

The Great Fire of London

2nd-6th September 1666



Picture of the fire drawn in 1667 by Samuel Rolle



INNER TEMPLE
LIBRARY

September 2nd 2016 marks 350 years since the outbreak of the Great Fire of London. The fire broke out at Thomas Farriner's bakery on Pudding Lane in the early hours of the morning and quickly spread, burning until the morning of the 6th of September. It destroyed a huge swathe of the city, from the edge of the Tower of London to the Temple and to the city wall in the north. In total, 426 acres were burnt; St Paul's Cathedral was destroyed, along with 87 churches, 42 livery halls, the Royal Exchange, and Newgate Prison. Vast numbers of houses were destroyed, leaving tens of thousands homeless. Despite the scale of destruction there were only six reported deaths, as Londoners were able to flee onto barges or to areas further outside the city. (However, many had to spend several days and nights sleeping in fields; it is suggested that "the deaths attributable in a secondary degree to the Great Fire of London must be estimated, not by the half-dozen, but by the hundred".)

The fire destroyed most of the Inner Temple, but this marked the western extent of its damage; the Middle Temple escaped almost unscathed, with only one building lost. Lincoln's Inn and Gray's Inn were unharmed, although the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn ordered a tavern in Chancery Lane, the St. John's Head, to be pulled down, "fearful lest a fire there might involve their property".

As well as being directly affected during the fire itself, the Inner Temple was involved in the Fire Court, a special court set up to settle disputes between landlords and tenants arising from the Fire. Eight of its twenty-two judges—Sir John Kelynge, Sir Heneage Finch, Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Sir Thomas Twisden, Sir Thomas Tyrrell, Sir John Vaughan, Sir William Wilde and Sir Edward Thurland—were members of the Inner Temple.

Timeline of the fire

Sunday 2nd September 1666

- AM:** The fire breaks out at Thomas Farriner's bakery in Pudding Lane by Fish Street Hill, at some time between 1 and 2 am. The fire spreads onto London Bridge by 8 am.
- PM:** Houses are pulled down to prevent the spread of the fire.

Monday 3rd September 1666

- AM:** The fire spreads to Cannon Street. The Duke of York sets up "fire-posts" at Temple Bar, Fetter Lane, Shoe Lane, Cow Lane and Clifford's Inn Gardens.
- PM:** The fire destroys Baynard's Castle (on the north bank of the Thames, east of Blackfriars).

Tuesday 4th September 1666

- AM:** Cheapside catches fire.
- PM:** Fleet Street catches fire, the fire passing from building to building "with unprecedented speed". The fire reaches the Temple by 6 pm.
- The progress of the fire is slowed by the new brick buildings in King's Bench Walk (then the Temple's most fashionable residential quarter), but eventually spreads into the Temple. Serjeants' Inn is destroyed, as are the Crown Office and King's Bench Office.
- The Master's House (built the previous year) burns down.

Fire approaches the Temple Church, but the buildings surrounding it are destroyed with gunpowder and it escapes unharmed.

Wednesday 5th September 1666

AM: Lamb Building in Middle Temple is destroyed, but the rest of the Inn survives. The fire is by now mostly under control; it is put out in Shoe Lane and at Holborn Bridge.

PM: Sparks from smouldering houses in King's Bench Walk cause a new outbreak. The Duke of York, a Bencher, rushes to the Temple to oversee the firefighting operation. Gunpowder is used to destroy houses and stop the spread of the flames. The roof of Inner Temple Hall catches fire but the flames are beaten out by Richard Rowe, a seaman, together with a soldier from Kingston.

Thursday 6th September 1666

AM: By the time the fire is out, the Inner Temple has been almost completely destroyed.



“When amidst the heaps of debris the Benchers of Inner Temple afterwards surveyed their property, they found standing the ancient church of the Knights Templars, which was jointly maintained by the two Societies, their Hall, part of Fig Tree Court [destroyed in the Blitz], and the gateway to Fleet Street. [...] Substantially nothing else escaped the Fire.”

