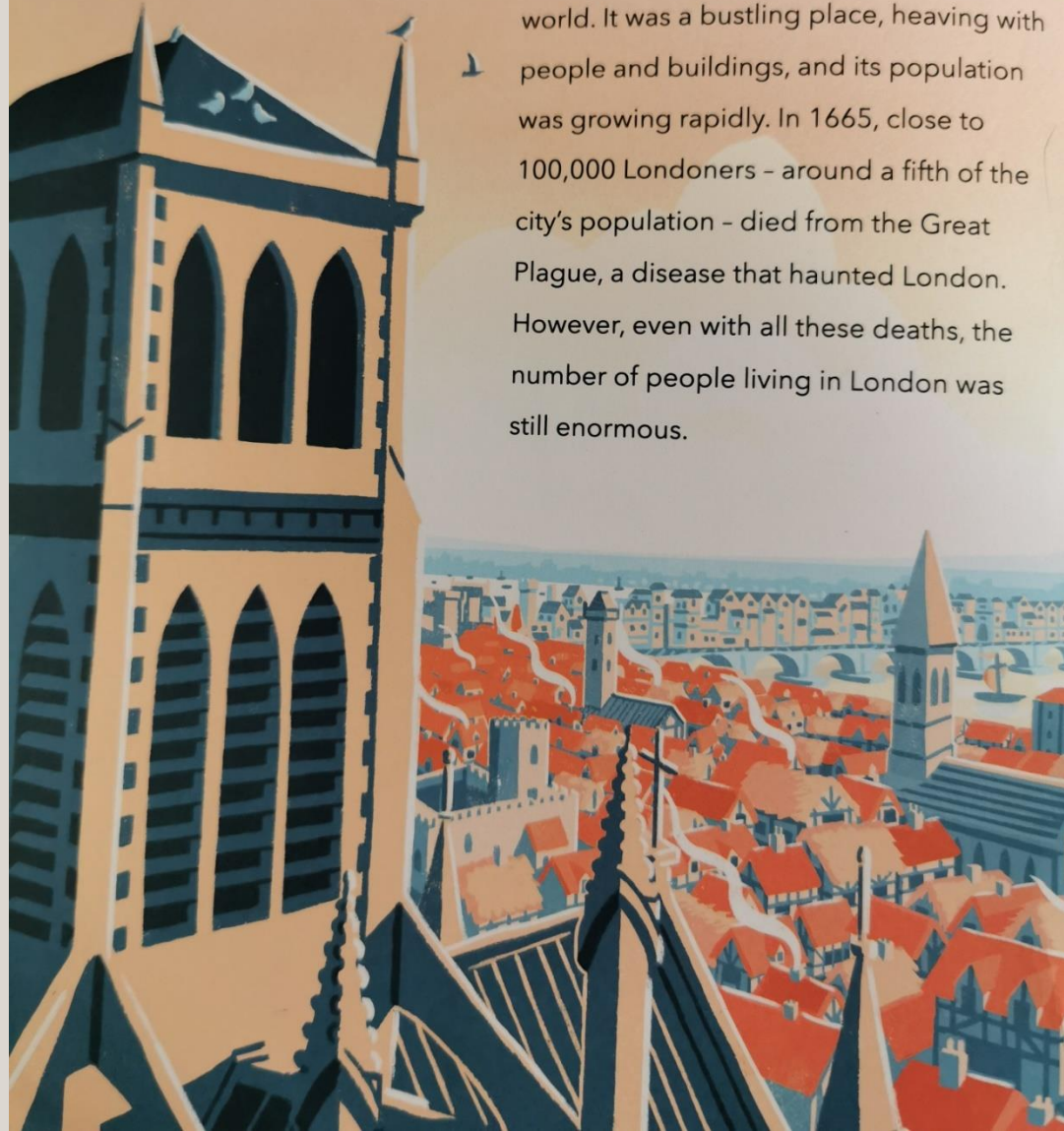





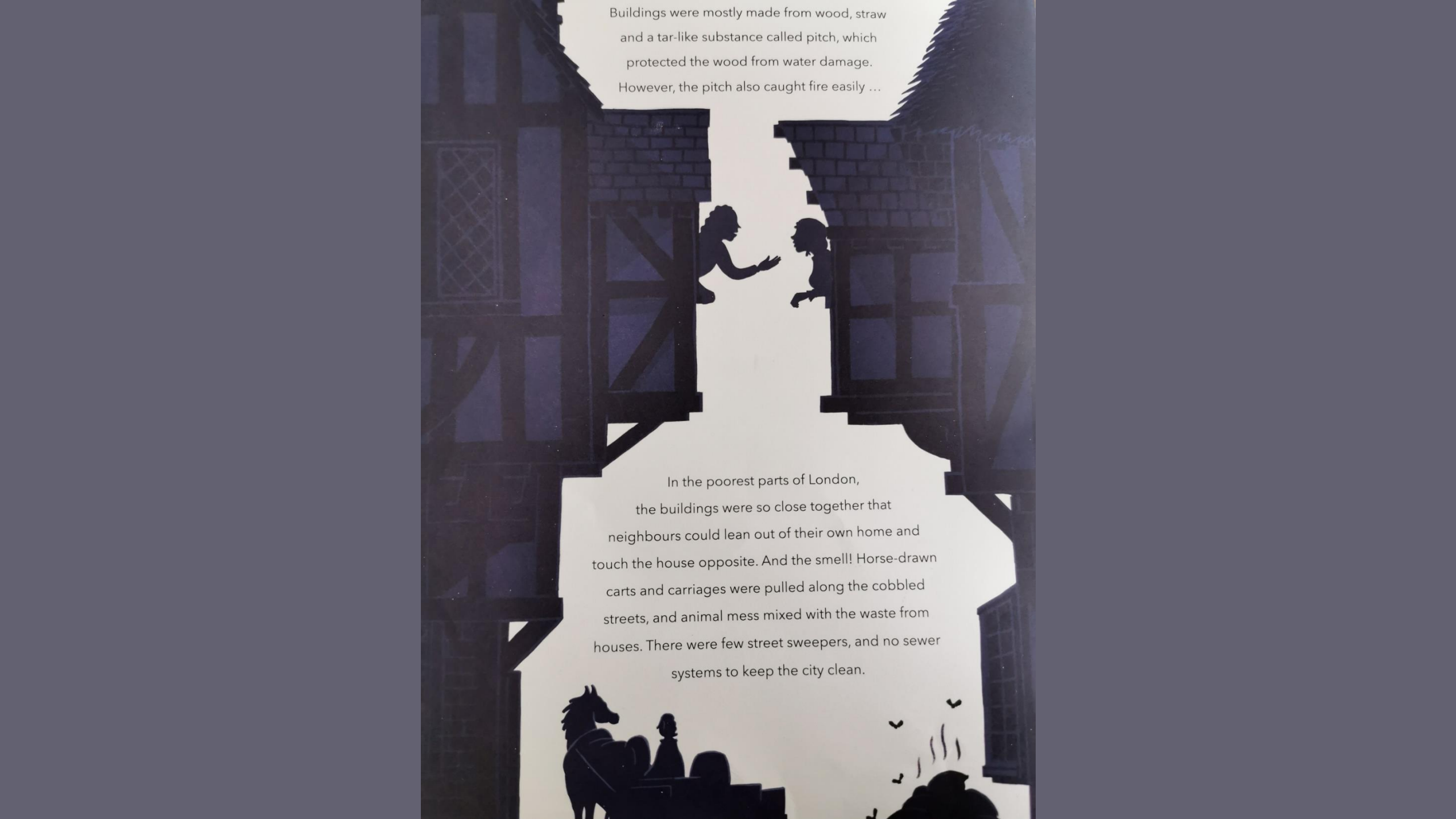
# THE CITY OF LONDON

In 1666, London was not only the capital of England, but one of the biggest cities in the world. It was a bustling place, heaving with people and buildings, and its population was growing rapidly. In 1665, close to 100,000 Londoners - around a fifth of the city's population - died from the Great Plague, a disease that haunted London. However, even with all these deaths, the number of people living in London was still enormous.





And in 1666, the city was very different  
from the one we know today.

The background of the page features a dark silhouette of a narrow street between Tudor-style buildings. Two figures are leaning out of windows on opposite sides, their hands reaching towards each other. The buildings have half-timbered walls and tiled roofs. The overall scene is set against a light, hazy background.

