

## Jane's pick



Jane Hodgett  
Buyer, Books

If you, like me, find yourself using historical fiction as a springboard to learn about history, have I got a book for you. I'm very excited to share Stacey Halls' novel *The Foundling*, this issue's book buyer's pick.

It's 1754 and Bess Bright has returned to London's Foundling Hospital to collect the daughter she left there six years ago. However, Bess learns that a different woman has claimed the girl. Thus begins a search to find out who took her daughter and why.

Once again, Halls competently proves that she's a master storyteller.

*The Foundling* (Item #321034; 6/2) is available in most Costco warehouses.



MICHAEL MORALEE



# Lost and found

The story of a mother's fight to reclaim the child she left behind

by ANNIE MAKOFF



Stacey Halls

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**W**hen Stacey Halls first set foot in London's Foundling Museum, little did she know the emotional impact it would have on her.

She wasn't looking for ideas at the time—she had just finished the first draft of her debut novel, *The Familiars*, set during the 17th-century witch trials in Pendle, Lancashire, and was “kicking about” in London, ticking off things on her bucket list.

But the museum, devoted to the 18th-century Foundling Hospital, which cared for impoverished infants beginning in 1739, was to form the basis of Halls' second novel, *The Foundling*.

Thousands of destitute women gave their infants to the hospital, often pinning tokens to the infant's clothing to help identify their child should they one day be able to claim them. But, as Halls points out, very few women could afford to take their child back.

“I came out of the museum a different person, it affected me so deeply,” Halls recalls. “I couldn't believe a place like this ever existed, and I was heartbroken. The tokens the mothers left—scraps of material, hairpins [or] maybe a brooch were emblems of hope: the hope that every woman might one day return to take their child back. But just 1% of children were actually claimed.”

*The Foundling* tells the story of a mother who manages to save up enough to claim her child, only to find that someone has already

claimed her. It also examines what it meant to be a woman at a time when there was so much social injustice and inequality. And it explores an ethical dilemma and the choices people make.

Halls says she has always been interested in history—it's the everyday and ordinary people who intrigue her the most. When she visited Hampton Court Palace, the graffiti the servants had left on the walls inspired her more than the grand rooms and furnishings.

Prior to writing her first novel, Halls worked at *The Bookseller* magazine, where she reviewed “millions” of books and interviewed publishers.

“Working at *The Bookseller* and being in contact with so many publishers made the idea of becoming an author much more possible,” she explains. “I'd always written things and I was a massive reader, but as a child I just assumed authors were all dead, as I'd surrounded myself with books by people like Beatrix Potter and A.A. Milne.”

Now a published author, Halls has firmly planted her flag in the historical fiction category. Her next book, she says, is likely to be set within her favourite period of history: the late Victorian to early Edwardian era.

“Research plays a big part of historical fiction. It has to,” she adds. “But I try not to get too bogged down in tiny details. I don't want to be constricted by it. I'm a storyteller, not a historian.” ■

Annie Makoff is a freelance journalist who lives in Rochester, Kent.