

## Then and Now 6 - Thames View



*Top Picture - Thames view by T. Bowles, 1794  
© British Library*

*The drawing of the River Thames in central London is facing East. The artist is T. Bowles.*

Look at both pictures and find these comparative details:

## Thames View - 1794

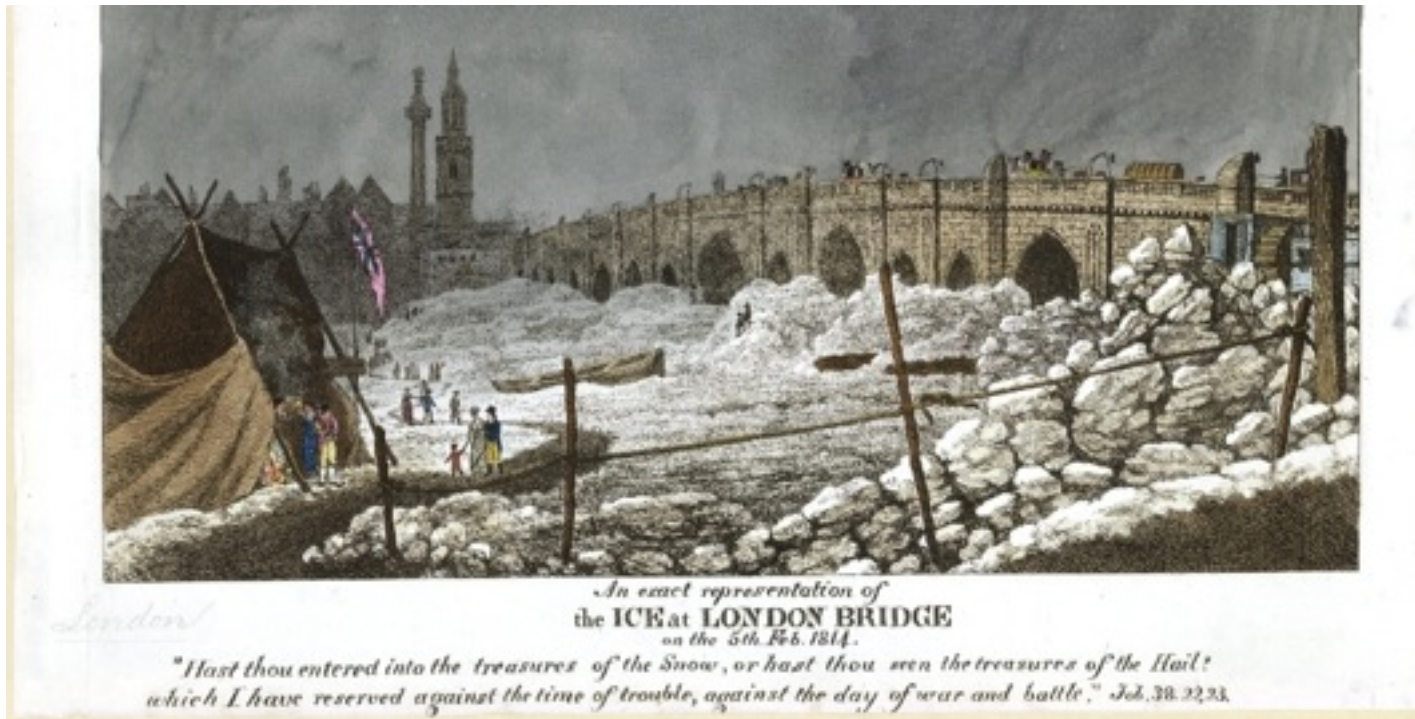
1: The drawing shows an aerial view of central London, looking westwards, towards the Pool of London and London Bridge. It is the opposite view to the one painted by Canaletto in 1752, (see Then and Now 1) which was painted some 40 years earlier. The view is from about 100 metres above the River Thames. We know that because it seems to be only a little above the top of the Monument to the Great Fire of London (the very tall thin column to the right of London Bridge). The only way that the artist could have drawn the view from this height would have been in a hot air balloon, but that is unlikely, so the artist probably used their imagination. The Monument is 202 feet high (62m) and its shadow falls at sunset 202 feet to mark the exact spot in Pudding Lane where the Great Fire of London started on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1666 and burnt for three days. Many of the houses in the area were destroyed, as well as St Paul's Cathedral.

