

LONDON'S *burning*

THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON 1666



MUSEUM OF LONDON

Museum of London relights the Great Fire of 1666

In the early hours of Sunday 2 September 1666, the Lord Mayor of London, Thomas Bludworth, was raised from his bed to inspect a fire in the City. Distinctly unimpressed, he declared “a woman could piss it out” before returning to his slumber. Five days later only a fifth of the City of London remained standing, as the fire which elicited Bludworth’s disdain took hold of the city and very nearly destroyed it. **London’s Burning – the Great Fire of London 1666**, a new exhibition at **Museum of London**, which opens on **16 March 2007** until Winter 2009, takes the most famous disaster in London’s history and tells its story through the voices of those who lived through it.

The exhibition follows Londoners’ experiences of the Great Fire. We may be familiar with facts of the fire itself, but what do we know about these people who lived through the terror of having their homes and livelihood destroyed? How did they cope? What happened to them afterwards?

Focusing on eye-witness accounts, **London’s Burning** reveals the personal side of the tragedy: Samuel Pepys rescuing his bags of gold at 4am in his nightshirt; Elizabeth Peacock and her 3 children being left with ‘not so much as a stool to sit upon’ and the boys of Westminster School who helped fight the fire. The exhibition explores why a fire which claimed less than 10 lives, scarred London as surely as the Great Plague the year before, which claimed 100,000.

A dramatic video installation will transport visitors back to the streets of 17th century London, and let them experience how a bustling city, full of merchants, traders and craft workers, collapsed into ruins. They will hear from Londoners left to pick

through the debris of their lives. The gallery contains interactive displays and questions, allowing children to engage with the story and think about how the fire changed the lives of Londoners and the city they lived in. There are also costumes to try on.

A wide range of contemporary objects bear testimony to the strength of the fire and the desperate and futile efforts made to quell the blaze. A 17th century oven matching the likely culprit for the fire’s origin in Pudding Lane is on display, next to the hopelessly ineffectual fire fighting equipment of the day. The panic which enveloped the city’s residents can be read in these paltry squirters and hooks, which would have been utterly useless against an inferno which reached some 1000°C. Archaeological finds from a building which stood on Pudding Lane give a physical record of an episode which literally scorched itself into the fabric of the city.

London’s Burning also tells of a city’s remarkable survival, how London responded to the fire and rebuilt itself. The blame, recriminations, scapegoating and summary justices are all here. As are the plans for new beginnings, designed by Christopher Wren and others, cast aside by financial imperatives. But these sit side by side with moving artistic responses to the Great Fire, and the legislative procedures that were its legacy.

Meriel Jeater, exhibition curator, says ‘The exhibition highlights the personal tragedies within the disaster that affected not just London, but the whole country – the woman who, while rescuing an apron full of chickens from the flames, was



attacked by a mob who thought she was an arsonist carrying fire balls, or Robert Hubert, the disturbed scapegoat for the fire, who was hung before the official enquiry declared him innocent. These stories, and many more, show how people dealt with the fire in some of the most dreadful and the most heroic ways.'

Nina Sprigge, Primary Schools officer, says 'The colourful and dynamic design of this exhibition will greatly benefit the many thousands of children who visit the Museum of London each year, including the 6-7 year olds studying the Great Fire of London as part of their National Curriculum history study for Key Stage One. Interactive exhibits and direct punchy text, including many provocative questions, will excite and attract children and encourage awe and wonder as they study original artefacts and reflect on what we do, and don't know, about this famous historical story.'

