

his pay packets. Some were unopened. Clearly he had just lived on the tips he received serving on the forecourt and hardly used his pay. I called the station again and asked for assistance. My reporting sergeant turned up and we checked all the money and he said he would take over the case. The cause of death was a heart attack. The enquiries to trace next of kin was unsuccessful so the couple of thousand pounds we found, a lot of money in the 1940s went to the Crown.
 Three sudden deaths in as many weeks; I dreaded early turn!

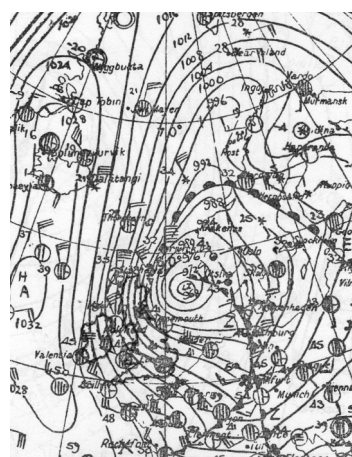
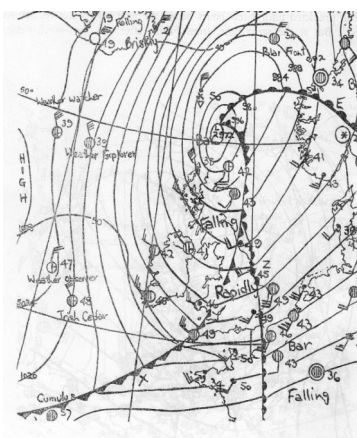
**WHO REMEMBERS?
 Richard Cowley**

The meteorologists had been keeping an eye on 'Low Z' since midnight on Thursday 29 January 1953. Although the pressure was falling steadily, there was nothing menacing at this stage, as the direction was north easterly, away from the British Isles. However, at midnight on Friday 30 January, now being driven by north westerly and then northerly winds, 'Low Z' was pushed south into the North Sea, and at 6am on Saturday 31 January, was just to the east of the Orkney Islands, with the lowest recorded pressure of 968 millibars.

Meanwhile, to the west of the depression, 'High A' was building to 1032 millibars, and moving relentlessly east. This resulted in the isobars being squeezed into an unusually steep pressure gradient, resulting in unprecedented wind speeds. At 6am at Grimsetter on Orkney, a gust of 125 miles per hour was recorded - Hurricane Force 12 on the Beaufort scale is 75 miles per hour!

All through that Saturday, 'Low Z' continued inexorably south down the eastern coast of Scotland and England with no change of pressure. To make matters worse, an abnormally high full moon spring tide was occurring. The combination of this, coupled with the unusually vigorous depression, caused the most devastating storm and flooding this country has ever known - much, much worse than the 'Hurricane' of October 1987. The total death toll was to be 531, with 307 people being drowned in the counties of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex; and a further 224 sailors drowning in shipwrecks around the coast.

In Lincolnshire flooding occurred from Mablethorpe to Skegness and stretched two miles inland. In Suffolk, 38 people drowned at Felixstowe. In Essex 58 people died on Canvey Island, and another 37 died when the village of Jaywick was washed away.



The progress of the storm - Midnight on Friday 30 January, and Noon on Saturday 31 January 1953.

So it is utterly amazing that this most devastating natural disaster is hardly remembered, and only one book has been written about it, and that for only one county.⁽¹⁾ But what is remembered, is during that one night, an incredible 30 police officers were decorated - 19 for gallantry and 11 for meritorious service - a phenomenon that was unprecedented, even during The Blitz, and has never been matched since.

The gallantry awards appeared in the *London Gazette* of 28 April 1953 (Number 39834), and the Meritorious Service awards (given mainly for rescue co-ordination), appeared in the Birthday Honours List in the *London Gazette* of 1 June 1953 (Number 39863).

NORTH RIDING OF YORKSHIRE CONSTABULARY

For Meritorious Service :

BOWLING, Harold, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Constable.

LINCOLNSHIRE CONSTABULARY

For Gallantry :

DEPTFORD, Leonard Charles, awarded **The George Medal** as Constable.

The sea defences on the Lincolnshire coast were breached in several places resulting in serious flooding. At Chapel St Leonards, PC Deptford searched a bungalow which had collapsed into the sea, but finding nobody, made his way across the remains of a sea bank to a two storey house where many elderly people were sheltering in upstairs rooms. The foundations had disintegrated and the building was on the point collapse. He roped the persons together and led them to safety across the remains of the sea bank which was being pounded by mountainous waves. All reached safety.

PC Deptford then improvised a raft with empty fuel barrels and rescued an elderly bed-ridden couple from a threatened house by strapping them to stretchers on top of the raft. From another bungalow, he rescued several more elderly persons by leading them across the broken sea-bank, and at one point had to carry two infirm persons across the breaches in the bank. He then continued to assist for the next 24 hours.

