

The Fire of London

Do you know this old rhyme?

*Sixteen hundred and sixty-six
London burned like rotten sticks!*

In the early morning of **September 2nd**, 1666, a fire started in a baker's shop in London, in Pudding Lane. Pudding Lane was a dirty crowded alley near the Tower of London. The houses were built with wooden frames.

Sparks from the blazing buildings were blown across the street and set fire to an inn. Hay was stored there and soon the flames were shooting far up into the sky. Samuel Pepys saw the fire from his house. He thought that it was too far away to worry about. He went back to bed.

Soon all of Pudding Lane was ablaze. Then the fire spread into the next street. Here there were warehouses filled with tallow, oil and spirits, the cargoes of ships. These things burn very well. The warehouses were soon blazing.

Samuel Pepys, got up at seven in the morning. He heard that more than 300 houses had already been burned down. He made his way to the Tower of London. Here from a high window he could see London Bridge burning.

The King sent word to the Mayor of London. "Pull down the houses!" he said. "That will make a break to stop the fire spreading." But the Mayor did nothing. That evening, Pepys went to the edge of the town. He could see an arch of fire over a mile long. Churches, houses, everything was on fire. He could hear the sound of houses cracking in the heat even from far away. He went home very sad.

The fire raged for five days. It burned down fifteen thousand houses and eighty-four churches. Two-thirds of the city had been destroyed. Now there were thousands of families who had escaped the fire but had no homes.



In 1665 plague had broken out in London. It killed about a fifth of the inhabitants. “How can two such terrible things have happened?” said the Christians in London. They knew that the city and the king were very wicked. “God is warning us,” they said. Did people take notice of the warning? No they did not. The king went on in his wicked ways and the people often followed him.

London had narrow streets. The top floors of the wooden houses overhung the streets. They were very close together. The fire passed quickly from one house to another. The fire was an accident but it was a warning. Jesus explained this. He told his hearers about a terrible accident when a tower fell down. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,” he said.¹

If you visit the City of London go and see the Monument to the Fire of London. Today, London has many very tall buildings. The monument is no longer the tallest but there is still a good view from the top.

¹ Luke 13.