

Monthly Weather Report

OF THE METEOROLOGICAL OFFICE

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS COMPILED FROM RETURNS OF OFFICIAL STATIONS AND VOLUNTEER OBSERVERS

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May 1955—Cold, wet and changeable.

During the first nine days the weather was changeable, with thundery rains, as depressions moved quickly across the north of the country; due to an influx of arctic air from an anticyclone near Greenland, it was unusually cold with occasional wintry showers of sleet or snow from the 10th to 21st, but it was brilliantly fine and warm for the last three days of the month.

On the 1st there were widespread thunderstorms in the path of a depression which crossed Northern Ireland and southern Scotland, and there was also heavy rainfall in central and southern England. The following day was generally sunny apart from isolated thunderstorms in south-east England, but further heavy rain occurred in west Scotland on the 3rd as an active trough crossed the country. During the next two days, with a deep depression off the coast of Scotland, strong south-westerly winds, reaching gale force at times, were maintained over most of the country. On the 5th, heavy showers in the west and north developed into local thunderstorms in west Scotland, while further east, local dust storms were experienced in East Anglia and Huntingdonshire. There were thunderstorms again on the 6th as an active depression with widespread rain crossed southern England. By the end of the week Eskdalemuir had recorded more than 3 in. of rain. An anticyclone had developed near Greenland on the 6th, and after the passage of minor troughs and depressions across the country on the 8th and 9th, an inflow of arctic air over the British Isles on the 10th caused temperatures to fall generally about 10°F.; rain turned to sleet and snow in the north and thunderstorms occurred in the south-east ahead of the cold air. The cold weather continued with only brief interruptions until the 21st; a depression accompanied by gales and heavy rain crossed southern England on the 16th and 17th, and the rain turned to snow in many parts of England and Wales, even as far south as London and the Channel coast. Snow lay on the ground 1 in. deep that evening in parts of Yorkshire and the Midlands, while Malham Tarn recorded a fall of 4 in. In the days that followed, an anticyclone developed west of the British Isles and moved slowly across the country, giving mostly sunny weather, but there were showers and local thunderstorms from time to time, until the 26th. As the anticyclone retreated temporarily northwards, a slow moving frontal system brought substantial rain to some midland and eastern districts; London Airport, in 12 hr., had more than 1 in. By the 29th, the anticyclone had spread southward again to cover the whole country, and the month ended with three days of fine, almost cloudless weather, on each day of which more than 15 hr. of sunshine was recorded in many districts, particularly in Scotland and northern England.

Pressure and Wind.—Mean pressure was nearly everywhere below the average for the period 1921–50, the deviation at 9h. ranging from +0.1 mb. at Newquay to –5.2 mb. at Lerwick. Winds were mainly southwesterly during the first half of the month, between north and north-west from 16th to 21st and from a generally south-easterly direction from the 24th to the end of the month. It was a windy month, the windiest May at Southport since 1923. Gales occurred on 1st, 18th, 19th and 26th in Scotland, and on most days till the 18th and on the 27th and 28th in England and Wales; that of the 17th was the most severe and widespread; it affected a large part of the country south-east of a line Aberporth to Whitby, and gusts of 57 kt. and 59 kt. were recorded at Larkhill and Stevenage respectively.

Temperature.—Mean temperature was everywhere substantially below the average for the period 1921–50 from which it differed by

–2.6°F. in England and Wales, –1.9°F. in Scotland and –1.5°F. in Northern Ireland. It was the coldest May since 1941 at many stations, for 32 years on Merseyside and since records began at Sheffield in 1883. The coldest day was the 17th when the temperature failed to reach 40°F. at several stations, and at Aberystwyth (Llety-evan-hen) the maximum was only 36°F. At Ross-on-Wye it was 40°F., the lowest May maximum temperature on record since 1875, and during this long period there were only two other days in May on which the corresponding temperature was lower than 45°F.

Extreme temperatures included:—(England and Wales) 76°F. at Urswick on the 31st, 25°F. at Kielder Castle on the 16th and at Lincoln on the 11th; (Scotland) 77°F. at Glasgow on the 31st, 21°F. at Dalwhinnie on the 16th; (Northern Ireland) 68°F. at Ballykelly on the 30th and at Garvagh and Aldergrove on the 31st, 32°F. at Nutts Corner on the 16th and 19th.

Precipitation.—The general precipitation expressed as a percentage of the average for the period 1881–1915 was 179 over England and Wales, 112 over Scotland and 117 over Northern Ireland. There was more than 150 per cent in parts of northern Scotland and over the southern part of Great Britain except Norfolk and Pembrokeshire. Much of southern and midland England had more than 200 per cent of the average, while parts of Sussex and Essex had as much as 300 per cent. It was the wettest May at Hastings since records began in 1875, and at Ross-on-Wye only in 1886 and 1932 was there more rain during May.

Among the heavier falls in 24 hours or less were:—

8th 2.25 in. at Blaenau Festiniog (Oakley Quarries), Merioneth.

17th 2.26 in. at Manby and 2.25 in. at East Kirkby, both in Lincolnshire.

Snow and Sleet.—Snow and sleet fell almost daily for the first three weeks in Scotland, and on the 10th and 14th to 21st in England and Wales. It fell on 8 days at Malham Tarn, where it lay on the ground to a depth of 4 in. on the 17th. On this date snow was the heaviest and most widespread; Birmingham experienced the worst May snow storm for 60 years, while in the London area snow had not occurred so late in the year for over a century.

Thunderstorms.—Thunder occurred on 7 days in Scotland and 20 days in England and Wales. Thunderstorms were widespread in England on the 14th, 15th and 20th, and most frequent in and around London; 7 were reported at Wisley and 6 at Westminster during the month.

Sunshine.—The general sunshine expressed as a percentage of the average for the period 1921–50 was 109 over England and Wales, 125 over Scotland and 113 over Northern Ireland. Totals exceeded the May average by 25–45 hr. over Scotland, south-west England and the London area. There was a small deficit at a few east coast stations. At Shanklin and Southport it was the sunniest May since 1949, while at the latter place May 1955 was the sunniest month since July 1951.

Fog.—Early morning fog occurred on 7 days in Scotland and 22 days in England and Wales.

Miscellaneous Phenomena.—A dust storm on the 5th reduced the visibility at Mildenhall to 200 yd. The aurora was observed in Scotland on 9 nights.