

**FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL**

A2 Reading Challenge

# The Great Fire of London

*How a small fire in a bakery destroyed most of London — and how the city was built again*

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| <b>Level</b>      | A2 (Elementary) |
| <b>Age Group</b>  | Teens (11-16)   |
| <b>Topic</b>      | True Stories    |
| <b>Duration</b>   | ~15 minutes     |
| <b>Vocabulary</b> | 12 words        |
| <b>Quiz</b>       | 5 questions     |

## Article

In the early hours of Sunday, 2 September 1666, a fire started in a **bakery** on Pudding Lane, a small street in the centre of London. The baker's name was Thomas Farriner. He made bread for the King's navy. That night, Farriner went to bed and left the oven burning, as bakers often did in those days. Sometime after midnight, a spark from the oven landed on a pile of firewood nearby. Within minutes, the kitchen was full of **flames**. Farriner woke up to the smell of smoke. He grabbed his family and climbed out of a window onto the roof of the house next door. They all escaped — all except one maid, who was too frightened to climb. She became one of the first victims of a fire that would burn for four days and change London forever.

### A City Made of Wood

To understand why the fire was so terrible, you need to know what London looked like in 1666. It was a big, crowded city with about 350,000 people. Most of the houses were made of wood and had straw roofs. The streets were very **narrow**, sometimes so tight that people in houses on opposite sides could almost shake hands through their windows. The buildings were often five or six floors high, and the upper floors hung out over the street, making the gaps even smaller. There had been almost no rain that summer, so the wood was very dry. The city also had many warehouses full of things that burn easily: oil, tar, coal, rope, and hay. London was like a giant box of matches, waiting for a spark.

### The Fire Spreads

At first, nobody was very worried. Small fires were common in London. The Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas Bloodworth, was woken up and told about the fire. He looked at it and said, "A woman could put it out!" He went back to bed. But the wind was blowing from the east, and it was strong. The **flames** jumped from house to house along the **wooden** roofs. By Sunday morning, the fire had already **spread** along several streets. People started to feel **panic**. They grabbed their belongings — clothes, furniture, money, food — and ran towards the River Thames. Some people threw their things into the river to save them from the fire. Others paid boatmen huge amounts of money to carry them and their belongings across the water to safety. The streets became chaotic. Carts and people blocked the roads, making it harder and harder to **escape**.

### Samuel Pepys and His Diary

One of the most important witnesses to the Great Fire was a man named Samuel Pepys. Pepys was a government worker who lived in London and kept a detailed diary. On the morning of the fire, his maid woke him up and told him there was a big fire in the city. At first, Pepys was not very interested. He went back to sleep. But later that morning, he walked to the Tower of London and climbed up to get a better view. What he saw shocked him. The fire was enormous. Whole streets were burning. People were running with their belongings on their backs. Pepys went to see King Charles II and told him that the fire was out of control. He

said that houses needed to be pulled down to create gaps — firebreaks — to stop the fire from spreading. The King agreed and gave the order. But it was already very late.

## Monday and Tuesday: The Fire Gets Worse

On Monday, the fire continued to grow. The wind was still strong, and the **flames** moved westward through the city. That night, the fire reached Baynard's Castle, a large stone building near the river. Even though it was made of stone, it burned and collapsed. On Tuesday, the worst day, the fire reached the old St Paul's **Cathedral**. The great church had been standing for more than 500 years. Workers had covered it in **wooden** scaffolding for repairs. The wood caught fire, and the entire building was soon burning. The lead roof melted and ran down the streets like a silver river. Stones exploded from the heat. By Tuesday night, the fire was at its largest. The sky over London was bright orange, and people said you could read a book by the light of the **flames** from miles away.

## The Fire Stops

On Wednesday, two things happened that helped stop the fire. First, the strong east wind dropped. Without the wind pushing the **flames** forward, the fire slowed down. Second, soldiers and citizens worked together to pull down hundreds of buildings to create firebreaks. These gaps in the rows of houses stopped the fire from spreading any further. The garrison at the Tower of London also used gunpowder to blow up buildings in the path of the fire, creating even wider gaps. By Thursday morning, the Great Fire of London was finally out. It had burned for four days and three nights. The damage was terrible.

