

their tracks. Fish were the earliest recorded victims: in the first weeks of the Frost vast quantities were found dead around the shores of Strangford Lough and Lough Neagh.⁴

Some people were simply delighted by the novelty of it all. What were in effect carnivals or banquets on ice were held at many venues across Ireland. The Dublin press carried numerous reports of such events in the early weeks of the Frost; a municipal sheep-roasting took place on the Boyne at Navan where the local gentlemen and their wives performed 'several country dances on the ice, being attended by a large band of music';⁵ north Tipperary gentry roasted a whole sheep on top of nineteen inches of Shannon ice near Portumna, 'at the eating of which they had great mirth, and drank many loyal toasts'; afterwards 'a match of hurling' was played between two gentlemen's teams. Extravaganzas took place in Britain – a frost fair on the Thames, a great sheep roasting on the Tyne, a women's curling match on the Nithdale ice near Dumfries, occasions redolent of the great seventeenth-century Dutch depictions of sociability on ice.⁶

Others used the frozen lakes as welcome shortcuts. Folk were walking from the Tyrone shore of Lough Neagh over ten miles of ice to Antrim market in mid-January. Some travellers were however caught on treacherous sections of ice; disaster hit a funeral cortege on Lough Cong in County Galway, and six were drowned trying to cross the frozen Foyle outside Derry.⁷

The all-pervasive cold had immediate effects on everyday life. Most obviously there was the problem of how to stave off catastrophic hypothermia and preserve minimal body warmth without using up all one's reserves of winter fuel in a matter of days. Country people rarely traded turf in winter-time, and certainly not in January 1740. The task of staying minimally warm may be easier in country cabins that lay abreast of reassuring turf stacks than in the freezing basements and garret dwellings of poorer families in the towns. Urban dwellers in the east- and south-coast ports were in normal times dependent on a shuttle service of small boats bringing coal from Cumbria and south Wales. Now, however, ice-bound quays and frozen coal



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yards brought the trade to an abrupt standstill. When in late January the traffic across the Irish Sea resumed, the retail price of coal soared so that many households simply could not afford it. Hedges, 'fine trees', and nurseries around Dublin were being stripped bare as desperate people searched for substitute fuel. Fourteen were arrested for tree-felling in the Phoenix Park; 'fair dealing from [the] colliers might have prevented a great deal of this mischief', remarked one city printer.⁸ The coal dealers and shippers were seen as the authors of this