the fire. Beyond this, the fire became politicized on a local, regional, and national level.

The nature of the sources utilized and the attempt to understand the demographic and economic consequences means that the second part of the work reads very differently from the first. The second part, except for the final chapter on cultural reactions, is dominated by data and charts which all provide important insight into the consequences and allows Field to develop an intimate understanding of the fire’s consequences. Overall, in a time when disasters are increasing—floods, fires, and artic vortexes—Field’s work provides one example of how communities respond to these crises. What he clearly demonstrates is that while the short-term consequences proved disruptive to many, over time the city and its activities recovered.


Craig Spence’s *Accidents and Violent Death in Early Modern London, 1650-1750*, is a data-driven analysis of the many ways in which primarily accidental violence injured and killed people in early modern London between the years of 1650 and 1750. Not consisting of mere lists of accidents and their causes across the century indicated in the title, *Accidents and Violent Death in Early Modern London* contains a great many anecdotes as well as literary references that make the book a valuable resource to historical and literary scholars of the period and perhaps to creative writers who might rely on the book for factual information about events in works set in the era. Accurately and thoroughly indexed, *Accidents and Violent Death in Early Modern London* is, in short, a useful tool for people interested in the subject and period.

Spence makes the book’s purpose clear in the Introduction, where he states:

The aim is not to reduce portrayal of such [violent] incidents and fatalities to anecdotal tales of ‘human interest’ or, for that matter, to see them as a window onto ‘everyday life’ in
the past. Rather, it is to comprehend who, among hundreds of thousands of Londoners, encountered such events, how the city’s bureaucracy recorded and elaborated their circumstances and why they did so, and what practical responses might follow. (2)

More specifically, the book aims to consider the early modern accidents primarily from two perspectives: first, as “lived events” and, second, as “transmitted accident narratives” (14).

The mechanisms of reporting accidental death are outlined so that readers learn about the communal responses to such death. Responses to deaths followed a regularized sequence of procedures that involved the following: the death; a notice to two “searchers,” who were mature women from the parish where the death occurred who would look at dead bodies and officially make judgments about the causes of deaths; reports by the searchers of the deaths to parish clerks who would maintain records of deaths for their parishes; reports by parish clerks to the official Bills of Mortality for London that recorded and described violent deaths for other official responses as necessary and for informing members of the public; and reports by clerks, the searchers, or even compilers of The Bills of Mortality to sheriffs or justices of the peace when foul play was suspected. In addition, accidental deaths and homicides might be reported to newspapers and even to relevant courts of law (such as the Old Bailey) when cases were criminal. The people of London thus had an orderly, institutionalized, metropolitan response to deaths.

The searchers in the above process generally took “a view” or made “a search” by examining a dead body. As mentioned, the searchers were mature women, and their office first arose from the need for competent people in London parishes to examine the dead in times of plague. The office of searcher first came about from the Plague Orders of 1592 that required the Churchwardens of each parish to appoint two “sober ancient women … to be viewers of the dead” (44). The practice of employing searchers continued in non-plague years and was further legally institutionalized in 1603. Most of the searchers were widows of good character and members of their parish churches, so they were expected to conform to the Church of England. Despite efforts to have searchers of good character, searchers, through their constant
association with death, acquired the same sort of negative cachet that apparently leads to the use of so many present-day euphemisms with respect to cultural practices concerning death (such as calling coffin carriers “pall bearers”). Besides modest pensions from their parishes, searchers were generally paid a going rate of 4 d. per death—though as the period passed this rate increased slightly.

The most common form of accidental death in early modern London was drowning. London, as the most important port for ocean-going vessels in England, had a high rate of drownings. In addition, people drowned because of accidents that occurred when people used the Thymes as the primary transportation artery for the city. People would fall out of the small boats of watermen, and watermen’s small craft would not infrequently capsize or collide with other vessels. People drawing water from the river for domestic or industrial use would sometimes accidentally fall in and often drown. Relatively few people knew how to swim, and techniques for artificial resuscitation did not yet exist. People, especially small children, were susceptible to accidental drowning in domestic settings in tubs for bathing, brewing, washing dishes and clothes, and cooking. Somewhat older children were liable to drown during play near the Thames or near pits dug to extract gravel or building stones. Some children were vulnerable to accidental drowning, moreover, in ponds and other watercourse besides the Thames when children fetched water for domestic use, went fishing, or simply played in open spaces near bodies of water.

