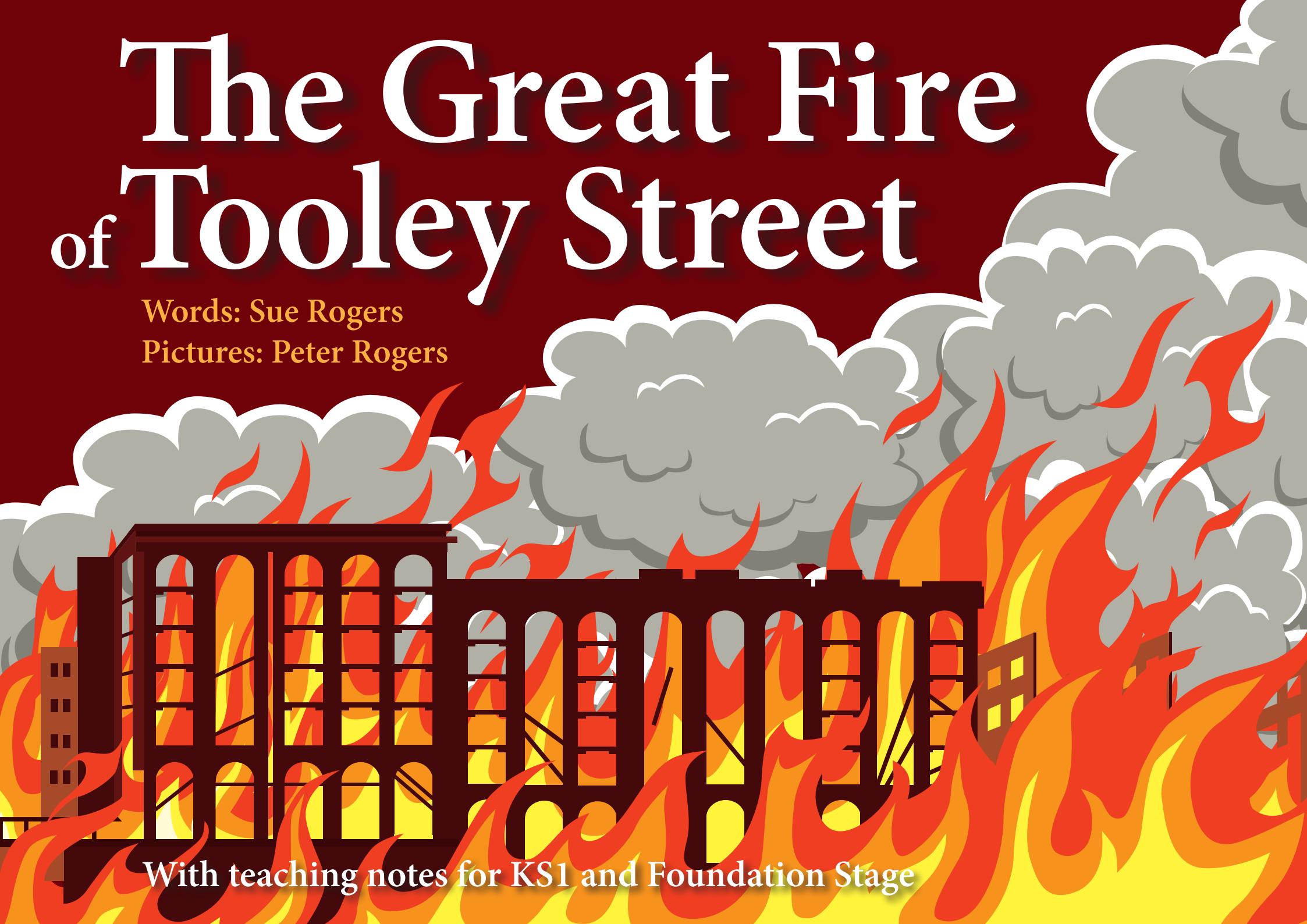


The Great Fire of Tooley Street

Words: Sue Rogers

Pictures: Peter Rogers



With teaching notes for KS1 and Foundation Stage

It was Saturday 22nd June, 1861
and it was late in the afternoon.

“Bertha! Come and help me
bring in the washing.”





As Mum and Bertha took the washing from the line they noticed flecks of grey ash.

“What’s this?” Bertha asked Mum.

