

## The Frost Fairs of London

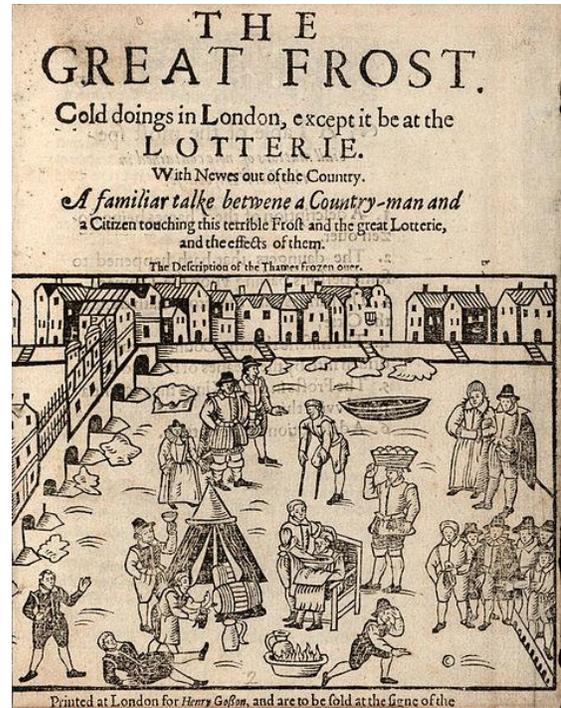


From 1300 until 1870, the Earth experienced very low temperatures due to a natural occurrence named “the Little Ice Age”. This was mainly due to a period of geological climate change combined with volcanic eruptions, and with very low sunspot activity.

The “Little Ice Age” phenomenon caused many consequences that affected everyday life for Londoners. In the worst freezes, like that of 1683-84, lakes, rivers and part of the sea around the southern coasts of England all froze. The fact was so exceptional that it was reported in the London Gazette newspaper dated 31 January 1684, in particular because it brought to a halt all the commerce on the water, especially on the river Thames. This was London's main form of travel and transportation. With the Thames at a standstill, hundreds of bargemen and sailors were frozen out of work. Frost fairs offered a chance for them to earn money by guiding sight-seers out onto the ice. Others fitted their small boats with runners, turning them into sledges, and offered rides along the frozen river.

The Thames was not the river we know today: it was much wider and shallower, and had not yet been contained within stone embankments. Its depth, and the fact that it flowed much more slowly meant that it was easier for the water to freeze. The Old London Bridge, built on nineteen arches supported by small piers with projecting "starlings", which broke up the flow of the river. In winter, when these arches were blocked with ice and debris, London Bridge almost acted like a dam, slowing the Thames and helping it to freeze.

The traders who set up on the ice sold many items which visitors could buy as a souvenir of their extraordinary visit to a Frost Fair. Printers would print and sell "tickets" to Frost Fairs, personalizing them with the names of customers.



The last Frost Fair occurred in 1814. Nobody thought it would be the last one at that time. By now, the Frost Fair was an experience reported in newspapers, depicted in paintings and passed on by word of mouth.

Temperatures were below freezing every night from 27 December 1813 to 7 February 1814. However, it was between 25 January and 1 February 1814 that vast congregations of people started to gather on the ice and set up the stalls marking the official start of the Frost Fair.

Source: The Museum of London ([https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/frost-fairs?gclid=EAIalQobChMI5JOp1sbQ-QIV8waICR3aDQg7EAAAYASAAEgIP9fd\\_BwE](https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/frost-fairs?gclid=EAIalQobChMI5JOp1sbQ-QIV8waICR3aDQg7EAAAYASAAEgIP9fd_BwE)).