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# ‘THE FATE OF SUBLUNARY THINGS’: LIVES OF MEDIEVAL CHURCHES IN GEORGIAN TIMES<sup>1</sup>

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By the eighteenth century many already vulnerable medieval churches were in dire physical straits, so one of the principal aims of the periodic Visitations made by bishops and archdeacons through their parishes was to determine if ‘all Things [are] kept in such Decent Sort as becometh the *House of GOD*?’ as well as ‘in good and sufficient Repair, as to the Roof, Walls, Windows, Doors, Floor and Seats’,<sup>2</sup> and ‘Had any Lands or Tenements been left for the Repair of your Church?’<sup>3</sup> The medieval Abbey Church at Malton, Yorkshire was ‘Totally Ruinous’ by the 1730s, so the Archbishop of York granted a licence to lower the roof, which would be ‘much more Commodious than the present’ structure, which was ‘too high and too much Exposed to Winds & weather’, remove the north aisle because it was ‘now altogether useless’ and erect a wall on a ‘Straight Line betwixt the pillars’, with the new windows ‘Glazed in a Decent manner’ and, lastly, reduce the east end by 36 feet, which had the advantage of being ‘more Convenient for the hearing of the Minister from the Comunion Table’.<sup>4</sup>

The major problem facing ancient structures was damage resulting from either the human follies of neglect and war (public riots seem to have been reserved for Dissenter and Catholic places of worship, usually of the Classical persuasion), or the vicissitudes of Nature – fires, floods, storms and earthquakes. Congregations were rightly fearful of such unpredictable phenomena, partly for reasons made clear in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* account

of an incident at Selkirk in Scotland one July 1768 noon when

the clouds began to thicken, and the darkness came on so fast ... that the Service ... was interrupted, and the people ... thrown into the greatest consternation ... lightning began to flash, and ... thunder to roll in so dreadful a manner, that no man living ever heard the like. The whole country was alarmed, and verily believed the day of judgement was come.<sup>5</sup>

Workmen assessing the state of St Botolph, Aldersgate, which had escaped destruction in the Great Fire of 1666, reported to Parliament in 1711 that the ‘Roof is in Danger to fall in, and the Inhabitants afraid to go to Church’.<sup>6</sup> At Holy Trinity, Kingston-upon-Hull, Yorkshire

when an high wind blows [this] keeps some people from Church ... who are not us’d to lay hold an little pretence to excuse their absence; and who seem determin’d to stand to the same resolution, if the cause of their fears be not removed, it is certain, that their devotions will be often confus’d and interrupted, when their minds are thus prepossessed. Had the wind been in a contrary quarter (when our late misfortune happen’d) [pinnacles fell from the tower in 1718] and the Church crowded with a multitude of people (as it generally is every Sunday) it would have been a very lamentable and shocking sight, to have view’d not only part of the Church in ruins, but hundreds crush’d and buried ... we therefore would prevent so great a calamity.<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Hutton, who had ‘known the Church [at Gainsborough, Lincolnshire] upwards of 20 Years, during all which time it has been thought to be in a

dangerous Condition’, testified to Parliament in 1736 that ‘the Inhabitants, when at divine Service, have been alarmed with every little Noise which happened, through an Apprehension of its falling’.<sup>8</sup> In 1766 ‘a violent storm of lightning [made] a large crack ... in the wall’ of St Mary, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, ‘several large stones were driven ... into the church, and so great was the explosion, that many of the neighbours imagined the whole church was coming down, and expected nothing less than being buried in the ruins’.<sup>9</sup> ‘A most alarming thunder-storm’ during divine service in St Akeveranus church, St Keverne, Cornwall in 1770, when the steeple was thrown on to the body, ‘the whole congregation was struck with astonishment: Many had their cloaths singed by the fierceness of the lightning, and some their watches melted’.<sup>10</sup> On 7 February 1779 during Divine Service in St Mary, Chatham, Kent ‘some of the plaistering from the gallery ... falling down, the whole congregation took the alarm, and endeavoured to make their escape’, while in July of that year Swaffham church, Cambridgeshire was ‘struck with lightning, and the congregation much frightened, but no damage done’.<sup>11</sup> Incidents like these were frequently reported in the local press and *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, which specialized in such sensationalism.

None more so than accounts of the catastrophes which befell two major medieval fabrics in the West Country. Structural faults in the masonry of the Romanesque west front of Hereford Cathedral had been detected in 1763 and attempts made to rectify them. In 1775 the Dean employed an examining ‘Architect’ (James Pearce, an Oxford builder); two years later Thomas Symonds was appointed Surveyor of the Fabric; in 1781 200 tons of stone costing £216 6s.*od.* was supplied and repairs carried out in 1783. The fabric remained precarious, with the ‘settling of the walls and arches from their perpendicular, for two or three years before, to which very little attention had been paid or ... assistance given’ and a serious rupture stretching

across the base of the north-west tower.<sup>12</sup> Then, on 20 April 1786, reported *The Hereford Journal*,

a small part of the stonework of the inside roof, under the WEST TOWER fell; and continued so to do, till last Monday afternoon ... at which time *all that beautiful and magnificent structure* fell down, and with it part of the body .... There was a great number of people in the Church-Yard, it being a remarkably fine day. This Tower ... is now a heap of rubbish [and] though awful, afford a pleasing view.<sup>13</sup>

A more dramatic account from an eye-witness interviewed by Lord Torrington, who had travelled to see the ‘sacerdotal shame’ in 1787, recounted how

the inside roof began to give way ... and continued to fall so rapidly, that people were placed around the close, to hinder any from entering. As the crumbling, and dissolution increased, this noble tower began ... to totter; and after many shakings at last sunk upon itself a heap of ruins, with half the body ... in sight of the whole town assembled ... what a ... tremendous ... glorious *clash* it made!

Torrington blamed ‘the woeful idleness and neglect of the canons’,<sup>14</sup> while *The Gentleman’s Magazine* wrote of the ‘barbarous indolence of the chapter’, though this was apparently untrue.<sup>15</sup> A later commentator described the catastrophe as ‘the most remarkable event of modern times in the history of English cathedrals’<sup>16</sup> and the ruins were duely recorded by artists, most notably James Wathen (Fig. 1).<sup>17</sup>

In May 1788 the young Scottish architect and engineer, Thomas Telford, having been invited to survey St Chad, Shrewsbury to settle parish quarrels concerning repairing a leaking roof, ‘discovered ... large fractures in the Walls [and] the whole ... in a most shattered condition, tho’ till now scarcely noticed’, and advised on securing ‘the most essential parts [which] appear to be on a very alarming situation’. Nevertheless, ‘popular Clamour overcame this report’, claiming the ‘fractures ... have been there time immorial – and it was said by every sensible person that Professional men always wish’d

