

## A Night that will never be forgotten

The summer in 1666 was extremely hot. London was tightly packed with wooden houses and the stench of sewage was intolerable. The city was overrun by domestic animals and in every nook and cranny there was a rat. Central London was a poor area, the streets were dirty and crowded with people. But money does not buy happiness, in these tiny city houses there were some very cheerful and loving families, including the Potts family.

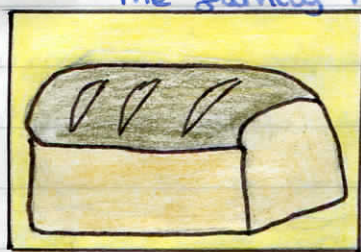
"Happy Birthday to Anne and Jane, Happy Birthday to you," merrily sang the Potts family around the wooden kitchen table in the small, dark downstairs room of the house, just round the corner from Pudding Lane.

It was the 1<sup>st</sup> September and it was the twins' eighth birthday, a vegetable stew was cooking on the open fire. Matilda, their older sister was helping to get the bowls together and the two boys were waiting patiently for their portage with their mouths watering, because this was going to be the best food they had had in a long time.



"Is father back yet mother?" asked Peter, "I'm really hungry."

"Oh I'm sure he'll be on his way, he just ripped down the road to get some bread from the bakers, anyway you know what he's like," said his mother, "he's probably having a good old chat with his mate Thomas Farynor."

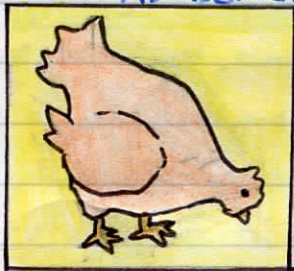


The family heard the sound of their father's jolly whistling and they heard the thumps of his heavy footed boots on the hard ground, then they saw a big black shape peering through the narrow doorway.

"I'm back, here's the bread," he called.



"It was lucky Thomas had some spare, he was in the middle of lots of cooking because he had had a big order from the king that he had to have ready for tomorrow. When I went in, it was really hot, I saw him building up the fires for the ovens overnight. That is an awful job for hot weather like this," he said to his wife.



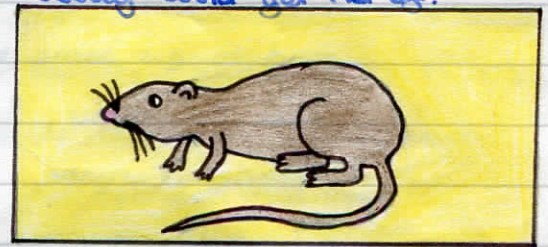
At last the whole family were ready to eat (including the chickens and pigs who were hoping for some scraps).

A heavy breeze was coming through the windows and there was complete silence as the family ate their warm and inviting vegetable stew.

After eating, the girls helped their mother clear up and the two boys went down to the river with their father. Their father, Mr Potts, was a waterman on the River Thames, his job was to take people up and down the river and in his free time he caught fish in the river for his family. The two boys looked on the river bank to see what they could find while their father mended his boat. Then they rowed in the boat with their father, after that they met up with their friends Will and Henry and played skittles.

Back at the house Matilda helped her mother. Matilda and her mother had a lot of pride in keeping the house clean, they swept and washed up everyday. When Edward and Peter went out they took buckets with them to fill up with water to wash the bowls and clean the table and afterwards the waste was just thrown outside. Matilda swept the dirt floors of the house with a broom. Everything got sorted out apart from the rats which nobody could get rid of.

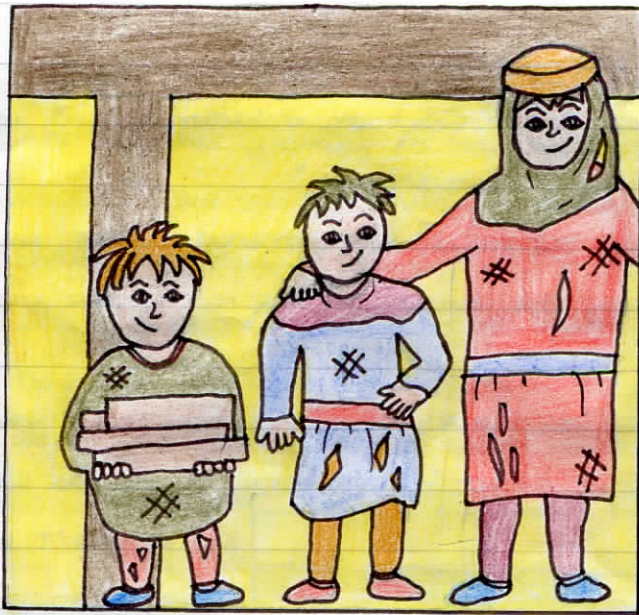
"Mother it's so annoying, these rats really irritate me.... achoo.... achoo, why is it always me that gets these annoying allergies?" cried Matilda.



