The Great Fire of London

What happened?
Introduction

Lesson at a Glance

Suitable For: KS1-3

Time Period:
Early Modern 1485-1750

Curriculum Link:
Events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally
  ➢ The Great Fire of London
  ➢ The development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745
  ➢ Society, economy and culture across the period

Learning Objective:
To closely examine a document in order to discover information.
To consider how and why the fire started, and how the city recovered.

Resources needed:
Printed sources and questions

The Fire

London was a busy city in 1666. It was very crowded. The streets were narrow and dusty. The houses were made of wood and very close together. Inside their homes, people used candles for light and cooked on open fires. A fire could easily get out of control. In those days there were no fire engines or firemen to stop a fire from spreading.

The fire began on Sunday evening on the 2nd of September. It started in Pudding Lane in the shop of the king’s baker, Thomas Farrinor. When Thomas went to bed, he did not put out the fire that heated his oven. Sparks from the oven fell onto some dry flour sacks and they caught fire. The flames spread through the house, down Pudding Lane and into the nearby streets.

Soon London was filled with smoke. The sky was red with huge flames from the fire. By Monday, 300 houses had burnt down.

Everybody was in a panic. People loaded their things onto carts and tried to leave town. Others tried to get away on boats on the river. Some people buried their things in the garden, hoping to save them from the fire.

The fire still spread, helped by a strong wind from the east. London Bridge and St Paul’s Cathedral were both burnt. On Tuesday, King Charles II ordered that houses and shops be pulled down to stop the fire from spreading. By Wednesday, they had the fire under control. But by then, 100,000 people were homeless.

Contents:

Teacher’s notes: ........................................... 3
Tasks: .......................................................... 4
Source One: .................................................. 5
Source Two: .................................................. 7
Source Three: ............................................... 8
Source Four: ................................................... 9
Source Five: .................................................... 11
The Great Fire of London

Teacher’s notes

This snapshot can be used with pupils at key stage 1 for the history national curriculum in year 2. It looks at the story of the fire of London through evidence relating to some of the key characters - Thomas Farrinor and Charles II. Background notes also provide contemporary views on the causes of the fire, based on original documents at the National Archives.

Sources

The questions progress in difficulty, so that questions based on source 5 are a little harder than questions based on source 1.

Source 1 provides evidence about Farrinor, the king’s baker, in Pudding Lane. E 170/252

Source 2 shows the instruction given by Charles II to survey the city after the fire. SP 44/23

Source 3-4 reveals how much of the city was destroyed. ZMAP 4/18

Source 5 provides evidence of how Charles hoped to improve the city and prevent such a calamity happening again. SP 29/171

Extension activities

The snapshot could be expanded to ask pupils to attempt a piece of writing on the fire such as a diary entry. -Pupils could read extracts (or simplified versions) from the diaries of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn. -The class could make a class mural of the Great Fire of London or pupils could do an individual drawing. -The class could discuss how we deal with fires today.

Background

Thomas Farrinor and his wife got out of their bakery in time, but their maid was too frightened to jump from the roof. She was the first to die. Surprisingly, only nine people died as a result of the fire.

Two people have left us eyewitness accounts of the fire. The first is Samuel Pepys, who worked for the Navy. He kept a diary from 1660-1669. The second is John Evelyn, who also kept a diary. Both men describe how dramatic and scary the fire was.

Not everyone at the time thought that the fire was an accident. Some said foreigners caused it. Others felt that the fire was started by those not free to follow their own religion. Some even saw the fire as a punishment from God.

A ten-year-old boy called Edward Taylor and his family were questioned for throwing fireballs at an open window in Pudding Lane and in the streets. Fireballs were made from animal fat (called tallow), set alight and used to start fires. However, the fire was most likely caused by chance rather than by a deliberate act.

Charles II ordered that 10 October 1666 be a day of fasting on account of the fire. He told the Lord Mayor of London to support collections for victims of the fire. Later, close to Pudding Lane, a monument was built so that people would not forget the fire. It was the work of Sir Christopher Wren, who designed many new buildings, including St Pauls Cathedral, when the city was rebuilt after the fire.
The Great Fire of London

What happened?

Tasks

Look at Source 1
This source was written about two weeks before the fire. It lists some of the people who lived in Pudding Lane. This is where the fire began.
   a) Can you find the name of the king’s baker?
   b) How many fireplaces and ovens did he have?
   c) How much tax did the baker have to pay? (Clue: number of hearths and ovens x 1 shilling)
   d) How many different jobs can you find on the list? Name them.
   e) How many men had houses on the list?
   f) How many women had houses on the list?
   g) How many houses were empty?