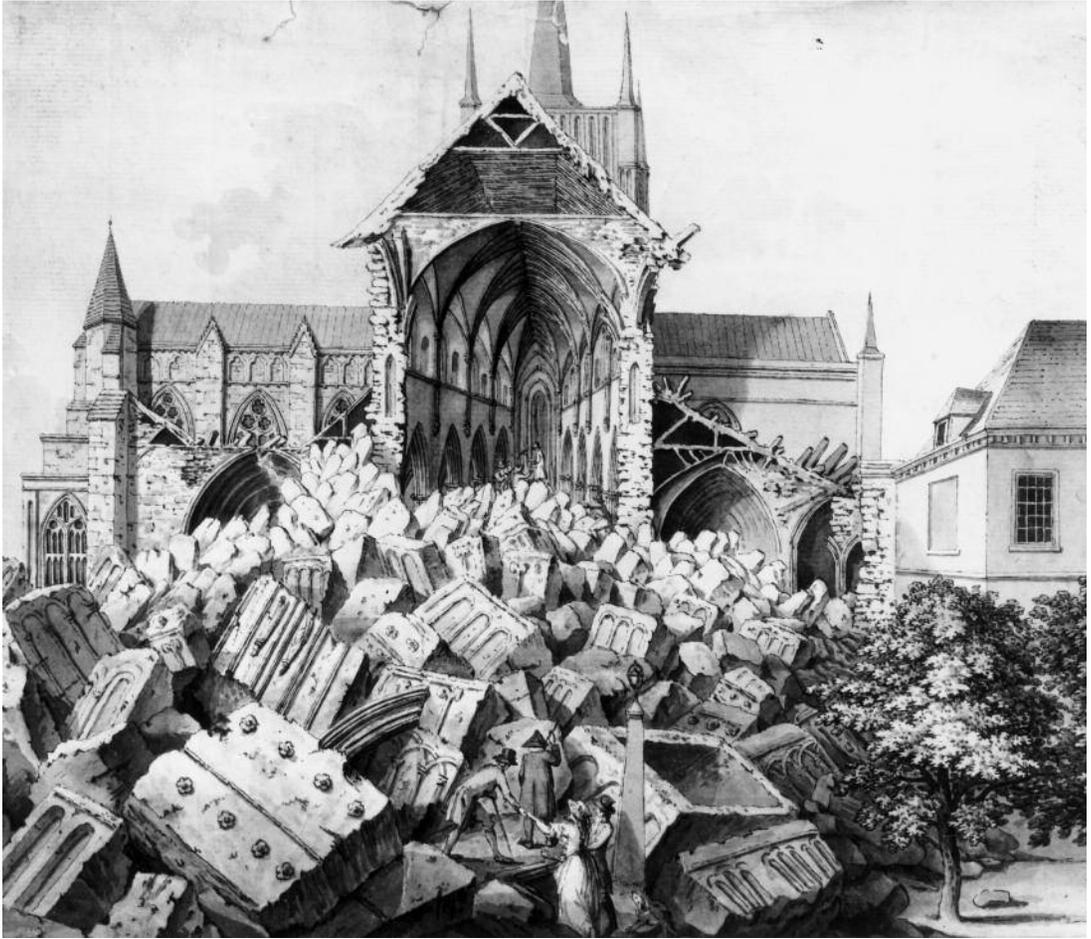


Fig. 1. James Wathen, preparatory drawing for ‘View of the Ruins of the West Tower & Front of Hereford Cathedral’, 18 April 1786, published 12 April 1788. *Paul Mellon Centre Photo Archive*.

to carve out employment for themselves’. Nothing more was done ‘when lo! & behold on the Morning of [9 July] the very parts I had pointed out gave way – and down tumbled the mighty mass forming a very remarkable magnificent Ruin’.<sup>18</sup> *The Shrewsbury Chronicle And Shropshire, Montgomeryshire, Denbighshire, Merionethshire, Flintshire, &c. General Advertiser* reported that

On Wednesday morning ... about a quarter past four ... the greatest part of ... St Chad’s ... suddenly fell down, to the great astonishment of the inhabitants ....

So great is the devastation, that ... remaining walls ... left standing, must be entirely taken down. In examining the ruins, it is discovered that the four massy pillars which support the tower, were only cased with rubble, the inside being filled with common loose rubble. The timber of the roof appears quite rotten .... How very providential that this dreadful catastrophe did not happen ... when the congregation were assembled for divine worship .... We hear that a Drawing ... is taken, and ... the same will be engraved. Our readers at a distance will then have an opportunity of forming a proper idea of the awfulness of the ruins, which it is impossible for language to describe.<sup>19</sup>

Part of this account was reprinted in *The Leeds Intelligencer*, the leading Yorkshire newspaper, on 22 July and would have held special fascination for its readers because on the night of 27 January 1779 three sides of the massive crossing tower of the Romanesque Cistercian Abbey Church at Kirkstall near Leeds, ruinous since the Reformation, tumbled to the ground (Fig. 2).<sup>20</sup> Shrewsbury’s disaster inevitably spread ‘Terror and Surprise’<sup>21</sup> and together with recent widely circulated press reports of the sudden collapse at Hereford panicked the public, inducing neighbouring parishes to examine the state of their ancient churches.<sup>22</sup> At nearby Madeley, during the last service held in the medieval church in 1794 before rebuilding, the

noise made by the fall of a person who was seized with a fit, excited ... a very general alarm [and] universal apprehension that the building was giving way, and everyone endeavoured to make his escape by the shortest road. The confusion, distress and terror that ensued cannot be described: great numbers were much hurt by jumping out of the windows, or being jammed in the door-ways whilst the shrieks of Women and Children left behind increased the horror of the Scene. Happily, however, no lives were lost or limbs broken

according to *The Salopian Journal or Courier of Wales*.<sup>23</sup>

Fabrics frequently collapsed as a result of neglect, carelessness or ‘the mere tyranny of time’.<sup>24</sup> Pickworth church, Lincolnshire, burnt down with the town by rebels in Henry VII’s time and still in ruins in the early eighteenth century, had its ‘very fine spire ... seen all round the country’ dismantled between 1728 and 1731 to build nearby bridges.<sup>25</sup> On 11 September 1736 the ‘old church’ at Blidworth, Nottinghamshire ‘fell ... by means of an unskilful or foolhardy Workmen, who, in making a [family] Vault, undermined one of ye main Pillars [and the] unhappy Workman [was] buried in the Ruins ... tho, it must be confess’d, ye Church was in a very ruinous Condition before’ and the ‘Timber ... appears ... so decay’d and rotten that ... it could not

have stood long without this Accident’.<sup>26</sup> Rostherne parish church, Cheshire fell victim one November day in 1741 when the steeple ‘suddenly tumbled down ... whereby the galleries were beat down and other damages done. ’Tis happy for the town’, reported a Brief, ‘that it fell in the evening; there being the greatest school of teaching arithmatic and mathematicks in all ye country kept direct under it; but the youths were gone home’.<sup>27</sup> During Sunday service on 10 October 1742, so noted the Bath architect, John Wood Sr quoting the Edinburgh press, ‘the Roof of the large Church of Fearn, which is the greatest in Ross, fell like a Clap of Thunder, by which unhappy Accident, a vast Number of People were killed and wounded’.<sup>28</sup> St Mary, Elmsthorpe, Leicestershire is a particularly sad case. Around 1754 half the roof retained its lead cover but subsequently had ‘fallen into the middle of the church’ and was either stolen or sold, so that the interior had been ‘occasionally made a garden, and used as a penn for cattle’.<sup>29</sup> Following the collapse of All Saints, Fulbourn, Cambridgeshire at 5 o’clock in the morning of Trinity Sunday 1766, a petition to Parliament secured a Bill to the effect that since

there have been for Time immemorial, Two Churches in the same Church Yard [and] a greater Part of ... *All Saints* ... cannot be again made fit for Divine Service, unless ... entirely re-built [that the parish be] allowed to take down the Ruins ... sell the Materials ... and Bells ... and ... apply the Money ... in repairing and ornamenting ... *Saint Vigors*.<sup>30</sup>

Of St Mary, Orston, Nottinghamshire, ‘an antient, but not a neat building’, the ‘heavy tower ... fell down by neglect of repair; and a small one disproportionate to the whole, rebuilt ... in 1766, gives it an aukward appearance’.<sup>31</sup> Pinchbeck and Surfleet, Lincolnshire were

remarkable for inclining considerably from a perpendicular, but they have been in this state so long, that the fears of their falling are wholly vanished: their deviation is undoubtedly owing to the swampiness of the soil, and the want of due care in first laying the foundations.<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 2. Kirkstall Abbey, Leeds, Yorkshire, from *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, Supplement, 1803, p.1197, pl.1.

