

**Chapter 1 : John Evelyn And The River Thames Frost Fairs**

*On 9th January , the eminent London writer John Evelyn wrote in his celebrated diary: 'I went across the Thames on the ice, now become so thick as to bear not only streets of booths, in which they roasted meat, and had divers shops of wares, quite across as in a town, but coaches, carts, and horses passed over.*

The weather event has an interesting name: To family and friends in Rhode Island, I say, only half in jest: But not this week. In the case of weather, I have stumbled upon the work of a British author named John Evelyn. He led a long and distinguished life as a thinker, author, botanist, and early environmentalist. But it is his diary, first published in 1846, which revealed the full range of his interests. One is weather and its effects. There is a brief entry for January 1, 1684. The smallpox was very mortal. It has, remarkably, five parts: An analysis of the severity of the weather. A report on human activity inspired by the weather. A mention of air quality. A comparison of this bad weather to bad weather from the past. An assessment of the effects on the most vulnerable. People look for indoor entertainment in the bad weather and our author found it the next evening at the house of Sir Stephen Fox: There was a dog also which seemed to do many rational actions. Four days pass to the next entry: The frost continues more and more severe, the Thames before London was still planted with booths in formal streets, all sorts of trades and shops furnished, and full of commodities, even to a printing press, where the people and ladies took a fancy to have their names printed, and the day and year set down when printed on the Thames: Coaches plied from Westminster to the Temple, and from several other stairs to and fro, as in the streets, sleds, sliding with skates, a bull-baiting, horse and coach-races, puppet-plays and interludes, cooks, tipping, and other lewd places, so that it seemed to be a bacchanalian triumph, or carnival on the water, while it was a severe judgment on the land, the trees not only splitting as if the lightning struck, but men and cattle perishing in divers places, and the very seas so locked up with ice, that no vessels could stir out or come in. The fowls, fish, and birds, and all our exotic plants and greens, universally perishing. Many parks of deer were destroyed, and all sorts of fuel so dear, that there were great contributions to preserve the poor alive. Nor was this severe weather much less intense in most parts of Europe, even as far as Spain and the most southern tracts. London, by reason of the excessive coldness of the air hindering the ascent of the smoke, was so filled with the fuliginous [sooty] steam of the sea-coal, that hardly could one see across the street, and this filling the lungs with its gross particles, exceedingly obstructed the breast, so as one could scarcely breathe. Here was no water to be had from the pipes and engines, nor could the brewers and divers other tradesmen work, and every moment was full of disastrous accidents. What a remarkable word report. Even in the worse storms some people have to be outside, others want to be outside, others find opportunities to work outside. What has happened in London is that it is so cold that the Thames has frozen so hard that the citizens turn it into a spontaneous thoroughfare. Rather than petrify the city, the ice and cold become an opportunity for enterprise. The great detail is that a printer sets up shop on the frozen river, printing out the names of ladies as novelties to mark this historical cold snap. In any great storm, there are winners and losers. The point of view has a cinematic effect, a kind of aerial shot capturing a devastated landscape, where living things are destroyed, from the trees to deer to human beings, and powerful human industry is frozen in time and place. While there is a degree of democracy in the weather – the snow falls on rich and poor alike – the privileged have more ability to deal with the consequences, leaving some stakeholders – the sick, poor, and old – most vulnerable. The big London freeze put a premium on the acquisition and use of fuel, and the poor needed contributions from those who had more. The lack of flowing water put both industry and human life in jeopardy. Weather creates direct and collateral damage to the environment. In that final passage, John Evelyn describes a poisoned atmosphere and the health risks that accompany it. A weather event – blizzard, hurricane, tsunami – is a destructive force, one that will be judged historically by the loss of property and natural resources – but most powerfully by the loss of life. If you are reading this from heaven, Sir John Evelyn, we say thank you for keeping your journal, for your vivid reporting, for your concern for the health of the environment, and, most of all, for your attention to life and its loss.

**Chapter 2 : History of The Great Freeze of at Windsor, UK**

*Evelyn, John (). "An Abstract of a Letter from the Worshipful John Evelyn Esq; Sent to One of the Secretaries of the R. Society concerning the Dammage [ sic ] Done to His Gardens by the Preceding Winter".*