If drowning was the most common form of accidental death, death by fire was, Spence demonstrates, the most feared—probably because fire was a spectacular form of urban mishap. Fire with open flames was an essential part of early modern life, as fire was necessary for cooking, heating, lighting, and serving in many manufacturing processes such as blacksmithing, smelting, and brewing. Stoves for containing fire for cooking and heating were not particularly common, so most cooking, especially for people from the lower classes, was done in open hearths. Chimneys would, of course, build up combustible soot and sometimes catch fire that could easily rage out of control and ignite thatched and wooden-shingled roofs. In an era in which building codes were just beginning to be promulgated, chimneys might be poorly constructed using lumber supports for parts exposed to intense heat,
which could easily catch fire. Lighting was accomplished primarily through the use of candles and rush lights—though poorer households would rely heavily upon light from hearth fires made of wood and coal. Lamps were used in the period, but even they often had open flames that could easily ignite clothing and other combustibles with which they came in contact. Furthermore, after the European discovery of tobacco in English-owned Virginia, accidental conflagrations started by careless smokers became common.

Of the large number of actual fires that Spence describes, not surprisingly the urban fire that he pays the most attention to is the Great Fire of 1666. The Great Fire burned for over four days and “destroyed more than 13,000” of London’s houses (71). Despite this huge level of destruction, Spence says that apparently “no more than seven Londoners were ‘burnt’” to death (72). The Great Fire “clearly overwhelmed London’s rudimentary fire-fighting defenses” (72) so that the City and its parishes in their post-fire responses made sure that in the future that London had the resources (such as hooks for pulling down burning roofs, fire buckets, water squirts, and, later, engines) to fight fires and prevent their growth into major conflagrations. Another important response to the Great Fire was that after 1666 a growing number of entrepreneurs began to sell fire insurance. In order to reduce their financial vulnerability to accidental fire, these insurers began to hire watermen and porters as salvagers after fires and even to retain such men to serve as regular firefighters who became known as “firemen” (73). Although the entries in The Bills of Mortality, Spence’s most important primary source, contain notices of many deaths from 1665, a year of one of the most severe instances of plague in England and London (commonly referred to as “The Great Plague”), the publication of The Bills was interrupted for several weeks by the destruction of the Parish Clerks’ Hall in the Great Fire. The Parish Clerks’ Hall is where The Bills were printed and published. This interruption in The Bills lasted from August 28 to September 18, but they continued to be published thereafter until the middle of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, the Great Fire resulted in the creation of stricter building codes within the City walls so that after the Great Fire the rate of fatalities in that part of the city fell. Perhaps the most important legal response to the Great
Fire was the Rebuilding Act of 1667, which mandated that exterior and party walls of new buildings be made of stone or brick to help stop the spread of fire from one edifice to another. The rebuilding of London after 1666 also led to an increase in construction accidents from falls from scaffolds and roofs, from structures collapsing while under construction, and from the accidental dropping of stones, bricks, and tools by workers on Londoners below. Typical of these sorts of accidents is one that was noted when John Tillison, the clerk of the works for Sir Christopher Wren’s demolition and reconstruction of St. Paul’s, was reimbursed for payments he made to a “chyrurgeon” to treat a worker whose skull was injured when a tackle rope broke and let a battering ram fall that struck the man. Another aftereffect of the Great Fire was the equipping of London streets with water conduits and hydrants, often by private water-supplying companies, to permit fire-fighting teams to have ready access to water.

Another important form of accident and death was that which constantly threatened London’s pedestrians. In particular, accidents that involved horses and carts, coaches, and wagons that would strike and injure and not infrequently kill people on foot receive considerable attention in The Bills and in Spence’s text. The incidence of severe death and injury from draft, pack, and riding animals and the conveyances such beasts pulled was common enough that the civil authorities put in place measures to help keep people safer. One important safety measure was the installation of protective railings along major streets to protect pedestrians from animal-based transportation. Other rules were established to limit the number of carts and wagons on the streets, for too much traffic of such vehicles led inevitably to higher rates of injury and death. Moreover, reckless behaviors, such as racing horses and horse-drawn vehicles on the streets, were discouraged by having offenders who injured innocent walkers brought to justice in criminal and civil legal proceedings.

