The Great Fire of London: A 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 accurate answers. Ensure your writing is clear and concise. Good luck!

In September 1666, London was a city of narrow streets and wooden houses packed closely together. Following a long, dry summer, a small fire broke out in a bakery on Pudding Lane. Due to strong winds and the city's building materials, the fire spread rapidly. Over four days, much of the medieval city was destroyed, leading to significant changes in how London was rebuilt, including the introduction of brick and stone regulations to prevent future catastrophes.

Word bank: Pudding Lane · Samuel Pepys · St Paul's Cathedral · Timber-framed · King Charles II · 1666 · Firebreaks · Reconstruction

1. Identify the year the Great Fire of London began and name the specific street where the fire started. (2 marks)

2. Ellie the elephant has found an old diary entry. Why was the fire so difficult to put out? Give two reasons related to the city's structure at the time. (2 marks)

3. Who kept a famous diary that serves as one of our most important primary sources for this event? (1 mark)

4. Explain what a 'firebreak' was and why it was used by the King's men to try and stop the fire from spreading. (3 marks)

5. Describe two major changes made to the city of London during the rebuilding process after the fire. (4 marks)

6. Compare the city before and after the fire. How did the reconstruction change the risk of fire for future generations? (5 marks)

7. Why do historians rely on primary sources, like the diary mentioned in question 3, to learn about the past? Give an example of why these might differ from a modern textbook. (8 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of a 17th-century London street showing the 'jettying' (overhanging) upper floors of the houses, which helped the fire jump from one side of the street to the other.

Extension challenge: Imagine you are a reporter in 1666. Write a short news update (50 words) for the town crier to read, explaining why the people of London must stay calm and what the authorities are doing to stop the flames. Total: /25