Buildings were mostly made from wood, straw  
and a tar-like substance called pitch, which  
protected the wood from water damage.  
However, the pitch also caught fire easily ...

In the poorest parts of London,  
the buildings were so close together that  
neighbours could lean out of their own home and  
touch the house opposite. And the smell! Horse-drawn  
carts and carriages were pulled along the cobbled  
streets, and animal mess mixed with the waste from  
houses. There were few street sweepers, and no sewer  
systems to keep the city clean.

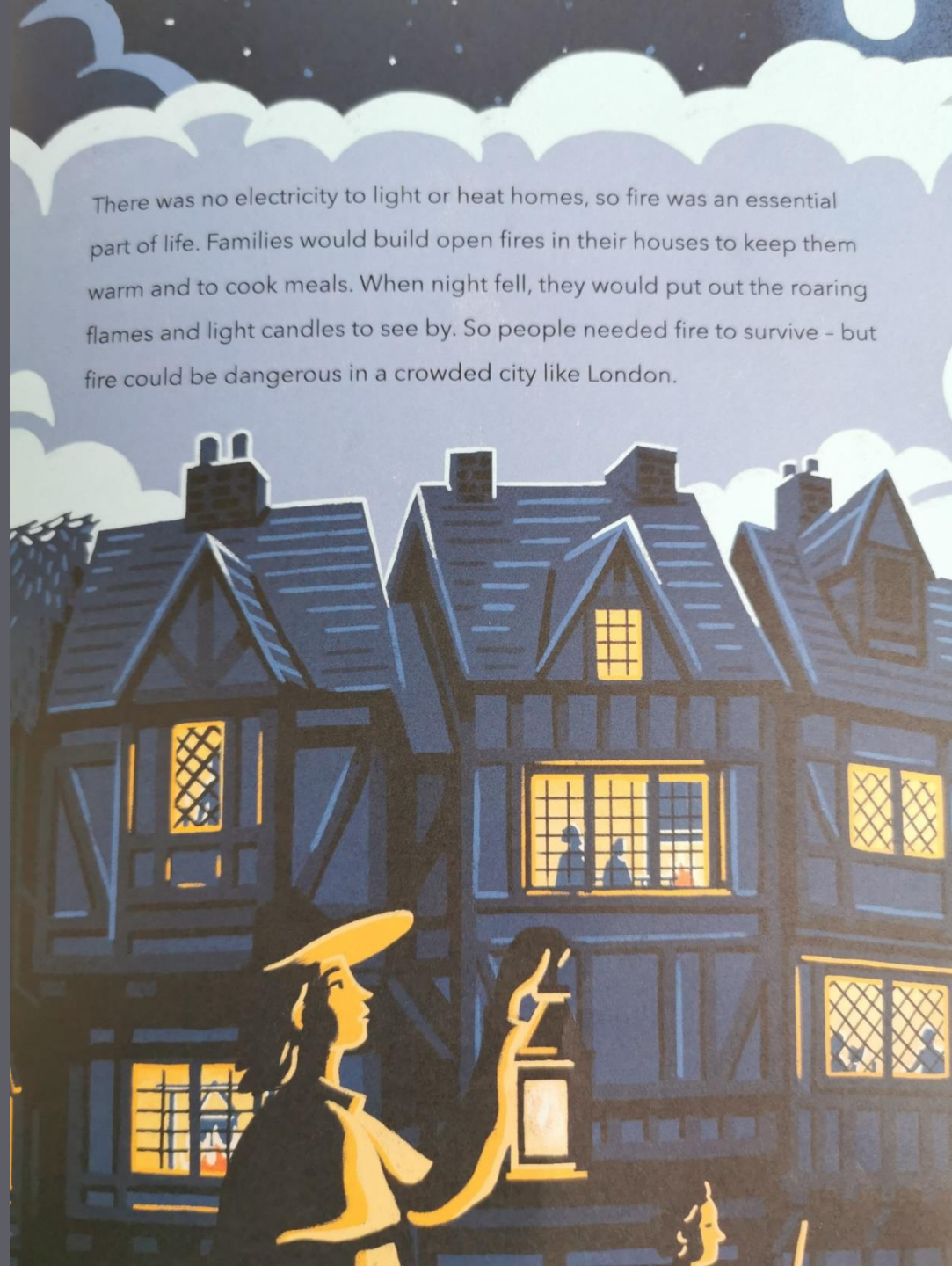


# A LONG, HOT SUMMER

London experienced an especially hot summer that year. In fact, very little rain had fallen across the whole of southern England. Buildings dried out, the ground became dusty and even London's main river, the Thames, was running low from so little rainfall.