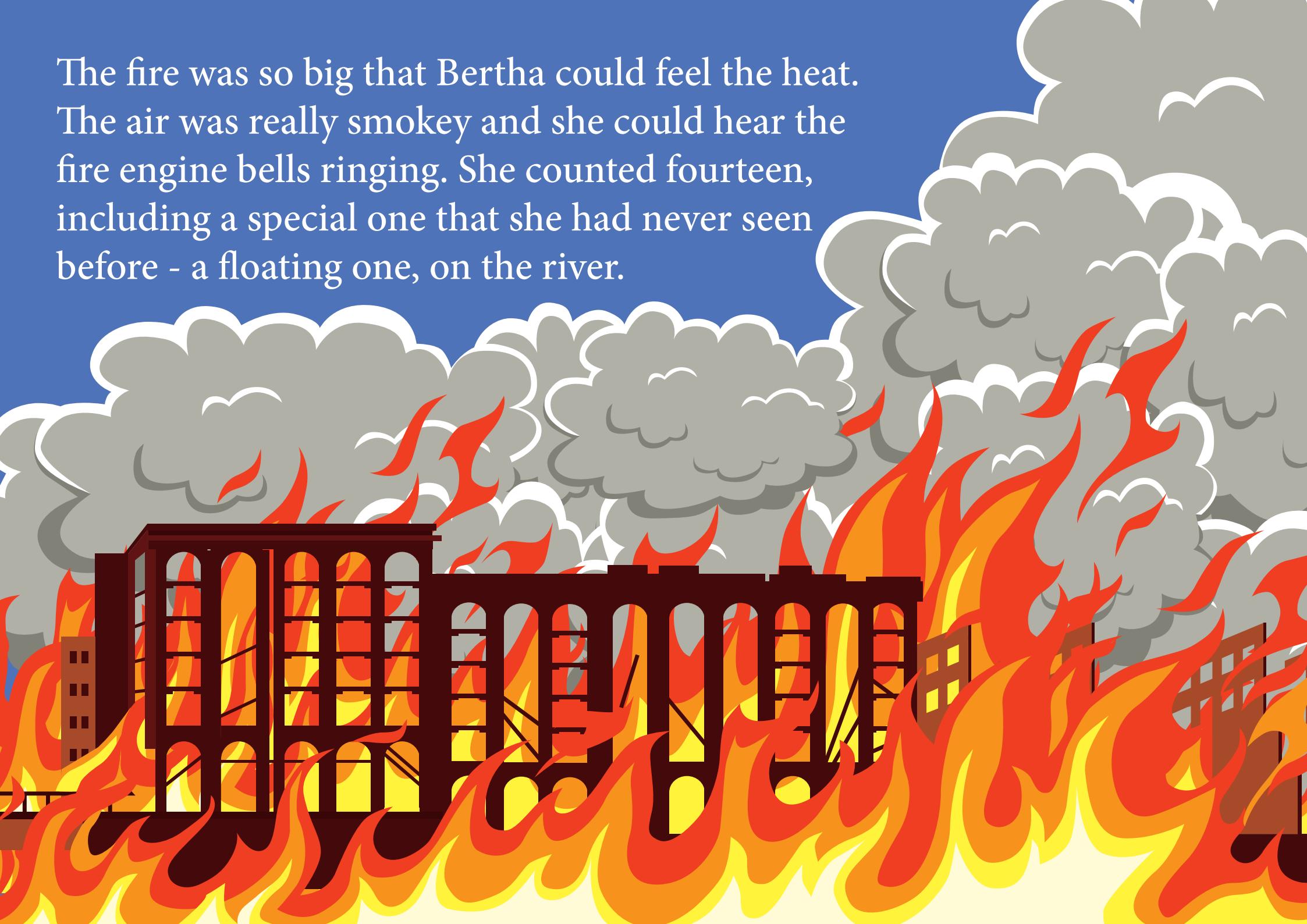
“Looks like there might be a fire somewhere,” Mum replied.

“Can I go and look?” Bertha asked. Mum nodded.



