BLAZING THROUGH HISTORY

THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON 1666

By Sarah Smith

Contents

London: Version 1.0

London, September 1666, a chaotic patchwork of narrow, winding streets, timber-framed houses, and questionable hygiene. The city was still recovering from being hit by the Great Plague, which kicked off in 1665. Cases had dropped significantly but, clearly, no lessons had been learnt. London was once again buzzing – busy markets, noisy taverns and people packed in like sardines in corsets.

The air was a heady mix of smoke, sewage, and the sweet scent of "please don't ask." Rubbish collection was more of a suggestion than a system, and chamber pot contents were still being launched out of windows.

Most buildings were made entirely of wood and crammed in so tightly you could shake hands with your neighbour across the street. Add in some straw roofing, a generous helping of open flames (candles, hearths, careless bakers), and you've got a recipe for a fire hazard with a side of doom.

So that was London back then – messy, lively, slightly smelly… and very flammable.

From Pudding Lane to Pandemonium

The fire kicked off in the early hours of Sunday 2nd September 1666 in a bakery on Pudding Lane. The bakery was owned by a Thomas Farriner, who just so happened to be the King's baker – probably not a job you want to mess up by setting the whole city on fire.

It's thought that the fire actually started when a spark from the baker's oven (which hadn't been properly extinguished the night before) caught something flammable nearby – possibly flour dust, kindling, or firewood, and very quickly escalated.

The building, like most in London at the time, was made of timber, packed tightly against its neighbours and filled with lovely burnable things like tar and straw, so in no time the whole house was ablaze.

The occupants managed to escape by jumping out of an upstairs window into the house next door, all except for the family's maidservant, who was too frightened to make the jump. When the house eventually burnt down, she sadly became the fire's first victim.

Nearby neighbours attempted to douse the fire, to no avail, and when the parish constables arrived an hour later, they suggested that adjoining houses should be demolished to prevent the spread. Clearly, they had the good sense to see where this was going. Unsurprisingly, the homeowners weren't thrilled at this idea and called in the Lord Mayor, **Sir Thomas Bloodworth**[1], to make the final call.

By the time he arrived, the strong winds had helped the flames leap from house to house, the neighbouring houses were fully ablaze and the fire was already eyeing up the warehouses full of flammable goodies down by the river.

The more seasoned firemen on the scene were calling for demolition to stop it spreading – but Bloodworth wasn't keen. His reasoning? Most of the buildings were rented, and no one could find the owners to ask permission. It seems, that like today's world, even with the risk of a whole city going up in flames, paperwork comes first.

Bloodworth, it seems, had landed the top job, not because he was any good at it, but because he was good at nodding in the right meetings. Now faced with a real emergency, he panicked and made his infamous comment “that a woman might piss it out” before promptly leaving the scene – presumably hoping that someone else would deal with it while he had a lie-down.

It would be easy to blame him for letting the fire get out of hand, and perhaps he didn’t handle it as well as he could, but realistically he didn’t have a lot of choice. Firefighting in those days was more guesswork than science, and who knows – knocking buildings down left right and centre at that early point may have made the situation worse – probably not though.

How *Not* to Fight a Fire (17th-Century Edition)

In 17th-century London, fires were about as common as gossip and bad smells. The city was a dangerously overcrowded maze of timber-framed buildings, open fires, candles left burning, and enough flammable bits and bobs dotted around to make any fire feel right at home.

In an attempt to keep things vaguely under control, around a thousand watchmen – known as *'bellmen'* patrolled the streets at night, keeping an eye out for trouble (and possibly snoozing in doorways). If a fire broke out, the church bells would let out a muffled *"uh-oh"*, and well-meaning neighbours would rally, grabbing buckets, axes and anything else that wasn't nailed down.

Firefighting back then was more enthusiasm than efficiency. The plan was normally 'chuck water at it, and if that doesn't work, then pull it down'. Every parish was legally supposed to have a stash of emergency gear, like ladders, leather buckets, **fire hooks**[2] and a healthy disregard for structural integrity. If things got really bad, they would blow up the lit building *on purpose* to stop the flames. Essentially the 17th-century version of 'turning it off and on again'.