Fornham, Suffolk was consumed by fire in 1773 ‘occasioned by the inadvertency of a man shooting at jack-daws’.<sup>33</sup> In 1774 as ‘the plumber was repairing the Leads of Burnham church in Essex it unfortunately took fire, by the lead being heated on the battlement and entirely consum’d the inside and roof’.<sup>34</sup> Of the ‘fine Gothic’ church at Banbury, Oxfordshire, the local press reported that on 12–13 December 1790 the north aisle and crossing tower collapsed, the

arches on which it stood first gave way, which occasioned a Chasm from ... bottom to ... top, and instantly the whole Tower became cracked, and Shivered in a variety of directions, admitting the light through each, but yet preserving a perpendicular Fall, even in its pinnacles.<sup>35</sup>

In 1791 the vicar of All Saints, Milwich, Staffordshire informed his bishop that the church was ‘much decayed and dilapidated [and] cannot be repaired ... the South Wall ... is very much bulged and has

given way, some Part of the Roof is fallen down, and the whole Fabric ... so ruinous ... as to render it unsafe’,<sup>36</sup> a story that must have been repeated up and down the country. At noon on 4 April 1800, reported *The Gentleman's Magazine*, the north-west corner of the tower of Writtle, Essex,

which had shewn, for some time past, evident works of decay, and had been, at different times, very injudiciously repaired, came down with a most tremendous crash. The remainder of the tower ... opened in the eye of the astonished beholder a scene which imagination alone can form. The bells were seen hanging in the steeple, suspended in the shattered and momentary crumbling fragments of the then still venerable pile .... The jangling of the bells was, to the inhabitants, a sure token of its total destruction; [then] a part of the East side ... falling upon the [body's] roof carrying ... vast sheets of lead ... and the immense force of the stones ... dealt destruction in their course, crushing to atoms the ... singing ... gallery, and seats beneath.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 3. 'West view of Chelmsford Church, that fell on the 17th of Jany. 1800', etching and aquatint by A. Pugin and Merigot after C. Nattes, published 25 March 1800. *British Library, Maps. K. Top. XIII. II-h.*

Finally, poignant graphic evidence is offered by two late eighteenth century catastrophes. In 1799 *The European Magazine* and *The Gentleman’s Magazine* published views of St Mary, Great Shelford, Cambridgeshire, showing the church before and after the west tower fell down on Friday morning, 23 November 1798.<sup>38</sup> The collapse of Chelmsford parish church on the night of 17 January 1800, resulting from workmen digging a vault and undermining two of the nave pillars which ‘gave way and ... pulled great part of the roof with them ... and greatly alarmed the Neighbourhood’,<sup>39</sup> was once again covered in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, which reckoned that it ‘will be timely warnings to the inhabitants and incumbent ... how they trust the repair of ... parochial churches ... to country or inexperienced workmen’ (Fig. 3).<sup>40</sup> Repairs (1800–03) were entrusted successfully to the London architect, John Johnson yet even then the vestry did not escape anonymous local censure for the ‘Shameful Infatuation ... Manifest ... In Supporting [his] Abilities ... and Forcing him upon the Inhabitants to Rebuild the ... Church ... by saying no one is Equal to itt but him’, which ‘is quite Dispotic and Unmanly .... It now Appears to the Public how Weak your Judgement is, in Supporting a man who knows nothing of Business and has been So Base as to Call the Tradesmen in Chelmsford a Sett of D-m’d Villons’ and obtained a rebuilding Act ‘under the Most basest falsehoods [which] ought to be held in Universal Abhorrence by all who wished to have Seen Justice and Equality took place.’<sup>41</sup>

Other churches fell victim to the Reformation and the Civil War, aptly described as ‘mangled by the ignorant rage of Fanaticks’ and ‘Cromwell’s fury’, respectively.<sup>42</sup> ‘There’s nothing ... concerns me more’, remarked Ned Ward’s friend in *The London Spy* (1706), ‘than to see any piece of antiquity demolished. It always puts me in mind of the ignoble actions of the unsanctified rebels in the late domestic troubles’ who reaped ‘a base and inglorious revenge, to gratify their choleric zeal, by robbing their own

native country of its ancient beauties; a crime abominated by the most savage and unpolished people in the whole universe. That Christians should be guilty of such barbarity that is held detestable amongst the worst of heathens, is very strange’.<sup>43</sup> Might one draw from this parallels between the architectural repercussions of such an event and the barbarian invasion which beset ancient Rome?<sup>44</sup>

Brampton church, Cumberland, had ‘become so ruinous and defaced, in the Whole, thro’ Antiquity, & ye Disorder of ye Civil War, that it was unsafe to assemble in’,<sup>45</sup> and was reported in 1704 as being ‘in a Slovenly pickle; dark, black and ill-seated. The Quire is yet more Nasty ... and the Altar-part lyes in a most deplorable Condition, without Rails or even a Table of common decency’.<sup>46</sup> Other similar war-damaged churches were repaired in 1708 (Dodderhill, Worcestershire), in 1710 (All Saints, Sudbury)<sup>47</sup> and in 1722 (St Olave, York),<sup>48</sup> whereas the church tower in the neighbouring parish of St Denys, ‘shot through with a Cannon-Bullet from the Rebel-Army’, went unrepaired and finally succumbed in 1798.<sup>49</sup> All Saints, Pontefract, in the same county and still today a magnificent ruin, suffered a similar fate. Thomas Gent, visiting in the 1730s, was ‘struck ... with Admiration’ by the ‘curious Octagon’ crowning ‘its noble Steeple’, but

alas! When I came near it, my Expectations were frustrated. All was but a mere roofless Shell ... Whoever would seriously contemplate on the End of Things, let them come hither. How desolate do the Isles appear ... Grass and Weeds grow within its Walls .... What a Pity was it ... this Building should not have been repair’d ... there had been a Design [and] Three Thousand Pounds were collected for this laudable Purpose. But, alas! Those unworthy Men, who were entrusted with the Money, partly converted it to the Use of their own secular Buildings, and partly made off, in a sacrilegious Manner, that they might not be render’d accountable for their unjust Stewardship,

so that the church is in ‘much lamented Decay’.<sup>50</sup> A visitor in 1800 found only ‘the shell of a fine old Gothic church, a melancholy sight.... A group of



Fig. 4. All Saints, Northampton; fourteenth-century west tower, and portico of 1676–1701. *Terry Friedman.*

girls playing at skip rope upon the tombstones added to the desolation of the scene’.<sup>51</sup>

Fires, floods and the ‘pelting fury of the brumal storms’,<sup>52</sup> with attendant lightning, account for the greatest damage by far sustained by already susceptible fabrics. The ‘universal ... conflagration’ of the 1666 Fire of London, which destroyed eighty-nine medieval City Churches as well as the great cathedral, was still fresh in the Georgian mind – Evelyn’s recollection of how the ‘stones of St Paul’s flew like grenades, and the lead melted down the streets in a stream. The very pavements flowed with fiery redness’ was quoted in *Parentalia: or, Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens*, 1750,<sup>53</sup> while the Northampton town fire of September 1675, which

razed the parish church (Fig. 4),<sup>54</sup> was repeated in ‘God’s dreadful visitation by fire’ on Blandford Forum, Dorset on 4 June 1731.<sup>55</sup> An eye-witness reported that the parish church of SS. Peter and Paul

held out against the Fury of the Flames a long time ... At length the Steeple took Fire ... but by ... care and Diligence ... was quenched ... However about Twelve ... at Night the Fire was seen afresh in the ... Roof [and] roared dreadfully, the Lead melted, the Stones split and flew ... so fervent and irresistible was the Heat, that the Bells ... dissolved and ran down in Streams ... several [inhabitants] betook themselves for Shelter within its Walls ... Whilst others ... lie down behind the Tomb-Stones; [by morning they were] so tired with Fatagues that ... ye Church was entirely destroy’d.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, on 19–20 July 1747 ‘a dreadful fire’ at Honiton in Devon ‘whereby near three quarters of the town were burnt’ was followed by another on 21 August 1765 which consumed ‘upwards of 140 houses, and a well-built stone chapel’ as well as the meeting house, where the clerk was ‘burnt to death’.<sup>57</sup>

The century opened ominously. In 1701 the spire of Halstead church in Essex was ‘fired by lightning’ and ‘in order to prevent ... spreading the flames, the supporters were sawn asunder, and it fell ... into the church-yard’.<sup>58</sup> This was replaced in 1717 and became the subject of a poem by Matthew Prior

Best be He call’d among good Men,  
Who to his GOD this Column rais’d:  
Tho’ Lightning strike the Dome again;  
The Man, who built it, shall be prais’d.  
Yet Spires and Towers in Dust shall lye,  
The weak Efforts of Human Pains:  
And FAITH, and HOPE themselves shall dye;  
While Deathless CHARITY remains.<sup>59</sup>

