

Malton Floods

Introduction



Flooding in the Malton area is an all too recent memory for many. History shows that flooding has been a regular occurrence over the years with measurements of up to 14 feet taken at the County Bridge. Most 19th century reports attribute the floods to the rapid thawing of snow on the moors and wolds and record devastation to the properties

in Castlegate/the Low street (including the breweries), the railway lines, the railway station and the fields bordering the river.

Given the location of the gas works, these were also flooded and this would limit the provision of gas to the town, often plunging it into darkness.

The 1867 Great Flood

Such was the flood in early 1867 that there was mention in The Illustrated London News [1] 'THE GREAT FLOODS IN NORTH YORKSHIRE' The sudden melting of the snow on the wolds and moors in North Yorkshire in the latter days of January caused the most disastrous floods throughout the lower lands between Thirsk and Malton, and especially in the neighbourhood of Malton. Two streams, the Rye and Riccal, overflowed to such an extent that the waters united, and only the trees were visible. The villages and roads along the course of the Leven were also inundated. The roads were 4 ft. to 5 ft. deep in some hollows, and all communication with Malton was cut off. At Newsham Bridge, over the Rye, the river was about two miles wide. The old Derwent had expanded into an immense lake several miles in length. On both sides of the Pickering railway the land was 3 ft deep in water. The Malton and Scarborough road for miles was

impassable; the post messenger managed to get through on horseback, but with difficulty. The town of Old Malton was flooded, although since the great flood of 1846 the streets have been raised nearly 3 ft. On Saturday night the 26th ult., the flood on the Malton and York and Scarborough Railways, and the other three lines meeting at Malton, as far as Norton junction, was 12 in above the rails, and the utmost difficulty was found in working the traffic. Pilot engines were run out of Malton before every train going east or west, in order to prove the line, apprehensions being formed that the great current might remove the ballast. Floating timber, too, gave rise to fear of disaster, and men in boats were engaged in keeping it off the railway. It was quite a novelty to see a wrecker's boat get out of the way of passing trains. For several miles the line of railway was the only portion of ground not under water, and below Malton the line itself was covered, but

the trains got through. At the county bridge at Malton, connecting the North with the East Riding, the three large arches were nearly submerged in the boiling flood. Most of the flour-mills, some of which had never been stopped for twenty years, were flooded, one or two having 3 ft. of water in the lower floors. The biscuit-works, gasworks, breweries, tanneries, and merchants' yards near the river were inundated. Cattle had to be driven off the fields at night, and workmen were engaged night and day in saving property. Rabbits rats, and moles were perched on the railway rails, and the rats even in the trees, and boating and shooting over the flooded fields seemed to afford capital sport. Property of all sorts, both live and dead, came down the river, and there were 'wreckers' in many places eager to get hold of it. In consequence of the

1878 Winter Floods

These floods were caused by a combination of melting snow and heavy rain. 'On Tuesday 12th November 1878 the flood water reached the height of nine feet at the County Bridge, and on Sunday some of the low roads were impassable' [3] but worse was to come. A week later 'The scene in the Malton railway station was something to be remembered. On all sides the station was surrounded by water, and between the down platforms, York to Scarborough, the water rushed like a river. No gas could be had at the station, and the scene caused by parties falling into the water was perfectly indescribable . . . In and around the town, as may be surmised, the business is in an utter state of stagnation. Mills and businesses flooded out' [4] 'But this morning, thanks to the gradual falling of the flood water, passengers could cross on

