

Ellie's Historical Enquiry: The Great Fire of London

Learning objective: To analyse the causes, events, and consequences of the Great Fire of London (1666) using historical evidence.

Ellie the Elephant has been researching 1666 in her historical archives. She has found several 'Evidence Cards' about the Great Fire. You must act as a historical investigator. For each statement below, decide if it is a 'Primary Cause', an 'Event Detail', or a 'Long-term Consequence'. Write your classification next to the statement and provide a brief justification for your choice, citing the historical context of 17th-century London.

Word bank: Pudding Lane · timber-framed · flammable · Samuel Pepys · St Paul's Cathedral · Reconstruction · Evelyn · firebreak

1. The fire started at a bakery on Pudding Lane because the oven was not properly extinguished. Classify and justify. (2 marks)

2. The houses were built very close together using wood and pitch, which acted like fuel for the flames. Classify and justify. (2 marks)

3. King Charles II ordered the creation of firebreaks by pulling down houses to stop the fire spreading. Classify and justify. (2 marks)

4. The Rebuilding of London Act 1667 stated that new houses must be built of brick or stone rather than wood. Classify and justify. (2 marks)

5. Compare and contrast the city of London before the fire and the city planned by architects like Christopher Wren afterwards. What changed? (3 marks)

6. Explain why the fire was able to spread so rapidly across the city despite the efforts of the citizens to stop it. (3 marks)

Draw: Sketch a 'before and after' split-view of a London street. On the left, draw the narrow, overhanging timber-framed houses of 1666. On the right, draw the wider, brick-built houses required after the Rebuilding of London Act.



Extension challenge: Justify this statement: 'The Great Fire of London was a tragedy, but it was also a necessary turning point for the city's modernisation.' Consider public health, architectural safety, and the economy in your argument. What might have happened to the city if the fire had never occurred?