

Falkirk Town Steeple

A Public Timepiece
Learning Resources

Falkirk **THI**





Introduction

2014 is the 200 year anniversary of Falkirk's current Town Steeple. As part of the overall Steeple 200 events and activities Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) have created this education pack for schools.

A Townscape Heritage Initiative, or THI for short, is a grant-giving programme that helps communities regenerate Conservation Areas displaying particular social or economic need. The scheme was introduced by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), but typically involves a number of funders contributing to a 'Common Fund', from which grants are given to local property owners, businesses and organisations to allow them to carry out repairs and other works to historic properties and spaces within the THI Area.

Falkirk THI is jointly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Historic Scotland, Falkirk Council and Falkirk BID. Between 2013 -2018 we plan to invest £5.5 million in the town centre. The aim is to help regenerate the area by investing in its unique and rich heritage.

The overall aim of the THI is to breathe new life into Falkirk's historic Town Centre by improving the physical appearance of the area and enhancing the things that make it special and unique. People are attracted to and enjoy living, working and visiting historic, locally distinctive and well-kept places. Falkirk THI aims to improve the economic and social success of the town centre by creating a high quality urban environment where people will want to spend their time and money.

Alongside the physical regeneration work, Falkirk THI will be implementing a 'Community Engagement' programme. This will bring local history to life and enable people of all ages to learn more about Falkirk's rich heritage. Training and job opportunities linked to the conservation of traditional buildings and historic environments will also be available.

If you would like to find out more about the work of the THI, events and projects then please visit our website www.falkirkthi.com. You can also find us on Facebook Falkirk THI and Twitter @FalkirkTHI.

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Brief History of Falkirk Steeple



For over 300 years Falkirk has had a town steeple dominating the skyline. It has had many uses across the years from holding meetings, acting as the local jail and communicating the time to the town. Falkirk's first steeple was built sometime in the late 16th or early 17th century and its location is unknown. In 1697 local stone mason William Stevenson demolished the Steeple because it had become a ruin and was unsafe. Falkirk's second steeple was built the same year and designed as a local symbol of Falkirk's civic pride which could

be seen far and wide. More importantly, at this time it was a timepiece for the local community, as there were few clocks to help people tell the time.

In 1801 Mr William Glen of Forganhall, a local businessman, acquired the land of the old tollbooth to the east of the Steeple. The old tollbooth shared a wall with the Steeple and Glen was given permission to rebuild on the site of the tollbooth, as long as he did nothing to weaken or endanger the structure of the Steeple. However, by 1803 the steeple developed serious

cracks and was leaning at such an angle it was compared to the tower at Pisa. The Steeple was demolished and a 10 year legal battle followed putting the building of a replacement Steeple on hold.

In 1812 David Hamilton, a famous Glasgow architect, was commissioned to design a brand new steeple. Building work on the new steeple began in 1813. The ground floor housed a shop, above this was a small room used by the jailor or shop keeper, the next two rooms were used as prison cells and had heavy wooden doors with iron

bolts. The next floor contained a meeting room with impressive views along the High Street through large windows. By June 1814 the new 140 foot steeple was complete, but as yet had no bell. John Russell a well-known Falkirk clockmaker (clockmaker to HRH the Prince Regent, later King George IV) offered to furnish a new clock which was installed in 1815. A new bell was also commissioned for the Steeple bearing the inscription 'May Falkirk Flourish', which was hung in 1816.

In 1927 disaster struck. A lightning storm damaged the top 40 feet of the steeple. Falling masonry covered a large area and damaged nearby buildings injuring several people. James McComish, a Barr lorry driver had a lucky escape when he instinctively took refuge against the steeple. His horse, not so fortunate, was killed and buried under the rubble. Local residents whose homes were damaged were relocated, except a Mrs Coatts who 'refused to leave her partially wrecked home' (Scotsman June 18 1927). By 1928 the Steeple had been repaired and in 1973 the ground floor shop was converted into an information centre before becoming the local box office in the 1980's.

Outwardly the Steeple has changed little since 1928 apart from the occasional face lift. It has been part of Falkirk town life and community identity for generations, overlooking countless market days and Hogmanay celebrations. It is still very much a symbol of local pride and used by many local groups in their logos, including Falkirk Football Club.

Brief History of Clocks and Timekeeping



Timekeeping has always been an important part of life. Before clocks were invented the sun and the seasons were used to tell the time.

For centuries bells have been rung to signal important times during the day. For example monastic communities' rang bells to signal the different services throughout the day and later bells were used in clock mechanisms. The invention of the first mechanical clocks in the 1500s led to time keeping being more accessible.

Since the medieval period public clocks have been placed in prominent buildings, usually in turrets (towers). These clocks were vital in communicating time to large groups of people. The creation of the mechanical clock led to more public clocks being set up. 1837 saw the construction of Britain's first purpose built clock tower in Herne Bay, England. Many towers had clocks before this but many of these clocks were installed as an afterthought

not as part of the original tower design. By the 20th century many turret clocks fell into decline. By this time many individuals owned watches and most households had their own clocks. During the 20th century the old mechanised wind-up clocks, which had to be repaired by specialist clock makers, were replaced by electric or battery powered pieces.

To tell the time today we use a 'standard time' which is regulated across the whole world. In 1884 Greenwich meridian become the basis for time everywhere and 24 hour time zones were set up. Around the same time more affordable timepieces became available, however it wasn't until the invention of the wrist watch in the 1890's that personal timepieces became the norm. Nowadays the need for public timepieces has all but disappeared. Turret clocks can still be seen in our villages, towns and cities. We may no longer use them for timekeeping, but they are a prominent reminder of how times have changed.

