My Reading's title is "London's Burning", and its theme is the impact of fire on the Temple.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

I begin with a fire in France, not London, eight centuries ago, which influenced, if indirectly, the history of the Temple. Early occupants of the Temple were members of the Knights Templar, a military religious order founded in the Holy Land to protect Christian pilgrims from robbery and violence. Growing in numbers and prosperity they acquired land in the middle east and throughout western Europe. In England they moved here naming it The New Temple, to distinguish it from their original headquarters in Holborn, and built the Round Church, consecrated in 1185, which stands today. The Templars were influential in the political affairs of England, and engaged in significant banking activities.

In 1307, the French King, Philip IV, caused the Templars in France to be arrested and their property seized. Charged with serious heresies, almost all, following torture, confessed. The Pope, Clement V, intervened and ordered all the monarchs of Christendom to arrest the Templars and seize their lands. A papal commission then investigated the Order and the French Templars began to renounce their earlier confessions. In short – because I must get to the promised fire - the French King reopened his own enquiry which found 54 Templars guilty. They were burnt at the stake outside Paris in 1310.

Templars in England were treated less severely. Under the Papal Inquisition they maintained their denials even after the King, Edward II, was prevailed upon to allow the use of torture; but the Inquisitors obtained limited confessions from three new witnesses and, satisfied that the accusations had to some extent been vindicated, allowed them to confess publicly and be reconciled to the church. Many other Templars, exhausted by imprisonment and harsh treatment and themselves fearing being burned at the stake, also confessed and were pensioned off or moved to other Orders.

Following that fiery conclusion in France the Order of the Knights Templar was suppressed in 1312. The King treated the New Temple as Crown property and granted it to a succession of owners, then in 1338 to the other great military Order, the Hospitallers who, not needing it for their own activities, leased it to William de Langeford. It is known that so-called "apprentices of the law" moved in later and occupied at least part of the land by 1346, but exactly when or whence they came, or on what terms, is unknown.

It is unclear whether the lawyers initially formed two Inns, using two halls built by the Knights Templar or, perhaps needing more accommodation, later divided into the Inner and Middle Temples. While there is evidence that Middle Temple existed by 1388, neither Inn

possesses written records from before 1501, possibly on account of their destruction in a fire.

HALL

Our original hall was presumably fairly small. Records show that overcrowding in Elizabethan times led to the building of new chambers. Construction of our present Hall was probably begun in 1562. The date in the window above the bust of Edmund Plowden, the Treasurer who was the inspiration for the building, is 1570, when it may have been first used though fully completed in 1574. In the centre of the hall was an open hearth, beneath a louvre allowing the smoke from the fire to escape. Presumably the flames of torches or candles provided lighting.

THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

Serious threat to the buildings of the Temple came from without, rather than from those sources of heating and lighting. As you all know, the Great Fire of London began in a baker's shop in Pudding Lane on 2 September 1666. John Evelyn, the diarist and writer, who became a member of Middle Temple in 1637, described the scene in his diary: "The conflagration was so universal and the people so astonished that from the beginning I know not by what despondency or fate they hardly stirred to quench it; so that there was nothing heard or seen but crying out and lamentation running about like distracted creatures without at all attempting to save even their goods; such a strange consternation there was upon them. ….Oh, the miserable and calamitous spectacle! …..All the sky was of a fiery aspect like the top of a burning oven, the light seen above 40 miles round about for many nights. God grant my eyes may never behold the like, now seeing above 10,000 houses all in one flame; the noise and cracking and thunder of the impetuous flames, the shrieking of women and children, the hurry of people, the fall of towers, houses and churches was like an hideous storm."

Samuel Pepys, who was not a Middle Templar though it is believed that some of his family members were, tells a rather different story of endeavours to save possessions: "About four o'clock in the morning, my Lady Batten sent me a cart to carry away all my money and plate and best things…Which I did, riding myself in my nightgown, in the cart; and, Lord! To see how the streets and the highways are crowded with people running and riding, and getting of carts…. to fetch away things."