For more information or images please contact **Tim Morley** or **Lisa Glanville** in the Museum of London Press Office on **020 7814 5607 / 020 7814 5511** or email **tmorley@museumoflondon.org.uk** or **lglanville@museumoflondon.org.uk**

Notes to editors:

1. The **Museum of London** tells the lively story of London from pre-historic times to the present day. Find out what Romans ate for dinner, experience the Great Fire of London and find out when pointy shoes first became fashionable. Reconstructed interiors and street scenes are alternated with displays of original artefacts found in the Museum's archaeological digs. **www.museumoflondon.org.uk**
2. From March 2007 to Autumn 2009, the Museum will be redeveloping its lower galleries to retell the story of London and Londoners from 1666 to the present day. The £18 million project, which is the largest the Museum has seen since opening in 1976, will revitalize the galleries, open up 25% more gallery space and create a glass frontage overlooking London Wall. The new galleries will open in 2009 with significantly increased access to the Museum's objects, both in the galleries and online, and will also include a new Clore Learning Centre, a theatre and The Sackler Hall containing an information zone and coffee point.
3. Throughout the redevelopment work, visitors will continue to be able to discover the city's many incarnations in the London before London, Roman London, and Medieval London galleries, together with London's Burning and a series of topical exhibitions. A full programme of activities and events for all ages, bringing London's past and present to life, will continue.
4. For more information, including about how to support the project by "buying a year of London's history" and becoming part of the new display see **www.museumoflondon.org.uk/buyayear** or call **020 7814 5505**.



How well do you know the Great Fire of London? Create your own firestarter for ten from our lists of Great Fire facts and fictions.

Heroes or villains?

Some people acted very bravely during the fire. Others were dishonest and cruel.
Read the stories below. Who do you think was a hero or a villain?

1. Thomas Bludworth, Lord Mayor of London

Thomas Bludworth saw the fire at 3am on Sunday and decided it would go out by itself. He didn't want to order the pulling down of houses without the owners' permission. Could he have prevented the fire from spreading?

2. King Charles II

The King personally helped fight the fire. He lifted buckets of water and threw money to reward people who stayed to fight the flames.

3. Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey

Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, a magistrate, was knighted by Charles II in September 1666 for his good work during the plague and fire. Godfrey gave silver tankards featuring etchings of both tragedies to his friends to celebrate his knighthood. He was also a coal and wood merchant. He lived in Westminster so he did not lose his coal stock in the fire. In January 1667 Godfrey was accused of raising the price of his coal – *'a very great Extortion and Oppression, especially to poor People.'*



4. James, Duke of York



The King's brother organised much of the fire fighting effort. He ordered the pulling down and blowing up of houses and saved people from being attacked by mobs.

5. The London carters

People were desperate to save their belongings from the flames. Carters started to ask huge sums of money for people to hire their carts. The price rose from 10 shillings to £40 (from £60 to £3000 in today's money).

6. James Hicks

This London postmaster saved as many letters as he could from the post office in Cloak Lane and fled to Barnet. He sent a letter to postmasters around the country to tell them about the fire.

7. Schoolboys from Westminster School

John Dolben, Dean of Westminster, and his schoolboys worked for hours to save the church of St Dunstan-in-the-East and nearby houses from the fire.

8. Mobs

Gangs of people searched the unburnt streets, looking for foreigners they thought had started the fire. They attacked anybody who couldn't speak good English, including women.

9. Count de Molena

The Spanish ambassador sheltered foreigners in his house in the Barbican to protect them from angry mobs.

10. Thieves

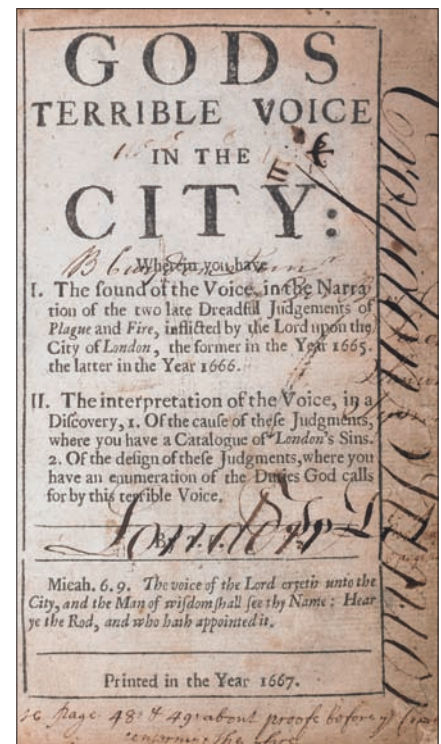
Rather than helping to put out the fire, some people looted abandoned houses and stole other people's belongings from carts in the confusion.



