

FLOODS DRIVE 50 FROM HOMES IN 72m.p.h. GALE

One Killed. £20,000 To Repair Sea Defences

C.T. December 3, 1954

While a 72 m.p.h. gale swept the South of England this week, Christchurch suffered its worst flooding for nearly 40 years.

One man was killed. Thousands of pounds worth of damage was caused. Families evacuated their homes and spent nights sleeping in emergency reception centres.

At times areas were flooded to a depth of four feet. Acres of low lying land were under inches of water for days. At the beaches 50ft.[sic] waves pounded sea defence works, swept some holiday huts away and smashed others to pieces. The level of the River Stour at Ensbury Bridge was 5ft. 9in. above normal at the peak of the gale. At Ringwood the Avon was 3ft. above normal.

A minimum of £20,000 will be needed to repair the damage to the town's sea defences.

Waves crashing on to the adjoining FRIARS CLIFF beach undermined the end of the sea defence works and demolished the steel piles and concrete. Before the gale abated, late Tuesday, authority had already been given for the works to be extended some 250ft. to prevent further demolition.

But the defences stood remarkably and saved the borough from far more serious damage.

Had they not been erected at AVON BEACH it is likely the cliff would have been destroyed. Avon Run Road would probably have been inundated—maybe lost.

40ft. WASHED AWAY

At MUDEFORD SANDSPIT about 40 ft. of the beach was washed away. The sea broke over the sandspit in two or three places during Friday night, but fortunately did not make any permanent breach. By Tuesday, however, it was feared that further severe gales would mean the destruction of the dunes.

Council workmen built sandbag defences there. In the night they worked by the light of flares at Avon Beach, defying the waves as they swept over the defences to reinforce the wall with more sandbags.

Altogether nearly 100 beach huts were lost, smashed or damaged by the storms.

The weather log of the five-day gale for Christchurch shows that gusts of 72 m.p.h. were recorded at Hurn Airport on Friday. On Saturday, Monday, and early on Tuesday, the highest gusts were 66 m.p.h.

Nearly two-and-a-half inches of rain fell in the district from 9 o'clock Friday morning to 9 o'clock Tuesday. Heaviest of the falls — almost one inch—was recorded in the last 24 hours, and was the heaviest day's rain for the town since July 25th.

FRIDAY.

But it was Friday that brought the town its worst flooding since 1916.

Police were warned that people were stranded at WICK. Ambulance men were called out and then the local Red Cross were warned by their Winchester headquarters to be ready in case of emergency. Half an hour later the police telephoned Mr. and Mrs. E. M. Stansfield, divisional secretary and director, to set up an emergency reception centre at the Addiscombe Road School. Blankets and stretchers were collected. By 11 o'clock the centre was ready to receive evacuees.

And at 11 o'clock the first two evacuees arrived from the Wick Ferry area.

By midnight most of the roads on the Wick estate were under 18 inches of water. Families stacked their furniture and belongings in their homes.

Ambulance men were called in from New Milton and Lymington. With Christchurch ambulance men, police, and volunteers they began evacuating more than 50 people, most of

them caravan dwellers, to the reception centre. Some were taken by boat, or were carried to the ambulances. Others waded thigh deep through the waters.

Eldest of those evacuated was 82-years-old Mrs. Mary Cowd. She and her grand-daughter, Susan, aged six, were carried from their home, "Homestead," Wick Ferry, by ambulance men.

Also evacuated was Mrs. Kathleen Simpson who had been living at Wick Ferry for only three weeks. During the evening she had watched the floods surround her home and was standing knee deep in water when she was taken away by the ambulance men.

Two people who managed to rescue their cat were Mr. and Mrs. L. Moyse.

"Sandy was up a tree near the caravan as the waters began rising," said Mrs. Moyse. "There was a fast current flowing and I could not get to him. We threw a line across, I shone my torch, and then he leaped into the water and swam across to me."

THREE FEET

Near the centre of the town, in BRIDGE STREET, the floods reached a depth of three feet. Dozens of cars were marooned. The floods swept into the houses.

