

The Great Fire of London: Investigation and Impact

Learning objective: To analyse the causes, progression, and long-term consequences of the Great Fire of London (1666) and evaluate its impact on urban planning.

Use your knowledge of 17th-century London to answer the questions below. Think critically about why the fire spread so rapidly and how the city changed after the disaster.

Ellie the elephant has been reading through historical accounts of the year 1666. She remembers that the fire began at a bakery on Pudding Lane. Because the houses were built closely together with wood and pitch, the flames travelled quickly. There was no modern fire service, and strong winds fanned the embers across the city. After the fire, regulations changed: new buildings had to be made of brick or stone to prevent another such disaster.

Word bank: Pudding Lane · Samuel Pepys · timber-framed · firebreaks · reconstruction · Charles II · Monument · catastrophe

1. Explain why the construction materials used in 17th-century London houses contributed to the rapid spread of the fire. Use specific vocabulary in your answer. (2 marks)

2. Compare and contrast the methods used to fight the fire in 1666 with how we manage urban fires today. Why were 'firebreaks' considered a desperate measure? (3 marks)

3. Justify why the introduction of brick and stone building regulations after the fire was a significant turning point in English urban history. (3 marks)

4. Samuel Pepys kept a detailed diary during the fire. Why are primary sources like his diary so valuable to historians trying to understand the past? (2 marks)

5. What might have happened if the wind had been blowing in the opposite direction during the early hours of the fire? Would the outcome have differed? (2 marks)

6. Evaluate the long-term environmental and social impact of the Great Fire. How did the 'reconstruction' change the way people lived in London? (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a 'before and after' split-screen image. On the left, draw a narrow street with timber-framed, overhanging houses. On the right, draw a wider street with stone houses and wider pavements, showing how London changed after the fire.



Extension challenge: Research the role of the Monument to the Great Fire of London. Design a new memorial plaque that you believe best represents the resilience of the people of London after 1666. Write a short paragraph explaining your choice of symbols and words for the plaque.