Look at Source 2
After the fire, King Charles II wanted a new map of London.
   a) Who did Charles ask to make a plan of London?
   b) Why did Charles want a map showing London after the fire?
   c) What did Charles feel about the fire?

Look at Source 3
Wenceslaus Hollar drew this map.
   a) Can you find the following places on the map?
      • River Thames
      • Tower of London
      • St Paul’s Cathedral (Clue: from above it looks like a cross, not a dome)
      • Pudding Lane (Clue: north of the river, near the bridge)
   b) Why are there not many buildings shown in the white middle part of the map?
   c) Ask your teacher for a map of London today. Try and spot the differences with Hollar’s map of London?

Look at Source 4
On the corner of his map, Hollar put some information. It is a list of places that are numbered on the map. This is called a key.
   a) There are a lot of halls. These were meeting places for different kinds of craftsmen. For example, number 130 is the Carpenter’s Hall. Can you find any more? In pairs, talk about what people had to do in these jobs. (Your teacher will help you with the unusual ones.)
   b) Try and find some new jobs listed here in the key that were not listed in source 1 (for example: 124. weavers).
   c) How many houses in the city were destroyed by the fire?
   d) How many churches were burnt

Look at Source 5
King Charles praised the courage of the people in the fire. He hoped to see a more beautiful city rebuilt. He also made plans to prevent another fire. Here are some of his plans.
   a) How did Charles plan to stop fires spreading in London? (Clue: There are five different ideas in this source.) How would each of these plans help to stop a fire from spreading?
Source 1: Pudding Lane Hearth Tax: August 1666: E 179/252

- Mary W. Bachelor's Orde, 2
- George B. Baker's Orde, 3
- M. Gaston, 1
- Benjamin B. Orde, 1
- Thomas Knight, 4
- Alice Spencer, 4
- Empty, 3
- John B. Baker, 3
- Thomas Jamison Baker, 5
- William Ludford, plasterer, 3
- James, 2
- Susan Allen, 3
- Empty, 3
- Lamb's Yard
  - William Smith, bricklayer's plumb, 3
  - Joshua Smith, plasterer, 2
  - Empty, 3
  - Charles Smith, bricklayer's edle, 5
  - John Smith, plasterer, 1
  - John Smith, plasterer, 4
  - William M. Baker, plasterer, 3
  - John M. Smith, plasterer, 2
  - John S. Smith, plasterer, 2
  - W. C. Baker, 2
  - William James, baker, 2

Total: 60
The Great Fire of London

What happened?

Transcript of Source 1: Pudding Lane Hearth Tax: August 1666

[This is a tax record for August 1666. These people lived in Pudding Lane in London. The numbers show the amount of hearths (fireplaces) in each person’s house. People who owned a house had to pay a hearth tax to the king. They paid 1 shilling (5p) for each hearth. This tax was collected twice a year. Some people might stop up their fireplaces for part of the year so they didn’t have to pay the tax twice.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Person</th>
<th>Number of Hearths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Whittacre widow</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Porter plasterer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widdow Gander</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Burstow</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Knight Glasier [glass maker]</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Spencer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Bibie turner [person who works with a turning lathe, a tool for shaping and cutting wood, important in making barrels]</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Farrinor baker 1 oven</td>
<td>5 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ludford plasterer 1 stop up</td>
<td>3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanna Noest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanbe Yard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Burgis hook &amp; eye maker</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Sands plateworker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolas Carter hook &amp; eye maker</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widdow Grimes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Wardley clothworker</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Walter smyth [blacksmith who worked with metal and made horseshoes]</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Wells porter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Hasleby porter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widdow Pawley</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Greene turner</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We have appointed Wencelaus Hollar and Francis Sandford to take an exact plan and survey of our city of London with the suburbs adjoining as the same now stands after the sad calamity of the late fire with a particular depiction of the ruins thereof.

