

Local History: The Tempest

On Sunday 19 December 1686, a massive thunderstorm broke over Alton and caused great consternation in St. Lawrence's Church where the Minister, Mr Henry Butler, was in the middle of a service.

A contemporary account of the storm mentions that;

All of a sudden it grew so exceeding dark that the people could hardly discern one another, and immediately after it happened such flashes of lightning that the whole Church seemed to be in a bright flame, the surprise of the Congregation was exceeding great, especially when two Balls of Fire that made their entry at the eastern wall, passed through the body of the Church, leaving behind them so great a smoke, and smell of brimstone was scarcely able to be expressed.

The people endeavoured all they could to get out of the Church, and as it generally happens in such occasions, the throng and pressing at the door was so great and tumultuous, that it was a considerable time before they got out, some of them fainted away in the Church, as namely the Clerk, who, when he came to himself, cry'd out, Good people where be yee, some swounded in the Churchyard and others in their own houses, so great an impression had the Tempest made on them.

In short, both within and without, the cry of women and children was exceeding affrightful, but to the everlasting remembrance of so strange an event none were killed. Lightning and Thunder cannot go a hairs breadth beyond the Almighty's Commission, Winds and Tempests fulfil His Words.