In 1724 Defoe reported Dunwich, Suffolk ‘in danger of being swallowed up’ and almost unbelievably where it ‘once had fifty churches ... I saw but one left, and that not half full of people’.<sup>60</sup> In Defoe’s vivid account of the Great Storm of 26 April 1703, published in *The Storm: or a Collection of the Most Remarkable Casualties and Disasters which Happened in the Late Dreadful Tempest, Both by Sea and Land* (1704): ‘the air was ... full of meteors and vaporous fires, and in some places both thundering and unusual flashes of lightning, to the great terror of the inhabitants’, and stone, brick and tiles ‘flew with such force, and so thick into the streets’. In Somerset ‘all the battlements’ of Batcombe church were blown down and ‘a great deal of damage done’, while at Compton Bishop the tower was ‘much shattered, and the leads ... taken clear away, and laid flat in the churchyard’ and at Fairford, Gloucestershire ‘a large and noble structure’, the ‘winds were [so] strong and boisterous [that] they unbedded 3 sheets of lead upon the ... roof, and rolled them up like so much paper’ and the celebrated suite of twenty-eight

windows filled with glorious Renaissance painted glass, which ‘equal ... if not exceed, any parochial church in England’, ‘felt the fury of the winds’.<sup>61</sup> The ‘great storm of wind, which raged throughout England’ on 27 November 1703 reached ‘its fury’ at Tiverton, Devon ‘when its raging blasts were frightful and amazing’ and the parish church was ‘uncovered’.<sup>62</sup> (The town was destroyed by fire on 5 June 1731, the day after the Blandford Forum calamity, described above).<sup>63</sup> Robert Atkyns recorded in *The Ancient and Present State of Glostershire*, 1712, an inscription on Slymbridge church ‘in memory of the dreadful Tempest’.<sup>64</sup> More than a dozen other churches were similarly affected, including the unfortunate Flixton, Suffolk, which having its roof blown off, remained in ruins, its walls used to build stables and its font ‘having been split asunder’ to support the ‘two ends of a hog-trough’.<sup>65</sup> Defoe also reported that at 10p.m. on Monday, 5 November 1711 one of the south spires of Romanesque Southwell Minster, Nottinghamshire was struck by lightning ‘backed by a furious wind that drove it almost directly on the body ... in a few hours burnt down the spire and roof, melted down the bells, and spared nothing that was combustible, except the other spire, till it came to the quire, where it had consumed the organs, it was by singular providence stopt and extinguish’d, though not before accruing near £4,000 worth of damage’.<sup>66</sup> Ralph Thorseby, the Leeds antiquary, reported that the fire burnt for ten hours, ‘a sad calamity [which] many censure ... as a judgement for not having had any divine service there that day, which’, he added, ‘I cannot believe’.<sup>67</sup> In 1721 lightning struck the 300 foot high central spire of Chichester Cathedral, Sussex ‘with such irresistible force, that it drove several large stones out of it .... The breach ... was incredibly large ... though [the structure] stood firm’.<sup>68</sup>

In 1722 the Riburn ‘suddenly swelled, by the dashing of a cloud ... to such a height that it swept away the old chapel’ at Riponden, washing the corpses out of the graves,<sup>69</sup> while also in Yorkshire



Fig. 5. St Mary and All Saints, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, central tower and spire, c.1325–50. *Author’s photograph.*

Holmfirth Chapel on the Holme was ‘over-flowed as high as the stalls [in] a very great flood’ in 1738.<sup>70</sup> Of Ely Cathedral Defoe remarked that ‘some of it is so antient, totters so much with every gust of wind, looks so like a decay, and seem so near it, that when ever it does fall, all that ’tis likely to be thought strange ... will be, that it did not fall a hundred years sooner’.<sup>71</sup> ‘At *Kilverston* in *Norfolk* rose a Hurricane, which blew the Lead off the Church’.<sup>72</sup> In Bath

during ‘a most violent Storm of Thunder, Lightning, Wind and Rain ... The Lead on a Church ... was rolled up from the Eves to the Top, and the Building so shaken, as to make it unsafe to assemble therein’.<sup>73</sup> The victim was St Swithin, Walcot, which was subsequently rebuilt (1739–42).<sup>74</sup> In a ‘violent storm and hurricane’ on 13–14 January 1739 (or 1740) ‘several ... turrets of the spire ... and battlements’ of Glasgow Cathedral were ‘throun down ... broke thrau and damnified the roof ... and several other parts of the church chattered and disordered and the top of the spire made to decline and bow down’.<sup>75</sup>

Martin Foulkes reported to the Royal Society that in September 1741 the leaden spire of St Margaret, King’s Lynn, Norfolk ‘fell its whole length upon the body ... made a deep hole in the pavement ... forced the corpses out of their graves ... and made an universal havoc throughout that most spacious church’.<sup>76</sup> On 13 August 1744 ‘a Storm of Rain ... violent Thunder and Lightning ... was so great that ... the Steeple [of Liverton parish church near Edinburgh] was ruin’d, and in the E. End ... a smooth, round Hole made, as if done with the greatest Art’.<sup>77</sup> A Parliamentary petition of 1766 described Folkestone, Kent, as situated ‘a small Distance from the Cliff; and ... by the continual flowing of the Tide, and raging of the Sea against ... the Bank [of] loose sandy Soil [has been] considerably washed away [and the] Church is in Danger of falling, unless timely prevents by erecting one or more substantial ... Jettées’.<sup>78</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine* reported the ‘tide rose so high in the *Thames*, that there was two feet of water in *Westminster Abbey*’ in 1763.<sup>79</sup>

Chesterfield, Derbyshire was (and, indeed, still is) ‘particularly remarkable’ for its 230 foot high spire which is ‘so singularly twisted, and distorted, that it seems to lean in what ever direction it may be approached’.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes misunderstood – George Vertue in 1727 considered it ‘an Artifice In building. To deceive the Eye’<sup>81</sup> – more considered opinions were offered that this marvellous aberration had been ‘warped by the weather’ and ‘strangely bent ...



Fig. 6. All Saints, Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, struck by lightning 6 July 1755, from J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, II, pt.2, 1798, pl.LXXXI.

by a violent wind<sup>82</sup> (Fig. 5). Moreover, it fell victim to fire in 1776<sup>83</sup> and in the 1790s Daniel Hodkin, a local architect and surveyor of bridges, who had estimated the cost of a new building at £1,050 10s.*od.*, wrote to the churchwardens

I hope you ... will think with me that the tower will remain in an unfinished state if the four [corner] pinnacles are not put on, and you will always wish they had been done when you see the effect so much different. The situation of the church will cause them to be shewed at so great a distance. I cannot take leave without a repetition of begging of you to raise your spirits and say with one voice we will have them done and look as respectful as any of our neighbours.<sup>84</sup>

In 1750 Smart Letheullier took the occasion, in informing the Royal Society that lightning had struck Danbury church, Essex, on 5 February, but ‘happily extinguished before it had consumed much

of the steeple’, the building standing ‘on a hill, which exposes it to these accidents’, to recount that on 24 May 1402 ‘a ball of fire passed through the whole Church, and did great damage, which they then thought was the devil in the habit of a monk’.<sup>85</sup>

At times storms were so dramatic that engravings were issued, as in the case of All Saints, Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire (Fig. 6), ‘Damaged by a Dreadful Storm’ on 6 July 1755, where the event is confirmed by the accompanying description of

Hail and Rain attended with terrible Thunder & Lightning as has not had its equal in the memory of Man ... stones were struck out of the Walls within side, the Pavement in some places raised an Inch above their former level, the Bells displaced, their Frames and Wheels oddly splintered, the spire ... very much shatter’d, a large Chasm opened in it, about twelve Yards in length & one in breadth, from when many heavy Stones were forced to a very great distance; Globes of

Fire were seen in the Air, Flashes of Lightning in a terrible manner ran along the Streets, and a great Smoke and Sulphurous smell issued from the Apperture of the Spire, and what is remarkably providential several hundred weight of Stones fell about & upon the Grave where the Minister (and a large Congregation attending) had just before buried a Corps.<sup>86</sup>

On 15 March 1757 ‘Arose the greatest storm of wind on the western coast of this island that has been known’, reported *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, and at Acton, Cheshire ‘the top of the ... steeple beat in the roof of the church and damaged it to the amount of 2000 l.’;<sup>87</sup> the parish records noting the destruction of most of the pews and a west gallery.<sup>88</sup> On the same occasion and in the same county much of the chancel of St Boniface, Bunbury was blown down and the church at Nantwich ‘much shattered’.<sup>89</sup> On 3 February 1764 ‘a most violent storm of snow, hail, and rain, attended with thunder and lightning’ at Clare, Suffolk ‘when a ball of fire ... beat down ... part of the tower, and left so great a heat in the body’ that people were appointed ‘to watch all night, for fear it should take fire; and the smell of sulphur was so great, that it was with much difficulty they could continue in the building’.<sup>90</sup> In the following year Bicester’s tower was struck by lightning, the fall of the bells forced the gallery wall into the body, leaving it ‘full of smoke, accompanied with a suffocating sulphurous stench, and many places discoloured, where the progress of the lightening had met with resistance’.<sup>91</sup>