The 200-years-old house of Purewell cycle agent, Mr. A. W. Honeybun, was surrounded by water. Between £400 and £500 of damage was caused to carpets when the storeroom of Mr. R. J. Sheppard, Christchurch Carpet Showrooms, was swamped to a depth of several feet. At Mulleys "between the bridges", cups and saucers were floating in deep water in the back store.

Mrs. Mulley said she was watching the television during the evening and knew nothing of the floods until she received a telephone call telling her the house was flooded.

She rushed out and found carpets in her downstairs flat under six inches of water.

The yard, office and works of the Fareham Factors Company were covered by more than three feet of water during the height of the flood. Garden huts and greenhouses stood partly submerged. Behind them was an almost unbroken sheet of water stretching to the marshes at Hengistbury Head.

Almost everyone from Purewell to the end of Bridge Street had water inside their front doors on Friday night. For the next few nights they blocked the doors with sandbags, boards or sacking.

Much equipment was lost when Bemister's boat yard was flooded and several landing stages were washed away. One was carried by the raging waves right down to Mudeford.

Out securing, drifting boats which threatened to smash into houseboats on Friday night went Mr. H. S. Bemister and Mr. G. White. They reached a 30ft. yawl that had broken its moorings just as it was about to crash into one of the river bridges.

THROWN ON BEACH

At MUDEFORD, homes were flooded, scores of beach huts were wrecked, and cabin cruisers, yawls and fishing smacks were lifted helplessly by the waves and thrown on to beaches. An elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. M. Harden, in an old fisherman's cottage at Haven Quay—worst hit by the storm—woke up suddenly to find water swirling through their bedroom. Later they had to call in the Fire Brigade to have 500 gallons of water pumped away.

A fearful all-night vigil, with her dog Frosty, was spent by Mrs. D. Gee-Williams, at the Haven Corner Cafe. She watched the sea pour over the defences and roll towards her house. A huge wave smashed down a six-foot wall at the bottom of her charming old English garden, and destroyed everything in its path.

"It surged through just like a river with waves five feet high," Mrs. Gee-Williams said.

Fisherman Mr. R. Foster, who lives in one of the cottages at Haven Quay, said that if the storm persisted no one could have got through to them. In his own cottage the floor was covered by four feet of water and furniture was floating about.

Another Mudeford fisherman, Mr. E. A. Edgell, said that in the 70 years he had lived there

he could not remember a worse storm.

"The harbour became a raging sea," he said.

The gale force winds left their trail of havoc, too. Between attending two chimney fires Christchurch secured a tree which threatened a house at the Grove and placed a temporary cover over a gable end blown out of No. 22 Pound Lane, the home of Mrs. W. Clarke.

Mrs. Clarke was getting ready for bed, just before 10 o'clock, when she heard a terrific crash. She and her son had to spend the night with neighbours. Afterwards it was estimated that nearly £100 worth of damage had been caused to their home.

At 11 p.m. a HOLMSLEY man was found dead as a result of the gale. Thirty-five-years-old Mr. Ernest Carter, of 7, Harrow Hill, had smashed into a fallen tree while motor cycling home.

SATURDAY.

By two o'clock Saturday morning the flooding began to subside quickly as a result of a change in the wind. An hour later the streets were clear and dry.

But the force of the wind did not diminish. Families woke to find slates damaged, railings smashed down, chimney pots broken, and even a boat high and dry on their lawn.

Scores of telephones were out of order. Many trees had been blown down in the Highcliffe area, one, in Elphinstone Road, narrowly missing a house. The Corporation hut at the car park was flattened. Part of the cliff had been torn down.

Many people who went to look at their beach huts found them smashed beyond repair, and their contents swept away by the sea. Part of a wall of the new Methodist Church hall, being built at Barton, was blown down.

The Mayor of Christchurch (Coun. K. H. Ashcroft) on Saturday afternoon held an emergency meeting at the police station to co-ordinate local arrangements for the emergency.

