

FEBRUARY 1997. STORMY AND MILD.

After a cold and dry January, February lived up to its reputation as the “Fill dike” month with rainfall, for once, above the 30-year norm. This was spread across the entire month with no pronounced drier spells apart from the first few days which continued the pattern of the dry January. Half of the months’ total occurred in the mid month period of the 11th to 20th with a fall of 32.9mm though the heaviest daily total was outside this period, on the 23rd with 10.6mm. Rain duration totalled 65.8 hours the wettest day being the 17th with 10.1 hours.

Pressure patterns returned to the more familiar “mobile westerlies” with a sequence of depressions tracking across the British Isles. As the month progressed these became more vigorous, local M.S.L. pressures falling as low as 970.6mb around 2000 hr on the 23rd. The only respite from this succession of vigorous lows were transient ridges, short lasting though welcome and bringing clear nights with a touch of ground frost.

With the “Jet Stream” well south of its normal path at this time of the year the British Isles was under attack from weather systems which brought gale force gusts of wind to areas as far inland as the English Midlands. Gusts in excess of 34 knots occurred on 9 days reaching a peak on the 19th when speeds reached 59knots (68mph) in Halesowen causing some structural damage to roofing and fences.

With the main air flow over the British Isles coming from a westerly direction temperatures were unusually high for February. January wind flow had a predominantly easterly component (20 days) whilst that for February was mainly westerly (23 days), this being responsible for the markedly differing temperature profiles. February was much warmer than average with a mean daily temperature of 6.4C some 3.4C above the 30-year mean ending as the warmest since 1990. As the month closed a further ridge brought more settled conditions and bright sunshine. This raised temperatures to the maximum for the month, and for the Winter, to a peak of 13.6C on the 28th.