Foulsham church, Norfolk, badly damaged when the gunpowder store blew up during a town fire on 15 June 1770, was repaired by James Frost (died 1851), who later established a successful architectural practice in Brooklyn, New York.<sup>92</sup> On Sunday, 5 May 1776, at Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire,

a small ball of fire ... from a cloud forced its way though a South pinnacle, leaving an hole as if bored with an instrument [and] the pinnacle on the North-east corner, and split it to pieces. Fragments ... broke through the roof .... From the bells ... lightning was conducted ... down the tower by a very thick wire ...

which it melted ... forced its way through the wall .... The whole congregation felt an electric shock, and ran out of the church.<sup>93</sup>

On 17 July 1791 at Lechlade, Gloucestershire ‘the thunder was most tremendous and the whole heavens appeared in a total conflagration. The rain ... with hail-stones of a prodigious size, descended in ... torrents. One of the windows of the church is shivered to pieces, and the steeple ... received much damage. Divine service had been over ... half an hour previous ... many lives were ... saved’.<sup>94</sup> On 20 October the same year Speldhurst church, Kent, was consumed by fire during a storm, witnessed from Mount Ephraim near Tunbridge Wells some three miles away:

the ball entered ... the shingled part of that beautiful steeple ... every thing contributed to its destruction ... the heavy rain and hail ceased. The high wind drove the flames from the steeple directly on the church .... In about four hours, this antient and most beautiful church was reduced to a heap of ruins. The fiery furnace into which Shadrack and his companions were cast ... could bear no comparison .... The bells are melted. The monuments ... crumbled to dust.<sup>95</sup>

At Chumleigh, Devon, in July 1797 a ‘dreadful storm ... struck off the South-East pinnacle of the tower, part of which falling on the roof ... forced its way through, and did considerable damage. The force of the lightning was so great ... one stone ... of 200lb. was ... carried quite over the tower, without touching it.’<sup>96</sup> During a ‘dreadful storm’ at Caldecot, Rutland on 30 July 1797

remarkably frequent and vivid ... intervals [of] lightning ... between each flash the darkness appeared as great as at midnight, and torrents of rain poured down. The claps of thunder ... were tremendous and awful, causing the bold as well as the timid to be astonished and tremble! ... the lightning struck the ... spire ... took entirely off about a yard and a half ... then making a large chasm [of 4½ yards as well as a] large hole ... and the stone shivered .... The North wall of the nave ... is cracked .... The ... window in the South aisle ... is also much shattered .... A large hole is made ... in the leads of the nave by ... falling stones from the spire.<sup>97</sup>

Readers were intrigued by accounts of the indiscriminate course of lightning. On 2 July 1783, soon after the top of Wymeswold spire, Leicestershire had been rebuilt, it ‘struck the weathercock ... passed with great violence down the spire, and ... along a door ... into the church, and went out at the chancel window’.<sup>98</sup> In October 1791 ‘a very vivid flash of lightning, succeeded by a most tremendous clap of thunder, fell on the ... tower’ of Rainham, Kent,

the wall of which it cracked for ... several feet, and passed down the ... stone steps, many of which are shivered in a surprising manner ... forced out the West door ... then passed into the body ... where it left several marks ... and from thence went through the East window.<sup>99</sup>

On 24 September 1794 ‘lightning forced its way through the stone walls ... on the West side’ of Keavil, Wiltshire,

went in an exact horizontal line ... and out ... the North side, driving many stones of large magnitude into the church ... other lightning [entered] the belfry-window, struck a very large beam, and shivered it into a thousand splinters ... passed down the wall of the tower, and out at the ... porch, doing much damage in its passage’.<sup>100</sup>

A number of churches fell victim to repeated battering. A ‘flash of lightning struck in the east window’ of King’s Sutton, Northamptonshire, and ‘rent the ... spire forty foot or more’ in 1722, then in 1776 the steeple crashed on the roof ‘beat it entirely in, leaving only the side walls standing’.<sup>101</sup> Part of the west aisle of the already ruined Whitby Abbey, Yorkshire, ‘though supported by more than 20 *Gothic* arches ... tumbled to the foundation’ during a ‘most violent storm’ on 2 December 1763, then on 12 November 1794 during a ‘heavy gale ... the greatest part of the West end gave way: the great window ... long ... the admiration of every person, now lies upon the ground in shattered fragments’.<sup>102</sup> Others were even worse hit. At medieval Holy Trinity, Guildford, Surrey, the tower and steeple ‘built Mostly of Chalk and Rubble’ were by ‘length of time ... generall decay [and] violent wind ... very much shatter’d’ in January 1734;

repairs costing £750 entailed removing arches and pillars supporting the steeple; an accident repeated by ‘another hurricane of wind and violent Rain’ in January 1739, followed by a ‘long frost’ and during ‘a sudden storm of hail’ on 23 April 1740 the steeple ‘all of a sudden sunk downe [and] totally demolished the whole ... church’.<sup>103</sup> At St Mary, Oxford, on 26 February 1751 a ‘high wind ... so damaged the steeple ... that it was expected to fall’, then in 1791 it (described as ‘one of most beautiful pieces of Gothic architecture in England’) ‘received so much injury by ... heavy gales ... that it will be necessary to take it down, to prevent the danger that threatens its neighbourhood’, and again in 1795 when it was ‘considerably injured by ... lightning, which disjointed and broke many ... stones’.<sup>104</sup> The lofty needle spire of St Mary de Castro, Leicester, was hit by a triple wammy within twenty-six years: first in 1757 by a ‘remarkable high wind’, then in 1763 by lightning, on both occasions being immediately repaired, and finally in 1783, when lightning ‘cracked the inclosed brick work, and discharged the free-stone shell, which was half a foot thick ... six yards perpendicularly; and ... a yard broad ... splitting the stone-work as low as the battlements’. The 97-foot-high structure was ‘rebuilt new [in] the same proportion’ but with ‘additional decoration to the battlements’ and now carrying an expedient ‘iron conductor’.<sup>105</sup> Brougham, Westmorland, was nicknamed ‘the Nine Churches, because ... it has faln down nine times, and ... as often rebuilt’.<sup>106</sup> A few churches had lucky escapes. ‘Some fractures in the leaden roof’ of the magnificent Perpendicular tower of All Saints (now the Cathedral), Derby, in 1735

demanding the solder and plumbing-iron, the young and inattentive plumber, to save the labour of carrying his hot iron upstairs, made a fire at the top of the steeple [which] he carelessly left. Some days elapsed, when a smoak was observed issuing from the battlements ... The aspect was dreadful; the roof was melted ... and the main beam consumed to the very edge of the wall [but] a masterpiece of elegance was snatched from the flames in the moment of destruction.<sup>107</sup>

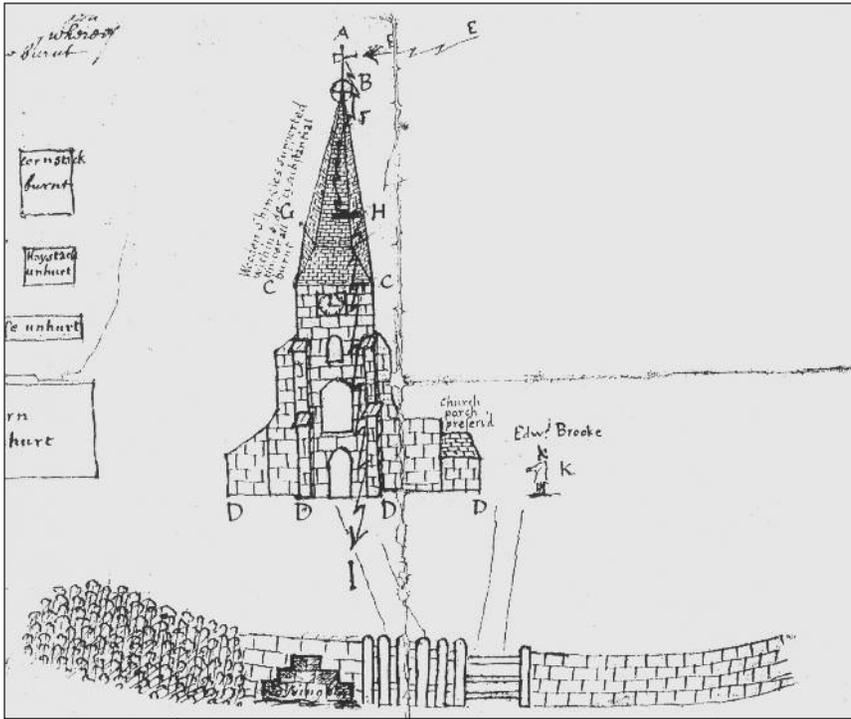


Fig. 7. St Michael, Chart Sutton, Kent, 'from the west with a description of the damage done to it by Lightning occasioned by conductors', 1779, artist unknown. *Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, U194 Q7/1.*

