

42.39/56

Extracts from *The Burning of London in the Year 1666*, by Samuel Rolle, published 1667

Who/what was to blame?:

pg 3: 'and if it be well known to many, that many Romanists have been very jocund and full of triumph since that Fire...I say if all these things may not warrant so much as a rational suspicion that more Catholics than that one that was executed for it, did promote the burning of London.'

pg 4: 'Witness that Frenchman that was convicted and executed upon his own acknowledgement of having begun the Fire on London, whose confession tells us that he was instigated by Papists'

pg 25: 'One while the people would take an alarm of treachery, and cry out that the French were coming to cut their throats.'

Pg 122: "But, so much precious Wine and Oyl, as ran down the Kennels upon this sad occasion, was never known to do so before: Then was *London* a burning lamp, flaming with its own Oyl; but, worse than wasting of those wines and oyls themselves was their unhappy mixing with that water; which some, not well considering, made use of, to throw upon the flames; and, thereby in stead of extinguishing, did increase them."

On what happened to London:

pg 4: 'Sure I am London was the glory of England, yea the glory of Great Britain, yea the glory of these three Nations, if not in some sense the glory of the whole world...But alas! What is London now, but another Sodome lying in ashes? What is it but a heap of dust and rubbish? The greatest part of it seems to be covered into so many Church-yards, as consisting of nothing, but the Reliques of Churches, with waste ground round about them, full of open

Vaults or Cellars, like so many uncovered Graves, and fragments of houses like so many dead mens bones scattered on every side of them'

pg 5: 'We can no longer say of London Here it stands, but *Hic jacet* (as we say of one that is dead and buried) Here it lies; not that here it is, but here it was.'

Pg 6: 'Why should I doubt to say, that a great part of the strength and defence of all England, yea of all three Kingdoms, is lost and taken away, in and by the destruction of London? Was not that great City able to have raised a mighty force in a short time, wherewith to have opposed an invading Forreigner? Was it not a Mine of Treasure, able to supply vast summes of monie for the use of King and Kingdom, at a short warning...? ...Surely London was the sinews and very right hand of all great and publick undertakings; and that they knew full well, that said in their hearts, Rase it, Rase it to the very ground'.

pg 6: 'Who can be a friend to England, or have any true English blood running in his veins, and not lament, to see so much of the strength of the Nation taken away at once?'

pg 7: 'Is it not worth taking notice of, that the beauty and splendour of England is defaced and lost by the destruction of London?'

pg 15: 'consider how unexpected, and how Incredible a thing it was that London should be almost totally consumed by fire'

On what happened to Londoners:

pg 5: 'Where are those multitudes that inhabited London a few moneths since? How are they dispersed and scattered into corners, some crowded into the Suburbs, others gone into the country, disabled in all likelihood, from ever returning again, to settle as before; Who complains not that they scarce know where to find any body, even those that they had wont to converse and trade with, for that their former places know them no more, yea they hardly know

the places again, where they dwelt formerly, or can find where those houses stood, which they inhabited many years together. To see a populous City so woefully depopulated in a few dayes time, and the late Inhabitants driven as stubble before the wind; Whose heart would it not cause to bleed? How oft have I heard men say since the Fire we have occasion to use such and such tradesmen, that use to work to us but know not were to find them, or we should speak with such and such Friends, but know not what is become of them, or whether they have gone.'

pg. 26: Others, it is like, would say, They were so ill with the fright they had taken, that they thought verily it would kill them, so that they would never come to themselves whilst they lived. Would not some others again report of some here and there, who by venturing too much in the fire, or staying too long to bring away their goods, had lost their lives and perished in the flames?'

Pg 123: "Drunkards may read their sin in their punishment: God hath inflamed their City with wine, wherewith they had wont to inflame themselves."

