



Exceptional weather events

Type of event:
Cold weather

Date:
Winter 1946/7

COLD SPELL OF 1947 WAS THE MOST SEVERE THIS CENTURY

The early months of 1947 saw the most persistent cold spell of the century, with snowfalls affecting all parts of the country from late January until mid-March. Although heavier individual snowfalls have been recorded, notably in January 1917, at no other time in the recent past has there been such a period of continuous cold weather. Following the disastrous harvest of 1946 and the extension of wartime rationing of food and fuel, the severe weather caused hardship for many people and disrupted the country's communication and transport facilities for several weeks.

Early 1947 was very wet and stormy with flooding in many places, but it was not until January 24th that the spell of severe cold weather began. By the beginning of February there were already reports of skating on frozen ponds and the unrelenting cold continued until the middle of March. As the graph below shows, the temperature did not rise above 5°C at Dublin Airport between January 22nd and March 7th and on most days during this period the temperature struggled to rise above freezing. In addition, a harsh easterly wind persisted for several weeks as the normal run of Atlantic depressions was diverted to the south of the country. There were between 20 and 30 days with snowfall in most places during this time and snow lay on the ground at Dublin's Phoenix Park for all but 2 days between January 26th and March 8th. Even at Valentia Observatory, where there would normally be snow on around 4 days during the first three months of the year, snowfall was recorded for a total of 50 hours over 14 days during the cold spell.

Different areas of the country experienced heavy snow at various times throughout the period of severe cold, with the most notable falls on February 2nd, 8th, 21st and 25th and on March 4th. The country's telephone system had barely recovered from the major snowfall of February 2nd when what was described by one newspaper as the "great blizzard" of February 25th struck. The south and southeast of the country suffered most from heavy snow on March 4th/5th and attempts to reach people trapped in snow in County Wicklow continued until March 8th. Another major snowstorm affected parts of Britain on March 12th/13th but Ireland largely escaped. Thereafter amounts of snow were on the decrease even though light falls were reported as late as March 24th.

Daily maximum and minimum temperatures at Dublin Airport, January - March 1947