Groom, on the Ice, on the River of Thames, January 31, In an oval cartouche at the top of the view, within the frame of the print, appears the title; and on the outside, below, are the alphabetical references with the words, "Printed and sold by William Warter, Stationer, at the signe of the Talbott under the Mitre Tavern in Fleete Street, London. There is also a variation of the same engraving in the City Library at Guildhall, divided with common ink into compartments as if intended to be used as cards, and numbered in the margin in type with Roman numerals, in three series of ten each and two extra. In the Thames was again frozen over, but the frost was not sufficiently permanent to allow of a repetition of Frost Fair, although several persons crossed over on the ice. In the winter of 16 the frost was again so intensely severe that the river Thames was frozen over during almost the space of three months. Booths were erected on the congealed river for the sale of all kinds of commodities, and all the fun of the fair of was revived. On the 19th of January, , two large oxen were roasted whole on the ice; the vast quantities of snow which had fallen at different times in the season rendered the City almost impassable. The Prince of Wales was attracted to the fair, and a newspaper of the day intimates that the theatres were almost deserted. The winter of the year , generally known as "the hard winter," was a season of distress to the labouring part of the public. A most severe frost began on Christmas Day, and continued till the ensuing February. Its severity was beyond precedent, and the effect produced was long felt. The Thames was soon covered with floating rocks and shoals of ice; and when these were fixed, the river represented a snowy field rising in many places in hillocks and huge heaps of icebergs, and many artists seized the opportunity of making sketches of the strange scene thus presented "above bridge. A few days after it began there arose a very high wind, which did considerable damage to the shipping, that happened at that time to be very numerous. The watermen and fishermen were entirely disabled from earning their livelihood, as were the lower classes of labourers from their employment in the open air; and the calamity was rendered more severe by coals and other necessaries being advanced in their price in proportion to the intenseness and continuance of the frost. Happily for the poor, the hand of charity was liberally extended; great benefactions were given by persons of opulent fortunes, and considerable collections were made in most of the parishes in London; and from this benevolent assistance many wretched families were preserved that otherwise must have inevitably perished. Little or no novelty, however, appears to have been introduced into the amusements of this fair, and the same things were done as on the former occasion, even to the roasting of the regulation ox on the ice, a feat which appears to have been accomplished with some little ceremony, for we read that "Mr. Hodgeson, a butcher of St. Hodgeson "came dressed in a rich laced cambric apron, a silver steel, and a hat and feathers, to perform the office. During its continuance, the distresses of the poor in town and country were truly pitiable. Fuel and other necessaries of life were remarkably dear: Many accidents happened in the cities of London and Westminster, and several people perished by the cold in the streets. The severity of the frost was equally felt in the country; many persons were found dead in the snow, the roads were rendered quite impassable, and it was at the imminent hazard of their lives, that the coachmen and mail-drivers performed their journeys. Again there was a very severe frost in 178, and the Thames was frozen over at Kingston. In the winter of 179 the Thames was again frozen over, and a bear-hunt is stated to have taken place on the ice off Rotherhithe. During this frost the fair on the ice occupied a considerably larger space than on any previous occasion, extending as it did from Shadwell to Putney; it included, among other amusements, a travelling menagerie of beasts which moved about from place to place. At the beginning of January, , a very severe frost set in. On the 8th, the Thames was so much frozen, that there was only a narrow channel in the centre free from ice. The banks of the river were so firmly set with ice and snow that people could walk upon it from Battersea Bridge to Hungerford Stairs. On the 8th of January, however, the fog disappeared, in consequence of a change of wind; and a frost then set in, almost as unexampled in its duration and severity as the fog had been for its density. The frost continued with little intermission till the 20th of March. On the 31st of January several persons walked across

the Thames between London and Blackfriars Bridges; and on the 3rd of February a sheep was roasted on the ice on the same spot, and the whole space between the two bridges had become a complete fair. Several printers had presses on the ice, and pulled off various impressions, for which they found a very rapid sale. So long a continuance of cold weather has seldom been experienced in our climate. A cotemporary account states, with minute precision, that on the morning of Sunday, the 30th of January, , huge masses of ice quite blocked up the Thames between London and Blackfriars Bridges, and that no less than seventy persons walked across from Queenhithe to the opposite shore. On the same night the frost so welded the vast mass together into one compact field as to render it almost immovable by the tide. On Tuesday the river presented a solid surface from Blackfriars Bridge to some distance below Three Crane Stairs, and "thousands perambulated the rugged plain, whereon a variety of amusements was provided. Among the more curious of these," continues the account, "was the ceremony of roasting a small sheep: Near Blackfriars Bridge, however, the ice was not equally secure; for a plumber, named Davies, having imprudently ventured to cross with some lead in his hands, sank between two masses, and was seen no more. Two young women, too, nearly shared the same fate, but they were rescued from their perilous situation by the prompt efforts of some of the Thames watermen. From the solid obstruction the tide did not appear to ebb for some days more than half the usual mark. From this press, too, were issued such papers as this: A handbill printed and sold on the ice contains the following notice: Frost, have by force and violence taken possession of the River Thames, I hereby give you warning to quit immediately. On Thursday the number of booths and stalls, and also that of the visitors, was largely increased. Swings, book-stalls, skittles, dancing booths, merry-go-rounds, sliding barges, and all the other usual appendages of Greenwich and Bartlemy Fairs, now appeared in scores. The ice seemed to be a solid rock, and presented a truly picturesque appearance. Friday, the 4th, brought a fresh accession of booths and of pedlars to sell their wares, and the greatest rubbish that would have long remained unsold on the land was raked up from cellars and garrets and sold at double and treble its value. Books and toys labelled with the words "bought on the Thames" found purchasers on every side. The Thames watermen, who, it might have been supposed, would have been ruined by the weather, their "occupation gone," reaped a considerable harvest; for every person was made to pay a toll of twopence or threepence before he was admitted into the precincts of "Frost Fair;" and some douceur was expected besides on quitting the scene. Indeed, some of them were said to have made as much in coppers as six pounds a day! On this afternoon, however, there occurred an incident which warned the most venturesome that the ice was not so solid, or at all events so safe, as it appeared; for three persons, a man and two lads, being on a piece of ice just above London Bridge, the latter suddenly became detached from the main body, and was carried by the tide through one of the arches. They laid themselves down at full length for safety, and happily were rescued by some Billingsgate fishermen. On the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday "Frost Fair" was in full favour, and the grand walk between Blackfriars and London Bridges was crowded till after nightfall. Saturday, the 5th, augured but badly for the continuance of the "Frost Fair," for the wind veered round to the south, and there was a slight fall of snow and sleet. The visitors, however, were not to be deterred by trifles. Thousands again ventured on the surface, and still there was as much life and bustle as before on the frozen element; the footpath down the middle of the river was hard and secure, and amongst the crowd were some donkeys, which brought in to their owners considerable profit, as a donkey ride on the ice was charged a shilling. These caused much merriment, as may very easily be supposed. Towards the evening the crowd thinned very much, for the rain began to fall and the ice to crack, threatening to float away and carry off booths, donkeys, printing-presses, and all the amusements of the last few days, to the no small dismay of stall-keepers, shop-keepers, typographers, and unlicensed publicans. The thaw, however, advanced rapidly, more rapidly indeed than heedlessness and indiscretion retreated. Two young men ventured on the ice above Blackfriars Bridge, notwithstanding the warnings of the watermen; the mass on which they stood was carried away, and they perished. On Sunday morning, February 6th, at an early hour the tide began to flow, and the thaw assisted the rising tide to break up the ice-field. On Monday, the thaw continuing, immense fragments of ice were in motion, floating up and down according to the set of the tide, carrying, of course, many of the barges and lighters from their moorings above bridge, and drifting them into positions where they speedily became wrecks and sunk. In two or three days more the frozen element