The progress of the fire:

pg. 23: 'Some came to London in the time of the Fire having heard of it (but not seen it) and probably their first question was, Is the fire out? Alas! no, would they say that answered them, It is so far from being out, that it rageth more and more. They that heard it was not out would be asking how far it was gotten, whereabouts it was: Then would men begin to reckon up the streets and churches that were burnt down already, Thames Street is gone, and Fist Street is gone, and Gracious Street is down, and now it is at such a place, and such a place, and so they would proceed. Is the fire abated would others say? Is there any hope of extinguishing it? We see little sign of it would some reply, It is feared it will consume the whole city and suburbs too. Why do they not play their engines would some cry? Alas they are broken and out of kilter, we little expecting such a sad time as this. Some it may be would say, Why do so many people stand gazing on, and do not run to help? The Fire hath now

got such a head and is so fierce would they say that there is no coming near it: But why do they not pull down houses at a distance? That is long work would some reply, and seeing they cannot carry away the timber, when they have done, it will do little good. Do not the magistrates, would some say, bestir themselves to put a stop to it? It is like they do what they can but they are even at their wits ends, or like men astonished. They that stood and look't on would cry out, see how it burns east and west at the same time, not onely with the wind, but against it. Hear how it crackles like a Fire in thorns: Hear what a rattling noise there is with the cracking and falling of timber...Oh what a wind is here, see how it is as bellows to the fire, or as the breath of the Almighty blowing it up. You would wonder to see how far the sparks and the coles do fly...Alas, Alas! cries one, now do I see such a good friends house to take fire, and, by and by, now do I ee the house of another good friend of mine on fire; in that house, that you see now burning dwelt a brother or sister of mine or some other near relation. Others would come dropping in and say, They had staid so long as to see their own houses on fire and then they came away and left them, such as dwell near to London and to the road would cry as they lay in their beds, we hear the carts rumbling and posting by continually. Those that were within the City, at that time, would ever and anon say to one another, Did you hear that noise. There was a house blown up, and by and by there was another house blown up. One while the people would take an alarm of treachery, and cry out that the French were coming to cut their throats.

Rescuing belongings:

pg. 25: 'Such houses the Fire had not yet seized but was hastning towards them, you must suppose to have made this their discourse, What shall we do for carts to carry away our goods, we have offered three, four pounds a load for carts to carry them but two or three miles off, and cannot have them. One while they cry there is an order to prevent the coming in of more carts, it being thought that whilst we mind saving our goods, we neglect the putting out the fire, and now will our houses and goods burn together, and so we shall loose all. Such as had the opportunity to convey their goods, as far as the fields and

no farther. How did they discourse of the hardship they must undergo, if they should leave their goods, they would be stolen, if they should look to them themselves (as many had no body else to do it for them) they must have but little sleep, and a cold open lodging, and what if it should rain?’

pg 821: “First to send away their Wives and Children, (as being their greatest treasure) next to them, their writings of consequence, such as Books of accompt, Bills, Bonds, and others of great moment; and after them, their first and greatest care was, to secure their Jewels...their cash, their Plate, and such like precious things. Next to them, their care was for their shop-goods, and first for those that were of greatest price.”

The burning of the prisons:

Pg 82: “ But the fire, when it had stollen the steed, I mean destroyed the City, flung open the Gates, or rather demolished and ruined severall of them.”

Pg 83: “But now came an unexpected Goal-delivery, better to many poor prisoners, than they looked for: but, to capital-offenders not so good, as it is like, they did hope it would have proved. When notorious Felons heard of this, probably they did hope, it would break open the doors of their several Prisons, and set them free: but, all they got by it, was, only a Newer-*Newgate* or to be removed from one Goal to another: But, poor men, that were in for debt only, as in *Lud-gate*, &c. possibly they were in a pannick-fear they should have been burnt in the prisons where they were, not knowing how to make an escape: But, if I mistake not, they were released in the time of the fire, which had left but room enough for Offenders of a higher nature.”

On Pudding Lane:

Pg 99: “Methinks the burning of *London*, by means of that obscure lane, was like the killing of that Giant *Goliah*, by a Pibble-stone, flung from the sling and Arm of little-*David*.”

