

The Great Fire of London

In the 1600s in the city of London, some people expected there to be a fire because:

- houses were built very close together;
- buildings were made from timber and sometimes thatch;
- it had been a long hot summer so water reserves were low and everything was very dry.

At that time, there was also a terrible disease called the plague. This was a disease that very few people survived. In fact, in the two years before the fire, around 68 000 people had died from it.

Sunday 2nd September 1666

The fire began in a bakery on Pudding Lane. The bakery belonged to Thomas Farriner, who was the King's baker. The bakery was near London Bridge. This bridge was the only one across the River Thames in London. The bakery workmen woke to the smell of smoke at 2 o'clock in the morning. Everyone in the house escaped except a maid, who was too scared to move. She sadly died in the fire.

The fire took hold very quickly, and spread very fast through the city (just had some people had predicted).

Here are some of the reasons why the fire spread so quickly:

- buildings were too close together;
- buildings were made from timber and tar;
- everything was dry after the hot summer;
- there was a strong wind that fanned the flames along the rows of buildings.

Samuel Pepys

Samuel Pepys, who was a man famous for writing newspaper articles and diaries, lived near the Tower of London. He saw the fire heading west and went to see King Charles to warn him of the dangers. Charles ordered the Mayor to destroy as many houses as possible before the fire got there.



They decided to create firebreaks. This meant pulling down buildings before the fire got to them so that there would be less for the fire to burn. It would eventually 'burn itself out' if there was nothing to fuel it. This would mean there would be a gap in the path of the fire.

Panic in London!

By the Monday morning, people began to panic! The fire didn't seem to be stopping. The streets were jammed with people trying to escape with everything they owned in carts pulled by horses.

Samuel Pepys packed his bag. He also dug a pit in his garden and buried a cheese, some wine and other important goods.

Then he and his wife went to The Anchor pub and waited to see what would happen.

The fire was finally over on Thursday 6th September 1666.

Damage caused by the fire

The fire caused huge devastation:

- 373 acres of the city were destroyed.
- 13 200 homes were burnt down.
- 87 churches were destroyed.
- St Paul's Cathedral collapsed.
- 4 people were officially recorded dead.



A lesson learned?

After the fire, things changed. The fire got rid of the plague as so many infected rats were killed. Also, laws were changed in the city. Thatched roofs were banned and even to this day thatch is not allowed to be used in London without very special permission. People also trained to be firefighters to avoid such an awful event happening again.

A monument stands at the junction of Monument Street and Fish Street Hill in the City of London. It was built between 1671 and 1677 to remember the Great Fire of London and to celebrate the rebuilding of the city.

