

The Great Plague and the Great Fire

Transition from the Tudor times:

The report is based upon the Great Plague, which is the height of a bad time for Britain after the good years of the Tudor time. In the year 1664, when the Great Plague began, King Charles II of England sat on the throne. The Great Plague went till 1666. In this time 70.000 people died in London alone. The Great Fire stopped the plague and changed London.

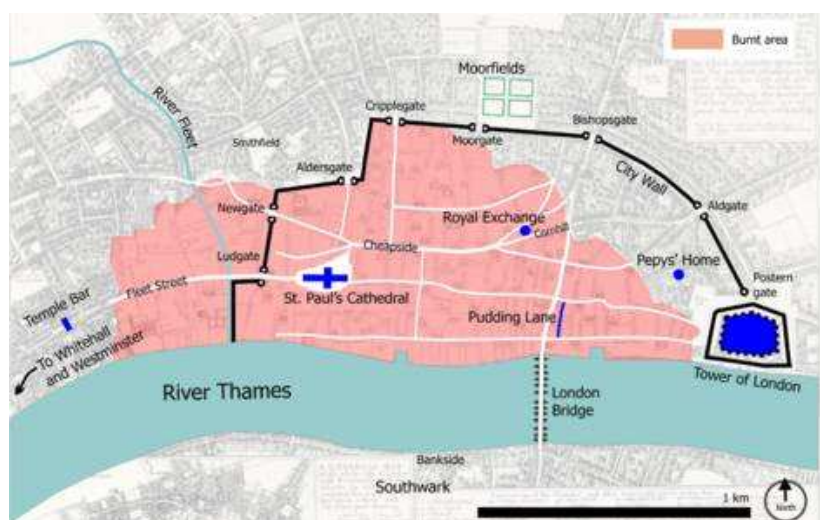
The Great Plague:

In the winter of 1664 a Dutch ship brought the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* into London's harbour. This winter was very cold, so that there was no dispersal for the bacteria. Only the poor workers in the harbour were hit by the plague. In comparison the spring and summer months were warm and the plague was spread fast. In July 1665 the plague caught the city of London and King Charles II of England and his family left London. Some of the richer people emulated King Charles II and left London, too. The shops were closed because of the small number of people who stayed in London. At first burials were carefully organized, but panic spread through London city and people were hastily buried in overcrowded pits. Cats and dogs were killed, but mostly the cats kept the population of rats down. Authorities ordered the people to let the fire burn night and day, to clean the area. Substances, which gave off a strong smell like pepper, hops and incense, were burned by people in the hope of warding the infection off. The citizens of London, also children, were urged to smoke tobacco.

The people thought that the wife of King Charles II was responsible for the Great Plague, because she was Catholic and the plague was a revenge of God. The plague was concentrated almost on London, where one-third of the population died. In July 1000 people died each week. In September more than 8000 people died in one week. At this time the Great Plague was stopped by the Great Fire of London.

The Great Fire:

From the 2nd to 5th September 1666 London city was burned down by the Great Fire of London. Four fifths of London city were destroyed. The fire broke out in Thomas Farriner's bakery in Pudding Lane on September 2. This area is near by the Thames so that there were many storage spaces full of combustible materials like oil, coal, timber and alcohol. At this time there was a strong wind, which spread the fire along the wharves and into the City. The last summer was



London city in 1666, with the burnt area shown in pink.

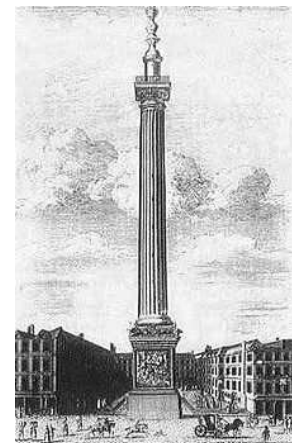
very dry so that the fire seemed unstoppable. On top of that the narrow streets and the overhang of the floors to the floor below made putting the fire out very difficult. Another problem was the wood canalization, which was in London at this time. The wood of the canalization caught fire and the water couldn't get where the fire brigade needed it. The only possibility to stop the fire was to blow houses up. But the home owners didn't allow it so the fire spread for the time being. The fire threatened the aristocratic of Westminster with Charles II's Palace of Westminster in the west and the Tower of London and Pepys' Home in the east. In the north the fire formed the boundary of the City Wall and in the south it formed the boundary of the River Thames. On the 5th September 1666 the fire brigade blew many houses up, especially because of the Tower of London, which threatened to catch fire. Now the fire brigade got the fire under control and put it out.

The Great Fire destroyed 400 streets with 13.200 houses over an area of 1,3 square kilometres. Sights like St. Paul's Cathedral were burnt down. There was damage to property of around 10 million pounds. Thousands of people were homeless and lost everything. The blame for the Great Fire was given to Robert Hubert. He claimed that he was an agent of the Pope and had started the Great Fire. On the 28th September he was hanged. After this it became apparent that Robert Hubert did not come to London until two days after the fire started. With this alibi the Catholic was innocent. Probably the baker had forgotten to put the fire in his stove out.

After the fire the citizens of London wanted a cleaner and more beautiful city with wider streets and fire-proof houses. But the government wanted eventually to rebuild London according to its old street plan with some improvements. In the year 1667 the citizens of London cleared rubble from the burnt area of London and decided on new building regulations. But at the end of the year only 150 houses were built. The new houses were built with bricks instead of wood. Some streets like the Fleet Street were widened and some new streets were built. Beside the streets pavements were built. The overhangs of floors to the floor below were avoided. A canalisation was now just like the canalisation is today. They didn't rebuild the bad wood canalisation. The Londoners of this time said that London was not only the finest, but also the healthiest city in the world.

Transition to the 18th century:

Before the 16th century the people built their houses with wood and thatched roofs. Since the 16th century the people have built their houses with stone, because of the many fires. Therefore the Great Fire 1666 hadn't changed the architecture really, only a little bit. The idea of stone houses was there before, but after the Great Fire many houses had to be rebuilt so that the idea could be implemented. St. Paul's Cathedral was rebuilt and in Fish Street, 61 meters from Pudding Lane, Robert Hooke built the Monument. It is a memorial to the Great Fire in the year 1666. After the reconstruction of London the economy recovered.



Monument in 1666

Conclusion:

The 16th century was an eventful time especially the time from 1664 to 1666. At first in 1664 and 1665 there was the great Plague. After a short recovery till September 1666 London was burned down by the Great Fire. This time had influenced all the people. In many pictures you can see London burning and many books include diary entries of people who lived to see the Plague and the Fire. Also the architecture had been influenced particularly. Most houses of the Middle Ages were burned down so that there was the development of a new architecture with stone houses. All in all, this time changed London like every other bad time can change a country.

by Sandra Hörburger

technical terms:

bacterium Yersinia pestis → Pestbakterium

burial → Beerdigung

pit → Grube

coal → Kohle

combustible → brennbar

timber → Bauholz

wharf → Kai

pope → Papst

rubble → Bauschutt

pavement → Bürgersteig

thatched roof → Strohdach

memento → Andenken

List of sources:

pictures:

London city in 1666, with the burnt area shown in pink:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/ae/Great_fire_of_london_map.png/350px-Great_fire_of_london_map.png

Monument in 1666:

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gro%C3%9Fer_Brand_von_London

The Great Fire (power point)

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/98/Great_fire_of_london_map-fr.jpg

King Charles II (power point):

<http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/England-History/charles2.jpg>

report:

www.museumoflondon.org.uk

<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/plague.html>

www.wikipedia.org