'Constable Deptford displayed gallantry of an exceptionally high order in crossing the broken sea wall at the height of a very strong gale and in the face of mountainous seas, and successfully led a most hazardous enterprise'.

LEWIS, Charles, awarded **The George Medal** as Inspector.

When a sea bank collapsed, Mablethorpe police station was

flooded by several feet of sea water, and all services were put out of action. Hearing cries for help, Inspector Lewis opened a window, climbed out, and waded towards the cries. The gale lashed the water to head height, but he reached a garage drive where an elderly couple were in danger of drowning. Inspector Lewis got the woman onto his shoulders and struggled across the street with them to shelter in an upstairs room. He then flagged down a lorry and went to Sutton-on-Sea where the promenade and sea defences had been carried away, leaving the main street under two to eight feet of water. A hundred people were sheltering in the cinema, and Inspector Lewis arranged evacuation of them and of nearby old peoples' bungalows. He then went to Trusthorpe, where in very hazardous circumstance he rescued seven elderly men and women from threatened bungalows, despite being up to his neck in sea water.

'Inspector Lewis returned to Mablethorpe and continued with the evacuation of the inhabitants until 10.30 pm on Monday 2 February, having been continuously on duty for 54 hours, for 26 of which he was constantly in and out of ice cold sea water.'

BRAY, John Geoffrey, awarded **The British Empire Medal for Gallantry** as Sergeant.

When the sea defences had been breached at Sandilands, PS Bray went to the spot, where he tried to reach an elderly lady in a bungalow below the sea bank, but was driven back by the strong debris-strewn current. On reaching another house, he helped a man up to his bedroom for shelter, but was then trapped in the house himself because of the water. After some time, the water receded and PS Bray made his way to a hotel where residents had assembled. He then visited the houses of the residents who were unaccounted for, and rescued many people, taking them all back to the hotel.

'Sergeant Bray was completely out of touch with his senior officers, but he continued to use his initiative and to work without ceasing for 46 hours until the worst of the danger had passed. He had been wet through the whole time and the icy wind had served to intensify the cold.'

MIDGLEY, Francis Joseph, awarded **The British Empire Medal for Gallantry** as Constable.

PC Midgley was at home, off duty, when he learnt of the breach of the sea defences at Sandilands, Sutton-on-Sea. He waded into the street, and brought three people to the safety of his own home. He then returned and rescued two elderly ladies who were struggling in the water. Going out again, he saw an elderly couple chest deep in water. PC Midgley managed to reach them and was taking them along his garden path, when the water washed them into a deep hole which had been scoured out by the floods. PC Midgley managed to reach the couple and after a struggle, managed to get them and himself back to the garden path.

'At 11pm. the water receded somewhat, and Constable Midgley waded out of the house to assist with the evacuation.'

BOND, Douglas Arthur, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

RAWSON, George Charles, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

'For rescuing people trapped by the floods at Mablethorpe'.

COOKE, John Charles, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

NEEDHAM, Dennis Clifford, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

TROUT, Arthur, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Sergeant.

WALKER, Charles William, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

'For rescuing people trapped by the floods at Sutton-on-Sea'.

For Meritorious Service :

BARNES, Sidney George, created a **Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)** as Superintendent.

GREENWOOD, Ronald Berry, created an **Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)** as Assistant Chief Constable.

NORFOLK CONSTABULARY

For Gallantry :

BUNNEY, Gerald, awarded **The British Empire Medal for Gallantry** as Sergeant.

In attempting to gain access to Snettisham beach, PS Bunney managed to get to a mile from the sea, but seeing torrential flood water rushing towards him he turned and raced the floods back to Dersingham to warn the local inhabitants. He then went to Snettisham where he organised rescue parties, and at the head of a rope life line attempted to get to a house about a mile away, the water constantly reaching up to the necks of the rescuers. The current was so strong, that the team split up after three-quarters of a mile. PS Bunney and his contingent continued to a house where 18 people were rescued. During this rescue one of the rescuers who was carrying a young child was attacked by cramp and fell into the water, but PS Bunney managed to rescue both of them and take them to safety. PS Bunney then organised more rescues throughout that night and well into the next day.

NOBBS, Henry Ernest, awarded **The British Empire Medal for Gallantry** as Constable.

At Snettisham, PC Nobbs organised a rope line and entered the flood waters to rescue a man clinging to a telegraph pole some distance away. Because of the current and waves being whipped up by the severe gale, progress from telegraph pole to telegraph pole was slow. The man was reached, and was on the point of exhaustion and about to slip into the water. PC Nobbs left the rope line, grabbed the man and brought him to safety. PC Nobbs then remained on duty and at one point rescued three more people from a flooded holiday camp.

DONNE, Noel Edward, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

SKERRITT, Raymond Yorick, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

'For rescuing people trapped by the floods at King's Lynn'.

For Meritorious Service :

DANIELS, Graham Fredrick Flaxman, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Detective Inspector.

GARNER, William, created a **Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)** as Superintendent.