This method could work brilliantly *if* it was used in time. Unfortunately, when the 1666 fire started, demolitions were delayed due the Lord Mayor being too busy dithering and not actually making a decision so, while the city smouldered, the firefighting effort was mostly a mix of bucket chucking, bell-ringing and frantic hoping.

Now, putting out a fire with water sounds great in theory – even back then, London had a clever network of elm pipes supplying tens of thousands of homes with water from a big tower at Cornhill and a fancy reservoir in Islington. Technically you *could* open a pipe near a burning house, attach a hose and have a good go at it. Even better, the fire started near the river, so ideally there should have been a neat little bucket chain snaking up from the Thames like a well-oiled, water-flinging machine. Problem solved, right?

Not really. It actually turned out that when your house is on fire and the sky is full of sparks, people tend to panic and leg it instead of calmly organising themselves into a human chain. Matters were made worse when the flames reached the river and decided to latch onto the water wheels under London Bridge – effectively cutting off the piped water supply.

Now, there *were* actually fire engines, which were big, shiny pumps that were supposed to save the day. Some even had wheels! Others, slightly less conveniently, were mounted on clumsy wooden sleds, because let's face it, nothing says "emergency response" like attempting to drag a sled over cobbled streets and turning up fashionably late, while struggling to get close enough to the flames do actually do anything useful.

That said, on this occasion, a few were dragged bravely to the river, only to be accidently dumped into the Thames – oops. By the time the soggy machinery had been dragged out, the fire had well and truly taken the upper hand and was toasting the city like a giant marshmallow.

From Spark to Spectacle

As the morning progressed, so did the fire. At 7am on Sunday morning, our good friend, **Samuel Pepys**[3], London's nosiest neighbour and diary-writing champion, climbed up the Tower of London to get a better look at the unfolding disaster. From his lofty vantage point, he could see the strong east winds whipping up the flames into a proper firestorm. Around 300 homes had already been burnt to the ground and even the houses on London Bridge were beginning to go up like kindling at a bonfire party.


Samuel Pepys - Diarist

Not wanting to miss the drama, Pepys hopped into a boat and rowed over to Pudding Lane for a front-row view. It was absolute chaos, people were frantically piling their belongings into boats while trying to dodge the flames, some were too frightened to leave and sat in their houses until the flames were practically knocking on the door before legging it out.

Bursting with news of the fire, Pepys cruised west along the Thames to Whitehall, where he promptly delivered the news to the Royal Court. King Charles II got wind of what was going on, and as Twitter was yet to be invented, he summoned Pepys personally to hear the gossip first hand.

Pepys bluntly informed the King that unless they started pulling down buildings, the fire would just keep rolling. The King was alarmed enough to tell Pepys to go straight to the Lord Mayor with royal orders to demolish *anything* in the fire's path. No dithering, no paperwork, just get rid of it.

Meanwhile Charles' brother, James, Duke of York, offered the help of the Royal **Life Guards**[4], because nothing says "we're taking this seriously" like sending in the cavalry to fight a fire.

Pepys found Bloodworth on the verge of a nervous breakdown and his response to the King's order to pull down houses was a plaintive "but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it". He also refused the offer of more soldiers before going home and taking to his bed – again.

By this time the King himself had sailed down from Whitehall in the Royal barge to inspect the scene, only to find houses not being pulled down and Bloodworth nowhere to be found. Clearly fed up with all the faffing about, he immediately pulled rank as king and gave the go-ahead for full-scale demolitions to the west of the fire.

Pepys meanwhile, headed home to attend to the very important matter of burying his cheese and wine in his garden in an attempt to protect it from the fire, he later records that he did manage to recover it, so sorry archaeologists – nothing to see here!

The Inferno Escalates

By this time the fire was absolutely raging to the point where people mostly gave up trying to tackle it and decided that running away was a better option. The streets quickly became packed with panicked Londoners hauling carts, bundles, pets and probably the odd chicken, making it near on impossible for the firemen to get through to actually put out the fire – not ideal.