Vestries tried various solutions to protect their sacred buildings, from window-shutters to fire engines to insurance policies. Georgians were aware that metal fixtures were potential hazards because they conducted lightning. At Chart Sutton in 1779 (Fig. 7) and Cranbrook in 1787, both in Kent, it was blamed on weathervanes.<sup>108</sup> At Norwich in 1760 lightning was 'attracted by the Weather-cock, ran down the perpendicular Iron Bar [and] down the Inside destroying [the spire] Walls in some places near 6 Inches in Depth .... The Most probable Conjecture [is] snow ... lodged [inside the] Spire, [which] served as a Conductor'.<sup>109</sup> At Grantham, Lincolnshire it was wires on a clock;<sup>110</sup> at St Paul, Hammersmith a 'most violent ... tornado ... beat open the door ... though a very strong one, and the chandelier becoming a conductor to the lightning ... past ... through the church, and beat out a very large Gothic window'.<sup>111</sup> Conditions improved as a result

of Benjamin Franklin's experiments, begun in 1746, proving lightning as an electrical discharge, which he published in *Experiments and Observations on Electricity*, and his advice on protecting buildings by installing lightning rods.<sup>112</sup> This achievement gained him election as Fellow of the Royal Society in London. Rods were fitted on Norwich Cathedral in 1770.<sup>113</sup>

Nor was Britain exempt from earthquakes. On 30 September 1750 both Narborough and Stonton Wyville in Leicestershire, about a dozen miles from each other, were struck: at the former, according to a letter published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* from the Revd. Metcalf, who was preaching there on that day, he was 'greatly alarmed with a very great shock ... where the whole church shook with such violence that the congregation thought the roof was falling in, and ran out', but when he prevailed upon them returning 'with fear and trembling', while

fourteen miles away, at Stanford, the congregation was ‘amazed with a violent shock ... which lasted between 3 and 4 minutes ... attended with a prodigious rolling noise, louder than any thunder’. On the same occasion there were reports as far as Northamptonshire, at Ashley ‘attended with a dreadful noise, like a subterranean explosion, twas thought part of the church would have sunk’, and at Kelmarsh the ‘shock was so violent ... that the minister and congregation went out of the church, apprehensive the roof was disjointed and ready to fall. Mr *Hanbury*’s lady was shaken out of her chair upon the floor’.<sup>114</sup> On 29 December 1768 ‘a violent ... earthquake ... split [the tower of Byton, Herefordshire] in many places .... Men and women, with their children, ran towards the church, as to a place of safety, but ... were prevented entering by the very ruinous condition’.<sup>115</sup>

The apocalyptic nature of these incidents took on almost biblical ferocity at Castor, Cambridgeshire in 1795 when

a thunder-cloud, highly saturated with the electric effluvia [and a] vivid flash of lightning ... quickly succeeded by a most alarming clap of thunder [and] a remarkable hollow, cracking sound ... being directly over the spire ... was ... attracted, and discharged a ball of fire upon the weather-cock ... passed down the iron rod ... to the stone-work ... entered the inside ... forced out the munting of the window ... crossed over and descended to the south corner of the tower ... then ... to the lead ... roof of the church ... diffused itself on the south, west, and north, entering the windows ... where the leaden spouts terminate ... splitting and tearing away the stones ... casting them ... at some distance; [while] the progress and effects of ... part of the ... discharge of this wonderful subtle fluid ... was ... attracted to the iron hammer of the clock, and passing down set fire to a dry, old, decayed beam ... melted all the wire [of the clock and] dispersed itself in one horizontal direction over the lead ... roof of the chancel, to the ... great east window ... split the muntings [and] the irresistible destructive force of the electrical matter ... pervaded the inside of the whole building.<sup>116</sup>

The preoccupation with disasters which informs the present article – there are, of course, many other examples one could cite – serves only to confirm Georgian obsessions with the more goulsh happenings suffered by buildings, and demonstrate how they affected religious worship and church-going in general as well as the very fabric of architecture.

#### NOTES

- 1 Referring to ruined Crowland Abbey, Lincolnshire [*The Gentleman’s Magazine* (hereafter *Gent.’s Mag.*), March 1784, 201].
- 2 Articles *To be Enquired of in the Visitation of the Right Worshipful Edmund Pyle ... Archdeacon of ... York*, 1762 [Collection of the Thoresby Society, Leeds].
- 3 S. L. Ollard and P. C. Walker (eds.), ‘Archbishop Herring’s Visitation Returns, 1743’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series*, 1928–31, 2. However, the practice was by no means foolproof. Torrington observed that ‘numbers [of] spires and steeples ... are gone to ruin, and yearly suffer to fall down: how happens this? Have we no bishops, or do they not visit their dioceses?’ (27 June 1791), while at Tattersall, Lincolnshire ‘One might suppose ... that visitations were never made; or questions about churches never ask’d! Else might not a bishop [command] Let everything be replaced, and repair’d with decency, so as to keep out shame and cold .... See that it be instantly begun’ (2 June 1791), in C. B. Andrews (ed.), *The Torrington Diaries Containing the Tour Through England and Wales of the Hon. John Byng (Later Fifth Viscount Torrington) between the Years 1781 and 1794*, London, II, 1934–38, 342, 356.
- 4 York, York University, Borthwick Institute (hereafter Borthwick), DR.C&P/M4, 7 March 1732.
- 5 *Gent.’s Mag.* August 1768, 393, on 24 July. Of storm-wrecked Cranbrook, Kent: ‘When lightning vivid thro’ the aether spreads,/ And awful thunder rolls about our heads,/ In the bright flash we view the brighter God,/ Who sends this token of his power abroad;/ And in the stroke which rends the passive air/ We heard his voice that fills the world with fear;/ Then, midst the dangers which our lives surround,/ Our shield of safety on his arm is found’ [*Gent.’s*

