Etching with contemporary hand-colour.

THE FROST FAIR FROM BANKSIDE

A View on the River Thames between London and Blackfriars Bridges in the hard Frost 1814 taken on the Spot at bankside February 4 1814.

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Publication date
Feb.y 7th, 1814.

Publisher
G[eorge] Thompson, No 43 Long Lane, Smithfield

Publication place
London,

Physical description
Etching with contemporary hand-colour.

Dimensions
159 by 217mm (6.25 by 8.5 inches).

Notes
George Thompson’s (d.1826) view of the Frost Fair on the frozen River Thames of 1814, is taken from Bankside, showing Blackfriars Bridge and St Paul’s on the left, London Bridge, the Monument and St Magnus on the right. As with other views of the fair in its final days, the ice is full of tents and stalls, and people. The latter are slipping, sliding, swinging, and according to the key, “walking on

the ice", "printing", and "playing at skittles". There is a tent offering "Good Gin", another purporting to be the "City of Moscow"; and a "sheep to be roasted whole".

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".

Many of London's printmakers capitalized on this carnival atmosphere by producing souvenirs of the great event. These included engraved scenes, portraits, poems and, perhaps most prolifically, personalized tickets, which gave attendees the opportunity to commemorate their trip onto the ice with a print bearing their own name. During the fair of 1814, multiple printmakers actually installed their presses on the ice; their souvenirs, "printed on the River Thames", were extremely popular.

One such press appears in Thompson's print, at a stall in the centre of the river where the printer is producing prints on demand for an eager queue of punters.

Bibliography
BM 1880,1113.1764

Provenance

Price:

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