There was no electricity to light or heat homes, so fire was an essential part of life. Families would build open fires in their houses to keep them warm and to cook meals. When night fell, they would put out the roaring flames and light candles to see by. So people needed fire to survive - but fire could be dangerous in a crowded city like London.



# THOMAS FARRINER'S BAKERY

Thomas Farriner owned a busy bakery on Pudding Lane, in east London. He was the baker to Charles II, the king at that time. The large stone oven in the bakery was lit in the early hours of each morning and burned throughout the day. At night, as the bakery was closing, the flames were beaten down to ashes. But on Saturday 1st September 1666, no one made sure that the fire in Farriner's bakery had been properly put out. The oven continued to burn, and no one noticed . . .

# SUNDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER

In the early hours of Sunday morning, the Great Fire of London started. Some say it was because a hot ember fell from the oven and set fire to a nearby pile of wood. Others say that Farriner had forgotten to sweep out the oven, which meant that the dying fire sprang back to life. Even Farriner's maid was blamed - although she never had the chance to deny this, because she was one of the first people to be killed by the fire.







# SUNDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER

By 3 o'clock in the morning, flames rose high above Pudding Lane and could be seen from a quarter of a mile away. A strong wind helped the fire move quickly, blowing it west from house to house. It fed off the dry wooden frames of buildings and licked at thatched roofs and pitch, pushing southwards towards London Bridge. If the fire travelled across the bridge, everyone and everything south of the river would also be in great danger.

