

***WILLIAM HARRISON
AINSWORTH***



***OLD
ST. PAUL'S***

William Harrison Ainsworth

Old St Paul's

Enriched edition.

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Paige
Caldwell*

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Introduction

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Between the stone permanence of a sacred landmark and the swift, unseen forces of disease and flame, *Old St Paul's* explores how a great city tests the limits of faith, authority, and human fellowship when ordinary life yields to calamity, tracing the movement from crowded markets to hushed sickrooms, from civic ritual to desperate improvisation, and from private vows to public reckonings, as London's physical fabric and moral imagination are strained, revealed, and remade by successive shocks that turn streets into corridors of fear, charity into courage, and spectacle into a reckoning with what can be preserved, and what must be let go.

William Harrison Ainsworth's *Old St Paul's* is a historical novel set in seventeenth-century London during the twin crises known as the Great Plague of 1665 and the Great Fire of 1666, with the medieval cathedral at its symbolic and geographic heart. First released in the early Victorian era, the book belongs to the popular historical romance tradition that blended panoramic urban spectacle with urgent, incident-driven plotting. Ainsworth's narrative situates readers amid alleyways, parish yards, and civic halls, attentive to pageantry and peril alike, and uses the city's monumental architecture to anchor a story of ordinary people confronting extraordinary pressures across a compressed, tumultuous span of time.

Without presuming foreknowledge beyond the era, the novel follows an ensemble of Londoners whose paths converge around Old St Paul's as illness creeps through neighborhoods and rumors outpace remedies. Scenes shift from bustling commerce to private households, from church rites to urgent civic debates, creating an immersive sense of movement through a living city. The voice is omniscient,

vivid, and often theatrical, favoring strong contrasts, swift turns, and sharply sketched types while reserving space for quiet moral reflection. The tone balances sensational urgency with earnest sympathy, inviting readers to witness danger, discipline, and devotion without surrendering to despair or cynicism.

At its core, the book probes how communities negotiate responsibility under stress: who leads, who serves, who profits, and who sacrifices when fear becomes a daily measure. It explores the tensions between faith and fatalism, medicine and superstition, order and chaos, and sets charity against opportunism in moments when help is costly. Old St Paul's also treats architecture as memory, presenting sacred space as a repository of civic identity that must weather both material threat and ethical trial. Time itself is a theme, as characters confront the brevity of safety and the urgency of choice within a swiftly changing urban landscape.

Ainsworth's craft emphasizes movement and spectacle without neglecting texture: street sounds swell and recede, public notices appear and vanish, and figures traverse shadowed lanes under a constant pressure of rumor and duty, all rendered with sensory insistence. The novel's episodic energy, typical of early Victorian storytelling, produces set pieces that feel theatrical yet grounded in social detail, from market negotiations to parish relief efforts. The result is a city portrait that operates almost as a character, crowded with competing voices and pressures. Yet the effect is not merely panoramic; the narrative pauses for conscience and care, showing how small acts of prudence and pity can defy catastrophe.

Read today, Old St Paul's resonates with present concerns about contagion, public health, and the uneven burdens of crisis. It captures the traction of rumor, the strain on caregivers and essential workers, and the dilemma of weighing liberty against collective safety, all in a dense

urban setting where proximity is both strength and hazard. The novel also speaks to debates about infrastructure, resilience, and the stewardship of cultural heritage under threat, asking what must be preserved and how communities decide. In this way, its seventeenth-century calamities mirror current anxieties, offering a historical lens that clarifies rather than distorts the present.

To approach Old St Paul's now is to encounter a vigorously told story that makes catastrophe legible without diminishing its human cost, and that imagines recovery as an ethical as well as a material task. Its blend of urgency, atmosphere, and moral inquiry invites readers to measure courage not only by heroics but by constancy, mutual care, and honest reckoning with risk. The novel matters because it frames crisis as a test of civic imagination, asking how a city can remain itself while changing, and how people can keep faith with one another when familiar structures tremble and new ones demand to be built.

