

MAY 1998.

The area of high pressure in the Atlantic extended a ridge eastwards to envelop much of the southern parts of the UK by the first of the month. This fed a mainly north to north easterly air stream across the country maintaining a relatively mild day. Periods of very light rain occurred from time to time amounting to no more than a trace, with 5.6 hours of broken sunshine and a maximum afternoon temperature of 14.9C

This ridge persisted, changing little in central pressure, though the 2nd was a much sunnier and warmer day, temperatures peaking at 17.6C with just over 9 hours of sunshine. Frontal troughs approached the north west of Scotland from a depression near to Iceland and this brought spells of light rain to both Scotland and parts of northern England. The night of the 2nd/3rd was mild with very slight overnight rain, the morning of the 3rd remaining predominantly dull, though dry. By late morning skies had cleared and the day then became sunny and relatively mild, temperatures reaching 14.3C with almost 8 hours of bright sunshine.

A strong ridge still straddled the south of the country on the 4th, which began with a slight ground frost, though further warm fronts began to make slow progress southwards during the day. This brought cloudier conditions to the Midlands mid-morning, though it was not cold, maximum temperatures again reaching 14.3C, though there were only 2.8 hours of sunshine. The 5th saw the eventual demise of the ridge across the UK, low pressure now becoming the predominant synoptic feature. One low centre off the north of Scotland continued to feed frontal systems southwards across the country, though this brought little more than slight rain to most of the region. However, it was a mainly cloudy day with only fitful sunshine, temperatures climbing no higher than 12.3C, the only precipitation being in the form of intermittent, light rain.

Pressure remained low to the west of the country, weak frontal systems moving erratically eastwards bringing only intermittent light rain on both the 6th and 7th. With winds in a south to south westerly direction, temperatures gradually climbed, though sunshine was limited on both days. The 6th saw a maximum of 15.8C with just 2.9 hours sunshine, whilst the 7th reached 15.1C, the day providing no more than 0.4 hours of sunshine. The 8th was a much brighter day, one area of low pressure migrating eastwards towards the Continent. This allowed a continuation in the south to south westerly winds, the air now fetching from more southerly regions raising both temperatures and sunshine, the maximum on the 8th reaching 21C with 10.6 hours of sunshine.

A weak area of low pressure moved slowly up the western seaboard of the UK on the 9th continuing the south to south westerly flow in wind. Temperatures again reached 20C with 11.1 hours of sunshine as the warmer interlude continued. A high pressure cell migrated very slowly on the north western Continental land mass, bringing in an easterly air flow across the North Sea. The result of this was to introduce much damper air into the UK, particularly to the eastern seaboard. Maximum temperatures in the north Midlands were pegged at 14.9C with a mere 0.6 hour of sunshine.

The 11th saw this easterly air flow continuing, with a low area of stratus covering much of eastern England and the north Midlands. The day was raw with no sunshine and a maximum temperature no higher than 12.9C. This pattern of low cloud and cool to cold conditions persisted into the 12th as the centre of high pressure moved to Denmark with a low to the south west of the country, attendant weak frontal systems lying across southern counties. This brought slight rain and drizzle to the area in the small hours, together with a period of local fog, the leaden skies gradually clearing late afternoon to give 2.7 hours of hazy sunshine and a maximum temperature of 17.1C

With high pressure still to the north west, low stratus persisted over the Midlands early on the 13th, which saw further intermittent spells of light drizzle and widespread fog. This eventually cleared mid morning to give a day of hazy sunshine amounting to 6.9 hours and a very warm afternoon with a maximum of 21.7C. An additional high pressure centre began to develop to the south west of the country on the 14th and this maintained the broadly easterly air flow across the UK. Consequently, much of the east coast and parts of the Midlands continued to endure low stratus and even fog during the early morning with spells of light and intermittent drizzle. These gave way gradually to give a short period of fleeting sun before skies again became totally overcast. As a result only a trace of sun was recorded with the maximum temperature pegged back to 19.6C.

The passage of a cold front westwards on the 14th gradually cleared skies and brought much fresher air to the region early on the 15th. The day began cloudless, and was to continue thus throughout. As a result temperatures rose quickly to peak at 24.2C, the maximum achieved so far this year, together with 12.4 hours of sunshine, also the year's maximum to date. The twin centres of high pressure near to the UK maintained the slack easterly air flow across the whole country on the 16th which began cloudless with a light easterly. The day dawned cloudless with persistent haze, afternoon temperatures reaching 23.9C under the uninterrupted sunshine which totalled 14.1 hours for the day.