W.G. Bell, *The Great Fire of London*, p.153

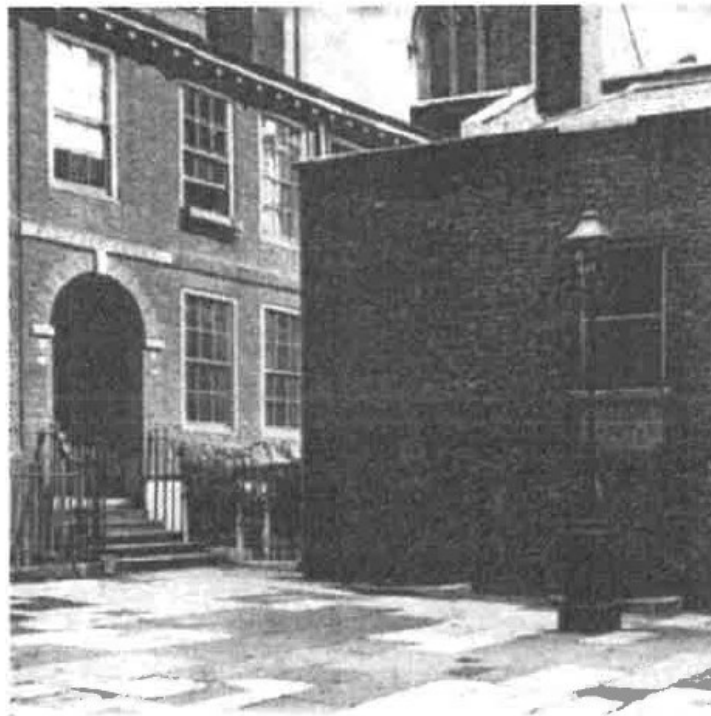


Fig Tree Court. North range and kitchens, c. 1900.

Image of Fig Tree Court from *A Portrait of the Inner Temple* by Gerard Noel (2002). He describes it as follows:

“Fig Tree Court, the earliest ‘garden court’ to be mentioned in the inn’s records, in 1516, was sited at the south-west end of Inner Temple Hall. When the hall buildings were extended into the court, it lost a great deal of its former charm. The buildings in the courtyard, some of which dated from the seventeenth century, were all destroyed in the Second World War. As part of the postwar land exchange agreement between the two inns, most of the site of Fig Tree Court was transferred to the Middle Temple and incorporated into Elm Court.”

Why was the Inner Temple so badly damaged?

The extent of the destruction in the Inner Temple was so great for several reasons. As the fire took place outside the legal term, many lawyers were not present; one eyewitness, Lord Clarendon, wrote that “when the fire came where the lawyers had houses [...] there was scarce a man to whom those lodgings appertained who was in town”. This meant the owners were not there to save their possessions; allegedly, the Benchers in attendance would not allow absent members’ goods to be removed, “it being contrary to the law to break open any man’s chambers”.

While the Temple’s proximity to the Thames meant there was plenty of water available, there was no system in place for using it to extinguish large fires. Although the Inn had obtained gunpowder for removing buildings in the fire’s path and preventing its spread—sailors were sent with barrels of naval gunpowder, and more was bought from a grocer, while four engineers were paid a sovereign each to provide assistance—there was some resistance to this idea. Windham Sandys, who was attending the Duke of York during the firefighting attempts on the 5th of September, described the following scene:

“One of the Templars, seeing gunpowder brought, came to the Duke and told him it was against the rules and charter of the Temple that any should blow up that house with gun-powder, upon which Mr. Germaine, the Duke’s Master of the Horse, took a good cudgel and beat the young lawyer to the purpose. There is no hopes of knowing who this lawyer is, but the hope that he will bring an action of battery against Mr. Germaine.”

Richard Rowe, who put out the flames on Inner Temple Hall's roof, saving it from the fire, had his actions celebrated in J. Crouch's poem about the fire, *Londinenses Lachrymae*.