again became fluid, and old Father Thames, under the bright rays of the sun, relaxed his "grim-visaged front," and very soon looked as cheerful and as busy as ever. There can be little doubt, if reliance can be placed on the calculations of civil engineers, that the Thames would have been frozen over in the winter of , and again in , if it had not been for the removal of old London Bridge, the narrow arches of which prevented the masses of ice from escaping seaward. The removal of this impediment has much increased what is called the "scour" of the river; and it is highly improbable that, however protracted, the frost will be able to coagulate the ice into one mass as it did, at all events, in the winters of , , , , , and as we have said above in " Again, towards the latter portion of his life, M. This invention, however, has perhaps been improved on by Captain Paul Boyton, who, in the early part of the present year of grace , might be seen making his way up and down the river between Westminster Bridge and Greenwich in a very novel manner. Dressed in an oil-skin or india-rubber suit of clothes, of sufficient capacity to allow of its being inflated, the captain could lie at full length on the surface of the water, or, placing himself partly in a sitting posture, propel himself comfortably along canoe fashion by means of a short paddle. The waterproof suit, which weighs about fifteen pounds, is in five separate parts—that is to say, head, breast, back, and two legs; and when all are inflated, it is capable of sustaining four men in addition to the wearer. About the year an American diver, named Scott, created some sensation by leaping from the parapet of Southwark and Waterloo Bridges into the river beneath, which was nearly full of floating ice, but the poor fellow shortly afterwards killed himself by hanging from a scaffold upon the latter bridge. Now and then a theatrical clown navigates the river in a washing-tub drawn by geese; and occasionally there are wonderful stories of sharks, porpoises, and other strange things—all "very like a whale"—leaving their ocean sire and disporting themselves "above bridge. Hunter in his "History of London" records the fact that in February, , the tide overflowed the banks to such an extent that casks and other articles of merchandise were swept away from the wharves and quays, and the prison-yard of the Borough compter was some inches under water, and in the next month at spring-tide, the water rushed in a body into Westminster Hall. The same thing seems to have happened in the following September, when the water is said to have risen twelve feet perpendicular in five hours. The worst effects of this high tide, it appears, were felt below bridge; the cattle being carried away—so Hunter says—in the marshes about Stratford and Bow. Several persons lost their lives on the high road, and many machines i. The houses from Bow Bridge to Stratford were all overflowed, and the inhabitants obliged to get out of their windows. He also tells us the tide in the Thames ebbed and flowed, in , three times within seven hours, its waters being thrown into the most violent agitation. From time to time, we may here remark, a variety of projects have been put forward having for their immediate object the improvement of the bed and course of the river both below and above London Bridge, and more than once it has been seriously proposed to dig an entirely new course, in a direct line from Lambeth to Rotherhithe; but though these plans were canvassed and agitated from time to time, the vested interests which opposed them have succeeded in carrying the day, and for a brief period the subject has fallen through, only to be again and again brought forward and as often disposed of in a similar manner. Croom, on the River of Thames. Small folio half-sheet, 74 lines.

