

Floods

Flood of 1881

The flood of Tuesday 5th July 1881, was accompanied not only by great destruction but the loss of three lives. During the day the weather had been hot and oppressive and about six o'clock in the evening there were signs of a approaching storm. The sky turned to a inky blackness and a shower fell but soon cleared. Between nine and eleven the rain began to fall again and by about 11.20 and 11.45 Burnley Road the streets around the George and Dragon pub, St James Street, Newchurch-Road, and all the low lying streets and alleys were caught in the surging flood waters. Atlas Works, Bakers Foundry, Irwell Mill all suffered massive flood damage. Burnley Road had the river wall washed away and stones, doors, grids, in fact anything that could move was washed away by the flood water. One of the first people to die during the 1881 floods was a young girl aged six years called Deborah Sheen the step-daughter of Emmanuel Cunliffe, a weaver at Broadclough mill and who lived at Underbank. The child was sleeping at her grandfathers, Mr Edward Mathews of Stanley Street Burnley Road. She had virtually lived with him since her father was killed in a quarry accident shortly after her birth. Hearing the storm Mr Mathews got up and seeing the cellar was flooded and the house was beginning to fill he ran with the child in his arms out of doors and tried to cross the road. He had not gone a yard before he was taken off his feet and swept down the road as far as Cropper Street, the water then wrenching the child out of his arms the body of Deborah being found afterwards besides Barkers Foundry on Henrietta Street. The child's body was then taken to the Waterworks to be identified and then returned home to her mothers house at Underbank.

The second person to die was that of Mrs Maria Jackson aged about 50 years of age wife of William Jackson of Waterside. The Jacksons lived in a cellar dwelling known as Dawson cottages situated across the road from Waterside Chapel. At the height of the flood when the water had almost filled their tiny dwelling William went out to attach a rope to the railings of the above landing intending to pull his wife up to safety with the aid of a young man named Hartley. When half way to the steps however her clothes became tangled in her legs and she fell into the raging waters, she was washed away by the current of water right down Burnley Road into Back King Street where she was found early the following morning. The third death by drowning was that of Mrs Hannah Renshaw wife of Joseph Renshaw better known as "Joe Waterworks". Mrs Renshaw was caught by the surging water as she stepped out of the back door of the Waterloo Hotel, where she was engaged as a out door servant. She was carried away and her body was later found by Irwell Mill. The damage in Bacup was confined to the areas of Burnley Road, Yorkshire street, Bridge Street, and St James street with the surrounding streets such as Union and Back Irwell street being affected. From Weir down to Bacup the road was awash with strands of red yarn swept down from the corner dye works. The carriage road for Broadclough Hall was literally swept away. In the middle of the storm the gas pipes got flooded and about 12-30 midnight the gas was extinguished and the town was plunged into darkness.

September 1935 Landslide

Heavy thunderstorms caused mass flooding in Bacup and Stacksteads in September 1935, streets became rivers as the water swirled down from the hillsides. At Stacksteads the flooding was fairly extensive the river assuming proportions of a raging torrent. An incident of major interest was a landslide on the Bacup to Rochdale railway line just beyond the borough boundary at Shanter Brow. What might have been a serious accident was prevented the actions of a Shawforth man who dashed along the permanent way and stopped an

approaching passenger train. The landslide was due to the water pouring down the steep embankment above the railway and many tons of soil and stone were hurled across the lines, which were covered to a depth of about a yard. The train service was suspended for a few hours only being resumed on a single line.

Harold Smith 25 a piano tuner, who lives not far from the spot at 343, Market Street, Shawforth, was the central figure in this exciting episode.