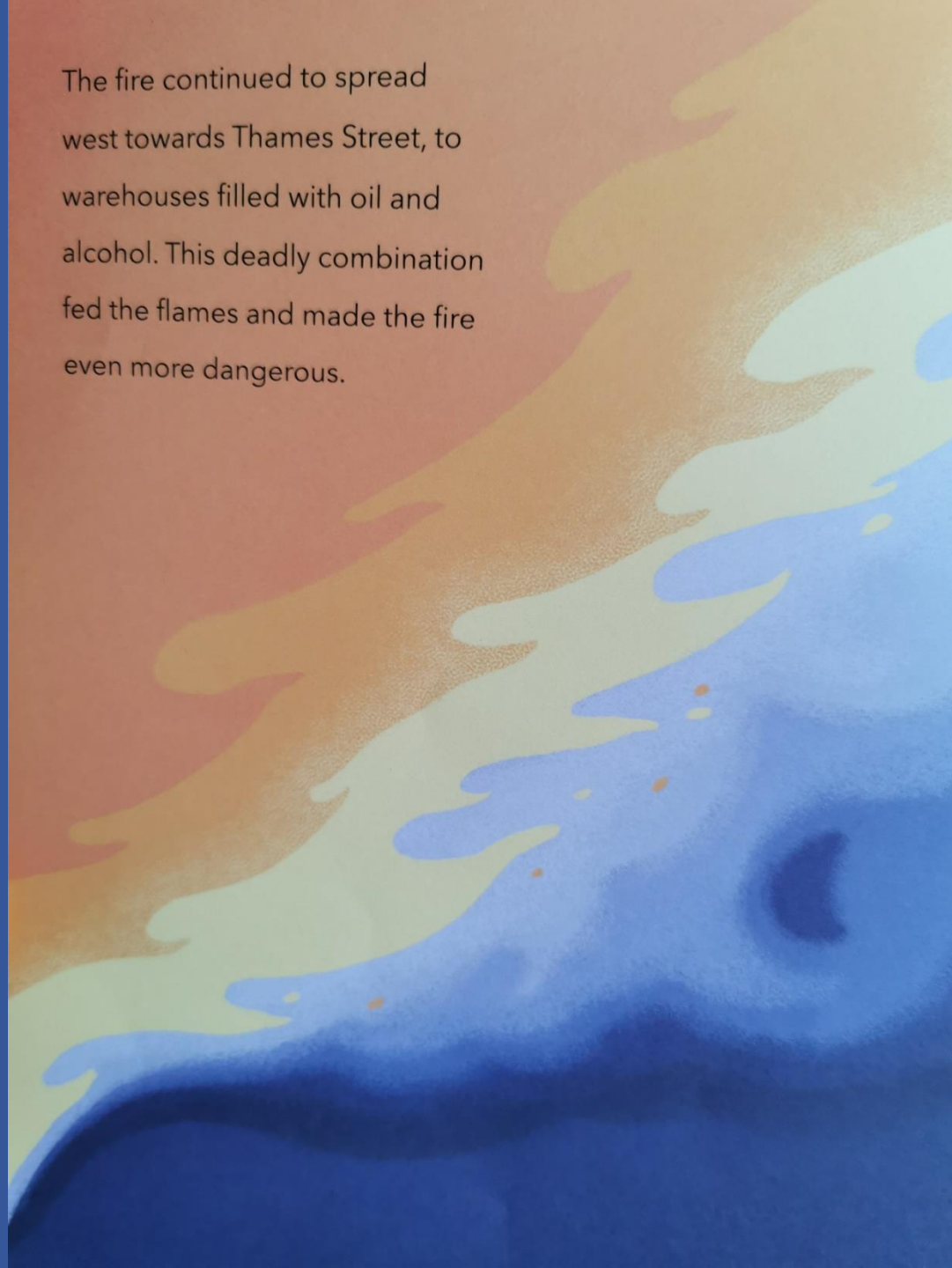


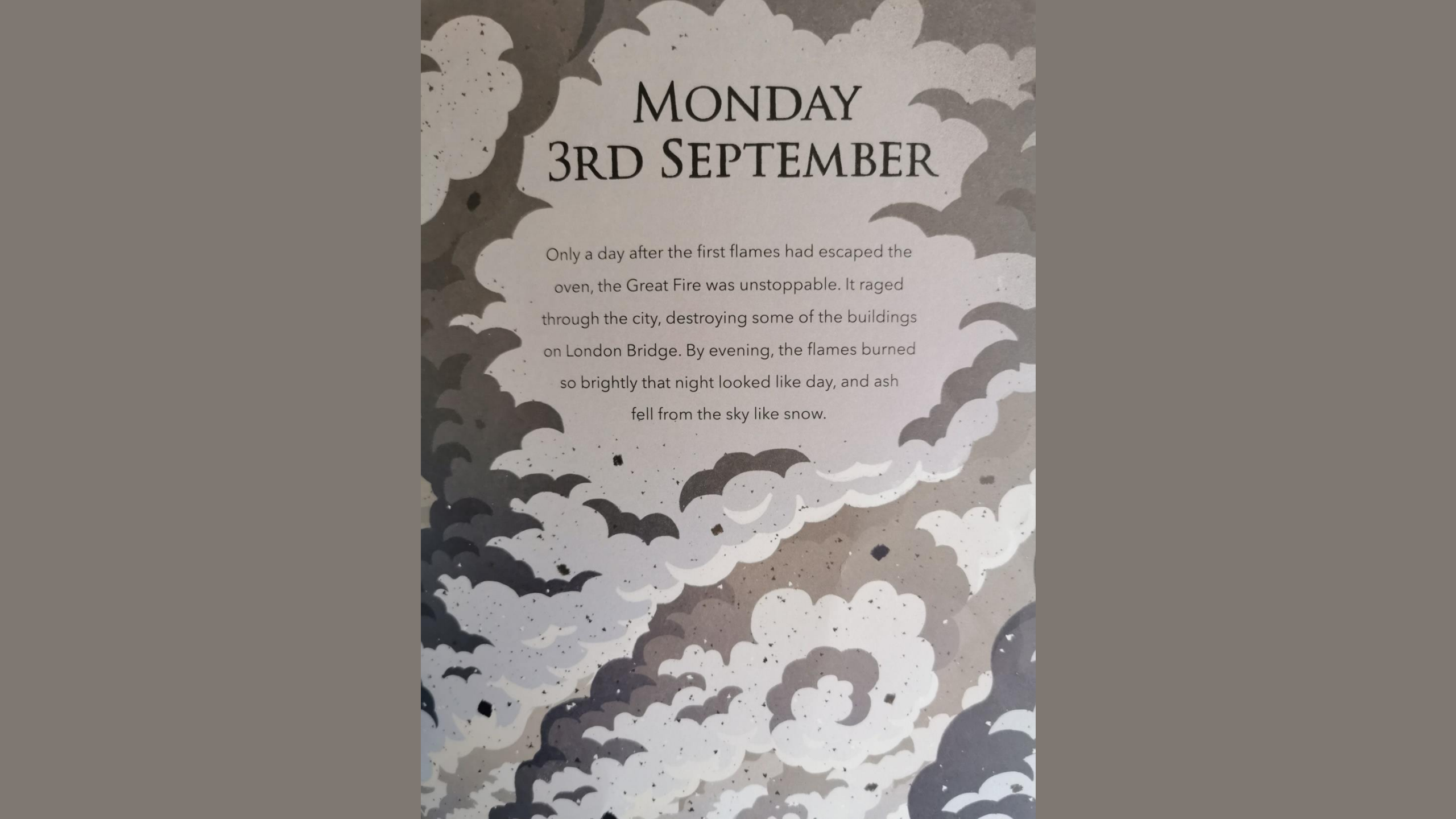


The only way to stop the fire from spreading was to create a firebreak - houses had to be pulled down to create space between the fire and the buildings still standing. Most people didn't want to tear down their homes, but nothing else would stop the fire. Pepys went to King Charles and asked him to take action. The King was deeply troubled by Pepys' visit and sent him to deliver his message to the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Bludworth. The Mayor was sent into a panic, shouting **“Lord! What can I do? . . . I have been pulling down houses, but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it.”**



The fire continued to spread west towards Thames Street, to warehouses filled with oil and alcohol. This deadly combination fed the flames and made the fire even more dangerous.





# MONDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER

Only a day after the first flames had escaped the oven, the Great Fire was unstoppable. It raged through the city, destroying some of the buildings on London Bridge. By evening, the flames burned so brightly that night looked like day, and ash fell from the sky like snow.

# TUESDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER

By Tuesday, the fire was so hot that nobody could get close enough to fight it. The firefighting equipment was no match for the blaze. And when St Paul's Cathedral caught fire, and Ludgate Hill and part of Fleet Street went up in flames, King Charles II ordered that as many buildings as possible be knocked down. Men, women and children fled their homes, taking as much with them as they could carry, even burying some of their belongings to protect them.

Some people escaped on foot, in carts and by boat, while others stayed to fight the fire. At its worst point, the Great Fire of London burnt through 100 houses in just one hour. But thankfully the strong winds were starting to weaken.



# WEDNESDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER

On Wednesday, the smell of gunpowder filled the air as houses and shops were blown up. Many important buildings, including St Paul's Cathedral, the Royal Exchange and Guildhall, couldn't be saved from the fire.

The King took charge of the firefighting, and organised groups of people to demolish buildings. Lines of men snaked from the River Thames to riverside houses and shops that were still on fire, passing buckets of water between them. It was a slow process, but the biggest flames began to die down. More than three days after it had started, the Great Fire was finally under control.

# A CITY IN RUINS

Once all of the flames were put out, east London was unrecognisable. Around 400 streets had been burnt to the ground, 87 churches lay in ruins and more than 13,000 houses were reduced to ashes. Amazingly, it was reported that fewer than ten people had died in the fire. Most had escaped to the fields north of the city.

It was in those fields - in Moorfields, Highgate and Islington - that the rich and poor set up tents and huts beside each other. Pepys was surprised to see that some wealthy people had chosen to save their musical instruments from the fire.



South of the River Thames was safe. London could be rebuilt.

# PEPYS' DIARY

Samuel Pepys is now famous for the diary he kept between 1660 and 1669. He was a highly regarded Londoner because he worked as an administrator in the Navy, and later became a Member of Parliament. Pepys' diary is more than a million words long and is packed with detail about his personal life and work. It also contains information on great moments in British history, such as the coronation of King Charles II, the devastation of the Great Plague and, of course, the Great Fire of London.

In his diary, Pepys wrote that his maid rushed to tell him about the spreading fire.

*“By and by Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses have been burned down to-night by the fire we saw, and that it is now burning down all Fish-street, by London Bridge.”*

*- The Diary of Samuel Pepys*