TRAVEL

The Great Fire Of London Map

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Introduction: A City Engulfed and the Maps That Tell Its Story

In the early hours of September 2, 1666, a small fire broke out at Thomas Farriner's bakery on Pudding Lane in the heart of London. Within days, that modest spark had consumed more than 13,000 houses, 87 parish churches, and iconic landmarks such as St. Paul's Cathedral. The Great Fire of London remains one of the most defining events in British history, reshaping not only the physical landscape of the capital but also its social, economic, and architectural identity. Yet for all the destruction, the fire left behind something invaluable: a remarkable cartographic legacy. **The Great Fire Of London Map**is far more than a historical curiosity; it is a window into a city on the brink of transformation, a tool for understanding urban resilience, and a fascinating artifact for historians, genealogists, and map enthusiasts alike.

Whether you are a student of history, a curious traveler, or someone tracing family roots in the City of London, understanding the various maps produced before, during, and after the Great Fire offers an unparalleled perspective. In this article, we will explore the key maps associated with the fire, the stories they tell, and how you can access them today. We will journey through the streets of pre-fire London, examine the surveys that documented the devastation, and consider how these maps continue to inform our understanding of modern London.

The Great Fire of 1666: A Brief Historical Context

To truly appreciate **The Great Fire Of London Map**, one must first grasp the scale of the catastrophe. The fire began in the early hours of Sunday, September 2, 1666, and raged until Wednesday, September 5. London at the time was a densely packed medieval city of narrow, winding streets, timber-framed buildings, and thatched roofs. Firefighting methods were primitive, relying on buckets, water squirts, and the demolition of buildings to create firebreaks. Strong easterly winds fanned the flames, and by the time the fire was finally contained, approximately 436 acres of the City of London lay in ruins.

Remarkably, the official death toll was recorded as only six people, though modern historians believe the true number was likely much higher, with many victims among the poor and undocumented. The disaster also destroyed the city's commercial heart, including the Royal Exchange, the Custom House, and countless warehouses filled with goods. In the aftermath, a massive rebuilding effort began, led by visionaries such as Sir Christopher Wren, Robert Hooke, and John Evelyn. The fire effectively wiped the slate clean, enabling a new, more modern London to rise from the ashes.

Why Maps of the Great Fire Matter

Before the fire, detailed maps of London were rare and often inaccurate. The first accurate map of the City of London was produced in the 1550s by the so-called "Agas" map, but by 1666, much of the city had grown beyond its boundaries. The fire created an urgent need for precise surveys: to assess property damage, to

adjudicate land disputes, to plan the rebuilding, and to document what had been lost. Consequently,
The Great Fire Of London Map is not a single document but a collection of maps, each with its own purpose and perspective.

These maps serve multiple functions today. For historians, they are primary sources that reveal the layout of pre-fire London, including the locations of churches, markets, guildhalls, and private homes. For genealogists, they help locate ancestral properties and understand the geography of family history. For urban planners and architects, they offer lessons in resilience, reconstruction, and the evolution of city design. And for the general public, they evoke the drama of a city fighting for its survival and the hope of rebirth.

Key Maps of the Great Fire of London

The John Leake Survey: The Official Record of Destruction

Perhaps the most authoritative **Great Fire Of London Map** is the one produced by John Leake in 1667. Leake was a land surveyor and cartographer commissioned by the City of London to create an exact plan of the burned area. His map, titled *An Exact Surveigh of the Streets and Lanes and Churches Contained Within the Ruines of the City of London*, is a meticulous record of the devastation. It shows the exact boundaries of the fire, the streets that were destroyed, and the buildings that survived. The map is both beautiful and haunting, with the burned area depicted in a stark, almost clinical style. Leake's work was essential for the subsequent rebuilding, as it provided a reliable base map for architects and property owners.

One of the most striking features of Leake's map is its precision. It uses a scale of about 200 feet to the inch and includes every major street, lane, and alley within the burned area. The map also identifies the parish churches that were lost, many of which were never rebuilt. For anyone studying **The Great Fire Of London Map** , Leake's survey is the definitive starting point.

Wenceslaus Hollar's Panoramic View

While Leake provided a plan view from above, the Bohemian artist and engraver Wenceslaus Hollar offered a different perspective. His famous "bird's-eye" view of London after the fire, produced around 1667, is not a map in the strictest sense but a panoramic illustration that shows the city as if seen from a great height. Hollar's work is invaluable for visualizing the scale of the destruction. His engraving captures the gutted shells of churches, the bare outlines of streets, and the makeshift shelters erected by displaced residents. Hollar's view complements Leake's map by adding an artistic and emotional dimension to the cartographic record.

Hollar also produced a smaller map titled *A Map of the City of London Showing the Extent of the Fire*, which is often reproduced in historical atlases. This map uses shading to indicate the burned area and includes a key identifying major landmarks. Together, Leake and Hollar provide the most comprehensive visual documentation of the fire's impact.

