



The Great Fire of London Video Diary

This play imagines the famous diary of Samuel Pepys is a video blog, in which he films his comments to camera and records the people he meets during the Great Fire of London.

Parts:	Narrator	
	Samuel Pepys	the famous diarist
	Elisabeth Pepys	his wife
	Jane	their maid
	King Charles II	his royal highness
	Thomas Bloodworth	Lord Mayor of London (1665-66)

Narrator: Just imagine if one of the most famous diaries in history had been recorded as a video diary on Samuel Pepys's webcam...

Samuel: Good evening, dear diary. It's a new month, the first of September. My word, it's been a hot, dry summer. London has been baking. I've kept away from the centre of town where it is so dusty and smelly. I avoid it like the plague... Come to think of it, the plague avoided us, luckily. It struck down many hereabouts last year.

Elisabeth: Who are you talking to, Samuel?

Samuel: Ah, dear wife Elisabeth. I am recording a diary of our times.

Elisabeth: Can I have a look? Just a few peeps.

Samuel: Call me Samuel, not Pepys. You can use my first name after eleven years of marriage. This is 1666, after all.

Elisabeth: And to think I married you when I was only fourteen.

Samuel: That's actually true, dear diary. And I was twenty two. Phew!



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- Elisabeth: Is something the matter, my dear?
- Samuel: Can you smell burning? Has the maid overcooked something in the kitchen?
- Elisabeth: I shall ask her. (Calling) Jane, can you come hither?
It is almost midnight. She should be in bed rather than cooking a loaf. I hope the crust has not burnt again as it is hard for me to eat with my false teeth.
- Samuel: (Whispering) That's true, dear diary. My wife is twenty six and has false teeth made of bone. But don't tell her I told you.
- Jane: (Knocks and enters the room) You called, madam?
- Elisabeth: Are you baking, Jane?
- Jane: I'm quite warm, yes madam.
- Elisabeth: No, I mean are you cooking something in the oven?
- Jane: Yes, madam – a fruit cake.
- Samuel: Ah ha! I've just thought of a good riddle. What's fruity and burns?
- Jane: I have no idea, sir.
- Samuel: The GRAPE fire of London! (They stare at him, totally puzzled)
No, I'm not sure that's funny, either. Maybe it will strike me as funnier tomorrow. And so to bed...
- Narrator: The next day, just hours later...
- Samuel: Good day, dear diary. It is very early on Sunday 2nd September.



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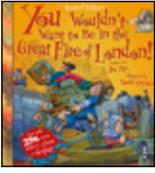
It smells as if Jane is already up and cooking something rather fiery.

- Elisabeth: You're talking in your sleep again, Samuel. Blow out the candle and return to bed. It is only three o'clock in the morning. What's that smell?
- Samuel: I don't think it is me, dearest. It must be the candle.
- Jane: *(calling at the door)* Sir, madam... the sky over the city is red.
- Samuel: Then it should be a fine day later. You know what they say; 'red sky at night, shepherd's delight...'
- Elisabeth: Or maybe the shepherd is on fire. Go and open the door in your night gown, Samuel.
- Samuel: But I don't have a door in my night gown, dearest.
- Elisabeth: Ask Jane what she can see exactly.
- Samuel: *(Opening door)* What can you see exactly, Jane?
- Jane: *(Shocked)* Ah! Your bare legs, sir. And no periwig.
- Samuel: No, where do you see something of concern in the sky?
- Jane: Through the window in the other room, sir.
- Samuel: *(Looking out of that window)* There appears to be a blaze far off. I think it is on the back side of Mark Lane.
- Jane: I don't know Mr Lane, sir. And why would his backside be on fire?



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- Samuel: No, Mark Lane is a street on the other side of the city. It is far enough away and of no concern. Back to bed.
- Narrator: Just a few hours later at 7.00 am on Sunday 2nd September, 1666...
- Elisabeth: (Samuel is dressed) Are you up and dressed already, dear? You look a little orange in the face.
- Samuel: It is the glow through the window, Elisabeth. I fear the fire is spreading.
- Jane: (*Calling at the door*) Sir, madam... I hear the fire started at Farynor's Bakery in Pudding Lane. The Star Inn and over three hundred houses have burned down. The fire is now burning down all Fish Street, by London Bridge.
- Samuel: Then I shall walk to the Tower of London to see this fire for myself...
- Elisabeth: Take good care, Samuel. Don't get scorched. And don't be late home. We have a dinner party this evening.
- Narrator: An hour later at the edge of the fire (sizzle, crackle, pop...)
- Samuel: I cannot believe what I am seeing - an infinite great fire on this and the other side of the bridge. It has burned down St. Magnes Church and most part of Fish Street already. The riverside warehouses are full of oil, hay, coal and tar – they are all ablaze. The heat is too much, I must retreat.
I must warn the Lord Mayor immediately...
- Narrator: Samuel knocks on the Lord Mayor's door – A grumpy man opens the door in his nightcap (silly place for a door!)