Among those present were Corporation officers, and representatives of the police, Red Cross, Fire Service, Civil Defence, West Hants Water Company and M.E.X.E. The question of providing temporary homes was discussed and accommodation was arranged at Highcliffe.

Mr. Nigel Nicolson, M.P., toured the area and expressed his pleasure at the way in which the emergency was being dealt with.

In the evening people living in the Wick area anxiously awaited the high tide. Carpets were rolled up again, furniture was stacked in the rooms, and doors were blocked against possible further floods. High seas at Mudeford demolished part of the top of the wall at Sandhills, and occupants of nearby caravans were advised to move. The Civil Defence set up an emergency centre at Stanpit Village Room and six people spent the night there. The Red Cross emergency centre in Christchurch was also in use again throughout the night.

SUNDAY.

Much of the low lying land adjoining the Avon and Stour was under water throughout the weekend, but no serious flooding occurred.

The Red Cross moved their reception centre to Druitt Hall on Sunday and again housed six people during the night. Ponies grazing in the water meadows beside the River Avon at WINKTON were rounded up by men on Sunday and taken to safer pastures.

MONDAY.

Monday brought almost continual rain. Gale force winds developed during the day, and with the afternoon tide the Quay, the Sailing Club yard, and part of Bridge Street again went under water.

Some 40 caravan dwellers, among them an expectant mother, went to the reception centre in the early evening. Those who did not had to be rescued again, by ambulance men and police early Tuesday morning.

By midnight Monday, the Quay was flooded to a depth of 18 ins. A boat was "moored" on the pavement. Wooden stakes and clumps of reeds moved slowly further and further down the roadway.

Behind the tide was a south-easterly gale which sent the sea crashing against the sea walls, shooting spray to a height of 50 feet at Avon Beach.

There was a slight fall in the floods when the tide turned, but with the second tide, about 3.30 a.m., the waters began rising rapidly again and police patrolled parts of the Wick estate and Bridge Street warning householders.

When the gale was at its highest on Monday night, Mr. E. J. Monks was stranded while trying to drive through the floods to the Haven House Inn. A friend from the inn, Mr. N. Collington, waded thigh deep through the water to assist him and together they eventually managed to struggle back.

TUESDAY.

During Tuesday morning also several inches of water still covered part of Wick Lane, but the water on the Quay and in St. Margaret's Avenue had subsided.

Badly hit by the gale were the local farmers. At Bockhampton Farm, Bransgore, Mr. D. Dalton reported he had 25 acres of sugar beet under water on Tuesday. Some of his corn crop was also beginning to rot.

Twenty acres at Mr. T. Gazzard's Waterditch Farm, also at Bransgore, were under water, too, on Tuesday. High winds ripped off the roof of one of the barns and the hay had to be removed to drier storage. The thatch was stripped off several corn ricks, and more than 600 slates were blown off farm buildings.

An A.E.C. official, said this week that one of the most serious consequences of the floods would be the delay in harvesting the root crops. It would be some weeks before that could proceed normally.

"The meadows are seriously affected too," he added. "Only the higher and drier fields are any use for the stock."

GRATEFUL THANKS

The Mayor of Christchurch (Coun. K. H. Ashcroft) in a statement during the week expressed sympathy with those who had suffered as a result of the flooding, and added: "May I convey publicly on behalf of the Town my very sincere appreciation and grateful thanks to the various organisations and people who so readily came forward and volunteered their assistance.

"Their help proved invaluable, and in particular I would pay tribute to the splendid work of the local British Red Cross Society, the Ambulance and Fire Services, and the Police. The prompt and able assistance rendered by them is deserving of the highest praise."

Some idea of the work involved can be gained from Christchurch Fire Brigade operations log from Friday to Tuesday. They dealt with nine pumping operations in flooded areas and two chimney fires, made safe two trees, patched the gable end of a house, removed one T.V. aerial, rescued one cat from a tree, and a pony from a flooded field.

RINGWOOD

The week end gales had little effect on Ringwood and district. The flooding was not as serious as in recent years though bungalow tenants below the Ashley railway arch began to get worried when the water from the swollen River Avon started creeping slowly up their back gardens.