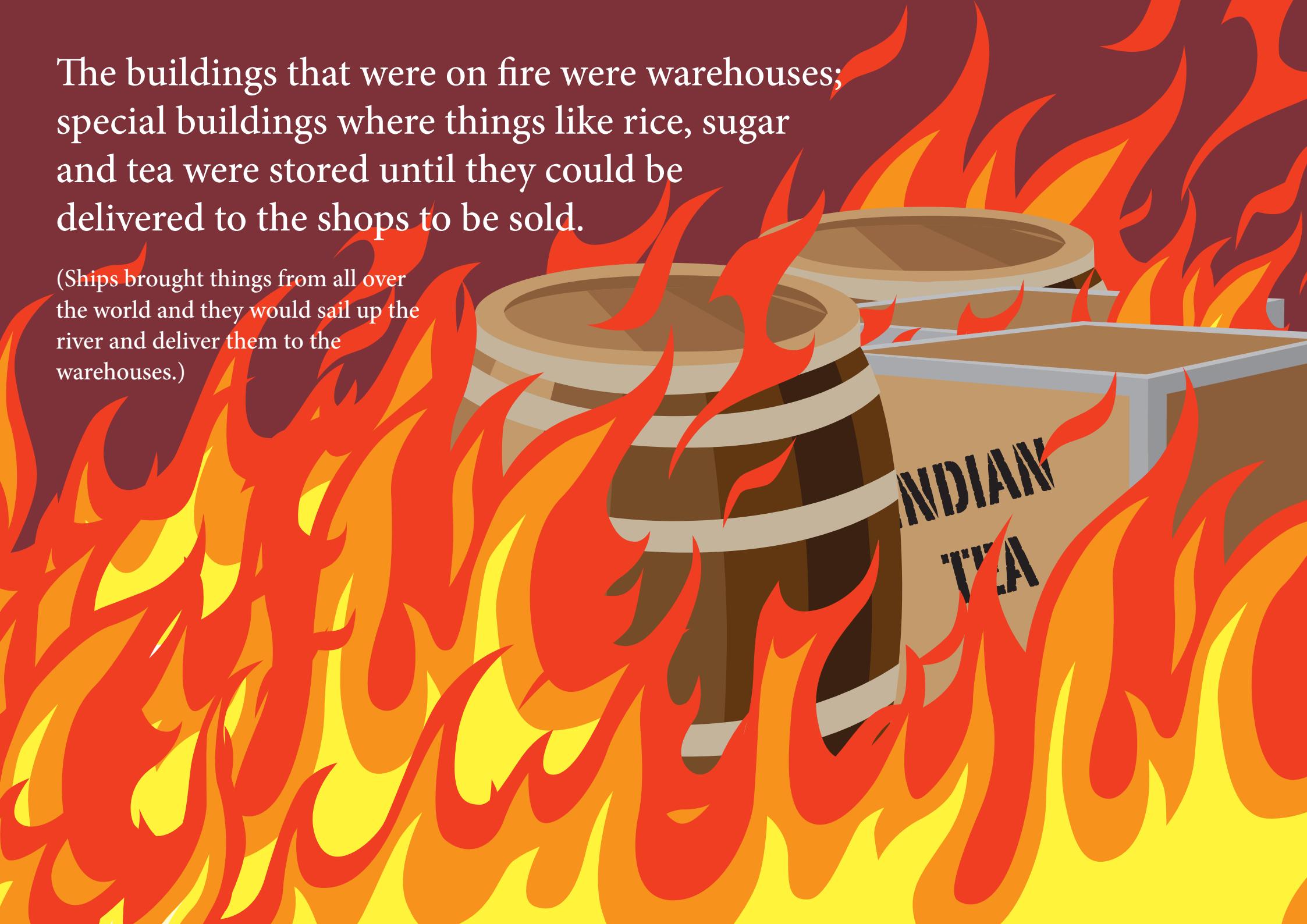
Bertha ran down the road towards London Bridge. She could smell smoke and she knew something exciting was happening. On the bridge lots of people were looking at the river, they were pointing and shouting. She squeezed through their legs so she could see.

The fire was so big that Bertha could feel the heat. The air was really smokey and she could hear the fire engine bells ringing. She counted fourteen, including a special one that she had never seen before - a floating one, on the river.



The buildings that were on fire were warehouses; special buildings where things like rice, sugar and tea were stored until they could be delivered to the shops to be sold.

(Ships brought things from all over the world and they would sail up the river and deliver them to the warehouses.)





Suddenly a lady shouted,
“There isn’t enough water!
The tide is out! They won’t
be able to pump the water
from the river!”

Bertha knew that the
fire was very serious
and that she should
run home and tell her
mum and dad what was
happening.