It was drawing close to the evening and not long after 7:00pm the boys arrived home with muddy knees, scrapes, bruises and red flushed cheeks.

"Goodness me look at you two, where have you been?" asked





their mother.

"Well," began five year Peter, "First we went down to the river bank with father to see what we could find and then we went onto the river with him, then we met up with Will and Henry to play skittles and then....."

"Ok, ok I understand. Well tomorrow I think you should go

back to the river and wash those muddy knees of yours. Anyway I think you should be settling down for bed now."

"Also mother," said Edward, "father told us to tell you that he's in the ale house with Thomas Fargnor and he won't be back till late."

Anne, Jane, Peter, and Edward made their way to bed. The bedroom was smaller than the kitchen but it was big enough to fit a large straw mattress that everyone slept on. The empty window brought in cold draughts in the winter, but the animals helped warm the room and there were blankets. A wooden chest was used for storage and even candles were too expensive for the Potts family to have, so when it got dark, it was bedtime.

"Are you hot Jane?" asked Anne.

"Yes very, I can't get to sleep because Peter keeps wriggling."

"I'm sorry, but I can't help it, it's these stupid lice and fleas," explained Peter.

"Me too," interrupted Edward. "And rats keep nibbling my toes!"

Mr Potts arrived back from the ale house just as Mrs Potts and Matilda were going to bed. He stumbled up the stairs behind them.

"I hope Thomas got back in time for his bread," said Mr Potts.

"He had so much ale he forgot about his big order for the king. I do hope it's not burnt."

The three of them walked over to the big mattress and to their



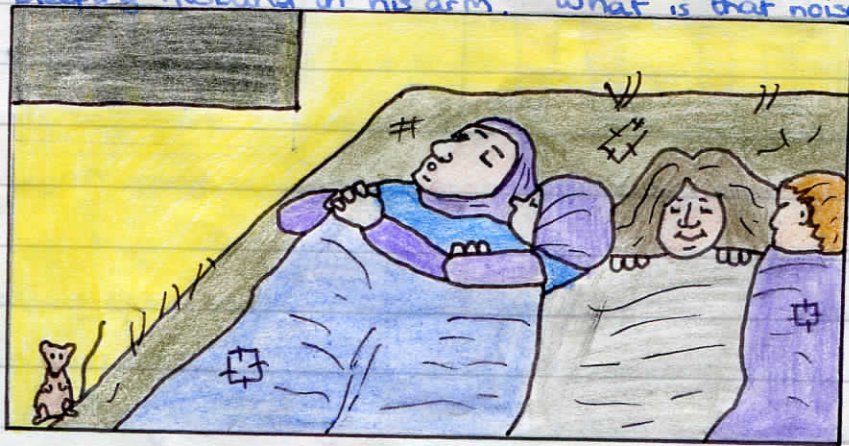


surprise the children were fast asleep.

"Let's be quiet, we don't want the children waking up," whispered Mrs Potts. "Anyway..... goodnight."

It was an extremely hot night, with strange winds coming through the window and considering the conditions, the rest of the family all went off to sleep quickly.

"Robert, Robert wake up, quickly!" yelled Mrs Potts nudging her sleeping husband in his arm. "What is that noise, it sounds like people,



but it can't be at this time of night."

Mr Potts immediately awoke and rushed to the open window, and he could not believe his eyes. It was

frightening. His wife followed him to the window and they stared in horror. There were people, people everywhere running and shouting, women were screaming for their children and there was a horrible fear of panic. Men were climbing over the crowds and pushing and shoving past other people.

"Right, everybody out, now. NOW!" Mr Potts ordered.

