

Lightning Conductors

Nearly all architects recommend the addition of lightning conductors at churches where there is currently none in their sexennial inspection reports. At an average cost of £1500 each, this represents a considerable expenditure.

The British Standard currently available for the design of lightning conductors is generally considered onerous. The standard, when applied to churches, will indicate that every church should have one. EIG/English Heritage has published joint guidance notes in response to concerns about the effect of conductors on the aesthetic appearance of historic buildings. The document is based on statistical evidence compiled by the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group. Of the 16,000 parish churches in England, between 50- 60 are struck by lightning each year (0.004%), and 90% of claims arising from strikes are for less than £1000. Damage is primarily structural or to electrical systems, and where structural, almost all damage occurs at the tower end. Guidance now suggests that there is a case for considering the risk to churches, in the context of how likely a strike and the cost of repairs, against the cost of installing a protection system and the aesthetic considerations. No lightning conductor system will guarantee full protection.

The Trust's current philosophy is to provide lightning conductors to towers or spires in the following circumstances; where the church is in a prominent position e.g. Portland; where the church has previously been struck by lightning e.g. Edlesborough. The provision of lightning conductors is considered at the consultation stage, and allowance made in consultation figures if protection is deemed necessary. Based on this recent research, the Trust's philosophy accords with the general guidance from EIG/English Heritage and no changes are proposed in the foreseeable future. Where lightning conductors already exist, it is important to maintain them, as one where resistance is high will attract lightning as intended but cause more damage, since the path the electricity takes is uncontrolled.

Testing

Lightning conductors to be tested a minimum of every 3 years (to tie in with our 6 year inspection report schedule), although they may be tested more frequently as circumstances dictate e.g. church in regular use or in a very prominent location.

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