King Charles II helping to fight the fire:

Pg 163: "I was no eye-witness, but have been informed, that when the Fire came near to *Cripplegate*, His Majesty being then and there present, did, in His own Person, take great Pains (no less, as was told, then if He had been a poor Labourer,) to promote the extinction of it. Possibly some weak and inconsiderate persons, that saw His Majesty as that time stooping so low, might in their hearts despise Him for it. ... How glorious was He in truth, and in reality, when he took it upon Him the form, rather the work of a mean-man; and vouchsafed His helping-hand to stop that dismal Fire, when it was in its full career? Had I seen Him with His Crown upon His head, His Scepter in His Hand...I could not have revered Him more than I should have done, if I had beheld Him, with a Bucket in His Hand, pouring water upon the flames."

Pg 165: "His most excellent Majesty bestiring Himself, to give check to those Flames which threatened to lay both His great City and Suburbs all in ashes. Who had the faces to stand still and look on... whilst their Soverign Himself was so employed."

Pg 166: "As for His Majesties inclination to all such Achievements, as sweetness of temper may induce men to, let all His Subjects be well perswaded of, by the tears he shed, when he beheld the Flames of London, which I had not reported but from a very credible Author. How amiable a sight is it to behold Kings weeping over the miseries of their subjects."

On the blowing up of houses:

Pg 126: "Men rose up and called them blessed who would do that good office, as to blow up their houses, lest they and many more should perish together. Did we ever think that a time would come, when men would beg, and intreat that not only their neighbours houses might be blown up, but their own also, and count themselves beholden to them that would do it? ...I cannot but think, what a name that way of Blowing-up-houses hath gotten; how much it is applauded and how much men lament that it was either not considered or permitted sooner."

Pg 127: "But how quickly was a great and stately house, first blown up, and then laid flat upon the ground? It was but as it were a flash of lightning. Then a clap of thunder, then one jump upwards (as if it had been that it might take the greater Fall); then a great smook, and presently all was in the dust."

Pg 128: "But, why was this way of blowing up houses no sooner thought of, (being so effectual as it is nothing could be more obvious; but God is wont to blind those whom he intends to ruine."

Pg 129: "They might fear to be called in question for giving way to the Blowing up of Houses: but magistrates should over-look-private-Concerns, when they are satisfied what will be for publick-Good."

On the fate of pregnant women:

pg. 26: 'I could tell you how women with child would say, They had but a month or a week to reckon, and this had frighted them almost out of their wits, so they found it would go very hard with them. Others again would say, They were but so many weeks gone, but were so disturbed, that they did never look to go out their full time'

Dishonesty and extortion during the fire:

Pg 115: "Some were honest gainers, (and much good may it do them); others dishonest. Some could not let their Tenements before the fire, who have since let them for moderate Rents; such are honest gainers: others have let their houses at most excessive Rates, and such have loaded themselves with dishonest gain. But be their gains one way or another, I think no man ought, for the present, to pocket the money which he hath clearly gotten by the fire."

Pg 116: "Let it never be said, the fire hath made you rich, whilst such multitudes continue poor, miserably poor."

pg 28: 'Upon the dishonest carters, who exacted excessive rates.

Is there conscience in men or is there none? ...Or is there some in other Englishmen, but none in plow-men, and Carters, at leastwise in the most of them, who came to help the Londoners away with their goods in the time of the Fire? ...witness their plowing, as they did, upon the backs of poor citizens, and making long furrows in the time of their utmost calamity...you, when you saw a fire that was like to break hundreds of citizens would have...five pound for so little work, as ten shillings, if not five, would have been taken for at another time...you seemed to vie with the fire it's self, which should be the most cruel, you or it? It gave most men space to carry away their goods, you might have given them opportunity to have done t, and would not, but upon most unreasonable terms, such as many were not able to come up to.'

pg: 31 (on carters, cont.): 'Quit yourselves, if you can, from having been extortioners, and as such as have defrauded and gone beyond others. I doubt not in the least, but this was a real theft in the sight of God: you think it was not, because they consented and contracted to give you so much: But so may a man consent to deliver his purse to a highwayman...Doth that make it not theft on his part that take it? ...How many, think you, did lose all, or the most of their goods, because they had not wherewithal to give those unreasonable rates which you demanded'

pg: 33: 'Upon those that stole what they could in the time of the Fire. How many, under pretence of rescuing their neighbour's goods out of the fire, carried them away for altogether. ... Was this your kindness to your friends?'

pg 35: 'Upon unconscionable landlords, demanding excessive fines and rents since the Fire.