The 25 sins of Londoners

which the puritan Thomas Vincent claimed caused the Great Fire in his book 'God's Terrible Voice in the City' (1667):

1. **Slighting the gospel**
2. **Unfruitfulness in such a fertile soil** - instead of the fruits of righteousness (praise and glory of God, love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, goodness, temperance and faith), Vincent blames Londoners for fruits of unrighteousness (works of the flesh, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, variance, emulations, wraths, strifes, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings)
3. **Hypocrisy in the profession of religion** - saying you believe something because it is fashionable
4. **Formality and lukewarmness in the worship of God** - saying formulaic prayers without meaning them
5. **Division amongst professors** - the differences between the Christian sects, who are too busy arguing to worship properly
6. **Neglect of reformation** - people not improving themselves: *'they who have clean houses and clean garments...had had foul hearts'*
7. **Fearful apostacy, and a spirit of compliance with the sins of the times**
8. **Deafening the ear against all God's calls**
9. **Profaneness, and a loose and frothy spirit, especially in the youth and springing generation** - taking God's name in vain, swearing in alehouses, whorehouses and other 'devil-houses' and not respecting the Sabbath
10. **Pride**
11. **Fulness of bread, or intemperance in eating**
12. **Idleness** - he comments that women in particular are guilty of this, lying in bed all morning and spending too long on their appearance
13. **Unmercifulness**
14. **Uncleanness** - fornication, adultery, privy lewdness, wantonness - *'O the boiling, burning lusts that have been in London!'*
15. **Drunkenness** - *'The corners and beds full of vomit, the reeling about the streets'*
16. **Perverting of judgement in law**
17. **Covetousness**
18. **Extortion**
19. **Lying**
20. **Cozening and defrauding**
21. **Prodigality and profuse spending**
22. **Envyng**
23. **Slander and backbiting**
24. **Murmuring** - saying that you want bad things to happen (such as the plague and fire) so your trade will increase or you can charge higher prices
25. **Carnal security** - feeling so secure in your sinfulness that you don't expect to be punished.



What would you grab if your house went up in smoke?

Here are 10 precious items Londoners buried, looted and risked life and limb to save during the Great Fire:

1. A parmesan cheese. Because they couldn't carry them Samuel Pepys and his friends buried some of their things in his garden. Pepys wrote in his diary: *Sir W. Batten, not knowing how to remove his wine, did dig a pit in the garden and laid it in there; and I took the opportunity of laying all the papers of my office that I could not otherwise dispose of. And in the evening Sir W. Penn and I did dig another, and put our wine in it; and I my Parmazan cheese as well as my wine and some other things.*

2. Stuffed humans. Barber-Surgeons Hall burnt down on the third day of the fire. Among other things, the surgeons managed to save 2 stuffed human figures known as 'Adam and Eve'

3. An apron full of chickens. One woman's most precious possessions were her chickens. She carried them in her apron out of the City to the safety of Moorfields. Unfortunately people thought the chickens were fireballs and attacked her! They believed she was an arsonist.

4. Skeletons of dissected criminals. The Barber Surgeons also saved several skeletons of dissected criminals (only the bodies of criminals were allowed to be cut up for anatomy lessons) who had been hung for their crimes at Tyburn.

5. Women in labour. Everybody had to escape the flames, even if they were giving birth. If they couldn't walk, they were carried on their beds down the street. Thomas Vincent, a vicar, described seeing: *'the distressed citizens, when they were bringing forth their wives (some from their child-bed) ...out of their houses, and sending them into the countries, or somewhere into the fields with their goods.'*

6. A blanket. Less than 10 people are recorded as dying in the Great Fire of London. One of the unfortunate victims was an old man who went back to St Paul's cathedral to rescue a blanket he'd stashed there. He was very weak and the fire overcame him.

