



The Arch Never Sleeps

Beauvais Cathedral

Narrator:

Although the masons became masters at keeping stone structures in equilibrium, they sometimes over-reached themselves. This is Beauvais, work on which was begun the year that Chartres was completed. It was to be the greatest and tallest cathedral ever built. But the nave of the cathedral suffered a catastrophic collapse, leaving just a scar at the west side of the Choir. The fact that subsidence was probably to blame is still in evidence. You can see how the thrusts in the vault and the walls are still out of equilibrium today because the internal arches have had to be braced together and, in some cases, propped directly. It may be that this cathedral was just beyond the limits of the technology of the time. But even so, the Choir has stood for over 750 years and rises to an amazing 45 metres. It has been said that 'arches never sleep', they're almost living in the way they adapt to change. But we can rely on mathematical modelling of the forces to preserve these majestic stone structures for centuries to come.