Mr Smith described how he heard shouting and went outside to see a landslide had occurred onto the line. Knowing that a train to Bacup was due in five minutes he lost no time. Scaling a wall at the rear of his home he dashed up the line towards Britannia. Fighting his way through mud and water he managed to accomplish his object waving his cap to get the attention of the engine driver who managed to stop the train about 100 yards away from the landslide. Just before the train reached the spot there was a blind bend of which the driver would not have been able to see any obstruction. Had the train hit the obstruction it would have no doubt been hurled 20ft down the embankment into the main road. A gang of about 30 platelayers shown in the pictures were soon on the job clearing the debris and after two hours a single line was cleared.

Meanwhile in the town cellars of shops in St James Street were quickly inundated in one instance to a depth of three feet. Householders in Queen Street of Market Street were among the worst sufferers the cellar of every house in this street being under water. At the house of number 18 a basement dwelling occupied by Mr and Mrs W Marshall, the bedroom, living room, and kitchen were flooded to a depth of 4 feet, and furniture and carpets were floating about. Prior to the arrival of the services Mr Marshalls brother Miles had been bailing out the house with buckets.

An alarming experience befell Mr George Lord, herbalist and confectioner of 183 Market Street and his wife. Mrs Lord stated that she and her husband were woken with the sounds of what sounded like a flood on Sunday morning. When she arose she found that water from Plantation Street at the rear of the house was pouring through the ceiling into the bedroom, part of the bedclothes were soaked though.

The position at Stacksteads was even worse than at Bacup, at Shade End in the vicinity of the Stacksteads recreation ground a small stream which flows through a tunnel under the railway became so swollen that the tunnel was unable to take the whole of the water, which in consequence poured out onto the recreation ground. The River Irwell also overflowed its banks near to the Acre woollen mill, water from this source joining the other so that the recreation ground was soon covered.

December 1936

History will record that December 14th 1936 was the day on which King George the sixth was proclaimed King in provincial centres. However in Bacup the day was remembered for a very different reason that of floods known as the worse for fifty years. Flooded houses, cellars and shop premises were the order of the day in Bacup with one mill having to close due to the depth of water. As usual the River Irwell was the source of the trouble. It became so swollen, following continuous heavy rain throughout the night and morning, that it overflowed about 12-30 p. m and rushed like a torrent down Burnley Road, the trouble being accentuated by some of the gullies were unable to take the storm water. The passage of cars in any direction sending up waves of muddy water was a spectacle of great interest. At the entrance to St James Square the water divided into two streams which swept round the square and into St James Street, and thence Union Street. Several houses in the latter street were flooded. The extent to which they were inundated can be judged from the experience of one resident, who said that the water had been "up to her knees".

When the emergency signal sounded at 12-55p.m members of the fire brigade with the Smith engine and trailer pump, visited Underbank district in Burnley Road. Water overflowing from

the River Irwell, rose from grates at the back of the houses, many of which are at least a foot below the road surface and added to the inconvenience caused by water from the hillside at Holmes Barn. This water rushed across the main road and entered several houses opposite Holmes Mill before the occupants had time to check it. The water rose to a height of two feet and extinguished the fires in the houses of Mr and Mrs F Meadowcroft, 49 Burnley Road, and Mr and Mrs J. E. Sunderland, 53 Burnley Road. One of the first concerns of Mrs Meadowcroft was the safety of her 10 year old crippled child and when the flood first threatened she carried her into a neighbours house. Water penetrated the front and back rooms and damaged carpets and oilcloth. A new pair of children's shoes was washed out of the house and swept down the grate near the front door. Disappearing into the river which runs almost below the houses there. The house of no 45 Burnley Road, occupied by Mrs Martha Doogan, was threatened with flooding while the occupant was away. A neighbour forced open the front door, and with the assistance of neighbours and work people at a nearby garage furniture was removed from the house to the garage until the flood subsided. Members of the Bacup Fire Brigade, were engaged for over an hour in pumping water from the premises of Messrs Taylor and Hargreaves, Irwell Mill, the doubling room of which was flooded. In places the water was seven inches deep. The high wind and torrential rain caused damage to hen pens and garden fences. Part of a large advertisement hoarding near Glenn Street in Newchurch Road, Lee Mill was blown down.