Suggested Lesson Activities

Activity 1

Using the written records and historical photographs in this pack the children can research into the history of the Steeple.

Children can then write a poem, eye witness account or newspaper article of the Steeple Lightning Strike, Steeple demolition or other event.

Children could discuss the sights, sounds and noises of the event before writing a draft copy of their chosen piece of writing. When creating their final piece of work they should think about lettering and layout.

Activity 2

Organise a visit to the Steeple to examine the building exterior. In groups the children can carry out a mini building survey.

The children should think about what the Steeple is made from, its shape, any prominent features, if it has different sections, the window size and shape, the doors, any plaques or stones that do not match and any modern additions to the Steeple.

A building recording sheet can be downloaded from the Get Involved section of the Falkirk THI website.

Activity 3

Show the children some photographs of the Steeple including the 1697 and 1814 plans.

If they were commissioned to create a modern or futuristic new design for Falkirk Steeple, what features would they include in the new building?

Following this the children can outline a design on A4 paper.

Curriculum for Excellence Links

LIT 2-24a

I consider the impact that layout and presentation will have and can combine lettering graphics or other features to engage my reader.

LIT 2-28a

I can convey information, describe events, explain processes or combine ideas in different ways.

SOC 1-03a

I can use evidence to recreate the story of a place or individual of local historical interest

SOC 2-01a

I can use primary and secondary sources selectively to research events in the past

SOC 2-10a

Having explored my local area, I can present information on different places to live, work and relax and interesting places to visit.

LIT 2-02a

When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking.

SOC 1-02a

By exploring places, investigating artefacts and location them in time, I have developed an awareness of the ways we remember and preserve Scotland's history.

SOC 2-10a

Having explored my local area, I can present information on different places to live, work and relax and interesting places to visit.

EXA 2-04a

Through observing and recording from my experiences across the curriculum, I can create images and objects which show my awareness and recognition of detail.

EXA 2-06a

I can develop and communicate my ideas, demonstrating imagination and presenting at least one possible solution to a design problem.

SOC 2-04a

I can compare and contrast a society in the past with my own and contribute to a discussion of the similarities and differences.

Steeple Timeline

Late 16th early 17th century

First Steeple is built

1697

First Steeple demolished as in bad repair

1697

Second Steeple built

New bell gifted for Steeple by James Livingstone, 4th Earl of Callendar

January 1746

Group of townspeople watch the Second Battle of Falkirk from Steeple

1801

Mr William Glen given permission to use ground floor of Steeple provided he did not endanger the structure of the building

1803

Steeple demolished as foundations damaged

December 1812

Construction of Third Steeple begins, designed by Glaswegian architect David Hamilton.

June 1814

Third Steeple Completed

John Russell, a local clockmaker is hired to replace the steeple clock and bell

January 1816

New bell hung in Steeple with the inscription 'May Falkirk Flourish'

January 1818

Stentmasters agree to ring Steeple Bell at 8 o'clock

1846-48

Two new transparent clock faces installed in the Steeple with Gas Lights

30th January 1848

Greenwich Mean Time adopted

1896

Clock refitted by local watchmaker Mr Muir. He suggests that the Steeple Bell be turned

May 1897

Steeple Bell cracked beyond repair

June 1927

Steeple hit by lightning. Falling masonry killed a cart horse and some locals injured

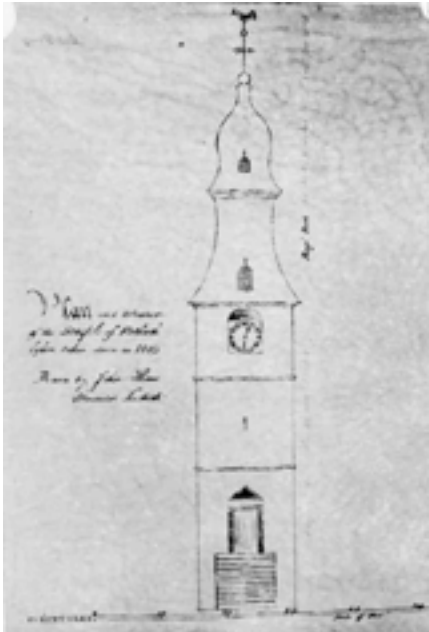
1928

Top 40 feet of Steeple finally replaced

1973

Steeple shop opens as information centre

Images of Steeple



Plan of 1697 Steeple before it was demolished in 1803. Drawn by John Shaw, Measurer, Falkirk. (P05667)



