

London Burning

London, England. September 2, 1666. Thomas Farriner's bakery on Pudding Lane was busy cooking Ship's Biscuit for King Charles II's navy. Before Thomas went to bed, he made sure to put out all the coals in his ovens. But he must have missed one. At 1am, Thomas woke up to find his bakery ablaze.

Thomas and his daughter escaped out of a window. Others were not so lucky. The fire spread quickly along Pudding Lane. Warehouses full of flammable materials like timber, rope, and oil, burned to the ground.

Winds blew and the fire spread. The city had experienced a long, dry summer, and houses were parched. They easily caught fire as the flames blew from Pudding Lane to Fish Street to the Star Inn Stables. The fire lit tar barrels at a ship's supply store and they exploded. The flames went higher and further, heading towards the River Thames.

People tried to put out the fire, throwing buckets of water and tamping the flames with blankets. But their efforts were no match for the wind that continued to blow. Every building in the fire's path was destroyed. Three hundred homes were burned down as it spread in those first hours.

The fire was even worse the next day. Wind continued to blow sparks, which started new fires in different areas of the city. King Charles II was afraid

all of London would be lost. He put his brother James II in charge of fighting the flames. James organized fire brigades to help save people. These groups of helpers were perhaps the first example of what is now our modern Fire Department.

Unfortunately, their efforts were not successful. The fire continued to spread the next day until half of the city was burning. Even the King joined in the fight. People were fleeing to the river and trying to escape by boat.

As the fire spread and explosions were heard, people began to wonder if an enemy had started the blaze. England was at war with the Dutch, and some thought this was part of the fight. Others thought it was arson caused by the French. People found shelter in St. Paul's Cathedral, but it too soon burned. Its lead roof melted and flowed down the streets like hot lava.

On September 5th, 1666, the Great Fire of London came to an end. The winds died down and the fire brigade could finally make progress against the flames. What had started in the bakery had destroyed all the public buildings and 13,000 private homes. Over 80 percent of London had burned. "London was, but is no more," said a historian writing at the time.

Of course, London has been rebuilt in the centuries since. Sir Christopher Wren reconstructed St. Paul's Cathedral, along with 52 other London churches. You can see the rebuilt cathedral still today, along with a monument to the fire that stands at the site of the bakery where it all started.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. How many days did the fire burn?
 - a. 2
 - b. 5
 - c. 3
 - d. 1

2. Which of the following burned last in the blaze?
 - a. Pudding Lane
 - b. St. Paul's Cathedral
 - c. Fish Street
 - d. Star Inn Stables

3. Which of the following was NOT a reason that the fire burned so fast and so far?
 - a. No one was trying to put it out
 - b. There were strong winds
 - c. There had been a hot, dry summer
 - d. There explosions that spread the flames

4. Which of the following was NOT mentioned as a suspected cause of the blaze?
 - a. Ovens in the bakery
 - b. War with the Dutch
 - c. Arson by the French
 - d. A candle in the Inn

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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