

Wintry first week, then dry at times; very warm mid- and late-month.

Pressure rose on the 1st as low pressure over Scandinavia moved away. Later next day, however, a deep Atlantic depression became slow moving over Scotland while its fronts swept south-eastwards to clear all districts overnight. For the next few days the depression filled slowly near Shetland. On the 5th and 6th a shallow low came slowly north-eastwards up the English Channel across south-eastern parts of England to the Netherlands while a ridge of high pressure developed over western and northern areas. By the 11th an intensifying anticyclone was centred over the North Sea with a depression to the south-west of Ireland.

On the 14th the anticyclone began to move away and for the next two weeks a series of fronts advanced eastwards across the United Kingdom. During the night of the 26/27th a thundery low passed north-eastwards over the nearby continent. Pressure now rose and an anticyclone moved up the English Channel into the southern North Sea on the 28th and 29th. The high continued eastwards and a rather weak cold front crossed most areas from the south-west on the 31st.

Weather

This was a month of considerable contrasts, even for May. After a wintry week at the start of the month with widespread frost and, particularly in the north, snow and gales, the weather was generally fine with most areas becoming very warm towards mid-month. The remainder of the month was mostly changeable while the last few days were again very warm. Except during the second week thunderstorms developed rather frequently, especially over the Midlands, East Anglia and south-east England. On the 16th large hail was reported near Stradbroke in Suffolk.

Wind

Until the 4th it was windy generally with gales at times, mainly in exposed parts of the west and north. In some areas the gales were severe, even storm force locally, on the 2nd and 3rd when a number of places experienced their highest May winds on record; for example, Lerwick (Shetland) from 1923 with an hourly mean speed of 44 and a gust of 65 kn, Great Dun Fell (Cumbria) from 1963 with 69 and 90 kn and Lynemouth (Northumberland) from 1972 with 50 and 72 kn. On the 3rd (May Day bank holiday) many caravans were blown off roads in north-east England, racing was cancelled at Newcastle upon Tyne and a trawler wrecked, but the crew rescued, at Workington in Cumbria. For the remainder of the month winds were mostly light or moderate, except from the 21st to the 30th when they were occasionally fresh or strong in the west and north. Wind directions were rather variable, but mostly between west and north-westerly until the 6th, between east and south-easterly from the 11th to 15th and south-westerly thereafter. After the first week sea-breezes developed in places on several occasions.

Temperature

Monthly mean temperatures were within 1 °C of average everywhere being mostly above normal in central and eastern areas and below in some western parts of the United Kingdom. However, while daytime temperatures were above average generally nights were colder than usual in most districts.

For about a week at the start of the month it was very cold; temperatures rose to only 2.0 °C at Dalwhinnie (Highland Region) on the 2nd and 3.0 °C at Leadhills (Strathclyde Region) on the 6th while night frost occurred widely between the 5th and 9th. Minima below -7 °C were recorded at a few isolated places in Britain while Armagh had its coldest May night this century and Valley, on Anglesey, and Dyce Airport, Aberdeen, their coldest since records began in 1942 and 1943. Frost damage to apple and pear blossom was reported in Hereford and Worcester and in Somerset and to strawberry blossom in Cambridgeshire. But by the 13th most areas became very warm for a few days; the maximum of 25.3 °C at Poolewe (Highland Region) on the 14th was the highest there in May since 1939. Although a spell of near-normal temperatures followed the month ended with three very warm days in most places; on the 31st the temperature reached 27.9 °C at High Beach (Essex).

Rainfall

Rainfall totals were below normal for May over much of the United Kingdom. Less than 50 per cent of average was recorded in a belt covering much of south-west England and South Wales across the Midlands to parts of east and north-east England and also at some places in Co. Armagh and Tayside Region. Over most south-eastern areas of England, parts of Scotland, in particular the west and north, and the north-west of Northern Ireland rainfall was above normal. More than 150 per cent of average fell here and there in Greater London, East Anglia and north-west Scotland.

All parts had showers at times with some occasional longer periods of rain, except during the second week of the month, which was dry generally, and the last seven days, which were mainly dry over south-eastern Scotland, northern and south-west England, and Wales. On the 2nd the rain was particularly heavy over west Scotland while over many central and southern areas it was the first appreciable rainfall for more than three weeks. Thundery rain was heavy over much of southern England on the 5th, parts of East Anglia on the 6th, 16th and 17th and over England

south-east of a line from Humber to Dorset late on the 26th and at first on the 27th.

Snow

Wintry showers fell at times in most areas during the first six days of the month. Over parts of Scotland longer periods of sleet and snow occurred on the 2nd in the north and on the 6th in the south. Reports of snow lying were mostly slight and confined to higher ground in the north of Scotland although on the 4th and 5th light coverings of snow were reported as far south as Bodmin Moor in Cornwall. Heavier falls were reported over northern mountains, however; on the 3rd the A689 was blocked by drifts and snow, 15 cm deep, on the boundary of Cumbria with Durham.

Sunshine

Sunshine totals were above average over much of the United Kingdom. Nearly 150 per cent of average was recorded in some north-eastern areas of Scotland and in parts of South Yorkshire and Humberside, making it the sunniest May at Hull, with 263.3 hours, Sheffield, Weston Park, and Nairn (Highland Region), both with 238.9 hours, since records began in 1907, 1898 and 1907 respectively. But in the west of Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, parts of south-west England and at a few places elsewhere in England, Wales and the Isle of Man totals were below normal with only about 75 per cent of average in Co. Fermanagh. The second week, and the 28th and 29th, in particular, were mostly sunny; between the 7th and 15th 109.5 hours of sunshine were recorded on Fair Isle (Shetland).

Fog

Fog patches occurred at times, especially between the 15th and 22nd over northern hills and by night over low-lying areas in the south of Britain. About this time fog banks were occasionally rather persistent over some north-eastern and south-western coastal areas.

Miscellaneous Phenomena

None reported.

Table 1 District values

District	air temperature °C					mean 30-cm soil temp °C	rain-days	rainfall	sunshine
	Highest Max*	Lowest Min*	max.	min.	mean				
	difference from average					% of average			
0 Scotland N	24.6	-2.8	+0.7	-0.5	+0.1	+0.3	0	113	122
1 Scotland E	25.2	-4.1	+1.0	-0.8	+0.1	+0.6	-2	77	130
2 England E & NE	25.5	-4.2	+1.1	-0.4	+0.4	+0.7	-4	63	132
3 East Anglia	26.0	-4.2	+0.8	-0.1	+0.3	0.0	+1	125	121
4 Midland Counties	27.0	-3.8	+1.1	-0.5	+0.3	+0.3	-4	48	121
5 England SE & Central S	26.8	-2.2	+0.8	+0.1	+0.4	-0.2	-1	83	112
6 Scotland W	24.6	-2.8	+0.5	-0.9	-0.2	+0.2	-1	94	107
7 England NW & Wales N	24.7	-2.6	+0.4	-0.3	+0.1	-0.1	-2	66	107
8 England SW & Wales S	25.1	-2.0	+0.4	-0.4	0.0	+0.1	-2	45	101
N Ireland	22.5	-3.0	+0.2	-0.3	0.0	+0.2	0	89	94
Scotland	25.2	-4.1	+0.7	-0.7	0.0	+0.4	-1	95	120
England & Wales	27.0	-4.2	+0.8	-0.3	+0.3	+0.1	-2	72	116

*Highest maximum and lowest minimum of District Value Stations