

The Great Fire of London

Paragraph A

The Great Fire of London swept through London in September 1666, devastating many buildings, including 13,200 houses and 87 parish churches. The Royal Exchange, the Guildhall and St. Paul's Cathedral, all built during the Middle Ages, were also all totally destroyed. Although the verified death toll was only six people, it is unknown how many people died in the Great Fire of London, because many more died through indirect causes. The financial losses caused by the fire were estimated to be £10 million, at a time when London's annual income was only £12,000. Many people were financially ruined and debtors' prisons became over-crowded.

Paragraph B

The Great Fire of London started on Sunday, 2 September 1666 in a baker's shop in Pudding Lane, belonging to Thomas Farynor. Although he claimed to have extinguished the fire, three hours later, at 1 a.m., his house was a blazing inferno. It is not certain how the fire actually began, but it is likely that it may have been caused by a spark from Farynor's oven falling onto a pile of fuel nearby. In 1979, archaeologists excavated the remains of a burnt out shop on Pudding Lane that was very close to the bakery where the fire started. In the cellar, they found the charred remnants of 20 barrels of pitch. Pitch burns very easily and would have helped to spread the fire.

Paragraph C

The fire spread quickly down Pudding Lane and carried on down Fish Hill and towards the Thames. The fire continued to spread rapidly, helped by a strong wind from the east. When it reached the Thames, it hit warehouses that were stocked with combustible products, such as oil and rope. Fortunately, the fire could not spread south of the river, because a previous blaze in 1633 had already wrecked a section of London Bridge. As the fire was spreading so quickly, most Londoners concentrated on escaping rather than fighting the fire.

Paragraph D

In the 17th century, people were not as aware of the dangers of fire as they are today. Buildings were made of timber covered in pitch and tightly packed together. The design of buildings meant flames could easily spread from building to building. Following a long, dry summer, the city was suffering a drought; water was scarce and the wooden houses had dried out, making them easier to burn.

Paragraph E

Samuel Pepys, a diarist of the period and Clerk to the Royal Navy, observed the fire and recommended to the King that buildings should be pulled down, as it could be the only way to stop the fire. The Mayor made the order to pull down burning houses using fire hooks, but the fire continued to spread. Pepys then spoke to the Admiral of the Navy and they agreed that they should blow up houses in the path of the fire. The hope was that by doing this, they would create a space to stop the fire spreading from house to house. The Navy carried out the request and by the next morning, the fire has been successfully stopped.

Paragraph F

London had to be almost totally reconstructed and many people went to the fields outside London. They stayed there for many days, sheltering in tents and shacks and some people were forced to live in this way for months and even years.

Throughout 1667, people cleared rubble and surveyed the burnt area. Much time was spent planning new street layouts and drawing up new building regulations. Public buildings were paid for with money from a new coal tax, but by the end of the year, only 150 new houses had been built. The new regulations were designed to prevent such a disaster happening again. Houses now had to be faced in brick instead of wood. Some streets were widened and two new streets were created. Pavements and new sewers were laid, and London's quaysides were improved. Initially, however, only temporary buildings were erected that were ill-equipped, and this enabled the plague, which was common in London at that time, to spread easily. Many people died from this and the harsh winter that followed the fire.

Paragraph G

In 1666, there was no organised fire brigade. Fire fighting was very basic with little skill or knowledge involved. Leather buckets, axes and water squirts were used to fight the fire, but they had little effect. As a result of the Great Fire of London, early fire brigades were formed by insurance companies. Building insurance was very profitable and many more insurance companies were set up, establishing their own fire brigades. These brigades were sent to insured properties if a fire occurred to minimise damage and cost. Firemarks were used to identify - and advertise - different insurance companies. They were placed on the outside of an insured building and brigades would use them to determine

whether a building was insured by them. If a building was on fire, several brigades would attend. If they did not see their specific firemark attached to the building, they would leave the property to burn. Some old firemarks can still be seen on London buildings today. Also, fire fighters wore brightly coloured uniforms to distinguish themselves from rival insurance brigades. Although this was a step in the right direction, fire fighters received little training and the equipment used remained very basic.

Glossary

Pitch - A thick liquid made from petroleum or coal tar.

Questions 1-7

The text on the reading passage 217 has 7 paragraphs (A-G).

Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list of headings below.

Write the correct number (i-x) in boxes 1-7 on your answer sheet.

i Vulnerable Buildings

ii The Effect on Trade

- iii How it Started
- iv A Positive from the Ashes
- v Food Shortages
- vi The Movement of the Fire
- vii The Effects of the Smoke
- viii Extinguishing the Fire
- ix The Costs
- x A New London

Questions 8-11

Choose FOUR letters, A-G.

What FOUR of the following were effects of the Great Fire of London?

Write the correct letter, A-G, in any order in boxes A-G on your answer sheet.

A. Officially, only six people died.

B. The French economy benefitted from the destruction of businesses in London.

C. Some people had to live rough in fields for years following the fire.

D. The English royal family were forced to live outside London for 18 months.

E. Disease spread more easily.

F. An enquiry was completed by the government into why the damage was so bad.

G. Fire fighting services were launched.

Questions 12-13

Complete the sentences below.

Write NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the text for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 12-13 on your answer sheet.

12. One measure to prevent further fires was to ensure that London houses would have facades in the future.

13. People could differentiate the fire brigades from different insurance companies by their

ANSWER

1. ix
2. iii
3. vi
4. i
5. viii
6. x
7. iv
8. A
9. C
10. E
11. G

[Answers from 8 to 11 in any order]

12. brick

13. (brightly) (coloured) uniforms