Is it a good rule, that men may take as much as ever they can get, for such things as men cannot live without? Surely, that is the rule you go by, in asking and taking such vast fines and rents for the houses you let...(pg 36) I doubt not, but the fines you have taken, and the rents you have agreed for, will be the undoing of many a poor family...Possibly, all the gains of your tenants, (trading being so dead as it is, and is like to be) will scarce pay for the houses

they live in, and if so, wherewithal shall they and theirs subsist? ...your rack rents, and more than rack fines, do eat the very bread out of their mouths'

Pg 168: "What pity is it, that over-hasty Creditors should clap their Actions upon them thick and threefold; as if seeing them stoop, they were resolved to break them; or thinking them fallen for the present, they would never suffer them to rise more. If you think them well able to pay you presently, and know yourselves unable to be without your moneys any longer, that is another matter; or if you have reason to think they will not be honest, unless you make them so by a surprise, and take them at an advantage, such thinks may plead for you: but such as have to do with men that are not able to pay their debts when they will, but willing to pay them when they are able, and who in case they were forborn a while, might be as well able as willing to satisfie every man; I say, where that is the case, to break mens backs with over-hastiness at such a time as this, to give them no respite, that they may recover their wind after the late calamity hath run them out of breath, is unchristian and more than heathenith unmercifulness."

Pg 169: "If the fire hath really undone men, do not you undo them yet more; if that have taken away all their Estates, do not you seize their Bodies; as if it were not misery enough for men to have nothing to live upon, unless they also lie and languish in a Prison."

On losses in the fire:

pg 9: 'Whose heart would it not grieve, to think what precious fuel went to feed that pernicious fire? [Then follows a list of major city buildings] In some places you might have seen rich wines...burning for no bodies use, elsewhere costly oilds swimming about the streets and afterwards converted into flames. Was not the fire fed in some places with rich household stuff, and dear furniture, in others with shop goods and wares of great value, as fine clothes, and such like, which their owners wanted opportunity to send away? How many precious drugs and odoriferous spices went up in those flames, as so much incense? How many welcome medicines, and powerful antidotes...'

pg 10: 'And above all other losses, what scholar ... can with dry eyes mention the inestimable loss of books that was sustained by that merciless fire, to the undoing of many booksellers, in one sense, and many more scholars in another [then follows a list of books, Bibles etc. lost].'

pg 14: 'If God had taken away the houses of rich men that could have born their loss, and mean time spared the houses of such as were poor, there had been pity in that, but he was pleased to take all before him, and with the same besom of destruction to sweep away the habitations of the poorest, as well as the most rich'

pg 15: He that should have come to a man worth eight or ten thousand pounds, a week before the fire, and told him that within ten days he should not be worth so many hundreds, would he not have laughed at him, and said in his heart How can that be? Had all his estate been in houses, some in one street, some in another, he would never have dreamed that they should all be fired together, or within a few days of one another: And yet it is well known to have been the case of many to have been worth a good estate one day, and the next day, by the fire to have been reduced almost to nothing.'

pg 16: 'The desolation of so many houses is a sad sight, but the ruin of so many families as this fire hath ruined, is yet a sadder consideration...Is it not worth our adding, and throwing into the balance, that this loss by fire trod upon the heels of two other greater losses, viz. By war and pestilence, the latter of which, not only diminished our estates, but (which was worse) deprived us of our near and dear relations'.

pg 17: 'for certain it is the children which are yet unborn will in time fare the worse for it. Who can estimate how great a damage and confusion will arise first and last from one branch of this loss viz. the burning of Bills, Bonds, Leafs, Conveiances, Books of Debts and Accompts [accounts], and other writings of great consequence, which was all that many men had to show for the greatest part of their estates'.