Chapter 3 : River Thames frost fairs - Wikipedia

*'The weather continuing intolerably severe,' John Evelyn wrote on 1 January , 'streetes of booths were set upon the Thames; the aire was so very cold and thick'.\* This was by no means the first time the Thames had frozen over.*

The severe weather – the worst in a sequence of harsh winters – lasted two months until thawing in early February. During that time the Thames in central London was transformed into a thoroughfare on which animals, vehicles and humans travelled. The event was not unprecedented; the river had already frozen during eight winters since and would do so once more before the century ended. The earliest account of an icebound Thames appeared in AD and wheeled traffic took to the river as early as AD . Two factors especially made the recreations possible. Not only rivers froze; the coasts bordering the southern North Sea were also affected. Food prices rose, supplies faltered and wood for heating became scarce. The Great Frost of – coincided with an outbreak of smallpox in London. The other factor was man-made. Old London Bridge spanned the Thames between the City and Southwark and over centuries a cramped and crowded street of townhouses, shops and religious foundations had been established along its length. The river was wider and shallower than it is today and the bridge stretched across 20 closely spaced stone piers between which water raced. Consequently, as water froze at the shallow riverbanks in severe winters, chunks of ice broke away on the sluggish current and were caught in the increasingly congested openings of the bridge. The river was so impeded as the tide ebbed that the ice compacted and thickened, quickly spreading across its expanse for some distance upriver, at least as far as Lambeth Palace almost three miles away. At that point, human ingenuity and enterprise speedily intervened. The extraordinary phenomenon known as the frost fair bustled into life, the first of which is known to have taken place in . Similarly attracted to the spectacle was the artist Abraham Hondius. Settled in London for at least ten years after leaving his native Holland and now in advanced middle age, Hondius probably witnessed the commotion of the fair first hand. Perhaps he made mental notes as he patrolled the ice and maybe even drew outline sketches with chilled fingers, although no studies exist. He might also have examined the illustrated printed broadsheets published for widespread distribution at the time, or absorbed written and spoken tales by observers like Evelyn. The conditions that year must have been exceptionally memorable. In addition to its panorama of gestures among the numerous groups of animated characters, the painting has two outstanding features. The first is the centrepiece of the composition: On the left of the stalls is a masted boat, stranded mid-river, with sail raised and flags flying. Its deck may have become the stage for performances with puppets or actors, or the site of an impromptu fairground ride. Its details are perfunctory, the buildings as intangible as stage scenery with windows reduced to minimal vertical rhythms. Although the ice is never thought to have exceeded a robust 11 inches in thickness, Hondius applies artistic licence to his depiction, piling grander blocks in the right foreground, perhaps intentionally recalling his painting of The Frozen Thames Looking Eastwards towards Old London Bridge. The frozen river, for its brief duration, may even have simplified travel through the chaotic medieval city. Charles II was reputedly keen on visiting the fair. One Victorian biographer of London alleged the king joined in a fox hunt on the Thames; and a French traveller present in London at the time stated that on one occasion Charles passed a whole night upon the ice. On 31st January , the printer G. Croom signed a decorative card he produced naming members of the royal family. Perhaps Charles bought one, a possibility that appealed to Henry Gillard Glindoni , an artist who specialised in depicting historical dramas, because he depicted the king with his entourage at the fair flamboyantly perusing a sheet pulled from a nearby press. Glindoni made the painting in , demonstrating a delight in ornate and colourful costumes from bygone eras that probably exceeded strict period accuracy. Even the name by which he was known to the Royal Academy and other London institutions where he regularly exhibited after was embellished with an exotic flourish: Glindoni had been begun life as Henry Glindon not far from the Thames at Kennington. By then the frost fair had been consigned to history. The last fair closed in when the river ice thawed after four days in early February. The demolition of Old London Bridge in and its replacement by a new structure with fewer piers and wider arches meant that the Thames flowed freely in winter. The Frozen Thames Walter Greaves – Then, with the embankment of the north and south banks

through central London in the s, the tidal river became deeper and narrower, eliminating the risk of a future Great Frost. Perhaps that accounts for the wistful mood pervading *The Frozen Thames* in which Victorian artist Walter Greaves , himself a Chelsea boatman devoted to the Thames, shows two snow-dusted boats beached on a bed of ice beside the flowing river. An elegy, of sorts, for former grandeur.

**Chapter 4 : Two Nerdy History Girls: The Frost Fair of**

*Evelyn's mention of skating on the Thames is explained by a period known historically as The Little Ice Age, where the winters in England were much more severe than in present day and the river was wider and slower and blocked by the Old London Bridge and was frozen solid.*