By Sunday afternoon, the fire had already travelled 500 metres west along the river and had already earned the title of *"Most Damaging Fire to Strike London in Living Memory".*

The fire continued to burn throughout Monday, moving west and north as if it were on some kind of sight-seeing tour of the city. Thankfully it did not reach the south due to the River Thames acting as an effective barrier but it took out the houses on London Bridge and looked very keen to hop across to Southwark, but luckily a handy gap between the buildings acted like a firebreak. Essentially the architectural equivalent of "you shall not pass!"

Up north, things were hotting up. By 10am the fire reached Lombard Street, where all the bankers lived, resulting in mass panic as they desperately tried to rescue their precious coins before they melted into shiny puddles.

By now, Londoners were collectively having a bit of a meltdown (no pun intended) and most of the city was a jumble of wailing, confused dashing about, and general emotional disarray. As the flames closed in on the posh end of town, Cheapside's luxury shops and the Royal Exchange, (which was basically a 1600s version of a very fancy shopping mall) most people just stood and watched in disbelief. The Royal Exchange went up in the afternoon, and within a few hours was nothing but a chargrilled shell.

Another gentleman diarist of the time, **John Evelyn**[5], noted that people seemed so utterly shocked by the events unfolding, they just ran around crying, doing little to save their homes or their posh hats. In short, it was a very bad day in the capital – and the fire was only just getting started.

Suspicion in the Air (Along with the Smoke)

As the fire continued to spread, so did whispers that the Great Fire wasn't just a very unfortunate baking accident. The strong winds were flinging fiery debris all over the city and burning bits were finding their way onto thatched roofs and wooden gutters, starting new fires in places that hadn't even ordered any flames yet. This naturally gave rise to all sorts of dramatic rumours, including the idea that people were *deliberately* setting the city alight.

The gossip quickly evolved into full-blown conspiracy theories: stories were flying around of undercover agents hurling "fireballs" into buildings, or being caught red-handed with grenades, matches, and suspiciously flammable moustaches. This started a wave of street violence, as clearly, the best way to handle a city-wide inferno was to throw a riot on top of it.

Panic at the Gates

As the flames raged on, the well-to-do residents were becoming increasingly frantic to remove their precious belongings – everything from silverware and silk gowns to portraits of bored looking ancestors. This sudden dash for the exit turned into a money-making bonanza for the able-bodied poor, who quickly became freelance removal men (and let's be honest, in some cases freelance looters…). If you had a working set of legs – or better yet, a cart or a boat, you were basically sitting on a goldmine.

A week earlier, you could rent a cart for a few shillings. By Monday, the price had rocketed to £40, which was a small fortune at the time (roughly £8000 in today's money, or four pints in central London). Every cart and boat in London seemed to appear out of nowhere, ready to cash in, leading to complete gridlock at the city gates.

Things were so chaotic that at around 3pm, local magistrates actually ordered that the gates closed for a bit – perhaps they were hoping that with no way out, people might stop obsessing over their furniture and actually lend a hand with the fire instead. Bold strategy, with mixed results.

Still, at least things were getting *slightly* more organised – although only just. While the fire was still happily rampaging through the city and the streets were full of chaos, someone tried to take charge. Unfortunately, that someone wasn't the Lord Mayor, who seemed to have vanished overnight. His name does not appear in any records after that day, so it's safe to assume he either melted (hopefully, not literally) into the crowd or was hiding under his bed with his chamber pot.

With Bloodworth missing in action, King Charles II handed the reins to his brother, James, Duke of York. James, to be fair, got stuck right in, setting up command posts around the edge of the inferno and appointing three courtiers to each one, armed with royal permission to start tearing down buildings willy-nilly. One impressed onlooker wrote that *"The Duke hath won the hearts of the people"* with his non-stop firefighting efforts.

James Duke of York

Sadly, even royal efforts couldn't save everything. That evening, everyone's fingers were crossed that the great stone walls of Baynard's Castle – sort of a western cousin to the Tower of London – might hold. But no such luck, the historic palace burned right through the night.

And Then It Got Serious

Believe it or not, things were only destined to get worse. Tuesday 4th September turned out to be the Great Fire's most destructive day – like we haven't already had enough destruction to be going on with.

