

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LONDON'S FROST FAIRS

London winters are more remarkable for dismal drizzling rain and impenetrable fog than for snow and ice; but about half a dozen times in the last three hundred years truly arctic conditions have prevailed in the world's metropolis and the River Thames has been frozen over so firmly that men and horses could go upon it. Each of these periods has been the occasion of a "frost fair"; booths have been erected on the ice, printing-presses set up, various sports and games indulged in; and the whole population has joined in celebrating the rare event.

The first great frost fair was held in January, 1608; but the most famous of all was that of 1683-4, which lasted from the beginning of December to the fifth of February. King Charles II and his family visited this fair and had their names printed on a quarto sheet of Dutch paper, which is still extant.

During the frost fair of January, 1716, it is recorded that an uncommonly high tide, which flooded cellars on the banks of the river, raised the ice fully fourteen feet without interrupting the people in their amusements. Similar fairs were held in 1740, 1788-9 and 1814. The last was one of the gayest and most animated of these events, though it lasted only four days.

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