

# Basic Detail Report

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## The Thames or the Triumph of Navigation [5 of 17 Prints]

### Date

1791

### Primary Maker

James Barry

### Medium

Engraving on paper

### Dimensions

Image Size: 41.7 x 50.4 cm

### Description

Fifth print of seventeen in 'A series of etchings by James Barry Esq. From his Original and Justly Celebrated Paintings in the Great Room of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.' Although the prints have been bound with the title 'A Series of Etchings ...' They are in fact engravings (intaglio prints). A detailed and in-depth description is transcribed below. This description is taken from the bound version of Barry's etchings and printed on the page following the actual print. 'The Thames The practice of personifying rivers, and representing them by a genius, adapted to their peculiar circumstances, is as ancient as the arts of painting and sculpture; and, in conformity to this practice, the ingenious Artist has in his picture represented the Thames of a venerable, majestic, and gracious aspect, sitting on the waters in a triumphal car, steering himself with one hand, and holding in the other the mariner's compass, by the use of which, modern navigation connects places the most remote, and has arrived at a certainty, importance, and magnitude unknown to the ancient world. The car is borne along by our great navigators, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sebastian Cabot, and the late Captain Cook: in the front car, and apparently in the action of meeting it, are four figures, representing Europe, Asia, Africa and America, ready to lay their several productions in the lap of the Thames. The supplicating action of the poor Negro slave, or more properly of enslaved Africa, the cord round his neck, the iron manacles, and attached heavy chain on his wrists, with his hands clasped and stretched out for mercy, denote the agonies of his soul; and the feelings of the Artist were thus expressed, before the abolition of slavery became the subject of public investigation. Over head is Mercury, the emblem of commerce, summoning the nations together; and following the car, are Nereids carrying several articles of the principal manufactures of Great Britain. The sportive appearance of some of these Nereids, gives a variety to the picture, and is intended to show, that an extensive commerce is sometimes found subversive of the foundation of virtue. In this scene of triumph and joy, the Artist has introduced music, and, for this reason, has placed among the sea-nymphs his friend Dr. Burney, whose abilities in that line are universally acknowledged. In the distance is a view of the chalky cliffs on the English coast, with ships sailing, highly characteristic of the commerce of this country, which

the picture is intended to record. In the end of this print, there is a naval pillar, mausoleum, observatory, light-house, or all of these, they being all comprehended in the same structure, and which by a flight of imagination no less classically happy than singularly original, the tritons or sea-gods themselves appear to have erected as a compliment to the first naval power. In this important object, so ingeniously produced by the sea-gods, we have at last obtained the happy concurrence and union of so many important desiderata in that opportunity of convenient inspection of all the sculptured commemorations, the want of which had been so deeply regretted by all who had seen the Trajan and Antonine columns, and other celebrated remains of antiquity.' Below the image is an inscription. For the full inscription, see the Inscription field.