

Thomas Rowlandson



Comforts of Bath: The Assembly Ball

Reference: 11135

Dimensions:

Height: 12.70 cm / 5 in

Width: 21.70 cm / 8½ in

Pen and grey ink and watercolour over traces of pencil

12.7 x 21.7 cm; 5 x 8 ¼ inches

Provenance

Ray Livingston Murphy;

Christie's, London, 8 July 1986, lot 57;

Anonymous sale; Sotheby's, London, 14 July 1994, lot 118, where purchased by John Ross

Literature

Christopher Anstey, *The New Bath Guide or The Memoirs of the Blunderhead Family*, 1798, pl. X

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

Engraved

By the artist and published by S.W. Fores, 1798

The poem The Comforts of Bath was published on 6th January 1798 and illustrated with twelve lithographs by Rowlandson caricaturing life in fashionable Bath.

There are other versions of this subject at the Yale Center for British Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum (and several exist of the other Bath drawings in this series) and it is hard to tell which served as the actual design for the prints as Rowlandson drew repetitions and variations of the popular subjects.

This ball took place in the Ball Room of the New or Upper Assembly Rooms built in 1769-1771 from a design by John Wood the Younger. By the end of the eighteenth century public assemblies at Bath had become very popular, attracting large crowds and often ending in uproar. Under the direction of the Master of Ceremonies the evening would usually begin with a formal cotillon and be followed by some English country dancing, as witnessed in the present work, where the couples are dancing in groups of four in a 'Longways' formation. This dance frequently degenerated into a rowdy spectacle with wigs flying in all directions. The chaperones sat on the benches fanning themselves to try and keep cool. The organ at the east end of the room was built by in 1771 by Mr Seede, the organ builder of Bristol.

John Ross (1919-2011) kept his collection of drawings and watercolours at his regency home, Knockmore, outside Dublin. Ross was an active member and Chairman of the Irish Friends of the National Collections, playing an important role in securing many great works for the national collection.