half-a-guinea, and the audience above a thousand.<sup>14</sup>

Handel had already written an *Anthem for the Foundling Hospital* which contained the *Hallelujah Chorus*, later incorporated into *Messiah*, and the notes of the British Museum curator relating to this blank ticket refer to the existence of another example ‘completed in manuscript for a performance of *Messiah* at 12 noon on 1 May 1750’.<sup>15</sup>

So popular were the annual performances of *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital, conducted or attended by Handel, that many were turned away. These events raised over £6,000, gave positive publicity for the Hospital and enabled the ‘striking and impressive’ chapel to be completed, upon which Handel donated an organ.<sup>16</sup> The Foundling Hospital’s historian, John Brownlow, writing in 1858, notes that there were so many present at the inauguration that Handel repeated the performance a fortnight later and that ‘upon one of these occasions the audience was conveyed in no less than 800 coaches and chairs’.<sup>17</sup> Sunday services and baptisms in the chapel were an opportunity to see the Foundling children and soon the Hospital had a waiting list for annual subscriptions for seats in the pews and galleries.<sup>18</sup> Handel became a Governor of the Hospital and on his death in 1759, he bequeathed to the Hospital the ‘Fair Copy of the Score and all Parts of his Oratorio call’d the Messiah’ – over a thousand pages of music. This enabled the annual performances in the chapel to continue, which they did until 1777.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this impression of aristocratic leisure and pleasant entertainment, the Foundling Hospital had from the beginning faced the difficulty of reconciling a controversial social problem, namely the rescue of abandoned babies, with its need to attract wealthy and influential donors. For seventeen years, Coram had walked miles every day asking for signatures for his petition to the King for the grant to create a Foundling Hospital. Unfortunately, few wished to become involved. Although the aristocracy were less worried by stigmas of illegitimacy than the ‘middling sort’,<sup>20</sup> it seems that they were nevertheless reluctant to give their support. Eventually, it was the women of the aristocracy who provided the initial signatures and their husbands then followed.<sup>21</sup> Having lent their names to the enterprise, the aristocracy declined any active

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<sup>14</sup> Brownlow, p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=1431746](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1431746) [accessed 2 February 2020].

<sup>16</sup> Brownlow, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> McClure, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

involvement in its day-to-day organisation, which was left to businessmen and tradesmen,<sup>22</sup> and artists such as Hogarth.

Already a Governor of two London hospitals and with a keen interest in social justice, Hogarth was involved in the Foundling Hospital from its foundation. It was his design for the coat of arms which was placed over the entrance on the night in 1741 when the Hospital took in its first babies. Together, Hogarth and Handel used art and music to attract influential support for the Foundling Hospital. This necessary aspect of the funding of the Hospital was the justification for the luxurious Court Room, designed by Hogarth and displaying a masterpiece of rococo plasterwork. The room was included from the beginning in Theodore Jacobsen's design for the Hospital, built between 1742 and 1752, and was hung with paintings donated by renowned artists of the day. Many of the pictures were idealised narrative paintings of compassion being shown towards abandoned babies,<sup>23</sup> designed to awaken the charitable impulses of the viewers.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Coram's initial appeal to royalty and the aristocracy, together with the draw of art and music as seen in the admission ticket, and the prestige of being the most fashionable place to visit in London, camouflaged the controversial nature of the cause.<sup>25</sup> It initially made the Foundling Hospital a great success, respectable and almost immune to the criticisms of its aims.

## LICENTIOUSNESS

Despite the luxury, the approval of the elite and the successful fundraising, the Hospital was never able to meet the demand for places. Numbers were restricted by the health and age of the babies but not by questions of morality. This predictably led to a certain backlash. Rhymes were written suggesting that women need no longer worry about the consequences of loss of virtue: they could simply leave their offspring at the Foundling Hospital and return to further sin.<sup>26</sup>

*Scandalizade, a Panegyri-Satiri-Comic-Dramatic Poem* by 'Porcupinus Pelagius' (1750) is addressed to Coram in the year before his death in 1751:

But this is not all the Effects of thy Pains  
The Hospital Foundling came out of thy Brains,

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<sup>22</sup> Colley, p. 61, pp. 95-99.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Hallett, *Hogarth* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2000), p. 154.

<sup>24</sup> David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 160-168.

<sup>25</sup> Rodgers, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> McClure, p. 109.