The Duke of York had set up his grand command post at Temple Bar (where Fleet Street meets the Strand) with big hopes and even bigger plans. His idea was simple: make a heroic last stand along the River Fleet and hope it would behave like a nice natural firebreak. Nothing could be easier, right?

Spoiler alert: it was not.

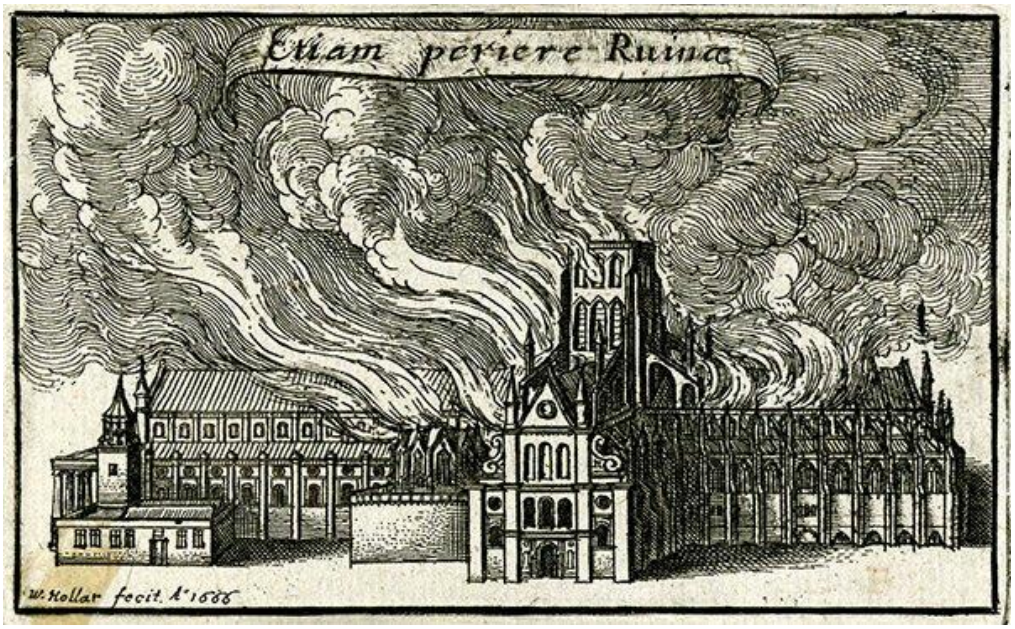
Bright and early on Tuesday morning, while the Duke and his firemen were gearing up for glory, the flames decided to skip confrontation and instead leapt over the river entirely, like some sort of fiery show-off. At this point the firefighters had no choice but to leg it. So much for the big stand.

By lunchtime, the fire had reached Ludgate and Newgate, destroying the prisons there and then, like a scene from a disaster film, the fire started heading east – *against* the wind – making a beeline for the Tower of London, which just so happened to be sitting on a stash of gunpowder. Because apparently things weren't dramatic enough already.

With the official firefighting team still busy trying to rescue what remained of the west, the **Tower garrison**[6] gave up waiting for help and deciding to take matters into their own, slightly singed hands, they began blowing up houses left, right, and centre to create massive firebreaks – and miraculously it worked. The eastward march of the fire was finally stopped, thanks to a few well-placed explosions and some very nervous soldiers.

Meanwhile, the fire was still causing havoc elsewhere – this time it had St Paul's Cathedral in its sights… everyone had assumed St Paul's would be safe with its thick stone walls and a big open square in front that looked like it might stop the flames in their tracks. Many people stuffed it full of their rescued belongings and the crypt was packed to the rafters with books and papers from the nearby printers and booksellers on Paternoster Row.

Unfortunately, the place was mid-makeover under **Christopher Wren**[7] and was wrapped with lovely, highly flammable wooden scaffolding. By the evening the whole lot was up in flames and within half an hour the lead on the roof melted like a candle, leaving the whole thing a smouldering wreck in no time.