Synopsis

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Old St Paul's: A Tale of the Plague and the Fire, first published in 1841 by William Harrison Ainsworth, unfolds across Restoration London as epidemic and conflagration remake the city. Anchored to the great medieval cathedral, the narrative follows apprentice Leonard Holt, his master, the conscientious grocer Stephen Bloundel, and Bloundel's daughter, Amabel, whose safety becomes the touchstone of private duty. Ainsworth frames the era's competing impulses—piety, commerce, and pleasure—against the mounting threat of contagion. Streets, markets, and the cathedral's vast interior form a continuous stage where personal ambitions and civic obligations intersect, hinting at how private affections will be tested by calamity.

With plague reports multiplying, Bloundel resolves on stringent self-preservation, sealing his household and rationing food with methodical care. His decision foregrounds themes of vigilance and restraint, setting a domestic counterpoint to the city's swelling panic. Outside, the civic machinery strains under watchmen, pesthouses, and shut-up houses marked with ominous signs. Ainsworth introduces figures who exploit disaster, notably grasping undertakers and ruthless plague-nurses, whose trade thrives amid despair. Leonard navigates shuttered streets and perilous errands, forced to weigh obedience to his master against the demands of compassion. The cathedral, now crowded with the displaced, becomes both sanctuary and marketplace, a barometer of mounting distress.

As the epidemic deepens, the plot entwines private peril with the allure and corruption of the Restoration court. A dissolute nobleman sets his sights on Amabel, drawing her family into a collision between sober principle and

fashionable license. Leonard's vigilance hardens into purpose as he counters schemes designed to separate him from those he would protect. The city's moral spectrum broadens in crowded aisles and shadowed chapels of Old St Paul's, where profiteers mingle with penitents. A visionary figure, Solomon Eagle, roams as a living warning, while rumors and remedies circulate, testing whether faith, prudence, or appetite will guide survival.

The narrative's middle movement surveys London's methods and failures of care. Physicians and clergy labor amid fear, and a humane doctor offers counsel and aid without miracle cures. Watchmen enforce quarantines of doubtful effectiveness, burial pits broaden, and the dead-carts rattle well beyond capacity. Leonard's efforts carry him through lanes where kindness and cruelty exist side by side, including encounters with a notorious nurse whose ministrations often conceal extortion. The cathedral's nave, once a notorious promenade, is reclaimed as a makeshift dormitory and storehouse, allowing Ainsworth to contrast sacred space with emergency utility while questions of conscience grow more acute.

When the Great Fire breaks out, the novel pivots from pestilence to conflagration without abandoning its moral compass. Ainsworth tracks the spread of flames from narrow lanes into the heart of the City, describing bucket lines, demolition crews, and the contested orders to pull down houses. The fate of Old St Paul's becomes central as wind-borne sparks meet scaffolding, timber, and stored materials that render the ancient fabric vulnerable. Crowds surge between flight and salvage, thieves shadow panicked citizens, and officials struggle to coordinate relief. The imagery of collapsing roofs and molten lead reframes catastrophe as both spectacle and reckoning.

Personal destinies crest within this public emergency. The young apprentice's courage is measured against hazards that strip away pretense, while the would-be seducer and

the plague-profiteers press their advantage in the confusion. Rescues, betrayals, and narrow escapes occur in streets blazing like furnaces and in precincts where the cathedral's stones radiate heat. Decisions about loyalty, forgiveness, and justice arrive under literal and figurative pressure, and antagonisms forged during the epidemic reach their conclusion amid falling masonry. Ainsworth preserves suspense by keeping outcomes contingent on character rather than chance, ensuring that final recognitions feel earned without dulling the urgency of the spectacle.