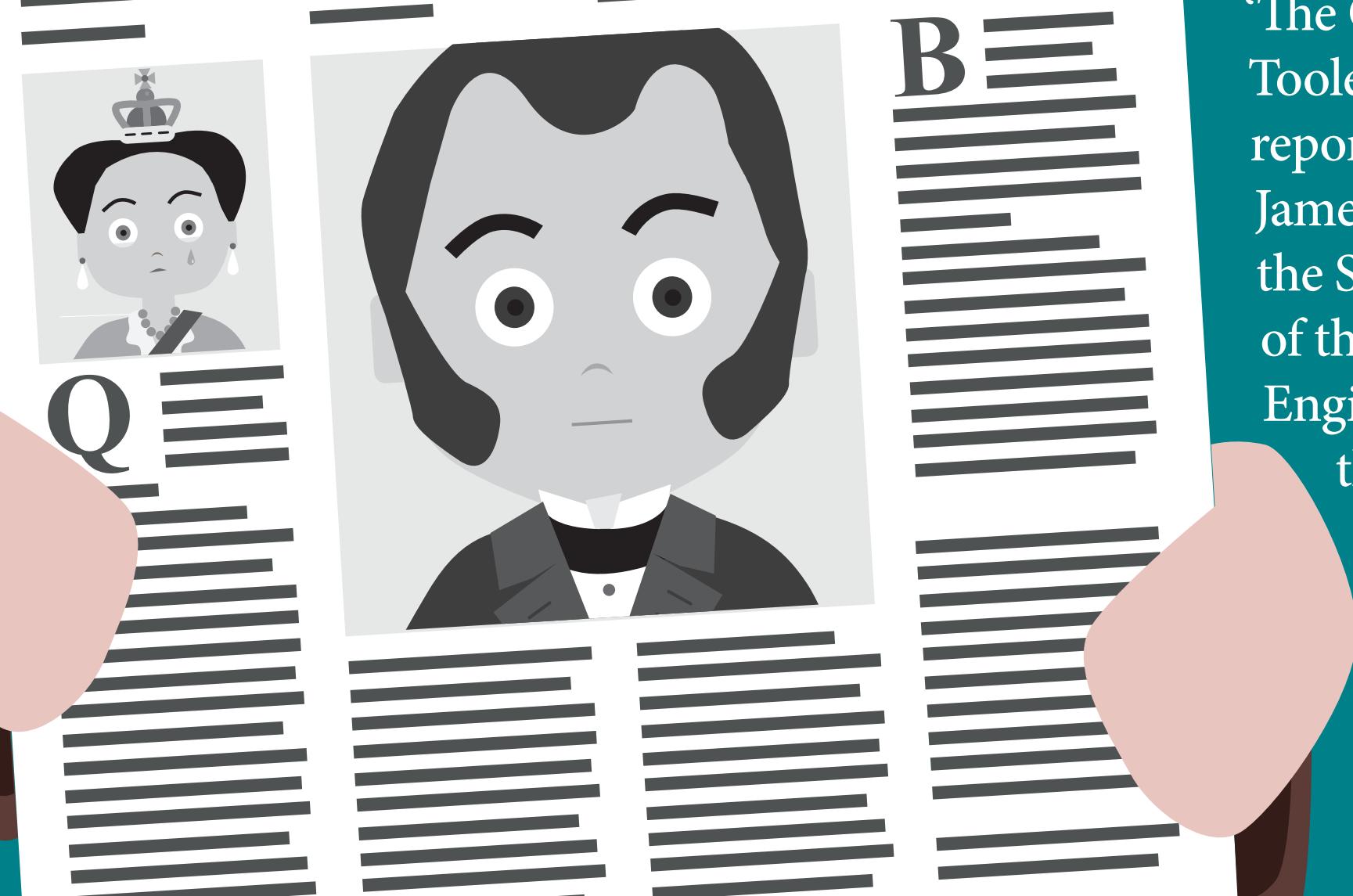


When Bertha reached her
house, she ran in and shouted,
“You have to come and see this!
Hundreds of people are standing on
London Bridge watching the fire - it’s huge!”



Back on the bridge, Mum, Dad and Bertha joined the crowd and watched as the firemen tried to get the fire under control. It was exciting and scary at the same time. Everyone gasped when an explosion caused a big wall to collapse.

DAILY NEWS



The next morning, the front page of the newspaper was all about the fire, 'The Great Fire of Tooley Street'. It reported that Mr James Braidwood, the Superintendent of the London Fire Engines had died in the fire and that Queen Victoria was very sad to have lost such a brave man.



On Monday, after school, Bertha went back to the bridge to see what was happening. The fire was still burning and policemen were on guard because it was so dangerous. It was the same the next day...and the day after...





It took two weeks to put the fire out completely and fire engines came from all over the country to help the London firefighters.

In the years that followed, Bertha and her mum would think about the 'Great Fire of Tooley Street' every time they brought the washing in. Bertha would never forget it.





