



City Events

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Had this been a normal year, the City churches would have afforded us the opportunity to have heard Handel's *Messiah* at least once. In June 2014 a workshop devoted to choral compositions by Handel was held in the church of **St Alban the Martyr** to commemorate the 275th Anniversary of the granting in 1739 by George II of the Royal Charter which resulted in the foundation of the Foundling Hospital. The Minute Book of the General Committee of the Foundling Hospital records the first appearance of George Frederic Handel in its history on 4 May 1749: 'Mr Handel being present and having generously and charitably offered a performance of vocal and instrumental music to be held at this Hospital, and that the money arising therefrom be applied to finishing the chapel of the Hospital.'

Philanthropic sea-captain Thomas Coram, whose magnificent tomb is in **St Andrew Holborn**, established the Foundling Hospital for the 'education and maintenance of exposed and deserted young children.' The Hospital was essentially the birthplace of dedicated social care for children. In 1954, it ceased to be residential and changed its name to the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children,

better known today as Coram.

The original site of the Foundling Hospital has a positive connection to what is there now. After the original Hospital was demolished in the 1920s, seven acres of the site were purchased for use as a playground for children, and this area is now called Coram's Fields. The Foundling Hospital itself bought back 2.5 acres of land in 1937 and built a new headquarters and a children's centre on the site in what is now Brunswick Square. Although smaller, the building is in a similar style to the original Foundling Hospital and important aspects of the interior architecture were recreated there. It is now the administrative base of Coram and it also houses the Foundling Museum, an independent charity, which explores the history of the Hospital.

The Foundling Museum also contains an important art collection which includes works by some of Britain's most prominent 18c artists: William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds, Louis-François Roubiliac and many others. These paintings and sculptures, donated by the artists themselves, were given in order to support the Foundling

Hospital and effectively made the institution the UK's first public art gallery. The Museum also houses the unique Gerald Coke Handel Collection which enables visitors to learn about Handel's connection to the Foundling Hospital and see his will, alongside manuscripts and printed scores, books, works of art, programmes and ephemera. A fair copy of Handel's *Messiah*, left to the Hospital at his death, is also displayed.

The concert held in May 1749 was essentially a benefit concert to help to complete the chapel in the original Foundling Hospital. That concert included an anthem written by Handel for the occasion, now known as the *Foundling Hospital Anthem*, using music taken from other works by Handel and ends with a version of the *Hallelujah Chorus*. These works were sung in the concert that took place at the end of the choral workshop that took place in St Alban the Martyr in June 2014.

Today, the Foundling Hospital with its fascinating history, continues as the children's charity Coram, with a mission to improve the lives of the UK's most vulnerable children and young people and thus to provide support for them from birth to independence. The strain on their family lives caused by lockdown has highlighted the need for Coram's work. ✨