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THE RHINEBECK PANORAMA

An Aeronautical View of London Drawn & Engraved by R. Havell.

Author
HAVELL Jnr., R[obert]

Publication date
1831.

Publisher
Published by R. Havell, 77 Oxford Street, Opposite the Pantheon,

Publication place
London,

Physical description
Engraving with aquatint, fine contemporary colour. Between the borderlines on the left and right are devices enabling the user to calculate distances within the print. Between the bottom borderlines are four compasses indicating the extent to which the print should be curved when viewed.

Dimensions
Image: 274 by 990mm (10.75 by 39 inches); Sheet: 405 by 1105mm (16 by 43.5 inches).

Notes
The viewpoint is midway between Bermondsey and St Katherine's from a station, according to the key, 402 feet above the Thames, looking west. It shows St Katherine's Dock, opened in 1828, and New London Bridge, due to be opened on 1 August 1831. Old London Bridge, demolished in 1832, is not shown. The panorama's title is likely to have been chosen to capitalize on the intense ballooning interest of the day.

The four large drawings for this panorama, measuring 2615 mm (103″) in total length, were purchased at auction by the Museum of London (Sotheby's, 9 June 1998, lot 18). Discovered in 1940

stored in a barrel in a loft of a house in Rhinebeck, N.Y., they show London as it was in c1810 (conceivably 1814, during the visit of the Allied Sovereigns). Initially the drawings may have served as the illustration for a cosmorama-type entertainment; series of such views during this period were being exhibited at Spring Gardens. Three unidentified artists may have been involved, one providing the marine detail, the second the topography, and the third the more distant landmarks. Evidently by 1831 the drawings were in the hands of Robert Havell Junior who reduced the view and updated it, incorporating the newly built Custom House and St Katherine's Dock, etc., and introducing some new vessels, such as the steam packets Dart and Columbine. The likelihood is that the drawings were taken by Havell to the U.S. when he emigrated in 1839. The Havells ultimately settled on the Hudson, first at Ossining, then at Tarrytown, N.Y., approximately 50 miles down river from where the drawings were discovered. A thumbnail version of the panorama appears on one of Havell's trade cards. It can also be identified hanging on the wall in an interior view of Havell's Zoological Gallery, Oxford Street, which features on another trade card.

A separate key sheet, consisting of a key-block and 192 refs. was published. Two states of it are known, one with the imprint of R. Havell, Messrs. Treuttel, and Wurtz and Co., the other with the imprint consisting of Havell's details only.

The publication of the print was announced in the Literary Gazette, 14 May 1831: 'Interesting Novelty, just published. An Aeronautical View of London and its Environs, arranged in a novel and interesting Style, exhibiting every Feature of the British Metropolis, disposed in the form of a Rotunda, and viewed through the medium of Magnifying Glasses, producing an Appearance of Nature hitherto unattainable in other than large Panoramic Views. Price of the Print in Rotunda, with Magnifying Glasses and Portfolio, £1.15s. The Print with Key, 15s.'

Aeronautical views were enjoying a period of popularity. Moving panoramas at pantomimes at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, included Harlequin and Poor Robin (1824) – "The Clown's Aeronautical Excursion from London to Paris, including various views from the English Metropolis till his Arrival in the Gardens of Thuilleries in Paris" (the clown being Grimaldi); and Harlequin and the Magick Rose (1826) with "A Panoramick Aerial Voyage Representing the following Cities and Capitals… Constantinople, St Petersburgh… Amsterdam… Dover… Ramsgate Pier, and London Bridge, Nearer view of London Bridge, which changes to the intended New Bridge" painted by T. Grieve, Luppino, W. Grieve.

'The Dart' was built in 1823 by Evans of Rotherhithe for the London and Margate service. 'The Columbine' belonged to the General Steam Navigation Co. It was built by Evenden at Deptford, and in the 1840s was running to Havre. In 1855 it was stranded near Rotterdam.

We are aware of four states of this engraving: 1) dated "April 20, 1831" in the imprint (cf. BM, Huntingdon, Yale); 2) dated "1831" (the present example); 3) Date in imprint altered to 1836 (BI, LMA, MoL); 4) Print as adapted, it would seem, for the rotunda, with wooden strips and eye-hooks attached to each end. In the sky is a paste-over consisting of a balloon labeled 'Graham'. Standing in the cockpit of this balloon is the aeronaut accompanied by the artist sketching the London scene below (GL).

Bibliography

F. Burtt, Steamers of the Thames & Medway (London: Richard Tilling, 1949); Ralph Hyde and Peter Jackson, The Rhinebeck Panorama of London, c1810 (London: LTS, 1981); Sotheby's, Important British Pictures sale catalogue, 9 June 1998.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 12499

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