The Great Fire of Tooley Street



Links to the EYFS: **Understanding the world**

Understanding the world involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community. The frequency and range of children's personal experiences increases their knowledge and sense of the world around them - from visiting parks, libraries and museums to meeting important members of society such as police officers, nurses and firefighters. In addition, listening to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems will foster their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically and ecologically diverse world. As well as building important knowledge, this extends their familiarity with words that support understanding across domains. Enriching and widening children's vocabulary will support later reading comprehension.

ELG: Past and Present

- Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society;
- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class;
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

Notes for teachers

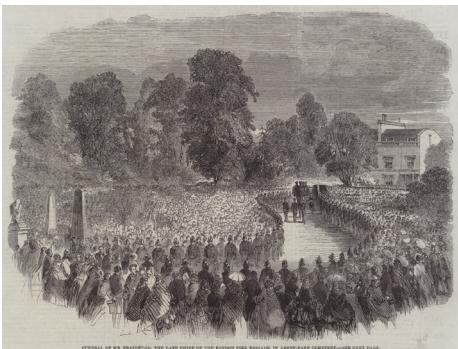
The Great Fire of Tooley Street is a true story of a real event that very few people know about.

It began on the afternoon of Saturday, 22nd June 1861 at Cotton's Wharf, where many warehouses were situated. The buildings were filled with a huge array of goods, including jute, hemp, cotton, spices, tea and coffee, which were all extremely combustible and contributed to the rapid spread of the fire.

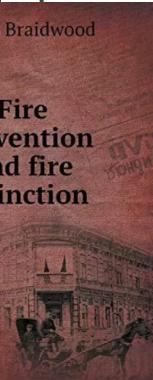
The London Fire Engine Establishment (LFEE) were quick to get to the scene. By 6pm, 14 fire engines, including a steam fire engine and a floating engine, were all fighting the blaze. Read more about it [here](https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/museum/history-and-stories/the-tooley-street-fire/) <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/museum/history-and-stories/the-tooley-street-fire/>

This book was written to help teachers talk to young children about an event that happened in the past and to think about what life was like then. The teaching notes will help you to develop a sequence of lessons on four different themes: James Braidwood - the Father of the British Fire Service; Firefighters and people who help us; the River Thames; Victorian life - doing the laundry. Choose the parts that are relevant to you and the children you are teaching!

