



SNOW COVERED  
ABBEY STREET,  
MARKET HARBOURGH  
c. 1950.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
MISS D MAYCOCK.

Observations of rainfall, if not of temperature, are known to have been kept in Market Harborough of more than 120 years. Mr. S Watson Cox, a local jeweller and silversmith, was keeping records in 1873 and continued until 1890. Mr. William Bragg kept records at his house in The Square from at least 1897 and we have rainfall records from the Market Harborough Grammar School dating from 1896. Mr G O Nicholson started rainfall observations at Rose Hill, Leicester Road in 1906 and the Rose Hill records continue until 1948.

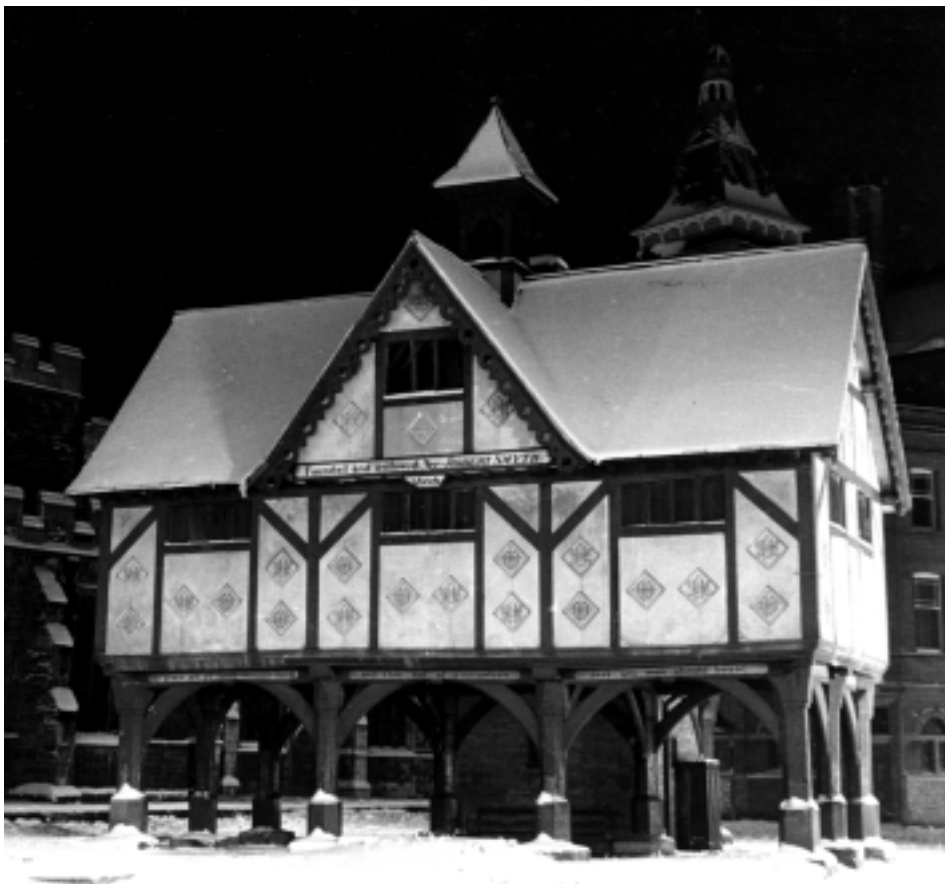
My father commenced weather observations in Market Harborough in April 1930 and since 1965 these have been continued by myself. This is now the longest running and most complete set of records of weather in Market Harborough.

Mr Cox's records include the year 1880 when the town suffered the biggest flood Market Harborough has ever known. July 1880 was excessively wet with a total rainfall of 8.4 inches, 4.85 of this falling in the 48 hours prior to the day of the flood. The river overflowed and flooded the town centre to a considerable depth causing great distress amongst the inhabitants. His records show that all the years from 1875 to 1883 had well above the yearly average amounts of rain. These were followed by a year of below average rainfall in 1884 with a total of 19.89 inches. Mr Nicholson recorded the rainfall in the very dry year of 1921 as 15.28 inches.

