The Great Fire of London: History Investigation

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

Read each question carefully and use your knowledge of 17th-century London to provide detailed answers. Think about how the city was built and why the fire became so difficult to control.

Ellie the elephant has been looking through her historical archives! She reminds us that in September 1666, London was a city of narrow streets, wooden houses, and very dry weather. When a spark jumped in a bakery, it changed the course of history forever. Use your historical enquiry skills to answer the questions below.

Word bank: Pudding Lane · timber · thatch · drought · firebreaks · Samuel Pepys · St Paul's Cathedral · rebuilding

1. Identify the specific location where the fire began and explain why the building materials used in 1666 made the fire spread so rapidly. (2 marks)

2. Explain the role of 'firebreaks' during the event. Why were they considered a necessary, yet destructive, solution? (2 marks)

3. How did the weather conditions in the summer of 1666 contribute to the severity of the fire? (1 mark)

4. Name the famous diarist who recorded his eyewitness account of the fire, and explain why his records are so important to historians today. (2 marks)

5. Following the destruction, new building regulations were introduced. Describe two ways in which the new city was safer than the old one. (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of a 17th-century London street showing the 'jettied' upper floors of the timber-framed houses. Label why these structures made it easy for fire to jump from one side of the street to the other.

Extension challenge: Imagine you are a reporter in 1666. Write a short, formal diary entry (50-80 words) describing the scene at the River Thames as people tried to escape the flames.