The history, art history and architecture of Britain and its Empire, Europe, the Mediterranean and North America, I assumed those were the few Londoners with enough leisure time on their hands to have fun and play sport on the frozen water, during the winter months. The River Thames has frozen over many times in the last years, and a number of festivals known as the Thames Frost Fairs sprang up on the river. But a frozen river was irregular and unpredictable back then. Even with colder temperatures, the Thames did not totally freeze over in the London area until . Clearly the Thames was wider and shallower pre and it had not yet been embanked. But mostly the river had been impeded by the structure of Old London Bridge. It had 19 narrow arches and each of the 20 piers was supported by large break-waters. When chunks of ice got caught between them, it slowed the flow of the water above the bridge, making it more likely to freeze over. When the old, medieval London Bridge was demolished and the new London Bridge opened in , it only had five arches. Once this structure was in place, the Thames never froze over in the London area again, despite temperatures dropping to C at times in very cold winters. Frost Fairs were carnivals on the ice. Once the Thames was frozen, traders grabbed their chance; dozens of shops popped up overnight. Unlicensed gambling, drinking and dancing were held at the fairs, along with stalls selling food and drink, skittle alleys and fair-ground rides. Vendors sold a very hot, very alcoholic drink made of wormwood wine and gin called purl. People enjoyed bull-baiting, puppet shows, nine-pin bowling and ox-roasting. Boys played games of football on the ice. Even kings and queens joined in the festivities. Queen Elizabeth I practised archery on the ice in the winter of . One fair apparently attracted King Charles who enjoyed a spit-roasted ox. The first big, official Frost Fair occurred during the winter of . During December the ice had been firm enough to allow people to walk from Southwark to the City, but it was not until January that people started setting up camp on it. There were football pitches, bowling matches, fruit-sellers, shoemakers and barbers. Pubs located on both banks of the river made a fortune during Frost Fairs. The most famous frost fair, Blanket Fair, was held in . He crossed the river on the ice on foot once, to dine with the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth, and again in his coach, from Lambeth to the Horseferry at Millbank. The ice had now become so thick as to bear not only streets of booths in which they roasted meat, and had diverse shops of wares quite across the town, but coaches, carts and horses passed over. Hackney coaches began to carry fares from Somerset House and the Temple to Southwark. Gallants in the fashionable dresses of the day were promenading, with wigs and swords; while the ladies, true to the instinct of their sex, were shopping briskly. Tea, coffee and edibles were provided in abundance, and passengers were invited to eat by way of recording their visit. Tradesmen attended with their wares, and sold books, toys, trinkets and souvenirs. The section of river between Blackfriars and London Bridges was renamed City Road and lined with many tradesmen. People had to be aware of rapid thawing, and the potential loss of life and property. During the fair of , for example, a whole band of ice gave away and swallowed up tents and businesses, as well as people. In a ship was anchored to a riverside pub in Rotherhithe, steadily tied until the ship veered about in the melting ice at night. Unfortunately the rigid cables carried away the beam, and levelled the house to the ground; five persons asleep in their beds were accidentally killed. The last ever London Frost Fair took place in Jan . Thousands of people turned up every day that winter, and there was said to be every possible form of entertainment including a parading elephant at below Blackfriars bridge! Although only lasting for five days, this was to be one of the largest fairs on record. By he climate was milder, Old London Bridge had been replaced and the Thames flowed more freely.

Chapter 5 : Antipodean Footnotes: Ephemera #1: 'Printed on the Thames being Frozen'

*A keepsake printed for a Mr John Warter at the frost fair on the Thames, 28 January From the collections of the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication (TYP CES MR/ Frost-fair/ 2).*

Historical background[ edit ] One of the earliest accounts of the Thames freezing comes from AD 1016, when it was frozen solid for six weeks. As long ago as the river was open to wheeled traffic for trade and the transport of goods for 13 weeks; in 1024, it lasted for 14 weeks. In England, when the ice was thick enough and lasted long enough, Londoners would take to the river for travel, trade and entertainment, the latter eventually taking the form of public festivals and fairs. The Thames was broader and shallower in the Middle Ages – it was yet to be embanked, meaning that it flowed more slowly. In winter, large pieces of ice would lodge against these timber casings, gradually blocking the arches and acting like a dam for the river at ebb tide. The most celebrated frost fair occurred in the winter of 1683–84 and was described by John Evelyn: Coaches plied from Westminster to the Temple, and from several other stairs too and fro, as in the streets; sleds, sliding with skeetes, a bull-baiting, horse and coach races, puppet plays and interludes, cooks, tipling and other lewd places, so that it seemed to be a bacchanalian triumph, or carnival on the water. King Charles II bought one. The cold weather was not only a cause for merriment, as Evelyn explained: The fowls, fish and birds, and all our exotic plants and greens universally perishing. Many parks of deer were destroyed, and all sorts of fuel so dear that there were great contributions to keep the poor alive London, by reason for the excessive coldness of the air hindering the ascent of the smoke, was so filled with the fuliginous steam of the sea-coal Hackney coaches plied there as in the streets. There were also bull-baiting, and a great many shows and tricks to be seen. This day the frost broke up. And this day an ox was roasted whole, over against Whitehall. King Charles and the Queen ate part of it. Thames frost fairs were often brief, scarcely commenced before the weather lifted and the people had to retreat from the melting ice. Rapid thaws sometimes caused loss of life and property. In January 1693, melting ice dragged a ship which was anchored to a riverside public house, pulling the building down and causing five people to be crushed to death. The Frost Fair of 1693, by Luke Clenell. Walking from Fulham to Putney[ edit ] Soon after Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London, took residence at Fulham Palace in 1693, he recorded that the year was remarkable "for a very severe frost the latter end of the year, by which the Thames was so completely frozen over, that Mrs. Porteus and myself walked over it from Fulham to Putney". The last frost fair[ edit ] The frost fair of 1789 began on 1 February, and lasted four days. An elephant was led across the river below Blackfriars Bridge. This was the last frost fair. The climate was growing milder; old London Bridge was demolished in [15] [16] [17] and replaced with a new bridge with wider arches, allowing the tide to flow more freely; [18] and the river was embanked in stages during the 19th century, all of which made the river less likely to freeze. Engraving[ edit ] The first panels of the engraving In the pedestrian tunnel under the south bank of Southwark Bridge, there is an engraving by Southwark sculptor Richard Kindersley, made of five slabs of grey slate, depicting the frost fair. In popular culture[ edit ] An early chapter of the novel Orlando: The Doctor had taken her there for ice-skating on the river Thames. When Rory expresses surprise that Stevie Wonder sang in, River cautions him that he must never tell the singer that he did.