Just as civil authorities created responses to the dangers posed by animal-drawn vehicles and by horses ridden for transportation, the civil authorities also crafted improved responses to other common urban dangers. Rules were made to regulate transports on the Thames, which was the major transportation artery across early modern London. These rules included limiting the number of passenger a craft could
carry and set a minimum age requirement for watermen. Another regulatory improvement of note occurred in 1745 when the barbers and the surgeons were split into separate professional companies, a division which became useful as the medical knowledge and skills of surgeons began to exceed those of barbers.

The wide range of accidents led also to a wide range of literary responses to mishaps and accidental death in the period. Besides The Bills of Mortality, accidents received frequent attention in broadsides, ballads, and newspapers, and Spence liberally quotes and analyzes passages from these sources. In addition, Spence relies heavily on the ample ecclesiastical records (such as parish registers and vestry records) available from the period. Moreover, Spence has carefully combed through and draws upon laws, ordinances, and proclamations that address issues of public health and safety. In addition to the regulatory records, first aid manuals such as Stephen Bradwell’s Helps for Suddain Accidents of 1633 and Richard Hawes’ The Poor-mans Plaster-box of 1634 provide instructions on how Londoners could treat such common problems as poisonings, insect bites, stings, injuries from falls, near drownings, choking, burns, broken bones, bruises, bites from larger animals, and small wounds from edged tools and weapons. Medical treatises began to be published during the period, and of these especially important were works on surgery such as John Woodall’s The Surgeons Mate or Military & Domestic Surgery of 1617. The first systematic study of occupational health, A Treatise of Diseases of Tradesmen by Bartolomeo Ramazzini of Modena, Italy, was translated into English and made available to Londoners by 1705. Scholars who study John Gay will find frequent references to his poem Trivia: or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London, where the perils of being a pedestrian in the metropolis are thoroughly explored. Importantly the diaries of Samuel Pepys and his friend John Evelyn record personal reactions not only to the Great Fire but also to the many specific instances of other types of accidents that happened in the city.

Perhaps most interestingly Spence traces a widespread change in philosophical attitudes toward mishaps and accidental violent death over the course of the period. Earlier in the period accidents and their attendant narratives generally treated such occurrences as acts of God—as instances of an often inscrutable Providence inserting
itself into the lives of mortals. As certain types of accidents became recognized and expected as regular and frequent realities of urban life, the perception of violent accidents as providential or fated occurrences shifted to simply being seen as part of the urban environment. This shift in perception allowed people from the end of the period to move toward institutionalized, rational, and remedial responses to common urban dangers. This shift in attitudes thus led to efforts to make the urban environment of London safer and healthier for the city’s early modern population.


Another new volume has now been added to the projected nineteen-volume edition of the collected works of Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), under the general editorship of Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann of the Free University of Berlin. A number of others have already appeared: Veri Christianismi Solidaeque Philosophiae Libertas in 1994; some biographical works in 1995; the Theca Gladii Spiritus (in 2000; Theophilus in 2002; Schriften zur christlichen Reform in 2010; and of especial interest to many, the Rosenkreuzerschriften in 2010. To these may now be added a volume with Andreae’s fictional utopia Christianopolis (1619) and his allegorical poem “Christenburg.”

Schmidt-Biggemann’s introductory essay places Andreae within the context of the Holy Roman Empire in the Thirty Years’ War and his struggles to maintain his Lutheran identity. He offers a brief sketch of Andreae’s life and of the intellectual circle in Tübingen, notably the Paracelsian Tobias Hess and Christoph Besold, who were moved by Johann Arndt’s Wahres Christentum (1605) towards Lutheran reform. Andreae saw himself as a Christian Hercules capable of rescuing church and state from its moral decline and became the force behind the Rosicrucian writings, which were written just after his expulsion from