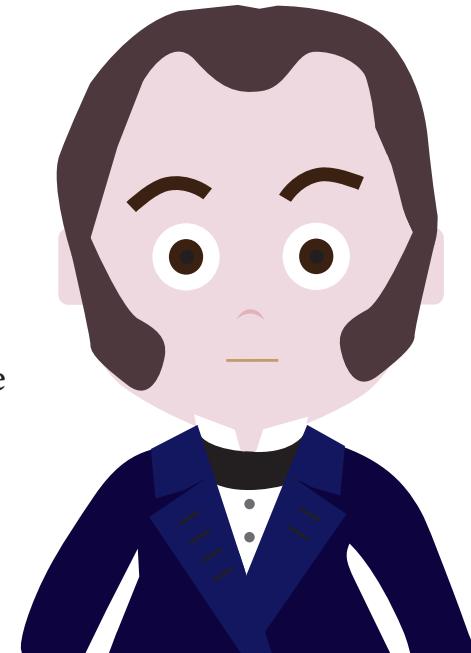
Mr James Braidwood



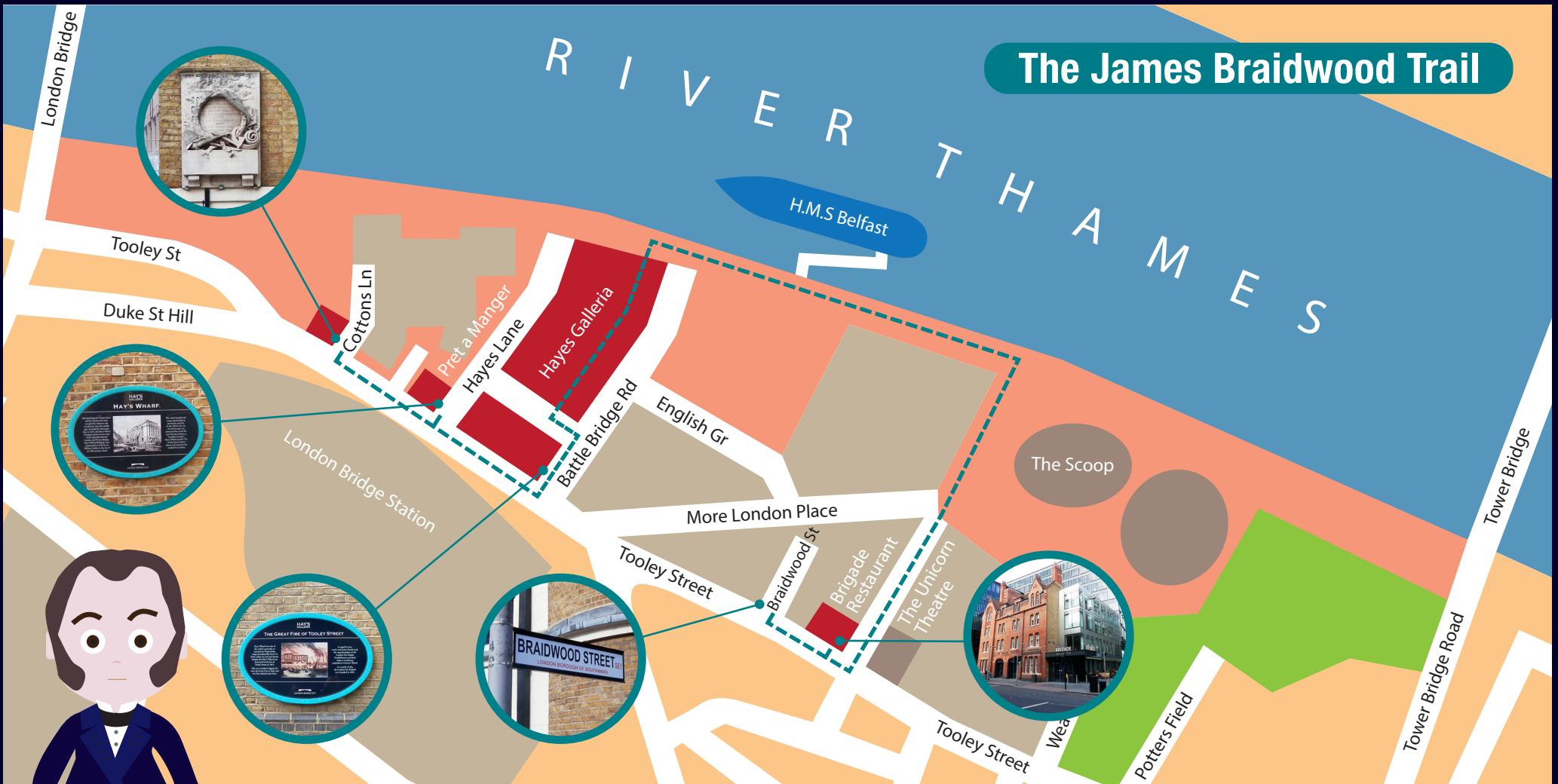
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- James Braidwood was born in Edinburgh in 1800. In 1824, he was appointed 'Master of Fire Engines' in Edinburgh and worked with the city authorities and insurance companies to establish the world's first municipal fire service. Since leaving school he had worked with his father in the building industry where he became interested in building materials and construction and how these could contribute to the spread of fire. With this knowledge he pioneered a scientific approach to firefighting. Two months after his appointment he was recognised for his heroic part in tackling the 'Great Fire of Edinburgh'.
- In 1833 he became head of the new London Fire Engine Establishment which had thirteen fire stations across London, with eighty firefighters. James Braidwood established the principles of firefighting that are still used today and ensured that firefighters were properly trained.
- When the fire broke out in Tooley Street, James was 61 years old. He lead the firefighters himself and was killed when a wall collapsed on him. His funeral drew big crowds, the procession, which included firefighters, police officers and eminent members of Victorian society was almost a mile and half long. He was buried in Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington.
- He left behind a wife and six children.
- In 1830 he wrote a book called, '*On the Construction of Fire Engines and Apparatus: the Training of Firemen, and the Method of Proceeding in Cases of Fire*'. In 1866, '*Fire Prevention and Fire Extinction*' was published posthumously.
 - In the 1930's a London Fire Brigade fireboat was named in his honour, and in 2008 a bronze statue was unveiled in Edinburgh's Parliament Square, commemorating James as the "Father of the British Fire Service".



