

Thomas Rowlandson



The comforts of Bath – the bath

Reference: 11128

Dimensions:

Height: 13 cm / 5 1/8 in

Width: 20.40 cm / 8 in

Signed l.r.: T. Rowlandson, pen and grey ink and watercolour over traces of pencil, on original wash line mount

13 x 20.4 cm

This subject was aquatinted by Rowlandson and published by S. W. Fores in 1798, as plate 7 of Christopher Anstey's *The New Bath Guide or The Memoirs of the Blunderhead Family*, 1766. There are numerous small differences between the present drawing (and the other three known versions of it) and the aquatint: notably the central structure with a tower is missing in the aquatint.

Another, smaller, version of this composition, measuring 18 x 18.1 cm, is in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Paul Mellon Collection (see John Baskett and Dudley Snelgrove, *The Drawings of Thomas Rowlandson in the Paul Mellon Collection*, 1977, no. 299 ill.). Another version can be found in the William A. Farnsworth Library and Art Museum,

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

Rockland, Maine.

Bath was the most fashionable spa in England in the late eighteenth century, with several public and private baths. The King's Bath, named after Henry II and built on the foundations of the old Roman reservoir enclosing the hot spring, was a rich source of public amusement. From 6 to 9 o'clock in the morning bathing took place, when fully dressed patients waded through the hot water. The spectacle is wittily described by Lydia Melford in Tobias Smollett's Expedition of Humphrey Clinker, I, 77, for which Rowlandson made ten illustrations in 1793:

'Right under the Pump-room windows is the King's Bath; a huge cistern, where you see patients go up to their necks in hot water. The ladies wear jackets and petticoats of brown linen with chip hats, in which they fix their handkerchiefs [sic] to wipe the sweat from their faces; but, truly, whether it is owing to the steam that surrounds them, or the heat of the water; or the nature of the dress, or to all these causes together, they look so flushed, and so frightful, that I always turn my eyes another way. '

Provenance: Chris Beetles Gallery; Private collection UK until 2017