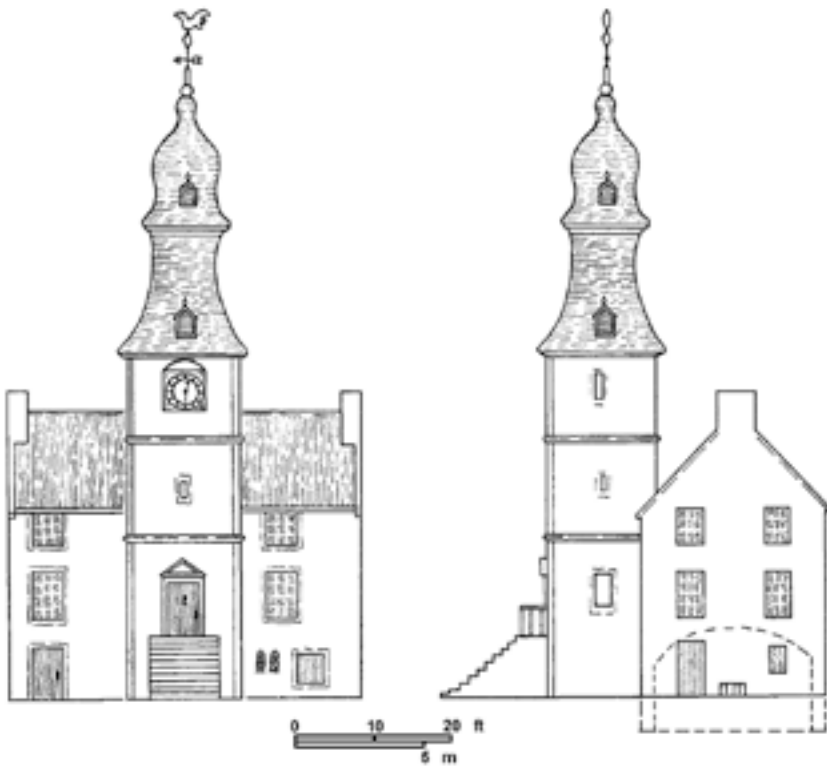
Brass bell given by James Livingstone, Earl of Linlithgow and Callander in 1697 for the new Steeple. It remained in use for 200 years and was replaced in 1816.

The Bell inscription reads "JAMES. EARLE. OF. LINLITHGOW. AND. CALLANDER. JOHN. MEIKLE. FECIT. EDINBURGH. 1697. FOR. FALKIRK". (1972-079-001)



Brass plaque commemorating the lighting of Steeple clock in 1848. The inscription reads "FALKIRK, 1848/ THE FITTING UP OF THE/ TRANSPARENT DIALS, AND LIGHTING WITH GAS,/ OF THIS CLOCK, WERE DONE BY SUBSCRIPTION FROM THE/ INHABITANTS, OBTAINED THROUGH THE EXERTIONS OF/ Robert Adam Esq./ PROVOST OF THE BURGH,/ IN THE YEAR 1847." (1985-074-005)

Here are some images of Steeple for educational use in the classroom. Unless otherwise stated they are reproduced courtesy of Falkirk Museum and Archives.



Elevation Drawing of 1697 Steeple
Courtesy of Geoff Bailey



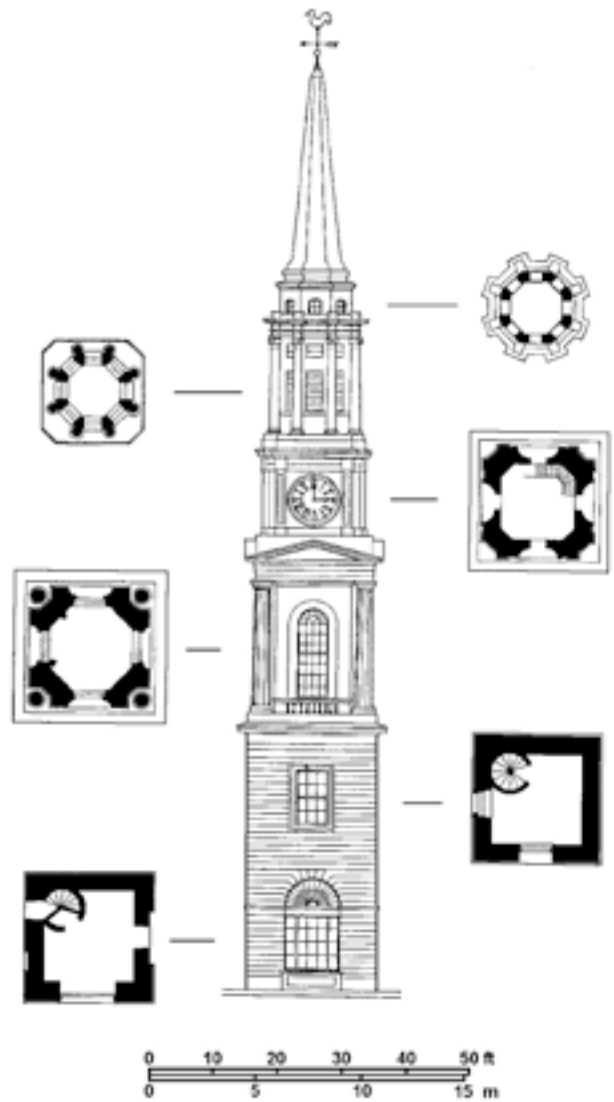
David Hamilton design for Falkirk Steeple,
1813. (A120.002)



Painting showing Falkirk High Street and Steeple from 1893 by Scott Stewart James. (2007-019-001)



Alexander Learmonth & Co Butcher shop in Falkirk Steeple, circa 1902. (P12319)



