

A Brief History of the School and its Site

The site of the nursery, and its immediate surroundings, has long been associated with education and child welfare. Our school takes its name after Captain Thomas Coram (1668-1751), a sailor and philanthropist, who established in 1739 the 'Foundling Hospital' (on the site of the present-day Coram's Fields) to care for orphaned children. Over a period of two hundred years, the Hospital provided for the care and education of over 27,000 children.



Thomas Coram statue

When the Foundling Hospital was relocated out of London in 1926, the current site was saved from redevelopment by local campaigners. Split in half, it has since been administered by two charitable trusts: 'Coram's Fields', which holds its land in perpetuity for the recreation and education of children, and the 'Coram Foundation', the UK's oldest children's charity, which specialises in adoption, fostering and children in care.

The Coram Foundation site has a complicated recent history. A nursery school called 'St Leonard's' was set up on the current site in 1930 and, although it was evacuated temporarily during the war, it returned, expanded and thrived up until the 1970's when financial difficulties led to local authority involvement and a substantial restructuring of provision.



Coram's Fields playground

A new 'Thomas Coram Children's Centre' was established in 1974 but yet more financial difficulties and structural deficiencies led to its demise and later reestablishment as the 'Coram Community Nursery Association', a parent-run organisation (part-funded by the Coram Foundation) which operated from a portacabin on site. The current nursery school has operated in its present form since 1998 when the community nursery and another existing provider were amalgamated as the 'Thomas Coram Early Childhood Centre' then integrated within a repurposed, and redeveloped, Coram Foundation 'campus'.



Coram Foundation

Despite continuing national funding challenges and the ongoing impact of the Covid pandemic, the nursery remains true, in the 21st century, to its enlightened origins. In providing for the learning and development of the children in our care, we follow in the distinguished footsteps of Captain Coram, whose statue at the corner of Brunswick Square bears the simple, but affecting inscription: 'Pioneer in the Cause of Child Welfare'.

This is an abridged version of 'Thomas Coram Foundation - a Brief History of the Foundation and the Services on the Site', written in 1998, author unknown.