## What Was Lost?

The numbers are shocking. The fire destroyed about 13,200 houses. It burned 87 churches, including the old St Paul's **Cathedral**. More than 100,000 people were left **homeless**. They slept in fields and parks outside the city, with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Surprisingly, the official death count was very low — fewer than ten people were recorded as having died. But historians today believe the real number was much higher. Many poor people lived in areas that burned completely, and their deaths may never have been counted. The fire also destroyed many important documents, books, and records that can never be replaced.

## Rebuilding London

After the fire, London had to be built again. King Charles II asked architects to design a new city. The most important architect was Sir Christopher Wren. Wren designed the new St Paul's **Cathedral**, which still stands today. It took 35 years to build, from 1675 to 1710. It is one of the most famous buildings in the world. New rules were introduced for building: houses had to be made of brick or stone, not wood. Streets had to be wider. Buildings could not be too tall. These rules made London much safer. The city was rebuilt slowly but carefully, and within a few years it was bigger and more modern than before. The fire had been a disaster, but it also gave London a chance to start again.

## The Monument

In 1677, a tall column called the **Monument** was built near the spot where the fire started on Pudding Lane. It was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and a scientist named Robert Hooke. The **Monument** is exactly 61 metres tall — and it stands exactly 61 metres from the place where Farriner's **bakery** once stood. If you visit London today, you can climb the 311 steps to the top and look out over the city. From up there, you can see the modern buildings, the River Thames, and the dome of St Paul's **Cathedral** in the distance. It is hard to imagine that almost everything you see was once a field of ashes and smoke. The Great Fire of London was one of the worst disasters in British history. But it was also a turning point. It ended the old, **wooden**, medieval city and gave birth to the London we know today — a city of stone, brick, wide streets, and one of the most beautiful cathedrals in the world.

## Vocabulary

| Word             | Definition   |
|------------------|--|
| <b>bakery</b>    | a shop or place where bread and cakes are made and sold                        |
| <b>flames</b>    | the bright, hot, moving shapes of burning fire                                 |
| <b>spread</b>    | to move and cover a larger area  |
| <b>wooden</b>    | made of wood   |
| <b>narrow</b>    | not wide; having only a small distance from one side to the other              |
| <b>destroy</b>   | to damage something so badly that it cannot be used or does not exist any more |
| <b>cathedral</b> | a very large and important church  |
| <b>homeless</b>  | without a place to live  |
| <b>escape</b>    | to get away from a dangerous or bad situation                                  |
| <b>panic</b>     | a sudden strong feeling of fear that makes you unable to think clearly         |
| <b>rebuild</b>   | to build something again after it has been damaged or destroyed                |
| <b>monument</b>  | a statue or structure built to remember a person or event                      |

## Comprehension Quiz

### 1. Where did the Great Fire of London start?

- A) In a church on London Bridge
- B) In a bakery on Pudding Lane
- C) In the Tower of London
- D) In a warehouse near the river

### 2. Why did the fire spread so quickly?

- A) Because someone started more fires on purpose
- B) Because there had been no rain and the wooden houses were very close together
- C) Because the fire engines broke down
- D) Because the wind was blowing towards the river

### 3. What did Samuel Pepys do that helps us understand the fire today?

- A) He painted a picture of the fire
- B) He built a new fire engine
- C) He wrote about it in his diary
- D) He saved the King from the flames

### 4. How many people officially died in the Great Fire?

- A) Thousands
- B) About 500
- C) About 100
- D) Fewer than 10

### 5. Who designed the new St Paul's Cathedral after the fire?

- A) King Charles II
- B) Samuel Pepys
- C) Thomas Farriner
- D) Sir Christopher Wren

## Answer Key

| # | Answer   | Question   |
|---|----------|--|
| 1 | <b>B</b> | 1. Where did the Great Fire of London start?                         |
| 2 | <b>B</b> | 2. Why did the fire spread so quickly?                               |
| 3 | <b>C</b> | 3. What did Samuel Pepys do that helps us understand the fire today? |
| 4 | <b>D</b> | 4. How many people officially died in the Great Fire?                |
| 5 | <b>D</b> | 5. Who designed the new St Paul's Cathedral after the fire?          |