1814 Steeple showing plans of the various floors

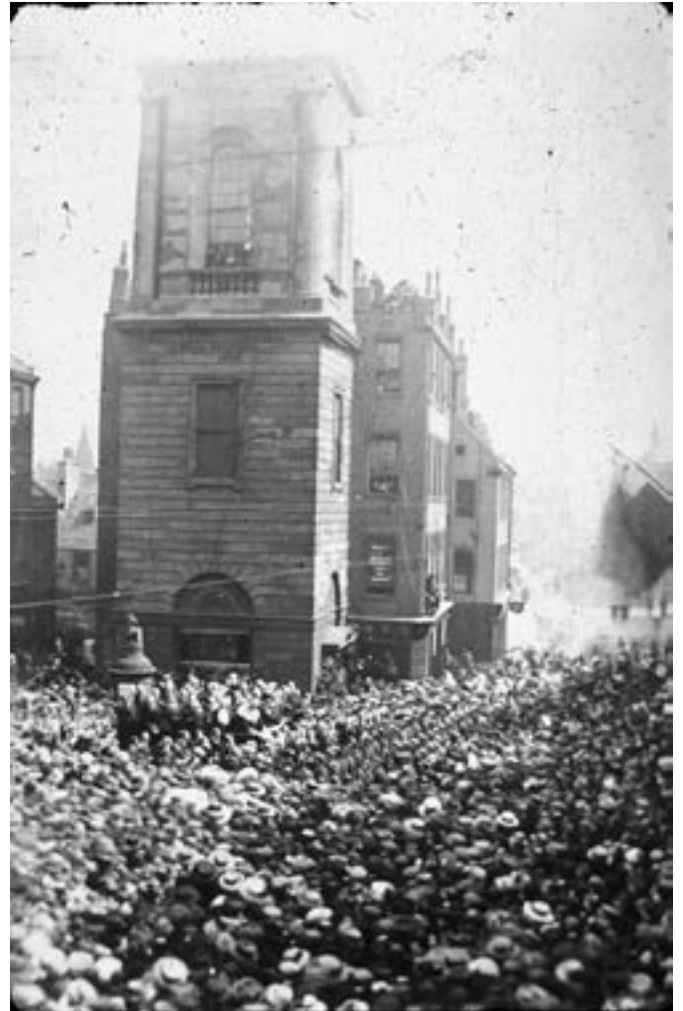
Courtesy of Geoff Bailey



Postcard of Falkirk High Street looking east circa 1905. (P07024)



Postcard of Falkirk High Street looking west circa 1905. (P07019)



Large crowds gathered to hear the proclamation of the accession of George V in 1910. (P06899)



Falkirk Steeple circa 1900 with shop fronts and pedestrians. (P01181)



Falkirk High Street, circa 1910 with tram lines and cables. (P12977)



Falkirk Steeple being rebuilt after it was hit by lightning, 1927 (P14967)



The damage to the top of Falkirk Steeple after it was struck by lightning in 1927 (P02840)



Interested locals surrounding Falkirk Steeple after lightning strike in 1927 (P42296)



Fallen masonry and Barr wagon in High Street after Falkirk Steeple struck by lightning.



Baxter's Wynd circa 1930. The Steeple's black wooden clock face can be seen in the background (P11444)



View of High Street from the Steeple in 1950's (P32205)



Steeple Clock Mechanism (P29750)



Cross Well area in front of the Steeple in 1950's with public telephone box and newspaper vendor (P32136)



Interior of the Steeple looking up the stairs leading to the clock tower.



Steeple Prison Cell Door will lock and three bolts.

