

## Kresen Kernow learning resource: Great Fire of London

Among the Kresen Kernow archive collections is a letter from John Tremayne to his father, Lewis, describing the events of the Great Fire of London. The Tremayne family lived at Heligan (now famous for its gardens), but 19 year old John was in London at the time of the fire.

John describes how an earlier letter to his father got lost as the post was so disrupted.

The letter is written in English, in a typical 17<sup>th</sup> century hand, which makes it quite difficult to read. An image of one page of the letter is provided in this resource, along with a simple transcript. For a full transcript, please contact us.

We recommend using this resource alongside the events and activities on the website <http://www.fireoflondon.org.uk/>.

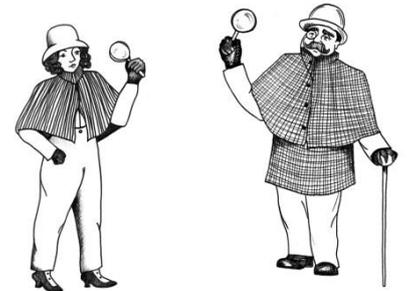
This resource contains:

1) Scan of a page of the original letter

(Kresen Kernow reference T/2004A)

2) Simplified transcript of the letter to use to inspire literacy activities

Did you know that Kresen Kernow offers free visits, as well as outreach workshops? Find out more by searching online for 'Kresen Kernow learning'.



London Septemb 22<sup>o</sup> 1666

Hon<sup>d</sup> Father

The 14<sup>th</sup> Instant came safe to my hands, which I perceived that had  
 of my l<sup>th</sup> hand mistooked as that of the 8<sup>th</sup> Instant per. In which  
 I gave you a particular account of the sad & most terrible fire which  
 hath destroyed most of this once glorious but now desolate City. & then  
 found that I may have done you some service in this manner, and  
 you this morn<sup>g</sup>. His on Saturday morn<sup>g</sup> the 2<sup>nd</sup> Instant about 2 of the clock  
 the fire began in a bakers house nigh the bridge end & reason of  
 the narrowness of the street, could not be stopped, the wind  
 being very high, raised it to incredible height, so fast that no  
 dust could be seen, therefore all people fled to their goods  
 what they could carry, so that all people mindings mind  
 the great reason of the fire, then to quench the fire, that in fact  
 it grew unmanageable, so continued from the time first  
 but till Monday about 2 of the clock in morn<sup>g</sup>, when it began  
 without the help of almost any, said of those of the house to  
 stop at the Temple, then it staid at Bishop gate, St. Dunstons gate  
 followed off to the house, nigh the tower, which when we saw  
 all did what possible, so that before night it was almost extin-  
 guished, but it broke out in the Temple again about 9 at night  
 & then we gave all for lost, but some sagacious persons in  
 the house were found morn<sup>g</sup> quenching it by blowing up the  
 houses round it, who were well rewarded, the fire at length  
 was made on Sunday, to stop it & drawings down  
 houses got it good in effect, & so did all other means  
 in short the whole City saw 16 parish is burnt & 2 parish  
 out the walls, Pauls Church, Exchange Burgate & the Customhouse  
 also are burnt, & all the churches w<sup>ch</sup> in the walls, saw  
 kind, which was the greatest loss, for all throughed with their  
 goods into them, had them burnt, though whome they sought  
 security from, the flames, in this once glorious City there is  
 scarce a house left, many that few days since were worth 1000  
 and now hardly worth 4<sup>th</sup> in this sad & lamentable con-  
 flagration, every person burned a portable Coach Cart, &  
 carts, because at such an excessive rate that they could  
 not be hired, to carry a load of goods a half mile & so  
 the uncountable villans wrought on the peoples necessity  
 would do nothing, but at the most unreasonable rates  
 virtually would not to be got a penny, hopes of rich cloth  
 indeed of all sorts of wealth by a prodigious quantity in  
 the streets, they are now rather think that the pro-  
 vidence of God is a tower than saving it, what we could  
 by any means, though we run in to the fire, where

## Simplified transcript of letter from John Tremayne (T/2004/A)

London, September 22nd 1666

Dear Father,

Here is an account of the terrible fire which has destroyed most of the city. The fire began at about 2 o'clock on Sunday morning in a baker's house near the bridge. The narrow streets and strong winds made it spread really quickly. It was so dangerous that no one dared get close to it.

On Wednesday at about 2 am it started to slow down and nearly went out but it flared up again. Some people tried to help put the fire out by pulling down houses and blowing houses up. Others were more worried about saving their belongings and trying to escape. Some people were in such a hurry to get away that rich clothing and all sorts of costly items were left lying in the street for people to tread on.

We tried to find a coach or cart to move our possessions but they were too expensive. What we couldn't carry we took into the fields. I lay in a field for 2 or 3 nights to look after my things. One night, there was a big outcry so I left the fields carrying our weapons to see what was going on. Food has become very expensive and hard to find.

The fire has caused so much damage. It is hard to believe the destruction everywhere. In some places there are hardly any houses left. People are saying the city will be rebuilt quickly and a model has been made showing how it will look. Some say that within 7 years it will look better than it did before.

Your most obedient son,

John Tremayne