More 19th Century Flooding

1840 - MALTON STREET LAMPS - The street lamps at Malton and Norton were only partially lighted with gas on Saturday evening last, and on Sunday and Monday nights the towns were in total darkness, there only being sufficient to light the churches and chapels on the Sunday, and the shops on the Monday evening, in consequence of the flood having got into the flues of the Gas Works, and prevented the usual working of the retorts. The towns of Malton and Norton, on the above nights,

saturated condition of the land the water from the natural springs rose so high that at the Crown and Anchor Hotel, Malton, the spring water rose 2 ft. out of the ground, and necessitated the removal of the flags of the footpath. This water emerged from the oolite range, almost exclusively oolite, which runs south-east of Malton. The farmers will feel the effects for some time to come. It it stated that all the wheat lands of the low country will have to be sown afresh. That same month, the Nottinghamshire Guardian [2], gives some additional information: 'In Malton, the wells, &tc in the lower part are flooded and stopped, and in she cases this is the seventh occurrence of the kind side last July, or one flood per month . . . The Malton Waterworks are again submerged . . .'

foot in the lower parts of the town, and some of the houses were being cleansed of the debris left by the flood . . . the town crier was sent round, and notices were put up that there would be no gas obtainable in the town tonight, nor for two or three nights to come. The waterworks are yet stopped, and this morning the board of health . . . sent a water cart round to supply the needful element to the distressed inhabitants. The mills and breweries are yet flooded out, but the water has now left the railway station' [5] 'At seven o'clock this morning the flood meter at the County Bridge marked 12 1/2 feet, and now the water is considerably above the highest register of the gauge itself being 14 feet of water, and the outer arches of the bridge are blocked up whilst fears are expressed for its safety' [6]

from this cause, were very gloomy, and some unavoidable inconvenience was experienced [7]

1863 - Floods at Malton and Norton - On Thursday night and Friday morning heavy rains fell throughout the North and East ridings. From the reports we have received, it seems hardly a field in the low country has escaped flooding. The consequences in Malton were very serious especially on the streets diverging from Butcher corner, where the water on Thursday night was fully

a foot deep. The drains were quite unable to take the surface water. At Old Malton the low-lying part of the town was flooded to a fearful extent, the water being yesterday (Friday) morning level with the floor of the Inn. Formerly an open stream ran through the street, but since this has been filled in, and an 18in. pipe drain substituted, the town is liable to periodic flooding. At Norton, near the Manor house, where the first section of the new drainage terminates, the rains appear to have caused an accident to the double trap, the consequence being that, about the terminal, 10 yards of the drain have caved in, in some places half a foot, in others nearly a foot. Thus it will be seen that the Malton Board of Health have plenty on their hands [8]

1866 - Flood at Malton Most of the rivers and brooks in the North Riding of this county have overflowed their banks, the heavy rains of Wednesday having overfilled them, and many fields of corn, as well as those of grass, with deep in water on Thursday. On the Malton and Pickering line of railway a wooden bridge, No. 9 was literally floated and the piles drawn by the flood, and on Thursday the trains could no longer pass. The traffic is being worked from Malton to the bridge, when passengers can walkover. Trains are consequently late, and are likely to remain so until a new bridge can be built. The Derwent from Malton downwards overflowed, and a good deal of land is flooded on both sides of the river for many miles At the Rose

1900 Flood

and Crown Inn, the water was so high in the house that the inmates were confined to the upper rooms of the house, and had to be fed by people in the street, who gave them necessaries by the upper windows . . . [9]

1870 - Great Flood in Yorkshire - Malton, Sunday night - the greatest commotion and fear have been caused here all day by the rapid downpour of the waters. The York and Scarborough Railway, at nine this morning, was covered with water to the depth of 18 inches, for about a quarter of a mile, and Mr Bains, inspector of permanent way, kept a pilot engine running to test the course for the mail, which passed safely at 7 am. The water continued rising with great force till 10 am, when it reached to within 1 inch of the great flood of 1867, and within 14 inches of the greatest flood ever known in the district - that of 1848. At Old Malton there's been no service today in the Primitive Methodist Chapel; the place being inundated and completely surrounded with a great depth of water, which reached across the town street. In some of the brewing yards, they'll ale and porter casks and brewery utensils are floating in strange confusion, and several dead bodies of cattle came down the river last night from the marshes. At Norton (East Riding) the water had entered the police cells at the station, and the outskirts of the town are one vast lake. The thaw and heavy rain have registered 2.2 inches. At 6 PM the water was receding very slowly [10].