After four days the fire spread along Fleet Street and to Inner Temple. King's Bench Walk, of fairly recent construction in brick, served as a fire break, but older timber buildings nearby

readily ignited, and, with the recently built Master's House, were destroyed. After briefly abating, the fire burst out anew. The hero of the day was James, Duke of York, an Inner Temple Bencher since 1661. His portrait hangs behind me. His actions are described in a letter from Windham Sandys, thus: "The Duke on Tuesday, about twelve o'clock, was environed with fire; the wind high, blowed such great flakes, and so far …..that the Duke was forced to fly for it, and had almost been stifled with the heat….it raged so extreme in Fleet Street on both sides and got between us, and at six of the clock to the King's Bench Office in the Temple. Night coming on, the flames increased by the wind rising, which appeared to us so terrible to see, from… the shore quite up to the Temple all in flame, and a very great breadth……..About eleven of the clock on Tuesday night came several messengers to the Duke for help, and for the engines, and said that there was some hopes of stopping it; that the wind was got to the south, and…. had took off the great rage of the fire …..By six of the clock on Wednesday the Duke was there again, and found the fire almost quenched on both sides of the street." By the Wednesday evening, however, the letter describes "the Temple on fire again. When we came there we found a great fire occasioned by the carelessness of the Templars, who would not open the gates to let the people in to quench it; told the Duke that unless there was a barrister there they durst not open any door. The Duke found no way of saving the [Church] and the Hall by the [Church], but blowing up the Paper house in that court…. One of the Templars seeing gunpowder brought, came to the Duke and told him it was against the rules and charter of the Temple that any should blow that house with gunpowder, upon which Mr Germaine, the Duke's Master of the Horse, took a cudgel and beat the young lawyer to the purpose. ….About one o'clock the fire was quenched, and saved the [Church] and hall; so the Duke went home to take some rest, not having slept above two or three hours since Sunday night."

Thus, the fire died out, just short of Middle Temple. Only one Middle Temple building was lost, Lamb Building, in the south-east of the churchyard. We possess in the Inn a sketch of that building, with the names of its occupants, possibly created in connection with litigation in 1679 when Inner Temple claimed that Middle Temple was refusing to readmit to the replacement building Inner Templar occupants before the fire. Most of the names on the drawing were undoubtedly Middle Templars. The only identifiable Inner Templar is described as such on the drawing.

The contents of buildings were lost too, of course, Lord Clarendon observing: "…whatever was there, money, books and papers, besides the evidences of many men's estates …, were all burned or lost to a very great value". Few lawyers were then in the Temple, as it was the long vacation and the Plague of the previous year still dissuaded many from staying

in London. So here it may have been absence rather than panic bred of the fire that led to possessions being abandoned.

THE TEMPLE FIRE OF 1679

Thirteen years later Middle Temple suffered much greater damage when a fire broke out in chambers in Middle Temple Lane around 10 o'clock on 26 January 1679, a bitterly cold night when the Thames was nearly frozen over. Sir Roger North, then a barrister of five years' standing and later a Bencher and Treasurer of Middle Temple, described the scene thus: "…the heat melted the glass of the windows which let in the wind and that converted all the smoke to flame which came issuing at the windows with a noise and fury like so many vents of hell, and at length the doors and roofs firing, the cold tiles with the suddenness of the heat would make a strange noise crackling and snapping till all came down together and then such flakes of fire would rise and scatter down the wind as if all the sky were inflamed and so drop upon the actors as well as spectators and burnt their clothes on their backs; the horror of this fire was as great as could possibly be contrived had it been designed for wonder, and no other instance in my observation, or description of poet or painter, ever came near it…. the cold was intense in the fiercest degree that our climate admits. The water froze in carrying and choked the engines with the ice that continually grew in it."

There came to tackle the fire the Duke of Monmouth, a member of Middle Temple since 1664, and the Earls of Craven and Feversham, with members of the Foot Guards. The fire spread, towards the Church and Inner Temple Hall. Lacking water, some young Inner Templars showed initiative in using beer to try to douse the flames. Their Benchers long objected to paying for the beer but the account books show that ultimately, in 1683, the brewer was paid £20 for it. The Duke of Monmouth used gunpowder to blow up buildings and isolate the fire. Unfortunately, the explosions killed three people and the Earl of Feversham sustained a fractured skull from which he recovered after the operation of trepanning. The strongly constructed buildings of Elm Court, near Middle Temple Hall, withstood two explosions, though the solid fabric did restrain the fire. Elsewhere gunpowder proved more effective and saved the Church. Also hastening to offer assistance came the Lord Mayor and the City Sheriffs, with the Lord Mayor's sword bearer holding aloft this symbol of jurisdiction. The young Inner Templars resented this assertion of authority within the Temple and struck down the sword. The Lord Mayor abandoned his willingness to help and retreated to a tavern. Gossip had it that he became drunk, and on his way back to the City stopped and sent away a fire engine heading for the Temple.

