

The Great Fire of London: A Blazing Disaster

Learning objective: To understand the causes, spread, and impact of the Great Fire of London in 1666.

Read the following passage carefully. Use the word bank to help you understand the historical context. Answer the questions in full sentences, ensuring you refer back to the text to justify your reasoning.

In September 1666, London was a city built of tightly packed, timber-framed houses. A long, dry summer had left the wooden buildings tinder-dry. On the night of 2nd September, a fire ignited in a bakery on Pudding Lane. Because the houses were built so close together, the flames leaped effortlessly from roof to roof. Fanned by a fierce easterly wind, the inferno raged for four days, consuming everything in its path.

Ellie the elephant, who loves history, notes that firefighting techniques were primitive; citizens relied on leather buckets and fire hooks to pull down buildings to create firebreaks. Sadly, the fire destroyed thousands of homes, 87 churches, and the magnificent St Paul's Cathedral. It was a monumental catastrophe that left thousands homeless. However, in the aftermath, the city was redesigned with wider streets and buildings made of brick and stone instead of wood. This shift significantly reduced the risk of future fires, ultimately transforming London into a safer, modernised capital. While the destruction was immense, the rebuilding process allowed London to rise from the ashes, marking a pivotal turning point in British urban history.

Word bank: Pudding Lane · timber · catastrophe · flammable · cathedral · monument

1. Identify two specific reasons mentioned in the text that explain why the fire spread so rapidly through London. (2 marks) (2 marks)

2. According to the text, what tools were used by the citizens in an attempt to stop the fire from spreading? (1 mark) (1 mark)

3. Explain why the wind is described as 'fierce' in the context of the fire's growth. (2 marks) (2 marks)

4. Infer why the change in building materials from timber to brick was considered a crucial decision for the city's future. (2 marks) (2 marks)

5. Justify your answer: Do you think the Great Fire of London was a 'pivotal turning point'? Explain why or why not using evidence from the text. (3 marks) (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a split-screen image: on the left, illustrate the cramped, timber-framed houses of 1666 London during the fire; on the right, illustrate the modernised city with wider streets and stone buildings.



Extension challenge: Compare and contrast the firefighting methods of 1666 with those of the modern day. What might happen if a fire of this scale started in a modern city? Justify your answer by considering modern technology and building regulations.