Mr Bragg was recording temperatures during the very severe winter of 1895 when Press reports described Market Harborough as just the 'nippiest' spot in England. On 4th February 1917, a newspaper report stated that Market Harborough had achieved the reputation of being the 'coldest place in England' by reason of the fact that the previous Sunday night 39 degrees of frost -7 degrees below zero, were registered in the grounds of the Manor House, Little Bowden.

# Market Harborough Weather Records

Douglas Wooldridge



A SNOWY OLD  
GRAMMARSCHOOL,  
MARKET HARBOROUGH.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
MISS D MAYCOCK.

In contrast to the above, the winters in the 1930s were generally mild, although they had their cold spells. The long-awaited White Christmas came in 1938 when there was snow on the ground over the whole of the Christmas holiday. This caused chaos to road and rail transport, particularly in the south of England, but the cold spell was short-lived and the remainder of the winter was unremarkable.

Having got away lightly with the winters in the 1930s, the early years of the Second World War were characterised by some of the severest winters for a great many years. Of these, 1939/1940 was probably the worst. There was much snow and severe frost which lasted from 26th December until 19th February. The mean temperature for January was 28.2 degrees F. and this may have been the lowest since 1895 and a lower January mean was not recorded until 1963.

1940/41 was slightly less severe but it produced a cold spell which lasted for well over a month and 1941/42 had a cold spell which lasted for approximately two months. From



SNOW FILLED  
CHURCH STREET,  
MARKET HARBOROUGH  
MARCH 1947.

January 6th until March 8th, with only a day or two's break, frost was continuous. Its longevity was the remarkable feature, there was more snow and severer frosts in 1940 but of shorter duration.

There were two mild winters and then a return to colder conditions in 1944/45. Although the only cold period was in January, conditions were as severe as in some of the earlier and longer cold winters. 1945/46 was mild but then came 1946/47, one of our most notable winters.

There was snow in mid-December 1946, but the predictions of a White Christmas were unfounded and Christmas Day was mild. January 1947 started frosty and snow lay on the 7th but this was followed by a quick thaw and the cold spell appeared to be over. A second cold spell started on January 19th, and this was to continue until early March. Although January was cold, the full force of the winter did not strike until February which, besides being intensely cold, was a month of great gloom. The last sunshine was recorded on January 30th and it was

not until 18th February that the sun again made its appearance. It had been many years since there had been such a long period without any sun.

The coldest night of the winter, and the coldest of many winters was that of February 25th. Following an intensely cold day with a maximum temperature of 32 degrees, the temperature fell to record levels at night. The screen minimum at Coventry Road was 1.5 degrees F. and a reading of 0 degrees F. was recorded at ground level. It was almost certainly the coldest night since 1917.

The winter continued into the opening days of March and the biggest snowfall of the winter occurred on the 4th and 5th. This was accompanied by a gale force



wind which caused severe drifting. On March 6th, Market Harborough was cut off from almost every direction and it was several days before communications were restored. There was further night frost but the long winter was effectively over. From January to March there were 63 nights of air frost of which 49 were consecutive from January 19th until March 8th, Twenty days had a maximum temperature below freezing point, twelve of these consecutive, snow had fallen on 28 days and lain on the ground for 56.

The second notable winter was 1962/63. The cold weather started earlier than in 1947 and the severest frost was in January when most of the snow also fell. The frost continued throughout February and the snow remained frozen on the ground. However, the frost lost

THE BROOKE MEMORIAL  
FOUNTAIN CHURCH SQUARE,  
ON A SNOWY NIGHT.  
DISMANTLED C. 1955.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
MISS D MAYCOCK.

some of its intensity and during February there were many sunny days which brought the maximum temperatures above the freezing point, unlike February 1947 when the sun was conspicuous by its absence. The long winter was not over until March 6th having lasted approximately ten weeks.

The 1970s started with mild winters but there was a gradual trend towards colder winters again. 1978/79 was a winter which never seemed to end for, almost without exception, there was cold weather from the end of November until mid March. This followed an autumn which was the warmest and driest for several years. The cold set in with a vengeance on December 31st and snow and frost continued throughout January and February. The heaviest snowfall of the winter occurred on the 14th and 15th February and this was accompanied by strong winds which caused drifts of several feet to form and many roads were impassable. March was mild at first but by mid month conditions were almost as bad as a month earlier. Heavy snow fell on the night of the 15th, followed by frost and it was not until March 24th that the winter was effectively over.