While the Halls of both Inns and the Great Gate on Fleet St were saved, many buildings were destroyed. Among possessions lost were those of Elias Ashmole, a member of Middle

Temple since November 1657 and who later declined an invitation to become a Bencher, including books, notes and his collections of coins and medals, seals and prints.

Middle Temple lacked resources to finance rebuilding, which would therefore fall to individual members of the Inn. It was decided not to reinstate the previous buildings but, in the words of Roger North, “to slight all old foundations”. Dr Nicholas Barbon, the son of Praise-God Barebone, a sectarian preacher whose name had been given to the Cromwellian Barebone’s Parliament in 1653, seized his opportunity. The Benchers agreed that Dr Barbon, a former physician turned speculative developer, should carry out his large-scale rebuilding plan involving widening Middle Temple Lane and enlarging Brick Court and Pump Court. Dispute arose over Barbon’s plan for a solid building in place of the cloisters, to provide additional chambers for Middle Temple, approved by our Benchers while Inner Temple wished to reinstate the cloisters. With the differences unresolved, both Inns embarked separately and competitively on reconstruction work. The Inner Temple account books record the payment of £3 “to the laborers for three severall tymes throwing in the earth upon the Middle Temple digging their foundacon in the Cloysters”.

Resolution came with the adoption of a fresh plan prepared by Sir Christopher Wren with the elegant compromise of retaining the cloisters but increasing their width with a larger building above. We are fortunate to possess in Middle Temple’s archive his beautiful drawing of the proposed replacement.

Roger North recounts that building work then moved on apace, sometimes by candle-light. Dr Barbon, however, lacked sufficient finance. Roger North described the conclusion of the works thus: “Barbon wanting money, materials were wanting or came in very thin. It was pleasant to see how intent the gentlemen were on their own concerns promoting the work and expostulating at every delay, nay, sometimes scarce forbearing violence to the workmen and one another: For they were apt to quarrel to have bricks etc carried to their respective works……. And there was at length a fail (as always in Barbon’s affairs) so that the House was feign to take upon them the winding up of the matter and the accounts standing out, whereby at last it was happily finished”.

FROST FAIRS

Let us now divert briefly to the River Thames, as earlier Middle Templars did to enjoy a more benign form of fire at Frost Fairs held when the river froze over. The first recorded Frost Fair was in 1608. The most celebrated one, in the winter of 1683–84, was described by John Evelyn: “Coaches plied from Westminster to the Temple…, as in the streets; sleds, sliding with skeetes, a bull-baiting, horse and coach races, puppet plays and interludes.” A print of

this Frost Fair was published in February 1684 and sold for three pence, showing “a Street of Booths built from the Temple to Southwark, where were Sold all sorts of Goods imaginable.” It depicts an area devoted to ox roasting.

The last Frost Fair was in 1814 when an elephant was led across the frozen river at Blackfriars and descriptions of other activity included: sitting around large fires “ drinking rum, grog, and other spirits”. A newspaper reported that “kitchen fires and furnaces were blazing...and animals from a sheep to a rabbit and a goose to a lark, were turning on numberless spits.” But then the climate grew milder; a new London Bridge with wider arches, and the embanking of the river, made the tide flow more freely, and the river less likely to freeze. So, let us fast forward a century.

WORLD WAR I

By the outbreak of World War I the formation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service heralded aerial warfare. Middle Temple addressed the threat of bombing. Parliament minutes record that in October 1914 the insurance cover against bomb damage was increased, in respect of the main buildings and their contents, and the Temple Church and the Master’s House. In June 1915 Master English Harrison, who became the Inn’s Treasurer in 1916, questioned the adequacy of the available fire appliances and Parliament gave authority to enlarge the water mains to connect with Inner Temple, to buy a fire engine and to employ a man at two guineas to overhaul the present appliances.