Beyond its plot, the novel endures for its panoramic anatomy of crisis and its portrait of a metropolis at a hinge of history. Old St Paul's serves as emblem and witness, an edifice whose trials mirror the testing of social bonds and personal consciences. Ainsworth's blend of romance, reportage, and moral inquiry situates private love within questions of governance, charity, and public order. Without relying on revelation for effect, the book locates meaning in conduct under strain, making its evocation of plague and fire resonate beyond the seventeenth century. Its closing notes affirm both loss and the possibility of civic renewal.

Historical Context

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William Harrison Ainsworth's *Old St Paul's* (1841) is a historical romance set in Restoration London during 1665–1666. Its action centers on Old St Paul's Cathedral and the surrounding wards of the City, a jurisdiction governed by the Lord Mayor and aldermen alongside the monarchy of Charles II and the restored Church of England. The narrative unfolds amid two defining disasters: the Great Plague and the Great Fire. Ainsworth situates characters within parishes, livery companies, markets, and hospitals, emphasizing recognizable streets and institutions. The work uses the cathedral's fabric and precincts to frame questions of faith, authority, charity, and urban resilience under severe strain.

By the 1660s, Old St Paul's was an immense but deteriorated Gothic monument. Its medieval spire had been destroyed by lightning in 1561, and Inigo Jones added a classical portico and repaired parts of the west front in the 1630s under royal and episcopal patronage. The nave, long known as "Paul's Walk," served as a meeting place for news and business, while St Paul's Churchyard housed the book trade. Civil War and Commonwealth neglect left the fabric damaged and cluttered. On the eve of the Fire, scaffolding and materials stood for long-delayed repairs, as the cathedral remained central to London's civic and religious life.

Restoration politics and culture shape the backdrop. Charles II returned in 1660, episcopacy was reestablished, and the Church of England's rites and governance were secured by statutes often called the Clarendon Code, including the Act of Uniformity (1662), Conventicle Act (1664), and Five Mile Act (1665). The City's lord mayoralty,

livery companies, and parish vestries regulated trade, welfare, and order. Theatres reopened under royal patents, coffeehouses proliferated, and the Royal Society received a royal charter in 1662, promoting experimental philosophy. War with the Dutch (Second Anglo-Dutch War, 1665–1667) strained finances and morale, intensifying anxieties that the novel situates within crowded urban spaces.

The Great Plague of London reached its height in 1665. Weekly Bills of Mortality, compiled by parish clerks, recorded 68,596 deaths from plague, with modern estimates of total mortality in the metropolis reaching roughly 75,000–100,000. Civic “Plague Orders” mandated shutting infected houses for weeks, marking doors with a red cross and the plea “Lord have mercy upon us,” and appointing watchmen. Women “searchers” certified causes of death; pesthouses, parish relief, and parish burial teams attempted containment. Physicians and magistrates recommended fumigation and quarantines. Contemporary observers such as Samuel Pepys described deserted streets, shuttered shops, and parish struggles around the cathedral’s neighborhoods.

The epidemic reordered city life. Many who could leave fled to the countryside; court and government business were intermittently displaced, and law terms were disrupted. Trade faltered, while the poor, servants, and artisans often remained. Parish and livery-company charities expanded alms for food, fuel, and burials. Hospitals such as St Bartholomew’s and St Thomas’s strained to cope. Nighttime interments and large burial pits were reported in several parishes. Clergy preached fasts and repentance, yet practical measures—nuisance removal, closure of playhouses, and regulation of markets—also featured prominently. These well-documented pressures encircle Old St Paul’s in the novel’s depiction of London under pestilence.

The Great Fire erupted on 2 September 1666 in Thomas Farriner's bakehouse on Pudding Lane and, driven by wind through narrow timbered streets, burned for days. Initial hesitation by officials, including Lord Mayor Sir Thomas Bludworth, gave way to royal direction as the king and Duke of York urged firebreaks and gunpowder demolitions. St Paul's Cathedral ignited on 4 September; scaffolding and printed stock stored around the churchyard added fuel, and the lead roof melted. By 6 September the main conflagration was contained. About 13,000 houses and 87 parish churches were destroyed, along with the Royal Exchange and Guildhall.

