

CALLING ALL PERFORMERS, MUSICIANS, ARTISTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

...showcase your talents in celebration of 400 years since Bankside's first great medieval Frost Fair of 1607–08

*Behold the wonder of this present age / A frozen river now becomes a stage
Question not what I now do close to you / The Thames is now both fair and market too*'*

From Friday 14th to Sunday 16th December 2007... the Bankside riverside between Southwark and Blackfriars Bridges will come alive with all the colour, sounds and energy of the fifth '21st Century' Frost Fair - the tradition of a mid-winter carnival and pageant centred on the frozen river having been revived by Southwark Council in 2003, so we could all relive the days when, every 15-50 years, the Thames used to freeze over all the way from Blackfriars to London Bridge, making this stretch of the river a perfect venue for an extraordinary carnival-centred celebration of all that Bankside's entrepreneurs and artists had to offer.

With the scene now set, and a sense of history 'to be continued', if you are involved in:

music – theatre – performance poetry – dance – sport – visual arts – crafts

...we would like to invite you to take part in a three-hour 'Show us what you do' workshop, with a view to you, and/or the group you represent, taking part in this year's Bankside Frost Fair...

main stage performances – promenade performances – workshops – exhibitions

Members of the creative teams at Tate Modern, Shakespeare's Globe and Southwark Playhouse will be on-hand to discuss ideas and to help decide who can be included in this year's programme

When Friday 28 September, 10am – 1pm OR 2pm – 5pm

Where Southwark Playhouse, Tooley Street London SE1

Timetable of day

10.00 – 10.30 / 14.00 – 14.30	meet the team, briefing and Q&A, signing-up for audition places
10.30 – 11.00 / 14.30 – 15.00	brainstorm re existing/site-specific new work, potential collaborations e.g community groups and local artists may like to work together dressing part of the Frost Fair site, or holding a themed workshop
11.00 – 13.00 / 15.00 – 17.00	auditions and presentations of work; with those hoping to develop their ideas with other artists and performers welcome to 'sit in'

Places at both sessions will be allocated on a first-come basis so please RSVP asap to Asghar Mukadam at tourism@southwark.gov.uk or on direct line 020 7525 1139

Everyone who auditions or submits a portfolio of work will be contacted again by 5th October, allowing those who are to be included in the community arts element of the 2007 Frost Fair two and a half months to develop their ideas in preparation for the event.

BANKSIDE FROST FAIR 2007 – THE BRIEF in brief

The Bankside Frost Fair Community Arts team would like the local creative community to help...

- **dress the site** – with outdoor lighting and art installations, film projections, art spaces... e.g. visual artists could capture visitors' impressions on a large canvas 'memory wall'
- **animate the site** – with street performers, musicians, dancers, sporting challenges... bringing people 'pied-piper style' from and through key surrounding areas, drawing visitors to lesser known spaces, or simple entertaining them on the main/side stages
- **enrich the site** – running educational and creative workshops and demonstrations... for children, adults or both, during and/or in the run-up to December's 3-day event

We are looking for our community creatives to interpret the Frost Fair's defining 'winter wonderland' themes

ice – frost – snow

river – boats – trading ships

the cultural riches of Bankside past and present, its creative and industrial heritage

- theatres, bull/bear-baiting rings, prize fighting
- breweries, brothels, mills, docks and fishponds
- printing, glassmaking, potteries (English Delftware)

...through performing and visual arts, design, music, fashion, food, photography and crafts... delivered as performance, demonstrations, interactive displays, exhibitions or workshops, that either re-enact an aspect of the historic Frost Fairs (see panel right), reinvent it giving past pleasures a 21st century twist or supercede them with their modern-day equivalent.

E.g. using bull and bear masks/costumes and dancers, hobby horses instead of real steeds... the options, and ways to be creative, are seemingly limitless — it really is up to you!

1 NOTE: Bankside was medieval London's Soho, but more so, from the late 16th to early 17th century its four renown theatres and live entertainments made it Elizabethan and Jacobean England's Covent Garden. This was due to the lax jurisdiction of 'The Clink' manor and Paris Gardens, which meant that the business and recreational activities that had no place in The City found a home just a discreet boat ride away on the opposite bank of the Thames — more details on request!

Elsewhere on site... there will be an Opening Lantern Parade on the theme 'I Saw Three Ships'; an inaugural traditional Thames Cutters' boat procession; London's largest winter market with 70 stalls selling crafts, Christmas gifts etc; winter food and drink; professional bands, choirs and street theatre; children's Husky dog sled rides; ice-sculpting, and art and craft workshops

in days gone by...