London: Slightly Less on Fire

By Tuesday evening, the wind finally gave it a rest, and the firebreaks the garrison had been frantically hacking out actually started to do their job. By Wednesday 5th September, things were looking slightly less apocalyptic. Our man Pepys climbed up the steeple of Barking Church for a good look, and declared that it was *"the saddest sight of desolation that I ever saw"* – which, given that most of the city was now a pile of ash, was a fair comment.

There were still a few fires smouldering away but the worst was done. That said, the clean-up wasn't exactly swift – I mean, where do you even start? Some coal in the cellars kept on burning for another two months, talk about slow burners.

Up in Moorfields – the big open park just north of the city – things had taken a grim turn. It was absolutely heaving with homeless Londoners, all camping out after losing everything. Some had tents, others had cobbled together shacks out of whatever they could find, and some didn't even have a blanket to their name.

As if that wasn't enough drama, everyone was still convinced that foreign troublemakers were behind the fire. On Wednesday night, panic broke out when someone spotted a mysterious light over Fleet Street and a rumour quickly escalated that 50,000 angry French and Dutch were marching on Moorfields with murder and looting in mind.

Terrified, people surged into the streets and starting attacking anyone with even the faintest foreign accent and chaos broke out until the **Trained Bands**[8], **Life Guards**[9] and some blokes from court stepped in and got them all to pack it in.

The "lights in the sky"? Just another fire flaring up near Inner Temple. They tried blowing up Paper House to stop it. Spoiler: it didn't work.

From Fire Starters to Scapegoats

With the fire (mostly) burnt out, the **Court of Aldermen**[10] wasted no time getting stuck in – clearing away the mess and making sure people could get their hands on something to eat. By the Saturday after the blaze, Moorfields market was back in business, dishing out supplies as if nothing had happened.

Charles II, never one to miss a PR opportunity, cheerfully suggested the newly homeless might like to try their luck *anywhere but London*, and issued a royal proclamation politely telling every town and city to roll out the welcome mat and let folks get back to their trades.

THE LONDON GAZETTE.

Published by Authority.

From Monday, Septemb 3, to Monday, Septemp 10, 1666.

Whitehall, Sept. 8.

THE ordinary course of this paper having been interrupted by a sad and lamentable accident of Fire lately happed in the City of *London*; it hath been thought fit for satisfying the minds of so many of his Majesties good Subjects who must needs be concerned for the Issue of so great an accident, to give this short, but true Account of it.

On the second instant, at one of the clock in the Morning, there happed to break out, a sad and deplorable Fire in *Pudding-lane*, near *New Fish-street*, which falling out at that hour of the night, and in a quarter of the Town so close built with wooden pitched houses spread itself so far before day, and with such distraction to the inhabitants and Neighbours, that care was not taken for the timely preventing the further diffusion of it, by pulling down houses, as ought to have been; so that this lamentable Fire in a short time became too big to be mastred by any Engines or working neer it. It fell out most unhappily too, That a violent Easterly wind fomented it, and kept it burning all that day, and the night following spreading itself up to *Grace-church-street* and downwards from *Cornhil* to the Water-side, as far as the *Three Cranes in the Vintry*.

The people in all parts about it, distracted by the vastness of it, and their particular care to carry away their Goods, many attempts were made to prevent the spreading of it by pulling down Houses, and making great Intervals, but all in vain, the Fire seizing upon the Timber and Rubbish, and so continuing it self even through those spaces, and raging in a bright flame all Monday and Tuesday, not withstanding His Majesties own, and His Royal Highness's indefatigable and personal pains to apply all possible remedies to prevent it, calling upon and helping the people with their Guards; and a great number of Nobility and Gentry unwearidly assisting therein, for which they were requited with a thousand blessings from the poor distressed people. By the favour of God the Wind slackened a little on Tuesday night & the Flames meeting with brick buildings at the *Temple*, by little and little it was observed to lose its force on that side, so that on Wednesday morning we began to hope well, and his Royal Highness never despairing or slackening his personal care wrought so well that day, assisted in some parts by the Lords of the Council before and behind it that a stop was put to it at the *Temple Church*, near *Hollorn-bridge*, *Pie-corner*, *Aldersgate*, *Cripplegate*, near the lower end of *Gleen-street*, at the end of *Lincs-Inn-fields* by the *Postern* at the upper end of *Bishopsgate-street* and *Leadenhall-street*, at the *Standard* in *Cornhill* at the church in *Fenchurch street*, near *Clark-workers Hall* in *Mincing-lane*, at the middle of *Mark-lane*, and at the *Tower-dock*.