- Mag.*, September 1787, 824]. Dr Zachary Grey seeing c.1719 St Charles Borromeo, Antwerp (1615–21), where 'Nothing but It's Front is now remaining, the Rest ... consumed by the thunder that ... fir'd and burnt It to the Ground' (in 1718), thought the inhabitants' 'Sins ... very great, to provoke the *Almighty*, to Strike to the Ground [one of] the Stateliest Structures in the World' [London, British Library, Add MS. 5957, ff.64–66].
- 6 *Journals of the House of Commons*, XVI, 581, 6 April 1711. Rebuilt in the Classical style 1788–91.
  - 7 Borthwick, FAC 1718/1, 8 September 1718 letter from Charles Mace, a parishioner.
  - 8 *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXII, 619–21, 9 March 1736.
  - 9 *Gent.'s Mag.*, August 1766, 387, 1 August.
  - 10 *Gent.'s Mag.*, March 1770, 138, 18 March.
  - 11 *Gent.'s Mag.*, February 1779, 98 and July 1779, 374, respectively. At Thornbury, Gloucestershire on 18 June 1782 a 'most awful storm of thunder and lightning struck the inhabitants ... with terror. A ball of fire fell upon the church, broke down one of the pinnacles and covered the pavement within with mortar and shattered stones' (*ibid.*, July 1782, 352).
  - 12 *Gent.'s Mag.*, April 1786, 350, confirmed in James Wathen's 17 April 1786 engraving, see Friedman, pl.6 (note 17).
  - 13 *The Hereford Journal*, XVI, No.820, 3.
  - 14 Torrington, *op. cit.*, I, 314, 10 August 1782.
  - 15 *Gent.'s Mag.*, July 1787, 578–79. Remedial work had been undertaken between 1775 and 1781.
  - 16 J. Britton, *The History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of Hereford*, London, 1831, 46.
  - 17 D. Whitehead and R. Shoesmith, *James Wathen's Herefordshire 1770–1820 A collection of his sketches and paintings*, Little Logaston, 1994. These were the subject of Terry Friedman, 'The Eighteenth Century Disaster Print' in Maurice Howard (ed.), *The Image of the Building*, Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain 1995, 1996, 73–5, figs. 5–7.
  - 18 Letter to Andrew Little, 16 July 1788 [Ironbridge Gorge Museum, 'Letters of Thomas Telford', I].
  - 19 *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, XVII, No.840, 3, 12 July 1788.
  - 20 Described in the *Leeds Mercury*, 2 February 1779. W. Bishop, 'Views of Kirkstall Abbey', *Leeds Arts Calendar*, LXXXI, 1977, 10–18.
  - 21 *Journals of the House of Commons*, XLIV, 11 February 1789. The 'astonishing crash ... greatly terrified the inhabitants' [*Gent.'s Mag.*, July 1788, 649].
  - 22 Such as St Alkmund, Shrewsbury, which was subsequently demolished and rebuilt in a Gothic style, 1793–95 [Terry Friedman, 'The Golden Age of Church Architecture in Shropshire', *Shropshire History and Archaeology, Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, LXXI, 1996, 118–26, pls. 34–36].
  - 23 *Salopian Journal*, 17 September 1794, 2. Telford designed the new Classical church 1794–96 [Friedman, 'Golden Age ...', *cit.*, 104–9, pls. 25, 27].
  - 24 J. Le Neve, *Monumenta Aglicana*, IV, London, 1717–19, 210–11, referring to 'a church extremely decay'd, or out of Repair'; also 'Time's capacious hand' and 'the iron hand of Time' ['Musarum Amicus' and 'Catesby. An Elegy', *Gent.'s Mag.*, August 1744, 379].
  - 25 At Wakerley and Casterton, according to W. Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum*, I, London, 85, writing in 1722.
  - 26 Nottinghamshire Archives, PR 5697 and Borthwick, Reg.35, ff.169v–170.
  - 27 R. Richards, *Old Cheshire Churches*, Didsbury, 1973, 268.
  - 28 Citing a 19 October article in his *Essay Towards a Description of Bath*, London, 1765, 308.
  - 29 J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, London, IV, pt.2, 1792, 606, pl. XCIX.
  - 30 Cambridge, Cambridgeshire Record Office, P74/1/2; *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXV, 140–1, 248, 388; Act of Parliament Stat. 15. Georgii III, c.49, 1775. 'Account of money expended 1775–76' including 'Money Received for ... Materials of ... All Saints when taken down' £141 14s.11d. [P75/5/1].
  - 31 Nichols, *op. cit.*, II, pt. 1, 85.
  - 32 *Gent.'s Mag.*, June 1774, 254, in 1772.
  - 33 J. Dugdale, *The New British Traveller, or Modern Panorama of England and Wales*, London, 1819, IV, 316.
  - 34 Chelmsford, Essex Record Office, D/D Qs 140, f.4. At Frampton, Dorset, a 'dreadful fire ... which nearly consumed [the village was] occasioned by ... sparks blown from the leads of the church ... repairing by the plumber' [*Gent.'s Mag.*, April 1796, 344].
  - 35 *The Oxford Journal*, 14 December 1790, quoted in N. Cooper, 'The Building and Furnishings of St Mary's Banbury', *Cake and Cockhorse*, Banbury Historical Society, V, No. 4, Autumn 1972, 65.

- 36 Stafford, Staffordshire Record Office, D917/3/5/20, 22 July 1791.
- 37 *Gent.'s Mag.*, May 1800, 473; a nearby cottage was also ‘levelled ... to the ground’. ‘What measures are to be adopted for rebuilding the tower ... which fell in consequence of three injudicious attempts at repair by a country bricklayer, is not yet known’ [p.432]. It was rebuilt 1802.
- 38 In ‘the beginning of the present century, the tower suffered very much from a violent storm, which threw down a spire of 45 feet ... and split the side walls in various directions. The damage was in part judiciously repaired at the time by a crown-work of stone on the top; but the lower part ... being neglected to be cramped round ... the fissures increased from the pressure of the super incumbent weight, aided by the effects of the weather’ [*Gent.'s Mag.*, March 1799, 185]. See Friedman (note 17).
- 39 I. Clusby (ed.), *James Plumtre's Britain: The Journals of a Tourist in the 1790s*, London, 1992, 189.
- 40 *Gent.'s Mag.* May 1800, 432. Colnaghi, Sala and Co., Cockspur Street, London, issued two prints of the ruined building in March and April 1800 [Friedman, ‘Disaster Print’, *cit.*, fig. 4].
- 41 Letter dated 6 October 1800, closing with ‘Adieu Bungling Johnson & Co.’, quoted in J. F. Williams, ‘The Re-building of Chelmsford Church, 1800 to 1803’, *The Essex Review*, July 1931, 99–100.
- 42 J. Bentham, *The History and Antiquities of the Conventual and Cathedral Church of Ely*, Cambridge, 1771, 286, and J. Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset*, London, 1791, II, 56, the latter in connection with the demolition of the organ and defacing of ‘many monuments’ at All Saints, Castle Cary.
- 43 E. Ward, *The London Spy*, London, 1706–9, III, 148.
- 44 James Gibbs observed in 1703–9 that after the fall of Rome ‘most of ye Churches ... suffered very much, and wer almost demolished, St Peetrs, St John Laterans, St Mary Majors and other Churches wer in danger of falling, being intirely neglected, having no body left to keep them in reipaire, for so many years, till times became more peaceable and the popes wer again resettled in Rome [and] begin with ... Churches ... in a bad condition’ [Sir John Soane’s Museum, London, *A Manuscri by Mr Gibbs Memorandums &c.*, ff.65–66].
- 45 Carlisle, Cumbria Record Office, WPR/15/3, 13.
- 46 R. S. Ferguson, (ed.), *Miscellany Accounts of the Diocese of Carlisle, with their Terriers Delivered in to me at my Primary Visitation by William Nicolson, Late Bishop of Carlisle*, London, 1877, 142–43, 7 March 1704. It was rebuilt 1725–6.
- 47 A ‘Noble and Capacious Fabrick decently Ornamented and in good Repair ... converted in to a Prison [for Dutch prisoners-of-war, who] defaced the Ornaments, demolished the Pews ... broke down the Glass, and greatly undamaged the Lead, Timber, Brick and Stone-work ... rendering it wholly unfit for the Service of Religion’ [Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Willis 52b, f.19a, printed petition dated 28 August 1710].
- 48 It was ‘greatly shattered ... by a platform of guns, which played from the roof in the [1644] siege’, rebuilt with stone from St Mary’s Abbey, which then became ruinous [Francis Drake, *Eboracum: or, The History and Antiquities of the City of York*, York, 1788 ed., I, 380, 399].
- 49 Thomas Gent, *The Ancient and Modern History of the Famous City of York*, York, 1730, 167.
- 50 See note 49.
- 51 M. W. Thompson (ed.), *The Journeys of Sir Richard Colt Hoare through Wales and England 1793–1810*, London, 1983, 122. The church was engraved by T. Malton and J. Gandon in 1778 [Derek Linstrum, *West Yorkshire Architects and Architecture*, London, 1978, pl. 127].
- 52 From a poem by W. Woolston referring to St Mary, Adderbury, Oxfordshire [*Gent.'s Mag.*, March 1800, 209–10].
- 53 Stephen Wren, *Parentalia*, 20; G. Huelin, *Vanished Churches of the City of London*, London, 1996, 1.
- 54 J. Bridges, *The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, I, London, 1791, 432.
- 55 J. Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, I, London, 1774, 78–79. E. L. Jones, S. Porter and M. Turner, *A Gazetteer of English Urban Fire Disasters, 1500–1900*, Historical Geography Research Series, No. 13, August 1984.
- 56 J. Chandler, *Wessex Images*, London, 1990, 88; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Willis 43, fol. 221.
- 57 *Gent.'s Mag.*, July 1747, 342 and August 1765, 393.
- 58 P. Muilman, *A New and Complete History of Essex*, II, London, 1767–72, 62.
- 59 ‘Engraven on a Column In the Church of Halstead in Essex, The Spire of which, burnt down by Lightning, was rebuilt at the Expense of Mr Samuel Fiske, 1717’ in *Poems on Several Occasions*, London, 1718, 312. Fiske, a local apothecary, gave £100.

