

Etching; imprint excised.

PRINTING ON ICE

Drawn on the Thames. Feb. 1814

Author
CLENNELL, Luke

Publication date
March 31, 1814].

Publisher
Engraved by George Cooke, London Published… by W.B. Cooke 12 York Place Pentonville,

Publication place
[London,

Physical description
Etching; imprint excised.

Dimensions
112 by 190mm (4.5 by 7.5 inches).

Notes
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.

Clennell's print is a snapshot taken from life. Drawn on the ice, which is beginning to melt, it shows a printing press being worked, with St. Paul's Cathedral and Blackfriars Bridge in the background. The citizens of London are slipping about, swinging, buying and selling their wares, including the ice itself, which is being cut up, wrapped and tied in striped cloth to be taken home.

Best known as a coastal and landscape painter, Luke Clennell (1781-1840), was apprenticed to Thomas Bewick in 1797, and became a talented wood-engraver. "After completion of most ambitious work, 'Banquet of the Allied Sovereigns in the Guildhall', became insane in 1819 and from 1831 was permanently in an asylum" (British Museum).

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".

Bibliography
18,801,113.18

Provenance

Price: £200

Inventory reference: 18202

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