Reconstruction began under new legislation. Parliament's Act for Rebuilding the City of London (1666, implemented 1667) set street widths, mandated brick and stone, and created the Fire Court to settle property disputes swiftly. Christopher Wren, appointed Surveyor of the King's Works in 1669, designed a new cathedral; the first stone was laid in 1675, and St Paul's was declared complete in 1710. Robert Hooke served the City as surveyor, helping to realign streets and parishes. Coal duties financed church works. Fifty-one parish churches rose under Wren and colleagues, and the rebuilt St Paul's became a potent emblem of restored civic and ecclesiastical order.

Ainsworth's portrayal draws on well-attested events and places, using catastrophe to examine conduct, belief, and governance in a teeming metropolis. Published in 1841, amid Victorian debates over urban health, policing, and historic architecture, the novel's emphasis on public order, charity, and institutional responsibility resonates with contemporary concerns. Its attention to the cathedral's fate echoes nineteenth-century fascination with medieval survivals and monumental rebuilding. By foregrounding officially recorded crises—the Plague and the Fire—and the recognizable machinery of City and Church, *Old St Paul's* reflects on authority under pressure and offers a critique

that links moral failure and civic renewal without departing from documented history.

Old St Paul's

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The portion of the ensuing Tale relating to the Grocer of Wood-street, and his manner of victualling his house, and shutting up himself and his family within it during the worst part of the Plague of 1665, is founded on a narrative, which I have followed pretty closely in most of its details, contained in a very rare little volume, entitled, "*Preparations against the Plague, both of Soul and Body*," the authorship of which I have no hesitation in assigning to Defoe. Indeed, I venture to pronounce it his masterpiece. It is strange that this matchless performance should have hitherto escaped attention, and that it should not have been reprinted with some one of the countless impressions of the "*History of the Plague of London*," to which it forms an almost necessary accompaniment. The omission, I trust, will be repaired by Mr. Hazlitt the younger, Defoe's last and best editor, in his valuable edition of the works of that great novelist and political writer, now in the course of publication. It may be added, that a case precisely similar to that of the Grocer, and attended with the same happy results, occurred during the Plague of Marseilles, in 1720.

For my acquaintance with this narrative, as well as for the suggestion of its application to the present purpose, I am indebted to my friend, Mr. James Crossley, of Manchester.

Kensal Manor House, Harrow Road,
November 30, 1841.

BOOK THE FIRST.

APRIL, 1665.

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I. THE GROCER OF WOOD-STREET AND HIS FAMILY.

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One night, at the latter end of April, 1665, the family of a citizen of London carrying on an extensive business as a grocer in Wood-street, Cheapside, were assembled, according to custom, at prayer. The grocer's name was Stephen Bloundel. His family consisted of his wife, three sons, and two daughters. He had, moreover, an apprentice; an elderly female serving as cook; her son, a young man about five-and-twenty, filling the place of porter to the shop and general assistant; and a kitchen-maid. The whole household attended; for the worthy grocer, being a strict observer of his religious duties, as well as a rigid disciplinarian in other respects, suffered no one to be absent, on any plea whatever, except indisposition, from morning and evening devotions; and these were always performed at stated times. In fact, the establishment was conducted with the regularity of clockwork, it being the aim of its master not to pass a single hour of the day unprofitably.

The ordinary prayers gone through, Stephen Bloundel offered up along and fervent supplication to the Most High for protection against the devouring pestilence with which the city was then scourged. He acknowledged that this terrible visitation had been justly brought upon it by the wickedness of its inhabitants; that they deserved their doom, dreadful though it was; that, like the dwellers in Jerusalem before it was given up to ruin and desolation, they "had mocked the messengers of God and despised His word;" that in the language of the prophet, "they had refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and

stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, had made their heart like an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law and the words which the Lord of Hosts had sent in his spirit by the former prophets." He admitted that great sins require great chastisement, and that the sins of London were enormous; that it was filled with strifes, seditions, heresies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and every kind of abomination; that the ordinances of God were neglected, and all manner of vice openly practised; that, despite repeated warnings and afflictions less grievous than the present, these vicious practices had been persisted in. All this he humbly acknowledged. But he implored a gracious Providence, in consideration of his few faithful servants, to spare the others yet a little longer, and give them a last chance of repentance and amendment; or, if this could not be, and their utter extirpation was inevitable, that the habitations of the devout might be exempted from the general destruction—might be places of refuge, as Zoar^[1] was to Lot. He concluded by earnestly exhorting those around him to keep constant watch upon themselves; not to murmur at God's dealings and dispensations; but so to comport themselves, that "they might be able to stand in the day of wrath, in the day of death, and in the day of judgment." The exhortation produced a powerful effect upon its hearers, and they arose, some with serious, others with terrified looks.

Before proceeding further, it may be desirable to show in what manner the dreadful pestilence referred to by the grocer commenced, and how far its ravages had already extended. Two years before, namely, in 1663, more than a third of the population of Amsterdam was carried off by a desolating plague. Hamburgh was also grievously afflicted about the same time, and in the same manner. Notwithstanding every effort to cut off communication with these states, the insidious disease found its way into England by means of some bales of merchandise, as it was

suspected, at the latter end of the year 1664, when two persons died suddenly, with undoubted symptoms of the distemper, in Westminster. Its next appearance was at a house in Long Acre, and its victims two Frenchmen, who had brought goods from the Levant. Smothered for a short time, like a fire upon which coals had been heaped, it broke out with fresh fury in several places.

The consternation now began. The whole city was panic-stricken: nothing was talked of but the plague—nothing planned but means of arresting its progress—one grim and ghastly idea possessed the minds of all. Like a hideous phantom stalking the streets at noon-day, and scaring all in its path, Death took his course through London, and selected his prey at pleasure. The alarm was further increased by the predictions confidently made as to the vast numbers who would be swept away by the visitation; by the prognostications of astrologers; by the prophesyings of enthusiasts; by the denunciations of preachers, and by the portents and prodigies reported to have occurred. During the long and frosty winter preceding this fatal year, a comet appeared in the heavens, the sickly colour of which was supposed to forebode the judgment about to follow. Blazing stars and other meteors, of a lurid hue and strange and preternatural shape, were likewise seen. The sun was said to have set in streams of blood, and the moon to have shown without reflecting a shadow; grisly shapes appeared at night—strange clamours and groans were heard in the air—hearses, coffins, and heaps of unburied dead were discovered in the sky, and great cakes and clots of blood were found in the Tower moat; while a marvellous double tide occurred at London Bridge. All these prodigies were currently reported, and in most cases believed[1q].

The severe frost, before noticed, did not break up till the end of February, and with the thaw the plague frightfully increased in violence. From Drury-lane it spread along Holborn, eastward as far as Great Turnstile, and westward to

Saint Giles's Pound, and so along the Tyburn-road. Saint Andrew's, Holborn, was next infected; and as this was a much more populous parish than the former, the deaths were more numerous within it. For a while, the disease was checked by Fleet Ditch; it then leaped this narrow boundary, and ascending the opposite hill, carried fearful devastation into Saint James's, Clerkenwell. At the same time, it attacked Saint Bride's; thinned the ranks of the thievish horde haunting Whitefriars, and proceeding in a westerly course, decimated Saint Clement Danes.

Hitherto, the city had escaped. The destroyer had not passed Ludgate or Newgate, but environed the walls like a besieging enemy. A few days, however, before the opening of this history, fine weather having commenced, the horrible disease began to grow more rife, and laughing all precautions and impediments to scorn, broke out in the very heart of the stronghold—namely, in Bearbinder-lane, near Stock's Market, where nine persons died.

