

# A HUNDRED YEARS OF HARBOROUGH WEATHER 1917-2016

by Douglas Wooldridge



Rainfall records for Market Harborough exist for 1873 and have continued with short intervals to the present day. However it is the hundred years from January 1917 which form the subject of this article. Mr G. O. Nicholson recorded rainfall at Rose Hill, Leicester Road from 1906 and the pre-1930 measurements are from his notes. My father thought that Mr Nicholson's temperature readings were unreliable due to the location of the thermometer.

My father commenced weather observations in Market Harborough in 1931 which I have continued since his death in 1965. There have been several moves but the weather station has now been established in Burnmill Road for fifty-seven years.

The average annual rainfall for Market Harborough is approximately 25 inches (63.5 cm). Amounts have varied from year to year from a very low rainfall of 15.28 inches (38.8 cm) in 1921 to the very high total of 35.82 inches (90.98 cm) in 2012. The driest year was 1921 with a deficiency in rainfall in every month with the exception of January and August. The following year compensated for the deficiency in 1921 with a total of 22.50 inches (57.15 cm), including a wet July and August.

In the 1930s, the two driest years were 1933 and 1934, with a combined rainfall of 35.87 inches (91.1 cm), not much more than half the amount for two years. Other years with low rainfall were 1945 (19.52"/49.6 cm), 1990 (19.72"/50.1 cm), 1996 (18.74"/47.6 cm) and 2011 (17.22"/43.7 cm).

The wettest year was 2012 with above average amounts in most months but a notable wet April, not normally a month with high rainfall although showery. More than 5" (12.7 cm) of rain fell in April 2012 and equally wet was June with 5.1"

(13 cm). Other years with more than 30" (76.2 cm) were 1930 (30.45"/77.3 cm),

1939 (30.79"/78.2 cm) with 5" (12.7 cm) in August, 1960 (33.34"/84.7 cm) with a wet summer following a dry spring, and 2000 (32.06"/81.4 cm).

Winters have varied from extremely cold to very mild. 1917 started with a cold January; there was a report of -7°F, 39 degrees of frost, registered in the grounds of the Manor House in Little Bowden and the local paper named Market Harborough 'the coldest place in England'. The following winters were unremarkable though there was one of the rare White Christmases, with much snow over the period. The winters of the 1930s were mostly mild with occasional cold spells. The first White Christmas after 1927 occurred in 1938 with snow on Christmas Eve; otherwise the winter was unremarkable.

Having got away lightly with winters in the 1930s, the 1940s opened with severe weather. The severity of the winter months of 1940, when there was deep snow and frost for 7 weeks, was only matched by that of 1947. 1941 and 1942 winters were cold but slightly less severe than 1940. There was a slight respite in 1943, which was mild, before a return to colder winters, culminating in the classic winter of 1946/7. Winter proper started in January and continued into March with the most snow since 1940 and frost which lasted for 7 weeks. On February 15th the thermometer at ground level registered zero Fahrenheit, 32 degrees of frost. In contrast, the following winter was mild and the winters thereafter were average until the second classic winter of 1962/3. The snow began to fall properly on 30th December and lay on the ground for many weeks. The frost continued for

10 weeks, 3 more than in 1947.

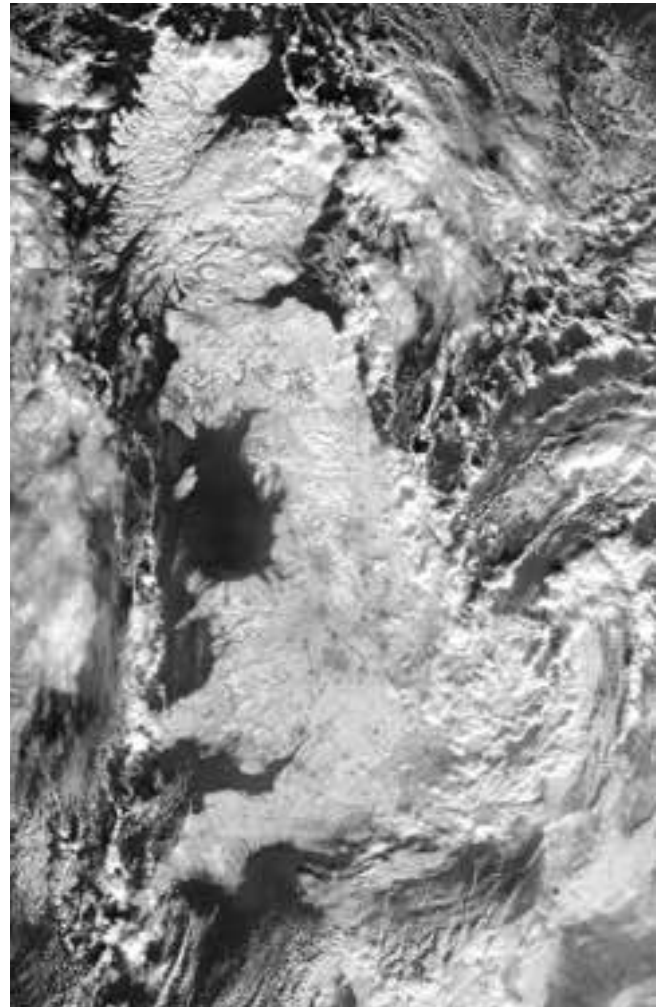
In the early 1970s, winters were mild and it appeared that winter had deserted January and February. By the mid-1970s, there were signs that winters were turning colder and there was another long, cold winter in 1978/9 and again in 1980/1. Cold weather in 1987 lasted only a short time but there were temperatures not experienced since 1947. On the night of 12th January 1981 the screen temperature registered zero Fahrenheit, unprecedented in the writer's lifetime and very rare in this district. 1988, 1989 and 1990 winters were extremely mild.