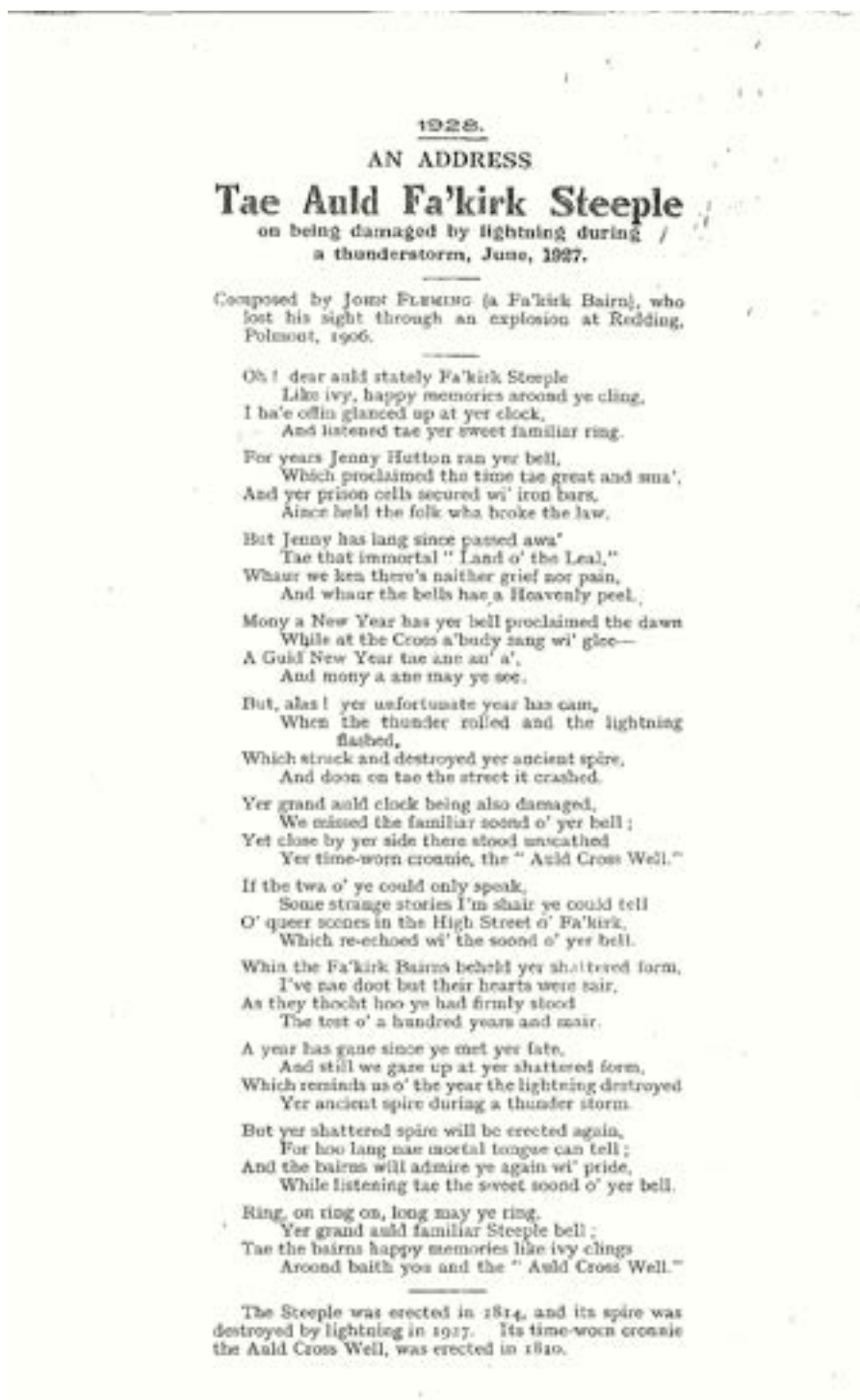


2013 View of Falkirk Steeple

Written Sources

Various primary and secondary written sources about the history of Falkirk Steeple can be found in Falkirk Archives in Callendar House and Falkirk Libraries. A list of some of these can be found on page 22.

Below are some extracts from primary sources about the Steeple.



Courtesy Falkirk Museum and Archives

Newspaper Extracts from The Falkirk Herald

Saturday 18 June 1927

Reproduced with kind permission of The Falkirk Herald

Disaster To Falkirk Steeple

Upper Portion Demolished By Lightning

Miraculous Escapes

Falkirk Town Steeple, which has been a familiar and popular landmark with the people of the locality for more than a century, was partially destroyed yesterday afternoon through being struck by lightning in the course of a short, sharp thunderstorm which passed over the town and district. Situated as the building is in a central position of the High Street, the main thoroughfare of the burgh, and surrounded by shops and tenement properties, the occurrence naturally created considerable alarm and excitement, but, fortunately it was unattended by any loss of human life. This latter circumstance is all the more remarkable when regard is had to the fact that something like forty feet, representing the major portion of the fifty feet iconic spire surmounting the base and pillars above the clock face collapsed and crashed into the street and through the roofs of adjoining tenement dwellings. The outstanding feature, indeed, apart from the highly alarming nature of the occurrence, was the positively miraculous escapes from serious injury or death of the tenants occupying the houses struck by the falling masonry.

A Tremendous Crash

It was soon after two o'clock in the afternoon that a hushed atmosphere and lowering light presaged the thunderstorm. Just then rain began to fall in torrents, which had the happy effect of sending most people who happened to be about in the streets scurrying in search of shelter. At ten minutes past two there came an unusually vivid and blinding flash of lightning, followed instantly by a reverberating clap of thunder and almost simultaneously by the tremendous crash of the falling steeple. The inhabitants for a wide distance around were startled by the terrific noise and in

their homes and places of business people stood stock still wondering what exactly had happened. News that the steeple had been struck by lightning and had crashed to earth spread quickly around. Thousands of people hastened to the High Street from all quarters to satisfy themselves of the accuracy of the reports which they found to be only very regrettably true.

The steeple appears to have been struck on the north side by the lightning which sent tons of masonry hurtling from the spire into the street below. Several huge pieces of the stonework were hurled to the north and west for a distance of fully one hundred yards over four rows of tenement property and fell into Manor Street, Bank Street and Vicar Street in each of which damage was in evidence by the breaking of windows and the dropping of the masonry of other buildings. It was a providential circumstance that as has already been stated the torrential rainfall had had the effect of practically clearing the streets of pedestrians, and at the time of the occurrence there were comparatively few people about.

Carters Marvellous Escape

A horse yoked to a lorry belonging to Messrs R Barr, aerated water manufacturers, and which was standing directly under the steeple in front of the shop occupied by Messrs Wilson and Timpson, grocers at the entry to Tolbooth Street, was killed instantaneously and buried in a pile of debris. The driver of the lorry, James McComish, Sunnyside, Camelon who was in the act of placing an empty box in the lorry when he heard the crash had a marginal escape from meeting the fate of his horse. Startled by the flash of lightning and the terrible noise with which it was at once followed he instinctively ran from his

lorry and sought refuge by standing with his back actually against the foot of the steeple building on the west side, while the falling masonry crashed all around him. He was struck and knocked down by a piece of stone but apart from a cut on the left side of the head, he escaped without injury. Naturally he suffered not a little from shock but after being attended to he quickly recovered.

Adjoining the steeple and practically forming a part of the base is the large four storey property known as 'Steeple Lands' which has shops on the ground floor and dwelling houses on the top floors. Through the roof of the building a great quantity of the steeple masonry fell, and as a result some five families had their homes more or less wrecked. The occupants themselves escaped serious injury in truly marvellous fashion.