At a season so awful, it may be imagined how an impressive address, like that delivered by the grocer, would be received by those who saw in the pestilence, not merely an overwhelming scourge from which few could escape, but a direct manifestation of the Divine displeasure. Not a word was said. Blaize Shotterel, the porter, and old Josyna, his mother, together with Patience, the other woman-servant, betook themselves silently, and with troubled countenances, to the kitchen. Leonard Holt, the apprentice, lingered for a moment to catch a glance from the soft blue eyes of Amabel, the grocer's eldest daughter (for even the plague was a secondary consideration with him when she was present), and failing in the attempt, he heaved a deep sigh, which was luckily laid to the account of the discourse he had just listened to by his sharp-sighted master, and proceeded to the shop, where he busied himself in arranging matters for the night.

Having just completed his twenty-first year, and his apprenticeship being within a few months of its expiration, Leonard Holt began to think of returning to his native town of Manchester, where he intended to settle, and where he had once fondly hoped the fair Amabel would accompany him, in the character of his bride. Not that he had ever ventured to declare his passion, nor that he had received sufficient encouragement to make it matter of certainty that if he did so declare himself, he should be accepted; but being both "proper and tall," and having tolerable confidence in his good looks, he had made himself, up to a short time prior to his introduction to the reader, quite easy on the point.

His present misgivings were occasioned by Amabel's altered manner towards him, and by a rival who, he had reason to fear, had completely superseded him in her good graces. Brought up together from an early age, the grocer's daughter and the young apprentice had at first regarded each other as brother and sister. By degrees, the feeling changed; Amabel became more reserved, and held little intercourse with Leonard, who, busied with his own concerns, thought little about her. But, as he grew towards manhood, he could not remain insensible to her extraordinary beauty—for extraordinary it was, and such as to attract admiration wherever she went, so that the "Grocer's Daughter" became the toast among the ruffling gallants of the town, many of whom sought to obtain speech with her. Her parents, however, were far too careful to permit any such approach. Amabel's stature was lofty; her limbs slight, but exquisitely symmetrical; her features small, and cast in the most delicate mould; her eyes of the softest blue; and her hair luxuriant, and of the finest texture and richest brown. Her other beauties must be left to the imagination; but it ought not to be omitted that she was barely eighteen, and had all the freshness, the innocence, and vivacity of that most charming period of woman's

existence. No wonder she ravished every heart. No wonder, in an age when love-making was more general even than now, that she was beset by admirers. No wonder her father's apprentice became desperately enamoured of her, and proportionately jealous.

And this brings us to his rival. On the 10th of April, two gallants, both richly attired, and both young and handsome, dismounted before the grocer's door, and, leaving their steeds to the care of their attendants, entered the shop. They made sundry purchases of preserves, figs, and other dried fruit, chatted familiarly with the grocer, and tarried so long, that at last he began to suspect they must have some motive. All at once, however, they disagreed on some slight matter—Bloundel could not tell what, nor, perhaps, could the disputants, even if their quarrel was not preconcerted—high words arose, and in another moment, swords were drawn, and furious passes exchanged. The grocer called to his eldest son, a stout youth of nineteen, and to Leonard Holt, to separate them. The apprentice seized his cudgel—no apprentice in those days was without one—and rushed towards the combatants, but before he could interfere, the fray was ended. One of them had received a thrust through the sword arm, and his blade dropping, his antagonist declared himself satisfied, and with a grave salute walked off. The wounded man wrapped a lace handkerchief round his arm, but immediately afterwards complained of great faintness. Pitying his condition, and suspecting no harm, the grocer led him into an inner room, where restoratives were offered by Mrs. Bloundel and her daughter Amabel, both of whom had been alarmed by the noise of the conflict. In a short time, the wounded man was so far recovered as to be able to converse with his assistants, especially the younger one; and the grocer having returned to the shop, his discourse became so very animated and tender, that Mrs. Bloundel deemed it prudent to give her daughter a hint to retire. Amabel reluctantly obeyed, for the young stranger