7. Virginals. (a type of early piano, which apparently got its name from the chastity of the young ladies who played them) Samuel Pepys watched people escaping in boats along the Thames and noticed one in three boats seemed to have a virginal in it: *'River full of lighters and boats taking in goods, and good goods swimming in the water, and only I observed that hardly one lighter or boat in three that had the goods of a house in, but there was a pair of Virginalls in it'*. These early pianos were expensive but small enough to be carried in an emergency.



8. £2 million worth of books. All the printers and booksellers that worked near St Paul's Cathedral put their entire stock in the chapel of St Faith's in the cathedral crypt for safe keeping during the fire. Unfortunately the whole lot went up in smoke, to the 'undoing' of many a bookseller.

9. The plate from your local church. Mr Langley, the churchwarden of St Mary Woolchurch Hawe, was clearing his belongings from his house when people from the church ran up carrying the church plate and books to be saved. He ordered all the men helping him to go and rescue more items from the church. While he waited for them to come back his house and its contents were consumed by flames.

10. London's post. James Hicks, London's postmaster, stayed in the post office on Cloak Lane until 1am on Monday 3rd September, until the fire got too close. He and his family fled with as many letters as they could grab. Unfortunately Hicks left behind a secret machine for forging letters in the interests of the State, much to the disappointment of government.



Seven Myths about the Great Fire:

1. The Great Fire stopped the Great Plague

The Great Plague hit London in April 1665 and the disease lessened from October that year. While there were still cases of the plague in 1666, it was in effect over by the time of the fire. In fact the areas that were worst hit by the plague, such as Whitechapel and Southwark, were untouched by the fire. The plague did not return in a significant way after the Great Fire but we are not sure why. It could have been that the population of London had some immunity.

2. The City walls stopped the Great Fire

The Great Fire actually spread outside the City walls in the Fleet Street area. 373 acres were destroyed inside the City walls and 63 outside. The fire stopped because the wind died down, which made fire fighting efforts more effective.

3. Only 5 people died in the Great Fire

We don't know how many people died because no official records were kept at the time. There are at least 8 deaths recorded in contemporary diaries and other documents. The number of people who died from their injuries or from being homeless during the winter that followed is unknown. None of the sources record a huge number of deaths as a result of the fire, so it is not likely to have been a large total.

4. The Great Fire was started by Catholic conspirators

After the Great Fire, the bulk of the blame was aimed at Catholics. An official Commons Committee enquiry collected many pieces of anti-Catholic evidence, much of it hearsay and rumour. The King's Council declared that *'nothing hath been found to argue it to have been other than the hand of God upon us, a great wind, and the season so very dry'*. Despite this, conspiracy theories persisted for years and a plaque was set up on the site of the bakery where the fire started, which blamed 'barbarous papists'. It was removed in 1830.

5. London was completely rebuilt after the fire in a new, modern way

New building regulations introduced after the fire stated that houses had to be built from brick, rather than wood. This was not a radical new idea. Brick houses were already being built elsewhere in London anyway – it was a fashionable material. The City was rebuilt on its old medieval street plan, with a few improvements, despite the submission of designs to rebuild it on a completely new grid plan. The City government did not have the time or money to put these plans into place. It needed the City to be rebuilt as soon as possible to avoid an economic disaster.

6. The whole of London burnt down during the Great Fire

Four-fifths of the City of London was consumed in the Great Fire, which amounted to roughly one-third of the total area of 17th-century London, including its suburbs.

7. The London Fire Brigade was established as a result of the Great Fire

Actually it was 200 years after the Great Fire before the London Fire Brigade was finally established. In 1680 the first fire insurance company, the Fire Office, was set up by Nicholas Barbon. Several others swiftly followed and by the 1700s these insurance companies had their own fire fighting brigades. Eventually the insurance companies worked together to found The London Fire Engine Establishment in 1833. This was still run by the insurers until 1866 when the first publicly funded fire service, The Metropolitan Fire Brigade, was set up.