To encourage the progress of vulgar Amours,  
The breeding of Rogues and th'increasing of Whores,  
While the children of honest good Husbands and Wives  
Stand exposed to Oppression and Want all their Lives.<sup>27</sup>

This verse expresses resentment that, unlike respectable people, the sinful are not obliged to support their own children. Thus, foundlings were stigmatized, not only for their unknown origins but also because they were a financial burden on society. Throughout the country, parishes strove to pass the cost of the upkeep of illegitimate babies to the parents, another parish, or the workhouse, where most died.<sup>28</sup>

This focus on cost over humanity was exacerbated when, in 1756, struggling with the extreme demand on its services, the Foundling Hospital had to ask for Government funding. The Whig Party under William Pitt the Elder, on the brink of the Seven Years' War with France and possibly with a view to raising future recruits,<sup>29</sup> granted £10,000 per annum but specified that all abandoned children under two months (later extended to six months and then twelve months) must be admitted under the General Reception.<sup>30</sup> The numbers of children in the care of the Hospital soared, as did the numbers of deaths.<sup>31</sup>

Inevitably, once the project was no longer largely funded by private donations and fundraising events such as concerts, but by everyone who was subject to taxation, and as the problems of running the Hospital became more apparent, condemnation grew in letters to, and articles in, newspapers and magazines.<sup>32</sup>

The second artefact considered in this article is one in a series of pamphlets that contributes to the discussion of the Hospital's funding. With newspapers and periodicals still in their infancy in the eighteenth century, the pamphlet was an effective way of conducting debates and expressing opinions. Pamphlets could be printed quickly and easily, although their distribution was mostly limited to London.<sup>33</sup>

The first to publish was Jonas Hanway, a Governor of the Hospital and well-known philanthropist. His pamphlet, *A Candid Historical Account of the Hospital for the Reception of Exposed and Deserted Young Children* [...] and including *A Letter from a Country Gentleman to a Governor of the Hospital* is a comprehensive and robust

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<sup>27</sup> Rodgers, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> McClure, pp. 11-14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80; Helen Berry, *Orphans of Empire: The fate of London's foundlings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> R.H. Nichols and F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-53.

<sup>32</sup> McClure, pp. 106-112.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy Black, *The English Press, 1621-1861* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd. 2001), pp. 36-37.

account of the history of the Foundling Hospital with suggestions for its improvement.<sup>34</sup> In his view, the government system was an expensive way of helping an insufficient number of children, for whom care would be better delivered in a family setting. He wished to restrict support to London children, who would be brought up in the healthy atmosphere of the country, and eventually contribute to the industrial and military needs of the nation.<sup>35</sup>

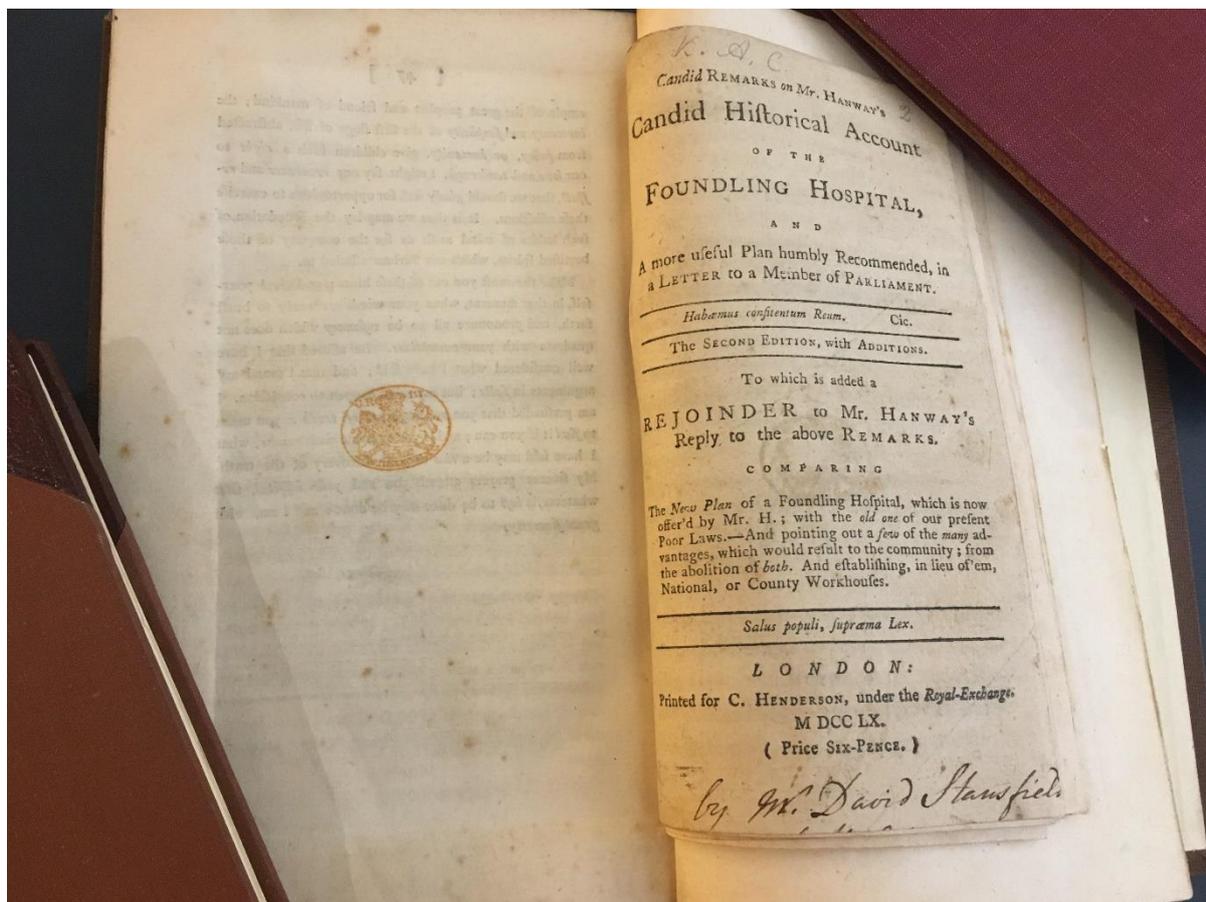


Figure 3: David Stansfield, *Candid Remarks* (1760), paper, 9cm × 17cm (British Library, London. Author's photograph)

In response to this, on 16 January 1760, David Stansfield writing as C.A., published the pamphlet under consideration here: *Candid Remarks on Mr Hanway's Candid Historical Account of the Foundling Hospital* (1760) (Fig.3). Representative of the popular view and expressed in forthright terms, his pamphlet outlines his strong objections to the reforms suggested by Hanway, together with his fundamental opposition to the General Reception. Not reading this until 9 February, Hanway wrote and published a *Reply* by 11 February 1760, with Stansfield publishing a *Rejoinder* on 15 March.

<sup>34</sup> Jonas Hanway, *A Candid Historical Account of the Hospital for the Reception of Exposed and Deserted Young Children to which is added A Letter from a Country Gentleman to a Governor of the Hospital* (London, 1760).

<sup>35</sup> Rodgers, pp. 37-38.

Very little is known about Stansfield himself. Hanway certainly knew nothing of him, as he states in the opening paragraph of his *Reply*:

As I am intirely unacquainted with your name, character, or place of abode, I take this public method to reply upon a subject which is very interesting to us all.

I observe that you have contracted a very strong prejudice against the institution of the Hospital.<sup>36</sup>

Stansfield replied to Hanway on behalf of those living in the countryside:

If City Luxury, and City Licentiousness, generate unhealthful Children in Stews and Brothels, and the Foundling Hospital by encouraging those Licentious generating Means increase the Number of unhealthful Children, - Must the Sober and Diligent in the Country, take Care of, and Support such Children?<sup>37</sup>

He appears to equate the City with the wealth seen, for example, at the concerts at the Foundling Hospital, and with the immorality that produced the babies cared for there. He suggests that the countryside is immune to such problems, being moral and hardworking. In fact, as Brownlow is keen to assert, the mortality of the foundlings during the General Reception was as much the result of the greater numbers received, and the corruption involved in transporting babies to London, as of inherent ill-health.<sup>38</sup> However, Adrian Wilson's detailed statistical study supports Stansfield's perception, or 'prejudice', and reveals that there was a particular illegitimacy crisis during the period of the General Reception. He suggests that this was the result of factors including a higher cost of living; the disruptions of the Seven Years War; in London, a rise in illegitimate babies compared with the rest of the country, attributable to changes in marriage and courtship practices; and, Wilson concludes, possibly and in part, the existence of the General Reception at the Foundling Hospital.<sup>39</sup>

Stansfield certainly blames the Hospital for the increase in illegitimacy and suggests that exporting London foundlings to the country will serve only to increase debauchery, and to compromise the care given to others in need.

