

Monthly Weather Report

OF THE METEOROLOGICAL OFFICE

Summary of observations compiled from returns of official stations and voluntary observers.

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March 1969 — Cold and dull; very dry in the north

For most of the month high pressure was concentrated to the north-east and low pressure to the south-west of the British Isles. The result was a frequent occurrence of east or south-east winds.

Scotland, N. Ireland, NE and NW England and N. Wales

Weather — It was drier than normal everywhere (except in north-east England) and exceptionally so in the Western Isles. Snow was mainly light but there were one or two heavy falls mid-month.

Wind — Gales were less frequent than normal and in Scotland occurred on only 10 days, the lowest number in March since 1957. On the 8th there was a severe north-westerly gale in north Scotland and a gust of 64 kt was recorded at Lerwick. Strong easterly winds during the period 13th to 22nd reached severe gale force at times in north and east Scotland and north-east England, and the rough weather closed Aberdeen Harbour from the 14th to the 19th. A drilling rig off the Scottish coast broke away from its anchorage on the 15th and remained adrift for several days. On the 17th a gust of 69 kt was reported from Fort William (Inverness-shire). The Longhope lifeboat, from Hoy in the Orkneys, was over whelmed in a south-easterly gale in the Pentland Firth on the 18th and all eight members of the crew were drowned.

Temperature — It was cold everywhere with mean temperature 2-3 deg C below normal. In general it was the coldest March since 1962. It was particularly cold in Scotland during the second week and frost persisted all day in many places. Among the minima recorded were: -11.7°C at Balmoral on the 11th and at Barr (Ayr) on the 27th; -10.0°C at Alwen (Denbigh) on the 28th; -9.2°C at Knockmany Forest (Co. Tyrone) on the 6th.

Maxima included: 13.9°C at Trawsfydd (Merioneth) on the 6th, at Inverpolly (Ross and Cromarty) on the 21st and at Prabost (Skye) on the 22nd; 13.4°C at Kilkeel (Co. Down) on the 31st.

Rainfall — Rainfall (including melted snow) was markedly below average in most districts. Less than one quarter of the normal monthly amount was recorded in many places in west Scotland, notably at Tiree, in the Western Isles, where the monthly total of 5 mm was only 8 per cent of average. It was the driest March at Stornoway since records began in 1871; at many other places in west Scotland it was the driest March for over 40 years. In sharp contrast, areas in north-east England had over twice the average rainfall. Among the heaviest daily falls was one of 40 mm at Moel Cynnedd, in Montgomery, on the 30th.

Snow — From the 11th to 19th, snow or sleet (rain or drizzle and snow) was frequent. It was mainly slight but from the 12th to 14th up to 20 cm fell on high ground. Snow fell for many hours in the Borders on the 12th and there were blizzards from North Wales to east Scotland during the next two days. Villages were isolated, roads were blocked and huge drifts built up in Angus and Perthshire. Severe drifting was reported in the Cairngorms on the 19th.

Sunshine — Sunshine amounts were below average in most areas except in western Scotland, where Stornoway had 126 per cent of normal, and on the coasts of North Wales.

Fog — Fog was infrequent but was widespread and dense in northern England on the 13th.

Miscellaneous Phenomena — The aurora was seen on 6 nights in Scotland and on the 23rd/24th it was observed also in the Isle of Man and in Ireland, the most southerly place being Claremorris in Eire.

From the 16th to 18th freezing rain or drizzle fell in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire with glazed frost forming on objects at levels above 150 m.

Midlands, E, SE and SW England and S. Wales

Weather — Except in South Wales, the weather was wetter than normal. However, there were some spells of almost dry weather notably in the

first and fourth weeks. These, together with drying, though cold, winds enabled farmers to begin clearing the accumulated back-log of work on the land.

Wind — Gales occurred locally on 11 days but there were no notable gusts. South or south-east winds were often strong and seas round the coasts were very rough at times.