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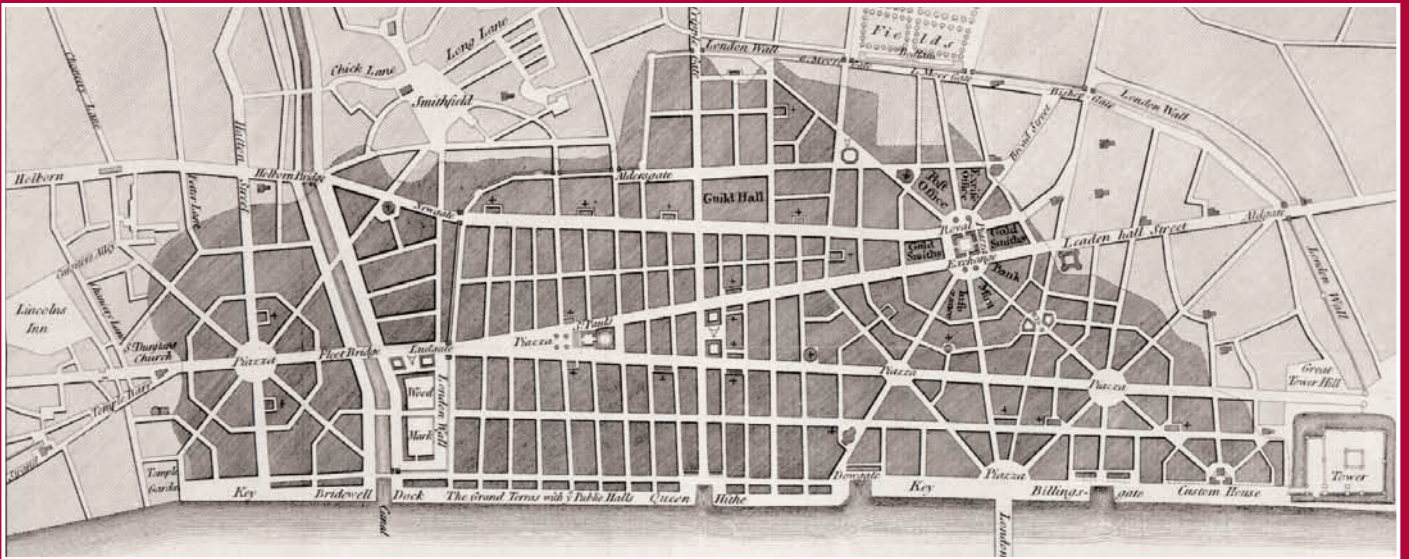
- 1 **'The Burning of London'**
by Samuel Rolle, 1667
© Museum of London
- 2 **Dressing up in a
replica firemen's
helmet**
© Museum of London
- 3 **Meriel Jeater, Curator,
with fire insurance
mark**
© Museum of London
- 4 **Meriel Jeater, Curator,
with 17th century
fire squirt**
© Museum of London
- 5 **Tin glazed floor tiles,
from Pudding Lane**
© Museum of London.
- 6 **Fire map of London,**
Wenceslaus Hollar, 1666
© Museum of London



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7 The Great Fire of London,
Dutch school, 1666
© Museum of London

8 The Great Fire of London
after Jan Griffier
the Elder, 1670's
© Museum of London

9 Wren's rebuilding plan, 1666
© Museum of London

10 Fire Engine, 17th century
© Museum of London

11 Fireman's helmet,
17th century
© Museum of London

12 Fire prophecy
William Lilly 1651
© Museum of London



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Events

FOR YOUNG SPARKS

Sat 26 May, Sat 2 June

Storytelling 5+

London's burning

Come and see some of the objects used in London at the time of the Great Fire in 1666 and discover the stories they can tell. Smell the candles, handle the buckets and try out a fireman's helmet.