**Chapter 7 : Antipodean Footnotes: March**

*During the Great Winter of / 84, where even the seas of southern Britain were frozen solid for up to two miles from shore, the most famous frost fair was held: The Blanket Fair. The famous English writer and diarist John Evelyn described it in extensive detail, writing.*

There is a Discussion Forum for The Great Freeze here Historical Note - Other Thames Freezes This is not intended to be a definitive list, and is based on reported weather conditions from agricultural records where the freezing of the Thames was recorded on most occasions in London. The intention is however to demonstrate that severe weather conditions such as described below were not unique and occurred from time to time on a reasonably regular basis. Freezes occurred in , , the coldest February ever , , , , Source: There are earlier records of freezes also back to AD. New Year Jan But in the end it was just strolls on the ice, and bicycle hockey for the school boys, despite the obvious dangers of falling through the ice. In this article we recall events and reminiscences of the hardest winter Windsor has seen perhaps for a century, using the detailed diaries and contemporary photographs kept by Gordon Cullingham, Deputy Borough Engineer for Windsor at the time, and who was closely involved with the effects of the bad weather around the town. The winter of had started unremarkably enough, with a dusting of snow on 20th November followed by milder weather at the end of the month. The first days of December saw temperatures below freezing all day, despite the sunshine, followed by thick, often freezing, fog from the 3rd - 6th. As Christmas approached there was nothing particularly untoward about the weather, some rain, a gale or two, but come Boxing Day, 26th December, all that was to change when the first heavy snow fell in the afternoon. It snowed again every day until the 29th December when blizzards were forecast. The local council drivers were kept busy salting the roads and, overnight, snow drifts of up to 3 feet 90cm accumulated around the town. Car travel was beginning to be difficult and longer journeys were postponed in the hope that the weather would clear, A common sight around Windsor at New Year, when up to 12" of snow had to be cleared from paths There was not much chance of side roads being cleared as the main roads regularly needed attention. A view of York Avenue and York Road. Sunny and snowy in Clarence Road At New Year there was between 6" and 12" of snow lying and temperatures were regularly below freezing during the day. In a normal winter, deliveries could be expected within a day or two. A policeman had seen flames leaping through the roof and raised the alarm. It was snowing, which hampered the firemen, especially as the water froze on their hoses, and traffic had to be diverted because at that time Windsor Bridge was still the main crossing point between Windsor, Eton and Slough. The blaze was believed to have started in the top flat, but water damage affected the entire building, including Forbes and Francis, the book and record shop at street level. On the 2nd January there was a further snowfall of several inches but hopes of better weather rose on the 3rd when there was a slight thaw that lasted until the 5th. But then it turned cold again and was to remain below freezing for several weeks. Boys returning to Windsor Grammar School in Maidenhead Road on the 8th were sent home as the heating was not working and threats of power cuts due to industrial action by power workers was on the cards. Gordon Cullingham witnessed a solitary skiff being rowed along the river, noisily hitting the chunks of ice - the Thames was beginning to freeze. A view from the promenade on 13th Jan The punt belongs to the ferryman who in the summer would take you across to the Brocas. Although a colour slide, there was little colour to photograph - see below In Romney Lock Cut, downstream of the town, ice had already formed from bank to bank. The water flow here was much slower - almost stationary - and so ice formed more readily than in the faster moving weir stream. Romney Weir and the Lock Cut. Around the town much effort had been made on a daily basis to keep the roads clear, but the problem was that the snow was just not thawing and it became necessary to shovel it into lorries and pile it up on open land. Great piles of snow were dumped by the arches at Baths Island on the site now occupied by the fun fair. There were complaints from residents who, having cleared the piles of snow in front of their drives, were awaking the next day to find that the snow ploughs had pushed it all back again! After five weeks of freezing weather, the Thames was now frozen right across. The following photographs were taken on 19th January and show that ice had formed right across the river at many points,