Woman's Terrifying Experience

Especially dangerous and terrifying was the experience of a young married woman Mrs James Barr who was with her two children both boys aged three years and fifteen months respectively was at work in the house occupied by her on the top flat and nearest the steeple. Through the roof of the house there fell a great mass of masonry and Mrs Barr was practically buried beneath the debris. Some presentiment of impending danger came upon her the moment she saw the brilliant flash of lightning and she at once clasped the younger child to her and bending over him to shield him with her body from succeeded in preventing him with sustaining any hurt. The elder boy who happened to be playing himself in front of the fireplace, was also buried in the debris, but his only apparent injury was a slight cut or abrasion on his left cheek. The mother herself sustained a somewhat nasty injury to her leg, and was also bruised to some extent about the arms. The marvel is that either she or her children escaped with their lives. Before they could be extricated from their painful predicament and taken

to safety the door of the house had to be burst open by neighbours who rendered what assistance they could in the dressing of injuries and in providing the unfortunate family with clothing to take the place of that which they wore and which was destroyed beyond repair.

Damage To Property

Stones also crashed through into another house which was unoccupied at the time, while two other houses on the top flat were not affected. The force and weight of the fall of stone resulted also in material damage being done to some of the houses on the second flat. The tenant of one of these – Mrs Coatts – though her home was partially weakened and in spite of repeated warnings by the police and neighbours as to the grave risk she was running, in view of the possibility of a further fall of masonry from the steeple could not be persuaded to leave. She remained in the house gazing placidly from her window on the High Street during the greater part of the afternoon and until she was finally warned out before the steeplejacks commenced work on the overhanging masonry of the steeple about six o'clock. A large quantity of masonry fell through the roof of another tenement property on the north of the High Street, and the windows of which overlook the spot in Tolbooth Street where the horse was killed. The tenant of the house most directly affected in this property – Mrs Docherty – was somewhat badly cut along the face and had to be medically attended. Altogether some six or seven people sustained injury requiring the attention of a doctor, but in almost every case the injuries were wonderfully slight.

The Falkirk Fire Brigade were summoned just after the disaster to deal with fire which in the Universal Bar, the now uninhabitable public house property adjoining the Steeple in High Street. The outbreak it appears was caused by the lightning striking an electric wire. It was expertly extinguished by the firemen.

A Second Rheims

The weather vane of the steeple was discovered lying in a court at the rear of the property occupied by Messrs Wilson and Thompson grocers in High Street. The scene in the High Street itself was one of utter desolation. Strwn all over the thoroughfare, and here and there piled in heaps were the huge pieces of stone that had a few minutes before formed the spire of the Falkirk steeple. Shop and house windows on each side of the street were smashed, and towering above the scene of destruction was the steeple, of such of it as was left, pre... a ragged and dejected like appearance. The clock faces had been blown out by an explosion, the result of the lightning while travelling down the conductor to earth ... a vacuum in the Steeple. Up till last night no person had been allowed to enter the Steeple and consequently it is not known whether the bells have been damaged or not. At the highest part of the broken spire were many apparently loose pieces of masonry, which seemed in danger of falling any minute. An onlooker described the spire as a second Rheims.

During the course of the afternoon thousands of people from all parts of the town and district visited the High Street, and looked with both interest and regret upon the damage that had been done. They were kept at a safe distance by the police and later in the day the precaution was taken of barricading the streets in the vicinity against all traffic.

The Fright Of His Life

A "Falkirk Herald" representative had interviews with some of the people who suffered narrow escapes. James McComish, who was in charge of the horse which was killed in Tolbooth Street, and who himself had a wonderful escape, was asked how he felt about it all, and his reply was – "I'm all right now, but I got the freight of my life, and I'm lucky not to be lying with my horse over there." After describing the manner of his escape as narrated above, he referred

to the tremendous crash and said – "I never heard a shell burst like that, and I served with the Garrison Artillery in France, and was accustomed to big noises, but I've never heard anything like that awful crash today. I was lucky in France too, for I came through without a scratch."

Mrs Barr, who with her town children was buried by falling debris in her home in Steeple Land, was obviously much distressed by her painful experience. She said – "I was just at the window putting up the screen when the lightning seemed to come right in my face. I got hold of wee Andrew who was just at my feet, and I gathered him into me. Jamie was playing by the fireside, and I could not get at him before the crash came, and I was covered with falling stones and rubbish. I scarcely remember any more, but after I got free I ran to pick up James fearing that something dreadful had happened to him. I was thankful to find myself and the children alive, and then get out of the house. I tried the door but it would not open, and before we could get out my neighbour, who heard my screams, had to force it open for me. We were covered from head to foot with dirt and dust, which was in our very ears, eyes and noses. I can't say much more about it. It was terrible, and I think we are very lucky to get off with such little injury."

An Eye-Witness's Story

One who actually witnessed the disaster to the steeple gave a vivid impression of what he saw. "I was walking along Cockburn Street" he said "and when at the foot of the Howgate I looked up at the Steeple to see the time on the clock. It was just at that moment that the flash of the lightning came. I saw it strike near the top of the Steeple then it appeared to run in a flame down the side of it until it came just past the clock, which then seemed to blaze out in a white heat. In a moment the whole thing was shut from my view by a great cloud. I never saw any of the masonry toppling over, but when the strange cloud cleared away I was left standing looking at the havoc that had been wrought on the Steeple."

