



**Foundling 14664**  
 'Brown silk and stuff'.  
 A mixed fabric of silk  
 and worsted stuff. A girl,  
 admitted 3 December  
 1759. Named Ruth  
 Williams by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Apprenticed 7 May  
 1770 to Anthony  
 Howard, farmer of Soot  
 Hill, Dousbury,  
 Yorkshire.

**Foundling 14940**  
 'Striped silk and  
 cotton'. Cotton and  
 silk woven in stripes.  
 A girl, admitted 27  
 December 1759.  
 Named Dorothy Stone  
 by the Foundling  
 Hospital. Apprenticed  
 15 November 1769  
 to William Hayes,  
 justice cutter of  
 Manchester, Lancashire.

**Foundling 15023**  
 'Flowered silk'. A  
 1740s brocaded silk.  
 A girl, one day old,  
 admitted 3 January  
 1760. Named  
 Elizabeth Mason by  
 the Foundling  
 Hospital. Died 9  
 January 1760.

**Foundling 15287**  
 'Blew Camblet'. Blue  
 camblet, a worsted  
 fabric. A boy, admitted  
 26 January 1760.  
 Named William  
 Linnet by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Died 1764.

**Foundling 16515**  
 A blue worsted damask.  
 A girl, admitted 11  
 February 1767.

**Foundling 2584**  
 An expensive flowered  
 dress silk of about  
 1750, with a matching  
 piece of fly braid. A  
 girl, admitted 27  
 October 1756. Named  
 Sarah Barber by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Died 17 March 1761.

**Foundling 14695**  
 An embroidered sampler.  
 A boy, admitted 6  
 December 1759.  
 Named William Porter  
 by the Foundling  
 Hospital. Died 27  
 May 1760.

**Foundling 10875**  
 'Striped camblet' Camblet  
 was a worsted cloth. A  
 boy, admitted 16  
 December 1758. Named  
 Urban Godfrey by the  
 Foundling Hospital. Died  
 23 December 1758.

# Scrap of a thing

## 18TH-CENTURY TEXTILE TOKENS FROM THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL



**Foundling 9018**  
 Cotton or linen printed  
 with a butterfly. A boy  
 aged 3 days, admitted  
 23 June 1758. Named  
 Henry Clive by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Died 27 August 1758.  
 The accompanying  
 letter reads: 'Sar this is  
 the Son of William  
 and Sarone Turnear  
 living in the Parish  
 of Sant Marey  
 Whitchapell is not  
 baptised Bornd June 11  
 20'.

**Foundling 11148**  
 'Blue and white  
 sheled'. Cotton or  
 linen printed with a  
 blue and white shell  
 pattern. A girl,  
 admitted 11 January  
 1759. Named Ann  
 Flamsted by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Died 21 February  
 1759.

**Foundling 9324**  
 Cotton or linen  
 printed with an  
 acorn. A boy, admit-  
 ted 22 July 1758.  
 The accompanying  
 note names him as  
 Thomas Jones junior,  
 but he was named  
 William Tent by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Apprenticed on 6  
 May 1768 to Robert  
 Bell, farmer of  
 Kildale in Yorkshire.

**Foundling 13187**  
 'Yellow Satten  
 Flowered'. Silk  
 woven in a flowered  
 pattern. A girl aged  
 about 14 days,  
 admitted 20 June  
 1759. Named Lucy  
 Locket by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Died 2 July 1759.

**Foundling 1109**  
 'Cap diaper'. A  
 baby's cap, made from  
 linen diaper, fringed  
 with lace. A boy aged  
 about a fortnight,  
 admitted 30 June  
 1753. Named Felix  
 St George by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Apprenticed 22  
 August 1764 to  
 Thomas Budgen,  
 farmer of Eaton  
 Bridge, Kent.

**Foundling 1293**  
 'The Inclosed Ribbon  
 tied on ye right  
 wrist'. A flowered  
 silk ribbon. A boy  
 aged about five weeks,  
 admitted 9 August  
 1755. Named James  
 Newton by the  
 Foundling Hospital.  
 Died as a child, date  
 unknown.

**Foundling 235**  
 'Sleeves red and  
 white speckl'd linen  
 turn'd up red spotted  
 with white'. A  
 baby's sleeve made  
 from linen printed  
 with red dots, and  
 cotton or linen  
 printed in red with  
 white flowers. A boy  
 about a month old,  
 admitted 23 May  
 1746. Named  
 Samuel Denton by  
 the Foundling  
 Hospital. Died 17  
 September 1746.

**Foundling 16516**  
 A patchwork huswife  
 made from printed  
 and woven fabrics,  
 embroidered with a heart  
 and the initials SC and  
 cut in half to form a  
 broken token. A boy,  
 admitted 11 February  
 1767. Christened  
 Charles, but given the  
 name Benjamin Twirl by  
 the Foundling Hospital.  
 Reclaimed by his mother,  
 Sarah Bender, on 10  
 June 1775.



**Foundling 27**  
*'Purple and white printed linen sleeves turned up red and white'. A girl, admitted 25 March 1741. Given the name Margaret Bentick by the Foundling Hospital. Died 6 April 1741.*

**Foundling 374**  
*'Flowered cotton'. Cotton printed with flowers. A girl, admitted 18 December 1747. Named Sabrina Rose by the Foundling Hospital. Died, probably 25 May 1754.*

**Foundling 11337**  
*'Purple and white flowered cotton'. Cotton printed in small floral designs. A boy, admitted 25 January 1759. Named John Hammersmith by the Foundling Hospital. Apprenticed 26 July 1769 to Mr Maycock, farmer of Thornton, Cheshire.*

**Foundling 11877**  
*'Flowered lining'. Linen printed with flowers. A boy about 1 month old, admitted 5 March 1759. Named Felix Dodd by the Foundling Hospital. Died 11 July 1759.*

**Foundling 170**  
*'A bunch of 4 ribbons narrow - Yellow, Blue, Green, & Pink'. Silk ribbons tied in a bunch with a knot. A girl, admitted 9 December 1743. Given the name Pamela Townley by the Foundling Hospital. Died 1 September 1746.*

**Foundling 1254**  
*'A piece of blue silk print'd on ye Breast'. A girl, admitted 29 May 1755. Named Anne Robinson by the Foundling Hospital. Died as a child, date unknown.*

**Foundling 11868**  
*'Flowered lawn'. Lawn printed with flowers. Lawn was one of the finest linens. A girl, about 1 day old, admitted 4 March 1759. Named Sarah Tucker by the Foundling Hospital. Died 9 March 1759.*

**Foundling 12843**  
*'Flannel the bottom worked'. Flannel embroidered with a flower. Boy aged about 9 months, admitted 19 May 1759. Named Theodosius Williamson by the Foundling Hospital. Apprenticed 24 May 1769 to Hugh Morgan, bricklayer of Barking, Essex. A Theodosius Williamson married Phoebe Lawrence at St Leonard's church, Shoreditch, London on 29 October 1776.*

**Opening in 1741**, the Foundling Hospital in London took in the babies of unmarried women. Not a hospital in the true sense, the Foundling Hospital provided 'Maintenance and Education for Exposed and Deserted Young Children', a home, an education; it also offered the mothers a chance to return to their former lives and perhaps regain some form of respectability in the community.

Its campaigning founder the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram returned from years at sea and was appalled by the plight and neglect of children left to die on the streets of London. He received a Royal Charter from King George II to establish the hospital in 1739, and to ensure its survival he enlisted the help of prominent men of the time. The artist William Hogarth donated a number of his paintings which were housed in the Hospital. Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough also gave works. George Frederic Handel performed his "Messiah" on a regular basis to help raise money for the work of the Hospital. Handel was so committed to Coram's charitable endeavours that he left a fair copy of the Messiah to the Hospital in his will.

London in the 18th century saw a high incidence of abandoned babies and infanticide. Poverty stricken women deserted their babies along the roadside or in the doorways of workhouses and churches. The Foundling Hospital offered hope to women and children who would have perished left to their own devices.

From 1741 to 1756, women leaving their babies at the Foundling Hospital were invited to leave a token with the child as a means of identification should they ever be in the unlikely position to return and reclaim them. These eclectic 'tokens' included buttons, thimbles, half a coin, a hazelnut, but the most compelling are the textiles; swatches cut from the clothes of the mothers and babies; a gown cut in half, a scrap tied to the child's wrist or a ribbon cockade left with a young boy.

These textile fragments, held at present in billet books at the London Metropolitan Archives, are too fragile to be on permanent display. They have been touched by few and still bear the experience of the maker and the wearer. Close inspection reveals the hand-stitching that seals a hem or finishes a cuff - a link to the individual who wore them more than 250 years ago and a reminder of their desperate plight and awful decision.

Children's clothes of the time were generally made from old adult garments. These worn swatches show the residue of life, depositaries of DNA; with modern forensic science at our finger tips, what could we unearth? Often a piece of the child's arrival clothes were cut to serve as the token, maybe a small woollen square, or the dissection of a sleeve. Was the mother furnished with an identical cloth square or the other sleeve perhaps? The imagined scene of the mother arriving at the hospital with



**Foundling 12924**  
*'Flowered lining'. Linen printed with flowers and leaves. A girl, admitted 26 May 1759.*

**Foundling 13287**  
*'Spriged cotten'. Cotton printed with sprigs and dots. A girl aged about 21 days, admitted 30 June 1759. Named Hannah Carter by the Foundling Hospital. Died 17 February 1760.*

**Foundling 208**  
*'A black Cockade on his head'. A cockade made from black silk ribbon. A boy, admitted 22 February 1745. Named Hamwell Helsden by the Foundling Hospital. Died 11 March 1745.*

**Foundling 166**  
*'Strip'd susa mark'd Dec 9 1743'. Susa, usually spelled soosey, was a silk fabric from India. A boy, admitted 9 December 1743. Given the name Columbus Bridgetown by the Foundling Hospital. Died 30 September 1744*

**Foundling 12956**  
*'Striped Calimanker.' Calimanco woven in stripes and figures. Calimanco was a worsted fabric. A girl, admitted 30 May 1759. Named Millicent Butler by the Foundling Hospital. Died 8 June 1759.*

**Foundling 13414**  
*'Chins'. Chantz - Indian cotton printed with flowers. A girl, admitted 13 July 1759. Named Elizabeth Cutler by the Foundling Hospital. Died 24 November 1759.*

**Foundling 10563**  
*A heart cut from red woollen cloth, a ribbon of blue paduasoy silk, and a piece of linen diaper. 'The Bit of Red Cloth Enclosed was pinned to the Childs Cap'. A girl, admitted 22 November 1758. Named Isabel Crane by the Foundling Hospital. Died 16 December 1758.*

**Foundling 12052**  
*A drawing of a tulip and a piece of cotton or linen printed with sprigs and diamonds. A girl, admitted 18 March 1759. Named Elizabeth Matteus by the Foundling Hospital. Died 29 March 1759.*

her baby, but leaving clutching just a fragment of the child's garment is a moving one. It is suggested that at times swatches were cut from an unseen part of the mother's garment such as a pocket; a symbol of the gaping hole in her life.

Presumably it was the Hospital clerk who folded the billet sheet into a small package of nine folds; unaware that they were preserving its contents for 21st century audiences. There was rarely an occasion to open the folded packages, children were rarely collected and never saw the tokens that represented their past. The billets lay untouched until they were collated into books.

The forthcoming Threads of Feeling exhibition at the Foundling Museum presents the textiles which accompanied the depositing of a child and offers insights into why tokens were used, how they relate to individual children and gives a rare glimpse of plebeian fashions of the 18th century. This era saw a growth in consumerism; clothes and textiles became more widely available. High society and grand garments from this time have been preserved for our heritage in collections but little remains of the clothing of the ordinary people.

In fact John Styles comments in his book *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England*, "This is the largest collection of 18th-century textiles in Britain and probably in the world providing an unparalleled archive

of what ordinary women wore. The textiles in the billet books represent the fabrics available to impoverished desperate mothers whose infants were taken in by the Hospital. Undoubtedly many raped or jilted by their betrothed."

By 1742 the numbers of mothers bringing children to the Hospital was so great and the admissions procedure so disorderly that it was decided to adopt a ballot system to decide which children were admitted. Around twenty infants would be admitted at each intake, but crowds of women, five times this amount, would gather outside the Hospital. In turn each woman drew a coloured ball out of a bag; white, indicating the baby would be examined and admitted if it was healthy; black, the mother and child were dismissed; the red ball meant a second chance was given in the case of any 'white ball babies' being refused admittance.

The inevitable cruelty of this early lottery system must ultimately have left each of these women devastated. "On this Occasion the Expression of Grief of the Women whose Children could not be admitted were Scarcely more observable than those of some of the Women who parted with their Children, so that a more moving Scene can't well be imagined", is a comment in the Foundling Hospital Daily Committee Minutes, 26th March 1741.

Mothers leaving children remained anonymous, with no questions asked, but ▶

# Threads of Feeling

Join Selvedge for a private view of the Threads of Feeling exhibition at the Foundling Hospital. This is a rare opportunity to view a poignant textile exhibition in the company of the curator and a limited number of fellow Selvedge readers.

Our private tour will be preceded by two guest speakers. Jerwood prize-winning artist and author of our article, Shelly Goldsmith, will give an overview of her work, including her recent partnerships with the Forensic Science Service and her current exhibition at Pitzhanger Manor, West London (see pg 7).

Her talk will be followed by a lecture from Professor John Styles, exhibition curator and author of *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England*. John will discuss the importance of the Foundling admission billets which form the largest archive of datable textiles in Europe, if not the world.

The event will take place between 6.30-9.30pm and will include a drinks reception and canapés. ●●●

**Selvedge Evening at the Foundling Museum, Tuesday 26th October, 6.30-9.30pm, Tickets £25 (space is limited), to book please visit [www.selvedge.org](http://www.selvedge.org) or call T: +44 (0)20 8341 9721, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ, T: 020 7841 3600, [www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk](http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk)**



**Foundling 13789**  
*'Flowered chance'.*  
*Chintz - Indian cotton printed with flowers. A girl, admitted 27 August 1759. Named Sarah Eld by the Foundling Hospital. Died of measles July (?)1765.*

**Foundling 14093**  
*'Flowered cotten'.*  
*Cotton printed with flowers. A girl, admitted 4 October 1759. Named Sarah Pagill by the Foundling Hospital. Died 16 October 1759.*

**Foundling 14922**  
*'Flowered all over with cards'.*  
*Cotton or linen printed with a playing card pattern. A boy, admitted 24 December 1759. Named Joseph Floyd by the Foundling Hospital. Apprenticed 26 July 1769 to John Bedsforth, whistler (a bleacher of linen) of Staines, Middlesex.*

**Foundling 14953**  
*'Checks stuff'.*  
*Worsted stuff woven in a check pattern. A boy, admitted 28 December 1759. Named Mentor Lesage by the Foundling Hospital. Apprenticed 7 November 1770 to Hercules Durham, farmer, of Fulmer, Buckinghamshire.*

**Foundling 14081**  
*'Worckt with flowers'.*  
*Linen or cotton embroidered with flowers. A boy, admitted 3 October 1759. Named John Fairfax by the Foundling Hospital. Died 4 October 1759.*

meticulous records of the child were made on admittance. A billet described whether the baby was male or female, their age (some as little as a day old), distinguishing marks and an inventory of his or her clothes; Cap, Biggin, Bibb, Frock, Upper-coat, Petticoat, Mantle, Pilch – 23 items in total on the printed checklist. Most were left unticked but some items on the list had descriptive notes jotted next to them, 'with a piece of silver chain tied to her wrist, with a bit of black ribbon'. In some instances written messages are sewn to the cloth or onto ribbon: 'This in remembrance of an unfortunate boy August 9, 1755' is stitched onto a blue printed cotton strip. Often a patterned fabric in particular was chosen as a token, it would be easily identifiable. This is where we see the examples of simple one colour printed florals of Indian origin, imitating the high fashions of the era. There are also the woollens, the linens, the checks and the stripes too, a few are multicoloured, of a different quality.

During the period it operated, 27,000 babies were admitted to the Foundling Hospital. This important and beautifully preserved cache of fabrics represents each of them and the women that gave them away. The completeness of the collection is particularly noteworthy. The other records made by the officers of the Hospital may document the way in which the Hospital operated, the methods of nursing, the prescriptions of the apothecary, the reports of the inspectors, even the extraordinary accounts of women's lives, and the involvement of leading figures of the day in actively supporting the charity: but only these worn scraps of cloth tangibly connect us back to them. ●●● **Shelly Goldsmith**

# Threads of Feeling

An exhibition of textile tokens left with abandoned children.  
The Foundling Museum. 14 October 2010 - 6 March 2011.



This emotive exhibition will showcase 18th century fabrics never shown before. They illustrate the moment of parting as mothers left their babies at the original Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram.

## FOUNDLING H

THE *foundling*  
MUSEUM

The Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1A [www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk](http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk)

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