On Thursday by the blessing of God it was wholly beat down and extinguished. But so as that Evening it unhappily burnt out again a fresh at the *Temple*, by the falling of some sparks (as is supposed) upon a Pile of Wooden buildings; but his Royal Highness who watched there that whole night in Person, by the great labours and diligence used, and especially by applying Powder to blow up the Houses about it, before day most happily secured it.

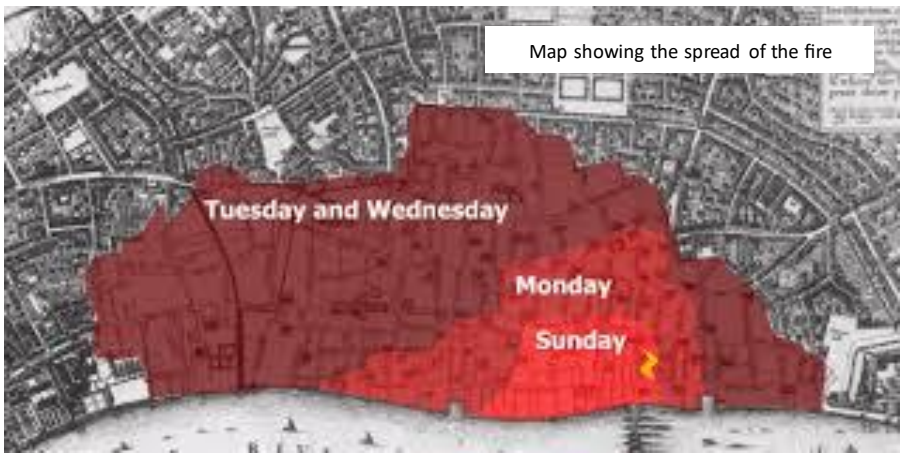
Divers Strangers, Dutch and French were, during the fire, apprehended, upon suspicion that they contributed mischievously to it, who are all imprisoned, and Informations prepared to make a severe inquisition here upon by my Lord Chief Justice *Keeling*, assisted by some of the Lords of the Privy Council; and some principal Members of the City, notwithstanding which suspicion, the manner of the burning all along in a Train, and so blowen forwards in all its way by strong Winds, make us conclude the whole was an effect of an unhappy chance, or to speak better, the heavy hand of God upon us for our sins, shewing us the terrour of his Judgement in thus raising the Fire, and immediately after his miraculous and never to be acknowledged Mercy, in putting a stop to it when we were in the last despair, and that all attempts for quenching it however industriously pursued seemed insufficient. His Majesty then sat hourly in Council, and ever since hath continued making rounds about the City in all parts of it where the danger and mischief was greatest, till this morning that he hath sent his Grace the Duke of *Albemarle*, whom he hath called for to assist him in this great occasion, to put his happy and successful hand to the finishing this memorable deliverance.

About the *Tower* the seasonable orders given for plucking down the Houses to secure the Magazines of Powder was more especially successful, that part being up the Wind, notwithstanding which it came almost to the very Gates of it. So as by this early provision the general Stores of War lodged in the *Tower* were entirely saved: And we have further this intimate cause to give God thanks, that the Fire did not happen when

The official account in the *London Gazette* concluded that the fire had been an 'an act of God' but despite this, rumours were still flying around that the blaze had been started deliberately, and in a frantic hunt for someone – *anyone* – to blame, authorities latched on to Robert Hubert, a somewhat confused French watchmaker who confessed to being part of the gang who started the fire… in Westminster. Later he changed his mind and said, no wait, actually he acted solo and started the fire at the bakery in Pudding Lane.

Despite the fact there were serious doubts as to whether this guy actually knew what was going on, he was found guilty and hung at Tyburn on the 29th October 1666. As it turned out, it was discovered afterwards that he had actually been on a ship bobbing about in the North Sea when the fire broke out, and didn't actually set foot in London until two days later, so unless he had a very long match and excellent aim, he probably wasn't their man – awkward.