although in some places it was not very thick, and certainly not thick enough to walk on. Despite this, many school boys from both sides of the river tried and survived to tell the tale The view upstream from the landing stage at Clewer. This view would now be dominated by the Elizabeth Bridge. The road was tinted brown from the brown rock salt. Clarence Road and Vansittart Road junction with snow piled high in the gutters Clarence Road and Vansittart Road junction in March Snow removed from the roadsides and piled up at Barry Avenue by the railway arches Of the gullies drains in Windsor there was concern that only 15 could be found under piled up snow and this would mean that localised flooding would result in the event of a quick thaw, or heavy rain. Efforts were made therefore to find the gullies and ensure that they were kept clear. The river had frozen at Romney Weir, the weather had turned much colder and on the night of January 19th there was a north east gale with blizzards and further snow drifts. But traffic movements were much reduced, especially at night and over the weekend and anyway the temperatures were so low that even salt water froze. A view from the Brocas after the river began to freeze, with areas of clear water where the ducks and swans gathered. The river was now frozen for much of its length at Windsor, with pools of clear water where the ducks and swans gathered. Locals remarked that the ducks were keeping the water clear, but it is also possible that fractionally warmer water from the bottom was rising to the surface and keeping some areas clear. The swans and ducks were well fed by Windsorians, although the weather remained miserable, with a fine hail and freezing rain falling on the 20th January. Food prices were beginning to be affected. Birds were "ravenous" Gordon Cullingham noted in his diary, and although many residents put out food for them, seemed to be less numerous. Gordon also noted that "the cold spell is in 5th week, one of three greatest cold spells this century From 21st - 25th temperatures were still below freezing and now freezing fog returned which made driving extremely dangerous. In addition diesel fuel froze causing many breakdowns. It was planned to hang similar tarpaulins on the other side and somehow draw them together under the bridge filled with insulation, to prevent the main from freezing in the bitterly cold winds. Tarpaulins hang beneath Windsor Bridge. Note the frost in the trees as freezing fog returned to add to the problems. This photo dated 24th January A reminder of warmer days! A similar view in Summer It was reported that some , gallons of water a day were pouring to waste in the Windsor area as a result of leaks and broken mains. The greatest alarm was being felt by the Thames Conservancy and the officers of Windsor Borough Council. The local Womens Voluntary Service WVS was ready with bedding and feeding arrangements for anyone made homeless as a result of flooding. The Adjutant of the Life Guards said that his men would be ready to co-operate if needed. There was one amusing incident reported in the Windsor Express. The Express reported in January that a policeman had slipped and fractured a rib, while an Express reporter had also fallen and fractured his wrist. When a gas shortage was announced in Wales Gordon wrote: Sale of equipment stopped. Southern - 12 hours ban on use. Adverts were replaced by appeals for economy. Anti-freeze iced up in car radiator. Walked across old Baths [to Baths Island] on ice - some walked across river at Ferry [to Brocas], 27 accidents on the M1. Pack ice and ice floes around coast. Small areas of clear water were populated by ducks and swans. The ducks were not amused! Closeup from the above picture Windsorians walk on the frozen Thames. A view towards Windsor Bridge photographed on 24 January On 24th January "Continuing very cold, some thaw in extreme west and Scotland. High pressure slipping to S. Stand pipes in use, Birds noisy at lunch time - weather change?? By the 26th a very slight thaw had started and records were now checked for possible information about likely flooding, but this time there was very little risk as the previous six months had been very much drier and so a quick thaw would be more readily absorbed by the sub-soil. But the thaw was a false dawn. By 30th January the cold weather had returned with some snow flurries. Fuel deliveries were unreliable at best, or non-existent at worst with Gordon writing that only two buckets of coke remained for the boiler. Gordon also mentions that frozen water supply pipes were a problem. On the 3rd February the diary entry reads "Siberian weather. Car badly affected by salt, rust stains. Old oil heaters had been put back into service - though many were probably past it - often by those who had no idea how to use them safely. The result was many fires were started either when a heater was knocked over, or was refilled whilst alight, or perhaps had been left unattended in a loft in an attempt to defrost frozen plumbing. In any event the fire brigade were kept busy! Priority in the distribution of coal was given to steam trains carrying supplies of food, coal, oil and petrol. Weather Map The weather

map for 5th February showed a deep depression to the south west of the UK. The Air Ministry forecast for much of England, Wales and southern Scotland was for cloud with moderate to heavy falls of snow at times, Rain was only forecast for the West Country, with some sunshine, the rest of the country was in the grip of a cold air flow from Europe. As this was in the centre of London, temperatures would not have risen above freezing out of town. The efforts of "meals on wheels" - deliveries of hot meals to the elderly - were much appreciated to say the least and the help also extended to taking buckets of coal to those who had run out. It was clear that many old people were suffering severe hardship as a result of the shortage of fuel. This was at a time when smokeless zones were being introduced despite inadequate supplies of these fuels being available. The result was power cuts that closed cinemas and theatres, darkened streets and traffic lights. It became necessary to carry a torch and also to keep matches and candles readily to hand at work or at home. On February 5th a thaw was forecast in the west, but a blizzard resulted with a very low depression moving up from Madiera. These were extremely dangerous conditions for pedestrians. The whole of the following week, from Monday 11th February through to Friday 15th, a very slow thaw alternated with night frosts such that by the end of the week there was still snow lying. By now the ice was almost 6" thick and so there was no danger of the ice cracking, but in mid-stream it was a different matter where areas of clear water still remained with very thin ice around them. Still there was no significant change in the weather and come 24th February freezing weather had returned by day as well as hard frosts at night. March - it is all over! Gordon drove to Oxford on 2nd March and took two colour photographs, one of which is reproduced below.