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- Bloodworth:** What is it? What do you want?
- Samuel:** Mr Bloodworth, sir. It is Samuel Pepys.
- Bloodworth:** Pepys? What do you think you are doing waking up the Lord Mayor of London at this hour on a Sunday morning?
- Samuel:** I am waking up the Lord Mayor of London at this hour on a Sunday morning – on account of a fire.
- Bloodworth:** What? Is my house on fire?
- Samuel:** No – but many streets by the river.
- Bloodworth:** Phew – that’s a relief. I thought for a moment my breakfast had overcooked.
- Samuel:** If you care to look towards the river you will see smoke.
- Bloodworth:** Are you telling me you disturbed me just for a puff of smoke? That’s hardly a fire. Wee could put that out.
- Samuel:** We? Are you suggesting you and I could extinguish it alone?
- Bloodworth:** Certainly not. Not we, but wee. My wife could put out those silly little flames just by peeing on them. You are making a fuss over nothing.
- Samuel:** Sir, if you are quick enough, you can destroy houses in the path of the flames. Then they will spread no further.
- Bloodworth:** What piffle. Now go away and leave me in peace (slams the door).
- Samuel:** In that case, I must go to see the King himself. He must know of this danger. Yikes – what has landed on my head? It’s a burning pigeon!



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(Sudden noise of angry crowd)

On my way to see the King, I see a vile mob. They shout that God has sent the fire to punish us and that foreigners started the fire. They're attacking anyone who can't speak English. Sacré bleu!

(Gets hit by a flying cabbage)

- Narrator:** King Charles the Second is at breakfast in his royal palace when a breathless Samuel is ushered in, covered in soot and smuts...
- King Charles:** Mr Pepys, there is a smouldering pigeon and cabbage in your periwig.
- Samuel:** Forgive me, your majesty - but the city is on fire. The wind is blowing so strongly that it will spread if you do not instruct your guards to pull down buildings to create firebreaks.
- King Charles:** You must tell the Lord Mayor.
- Samuel:** I have, your majesty – but he would not act.
- King Charles:** What? Then I shall leap into action myself. I shall fight the fire with my own bare hands. In the meantime, take a coach to the Lord Mayor with my orders that no houses are to be spared in putting out the fire. Blow them up and pull them down to make firebreaks. Tell the fire brigade to work round the clock.
- Samuel:** Er, two slight problems with that one, your majesty. One: all the clock towers have melted and burnt. Two: there is no fire brigade.
- King Charles:** Then man the pumps! We must get water to the flames immediately.
(They both run from the palace)
- Narrator:** Back at The Lord Mayor's House, things are hotting up...



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- Samuel: *(Knocking on the door)* Ouch, this door is red hot.
- Bloodworth: *(Opens door, looking hot and dabbing his face with a handkerchief round his neck)* Now what do you want?
- Samuel: The King has sent me. To put it bluntly, he thinks you're a blithering nincompoop. He blames you for not pulling down houses in time to stop the fire spreading.
- Bloodworth: *(Dropping to his knees, whimpering)* Woe is me! What can I do? I am spent. People will not obey me. I told them to pull down houses but they will not. But the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it. I am so weak.
- Samuel: True. Too weak. More like a fortnight. And now you are crying like a fainting woman.
- Bloodworth: *(Snivelling and sobbing)* I'm going to get the blame for this forever. I will go down in history as a wimp. What a terrible nightmare.
- Samuel: What a terrible Lord Mayor, more like! Now, fetch your wife's chamber pot and start pouring it on the flames...
- Narrator: *(This could be mimed)* Meanwhile, down at the River Thames, the King and his brother, the Duke of York (who later became King James the Second) were up to their ankles in water with buckets and spades. No, they weren't building sandcastles but throwing water onto the flames. By the end of the day, King Charles was dirty and muddy, his face black and his clothes soaked. But even he couldn't save Saint Paul's Cathedral burning to the ground.
- King Charles: Holy Smoke!



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- Narrator:** Meanwhile, back at his desk, Samuel sits stunned in the early hours...
- Samuel:** Dear diary – I am exhausted. I walked along Watling Street as best I could, as it was chaos. Everyone was laden with goods to save from the fire, also carrying sick people in beds. Some escape with all their belongings by cart, others by boat. There is a huge arch of fire from this to the other side of the bridge, a mile long. It makes me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire and flaming at once, and a horrid noise the flames make.
- Elisabeth:** Why are you sniffing, Samuel? Do you have a cold?
- Samuel:** Nothing is cold round here! I'm crying, Elisabeth. It is all so tragic. We may soon have to escape by boat. I have already moved my silver and valuables to my friend outside the city.
- Elisabeth:** (*Scowling*) Not one of your lady friends, I hope.
- Samuel:** This is no time for a domestic argument, Elisabeth. I am very worried about my cheese.
- Elisabeth:** Sometimes, Samuel, I worry about you.
- Samuel:** It is a very expensive Parmesan cheese from Italy. I'll tell Jane to put it somewhere safe. I don't want it to melt. Did you know that lead is melting from roofs and running down the streets aglow?
(*Calls*) Jane! Jane!
- Jane:** You called, sir?
- Samuel:** Fetch my cheese.
- Jane:** On toast, sir? How would you like it?



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Samuel: In a hole. I want you to bury it in a hole in the garden. I fear our house will soon become an inferno. The night sky looks as if the whole of heaven is on fire.

Elisabeth: Then why don't you bury yourself as well, dearest? Then you'll have cheese if you get hungry, a grave already prepared and a cosy plot to be cremated in when the fire reaches us.

Samuel: Elisabeth! You are making fun of me. We must escape and I will take my video diary with me. One day I will be famous for my words. I'll be a celebrity... get me out of here! *(He runs out screaming)*

Narrator: Which all goes to show **YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO BE IN THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON... EVER!**
(The play could finish with the song 'London's burning', maybe as a round)

London's burning, London's burning,

Fetch the buckets, fetch the buckets.

Fire, fire, fire, fire,

Pour on water, pour on water

*(The last line could be changed each time eg: Save my big cheese,
Run like blazes, Stop it raging, It's all over, Start rebuilding)*