While all this is going on, a committee had been set up to figure out what – or who – had started the Great Fire, with **Sir Robert Brooke**[11] as chair. It didn't take long for wild theories to pour in, mostly pointing fingers at foreigners and Catholics. The committee eventually presented its findings to Parliament in January 1667, and printed versions of the report confidently claimed that poor old Hubert was responsible for starting the fire (even though he wasn't actually there – so hardly prime arsonist material) and that he didn't act alone but was part of a full-blown Catholic conspiracy to toast the capital. Clearly this wasn't an exercise in calm, evidence-based reasoning.

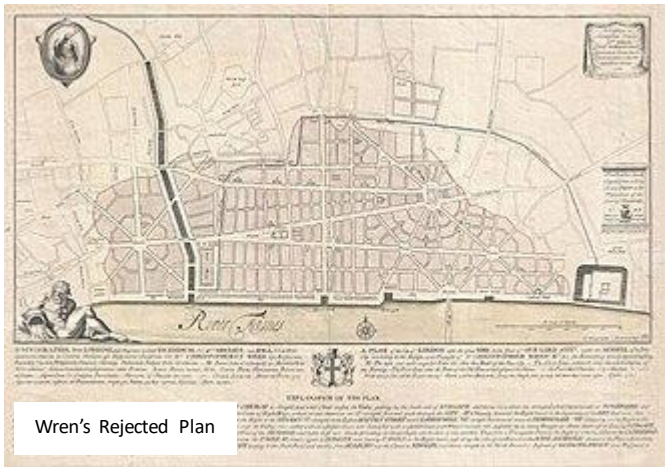


Map showing the spread of the fire

Rekindling London (Minus the Flames)

To stop London descending into years of legal squabbling and more finger pointing, a special Fire Court was set up – first from February 1667 to December 1668, and then again from 1670 to 1676. Backed by the *Fire of London Disputes Act 1666* and the *Rebuilding of London Act 1670*, the court's job was to sort out who should pay to rebuild what – landlords, tenants, or whoever had the deepest pockets. Cases were heard at lightning speed, often wrapped up within a day, which was just was well – without it, the city's recovery might have moved at the pace of a sleepy tortoise in legal robes.

Radical rebuilding schemes were encouraged by Charles II and as well as Wren and Evelyn, **Robert Hooke, Valentine Knight and Richard Newcourt**[12] all proposed new building plans which all followed a tidy little grid system, which was very fashionable across the pond in American cities. Had any of these grand schemes actually been carried out, London might have given Paris a run for its money in the Baroque beauty stakes. Wren's plan would have probably encouraged the separation of social classes into different areas, but the snag with this was the mammoth task of sorting out who actually owned what.

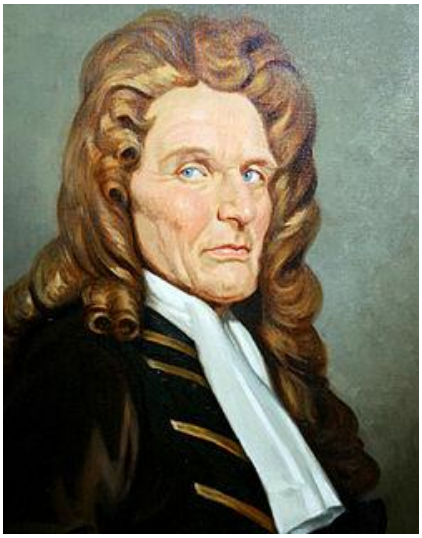


Wren's Rejected Plan

Instead, much of the old street layout was simply stitched back together and rebuilt. The rebuild did bring about some much-needed upgrades: wider streets (so fewer elbows in the ribs), open wharves all along the Thames with no houses cluttering up the space, and most crucially, buildings made of sturdy brick and stone rather than highly flammable timber. The Rebuilding London Act 1666 stepped in with a firm "no wood on the outside please," and helpfully regulated building costs, worker's wages and even gave everyone a three-year deadline to get cracking – or risk losing the land.