2: St Paul's Cathedral was rebuilt, after the Great Fire of London. It was designed by Sir Christopher Wren, a very famous architect. It was finished in 1710. The dome of the rebuilt St Paul's is quite distinct and can be seen clearly in the drawing. Wren also designed many of the rebuilt churches in the City of London. The tall spires of these churches can also be seen on the northern bank of the River Thames, on the right of the drawing, just as they can be seen in Canaletto's painting of the City from 1752 (See Then and Now 1)



*The Monument to the Great Fire of London (British Library)*

3: London Bridge dominates the centre of the drawing. There has been a bridge here for nearly 2000 years. The bridge in the drawing is the medieval "Old" London Bridge started in 1176, so it was over 600 years old at this point. The houses that had been built on the bridge were knocked down between 1758 and 1762 to ease traffic congestion and a wider single span bridge built in the middle to make it easier for small boats to pass through upstream of the bridge. The remaining narrow spans on the rest of the bridge still remained until the whole bridge was demolished in 1831 to make way for a new Victorian stone bridge built 30m upstream with only five spans across the river instead of about twenty narrow arches. The arches of the "Old" bridge, slowed down the flow of water, leading to the Thames freezing over 24 times between 1408 and 1814, providing Londoners the chance to celebrate with Frost Fairs. These included setting up stalls on the ice to sell hot food and even driving horse and carriages across the ice. (also see Then and Now 11 - London Bridge for more details)



*Ice at London Bridge - 5<sup>th</sup> February 1814 (unknown artist) - British Library*

4: Tall-masted sailing ships can be seen in the middle of the river in what is known as the Port of London, the centre of river trade in London at this time. Billingsgate Fish Market and the Customs House can be seen on the right bank this side (downstream) of London Bridge. These large boats could still not pass through the slightly wider central arch of London Bridge, they either had to tie up next to Billingsgate and the Legal Quays at the Customs House or be unloaded to smaller lighters in the middle of the river. There were pirates here who would steal from all the boats waiting to unload. This was why wet docks were built downstream from this point from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards to make it possible to unload at any tide and to stop theft.

5: The Tower of London can just be seen in the bottom right of the picture and the twin towers of Westminster Abbey in the top left. If the artist could not actually see this view, as seems likely, he or she did make a remarkably accurate drawing.

## Photograph - 2014 - Thames View

1: This same bird's eye view of the River Thames in central London looking west, was taken from the upper walkways of Tower Bridge, 213 feet (65m) above the river, putting the photographer in a position only slightly lower than the artist imagined in 1794, some 220 years earlier.

2: The first bridge we can see looking up stream is still London Bridge. The Victorian Bridge was taken down in 1972 and rebuilt as a tourist attraction in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, USA. It was replaced in London by a new bridge in the same location, which now has only 3 spans instead of 5. It was opened by her Majesty the Queen in 1973. We can now see several bridges behind London Bridge. See the Transport Lesson plan to work out which bridges these are.

3: Some buildings in the 1794 drawing still remain in place and can be seen in the modern photo; St Paul's Cathedral, the Monument (311 steps to the top) the old Billingsgate Market, Customs House (now with trees in front on what was the Legal Quays) and the Tower of London (just out of the picture on the right). It is not possible to see the twin towers of Westminster Abbey from this point but the Abbey is still there.



*Her Majesty's Royal  
Palace and Fortress more commonly known as the Tower of London*

4: The cargo ships in the Pool of London have gone to docks downstream. The large ship on the left is HMS Belfast, a World War 2 cruiser. Have you been on board HMS Belfast?



*Tower Bridge does not open very often now. HMS Belfast is also in shot*



*The view of London Bridge from the Shard*

5: Office buildings now stand tall where Wren's church spires once dominated the sky line of the City of London. The Shard (opened in 2012) is the tallest building in the United Kingdom at 309.6m tall, it is the fourth largest in Europe. It is on the left of the picture and stands above London Bridge Station in Southwark. It has fantastic views from the observation deck. On the right bank, in the City of London there are also many tall buildings and many cranes building even more tall buildings. The large building on the right, 20 Fenchurch Street, often

called the “Walkie Talkie”, also has an observation deck called the Sky Garden with views looking out south over the river. Have you been to either of these places?