

Monthly Weather Report

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OF THE METEOROLOGICAL OFFICE

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

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May 1958—*Changeable, wet and rather cool*

May was a particularly unsettled month during which an almost uninterrupted sequence of depressions approached the British Isles from the Atlantic and a trough of low pressure lay over some part of the country nearly every day. Rain was frequent but only occasionally heavy, the wetter periods occurring about 5th–10th, 14th–15th, 22nd–26th and 29th.

The month opened with a blocking pattern over mid-Atlantic at 500 mb., the high cell of the pattern being over Greenland, the low cell near the Azores and the confluence of the north-westerlies and south-westerlies associated with these features in the neighbourhood of the British Isles. On the 1st a surface anticyclone was centred over the North Sea and weather over the country was generally sunny and warm with afternoon temperatures frequently exceeding 70°F. although, with light south-easterly winds, it was cooler along parts of the east coast. The following day was warmer still over the greater part of England and Wales, especially over eastern England with the movement westward of the anticyclone. However, northerly winds spread into our northern districts causing temperatures to fall about 10°F. during the day in parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland. A frontal zone became established across the country roughly from east to west which, with frequent changes in position, lasted about a week. Little rain was associated with the frontal zone at first, although on the night of the 4th/5th thunderstorms broke out over a wide area in southern England.

On the 5th a south-westerly airstream, associated with a complex low pressure area in mid-Atlantic, spread over the British Isles bringing cloudy weather with rain to the whole country. The Atlantic blocking pattern began to decline, its low cell, which had been near the Azores since the 1st, moved eastward in company with associated surface depressions and on the night of the 7th/8th a deepening depression moved across Scotland; temperature remained in the upper fifties all that night in south-east England and rainfall was widespread, many places in the north-west recording more than 1 in. in 24 hr. During the next four days the upper trough to the west of the British Isles slowly weakened and moved across the country and shallow depressions gave rain at times with scattered thunderstorms but there were sunny periods.

A week of strong westerly upper winds over the Atlantic followed and winds at about 300 mb. over the British Isles frequently exceeded 100 kt. between the 12th and 19th. A weak depression crossed northern England on the 14th and 36 hr. later a more vigorous system moved rapidly south-east from Wales to Kent accompanied by gale force winds – a gust of 75 kt. was recorded at the Lizard – and heavy rain locally in south-east England. As an anticyclone which had been near the Azores since the 12th spread slowly eastward a warm front from the Atlantic brought milder air into the British Isles and on the 18th temperatures in many places reached the middle sixties after having been below average for about a week.

Meanwhile the flow at 500 mb. had become gradually more meridional until by the 20th a major trough became established near the British Isles where it persisted until the end of the month. On the night of the 22nd/23rd a depression deepened off the mouth of the Bristol Channel subsequently moving north to reach north-west Scotland about noon on the 25th bringing substantial rainfall to western districts and to Scotland.

From the 25th until the end of the month the situation was weakly cyclonic with cool rather wet weather. On the 29th there was retrogression of the upper trough to about 15°W. and depressions developing off the west of Ireland brought prolonged rain to many districts of the British Isles during the last three days of the month.

Pressure and wind. Mean pressure was everywhere below the 1921–50 average, the deficit at 9 h. ranging from 5.1 mb. at Lerwick to 0.5 mb. at Plymouth. Winds were mainly light and variable during the first four and last six days of the month and were predominantly south-westerly, although rather variable, from 9th to 24th, apart from a period of westerlies from 17th to 21st. On the remaining days winds were generally westerly on the 5th and 6th backing to southerly on the 7th and 8th. Gales were frequent for May and occurred on 12 days; they were widespread in Scotland on the 19th/20th and in England and Wales on the 16th. The 22nd–24th was a stormy period in south-west England; on the 22nd a gust of 74 kt. was recorded at Scilly with a mean hourly wind of 50 kt. and the following day there were 14 hr. with gusts exceeding 47 kt. At Scilly a gust of 74 kt. was also recorded on the 16th and one of 69 kt. on the 15th.

Temperature. Mean temperature differed little from the 1921–50 average in England and Wales, and by -1.3°F . in Scotland and -1.5°F . in Northern Ireland. In England and Wales mean maximum temperatures were generally below average and mean minimum above average. The warmest days occurred during the first two days of the month; during the latter half of the month temperatures were generally below average. Night frosts were fairly frequent in Scotland; ground temperature fell to 10°F. at Cannich on the 3rd and 7th and to 11°F. at Dalwhinnie on the 3rd and 10th. Screen temperature fell to 30°F. locally in Kent on the 4th.

Extreme temperatures included:—(England and Wales) 80°F. at Farnham on the 2nd, 25°F. at Kielder Castle on the 13th; (Scotland) 75°F. at Selkirk on the 1st, 19°F. at Kincaig on the 3rd and 10th; (Northern Ireland) 71°F. at a number of places on the 1st and 2nd, 29°F. at Aldergrove on the 10th.

Precipitation. The general precipitation expressed as a percentage of the 1916–50 average was 133 over England and Wales (where apart from 1955 it was the wettest May since 1942), 132 over Scotland and 108 over Northern Ireland. Less than average rainfall occurred over the greater part of the Thames Valley, Somerset, the north and west Midlands and parts of south-east and south-west Scotland. More than twice the average was recorded in parts of Ross and Cromarty, the northern Hebrides, Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire and locally in east Norfolk. At Achnashellach it was the wettest May since 1922.

Local snow and sleet showers fell in the northern half of Scotland on the 3rd–7th and 9th–14th and locally in northern England on the 11th, 12th, 23rd and 24th.

Thunder was heard on 5th, 8th–15th and 21st–30th.

Sunshine. The general sunshine expressed as a percentage of the 1921–50 average was 95 in England and Wales, 108 in Scotland and 103 in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, except in the extreme north and south, May was a sunny month, some stations recording 35 hr. sunshine in excess of their average, in England and Wales percentages of average ranged from 115 at Wisley to 76 at Spurn Head.

Fog. Local early morning fog occurred in Scotland on 10 days and in England and Wales on 15 days. It was prevalent in southern England on 5th, 6th and 7th, and was most frequent in the Midlands where it was reported on 10 mornings during the month at Mansfield and Bingley.

Miscellaneous Phenomena. The aurora was observed on nine nights in Scotland.