The Richard Blome Map: A Contemporary Perspective

Richard Blome, a publisher and cartographer, included a map of London in his 1673 work *Britannia*. This map, while not solely focused on the fire, shows the rebuilt city as it appeared just a few years after the disaster. It is an excellent resource for comparing pre-fire and post-fire London. Blome's map includes the new streets that were laid out as part of the rebuilding, as well as the new churches designed by Christopher Wren. By studying Blome's map alongside Leake's, one can gain a deep understanding of how the city was transformed.

The Ogilby and Morgan Map: The Rebuilt City

A generation after the fire, John Ogilby and William Morgan produced a magnificent map of London in 1676. This was the first large-scale map of the entire city since the fire, and it shows the rebuilt streets, squares, and buildings in extraordinary detail. Ogilby and Morgan's map is often considered the crowning achievement of 17th-century London cartography. It is not a fire map per se, but it is the ultimate document of the city that

The Great Fire Of London Map, Digby and Morgan's work is the essential companion to Leake's survey, showing the outcome of the recovery efforts.

What These Maps Reveal About London Before and After the Fire

The various maps of the Great Fire collectively reveal a great deal about the city's structure and society. Pre-fire London was a maze of narrow streets, with many alleys and courts that were inaccessible to carts and carriages. The fire destroyed this medieval fabric entirely. The new city that emerged was wider, straighter, and more ordered. Streets were broadened, building materials shifted from timber to brick and stone, and sanitation improved. The maps document this transformation in painstaking detail.

One of the most informative elements of **The Great Fire Of London Map** is the depiction of property boundaries. Leake's survey shows the footprints of buildings within each block, allowing researchers to understand the density of pre-fire London. The maps also reveal the location of important civic and religious buildings. For example, the pre-fire St. Paul's Cathedral is shown as a sprawling medieval structure, quite different from Wren's majestic dome that replaced it. By overlaying these historic maps onto modern street plans, we can see exactly where the new St. Paul's was built relative to its predecessor.

Using Great Fire Maps for Genealogy and Local History

For those tracing family history in the City of London, **The Great Fire Of London Map** is an indispensable resource. The parish system was central to London life in the 17th century, and the fire destroyed many parish churches along with their records. Maps from the period can help locate the precise area where an ancestor lived, worked, or worshipped. Leake's map, in particular, identifies individual parishes within the burned area, making it possible to narrow down family locations.

Moreover, the maps can be used in conjunction with other historical documents, such as hearth tax records, wills, and parish registers, to build a fuller picture of an ancestor's life. If you know that a family member lived in a particular street, the map can show you the physical context of that street, including nearby markets, churches, and commercial districts. For many family historians, finding their ancestors on a historic map of the fire is a deeply moving experience, connecting them directly to one of London's most dramatic events.

Digital Access and Modern Interpretations

Until relatively recently, viewing original copies of these maps required a trip to a library or archive. Today, thanks to digitization efforts by institutions such as the British Library, the London Metropolitan Archives, and the Museum of London, high-resolution scans of **The Great Fire Of London Map** are freely available online. Websites such as British History Online, Layers of London, and the National Library of Scotland offer interactive versions that allow users to zoom in on details, overlay historic maps onto modern satellite imagery, and compare different maps side by side.

One particularly exciting development is the creation of GIS (Geographic Information System) layers for the fire maps. Researchers can now analyze the spread of the fire, the demographics of the affected areas, and the economic impact with a level of precision that was impossible a generation ago. For educators, these digital tools make the fire accessible to students of all ages, enabling virtual explorations of the historic city. The availability of these resources has transformed **The Great Fire Of London Map** from a specialist's artifact into a resource that can be enjoyed by anyone with an internet connection.

Key Online Resources for Great Fire Maps

- British Library Online Gallery – High-resolution scans of Leake and Hollar maps.
- Layers of London – An interactive platform for comparing historic maps with the modern city.

- Museum of London – Exhibits and digital content dedicated to the fire.
- London Metropolitan Archives – Original maps and related documents available for viewing by appointment and online.
- British History Online – Curated collections of maps and historical texts.

Preserving the Legacy of the Great Fire Maps

The original maps of the Great Fire are fragile works on paper, often hand-colored and subject to fading, tearing, and other forms of degradation. Conservation efforts by major libraries and archives are ongoing, ensuring that these irreplaceable documents survive for future generations. At the same time, digital preservation is becoming increasingly important. High-resolution scans, 3D models, and virtual reality experiences are now being developed to capture every detail of these maps. The goal is not only to preserve the maps themselves but also to make them accessible to the widest possible audience.

In recent years, there has also been a surge of interest in creating "map-based storytelling" experiences. Authors, historians, and digital artists are using **The Great Fire Of London Map**as a foundation for interactive narratives that bring the events of 1666 to life. These projects range from simple annotated maps to elaborate game-like simulations that allow users to walk through the burning city. Such initiatives demonstrate that historic maps are not just static documents but dynamic tools for education and engagement.

The Great Fire Maps in Education and Popular Culture

The Great Fire is a staple of the British school curriculum, and maps are central to how the event is taught

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