*When after one dayes rest the Temple smokes,
And with fresh fires and fears the Strand provokes,
But with good Conduct all was slak'd that night
By one more valiant than a Templar Knight.
Here a brisk rumour of afrighted gold
Sent hundreds in; more Covetous than bold.
But a brave Seaman up the Tyles did skip
As nimbly as the Cordage of a Ship.
Bestrides the singed Hall on its highest ridge
Moving as if he were on London Bridge,
Or on the Narrow of a Skullers keel:
Feels neither head nor heart nor spirits reel.*

He was initially given five pounds by the Inn as a reward. This was later increased to ten pounds, as noted in the record of the Inner Temple Parliament of 27th January 1667:

“Whereas at this parliament Richard Rowe, mariner, who had 5*li.* formerly given to him by this society for his pains taken in extinguishing the fire at the end of Inner Temple Hall, did now petition for a further reward, whereupon it is ordered that the petitioner should have given to him the sum of 5*li.* more as a full and final reward from this society.”

GENERAL ACCOUNT BOOK.

ACCOUNT of Sir Heneage Finch, treasurer, from 5 February, 1665-6
to 5 November, 1666.

DISBURSEMENTS.

<p>To John Craford, for nursing a bastard child,¹ 2<i>li.</i> 4<i>s.</i></p> <p>To Alice Chiltern, daughter and administratrix of Henry Chiltern, late steward, for wages due, 12<i>li.</i> 16<i>s.</i></p> <p>To Samuel Hall, for watching in the fire time, 1<i>li.</i> 15<i>s.</i></p> <p>To Spier, the grocer, for the Inner Temple share of a barrel of powder used in the time of the fire, 1<i>li.</i> 8<i>s.</i></p>	<p>To Mrs. Anne Mathew, for stones and paving the Middle Temple Lane, for the Inner Temple share, 7<i>li.</i> 0<i>s.</i> 6<i>d.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Sum total of the receipts, 792<i>li.</i> 2<i>s.</i> 10<i>d.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Sum total of the disbursements, 538<i>li.</i> 1<i>s.</i> 2<i>d.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">There remains in emendels, 254<i>li.</i> 1<i>s.</i> 8<i>d.</i></p>
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DISBURSEMENTS by Richard Fifeild, chief butler, from 5 November, 1665, to 5 November, 1666.

<p>Allowance as usual to Dr. Ball and Pomery.</p> <p>To Robert Britton, a carpenter, the moiety of a bill for work done at the church, 1<i>li.</i> 12<i>s.</i> 11<i>d.</i></p> <p>To Thomas Porter, bricklayer, for the like, 2<i>li.</i></p> <p>To Blake, plumber, for the like, 7<i>li.</i> 8<i>s.</i></p> <p>To Playford, the clerk, for hiring a preacher, 10<i>s.</i></p> <p>For the fee farm to the Exchequer, 10<i>li.</i></p> <p>To four engineers that worked at the fire, by order of the masters of the bench, 4<i>li.</i></p> <p>To the glass painter, the moiety for mending the king's arms in the church and work in the hall, 2<i>li.</i> 1<i>s.</i></p> <p>To Drake, the upholsterer, for mending</p>	<p>an old leather carpet, and for a new carpet, 1<i>li.</i> 19<i>s.</i></p> <p>To the woodmonger, for faggots for bonfires, 4<i>li.</i> 4<i>s.</i></p> <p>Allowed to Fifeild for his attendance after the great fire, 6<i>li.</i></p> <p>To a soldier of Kingston, for service done to prevent the firing of the hall, 2<i>li.</i></p> <p>To the three butlers, Andrew, Richard, and Robert, for pains taken and watching, amongst them, 4<i>li.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Sum total of the receipts, 342<i>li.</i> 8<i>s.</i> 8<i>d.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Sum total of disbursements, 243<i>li.</i> 13<i>s.</i> 8<i>d.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">So there remains, 98<i>li.</i> 15<i>s.</i> 5<i>d.</i></p>
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¹ Several other like payments.

Accounts of the Inn for the period following the fire. Note the payments to Samuel Hall, Spier the grocer, the four engineers, Fifeild and "a soldier of Kingston".