GREAT YARMOUTH COUNTY BOROUGH POLICE

For Gallantry :

BAUMBER, George William, awarded **The British Empire Medal for Gallantry** as Constable.

PC Baumber was on motor patrol when he was told of trapped persons on a caravan site on the banks of the River Yare. He left his car about 20 yards from the floods, took off his jacket and entered the floods. Despite the strong current, he waded to the caravans which were surrounded by five feet of water. At the first caravan, he helped a woman onto the roof. At another caravan despite a collapsing pile of logs, he broke the

caravan window and got the persons onto the roof. Wading back to the bank, PC Baumber tried to construct a raft, but because he was numb with cold was unable to do so. However, he obtained a boat and by this means, rescued those people who had escaped to roof tops.

EAST SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

For Gallantry :

DUNNETT, Leslie George, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Sergeant.

'For rescuing people trapped by the floods at Felixstowe'.

REEVE, Lewis William, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

'For rescuing people trapped by the floods at Wherstead'.

For Meritorious Service :

LING, Leslie George, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Special Constable.

ESSEX CONSTABULARY

For Gallantry :

BATCHELOR, Joseph, awarded **The British Empire Medal for Gallantry** as Special Constable.

SC Batchelor reported for duty at Jaywick in the early hours of the morning and throughout the day he helped to man the boats and assist in the rescue operations. On many occasions he carried survivors to waiting ambulances through the water, which was chest deep. He continued to carry out rescue work under appalling conditions until sent to hospital for treatment.

HARMER, Donald Percival, awarded **The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct** as Constable.

'For rescuing people trapped by floods at Jaywick'.

For Meritorious Service :

HOWES, William Edward, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Sergeant.

WOOD, Norman John, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Inspector.

KENT CONSTABULARY

For Meritorious Service :

BROWN, James Charles Frederick, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Chief Inspector.

FOWLER, Norman William Frederick, created an **Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)** as Assistant Chief Constable.

SETTERFIELD, Charlie William Thomas, awarded the **British Empire Medal** as Inspector.

And what then? By the early hours of Sunday 1 February, the storm was on the Dutch coast, with a central pressure of 972 millibars. It rampaged through Belgium and The Netherlands, where an incredible 1,864 people, and an estimated 30,000 animals were drowned. And it is this enormous death toll which ensures that the 1953 storm is permanently etched into Dutch folk memory as the 'Watersnoodramp' - 'The Great Flood Disaster' - in complete contrast, it seems, to that of the British.

Reference :

1. Grieve, Hilda *The Great Tide : The story of the 1953 flood disaster in Essex* Essex County Council, 1959.

Polar Policeman.

Paul Dew

Edward McKenzie joined the Metropolitan Police just before the First World War on 1st December 1913 as a PC 475 on Y div with the warrant number 103469. The Y Divisional Ledger entry provides more details, he was 25 when he joined, born at Winterton near Great Yarmouth, 5' 7½" tall and his previous occupation was seaman.

His career with the police began in the Seven Sisters Road area but shortly after the outbreak of the First World War he joined the Guards and served for 6 months in a machine gun regiment until a special transfer brought him back to the Met. At the end of the war he transferred to Mounted Branch at Limehouse then in 1920 to North Woolwich.

As befits a former seaman he joined Thames Division in 1930 (as PC 'TA 140') serving at Wapping, Blackwall and Erith until his retirement 1938. However in 1939 he rejoined as a War Reserve PC, staying until 3rd January 1941 when he retired on medical grounds. His home was in Sheerness and it was there, next door to his son's house, he died in 1973.

These 'bare bones' of a police career however exclude his claim to fame, revealed in a January 1942 issue of Police Review. In the article it says that McKenzie was a member of Scott's famous expedition to the South Pole (1911 - 1912). The story of this, Scott's journey to the South Pole, return towards the coast, death before reaching safety and the suicide of Oates who feared being burden on his companions is quite well known.

McKenzie's part in the expedition (he was a Leading Stoker on the expedition ship Terra Nova) is not often mentioned in books but in the film Scott of the Antarctic Sam Kydd took the role of McKenzie who asks Scott if the ship's cat can be taken to the pole. However, indirectly he is very famous as he was the model for the melodramatic painting, now at the Cavalry and Guards Club in Piccadilly, by John Charles Dollman (1851 - 1934) of Oates leaving the tent during a blizzard. Immediately before then Oates had said 'I am just going outside and might be some time' and it is this painting and incident that, to many, epitomises the spirit of the pre First World War polar explorers. Why McKenzie was chosen is a mystery; although the painting does not show the face in detail presumably it was thought someone who had been to Antarctica would add a touch of authenticity, know exactly what it is like to move against high wind in the bitter cold and snow and be familiar with the correct clothing.

In common with the other members of the Scott Expedition he was awarded the Polar Medal. Finally it is worth adding that he was skilled at making models of ships and a model of the Terra Nova (the expedition ship) made by him was presented to the Science Museum.

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Sources

Police Review 9.1.1942

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