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS  
SPARKLING ON THE SNOW IN  
CHURCH STREET  
MARKET HARBOROUGH 1960S.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
MISS D MAYCOCK.

After two mild winters, 1981/82 was equally as severe as some of the earlier ones. The unusual feature of this winter was the amount of snow and frost which occurred before Christmas. A spell of cold weather with an intensity which is rare in that month set in during the second week of December and snow and frost was continuous over the Christmas holiday period. The coldest weather was from 6th - 16th January after which the worst of the winter was over.

The following three winters were unremarkable but 1985 and 1986 both had cold spells with considerable amounts of snow in January and February.

1987 had a cold spell in January which, although it did not last for long, was remarkable for its intensity. Monday 12th January had a maximum of 19 degrees F and not even the cold winters of 1947 and 1963 produced a maximum as low as this. At 9.00 pm that night the thermometer in the screen at Burnmill Road registered Zero F. and the ground minimum was -1.5 degrees F. There were reports of readings of -22 degrees C. ( about -4.5 degrees F. ) but the degree of exposure is not known.



Like the winters, the summers of the 1930s were unremarkable. 1935 was probably the warmest with a long dry spell in July lasting into early August. 1932 had the distinction of producing the highest temperature with a reading of 91 degrees F in August but this was not otherwise a hot summer. It was to be 1975 before another temperature of 90 degrees or over was to be recorded.

THE SQUARE,  
MARKET HARBOROUGH 1935.

After the long cold winter in 1947, the summer was warm and dry. There was a hot spell around the Whitsuntide weekend at the end of May and although there have been higher temperatures in other summers since, there was a consistent warmth throughout the summer extending right through September well into October. The summer was particularly remarkable for the extremely dry August, often a wet month. Rain fell on only one day producing a mere 0.03 inch and for thirty-eight days after August 3rd no rain fell in Market Harborough.

The next summer, 1948, is best forgotten for it was cool and wet apart from one very hot week at the end of July. This ended on August Bank Holiday, the 1st, with one of the

heaviest falls in 24 hours ever recorded amounting to 1.89 inches which fell between 8.00pm on August 1st and 9.00am on August 2nd.

1949 was another hot summer and unlike 1947, this followed a mild winter. July was particularly warm with nine days above 80 degrees F. The fine weather continued into October.

The 1950s started with some indifferent summers but 1959 was one of our most outstanding. There were warm sunny days early in the season and late in the autumn. September was particularly notable because only one day's rain was recorded in the whole month. A drought started on 13th August and no rain was recorded in Market Harborough until 21st September and no further rainfall until October.

Our coldest summer was probably 1972 which never really warmed up. It was not until the first week of July that a maximum of 70 degrees was recorded, a very unusual occurrence. August was the warmest month but even then temperatures were mostly below normal.



THE SQUARE, MARKET  
HARBOROUGH 1958.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
THE HARBOROUGH MAIL.

The only instance of snow falling in June occurred in 1975. On the 2nd June, Market Harborough in common with other places had a fall of snow which covered the ground. Despite this cold start, five days after the snowfall a maximum of 82 degrees was recorded and the whole summer was warm and dry. This was particularly so in August which had a maximum of 92 degrees.

The summer of 1975 was followed by an even warmer one. 1976 was unusual for the run of very hot days in June. Fifteen days had a maxima above 80 degrees and five of those were above 90 degrees. The dry weather came to an end on the August Bank Holiday

weekend when heavy rain fell ending the long hot summer. Neither 1975 nor 1976 had the long warm autumns enjoyed in 1947, 1949 and 1959.

The 1980s had their hot summers. Both 1983 and 1984 were warm and dry with hot days in July and August. The next few summers were generally written off as being cold and dismal although they had their better periods, notably the warm September of 1985, which followed an indifferent summer. 1989 was warm and dry and this was followed by one even drier and warmer.

The summer of 1990 had the distinction of having the highest temperature recorded in Britain since August 1911. On 3rd August a maximum of 97 degrees F was recorded in Market Harborough. A claim for the highest temperature came from Nailstone, Leicestershire with a reading of 99 degrees F.