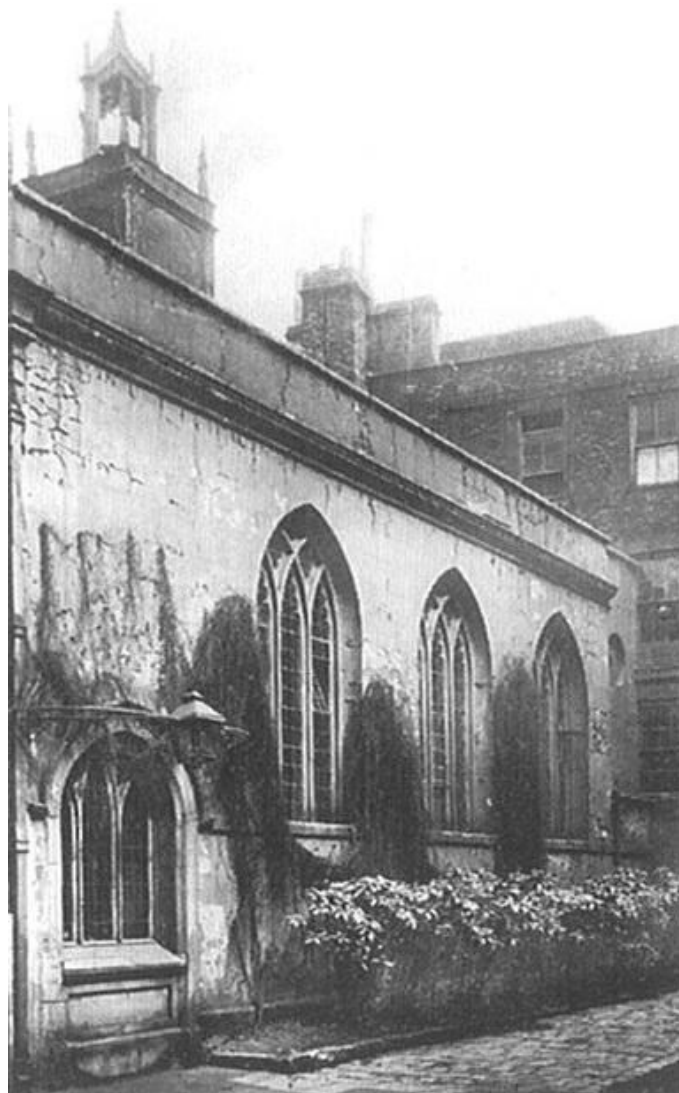
The Fire Court

The Fire of London Disputes Act 1666 (cited variously as 18 & 19 Cha. II c. 7 and 19 Cha. II c.2) established the “Fire Court”. The Court was set up to resolve disputes relating to property destroyed or damaged in the fire. At the time, leases commonly bound the tenants to maintain and repair the premises, meaning that the tenant would be legally liable in case of fire to rebuild and to continue to pay rent while doing so. The Act was made to provide relief and to encourage swift rebuilding; the judgments (called “decrees”) required (or at least implied) that rebuilding should be completed by a certain date, upon which rent would again be payable.

The Court consisted of three or more Justices of the Courts of the King’s Bench and Common Pleas and Barons of the Exchequer, who were instructed to hear and determine summarily on all differences relating to rebuilding without the proceedings and formalities of the Courts of Law. The Court sat in the Hall of Clifford’s Inn and the judges attended without fee on days when they were not sitting in their own courts. As a memorial to their service a series of portraits of the twenty-two judges was commissioned and hung in the Guildhall. Four of these portraits, those of Sir John Vaughan, Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Sir Thomas Tyrrell and Sir Heneage Finch, members of Inner Temple, now belong to the Inner Temple and hang in the Hall Gallery.

The Court first sat on 27th February 1667; during its first year it was in session for 120 days and passed judgment on 374 cases.

The vast majority of cases were completed within a day and adjournments were avoided (cases sometimes proceeding in the absence of the defendant). As the overarching aim of the court was to encourage swift rebuilding (the Court often stated that it made a decree “to promote the building of the City”), if no party was willing to rebuild then the Court could declare leases void so that the site could be built on. The Court made efforts to bring parties to agreement and tried to avoid making decrees that were not agreed upon by the parties involved. In general, it gave preference for rebuilding to the person in occupation at the time of the fire, as it was seen as best for the public good and most just.



Clifford's Inn Hall

G. C-2; B.M. 5066-84

12 Dec. 1667. Lord Chief Baron(s), Justice Tyrrill(s), Baron Raynsford(s).

Henry Parker of the Inner Temple v. Judith Pearcey, John Kinnaston esq. and George Jefferies, gent.

