

PROLONGED COLD SPELLS IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT SINCE 1918

Kenneth J. Hosking F.R. Met.S.

Following the severe weather during January and February 1985, I have researched the meteorological records at Ryde, Isle of Wight – commenced in January 1918 – to compare similar arctic conditions there.

These are tabulated in Table 1 with notes giving the dates of significant snowfalls which invariably provided additional hazards.

Table 1: Cold spells at Ryde, Isle of Wight since 1918.

Dates	Duration days)	Mean Temp °C	Lowest Min. °C	Highest Max. °C	Dates of significant snowfall
Feb. 11th – 20th 1929	10	-1.6	-6.7	5.0	
Dec. 18th – 25th. 1938	8	-1.2	-5.0	2.2	22nd. Dec.
Jan. 10th – 25th 1940	16	-0.8	-6.7	6.1	
Feb. 10th – 18th 1940	9	0.2	-5.0	10.0	16th Feb.
Jan. 2nd – 18th 1941	17	0.2	-4.4	7.2	
Feb. 5th – 28th 1942	24	0.7	-4.4	8.9	
Jan. 24th – 30th 1945	7	-2.1	-9.4	8.9	
Jan. 24th – 31st 1947	8	-1.4	-6.7	1.1	29th Jan.
Feb. 5th – Mar. 9th 1947	33	-0.2	-7.8	8.3	30th Jan.
Jan. 26th – Feb. 7th 1954	13	-1.5	-5.6	6.1	1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 8th Feb.
Feb. 1st – 26th 1956	26	-0.1	-6.7	9.4	25th and 26th Jan.
Dec. 23rd 1962 – Mar. 2nd 1963	70	-0.4	-8.3	4.4	
Jan. 11th – 20th 1966	10	0.4	-4.6	3.3	26th, 27th, 29th and 31st Dec.
Feb. 9th – 20th 1978	12	0.5	-5.0	6.2	
Dec. 30th 1978 – Jan. 6th 1979	8	-0.5	-5.9	6.8	15th and 18th Feb.
Feb. 14th – 21st 1979	8	0.7	-3.5	4.4	30th Dec.
Jan. 6th – 16th 1982	11	1.1	-2.5	9.1	
Jan. 5th – 19th 1985	15	-0.7	-5.5	4.0	7th, 8th and 9th Jan.
Feb. 9th – 19th 1985	11	-0.4	-4.5	4.0	17th and 18th Jan. 9th Feb.
Feb. 6th – Mar. 3rd. 1986	26	-0.3	-6.0	5.6	6th and 28th Feb.

The readings throughout the 67 years have been taken in Ryde's Eastern Esplanade Gardens on the Island's north-east coast a few feet above sea-level and only a matter of yards from the waters of the Solent, proximity to which accounts for the fact that the temperatures tend to be above those recorded in parts of the Island away from the coastal fringe.

Each of the fifteen successive days during January 1985's cold spell and the eleven during February had maximum and minimum temperatures lower than any recorded at

Ryde during the whole of 1984 – a year remarkable for the fact that the temperature there only twice fell to 0°C and never below.

The snowfall of 18th January 1985 came on the 104th anniversary of the great blizzard of 1881 which remains the most notable ever to have been experienced in central southern England. In addition to the dates of significant snowfalls listed in Table 1, notably heavy falls occurred on 26th December 1927, 15th December 1950, and 8th December 1967.

That the Island escapes much of the snowfall of mainland Britain is illustrated by the fact that at Ryde at any time between 24th and 27th December inclusive only the years 1927, 1938, 1962 and 1970 qualify as having provided a 'white' Christmas.

Footnote

This article was originally published in the *Journal of Meteorology* **10** (no. 99), May/June 1985. Since that date there has been a further period of prolonged cold weather: