

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 23, 1931

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STORMS AND STEEPLES

After the Great Storm of 1703, supposed to have been the most severe that has ever visited the British Isles, Sir Christopher Wren was informed that the steeples of nearly all the London churches had been damaged. "Not St. Dunstan's, I am sure," replied the great architect, and he was right, for this church, one of the many he had designed, was almost the only one that entirely escaped injury. An aperture had been left in the spire for the wind to pass through.

Wren was also responsible for placing inside the fourteenth century spire of Chichester Cathedral a swinging balance as a counterpoise to the action of high winds, but in spite of this precaution the spire collapsed in a great storm on February 21, 1861. The event was expected and crowds of people had assembled to watch it. "The spire," writes Professor Willis, "was seen to incline slightly and then to descend perpendicularly into the church, as one telescope tube slides into another, the mass of the tower crumbling beneath it."

Other English cathedrals have suffered similar injuries. In a great storm on St. Andrew's Day in 1221 two of the lesser towers of Worcester Cathedral were carried away. In 1548 the spire was blown off the center tower of Lincoln Cathedral. In 1660 Ripon also lost the spire of its middle tower in a storm; and in 1714 the upper part of the tower of St. Asaph Cathedral was blown down.

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