The petition stated that James Phillipps esq. was seised of messuages in New Fish Street, Puding Lane, Buttolph Lane, Beere Lane, Duxfeild Lane and at Dowgate, in the parishes of Allhallows the Great, Allhallows the Less, Allhallows Barking, St. Magnus, St. Margaret and St. George, which he devised to Phillippa his wife with reversion to John, Richard and Daniel Phillipps, Jane Wymington and Judith Pearcey to be divided equally, that the petitioner purchased the estate of all the reversioners except Judith and held the estate of Phillippa by decree of the Court,² that Judith settled her estate on Kinnaston who married her daughter and that Kinnaston mortgaged to Jefferies, that the messuages having all been burnt the petitioner is ready to rebuild subject to reasonable contribution from the defendants.

Upon summons the petitioner appeared with Mr. Jenner his counsel and the defendants attended personally. When it appeared that Jefferies had the absolute estate of Kinnaston, he and Mrs. Pearcey were dismissed from the suit. The petitioner asked for a term of 40 years from Jefferies or offered to pay him £100 for his interest. Jefferies asked for £200 and refused a further offer of £160. In order that rebuilding might not be obstructed the Court ordered that the petitioner should rebuild with all convenient speed and should have a lease of Jefferies' fifth part for 40 years from the death of Phillippa, now the wife of Edward Brooke, at a rent of £20 p.a.

Fire Judge Portraits

The Court of Aldermen of the City of London commissioned John Michael Wright to paint portraits of all twenty-two judges so they could be displayed as “a grateful memorial of their good office”. The portraits were hung initially in the Guildhall and later in the Guildhall Art Gallery; while stored in the crypt during the Second World War, they suffered water damage when the building was burned in an air raid in December 1940. After the war it was decided that the majority of the portraits were in too bad a condition to justify restoration, and the collection was broken up in 1952 and presented to interested bodies (including the Inner Temple) or individuals. Other portraits from the group now hang in Lincoln's Inn and the Royal Courts of Justice.



Portrait of Sir Thomas Tyrrell, Inner Temple Bencher and Fire Court Judge. Tyrrell was the most prolific of the Fire Court judges, sitting on 383 cases. He was admitted to the Inn in 1612, was called to the Bar in 1621 and became a Bencher in 1659.

Descriptions of the Great Fire

The burning still rages; I went now on horse back, & it was now gotten as far as the Inner Temple, all Fleetstreete, old baily, Ludgate Hill, Warwick Lane, Newgate, Paules Chaine, Wattlingstreete now flaming & most of it reduc'd to ashes, the stones of Paules flew like granados, the Lead mealing down the streetes in a streame, & the very pavements of them glowing with a fiery rednesse, so as nor horse nor man was able to tread on them, & the demolitions had stopped all the passages, so as no help could be applied; the Easter[n] Wind still more impetuously driving the flames forewards. Nothing but the almighty power of God was able to stop them, for vaine was the help of man.

Diary entry of John Evelyn, 4th September 1666



I can say but this, that there is nothing but stones, and rubbish, and all exposed to the open air, so that you may see from one end of the City almost to the other. You can compare London (were it not for the rubbish) to nothing more than an open field.

Letter by Edward Atkyns (Baron of the Exchequer and Fire Court Judge) 8th September, 1666

Books in the Library about the fire, its aftermath and its effect on Inner Temple

Bedford, J. *London's Burning* (1966) London, New York [etc.]:
Abelard-Schuman

Bell, W. G. *Fleet Street in Seven Centuries* (1912) London: Pitman &
Sons

Bell, W. G. *The Great Fire of London in 1666* (1920) London: John
Lane

Inderwick, F.A. (ed.) *A Calendar of the Inner Temple Records: Vol.
III* (1901) London: Published by order of the Masters of the Bench

Jones, P. E. (ed.) *The Fire Court* (2 volumes) (1966-1970) London:
Clowes & Sons

Mills, P. and Oliver, J. *The Survey of Building Sites in the City of
London after the Great Fire of 1666* (3 volumes) (1946) [London]:
The London Topographical Society

Williamson, J. B. *The History of the Temple, London* (1924) London:
John Murray