was so handsome, so richly dressed, had such a captivating manner, and so distinguished an air, that she was strongly prepossessed in his favour. A second look from her mother, however, caused her to disappear, nor did she return. After waiting with suppressed anxiety for some time, the young gallant departed, overwhelming the good dame with his thanks, and entreating permission to call again. This was peremptorily refused, but, notwithstanding the interdiction, he came on the following day. The grocer chanced to be out at the time, and the gallant, who had probably watched him go forth, deriding the remonstrances of the younger Bloundel and Leonard, marched straight to the inner room, where he found the dame and her daughter. They were much disconcerted at his appearance, and the latter instantly rose with the intention of retiring, but the gallant caught her arm and detained her.

"Do not fly me, Amabel," he cried, in an impassioned tone, "but suffer me to declare the love I have for you. I cannot live without you."

Amabel, whose neck and cheeks were crimsoned with blushes, cast down her eyes before the ardent regards of the gallant, and endeavoured to withdraw her hand.

"One word only," he continued, "and I release you. Am I wholly indifferent to you! Answer me—yes or no!"

"Do *not* answer him, Amabel," interposed her mother. "He is deceiving you. He loves you not. He would ruin you. This is the way with all these court butterflies. Tell him you hate him, child, and bid him begone."

"But I cannot tell him an untruth, mother," returned Amabel, artlessly, "for I do *not* hate him."

"Then you love me," cried the young man, falling on his knees, and pressing her hand to his lips. "Tell me so, and make me the happiest of men."

But Amabel had now recovered from the confusion into which she had been thrown, and, alarmed at her own indiscretion, forcibly withdrew her hand, exclaiming in a cold

tone, and with much natural dignity, "Arise, sir. I will not tolerate these freedoms. My mother is right—you have some ill design."

"By my soul, no!" cried the gallant, passionately. "I love you, and would make you mine."

"No doubt," remarked Mrs. Bloundel, contemptuously, "but not by marriage."

"Yes, by marriage," rejoined the gallant, rising. "If she will consent, I will wed her forthwith."

Both Amabel and her mother looked surprised at the young man's declaration, which was uttered with a fervour that seemed to leave no doubt of its sincerity; but the latter, fearing some artifice, replied, "If what you say is true, and you really love my daughter as much as you pretend, this is not the way to win her; for though she can have no pretension to wed with one of your seeming degree, nor is it for her happiness that she should, yet, were she sought by the proudest noble in the land, she shall never, if I can help it, be lightly won. If your intentions are honourable, you must address yourself, in the first place, to her father, and if he agrees (which I much doubt) that you shall become her suitor, I can make no objection. Till this is settled, I must pray you to desist from further importunity."

"And so must I," added Amabel. "I cannot give you a hope till you have spoken to my father."

"Be it so," replied the gallant. "I will tarry here till his return."

So saying, he was about to seat himself, but Mrs. Bloundel prevented him.

"I cannot permit this, sir," she cried. "Your tarrying here may, for aught I know, bring scandal upon my house;—I am sure it will be disagreeable to my husband. I am unacquainted with your name and condition. You may be a man of rank. You may be one of the profligate and profane crew who haunt the court. You may be the worst of them all, my Lord Rochester himself. He is about your age, I have

and not clearly identifiable with a specific historical person.

95 Described in the chapter as the clergyman who signed the marriage certificate; the name functions here as the officiating priest on the document central to the plot.

96 A historic parish and ecclesiastical precinct in central London near St Paul's, long known as a liberty with its own jurisdiction and a street/area of the same name.

97 In the narrative this denotes a hidden stash of valuables belonging to a character named Chowles; in general, a 'hoard' refers to money or goods secreted for safekeeping in a dwelling or vault.

98 A physical mark, token, or document associated with plague patients or plague hospitals in the period; this term can refer to varied objects or marks used to identify, record, or control the infected, and its specific meaning depends on contemporary practice.

99 A historic parish in central London (St Giles-in-the-Fields) that was densely populated and was particularly hard hit during 17th-century plague outbreaks.