Temperature — In general it was the coldest March since 1962. Mean temperature was 2-3 deg C below average in most areas but it was slightly milder in the south. The minimum temperature of -7.8°C at Kew on the 7th is the lowest March value recorded there since 1909 but it is not strictly comparable with previous records because of a change of site. The historic "north wall screen" was replaced by a more conventional exposure on 1 January 1969. Other extremes included: 15.0°C at Shaftesbury (Dorset) on the 13th and -7.8°C at Finchhampstead (Berkshire) on the 8th.

Rainfall — Apart from South Wales, most areas had more than average rainfall (including melted snow) and nearly three times the normal occurred at Pontefract, Yorkshire. Until the 10th, many places in the south-west had had no measurable rain for a fortnight. There followed a wet spell with local flooding which was severe in East Anglia; between the 11th and 13th places in the south and east had almost the average rainfall for the whole of March. On the 12th, a daily fall of 44 mm was recorded at Sheffield and one of 40 mm at Neath, Glamorgan. From the 21st until almost the end of the month it was mainly dry.

Snow — Snow was neither frequent nor heavy except on high ground in the north Midlands on the 12th and late on the 31st.

Sunshine — Amounts were below normal in all areas except parts of South Wales where they were near average. A few places recorded barely half the average amount; it was the duldest March at Kew since 1916 with only 58 per cent of normal.

Fog — On the 9th, freezing fog caused a 10-hour closure of London (Heathrow) Airport. A French ship sank on the 14th after a collision in thick fog in the Channel. From the 17th to 22nd hill fog was extensive in many areas.

Miscellaneous Phenomena — On the 5th, very dry air spread from the Continent to southern England. By the afternoon the relative humidity in parts of the Thames Valley was only 20-25 per cent while it fell to 11 per cent at London Weather Centre and to 15 per cent at Kew and Bracknell. Relative humidities of less than 20 per cent are rare in the British Isles.

From the 16th to 18th freezing rain or drizzle occurred widely in the north Midlands, and glazed frost formed on trees and other objects. Accumulations were large at heights above 150 m, and above 200 m in the Pennines deposits of up to 15 cm were reported. There was extensive damage to trees, and telephone and power cables were brought down. On the 19th, a television transmitter mast (about 384 m high) collapsed on Emley Moor, near Huddersfield.

TABLE I—DISTRICT VALUES, March 1969

DISTRICTS	AIR TEMPERATURE °C					EARTH TEMP. °C		RAIN DAYS	RAIN-FALL	SUNSHINE
	*Highest Max.	*Lowest Min.	Max.	Min.	Mean	Mean 30 cm.	Mean 122 cm.			
	Difference from Average							% of Average		
0 SCOTLAND, N.	11.6	-7.2	-1.6	-2.1	-1.9	-1.4	-0.6	-3	47	105
1 SCOTLAND, E.	12.2	-6.1	-3.0	-1.8	-2.4	-1.6	-1.3	+2	72	85
2 ENGLAND, N.E.	12.8	-6.7	-3.8	-1.4	-2.6	-1.9	-0.7	+2	194	64
3 ENGLAND, E.	12.8	-6.7	-3.3	-1.0	-2.2	-1.4	-0.7	+2	169	60
4 MIDLANDS	13.3	-7.8	-3.7	-1.5	-2.6	-1.8	-0.8	0	149	62
5 ENGLAND, S.E.	13.0	-7.8	-2.3	-1.1	-1.7	-0.8	-0.6	-1	109	57
6 SCOTLAND, W.	11.7	-9.6	2.7	-2.2	-2.5	-2.0	-1.0	-5	37	91
7 ENGLAND, N.W. and N. Wales	13.8	-6.7	-3.2	-1.9	-2.6	-1.9	-1.0	-3	95	79
8 ENGLAND, S.W. and S. Wales	13.3	-6.1	-2.3	-1.5	-1.9	-1.0	-0.5	-3	122	63
N.IRELAND	12.2	-7.6	-2.6	-2.8	-2.7	-	-	-7	73	80
SCOTLAND	12.2	-9.6	-2.4	-2.0	-2.3	-	-	-2	47	94
ENG. and WALES	13.8	-7.8	-3.1	-1.3	-2.2	-	-	-1	133	65

*Highest Max. and Lowest Min. of the District Value Stations.