

# The Great Fire of London

In some ways a huge fire was expected in the city of London during the 1600s. In fact, in 1559, a man named Daniel Baker predicted London's destruction by 'a consuming fire'.

## Why was a fire expected?

- 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.

Because of the plague, which was a terrible disease that was spreading through the city that very few people survived, the risk of a fire was not taken very seriously as people were too busy worrying about other things. In the two years before the fire, around 68 000 people had died from having the plague.

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The Plague was a disease passed on through the bite of an infected flea from a rat.

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## 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. They woke the rest of the household, who all escaped from their bedroom windows and across the rooftops. All except a maid, who was too shocked to move. Sadly, she died in the fire.

The fire took hold very quickly and spread very fast. 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 made the fire spread more quickly.





### **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.

### **Panic in the streets of London!**

By the Monday morning people began to panic! The fire didn't seem to be stopping. By the evening, the streets were jammed with people trying to escape with their belongings and families 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 declared 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.

They decided to create firebreaks. This was 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.

### **A lesson learned?**

After the fire, many things changed. Insurance companies, volunteer groups and parish authorities began to train as firefighters to avoid such a disaster happening again.

A special 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.

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Read the text carefully then answer the questions in full sentences and in as much detail as you can.

1. What does the author mean when they say that Daniel Baker 'predicted London's destruction by a consuming fire?'

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2. Name two reasons why the fire was expected.

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3. What was the plague and how was it passed on?

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4. Why was a strong wind a factor in how quickly the fire spread?

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5. What word does the author use to explain to us that people were very worried about the fire?

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6. Describe three things Samuel Pepys did when he realised the fire was spreading.

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7. Explain in your own words what you understand a 'firebreak' to be and why they were used.

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8. For how many days did the Great Fire last?

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9. What changed as a result of the Great Fire?

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10. Do think a monument is necessary? Explain your thoughts.

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