

The Great Fire of London: Historical Assessment

Learning objective: To evaluate understanding of the causes, events, and consequences of the Great Fire of London (1666).

Read each question carefully. Use your historical knowledge to provide detailed answers. Ensure you use the provided vocabulary to support your explanations.

In September 1666, London was a city of narrow streets and wooden buildings. Following a long, dry summer, a small spark in a bakery on Pudding Lane ignited a fire that would change the city forever. Over four days, the fire spread rapidly, consuming homes, businesses, and iconic landmarks. The diary of Samuel Pepys provides a vital primary source for historians today, detailing the panic and the desperate measures taken to stop the flames.

Word bank: Pudding Lane · timber-framed · conflagration · catastrophe · reconstruction · Samuel Pepys · firebreaks · St Paul's Cathedral

1. Identify the primary cause of the fire and explain why the city's architecture made it difficult to contain. (2 marks)

2. Why are the diary entries of Samuel Pepys considered such a significant historical source for Year 5 historians? (2 marks)

3. Explain the method of creating 'firebreaks'. Why did this strategy struggle to stop the fire initially? (3 marks)

4. Compare and contrast the city of London before and after the 1666 fire. How did building regulations change? (3 marks)

5. Justify why many historians argue that the Great Fire, while a catastrophe, ultimately improved the health and safety of Londoners. (4 marks)

6. Imagine you are a reporter in 1666. Write a 5-mark extended response describing the atmosphere in the city as the fire approached St Paul's Cathedral. Use emotive language and historical detail. (5 marks)

7. What might have happened if the wind had been blowing in a different direction throughout those four days? Explain your reasoning. (3 marks)

8. If you were the King of England in 1666, what is one specific law you would have introduced to prevent future fires, and why? (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of a 17th-century London street. Label the materials used in the buildings and show how they were positioned close together to illustrate the spread of the fire.



Extension challenge: Total: /25. Challenge: Research the cost of rebuilding a single house in 1666 currency and compare the relative value to £100 today. Write a brief reflection on the economic impact of the reconstruction.