In the present century there have been few remarkable winters. 2009/10 and 2010/11 were unusual in having snow that lay on the ground during the Christmas period. 2013 had snow and frost in January and February and was the last of our severe winters.

Summers, like winters, have varied from cool and wet to warm with long dry periods. After the severe winter of 1947, there was along warm summer although temperatures did not rise as high as in some later years. There was only one day's rain in August, measuring 0.03" (0.07cm) and the fine warm days continued throughout September and into the first part of October. Summer in 1948 was disappointing apart from one long hot week at the end of July. Another long, hot summer occurred in 1949. 1959 was another outstanding summer with little rainfall and hot days continuing until October. Unlike 1947, following the hard winter, the summer of 1963 was no more than average.

There was a cold summer in 1972, which never really warmed up. A maximum of 70 degrees Fahrenheit was not achieved until 5th July, a very unusual occurrence; at no time was a temperature of 80 degrees reached.

The trend for cool summers continued until 1975. The 1975 summer started with conditions more like winter. On 2nd June snow fell in many places including Market Harborough. By the end of the same week, the temperature had reached 80°F. or more and high temperatures continued throughout the summer months. 1976 was even more notable than 1975; two hot summers in succession are rare but 1976 was even hotter than 1975. It was also remarkable for its dryness and high temperatures in June, reaching 90° on several occasions. There had been little rain in the months



*Great Britain in the winter of 2009-2010*

preceding 1976 and the summer was extremely dry with reservoirs running dry due to the lack of rain. The dry weather broke on August Bank Holiday weekend and cooler weather followed with no warm and fine Autumn days in October as in 1947 and 1959.

In the late 1980s there was a tendency for higher summer temperatures and there was a record high temperature on 3rd August when the writer recorded a maximum of 97°F in the Stevenson Screen; it was even hotter elsewhere, with a top temperature in Britain of 100°F. There were hot summers in 1996 and 2006. Since then there have been few notable summers although all have had hot spells, if short lived.

From these notes it will be seen that there is nothing so varied as the British climate. Some say its variety is its virtue whilst others dismiss it as damp, cold and lacking in sunshine. Market Harborough is particularly fortunate, the rainfall is amongst the lowest in the country and it frequently escapes severe conditions experienced elsewhere.

