

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

No.11 'York: Printed on the Frozen Ouse'

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At the conclusion of 'An Excursion into printed ephemera: III: "Printed on the Thames being frozen"' (*BSANZ Bulletin* 11(1987) [November 1989], 157-168) I quoted a passage from Thomas Gent's autobiography, *The Life of Mr. Thomas Gent, printer of York* (London, 1832), as evidence that in the winter of 1739/40 the River Ouse froze over in York and keepsakes were printed on the ice there, just as in the same season they were printed on the frozen River Thames in London:

In January 1739 [/40], the frost having been extremely intense, the rivers became so frozen, that I printed names upon the ice. It was a dangerous spot on the south side of the bridge, where I first set up, as it were, a new kind of press, only a roller wrapt about with blankets. Whilst reading the verses I had made to follow the names, wherein King George was most loyally inserted, some soldiers round about made great acclamations, with other good people; but the ice suddenly crackling, they almost as quickly run away, whilst I, who then did not hear well, neither guessed the meaning, fell to work, and wondered at them as much for retiring so precipitately as they at me for staying; but taking courage, they stoutly returned back, brought company, and I took some pence amongst them. After this, I moved my shop to and fro, to the great satisfaction of young gentlemen, ladies, and others, who were very liberal on the occasion. (pp.192-3)

It is now possible to report that at least one copy of Gent's keepsake has survived, that produced for Mr. Nicholas Hailstone and forming part of the Hailstone Collection in the York Minster Library (see illustration). I am grateful to the Dean and Chapter of York for permission to reproduce it here, and to Mrs. Deirdre Mortimer, Assistant Librarian, for valued assistance in identifying the item and providing details about it.

The leaf measures approximately 217 x 187 mm, with vertical chain lines and the trace of a watermark at the lower left-hand corner, suggesting that it is one-eighth of a sheet, though one of unusual dimensions, approximately 75 x 44 cm. The printed area measures 196 x 123 mm, the border made up of ornaments predominantly the Arms of Amsterdam - on the face of it an unusual design for Gent to possess, though I have not looked at further

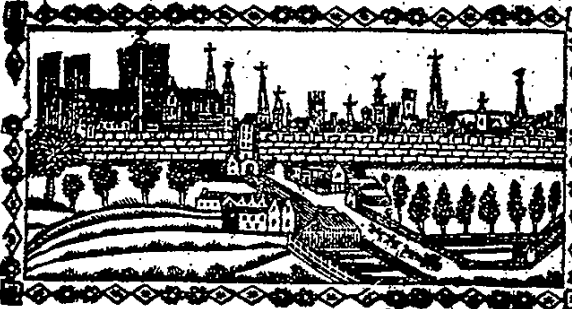
examples of Gent's work to check whether they appear elsewhere; the woodblock at the head of the text obviously represents the river and Ouse Bridge, but, apart from depicting the Minster, the background is no doubt suggestive rather than accurate. Given the improvised nature of the press, it must be allowed that the quality of the printing is more than passable. As far as I can establish, Gent is the only person ever to have printed on the Ouse at York, though the river had frozen over twice in the previous century. According to the weekly *York Courant*, No.744, 15 January 1740, quoting an 'Abstract from the Historical Collections of the City, lately printed', in 1607,

About Martinmas [11 November] began an extream Frost; the River Ouse was wholly frozen up, so hard that you might have passed with Cart and Carriage as well as upon firm Ground. Many sports were practised on the Ice; as shooting at Eleven Score [paces] with Arrows, Bowling, Playing at Football, Cudgels, &c. And a Horse-Race was run from the Tower at St Marygate End, along and under the great Arch of the Bridge, to the Cram at Skelder-Gate Postern.

And in 1614, beginning 16 January, 'there was such a heavy Snow upon the Earth, as was not remember'd by any Man then living', but with no reference to activities on the frozen river. (This information is repeated in *The History and antiquities of the City of York, from its origin to the present time*, 3v. (York, 1785) and its second edition, *Eboracum: or, The history ... to this time* (York, 1788).)

On the frost of 1739/40 the *Courant* is disappointingly uninformative. It reported, 8 January 1740 (No.743), that it had begun to freeze 23 December; in the next issues it claimed that 'This is the longest and severest Frost that has been felt with us these fifty Years'; but it did not record the thaw, the last reference being 29 January (No.746), when 'the *Embargo* on our Navigation is still *rigorously* continued, and all Intercourse with this City, by Water, is *strictly* prohibited'. Indeed, there is - as with other provincial newspapers of the period¹ - very little local news at all, and the sole reports in relation to the frost are of charitable gifts to ease the lot of the poor of the city, beginning with that of the Dean and Chapter, who gave £20, an example which the paper hoped would be copied by all the clergy of the diocese. (Sir Edward Gascoigne, 'two eminent Brewers' and 'several other considerable Citizens' are in the same issue reported to have given coals.) Mrs. Mortimer has drawn my attention to what is possibly the only reference other than Gent's own to his printing on the frozen river - a

1. See R.M. Wiles, *Freshest Advices: early provincial newspapers in England* ([Columbia]: Ohio State University Press, 1965), especially chapter 5, 'News from Far and Near'.



Mr. Nicholas Hailfrone

YORK : Printed on the frozen River
Ouse, JANUARY 8, 1739-40.

WHEN Good King GEORGE the 1st. sat on the Throne
In Seventeen Hundred Sixteen, well 'twas known
Frost-Fair was held upon the River *Thames*,
And Shops with Booths stood firm o'er crystal Streams.
Meat-roasting, printing; some fine Glafs a spinning;
Milliners, Toyshops; Venturers loofing, winning;
Musick, Bear-baiting; humming Ale, strong Brandy;
And Lovers young, more sweet than Sugar-Candy:
In short, most Persons of fair Occupations,
Left their warm Houses for their Icy Stations.
As then great *London* frozen Splendors view'd,
So now may YORK with Pleasures be end'd;
That Seventeen Hundred Forty may be reckon'd
An happy *Æra* to King GEORGE the Second.
Come, sprightly Youth, fair Virgins, Husbands, Wives,
Behold our Art, that seems to give new Lives;
Divert your Thoughts with ravishing Content;
And be immortal made by THOMAS GENT.

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footnote in Robert Davies, *A Memoir of the York press, with notices of authors, printers, and stationers, in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries* (Westminster, 1868):

During the severe winter or 1739-40 the river Ouze [sic] was frozen over, and Gent was glad to gather a few pence by setting up on the ice a quasi press, and printing for sale on small broadsides some of his own wood-cuts and doggrel [sic] verses, to which he added the name of the purchaser. Mr. Hailstone [a descendent of Nicholas] possesses one specimen, and another is in the collection of Mr. Sumner, of Woodmansey, near Beverley. (p.201)

In that Davies refers to 'wood-cuts' (plural) there may have been keepsakes differing from the Hailstone, but until one turns up it would be prudent too accept the implication of Gent's own account, that the only keepsake produced is that represented by the Hailstone.

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