**Chapter 8 : ART and ARCHITECTURE, mainly: Frost Fairs on the Frozen Thames**

*The coldest winter in the CET records with a value of Here's some extracts from John Evelyn's diary on this winter. 2nd January: The Thames is frozen.*

As long ago as the river was open to wheeled traffic for trade and the transport of goods for 13 weeks; in , it lasted for 14 weeks. In England, when the ice was thick enough and lasted long enough, Londoners would take to the river for travel, trade and entertainment , the latter eventually taking the form of public festivals and fairs. The Thames was broader and shallower in the Middle Ages " it was yet to be embanked , meaning that it flowed more slowly. In winter, large pieces of ice would lodge against these timber casings, gradually blocking the arches and acting like a dam for the river at ebb tide. The most celebrated frost fair occurred in the winter of "84 and was described by John Evelyn: Coaches plied from Westminster to the Temple , and from several other stairs too and fro, as in the streets; sleds, sliding with skeetes , a bull-baiting , horse and coach races, puppet plays and interludes, cooks, tipling and other lewd places, so that it seemed to be a bacchanalian triumph, or carnival on the water. King Charles II bought one. The cold weather was not only a cause for merriment, as Evelyn explained: The fowls, fish and birds, and all our exotic plants and greens universally perishing. Many parks of deer were destroyed, and all sorts of fuel so dear that there were great contributions to keep the poor alive London, by reason for the excessive coldness of the air hindering the ascent of the smoke, was so filled with the fuliginous steam of the sea-coal Hackney coaches plied there as in the streets. There were also bull-baiting, and a great many shows and tricks to be seen. This day the frost broke up. And this day an ox was roasted whole, over against Whitehall. King Charles and the Queen ate part of it. Thames frost fairs were often brief, scarcely commenced before the weather lifted and the people had to retreat from the melting ice. Rapid thaws sometimes caused loss of life and property. In January , melting ice dragged a ship which was anchored to a riverside public house , pulling the building down and causing five people to be crushed to death. The Frost Fair of , by Luke Clenell. Walking from Fulham to Putney Soon after Beilby Porteus , Bishop of London , took residence at Fulham Palace in , he recorded that the year was remarkable "for a very severe frost the latter end of the year, by which the Thames was so completely frozen over, that Mrs. Porteus and myself walked over it from Fulham to Putney". The last frost fair The frost fair of began on 1 February, and lasted four days. An elephant was led across the river below Blackfriars Bridge. This was the last frost fair. The climate was growing milder; old London Bridge was demolished in [15] [16] [17] and replaced with a new bridge with wider arches, allowing the tide to flow more freely; [18] and the river was embanked in stages during the 19th century, all of which made the river less likely to freeze. Southwark engraving about the River Thames frost fairs 1.

**Chapter 9 : Frost Fairs on the Thames**

*For perhaps the most familiar general account comes from John Evelyn's diary; we read how he 'took coach to Lambeth' along the frozen river. We have enough in the way of daily weather observations for to go some way towards a reconstruction of the meteorology.*

Already known for its tendency toward fog, the city was encased in thick clouds for eight days. While the freezing of the Thames was not unknown to Londoners, the relatively temperate climate of London meant that the river froze only rarely. The first of these fairs dates back to at least AD when booths selling goods were built upon the river after it had frozen. By the sixteenth century, a period when the weather was colder than it is today, the freezing of the Thames brought out revelers in full force. Two men are falling on the ice at the front of this etching of the Frost Fair. Just over forty years later, in , the Thames froze again. It is an alley to walk upon without dread. The frozen river also presented dangers, as holes appeared when the ice froze, thawed, and froze again. After decades of civil war and religious-political tensions, the English had achieved an uneasy peace. While Charles II was not universally popular throughout his reign, the early s did see a resurgence of popularity for the king. John Forde clearly made a habit of purchasing printed cards at Frost Fairs, photo courtesy Univ. If nothing else, the placement of a printing press on the ice, which operated without any real oversight, signaled that Britain was a very different society than it had been previously. The printer who brought his press onto the ice knew, however, that Londoners were not eager to buy anything overtly political. Later frost fairs followed this tradition of including printing presses on the ice, with multiple printers competing to turn out not only cards but also ballads and poems celebrating the icing over of the Thames--as well as the icing of other rivers in Britain. In , Thomas Gent set up his printing press at a frost fair on the river Ouse in York. That year had seen such severe weather across Europe that the Empress Anna of Russia was able to build an entire ice palace with walls that were three feet thick on the River Neva. Britons, however, did not aspire to build on that scale on their rivers. Instead, they continued to set up simple booths and small-scale structures made out of the ice as they had done for centuries. Kitchen fires and furnaces were blazing It has simply not sparked the same sort of revelry. Take a look at this short film below from The Museum of London about frost fairs.