

# The Frost Fairs of London [B2]

Durante la Piccola era glaciale, tra il 1607 e il 1814, il Tamigi si ghiacciava per settimane intere. Sulla superficie congelata venivano allestite fino a sette fiere, con la presenza di mercati, taverne e spettacoli di animali.

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Nowadays it is rare to see snow in the city of London, but this wasn't always the case. From approximately 1250 to 1860 the Northern Hemisphere suffered what is known as the Little Ice Age and, during the periods of more intense cold, the River Thames occasionally froze over completely for as long as two months. A contributing factor was the medieval London Bridge, which had **piers** that were placed much closer together than those of the current bridge. During winter, pieces of ice floated down the river, got **stuck** between the **narrow** supports and created a **dam**, allowing more ice to form.

## SOCIAL COST

These **harsh** winters had terrible consequences for the poor. They brought famine and death as well as a loss of **income** for the boatmen who **ferried people across** the river. However, Londoners have always been resilient and enterprising. During December 1607 the ice became firm enough for people to walk between Southwark and the City, then in January, it became so **thick** that they went a step further and set up **hastily** constructed shops and pubs to create the first Thames **Frost** Fair.

## SPECTACULAR SIGHT

Between 1607 and 1814 there were a total of seven great fairs and many smaller ones. A spectacular sight, they included shops and pubs, **football pitches** and bowling matches. There were **jugglers**, musicians, **puppet plays** and ice-skating races. The **shop keepers** even had fires inside their tents to keep them warm. The biggest fair, known as the **Blanket** Fair, took place in the winter of 1683-84. It was **reportedly** attended by King Charles II, who enjoyed a **spit-roasted ox** on the ice.

## RISK TO LIFE

Unsurprisingly, there was the occasional tragedy. During the fair of 1739 a huge piece of ice collapsed, dropping people and tents into the freezing water. In 1789 the captain of a ship [moored further east](#) paid a local pub owner to make his ship secure by placing an anchor in the pub [cellar](#) and tying a cable from the ship to a [beam](#) in the roof. During the night the ice began to [melt](#), the ship moved about and pulled the pub down with several people inside.

## LAST AND LARGEST

By the 1800s the winters were becoming less severe. The last ever London [Frost](#) Fair was held in January 1814. Lasting only five days, it was nevertheless one of the largest [on record](#), attended by thousands of people. According to historical accounts, there was every entertainment imaginable, including a [parading](#) elephant!

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# Glossary

- **stuck** = bloccato
- **harsh** = rigido
- **ferried people across** = traghettare
- **jugglers** = giocolieri
- **puppet plays** = spettacoli di marionette
- **moored** = ormeggiare
- **piers** = moli
- **thick** = spesso
- **football pitches** = campi da calcio
- **reportedly** = secondo quanto riferito
- **further east** = più a est
- **cellar** = cantina
- **parading** = sfilare
- **narrow** = stretto
- **dam** = diga
- **ox** = bue
- **beam** = trave
- **on record** = ufficialmente, pubblicamente
- **income** = reddito
- **hastily** = frettolosamente
- **Frost** = gelo
- **shop keepers** = negozianti
- **Blanket** = manto
- **spit-roasted** = arrostito allo spiedo
- **melt** = sciogliersi