**Annual Rainfalls at Market Harborough  
1917-2016**

| <i>Measurements in inches</i> |              |             |              |             |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| <i>Year</i>                   | <i>Total</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| 1917                          | 23.37        | 1951        | 30.17        | 1985        | 25.51        |
| 1918                          | 23.29        | 1952        | 25.56        | 1986        | 28.44        |
| 1919                          | 29.63        | 1953        | 22.79        | 1987        | 26.18        |
| 1920                          | 26.10        | 1954        | 29.41        | 1988        | 25.75        |
| 1921                          | 15.28        | 1955        | 20.12        | 1989        | 26.65        |
| 1922                          | 28.50        | 1956        | 23.90        | 1990        | 19.72        |
| 1923                          | 27.71        | 1957        | 24.10        | 1991        | 21.88        |
| 1924                          | 28.06        | 1958        | 29.56        | 1992        | 32.87        |
| 1925                          | 24.63        | 1959        | 21.17        | 1993        | 26.25        |
| 1926                          | 26.78        | 1960        | 33.34        | 1994        | 28.37        |
| 1927                          | 30.55        | 1961        | 21.59        | 1995        | 23.21        |
| 1928                          | 27.09        | 1962        | 20.64        | 1996        | 18.74        |
| 1929                          | 23.83        | 1963        | 22.19        | 1997        | 24.86        |
| 1930                          | 30.45        | 1964        | 18.02        | 1998        | 28.31        |
| 1931                          | 23.48        | 1965        | 29.53        | 1999        | 29.74        |
| 1932                          | 23.87        | 1966        | 28.98        | 2000        | 32.06        |
| 1933                          | 17.39        | 1967        | 25.70        | 2001        | 27.52        |
| 1934                          | 18.48        | 1968        | 28.86        | 2002        | 29.32        |
| 1935                          | 26.15        | 1969        | 26.56        | 2003        | 19.52        |
| 1936                          | 27.95        | 1970        | 23.69        | 2004        | 31.57        |
| 1937                          | 26.62        | 1971        | 22.81        | 2005        | 22.23        |
| 1938                          | 22.03        | 1972        | 23.29        | 2006        | 28.13        |
| 1939                          | 30.79        | 1973        | 21.06        | 2007        | 29.25        |
| 1940                          | 27.40        | 1974        | 28.17        | 2008        | 27.73        |
| 1941                          | 27.88        | 1975        | 20.34        | 2009        | 25.51        |
| 1942                          | 20.84        | 1976        | 22.00        | 2010        | 22.51        |
| 1943                          | 20.77        | 1977        | 26.99        | 2011        | 17.22        |
| 1944                          | 22.18        | 1978        | 24.26        | 2012        | 35.22        |
| 1945                          | 19.62        | 1979        | 29.89        | 2013        | 24.14        |
| 1946                          | 31.90        | 1980        | 28.29        | 2014        | 31.34        |
| 1947                          | 20.05        | 1981        | 27.08        | 2015        | 25.30        |
| 1948                          | 26.44        | 1982        | 26.17        | 2016        | 26.19        |
| 1949                          | 22.90        | 1983        | 23.55        |             |              |
| 1950                          | 24.95        | 1984        | 29.74        |             |              |

Sources –

1917-1930

G. O. Nicholson

1931 to the present –

G. C. Wooldridge

H. D. F. Wooldridge

**Annual Mean Temperatures from 1931  
in degrees Fahrenheit**

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Mean</i> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1931        | 47.5        | 1960        | 50.0        | 1989        | 51.2        |
| 1932        | 48.6        | 1961        | 50.5        | 1990        | 52.3        |
| 1933        | 49.8        | 1962        | 47.9        | 1991        | 49.1        |
| 1934        | 49.1        | 1963        | 47.4        | 1992        | 50.4        |
| 1935        | 49.7        | 1964        | 49.3        | 1993        | 49.1        |
| 1936        | 47.5        | 1965        | 48.6        | 1994        | 50.7        |
| 1937        | 48.3        | 1966        | 49.7        | 1995        | 50.8        |
| 1938        | 49.9        | 1967        | 50.5        | 1996        | 48.6        |
| 1939        | 48.6        | 1968        | 49.3        | 1997        | 51.4        |
| 1940        | 47.7        | 1969        | 49.0        | 1998        | 50.0        |
| 1941        | 47.9        | 1970        | 49.5        | 1999        | 51.5        |
| 1942        | 48.1        | 1971        | 49.5        | 2000        | 51.8        |
| 1943        | 49.8        | 1972        | 48.2        | 2001        | 50.3        |
| 1944        | 48.9        | 11973       | 48.8        | 2002        | 51.9        |
| 1945        | 50.0        | 1974        | 48.4        | 2003        | 51.5        |
| 1946        | 48.8        | 1975        | 49.3        | 2004        | 51.2        |
| 1947        | 48.8        | 1976        | 50.4        | 3005        | 51.4        |
| 1948        | 49.7        | 1977        | 48.8        | 2006        | 52.2        |
| 1949        | 50.7        | 1978        | 48.9        | 2007        | 51.4        |
| 1950        | 48.4        | 1979        | 48.3        | 2008        | 50.9        |
| 1951        | 48.3        | 1980        | 49.9        | 2009        | 51.1        |
| 1952        | 48.4        | 1981        | 48.7        | 2010        | 48.8        |
| 1953        | 49.9        | 1982        | 50.0        | 2011        | 52.5        |
| 1954        | 48.8        | 1983        | 49.2        | 2012        | 50.0        |
| 1955        | 48.2        | 1984        | 48.2        | 2013        | 50.4        |
| 1956        | 47.4        | 1985        | 48.1        | 2014        | 52.2        |
| 1957        | 50.4        | 1986        | 48.8        | 2015        | 51.5        |
| 1958        | 49.2        | 1987        | 48.8        | 2016        | 51.7        |
| 1959        | 50.5        | 1988        | 50.2        |             |             |

*Yearly Mean Temperature*

*1931 - 2016 (86 years)*

*48.8°F*

*1931 - 1989*

*48.1°F*

*1990 - 2016*

*50.9°F*

*Note: Means prior to 1931 not available*