The family ran from the house.

"What is happening?" said Jang.

"I don't know but we are not safe here," answered Mrs Potts.

As soon as the children got out they could then see what was happening, there in front of them was a monstrous, raging fire, eating up everything in its path.

"If we can get to the river we can get our boat and row down to safety," said Edward starting to choke on the smoke.

Grabbing each others hands the family pushed their way through the crowds.

Down at the river other families had got the same idea. The men had made a chain of buckets getting water from the river to



the fire. Mr Potts looked at the chain and knew he had to help, but he wanted his family to be safe and escape.

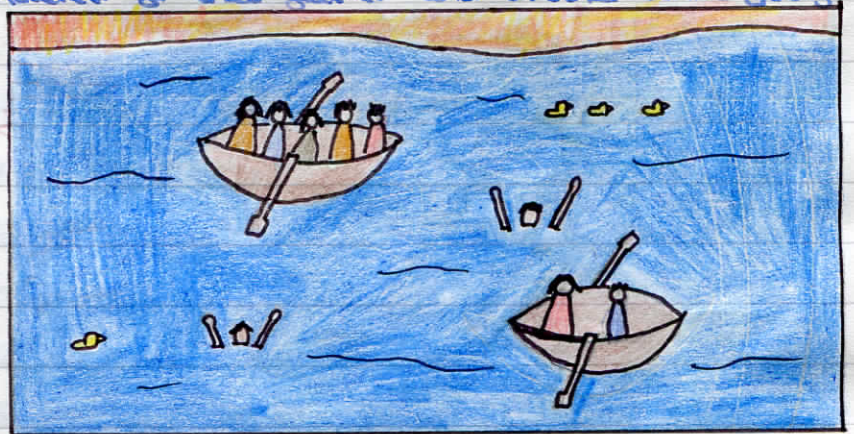
"You row the children down the river while I help with the water chain."

"No father, I'm not leaving you," said Edward. "I'm going to help you with the water chain as well, Peter and the girls should go down the river. We'll catch them up. I am sure we'll be OK."

"Alright," said Mrs Potts. "But take care of yourselves!"

Mrs Potts did as she was told, the children got into the boat, and Mrs Potts and Matilda rowed while the children sat there in silence, thinking about their house and wondering about what was happening. Most importantly they wondered if their father and brother were going to be alright.

The water chain wound round all the narrow streets, but did not look like it was going to be a success, the fire was huge and



the Potts family could really see how big it was from the boat compared to when they were in their little house.

"Mother, you can really see so much more from here, it looks dreadful and there are still so many poor people panicking right now. I feel really lucky here because we are safe."

"Will father and Edward be OK?" sobbed the children.

"I'm sure they will," said their mother putting on a brave face.

"Come on children let's look on the positive side of things. We are together and we are safe. Look, I can see people going to St. Paul's Cathedral, goodness knows what they are doing there but they seem to be carrying their belongings," explained their mother trying to take the children's minds off the fire.

Back at the river edge Mr Potts and Edward were working as fast as they could in the water chain. It was back breaking



work, but the only thing that was on their minds was whether their family were safe. They tried not to think about what was going to happen to them but they concentrated on getting water to the fire.

"Oh mate, I can't wait to hear about who did this, I want the truth. Nobody can commit a crime this big, it was deliberate, I know it was. This is arson, I tell you ARSON!" shouted a man off the street



to Mr Potts.

Edward was beginning to feel scared, sights were breaking out and there was violence about the fire because people could see it was getting out of hand.

Edward tried to hide the fact that he was scared and he stayed close to his father.

The rest of the family sat in shock as they looked back at the skyfire of flames and at the tons of thousands of houses being burnt into shreds. They could see animals charging down the streets or even running into the fire. None of them said a word but they all knew they were thinking the same thing - What will happen next?

The fire finally burnt itself out after four days. Eighty percent of London was destroyed: 13,200 houses, 89 churches and 52 public halls were burnt to the ground. The fire destroyed 373 acres inside the city walls and 63 acres outside them. About 100,000 people or a sixth of the population of London were left homeless and even St. Paul's Cathedral was destroyed. The Great Fire of London has gone down in history as one of the biggest disasters that London has ever experienced and it will never be forgotten.