Glossary

Suburbs adjoining = areas where people live next to the city
Sad calamity = event that brings terrible loss and sadness; a disaster
Depiction = a picture (or a description in words)

Simple transcript

The king has chosen Wencelaus Hollar and Francis Sandford to make a map of the city of London and the nearest suburbs to show the damage caused by the terrible fire.
Source 3: Map of London after the fire ZMAP 4/18
The Great Fire of London

Source 4: Key to map ZMAP 4/18

115. Poulters Hall
114. Cookes Hall
115. Barber Chirurgeons Hall
116. Scriveners Hall
117. Goldsmiths Hall
118. Waxchandlers Hall
119. Haberdashers Hall
120. Curriers Hall
121. Brewers Hall
122. Gilders Hall
123. Coopers Hall
124. Weavers Hall
125. Macon's Hall
126. Mercers Hall & Chapell
127. Grocers Hall
128. Founders Hall
129. Armorers Hall
130. Carpenters Hall
131. Loriners & Glasters Hall
132. Drapers Hall
133. Merchant Taylor's Hall
134. Salters Hall
135. Cutlers Hall

Burnt 373 acres within 63 acres & 3100 yards without the wall 89 Churches 13200 Houses 18 Parishes within the walls entire.
### Transcript of Source 4: Key to map ZMAP 4/18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Glossary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113. Poulterers Hall</td>
<td>People who sold chickens, hens and eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114. Cookes Hall</td>
<td>People who prepared and sold cooked food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115. Barber Chirurgeons Hall</td>
<td>People who cut hair and beards and could also carry out operations or remove teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116. Scriveners Hall</td>
<td>People who wrote letters and documents for money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117. Goldsmiths Hall</td>
<td>People who worked with gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118. Waxchandlers Hall</td>
<td>People who made candles and sold them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119. Haberdasher’s Hall</td>
<td>People who sold men’s clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120. Curriers Hall</td>
<td>People who worked with leather (colouring it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121. Brewers Hall</td>
<td>People who made beer and ale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122. Girdlers Hall</td>
<td>People who made girdles (belts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123. Coopers Hall</td>
<td>People who made and repaired barrels and casks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124. Weavers Hall</td>
<td>People who made cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125. Masons Hall</td>
<td>People who cut stone (for buildings etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126. Mercers Hall &amp; Chappell</td>
<td>Important traders who sold rich fabrics like silk and velvet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127. Grocers Hall</td>
<td>People who sold food, like spices and sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128. Founders Hall</td>
<td>People who worked with metal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129. Armorers Hall</td>
<td>People who made weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130. Carpenters Hall</td>
<td>People who made furniture from wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131. Loriners &amp; Glasiers Hall</td>
<td>Loriners made metal bits for bridles and saddles (kit for a horse). Glasiers made glass for windows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132. Drapers Hall</td>
<td>People who sold woollen cloth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133. Marchant Taylors Hall</td>
<td>People who bought cloth and made it into clothes, usually for men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134. Salters Hall</td>
<td>People who made and sold salt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135. Cutlers Hall</td>
<td>People who made, sold or fixed knives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Glossary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnt 373 Acres within</td>
<td>373 acres were burnt within the city walls. One acre is about the same amount of land as a football pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63 Acres &amp; 3 roods without the walls</td>
<td>63 acres &amp; 3 roods were burnt outside the city walls. A rood is one quarter of an acre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89 Churches, 132,00 Houses</td>
<td>89 churches &amp; 132,00 houses were burnt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Parishes within City walls entire.</td>
<td>11 whole communities within the city walls were burnt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the first place the woful experience in this late heavy visitation hath sufficiently convinced all men of the pernicious consequences which have attended the building with Timber, and even with Stone it self, and the notable benefit of Brick, which in so many places hath resisted and even extinguished the Fire; And we do therefore hereby declare Our express Will and Pleasure, That no man whatsoever shall presume to erect any House or Building, great or small, but of Brick, or Stone, and if any man shall do the contrary, the next Magistrate shall forthwith cause it to be pulled down,

all other eminent and notorious Streets, shall be of such a breadth, as may with Gods blessing prevent the mischief that one side may suffer if the other be on fire,

not will we suffer any Lanes or Alleys to be erected, but whereupon mature deliberation the same shall be found absolutely necessary,

no house shall be erected within so many foot of the River,

any houses to be inhabited by Brewers, or Diet, or Sugar-Bakers, which Trades by their continual Smoaks contribute very much to the unhealthiness of the adjacent places; but We require the Lord Major and Aldermen of London upon a full consideration, and weighing all conveniences and inconveniences that can be foreseen, to propose such a place as may be fit for all those Trades which are carried on by smoak to inhabit together,
The Great Fire of London

Transcript of Source 5: Charles II’s declaration to London in 1666

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...no house shall be erected within so many foot of the River,

...any houses to be inhabited by Brewers, or Diers, or Sugar-Bakers, which Trades by their continual Smoaks contribute very much to the unhealthiness of the adjacent places, but We require the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of Lon...