All the fun of the Frost Fair

al-fresco dining rooms and 'cookshop'
tea shops, coffee houses
brandy & 'Mum' sellers – hot ale with spices
beer tents, gin palaces, whisky sellers
braziers roasting meat
(oxen and sheep known as 'Lapland Mutton')
bullring, bull and bear-baiting
(occasionally even horse baiting)
gambling booths
fox-hunting
pigeon holes
horse and donkey racing
coach racing
the Vulcan chariot, a boat on wheels
a whirling sledge, turnabouts
the Dutch Whimsie – a 'boat-on-a-rope' pulled around a central stake by Flemish strongmen
ice sliding and later skating
skiing and sledging
football
9-pin bowling, skittles
bowls for ladies of quality
dancing
musicians, fiddlers
fire-eaters, jugglers, sword swallows
stilt walkers
travelling theatre
travelling menageries
puppet shows
throwing-at-a-c*ck 'for crude hearted roughs'
cup and ball
printing presses
.and a barber or two

A Frost Fair shopping list

black pudding, hot pudding pies
pancakes, plum cakes, gingerbread
fruit, candies, snuff
toys, trinkets, bric-a-brac
commemorative prints and books (including special 'Printed on the Thames' titles)

What was once a cultural and commercial free-for-all is now a free-to-all cultural and commercial success story, staged annually by an event management team from Inneventive on behalf of London Borough of Southwark, with the financial, administrative and creative support of Better Bankside, and much assistance in-kind from the management and artists of

THE BANKSIDE BACKSTORY

some information and inspiration...

Bullrings, baiting-rings, braziers and barbers, brothel-owning bishops and beer by the barrel. In the middle of winter, in the middle of the Thames, the scene at Bankside was described by Evelyn as 'a Bacchanalian triumph of carnival on the water'.

And It wasn't just the ordinary Londoners who enjoyed a good Frost Fair – royalty, including Queen Elizabeth I, were often seen practising archery and target shooting amidst the crowds and carnival atmosphere that bought a wealth of life to the frozen Thames.

All the fun of the Fair, including fun for all the family, was awaiting the medieval masses just outside the jurisdiction of the City elders. And they all came, from maids to merchants, manorial masters to madcap minors, to have their hearts warmed during the big freeze.

The sharp frost had set in between 8–15 December 1607, and after a temporary thaw lasting until 22 December the normal flow of life along the Thames was again bought to a standstill by the extreme freeze between 10–15 January 1608, bringing all sorts of men, woman and children out onto the ice, in 'tumultuous possession' to dance and engage in other variable pastimes, and to ply their trades. Fires were lit to toast bread and roast oxen – sold for 1 shilling a slice. The glitterns and lute strings of the barbers offering 'a shave in the middle of the Thames' were a major attraction, and with the word-of-mouth marketing suggesting that it was 'something to be remembered in the afterlife' the barbers found plenty of custom.

London apprentices would be running and sliding on the ice at 'an increment of velocity' while others were being drawn along the frozen Thames by their companions, on large sledges of ice. Those more 'expert in the amusements of the ice' placed the leg-bones of animals under their feet and, having tied them in place with straps around their ankles and found themselves an iron staff, were able to ski across the ice 'at a velocity equal to the flight of a bird, or bolt discharged from a cross-bow'

By 1662 iron skates had been introduced from Holland, and all manor of sports – including bowls for ladies of quality, throwing-at-a-c*ck 'for the crude hearted roughs', and horse and donkey racing for all – were ready to take to the ice, as well as thousands of people coaches and carts, and a three-wheeled Vulcan chariot. By the time London was trying to find ways to enjoy it's coldest winter of 1682-83, stilt-walkers and travelling theatres were promenading across the ice, that at its deepest was 11 inches thick. There was a boat on wheels, ice-bound boats bedecked with flags, and in the midst of it all the Dutch Whimsie, a boat tied to a central stake by rope so that it could then be pulled around at speed by muscle-bound Dutchmen. Elsewhere on the river football teams were up to their full strength, shooting goals across the frozen water.