1.00 PM, 2.00 PM, 3.00 PM (30 mins)

Sat 26 May

Drop-in 5+

The Monument - a constant reminder

It stands so tall, as tall as a three storey house and it reminds us what happened in 1666. At the top a flame symbolises the fiery force that destroyed much of London. If you had lived 330 years ago how would you have designed it? This workshop will give you the chance to do just that.

12.30 PM & 2.30PM (1 hrs 30 mins)

Sun 27 May, Mon 28 May

Drop-in 5+

What's the story?

The story of the Great Fire of London is dramatic and gripping. Join our artist and create a cartoon strip adding your own drawings to the story.

12.30 PM, 2.30 PM (1 hrs 30 mins)

Sun 27 May, Mon 28 May, Thu 31 May, Sun 3 June

Storytelling 5+

Fire! Fire!

Travel back in time to 1666 and find out about the Great Fire of London. How did it start? How long did it last? How was it finally put out?

1.00 PM, 2.00 PM, 3.00 PM (30 mins)

Tue 29 May

Drop-in 5+

Fighting fires

With houses made of wood, candles used for light and fires for heating, large fires broke out all the time in old London. After the Great Fire of London special insurance could be taken out to protect your house against fires. If you had a fire plaque put up on your door, a fire brigade would help you in future fires. Join this workshop and create a fire plaque for your door.

12.30 PM, 2.30 PM (1 hrs 30 mins)

Tue 29 May

Talks 7+

How did they fight the fires?

How were the early firemen protected while they were fighting the flames? Surprisingly, leather was widely used for both clothing and equipment, from helmets to hoses and buckets. Using actual examples this family talk will show how these developed into the modern fire-fighting equipment that we see today.

1.00 PM, 2.00 PM, 3.00 PM (30 mins)

Wed 30 May, Thu 31 May

Talks 5+

Fiery objects and stories

Even though the destruction was vast some things survived the Great Fire of London. Meriel Jeater, the curator of our special exhibition about the Great Fire, will guide you through the exhibition and tell you stories and facts behind some of the most fascinating objects.

1.30 PM, 2.30 PM (30 mins)

Wed 30 May

Workshops 5+

Music from the fire

We have taken one of the most well known and loved songs, London's Burning, and created an interactive event where everybody can get involved. We will look more closely at the words, swap them around or replace them. Together we will build something new and exciting.

12.00 PM, 1.00 PM, 2.00 PM, 3.00 PM (30 mins)

Fri 1 June

Workshops 5+

Holding the fire

Candles come in lots of designs, some very pretty but others designed to protect the flame, or to be difficult to knock over. Find out more about candles 350 years ago and make your own candle holder.

11.30 AM, 12.45 PM, 2.00 PM (45 mins)

Fri 1 June

Workshops 5+

Music from the fire

We have taken one of the most well known and loved songs and created an interactive event where everybody can get involved. We will look more closely at the words, swap them around or replace them. Together we will build something new and exciting.

12.15 PM, 1.30 PM, 2.45 PM, 3.45 PM (30 mins)



Sat 2 June, Sun 3 June

Workshops 5+

Fire through art

Explore the objects and equipment associated with the Great Fire of London. This workshop will give everybody the chance to be creative and use their imagination to produce a piece of art that will reflect what happened during the fire and bring the flames alive.

1.30 PM, 2.30 PM, 3.30 PM (30 mins)

FOR OLDER FLAMES

Sat 12 May

Walks 16+

Walk: Restoration London

The second half of the seventeenth century proved to be one of the most consequential eras of the City's history. London survived the Civil War, only to be devastated by disease and the Great Fire. This walk traces the story in the City's streets and buildings.

2.00 PM (90 mins)

£6

Sun 13 May, Sun 10 June

Gallery tour 16+

Fires of London

Explore how fires have shaped the development of the City throughout London's history with Museum of London guide Robert Whitwell.

3.00 PM (60 mins)

Thu 17 May, Thu 28 June, Thu 26 July, Thu 30 August

Gallery tour 14+

London's Burning

Meriel Jeater, curator of London's Burning, gives a guided tour of the exhibition and explains how it was created.

3.00 PM