At that same meeting the Benchers considered a motion of Master Ringwood that “the Fire Committee be instructed to consider the advisability of fixing a steel or other netting over the roof of the Hall, and over the roof of the Church”. The motion was lost.

These precautions were happily not needed. While the Inn suffered the loss of many barristers, students and staff members serving in the armed forces, the only damage to our buildings occurred in what is now the Queen’s Room on 30 September 1917. Brass plates in the floor mark the spot where a shell lodged, believed to have been an anti-aircraft shell which missed its Zeppelin target.

WORLD WAR II

Before World War II, Middle Temple Benchers considered protection from air attack as early as 1937. Between May and September 1938, eight shelters in the Inn’s basements, capable of accommodating at least a thousand people, were prepared, stocked with first aid supplies, stretchers, candles, water and other equipment. To conserve oxygen, the candles were later replaced with electric torches, although smoking was still permitted. In May 1939 a Mr G R

Fleming wrote with a number of suggestions for equipping the shelters, most of which were already in place or considered superfluous. A detailed and polite response dealt with the suggestions in turn, but I detect some impatience in the comment "Speaking Tube. The Committee would be glad to know why this is thought to be necessary, and with what place or places it would communicate." Mr Justice Cassels reported to Parliament that "the wine in the cellar is in a fairly safe place. Sandbags will provide further protection and it is proposed that a wire grill be constructed in front of the bins so that in the event of these cellars being used persons will not be unduly tempted to compare their own tastes with that of the Benchers."

Volunteers were trained to oversee the air raid shelters and to assist Inn staff to tackle fires until the arrival of the fire brigade. Master Kingham recounted "that of which we boasted most at that time was the fact that we had a member of the Bar aged 90 who was delighted and extremely proud that the opportunity should have come to him at his age to do his bit for his King and his Country by doing duty in our Wardens' Post". He added: "The snag about him, however, was that his remarks over the telephone were somewhat unconventional and caused trouble. He did not stay with us very long because his daughter took him away to the country out of danger…"

As is well known, a year passed between the declaration of war and air raids to test the Inn's precautions. London was bombed throughout September, October and November 1940. The first six bombs to fall on the Temple were dropped on 24 September. There is in the Inn's archive a vivid description of the first two, including "I can well remember that night, as the Fireman and the Inn's cashier were with me on the roof of ….Four Elm Court, watching the fireworks, when we heard a noise like the rushing of an express train. This proved to be a bomb which fell in Inner Temple Gardens…….. No sooner had that one landed than once again we heard the same noise and before we could act, except to crouch down, we heard a terrific explosion and the whole of Number Four seemed to rock and sway. This bomb had hit …One Elm Court, demolishing it to the ground. The rocking of the building we put down to our imagination but it was a reality and not fancy. Well, we thought that was enough of that, so as best we could we made our way down to floor level…… the dust that filled the air made breathing not any too easy and our torches would not pierce through the dust clouds, but by putting one foot forward very carefully and relying on our sense of touch we made the ground, where we found two more bombs had fallen …". Another unexploded bomb that night smashed its way to the basement of Six Pump Court. The Fireman and the Porter showed great heroism: "Never will I forget the sight that met our eyes…. There were armchairs, desks, telephones and typewriters all over the place and these had followed the bomb down. We set to work and cleared the cellar and scraped round to find the bomb….

We eventually traced the bomb buried about one foot. It took no time to get it up. We proceeded to carry it to the garden where we rendered it as harmless as possible by well covering it with sandbags."

The Inn's senior Warden gained support from the attitude of the Inn's Fireman and Porter towards bombs: "For them it was just like rain falling". The Porter suggested that if you heard the whine of a falling bomb the safest course was to run towards it. The Warden recalled "spending quite a lot of time running from South to North of the garden toward the falling bombs which in fact were dropping on the other side of the river."

On 15 October, a land-mine attached to a parachute caused a tremendous explosion and widespread damage including the buildings of Crown Office Row, Pump Court, Cloisters, Lamb Building, Brick Court, Essex Court, Plowden Buildings, Garden Court and Temple Gardens. For this Inn the most serious damage was to Hall. A huge piece of masonry was hurled through the east gable, smashing the minstrels' gallery and burying the oak screen under rubble. Much panelling bearing the arms of Readers was torn from the walls. That end of Hall was left open to the sky. Still, most of the double hammer beam roof was intact, the High Table and the Cupboard, at which I now stand, also survived. And, once the screen and panelling were unearthed from the rubble, what had at first appeared to be irreparable damage proved capable of salvage. This took painstaking work, sifting the debris by hand to recover small portions of wood and carvings which were gathered into some 200 sacks and removed for safe keeping and post-war reconstruction.