pg 22: 'How like is he to those churches the outsides whereof are yet standing; their walls and steeples make such a fair show, that they, who view them at a distance, would think, they were just as before; but alas! Their insides are gone, they are fit for no use, yea their very outsides are so frail and brittle, that in a windy day men are loth to pass by them for fear of being knockt on the head'.

pg 26: 'And some we may imagine were discoursing, what they and their should do, their houses and good being burnt, where they should put their heads as having neither money nor friends, as leastwise so near that they knew how to get to them. These were but some of the dreadful stories that men and women talkt of.'

pg 26: 'For since that time it hath been the manner of friends, as they met to ask some accompt [account] of the losses each of other. Pray what lost you, saith one, by the Fire? I lost the house I lived in, saith one, ...I lost my houses and goods, saith another. I lost to the value of two thousand pounds, saith one, I four, I six, saith another, I have lost all saith another, I am burnt to my very shirt: I have lost more that all, saith a third, for I by this meanes am left in a great deal of debt, that I shall never be able to pay, I had many things belonging to other men committed to me, which are swept away. Saith another I am not only undone my self, but so many of my children and near relations, it may be all of them are undone by this Fire and well as my self.

Loss of the schools:

Pg 59: "Is learning taking its leave of *England*? Is that sun about to set in our Horizon? That schollars have received two such terrible blows? Young ones have lost their schools; and, both young and old have Isot their books."

Pg 60: "I cannot but muse to what a plunge Parents are now put, to get good schools for their children (especially those, who cannot endure their children should live at a distance from them) considering, that honest and able school-masters are but here and there to be found."

Pg 64: "This poor lads little lay to heart (as being ignorant of what is for their good); yea possibly, what through dread of their masters, disaffection to their Books, and love of their Play, they are even glad their schools are burnt."

The loss of writings as Bills, bonds e.t.c:

Pg 68: "How many had nothing to show for all the money they had lent out; for all the debts that were owing them, upon any accompt: yea, for all their Interest in Lands and Houses, to a great value; but only certain Papers, or parchments, called Bonds, shop-books, Deeds, Converances, Leafes &c. writings are the most compendious Treasure in, and of the whole world: O so many single sheets of Parchment, may it not be said by soe, This is my Money, (all I have in the world;) this is my House, that is my Land; this is my Inheritance, that is my Jointer; this is my Patent for such an office, or for such a Dignity; this is my discharge, for so much money that I have disbursed for such and such, this is my Accoun, for so many thousands that I have been intrusted with;oh the vast concernment of such papers and parchments as these! What had not many rather have lost than these? ... Doleful Fire! That hath made honest men mourn, and knaves rejoyce."

Pg 71: "Can the wisdom of our Governors find out no way whereby to prevent vexatious Suits, that will otherwise arise upon this occasion, to preserve the rights of honest men, now their Writings are gone; and, to prevent the unjust claims of those that are dishonest?"

The difficulty in finding the remains of houses:

Pg 185: "Some who attempted to visit the Ruines and Reliques of those houses in which they dwelt...though they found the street in which they stood, yet had much ado to be certain which was the ground they stood upon. He that told them but one day before the Fire began, that within five or six dayes, they being in *London*, and in the same street where their dwellings was, should not be able to find the way to their own Houses, (where they had lived, it maybe, twenty years and upwards,) would have been looked upon as mad.

... Methinks it is sad to hear men, that knew *London* well enough before, as they walk along the Ruins, asking at every turn, which is the way to such a place? And, what street is this? And, what street is that? But yet more sad, to think of men, that have fought their own houses, not far from the place where they had wont to stand, and could not easily find them."

On the dangerous ruins:

pg 140: '...those persons that were killed by the fall of ruinous buildings...as for those, who have often passed to and fro the ruins, and by the sides of tottering walls, but never received any hurt'

The fate of the homeless

pg 144: 'Upon suburbs coming into more request than ever, since the fire How much more considerable are the suburbs now, than that lately were? Some places of despicable termination, and as mean account, but a few months since, such as Houndsditch, and Shoreditch, do now contain not a few citizens of very good fashion...so was the marring of the City the making of the suburbs. What rich commodities cannot the suburbs now supply as with, which heretofore could be had only within the walls. Time was that rich citizens would almost have held their noses, if they had past by those places where now it may be they are constrained to dwell...What multitudes of Citizens have flockt to it, as glad to be free amongst those that were not free themselves, the fire having as it were broken down the partition-wall, betwixt those that were Free-men of *London*, and those that were not... So that he, who would now look for *London*, must look for most of it, not within, but without the Walls...

