

Engraved print.

THE FINAL FROST FAIR

[Frost fair]

Author
[CLENNELL, Luke]

Publication date
1814].

Publisher

Publication place
[London,

Physical description
Engraved print.

Dimensions
314 by 523mm (12.25 by 20.5 inches).

Notes
Clennell’s depiction of the Frost Fair on the frozen River Thames of 1814 became very popular and was published by numerous printers in London. He has captured the carnival atmosphere of the event, showing the wide range of the activities and entertainments enjoyed by all: from a band to a barbecue, fortunetelling to fairground rides; and even one of the many printing presses that worked on the ice to issue souvenirs.

People from all walks of life seem to be attending, with some dressed in suits and top hats, others in shawls and caps. On the left, the prow of a small boat is visible, held fast by the presumably thick ice that has formed around it. Some punters enjoy a ride on swing boats, a fair-ground attraction which gained popularity during the Victorian era. St. Paul's Cathedral and Blackfriars Bridge are visible in the background.

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 Frost Fair of 1814 was in fact the last of London's Frost Fairs on the icy Thames. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Europe began to emerge from the "Little Ice Age", and temperatures globally started to rise. The last time that the Thames froze over completely was in 1963, and although some Londoners took the opportunity to walk, skate and even cycle on the river, it was no longer deemed viable to host an entire fair on the ice.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £2000

Inventory reference: 18154

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