

## THE GREAT FIRE

Samuel Pepys

[2 September 1666] Lord's Day. Some of our maids sitting up late last night to get things ready against our feast today, Jane called us up about three in the morning to tell us of a great fire they saw in the City. So I rose and slipped on my nightgown and went to her window, and thought it to be on the back side of Mark Lane at the farthest; but, being unused to such fires as followed, I thought it far enough off, and so went to bed again and to sleep. About seven rose again to dress myself, and there looked out at the window and saw the fire not so much as it was, and farther off. So to my closet to set things to rights after yesterday's cleaning. By and by Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses have been burned down tonight by the fire we saw, and that it is now burning down all Fish Street by London Bridge. So I made myself ready presently and walked to the Tower, and there got up upon one of the high places, and there I did see the houses at that end of the bridge all on fire and an infinite great fire on this and the other side the end of the bridge; So down, with my heart full of trouble, to the lieutenant of the Tower, who tells me that it began this morning in the King's baker's house in Pudding Lane, and that it hath burned down St Magnus' church and most part of Fish street already. So I down to the waterside and there got a boat, and through bridge, and there saw a lamentable fire.

Everybody endeavouring to remove their goods, and flinging into the river or bringing them into lighters that lay off. Poor people staying in their houses as long as till the very fire touched them, and then running into boats or clambering from one pair of stair by the waterside to another. And, among other things, the pigeons, I perceive, were loath to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies till they burned their wings and fell down. Having stayed, and in an hour's time seen the fire rage every way - and nobody, to my sight, endeavouring to quench it, but to remove their goods and leave all to the fire. I to Whitehall with a gentleman with me who desired to go off from the Tower to see the fire in my boat, and there up to the King's closet in the chapel, where people came about me and I did give them an account dismayed them all. And word was carried in to the King; so I was called for and did tell the King and Duke of York what I saw, and that unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down nothing could stop the fire. They seemed much troubled, and the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor from him that if he would have more soldiers he shall; and so did my Lord Arlington afterward, as a great secret. At last met my Lord Mayor in Canning Street, like a man spent, with a handkercher about his neck. To the King's message, he cried like a fainting woman: 'Lord! What can I do? I am spent! People will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses, but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it.' That he needed no more soldiers: and that, for himself, he must go and refresh himself, having been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked home, seeing people all almost distracted and no manner of means used to quench the fire.