The James Braidwood Trail



- The trail begins on the corner of Tooley Street and Cottons Lane. High up on the wall is an ornate Victorian memorial stone to the memory of James Braidwood marking the site where he was killed by a falling wall in Cottons Yard. It was erected just 9 months after the fire.
- Walk a few metres further up Tooley Street to Hayes Lane and there you will see a more modern plaque immediately on your left, explaining the history of the old wharfs and warehouses.
- Continue on up Tooley Street, past the frontage of Hayes Galleria and turn left into Battle Bridge Road. Immediately on your left you will see another plaque, similar to the last one, commemorating and giving information about the Great Fire of Tooley Street.
- Continue up Battle Bridge Road and turn left into Hayes Galleria when you can. Walk through the Galleria and out onto the Thames Embankment. The fire stretched along this side of the Thames all the way between these two bridges. The area marked in pink on the map.
- Walk along the embankment towards Tower Bridge. Try to imagine what this might have looked like at the time of the fire. Go up the steps just before you reach The Scoop and head straight through the buildings back to Tooley Street.
- Turn right on Tooley Street and you will find the Brigade Restaurant (139 Tooley Street). This was an old Fire station - built in 1879 and in use until 1928. There is a small statue of James Braidwood displayed in the entrance. The statue is a small copy of the original full size statue in Parliament Square, Edinburgh, his home city.
- Continue on a short distance down Tooley Street and on your right is Braidwood Street - named in his memory. This concludes the James Braidwood Trail.



Firefighters - people who help us



- Firefighters help to protect people in 'emergency situations'. What is an emergency?
- They help with fires, car crashes, chemical spills, flooding and water rescue.
- Help children to understand 'rescue situations' by reading books like: '*The Rescue Party*' by Nick Butterworth; '*Fix it Duck*' and '*Duck in the Truck*' by Jez Alborough; '*The Snail on the Whale*' by Julia Donaldson; '*Chimp and Zee*' by Catherine and Laurence Anholt
- How do you call firefighters to help you in an emergency situation. You call 999.
- Encourage children to role play 'emergency situations' and using phones to dial the emergency services.
- Visit the local fire station or invite a firefighter into school. Many local Fire Brigades offer this service to schools to help children know how to stay safe from fire.
- Staying safe: go for a walk to look for things that help to keep us safe:
 - around school (indoors and outdoors) to look for 'fire alarms' bells and buttons, 'fire exit' signs, 'fire door' signs, (why do fire doors need to be kept closed?), smoke detectors, sprinkler systems etc.
 - the streets around the school to look for 'fire gate' signs, 'fire assembly point' signs, water hydrants etc.
- What are the things that are 'dangerous' and could cause a fire (candles, matches, lighters, plug sockets, electric heaters). Why are they dangerous?
- Old and new fire engines: how have they changed?

Related texts:

'Firefighter Ruby: Because Girls Can Be Heroes Too!'
by Emma Greenhalgh and Sarah-Leigh Wills;
'Real Superheroes' Julia Seal