The Library, a large Victorian building in the garden, then suffered only broken windows but it sustained severe damage on the night of 8th December 1940 when a land mine demolished a large oriel bay window and damaged other windows and the roof. An eye witness recorded that "books, splintered glass, soot, masonry, wood and mould from the garden were heaped to a height of three feet over the whole floor space. The Librarian and his staff, now only two men, the Librarian from Lincoln's Inn and his assistant, and a bencher from that Inn dressed in a boiler suit, together with a woman barrister, a West African student and a bencher of [Middle Temple] began the great work of rescuing 50,000 books from the floors, brushing glass from between their pages, cleaning and stacking them in some tolerable order." Temporary repairs to Hall were also destroyed that night. Work was renewed and Hall was ready to serve lunches by 27 December. On 1 January 1941 another land mine falling in Crown Office Row again smashed all the repair work to Hall, and repairs began for the third time. Despite further damage to the Library, herculean efforts by the Librarian and his staff enabled a working library to open the following day. The fall of the land mine in the garden did however bring a glimmer of solace to the gardener. Long before

the war he had observed how much the soil in the garden needed disturbing. By then virtually every inch of soil had been thoroughly disturbed.

On the night of 10 May 1941 the Temple suffered more devastation than in all the previous raids when high explosive and fire bombs rained down for five hours. An incendiary lodged on the top of Temple Church. A bomb had earlier smashed the water mains and yet again there was insufficient water to extinguish the fire. The church roof fell in, leaving standing only the outer walls of the round church built by the Knights Templar. The fire spread, destroying the Master's House, Christopher Wren's Cloisters, most of Pump Court and Lamb Building, Brick Court, Hare Court and Harcourt Buildings. As in the Great Fire of London, fires continued to smoulder for days.

Fortunately, the enemy then turned its attention to Russia. While there were minor raids in 1943 and one more attack by incendiaries in March 1944 causing damage to nine Middle Temple buildings, including the Hall, the Temple was spared further high explosive attacks. A flying bomb and a rocket heard on 12 December 1944 when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, later known as the Queen Mother, became a Bencher of Middle Temple failed to disturb the occasion. When the war ended on 9 May 1945 there were further fires in the Temple, but they were celebratory bonfires fuelled by broken doors and furniture.

In 1939 there were 285 sets of chambers in Middle Temple, both business and residential. By 1945, 112 sets were completely demolished and 10 too badly damaged to be usable. But, miraculously, in the whole of the war there were no fatalities caused by enemy action in the Temple and, quite as remarkable and almost, if not equally, as important, not a bottle of wine stored in the Middle Temple cellar was broken.

The Temple embarked on the work of reconstruction. Immediate repair work to surviving buildings went ahead but replacement of demolished buildings took much longer given a shortage of materials and labour and protracted negotiations, led by Master Carpmael, with the planning authorities, the Ministry of Works and the War Damage Commission. The Inn sought to resume business as usual fairly quickly, with a temporary library in a prefabricated building in Brick Court opened by the then Queen in November 1946. Hall reopened in July 1949 though not fully reconstructed for another couple of years. In May 1948 Edward Maufe, originally a consultant, became the sole architect for this Inn. The opportunity was taken to remodel parts of the estate and the two Inns exchanged some pieces of land and avoided rebuilding in some places where a demolished building had been awkwardly sited. The Library was rebuilt more conveniently adjoining the Treasury and Hall and opened in November 1958. New chambers were built, with Pump Court completed in 1953, followed by

Lamb Building and Carpmael Building, with Queen Elizabeth Building, on the site of the Victorian Library, completed in 1956. The Church was rededicated in November 1958.

I hope that I have shown how fires have over the centuries brought out the spirit, fellowship, loyalty, ingenuity and resilience of members of Middle Temple and others associated with it, from Royalty to staff, and gradually shaped the Temple we know and love today.