Floods have been a feature of Market Harborough periodically over the years. These have been caused by the river overflowing its banks in times of extreme wetness and also as a result of heavy rainfall during thunderstorms as in 1935 when the square was flooded on Market Day. The flood which occurred on 2nd July 1958 was acknowledged to have been the biggest since the Great Flood of 1880 and was of the old variety when the river overflowed its banks. The water level rose in the early hours and flooded the Square and low-lying parts of the town causing disruption to traffic and much damage to shops and business premises. June had been a very wet month with 4.6 inches of rain and the river was already full and fast flowing and unable to contain the rainfall which fell in the 24 hours prior to July 2nd. In excess of an inch of rain was measured at Market Harborough but there was heavier rainfall west of the town and it is thought that this rainfall running off the land into the upper reaches of the Welland caused much of the trouble in Market Harborough.

The last of the old time floods when the river rose and flooded the centre of the town occurred in March 1975 when a little over an inch of rain fell in 24 hours and, although there have been floods as a result of sudden storms since, it would appear that the old style floods are a thing of the past.

Besides the periodical flooding, other notable events have been the two whirlwinds which occurred in 1936 causing much damage in the west and north areas of the town, severe thunderstorms as in June 1935 when amongst other places in the town, the public baths were struck and in June 1946 when one of the most severe storms to occur in the area caused much damage by lightning and severe flooding in the town centre, and notable gales such as the one in March 1947 following the severe winter when a lot of damage was caused and the great gale of January 1976 when there was much damage in Market Harborough and the surrounding district.

**Easter Eve** - The old custom to sing the Easter hymn over Mr. Hubbard's grave, in ST. Mary's burial ground, was carried out again on Saturday last, at 8.30, by the church choir. To get to the grave yard this year there was something very unusual. The waters, from the rapid melting of the snow which had fallen on the two preceding days, were out, near the Toll-gate and Gas works, but this obstruction was bravely encountered by about thirty of the choir, besides a few others. Many more who intended to go, declined, when they got to the end of the walk, not liking to go through the flood, and returned again to the town. One gentleman was kindly carried over the flood by a young man named Toomes. This little incident amused the choir boys and one of them was overheard to whisper, 'I wish he'd drop him.' We understand this is the 70th year that the above custom has been carried out.<sup>(1)</sup>

**The Weather** - The very peculiar weather we have had during the past week, has called forth a vast number of remarks from our townsmen and friends. The oldest inhabitant cannot remember such weather on a Good Friday before. The snow began to fall in early in the morning and continued until noon, with a cold wind from the north east, which blew the snow in drifts making the roads in many places quite impassible. We heard of two or three instances where conveyances were set fast in the snow drifts and had to be dug out, after a delay of some hours. Frost and snow had prevailed for three or four previous days. A correspondent of our's says that the quantity of snow which fell on Thursday and Friday, was almost without parallel. Considering the advanced season of the year it was extraordinary. He says "I turned to an old memorandum which I made, dated April 13th 1849 as follows:- very cold weather, severe frost, a good deal of snow fell, and the weather continued frosty with snow until after the 17th day of that month." Serious floods have resulted in this county from the recent heavy falls of snow, the river Soar and the canal having in some places overflowed their tanks. Between Billesdon and Leicester the snow lay so deep as to cause the stoppage of the mails on Saturday, and gangs of men had to be employed to cut a road through. A portion of the corrugated Iron roof over the Melton Mowbray Railway station was carried away during the high wind. Near to Crow Mills, on the Rugby branch of the Midland railway the country, as viewed from the railway banks, presents once more the appearance of an inland sea. In the neighbourhood of Lutterworth men were employed digging a road through the snow, which in some places had drifted to a depth of between 5 and 6 feet. At Cosby the water about 6 o'clock on Friday night was about 4ft deep in the village street. The fury of the storm appeared to have its fury in Huntingdonshire. Immense losses have been occasioned of sheep and lambs to farmers. In some places whole flocks were covered up, and had to be dug out and lambs were found dead by scores.<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) Local Paper 1876.

(2) Local Paper 1876