In 1715–16 the seven week frost that lasted until 9 February, allowed the Frost Fair to host a great cookshop where 'where gentlemen went frequently to dine'. There was also good business to be done as a printer, as there was much enthusiasm for having names printed for posterity on commemorative sheets. *'Behold the Power of God which locks / In close confinement under pond'rous Rocks / Of dreadful Ice and Snow, our famous Thames / Whole matchless Glory all the World proclaims'* – *'Printed on the Thames Thursday January the 12th 1716'*

During the 18th Century's coldest winter of 1739–40, at the time of Bankside's fourth great Frost Fair, Robert Ball described the frozen Thames 'like a model in the raw material of a select nook in the arctic regions, being covered with icebergs rising on all sides in gigantic masses.' Ashes were spread on the ice to prevent slipping, but nothing could be done to prevent wine and beer in Bankside basements freezing in its cellars, and across the river the ink setting solid in the drawing rooms of the City. The 1739-40 Frost Fair bought the people welcome relief from the fact that the temperature in the City of London was – according to Dr James Jurin of the Royal Society – minus 11 degrees Fahrenheit. Turnabouts, puppet shows and travelling menageries. All were doing a roaring trade in the middle of a frozen Thames, with retail space being offered under the terms of *'This booth to let. The present possessor of the property is Mr J Frost. His Affairs however not being on a permanent footing a dissolution or bankruptcy may soon be expected and the final settlement of the whole entrusted to the Thames'*.

THE BANKSIDE BACKSTORY continued

Forever inspired by the icy backdrop to the Frost Fair, and pandering to a poetically-inclined public, in the winter of 1788-89 one visitor used 'the Noble Art and Mystery of Printing' to preserve for future generations his observation that *'The silver Thames was frozen o'er / No difference 'twixt the stream and shore / The like no Man hath seen before / 'except he that lived in days of yore'*. Fortunately, having been established 14 years earlier as 'The Institute for affording immediate relief to persons apparently dead from drowning', the Icemen of The Royal Humane Society were now on hand to deal with the realities of those who had fallen through the ice.

By the end of January 1814 it had below freezing for sixteen consecutive days, and huge formations of ice blocked the Thames from Blackfriars to London Bridge, making this stretch of the river a 'solid field of ice'. However, with the arrival of new wide-span bridges, and the draining of river-side marshes, that all served to increase the flow of the Thames, that year's celebrations were to be the last great Frost Fair of Old. And it certainly had all the trappings of the early nineteenth century. There were now ten printing presses out on the river – printing whole books such as G. Davis' 'A History of The River Thames in a frozen state interspersed with various amusing anecdotes to which is added the art of skating'. Sheep, advertised, as 'Lapland Mutton', were being roasted over coal fires, as thousands of people came to wonder at, if not take a seat in, the gin palaces and brandy halls. In these 'fuddling tents' customers would be welcomed with the greeting 'What lack ye Sir? Beer, ale or brandy', knowing that here popular wisdom allowed for the fact that '...folk do tipple without fear to sink / More liquor than the fish beneath do drink.' As they raised their glass of 'Mum' – hot ale with spices – and made their way to and from the Barclay's Intire and The Lord Wellington Forever, and the Rouge et Noir gambling den, they met with fire-eaters, jugglers, and sword swallows. A booth owned by Mr Lawrence of High Timber Street Queenshithe, opposite the modern-day Globe, was set up 'for the accommodation of the curious'. Booths garlanded with flags, streamers and signs, were fashioned from blankets, which 'did double duty' serving as beds at night and houses all day. The cloth a type of frieze earned the scene as whole the name of 'Freezland Street'. Elsewhere, a passageway on the ice from Blackfriars Bridge became known as City Road, and the place where Frost Fair visitors could find tradesmen of every description. Trinkets were two–three times their dry land price. But there seemed to be no end of demand for the bric-a-brac, books, toys, gingerbreads, all labelled up for the occasion as having been 'bought on the Thames'.

FROST FAIR — FACTS & FIGURES

- records first mention sports and pleasurable diversions on the ice in 1309–10
- subsequent Frost Fairs were held during the 'Big Freeze' of 1607–08, 1682–83, 1715–16, 1739–40 1788–89 and 1813–14

WHISPERS FROM HISTORY – Who said what about life in Old Bankside, in the days of the Frost Fairs

**Behold the wonder of this present age / A frozen river now becomes a stage
Question not what I now do close to you / The Thames is now both fair and market too'.*
— printed by M. Haly and J. Miller, 1684.

"and if the words get muddled in my tale just put it down to too much Southwark ale"
– The Miller in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'

- many more such quotes available, and are in the process of being verified

SOURCES

The Story of Bankside — Leonard Reilly & Geoff Marshall, published by L.Borough of Southwark, 2001
Frosts, Freezes & Fairs — Ian Currie, published by Frosted Earth, 1996 (01737 554 869)