



Woodcut ticket, laid on card.

PRINTED ON THE ICE

[Souvenir ticket from the Frost Fair of 1814].

Author

[ANONYMOUS]

Publication date

February 4, 1814.

Publisher

Publication place

River Thames,

Physical description

Woodcut ticket, laid on card.

Dimensions

114 by 127mm (4.5 by 5 inches).

Notes

From one of the presses working on the ice this small ticket was printed as a souvenir commemorating the Frost Fair on the frozen River Thames of 1814. It was apparently issued from a booth above which an orange banner emblazoned with the words "Orange Boven" flew, a reference to King William I Prince of Orange-Nassau (1772 -1843), the son of the last Stadtholder of the Dutch Republic, who after the Defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig, in November 1813, was asked to become the Sovereign Prince of the United Netherlands.

It reads:

"Amidst the Arts which on the Thames appear,
To tell the wonders of this icy year,
Printing claims prior place, which at one view,
Erects monument of THAT and YOU.

Printed on the River Thames, February 4, in the 54th year of the reign of King George the III. Anno Domini 1814".

The River Thames has been known to freeze over on several occasions, especially during the "Little Ice Age" of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, upon which the inhabitants of London took to the solid ice for business and pleasure. The most important of these "Frost Fairs" occurred in 695, 1608, 1683-4, 1716, 1739-40, 1789, and 1814. In 1684, during the Great Freeze of 1683-4, which was the longest in London's history and during which the ice reached depths of around 28cm, the diarist John Evelyn recorded the attractions of the Frost Fair:

"Streetes of Boothes were set upon the Thames... all sorts of Trades and shops furnished, & full of Commodities... Coaches plied from Westminster to the Temple, and from several other stairs too and fro, as in the streets, sleds, sliding with skates, bull-baiting, horse and coach races, puppet plays and interludes, cooks, tippling and other lewd places, so that it seemed to be a bacchanalian triumph, or a carnival on water".

The last Frost Fair took place between Blackfriars Bridge and London Bridge for four days at the beginning of February 1814. There was feasting, drinking, and activities such as nine-pin bowling, dancing, and swings. One of the highlights included an elephant being led across the river! On February the 5th, the fair ended when the ice began to break up, tragically resulting in several deaths. Since then, on account of the milder climate, the replacement of the Old London Bridge with a new one with wider arches, and the incremental embankment of the river, the Thames has not frozen over so completely as to allow another fair to take place upon it.

During the fair, London's printmakers took advantage of the widespread enthusiasm and excitement it generated by producing souvenir prints to commemorate the spectacular event. In fact, during the fair of 1814, between eight to ten printers actually set up their presses on the ice, printing images and poems for punters there and then. One of these enterprising printmakers was George Davis, who published a short book, 'Frostiana; or A History of the River Thames In a Frozen State', which was actually printed on the frozen Thames.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £500

Inventory reference: 18204