Wednesday 9th September
1925

Stories Of The Steeple

Where, tell me, is the being worthy of the name of "Bairn" who is not naturally proud of that tall and dignified structure which stands in the High Street of Falkirk – the town steeple? To every citizen born and bred within the confines of the old historic town of ours, it fills the place of London's "Big Ben", the Eiffel Tower of Paris, the leaning tower of Pisa, the Washington obelisk, or even the Wallace Monument at Stirling. It is ever ready to give us the "time of day" as we pass, though through lack of encouragement it has abandoned its old practice of ringing the curfew each evening and warning the "Bairns" under its shadow of "cuddle doon". It is a guide to the weary and wayward wanderer, and resounds gallantly to the plaintive words of the modern song "Show me the way to go home."

Saturday June 25th 1927

Falkirk Steeple (Struck by lightning Friday 17th June 1927)

'Twas a glad day for Fa'kirk town
When thy foundation first was made
When worthies watched wi' glowin' pride
Each stane upon its neeber laid,
Till thou wert reared wi' skilful care
A noble structure, time to crown,
A landmark for the days to come,
A glory for auld Fa'kirk toun.

I think I see thee in thy prime,
New masoned sandstone, fashioned rare,
A spectacle o' classic art,
A clock on every side, four square.
The wearie toilers in their beds
Could view thy time, frae far and near,
But noe, alas, they'll miss thee sair,
And for the loss may shed a tear.

'Twass a sad day for Fa'kirk toun
When elements against thee warred,
And smote thee wi' ruthless flame,
And a' thy ancient beauty marred.
That was a day few shall forget,
The rain in torrents lashed the street,
And ne'er a body could be seen
Where groups before were wont to meet.

The lightning flashed sae vividly,
The thunder clap foundations shook,
The Steeple crashed, in debris lay,
And men, half blinded, scarce could look
To where the storm wi' vicious haste
Such agonizing havoc wrought.
Bewildered by the sudden shock,
They, staggerin', for safety sought.

A horse, for beauty unsurpassed,
A victim to the storm fiend fell.
The man in charge – great miracle—
Was saved, and that we're glad to tell.
A gloomy pall hung owre a',
As if the hand o' death had caught
A living soul we loved full well,
And desolation to us brought.

Although we are o' thee bereft,
And mourn for thee as for a friend,
Yet are we thankful Providence,
From death, did human life defend.
And as we view thy shattered frame,
And miss the weather cane abune,
We think o' thee as thou hast been,
A pride to dear auld Fa'kirk toun.

E. J. PURVIS

The Scotsman, June 18 1927

Reproduced with kind
permission of The Scotsman

Lightning Havoc: Falkirk Steeple Struck Several Houses Wrecked

FALKIRK town steeple was practically destroyed by lightning during a short sharp thunderstorm which passed over the district yesterday afternoon. Situated as the building is in a prominent position in the centre of the town surrounded by shops and dwelling-houses, the occurrence created considerable alarm and excitement, but was fortunately unattended with any loss of life. This is all the more remarkable in that fully forty feet of the top of the structure, which stands about 150 feet high, collapsed and crashed into the street and through the roofs of adjoining tenement property and there were many narrow escapes from serious injury and death.

About 2 'o'clock in the afternoon, at which time rain was falling in torrents, the inhabitants of the town and the district for miles around were startled by an unusually vivid and blinding flash of lightning which was followed immediately by a reverberating clap of thunder and the tremendous crash of the falling steeple. The imposing structure, it appears, had been struck by the lightning on the north side, and the iconic spire, which stood

A reverberating clap of thunder and the tremendous crash of the falling steeple. The imposing structure, it appear, had been struck by the lightning on the north side and the iconic spire, which stood about 50 feet above the supporting base and pillars was thrown to the earth.

Several huge pieces of masonry were hurled to the north and west for a distance of fully 100 yards, over four rows of tenement property, and fell into Manor Street, Bank Street and Vicar Street in each of which damage was done by the breaking of shop and house windows. Fortunately the heavy rain had had the effect of practically clearing the streets of pedestrians, and at the time of occurrence there were comparatively few about.

A Horse Killed

A horse, yoked to a lorry, which was standing directly below the steeple in Tolbooth Street was killed instantaneously and buried in a pile of debris. The driver, James M'Comish, Sunnyside, Camelon, was in the act of putting an empty box onto the lorry when he heard the crash and he had a marvelous escape. Startled by the noise, he instinctively ran from his lorry and took up position actually leaning against the steeple on the west side while the stones crashed all around him. He was struck and knocked down by one of the pieces, but beyond a cut on the left side of the head, he escaped without injury.

Immediately adjoining the steeple and practically forming part of the base is a large four storey property known as "Steeple Land," with shops below and dwelling houses above. Heaps of the falling masonry crashed through the roof of this building and as a result some four or five families had their homes wrecked and themselves experiencing very narrow escapes. Mrs Barr, a young woman, who with her two children aged three years and fifteen months respectively was at work in the house occupied by her on the top flat and was buried in the material and stones that tumbled through the roof into her room. She had time, however, to clasp the younger child to her and succeeded in protecting him with her body. The elder boy was also buried in the debris and was rather badly cut about the face. The mother sustained a nasty injury to her leg and was also bruised about the arms, but the younger child was unhurt. The door of the house occupied by these people had to be forced open by neighbours before they could be extricated.

Stones also crashed through into another house which happened to be unoccupied at the time, while other two houses on

the top flat were not affected. The force and the weight of the fall of stone resulted also in damage to some of the houses on the flat below, where one of the tenants, Mrs Coutts, although in some peril from a possible further fall of masonry from the steeple, refused to leave her partially wrecked home. Much of the steeple masonry also fell around the roof of an adjoining tenement house on the north side of Tolbooth Street, and the tenant, Mrs Docherty, was rather badly cut about the face. Another six people had to be medically attended to for injuries, but in almost every case they were surprisingly slight.