GREAT FLOOD AT MALTON AND DISTRICT.

—The heavy rain at the end of last week and the beginning of this brought down the melted snow from the moors and wolds to such an extent that the flood has been one of the most severe for many years. The water continued to rise until Wednesday evening, when it had reached a height of 12ft. 9in. above summer level. The road leading to Welham was on Wednesday covered with water to a depth of between two and three feet. Carts were used in the morning to convey people across, but later on some planks were raised on blocks of wood over the footpath. The water nearly covered the island in the centre of the county bridge, and the occupants of the bridge house had difficulty in rescuing their live stock. A pig had to be killed before it could be lifted out. At the Crown and Anchor Inn, near the bridge, the flood water had backed up an underground spring, and the novel sight was seen of a stream of pure water running out of the front door of the house. The next house was similarly affected. The yards of all the mills, breweries, and other works by the river-side were flooded, work being stopped, and barrels and other things floating about in all directions. At Old Malton the main street of the village was flooded, and at the railway station the water had just got on to the line. Fears were entertained that the gas supply of the town might be cut off. The water supply is not yet affected by the flood, though the river has risen to within a few inches of the banks round the spring whence the supply is drawn. The railway is being constantly patrolled on both sides of the town for fear of damage by the flood. The roads in the lower part of Ryedale are submerged to a great depth, and the whole of the district called the Marishes is one vast lake, even the hedges being covered in most cases. The flood began to recede during Wednesday night and Thursday morning, but is still very high. It was about 15 inches lower than the great flood of November, 1878. Previous high floods at Malton were:—April, 1846, 13 feet 6 inches; January, 1867, 12 feet 7 inches; November, 1878 (the highest flood in the memory of living man), 14 feet; October 30, 1880, 13 feet 6 inches; December, 1882, 11 feet 8 inches; and October, 1892, 12 feet 3 inches.

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References

- [1] The Illustrated London News, 9th February 1867
- [2] Nottinghamshire Guardian, 1st February 1867
- [3] Yorkshire Post and Leeds intelligencer, 13 November 1878
- [4] Yorkshire Post and Leeds intelligencer, 19 November 1878
- [5] Yorkshire Post and Leeds intelligencer, 20 November 1878

1900 - This article hints at the concern that river water could enter the town's water supply. As usual, the mills and other businesses close to the river were flooded. At the end of the article is a reference to the heights of the worst floods in the second half of the 19th century. [11]

Additional water in the locality produced some unpredictable effects as reported in March 1900 [12]. 'The great inconvenience caused by the big flood of last week continued at the Crown and Anchor, in Low-street, Malton, until Tuesday morning, to the serious loss of Miss Anderson, the landlady. For nearly six days the singular spectacle was witnessed of springs of water bubbling up in several places through the floor of the smoke-room, flooding the whole of the lower floors of the hotel, and rushing through the houses in two strong streams. Hundreds of persons - scientific and otherwise - went to view the place, and, certainly, the sight is rare. Flooded houses are not uncommon in the district but the Crown and Anchor and the adjacent private house of Mr. Frank Anderson's had the unique privilege of a flood of their own, seeing that in both cases the springs burst through the flooring of the houses. It was a privilege, however, both could well have dispensed with, as the loss and inconvenience caused are very great, and the damp floors will doubtless be in evidence for some time to come. In the great flood of 1878 the springs burst out in nearly the same positions - of course being backed up by the higher river and thus having to seek a fresh outlet.'

- [6] York Herald, 23 November 1878
- [7] York Herald 21st November 1840
- [8] Yorkshire Gazette 3rd January 1863
- [9] Yorkshire Gazette - 1st September 1866
- [10] Sheffield Daily Telegraph 13th December 1870
- [11] Malton Messenger, 3 March 1900
- [12] York Herald 7th March 1900