100 An area west of central London that was rural in the 17th century; it later became more built up and is now a well-known London district.

101 A 'postern' is a small secondary gate in a defensive wall; here the phrase indicates a minor city gate near Moorgate, one of the historic gates through London's medieval city wall.

102 At the time described, Paddington was a small village on the outskirts of London; over subsequent centuries it was

absorbed into the growing metropolis and is now a central London district.

103 An oath invoking classical myth: Nox is the Latin name for Night (Greek Nyx) and Acheron is a river of the underworld in classical mythology, commonly used in early modern literature as a dramatic exclamation.

104 Pole weapons combining an axe blade with a spear point, commonly carried by city guards, watchmen, and infantry in early modern Europe; here they indicate armed municipal soldiers or watch.

105 The head of the New River, an artificial waterway opened in the early 17th century to bring fresh water into London from Hertfordshire; the New River Head in Islington was the facility that collected and distributed the supply.

106 The Tun was an inn or tavern on Cornhill in the City of London; in the 17th century such buildings could be repurposed temporarily as a 'round-house' (a lock-up or temporary prison), as the text indicates.

107 The baker named on the Pudding Lane sign; historically recorded (spelled Farriner/Farryner) as the occupant of the Pudding Lane bakery where the Great Fire of London is traditionally said to have started on 2 September 1666.

108 A common pictorial sign used above shops or inns in early modern England to identify premises before systematic street numbering; here it denotes the signboard over the baker's door.

109 Incendiary devices described in the text as 'fire-balls' — small combustible spheres or containers used to start fires; their exact composition varied historically and is not specified in the passage.

110 A street in the City of London where the Great Fire of London began in September 1666; contemporary accounts link the outbreak to a bakery on Pudding Lane.

111 The Lord Mayor of London at the time of the 1666 Great Fire, who contemporaries and some later writers described as slow or indecisive in the early response to the conflagration.

112 A French-born watchmaker who confessed to starting the Great Fire of London and was executed in 1666, though many historians consider his confession unreliable or coerced.

113 A mass burial ground in Finsbury Fields used during the 1665 Great Plague to inter large numbers of victims; such 'plague-pits' were common where deaths outpaced normal burial capacity.

114 In 17th-century London the lord mayor was attended by a small body of civic guards armed with long spears or javelins; they served as the mayor's attendants and a form of municipal police or escort.

115 A riverside installation or pumping/storage apparatus used to supply Thames water for firefighting and domestic use; such towers or engines could be ineffective at low tide, when the river level fell and the device might be empty.

116 Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), Secretary to the Admiralty, whose detailed private diary provides an important eyewitness account of London life and of events such as the Great Fire of London (1666).

117 Whitehall was the principal royal palace and administrative complex on the north bank of the Thames in London during the 17th century, serving as the king's

residence and the seat of government (much of the original palace was later demolished or destroyed).

118 'Evelyn' refers to John Evelyn (1620–1706), an English writer and diarist whose contemporary accounts include vivid descriptions of the Great Fire of London in 1666.

119 A contemporary form of the word "Exchange," referring to the merchants' exchange area in the City of London near St. Paul's; 'Change was a common abbreviation and the site was associated with trade and financial dealings in the 17th century.

120 The principal merchants' exchange in the City of London founded in the 16th century as a centre for commerce and banking; the building described here was famously damaged in the Great Fire of London (1666) and was later rebuilt.

121 A 16th-century English merchant and financier who founded the original Royal Exchange (c.1565) and left an enduring legacy in London commerce; his statue is noted as surviving the fire in the passage.

122 A street and market area in the City of London adjoining Cheapside, historically associated with the sale of poultry and other goods; the name has medieval origins and denotes that district of the city.

123 The "Stone Hold" was a secure stone-built cell or strong-room within Newgate Prison in early modern London, reserved for serious felons; contemporary accounts describe it as difficult to access, which helps explain why prisoners there could be trapped during events like the Great Fire of 1666.