It should seem, the poor despised the Suburbs were destin'd to hold up their heads even more than ever, when the noble City should lie in dust and ashes, as now it doth."

Pg 211: "What wooden-houses are those that many citizens of good fashion are now forced, yea glad, to dwell in? May we call them Houses? Or are they

anything but Sheds, and Hovels, or Boothes, at most? ...How are the citizens in *Moore-fields* like an army incamped, and lodging only within tents?"

Pg 121: "How many hundred Families are there, whose livelihoods seem to depend upon the re-building of that city? What hard shift do they make in the mean-time, dwelling many of them like the *Israelites*, in tents or Bothes?"

Was the fire a Catholic plot?:

Pg 156: " Me thinks I hear some *Roman-Catholicks*, (as they are pleased to call themselves,) saying, some of your Protestants did confidently fortel, That within this present year 1666 *Rome* should down; *Babylon* should fall; Antichrist should be destroyed; But, now your own City is destroyed in the self-same-year; which (according to you) doth show, that *London* was the true *-Babylon*, and that the true Antichrist is amongst your selves. ... Their Argument put into Syllogism, is this; if *London* were destroyed the self-same-year in which some did Prophesie that *Babylon and Antichrist* should be destroyed, then is *London* that which the scripture calls *Babylon and Antichrist* amongst the Protestants."

Pg 158: "Possibly they were some of your own Religion some Romanists, putting on the mask of Protestants (as hath bin usual with them to do, for sinister end) who foreknowing, that *London* would be burnt this year (as nothing is more easy, than for men to knoe what themselves intend to do) gave out that *Babylon* and Antichrist would be destroyed in sixty six, for that very end, that when they had once effected the burying of *London* in ashes, they might have some pretence to write this Epitaph, *Here be Babylon*, here lies that which was the feat of the true Anti-christ; thereby rolling away the approach of *Babylon* and Anti-christ from themselves to whom it belongs, upon the Protestants whom it concerns not."

The Monument in remembrance of the burning of London:

Pg 193: "if London its self be not the doleful Monument of its own destruction, by always lying in ashes (which God forbid it should) it is provided for by Act of Parliament, that after its restoration a Pillar either of brass or stone, should be erected in perpetual memory of its late most dismall conflagration."

Pg 198: "Whereas some of the same Religion with those that did hatch the Powder-plot are, and have been vehemently suspected to have been the incendiaries, by whosse means *London* was burned, I earnestly desire that if time, and further discovery, be able to acquit them from any such guilt that Pillar may record their Innocency and may make themselves, *as an iron Pillar or Brazen Wall*, against all the accusations of those that suspect them, but if indeed, and in truth that Fire either came, or was carried on and continued by their treachery that the Inscription of the Pillar may consigne over their names to perpetual hatred and infamy."

The re-building of London:

Pg 119: "If we build everywhere, as before, it will be incommodious for passage, dangerous for Fire...But, How shall Moneys be Levied for the re-building of *London*, where the estates of persons concerned do fall short? Two Expedients for that I have propounded already; one was, by the Mercy and Charity of those persons who have lost little or nothing by the fire; and, who have something they could well spare: the other is, by the Justice and due Repentance of all those persons, Carters, Landlords, and others, who have raised uncoscionable gains to themselves, by means of the late Fire, but some certain over-plus, as was provided under the Law, in cases of *Restitution*: when that is done, I wish there were a certain Pole-fine, or Mulet, set upon the head of every common sin, not made capital; wich are able, when once convicted of Drunkenness, swearing, cousenage, cursing, yea Lying its self, might be for, and towards the re-building of *London*."