- 60 D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, I, London, 1724–26 (1962 ed.), 54.
- 61 Reprinted in L. A. Curtis, *The Versatile Defoe*, London, 1979, 286–88, 290–92, 294.
- 62 M. Dunsford, *Historical Memorials of the Town and Parish of Tiverton*, 1790, 205–6.
- 63 *Gent.'s Mag.*, August 1731, 329. P. Russell and O. Price (eds.), *England Displayed*, I, London, 1769, 34.
- 64 Robert Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire*, 1712, 658.
- 65 Dugdale, *op. cit.*, IV, 308.
- 66 Defoe, *op. cit.*, II, 152–53.
- 67 J. Hunter, (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby F.R.S.*, Leeds, 1830, 87–8.
- 68 Russell and Price, *op. cit.*, I, 118.
- 69 T. D. Whitaker, *Loidis and Elmete*, London, 1816, 402; Hunter, *op. cit.*, II, 340, on 18 May.
- 70 C. E. Whiting (ed.), 'Two Yorkshire Diaries: The Diary of Arthur Jessop and Ralph Ward's Journal', *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series*, CXVII, 1952, 39. A report in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1764, 93, that the bank of the New River at Spalding, Lincolnshire 'broke down' flooding the church, 'several of the pillars are sunk near two feet, and it thought the church will fall', had to be withdrawn as inaccurate in the March 1764 issue [p.142].
- 71 Defoe, *op. cit.*, I, 74.
- 72 *Gent.'s Mag.*, 9 March 1735, 161.
- 73 *Ibid.*, January 1739, 45, adding that the 'same Storm was felt in Paris, where the Lightning beat down the Steeple of a Church'.
- 74 A 9 March 1739 faculty refers to it being 'in so ruinous a condition that ... parishioners ... cannot without manifest hazard of their lives assemble therein' [Taunton, Somerset Archive and Record Service, D/D/Cp].
- 75 R. Renwick, *Extracts from the Records of The Burgh of Glasgow*, Glasgow, VI, 20–1.
- 76 'The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D. and the Antiquarian and other Correspondence of William Stukeley, Roger & Samuel Gale, etc., Vol. III', *Surtees Society*, LXXIII, 1880, 30, on 12 November 1741; furthermore, St Nicholas's spire falling into the churchyard 'made itself ... a great grave of an isosceles triangular form'.
- 77 *Gent.'s Mag.*, August 1744, 450. A 'short but most violent storm of thunder and lightning at Ipswich ... did considerable damage to St Clements' [*ibid.*, September 1748, 425].
- 78 *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXX, 544. A Bill for the 'Support and Preservation of the Church and the Town' was granted 26 February (p.605).
- 79 *Gent.'s Mag.*, 15 February 1763, 96.
- 80 Torrington, *op. cit.*, II, 28, June 1789.
- 81 'Vertue Note Books, VI', *Walpole Society*, XIII, 1955, 73, for it 'seems to lean, from you, as you go round it', 'to encline every way. A disception to the Eye' [pp.73 & 24]; 'the angular fluting ... wind spirally from the base to the top' a 'strange fancy of ... the architect' [*Gent.'s Mag.*, November 1793, 977].
- 82 Russell and Price, *op. cit.*, II, 106 and T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland 1769*, Edinburgh, 2000, 7. A 1772 visitor 'saw nothing worthy notice but the church, and this only for its ugliness; it is old, and built of bad stone, but rendered most disgusting by its wooden spire (covered with lead) being so much warped, that I discerned its crookedness at three miles distance' [*Gent.'s Mag.*, July 1774, 302–03].
- 83 On 24 June 1776 the churchwardens paid 1s. to John Henshaw 'for quenching the fire in the Steeple' [Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D643 A/PW/1/1].
- 84 Quoted in J. C. Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, I, Derby, 1875, 95.
- 85 Stukeley, *op. cit.*, II, 166, 2 March 1750.
- 86 Repeated in Nichols, *op. cit.*, II, pt.2, 1798, 467–68.
- 87 *Gent.'s Mag.* March 1757, 139.
- 88 Richards, *op. cit.*, 15.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 76, quoting eighteenth century sources.
- 90 *Gent.'s Mag.*, February 1764, 94.
- 91 *Ibid.*, August 1765, 391–92, 3 August.
- 92 Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840*, New Haven and London, 1995, 383.
- 93 Nichols, *op. cit.*, II, pt. 1, 252.
- 94 *Gent.'s Mag.*, August 1791, 768.
- 95 *Ibid.*, November 1791, 1055. See Friedman (note 17), fig. 2.
- 96 *Ibid.*, September 1797, 790; Dugdale, *op. cit.*, II 116.
- 97 J. Tailby, 'Effects of the Lightning', *Gent.'s Mag.*, October 1797, 817–18, illus.
- 98 Nichols, *op. cit.*, III, pt. 1, 1800, 504, pl. LXXI, a 1794 view.
- 99 *Gent.'s Mag.*, November 1791, 1056, noting the 'whole damage ... estimated at 150 l.'. The incident occurred on 22 October.
- 100 *Ibid.*, October 1794, 949.
- 101 J. Bridges, *The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, I, London, 1791, 179.

- 102 *Gent.'s Mag.*, December 1763, 613; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 December 1794, 3. *York Courant*, 6 December 1763, 2, found ‘amazing ... that the South Side of the West Isle ... which had outbraved the Fury of all Storms for many Ages ... is intirely blown down to the very Foundation’.
- 103 Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey History Centre, QS 2/6 1741 Christmas 18 and PSH/GU.HT/16/1. The Church was rebuilt 1749–63 in the Palladian style.
- 104 *Gent.'s Mag.*, March 1751, 135; February 1791, 174; August 1795, 694.
- 105 Nichols, *op. cit.*, II, pt. 2, 312, pl. XLVII; *Gent.'s Mag.*, June 1763, 312 and October 1783, 811–12.
- 106 J. J. Cartwright (ed.), ‘The Travels Through England of Dr Richard Pococke Successively Bishop of Meath and of Ossary during 1750, 1751, and Later Years’, *Camden Society*, NS, I, Vol. 42, 1888, 33.
- 107 W. Hutton, *The History of Derby*, Derby, 1791, 258–59. The structure was repaired in 1715 and 1736; in 1763 1s. was paid for ‘assistance in Searching the Steeple, Suppos’d to be on Fire’, a false alarm [J. C. Cox and W. H. St John Hope, *The Chronicles of the Collegiate Church or Free Church of All Saints, Derby*, London, 1881, 54].
- 108 Chart Sutton was consumed by fire, the ‘bells melted ... all the pews reduced to ashes [and] only the walls ... left standing’ [*Gent.'s Mag.*, May 1779, 266]. At Cranbrook the weathercock was ‘struck by ... lightning, which ... ran down the large iron bar that supported the vane ... passed ... through the door ... down the stone steps, some of which were loosened by its force .... Providentially the congregation was not assembled ... when the explosion took place’ [*ibid.*, September 1787, 824]. At Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire ‘electric fire ... attracted by ... iron works which ornaments the steeple ... thence ... iron-rod that guides the hand of the clock ... proceeded down the organ to a curtain-rod in the front ... and rent it with such violence, that splinters were found sticking in the ceiling, as if discharged from a gun ... then penetrated the floor of the gallery, and followed the iron pillar’ [*ibid.*, January 1791, 82].
- 109 Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, DCN 118/1, fols. 18–20.
- 110 *Gent.'s Mag.*, February 1798, 104, 30 July 1797.
- 111 *Ibid.*, November 1780, 537, on 15 October.
- 112 *The World of Franklin & Jefferson*, New York, 1976, 46.
- 113 To ‘give ... additional stability to the Spire by screwing the Iron Conductor to the Frame of Timber and Iron which binds the Tower together’ [Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, DCN 118/1, fol. 18, 1 March]. At Prescott, Lancashire 15s. 9d. was spent on ‘fixing a Conductor’ in 1797 [Preston, Lancashire Record Office, PR 3404/4/26, item 59].
- 114 *Gent.'s Mag.*, June 1753, 263–64, and October 1750, 473.
- 115 *Ibid.*, January 1769, 50.
- 116 *Ibid.*, 4 June 1795, 517–18.