To help fund this grand makeover, a tax was slapped on coal, much to everyone's delight, and by 1671, most private homes were back up with grand public buildings rising phoenix-like from the ashes, including the showstopper St Paul's Cathedral and 51 new churches, courtesy of Christopher Wren.

Meanwhile, English economist Nicholas Barbon took something of a "rules are more like guidelines" approach and went ahead with his own rebuilding adventures, reshaping chunks of London in the process. He got busy developing the Strand, St Giles, Bloomsbury and Holborn – clearly not wanting to let a little thing like legality get in the way of a good building spree.



Nicholas Barbon - Economist

London Transformed: The Legacy of the Great Fire

Incredibly, there are very few deaths from the fire officially recorded – single figures in fact – but that's assuming there weren't any unrecorded deaths, which given the chaos, there probably was. Many people may have survived the fire only to perish from hunger or exposure after losing their homes.

1677 Monument to the Great Fire

Even so, the fire dramatically reshaped the city, not just physically, but socially, economically, and in terms of urban planning. Around 13,200 houses, 87 churches, and most of the City of London within the old Roman walls was destroyed with *entire* neighbourhoods being reduced to ash.

In a way it was a bit of a brutal urban reset, many plague-infested areas were destroyed, and with them, the last major outbreak of bubonic plague in London. Sanitation also improved, simply because much of the accumulated grime and filth had been wiped out.

The city was rebuilt according to stricter regulations (which clearly didn't apply to Nicholas Barbon who just did his own thing). The fire also gave birth to stricter cartography and urban planning, as accurate maps were needed for the rebuild. It nudged London closer to becoming a modern city.

So, in a nutshell, the Great Fire was no doubt catastrophic, but it sparked a transformation. London emerged stronger, safer, and just a bit grander – with fewer fleas, fewer flames and a lot more bricks.

Glossary

1. Sir Thomas Bloodworth: Lord Mayor of London during the time of the Great Fire. He is mostly remembered for… not handling it particularly well.
2. Fire hooks: Tools used by firefighters to assist in demolishing buildings and removing materials to prevent fire spread. They are typically long poles with a hooked head, allowing firefighters to tear down walls and other structures from a safe distance.
3. Samuel Pepys (1633-1703): 17th-century English naval administrator, member of Parliament, and most famously, a diarist whose private journals offer a vivid and often very personal glimpse into some of the most dramatic years in London's history.
4. The Royal Life Guards: A cavalry unit formed in the 1650s and the senior regiment in the British army. Now part of the Household Cavalry.
5. John Evelyn (1620-1706): English writer, landowner, gardener, courtier and minor government official, now best known as a diarist.
6. Tower garrison: The troops stationed in a tower to defend it and the surrounding area.
7. Christopher Wren (1632-1723): English architect, astronomer, mathematician and physicist, best known for the design of St Paul's Cathedral and The Monument as well as many other significant building works.
8. Trained Bands: Companies of part-time militia that existed to defend communities in the absence of a large standing army. They were often composed of local men, required to maintain arms and serve in defence of their areas.
9. The Life Guards: Military units historically tasked with protecting high ranking officials such as the monarch.
10. Court of Aldermen: Part of the senior governance of the City of London Corporation. It comprises twenty-five Aldermen of the City of London, presided over by the Lord Mayor
11. Sir Robert Brooke (1637-1669): English landowner, magistrate, commissioner, military officer, knight and MP who sat in the house of commons from 1660 to 1669.
12. Robert Hooke: A well-respected scientist, known for his work in physics and astronomy. Played a role in surveying London's streets following the Great Fire.
13. Valentine Knight: Army Officer who proposed a plan for rebuilding London after the Great Fire.
14. Richard Newcourt: Cartographer and architectural draftsman who also submitted a plan.

Sources;

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- JSTOR (search "Great Fire of London", urban planning in the 17th century)
- The National Archives (UK) - https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Museum of London: Fire of London Collection - https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk
- British Library
- London Metropolitan Archives (LMA)
- BBC In Our Time – The Great Fire of London
- Horrible Histories (CBBC)
- History Extra Podcast – The Great Fire of London Special