Is this the way to check that torrent of Evil in the City which such a Licentious Carnality threatens? or to restore the Morals which the F.H. has corrupted?[...] wil not granting Public Money, in aid of Metropolitan Parishes, for their Officers *confess'd misconduct* to Infants, tend to promote farther and greater degrees of misconduct to their other Poor, the Adult and Aged? <sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hanway, *Reply to C.A.*, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Stansfield, *Candid Remarks*, pp.5-6.

<sup>38</sup> Brownlow, p.16.

<sup>39</sup> Adrian Wilson, 'Illegitimacy and its implications in mid- eighteenth-century London', *Continuity and Change*, 4.1 (1989), 103-64 [https://ezproxy\\_prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2109](https://ezproxy_prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2109) [accessed 9 February 2020], pp. 137- 140.

<sup>40</sup> Stansfield, *Candid Remarks*, p. 6.

He is also concerned that in receiving public money to look after their children, the poor would have no incentive to work, with serious consequences for the economy.

Wil Poor People *work* when they may have their Wants relieved without it? Wil *Industry* thrive, when the Principal Motives (namely their Children) which lead to it, are taken away? Will Commerce and Manufactories flourish when, for want of these Spurs to Labor none will labor, in the lowest Offices, but on their own terms? can it be expected that these *Paupers* will struggle with constant Difficulties, under the severest Labor (and which Multitudes do at present struggle with contentedly, even to the end of life) when they have such Commodious Access to Ease and Relief?<sup>41</sup>

Finally, in a *Rejoinder* to Hanway's *Reply*, Stansfield insists that in allowing children to be maintained without recourse to the fathers in question, the Hospital obliges the government to

[levy] money upon the Public and upon well disposed Citizens, to save the pockets of Whoremasters and other fornicating Criminals.<sup>42</sup>

The General Reception represented a great opportunity to pursue the ambitions of Thomas Coram. Its plans for branch Foundling Hospitals in the countryside and near universal admission could have led to a state funded national response to the problem of abandoned babies.<sup>43</sup> However, it turned out to be too ambitious in its scope at this time, and unfortunately coincided with an upsurge in illegitimate babies. This led to a significant change in attitude towards the Hospital and an increase in moral outrage at the financial cost of supporting illegitimate children. Its failure left the Hospital with virtually no money, and interestingly, the name given by the Hospital to the last child received under the publicly funded General Reception was Kitty Finis.<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSION

When the Foundling Hospital was supported from private means, raised by bequests, subscriptions or most conspicuously, the enjoyment by the upper classes of fund-raising concerts of Handel's *Messiah*, the Hospital was able to control intake and maintain standards of care. Although the moral objections no doubt remained, they were not urgent. This changed once the funding arose from taxpayers' pockets, was seen to be at the expense of other state provision and would cause an inconvenience to the countryside or jealousy at apparent exemption from work. Then, the objections to the support of the perceived immorality of the City, so vividly expressed in Stanfield's pamphlet, took hold. Thus, despite an auspicious

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>42</sup> David Stansfield, *A Rejoinder to Mr. Hanway's Reply to C. A.'s Candid Remarks*, (London, 1760) p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Sina Rahmani, 'Blank Subjects: Orphanhood and the Rise of the British Novel', UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations, (2014) <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/95q2007s> [accessed 17 January 2020].

<sup>44</sup> Brownlow, p. 43.

start, the Foundling Hospital ran across the same issues of cost and morality as the earlier attempts to set up such institutions in England.

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--- *A Reply to C. A. Author of the Candid Remarks on Mr. Hanway's Candid Historical Account of the Foundling Hospital, With relation to The probable Advantages of this Institution, if confined to such Foundlings, Orphans, and Deserted Children, within the Bills of Mortality, as were usually sent to Parish Workhouses and Parish Nurses* (London, 1760)

Stansfield, David, *A Rejoinder to Mr. Hanway's Reply to C.A.'s Candid Remarks Comparing The New Plan of a Foundling Hospital, which is now offer'd by Mr. H.; with the old one of our present Poor Laws:- pointing out a few of the many advantages, which would result to the community; from the abolition of both, and establishing in lieu of 'em, National, or County Workhouses* (London, 1760)

--- *Candid remarks on Mr. Hanway's candid historical account of the Foundling Hospital, and A more useful Plan humbly Recommended, in a Letter to a Member of Parliament. To which is added a rejoinder to Mr. Hanway's reply to the above remarks. Comparing The New Plan of a Foundling Hospital, which is now offer'd by Mr. H.; with the old one of our present Poor Laws. – And pointing out a few of the many advantages, which would result to the community; from the abolition of both. And establishing, in lieu of em, National, or County Workhouses* (London, 1760)

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