



Etching, laid on card.

## THE KING'S LOCK

**Public architecture. An arch of London Bridge as it appeared in the Great Frost 1814.**

### Author

SMITH, John Thomas

### Publication date

1814

### Publisher

J. T. Smith

### Publication place

London,

### Physical description

Etching, laid on card.

### Dimensions

315 by 250mm (12.5 by 9.75 inches).

### Notes

Smith's iconic image of the frozen waters beneath London Bridge, was first printed, as here, in his 'Ancient Topography of London: Containing Not Only Views of Buildings... But Some Account of

Places and Customs Either Unknown, Or Overlooked by the London Historians' (1815). It shows the "King's Lock" of London Bridge from the east, beneath which two men and a dog are scrambling up from a boat submerged in ice, since the river has solidified. Rather than signifying an actual lock, the King's Lock refers to the arch through which the monarch typically went when travelling by river.

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**

BM 1880,0911.571

## **Provenance**

**Price:** £500

**Inventory reference:** 18169