The River Thames

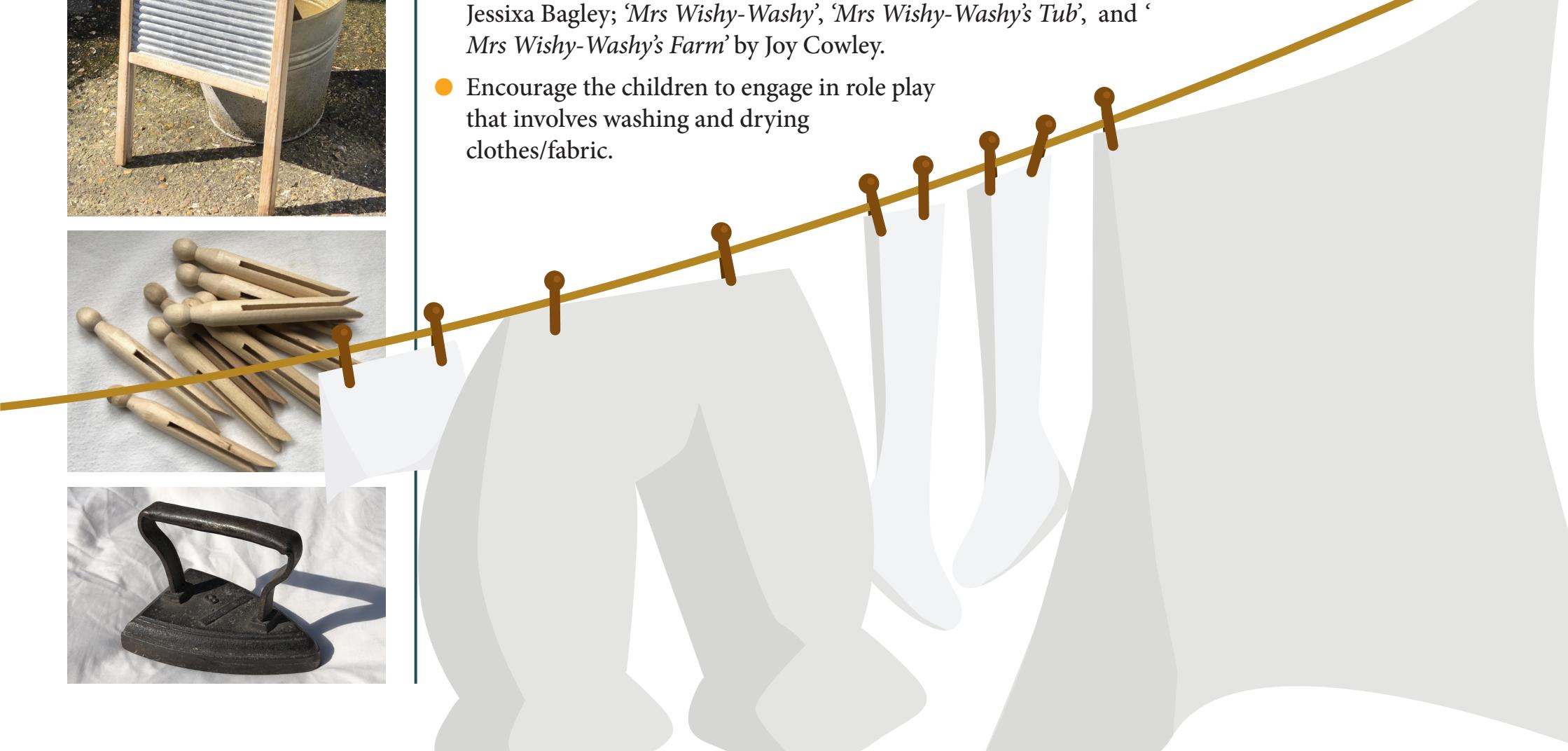


- What is a river? Is there a river near to where you live? Is it a big river or a small river? Can you go and see it? The River Thames is a big river.
- Thames River fire boats are called 'Wave Patrollers'. They are used to put out fires, rescue boats that are in trouble and to rescue people and animals from water and mud.
- What is 'high tide' and 'low tide'? Do all rivers have high tides and low tides?
- Why is the Thames an important river? It is because of the Thames that London is the capital city of the country. Ships were able to come from all over the world and access the 'Port of London' easily via the river. Look at the River Thames on a map; where does the river end and the sea begin.
- At the beginning of the 1800's 'docks' were established in London so that goods could be imported in greater quantities. Docks made the loading and unloading of ships easy and nearby 'warehouses' provided storage facilities until things were sold on. The 'wharfs' along the river also provided 'acres' of storage. The docks drew produce and people from all over the world. The photo (bottom left) is of a three dimensional map of the original Surrey Docks, as they were. It can be found at the top of Stave Hill in Rotherhithe - a great place to visit! What products do we need to import and why? Where do things like bananas come from and how do they get here?
- Getting over rivers: bridges, ferries and tunnels. The Thames has many bridges and several tunnels including the Blackwall and Rotherhithe Tunnels; the Greenwich Foot Tunnel; Brunel's Thames Tunnel (Rotherhithe to Wapping) - which has been sealed off for many years, and has been referred to as "the eighth wonder of the world". Children could build their own bridges from different materials and construction toys. (Related text: '*Iggy Peck Architect*' by Andrea Beaty.)



Bertha and the washing

- Bertha was born in 1853, that's more than 150 years ago. Washing machines, tumble dryers and electric irons hadn't been invented. Doing the washing was hard work! How did they do their washing? Victorian washboards, pegs, flat irons and bars of soap are very easy to source for children to experience first hand and talk about how they worked.
- Read books such as: '*Doing the Washing*' by Sarah Garland; '*Mrs Lather's Laundry*' by Ahlberg and Amstutz; '*Laundry Day*' by Karen Hjemboe; '*Laundry Day*' by Jessixa Bagley; '*Mrs Wishy-Washy*', '*Mrs Wishy-Washy's Tub*', and '*Mrs Wishy-Washy's Farm*' by Joy Cowley.
- Encourage the children to engage in role play that involves washing and drying clothes/fabric.



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