Scene Of Devastation

The weather vane fell into a yard at the rear of a tenement properly in High Street, while in the High Street itself the scene was one of devastation, piles of masonry in the thoroughfare, and on each side shop and house windows were smashed. The Fire Brigade were summoned to deal with fire which broke out in an unoccupied public house near the steeple and which appears to have been caused by the fusing of an electric wire.

Thousands of people assembled in the course of the afternoon to look upon the scene and later in the day the precaution was taken of barricading the streets in the vicinity against all traffic. The destruction of the steeple removes a structure which has been a familiar and popular landmark in the district for a period of over 100 years. It was erected in 1814 and was the third steeple which had been built on the same spot, the one which it displaced having been erected in 1597. A somewhat unusual feature and one which invariably interested visitors to the town was the fact that for very many years the lower part of the steeple had been occupied as a butcher's shop.

Council And The Situation

Provost Gilchrist presided at a special meeting of the Falkirk Town Council last night, called to consider what steps should be taken to deal with the unusual situation which had arisen and also consider the question of providing accommodation for five families which had been warned out of tenement building adjoining the steeple because of the grave danger of loose masonry falling from the ruined steeple. The Provost said that five families had been warned out of their homes and that the property and thoroughfares adjoining the steeple had been declared a danger zone. Everything was being done to get the streets made safe at the earliest possible moment. He hoped that by this morning certain of the shops in the danger zone would be allowed to carry on business, provided it was not necessary for people to go on to the carriageway but certain shops, including those underneath the steeple could not be opened today. He was hopeful that the High Street would be open for through traffic by tomorrow.

The Council agreed that the tenants whose homes had been damaged should, along with other families be given temporary accommodation in the burgh hostel until all cause for anxiety had been removed.

Last night a staff of steeplejacks commenced to remove the loose masonry on the steeple, and their dangerous work at fully 100 feet above the level of the ground was witnessed by thousands of spectators.



FALKIRK TOWN STEEPLE REBUILT,- the spire of Falkirk Town Steeple, an imposing structure 146 feet high, which prior to its destruction by lightning on 17th June 1927 graced the High Street of the town for over a century, has been rebuilt. Steeplejacks who have been engaged in the work of reconstruction for several months applied an interesting touch yesterday morning when the old weathercock, repaired and beautifully gilded, was reset on its former perch at the pinnacle of the spire. The "Cock o' the Steeple," as it is familiarly called, measures three feet four inches wide and is two feet two inches high. It is made of brass and bears the date 1814. When the steeple was struck by the lightning many tons of masonry crashed with a deafening roar on to the High Street below, while huge boulders were hurled through the roofs of adjoining houses. By some miraculous chance there was no loss of human life, though a horse standing beneath the steeple was killed by the falling debris. The weathercock was lost for a time, but it was ultimately found in a courtyard some distance away at the rear of shop premises. Preparation is now being made by the steeplejacks to effect necessary repairs to the lower part of the structure. An offer of £200 has been made by Mr Robert Dollar, head of the Dollar Steamship Line, San Francisco, towards the cost of installing a new electrically controlled clock in the steeple. Mr Dollar is a native of Falkirk and has been a generous benefactor to the town.

Further Reading and Falkirk Archive Sources

A History of Falkirk

Lawson, Lewis
1975

Local Antiquarian Notes and Queries re- printed from the Falkirk Herald Vol I-IV

Love, James

Falkirk A History

Scott, Ian
2006

Falkirk and District: An Illustrated Architectural Guide

Jaques, Richard (ed.)

Pamphlet: "The Steeple of Falkirk: its history, its re-building, its future". Appeal for support for restoration of Steeple following damage by lightning

Falkirk Rotary Club
1928

Falkirk Archive Ref. A404.001

Calatria: The Journal of Falkirk Local History Society

The Stentmasters of Falkirk

No. 5 John Reid
1993

John Russell, Watch and Clockmaker of Falkirk

No. 9 Winnie R McPherson
1996

The Feuars of Falkirk

No. 15 John Reid
2001

Falkirk Steeple

No. 20 James Love
2004

Tolbooths Revisited

No. 21 John Reid
2004

Local Bells

No. 25 John Reid
2009

Special Edition: Bicentenary of Falkirk Steeple

No. 30
2014

The Falkirk Archive in Callendar House and the Local History Reference Section in Falkirk Library have a wide range of books on the history of the Falkirk area. Reference copies of Calatria are available at both venues.

Other Resources

Project Explorer

Founded in 2003 this US based project aims to bring the world into the classroom with free multimedia content.

Short film clips about bell casting at Whitechapel Bell Foundry, London

www.projectexplorer.org/ms/se/whitechapel.php

Scran

Scran (www.scran.ac.uk) is a charitable online learning resource base with over 360,000 images, movies and sounds from museums, galleries, archives and the media. It is available free to schools across Scotland and can be accessed using your Glow Account.

Pathfinder Packs

Falkirk Steeple

<http://bit.ly/1fMNNtq>

Telling the Time

<http://bit.ly/1rZjOyH>

Time: Clocks and Bells

<http://bit.ly/1mz9mMQ>

British Museum

Animation of clock mechanism (Linked to Clocks and Watches Gallery at the Museum) <http://bit.ly/1myP3DN>

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