

Monthly Weather Report

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May 1961 — *Dry; damaging late frosts*

The first week was unsettled but thereafter weather was generally anticyclonic with pressure high over or near the British Isles from the 9th to the 17th, and to the north-west of the country during most of the latter half of the month.

For the most of the first week a complex depression was situated to the north-west of the British Isles and troughs and secondaries moved across the country in an unstable south-westerly airstream. A generally dull day on the 1st, with frontal rain in most areas, was followed by two brighter but showery days; there were fairly frequent thunderstorms on the 2nd. Thunderstorms were renewed on the 4th in the Midlands and eastern England as a wave depression, which formed south of Ireland during the afternoon, moved north-east to reach the northern North Sea the following morning. Rain was heavy over much of England and Wales, and at many places it was the wettest day of the month with over 1 inch in 24 hours. The 5th was fine and sunny nearly everywhere, but a deepening depression moving rapidly across the Atlantic became situated off north-west Scotland on the 6th and an associated trough brought further rain to most districts of the British Isles on that day. The depression moved slowly eastwards, skirting the north coast of Scotland, to southern Norway during the next two days; a ridge of high pressure formed behind it to the west of Ireland. Winds freshened, slowly veering from west to north-west, and reached gale force in many places, especially in the north, on the 8th. Showers were frequent with local thunder on the 7th but shower activity decreased markedly on the 8th and there was over 12 hours of sunshine in parts of eastern England.

An anticyclone in the South-west Approaches intensified and moved northward becoming centred over Ireland on the 9th, pressure in the neighbourhood of the British Isles subsequently remaining high until about the 17th. Weather became fine and dry nearly everywhere and this proved to be the beginning of a spell without measurable rain which lasted over most of the country for more than two weeks. Temperature rose progressively during the next few days; the 12th and 13th were the warmest days of the month with afternoon temperatures exceeding 23°C at many places.

On the 13th the anticyclone drifted southward into France and cloudy weather, associated with a weak trough, moved into northern Scotland. The next day there were many cloudy periods, especially in eastern coastal areas, but in the south-west many places had 12 to 13 hours of sunshine daily from the 10th to the 14th.

By the 15th the centre of highest pressure had been transferred to the north of the British Isles. With winds from between east and north, weather became generally cooler during the third week of the month. Ground frost was widespread on the morning of the 17th and 18th. Westerly winds, associated with a deep depression moving eastwards from Iceland, set in over Scotland on the 23rd but this was only a temporary backing ahead of an outburst of Arctic air which spread over the whole country on the 24th and 25th. The northerly winds brought snow and hail showers to Scotland on the 26th and 27th. Ground frost was widespread again on the mornings of the 27th and 28th with air frost in several areas particularly in central and southern England where severe damage was done to crops in many places.

Weather was dull on the 29th with rain in many places as a depression moved southward off the west of Ireland. During the last

two days of the month it became somewhat milder as winds changed to south-east and on the 31st wet weather began to spread westwards from the North Sea over the country.

Pressure and Wind — Mean pressure was above the average everywhere the excess at 9h ranging from 0.3 mb at Lerwick to 2.9 mb at Plymouth. Surface winds were predominantly south-westerly until the 6th, westerly on the 7th and 8th, light and variable on the 9th-14th and mainly between east and north on the 15th-21st, after which they became variable or northerly until the 29th and mainly easterly during the last two days of the month. Winds reached gale force on five days in Scotland and on six days (2nd, 3rd, 6th-9th) in England and Wales. Gales were fairly widespread on the 8th with gusts reaching 54 kt and 59 kt at Tiree and Durham respectively.

Temperature — Mean temperature was close to the 1921-50 average in all districts, the deviation being -0.2°C in England and Wales, +0.3°C in Scotland and 0.0°C in Northern Ireland. The latter part of the month was rather cold particularly in eastern Britain with easterly and northerly winds. Air-frost was widespread on the 27th and 28th.

Extremes included: (England and Wales) 24.4°C at Llandrindod Wells on the 13th, -6.7°C at Santon Downham on the 31st; (Scotland) 23.3°C at Loch Tay on the 21st, -5.8°C at Glenlivet on the 27th; (Northern Ireland) 22.8°C at Lislip Forest on the 13th, 0.0°C at Loughgall and Lislip Forest on the 28th.

Precipitation — The notable feature of the month was the dry weather which persisted after an opening wet week. The general rainfall expressed as a percentage of the 1916-50 average was 64 over England and Wales, 71 over Scotland and 103 over Northern Ireland. Most of the month's rain fell during the first eight days, virtually the whole of Britain being without measurable rain from the 9th to the 24th. Less than 25 per cent of the average occurred in the Exeter, Huntingdonshire and Bedford areas while more than 150 per cent of the average was recorded locally in the southern Antrim mountains.

Snow or sleet was reported here and there in Scotland on nine days (6th-9th, 24th-27th and 29th), and ground was snow-covered for a time at Balmoral, on the 26th. There were sleet showers over high ground in North Wales on the 27th.

Thunder was reported on six days in Scotland and on nine days (2nd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 28th and 29th) in England and Wales. Thunderstorms were widespread on the 2nd and 4th.

Sunshine — The general sunshine expressed as a percentage of the 1921-50 average was 111 in England and Wales, 106 in Scotland and 98 in Northern Ireland. In parts of Cornwall sunshine was more than 130 per cent of the average and at Newquay it was the sunniest May since 1948.

Fog — In Scotland early morning fog was reported at one place or another on 7 days and in England and Wales on the 1st, 4th, 5th, 10th, 14th and 20th (6 days).

Miscellaneous Phenomena — The aurora was visible in Scotland on 10 nights; it was seen as far south as Hurn on the night of the 8th/9th.