

The Great Fire of London.

Sunday 2nd September 1666

The Great Fire of London started on Sunday 2 September 1666. In the early hours of the morning, Thomas Farriner, the King's baker, was awakened by his maid: the bakery on Pudding Lane was on fire.

Due to the early hour, few people were awake. At first the Lord Mayor dismissed the fire and Samuel Pepys wrote: '*I thought it far off, and so went to bed and to sleep.*'

The fire spread quickly, due to a number of factors: it had been a very hot and dry summer, the rivers and streams that ran through the city had dried out, there was a strong wind blowing from the East, the medieval streets were packed inside the old Roman city walls with timber houses built close together, making them convenient fuel for the fire.

Residents of London left the City as the flames spread quickly, grabbing what possessions they could carry, they escaped through the crowded, narrow streets, to the open fields outside the City walls, realising their homes were under great threat.

Tuesday 4th September

The fire had reached across the streets to St. Paul's Cathedral. Diarist John Evelyn wrote that '*the stones of St. Paul's flew like granados*' as they exploded in the intense heat of the flames and that the lead roof was melting and flowing like a river down Ludgate Hill.

Wednesday 5th September

By Wednesday evening the wind had dropped but the fire had raged across London Bridge, along the Thames riverbank and continued burning throughout the city.

Thursday 6th September

King Charles II brought the army to create fire-breaks in the streets by destroying houses with gunpowder, the fire finally stopped spreading.

The people of London surveyed the damage. In five days, one hundred thousand Londoners had been made homeless. 13,200 houses, important business and Guild buildings, St Paul's Cathedral and 87 churches had been completely destroyed. This was four-fifths of the entire city.

The Aftermath

The King instructed that London should be brought out of this disaster as quickly as possible.

He asked Sir Christopher Wren to help rebuild London after the fire, including designing the new St. Paul's Cathedral. He wanted to build a modern Cathedral, which would be beautiful, strong, and useful, and which would bring hope to all Londoners. The dome of St Paul's Cathedral would rise out of the ashes of the Great Fire of London, it would be a community space, a symbol of change, resilience, and hope.

Wren designed and built this new modern St Paul's in 35 years, completing it in 1710.

The people of London worked together to clear away the burnt debris of the old city and find a way to start building their homes and businesses again. Employment was to be found in house building, carpentry, furniture and fabric production, brick and tile factories, food production and sale, finance, commerce, warehouses and shipping.

A new London rises from the ashes

Workers from around the country and from Europe came to the City, seeing the opportunities to gain employment, earn money and become part of the new and growing community of London.

After 10 years, the burnt areas had been completely rebuilt and London had become a successful, wealthy city once more, with better living conditions, many trading possibilities and a vibrant multi-cultural society.