



THE WEATHER OF 1994.

In general climatic conditions 1994 ranked 12th in the last 39 years in a position very similar to both 1967 and 1972 as a "better-than-average" year.

Several long-standing records were broken across the whole spectrum of recorded elements. In terms of temperature new "warmest night" records were set on April 28th and December 11/12th. However, by far the most spectacular month was November which saw no less than three long-standing temperature records tumble.

Rainfall records also fell on August 31st which had the longest daily rainfall

duration for the month whilst September 14th saw the wettest September daily record shattered.

The year was also warmer than average, the mean daily temperature ending 0.8C up on normal. All soil and earth temperatures were also well above the 30-year means.

In terms of sunshine 1994 produced a surplus of 10% over a normal year, with a near maximum daily total of 15.1 hours on June 22nd.

However, total rainfall ended only marginally down on average, the record fall of 72.7mm on September 14th

making a considerable contribution to the annual total. There were also more days with recorded rainfall than average.

Days of lying snow showed a marked deficiency again with only 41% of the expected incidence. Air frost was also well down, though ground frost was 13% above the 30-year mean. Unusually, no gale was recorded, all wind data being very near to the expected values.

THE WEATHER OF 1994 IN CONTEXT.

Situated on the south-western edge of the West Midlands conurbation, Halesowen is spared much of the extreme weather experienced by other Midland stations, notably on the Welsh border in Shropshire, or on the Warwickshire plateau. That said, 1994 has produced some quite exceptional features, several of which have broken long-standing records here, in a database extending back to 1946 for rainfall and 1956 in terms of general climate.

The year began with a very open January, there being only one incidence of snow or sleet, and no lying snow at all, making this the fourth successive snow-free January. Temperature, rainfall and sunshine were all above the 30-year means, and yet again pasture in the area was unseasonably lush for the time of year with cattle still able to graze freely.

Both in 1962 and 1967 there was untypically no incidence of January snow or sleet, whereas in 1979 it occurred on 15 occasions. Additionally, January 1982 saw a continuous period of 31 hours snowfall in an exceptional spell of Arctic weather.

One has to look back to 1963 for a really severe January which had 28 air frosts and 31 days of lying snow. That month also saw air temperatures plunge to -13.9C and the snow surface to -20.6C. Yet it also provided the longest January dry spell of 14

days precipitation-free. Of particular significance in this severe spell was the evidence of "Permafrost", a phenomenon seldom seen in this country. The soil froze solid to a depth of around a foot resulting in garage doors jamming and verandah roofs cracking as floors rose with the ensuing expansion. Local Authorities faced massive increases in costs required to put right the widespread damage to road surfaces.

Earliest records for Halesowen date back to 1946, and the Winter of 1947 was the first to be observed in detail. In that year drifts lay over 12 feet deep, roads were closed for days on end, people had to exit houses via igloo-style tunnels dug through snow which extended to the upper-floor windows, and I well recall digging down to reach the local road sign on its 8ft. post which lay beneath my feet ! And all of this in a fuel shortage !!

With February a more normal "Winter" month ending as the most severe in 7 years, and with lying snow on 5 days, conditions were far more seasonable. The 14th saw a maximum air temperature no higher than -1C, the month producing air frosts on 11 nights and ground frosts on 23. The Winter of 1993/1994 therefore finished as an average one, though temperatures were up on normal by as much as 0.5C for the mean daily. Air frost was down, and ground frost up, on the 30-year means giving a relatively open Winter with lying snow

only half of expectation.

March was the mildest since 1991 and the fifth mildest on record here, with all temperatures up on normal by as much as 4C. Though rainfall was about average, sunshine was 11% above expectation. No hail, snow or sleet was observed and it was a particularly dry month. In contrast 1969 saw snow or sleet on 23 days, whilst snow lay on 9 mornings in March 1970.

April began cold and unsettled with a centimetre of snow lying on Easter Monday, only the second such event in 39 years. Yet the night of the 28th saw the warmest April night on record here at 11.7C. Such are the vagaries of the British climate. In contrast April 1983 had two days with lying snow, whilst the month in 1968 produced 10 air frosts, the worst to -5.4C. It was 1968 which had a very delayed Spring and led to problems with horticulturists and farmers alike. Market gardening in the Vale of Evesham, which has to make an early start, was made almost impossible by the succession of night frosts.

The late-Spring month of May was cool and generally dull, though the 31st provided a glimpse of the Summer-to-come with a record-breaking 15.1 hours of bright sunshine. Ground frost was not prevalent, in total contrast to May 1975 when a severe frost on the night of the 31May/1June wiped out much of the produce in the Vale of Evesham and wide areas of Worcestershire and

Warwickshire.

Spring 1994 was a very open one with air temperatures above the 30-year means in all but the highest maximum. The warmest day with 21.3C was, however, the lowest Spring maximum since 1986. Rainfall was below expectation and sunshine marginally above, though air frost was less than half of the normal for the season. Outside work was able to proceed apace, and local agriculture was well advanced.

Early Summer began pleasantly enough with June temperatures well above the 30-year means, peaking at 27.5C. Sunshine was also above expectation, 14 days seeing more than 9 hours each, 6 days with more than 12 hours each, and 4 with above 15 hours each. These were the best figures since the superb June of 1989. Incidentally, June 1957 saw 15 consecutive days with more than 12 hours sunshine each.

Severe thunderstorms lashed the area on the 24th giving half of the month's rainfall, killing a teenage girl in the West Midlands, and disrupting many local telephone exchanges.

July was the best of the Summer months, 11 days seeing maxima above 25C, the same as in the "Summer of Summers" 1976, but still 9 fewer than seen in 1983. Air temperatures peaked at 30C on the 12th and did not reach these values again. It is perhaps worthy of note that Halesowen has seen 8 July ground frosts since 1956, the last on July 3rd, 1991. Sunshine was 30% above usual, the best since 1983, with 15 days

providing more than 9 hours each, two fewer than the record 17 days in both 1989 and 1990. Rainfall was now deficient, resulting in problems for farmers, gardeners and builders alike, the latter finding house footings based on clay to be suffering from quite a degree of cracking unless adequate precautions were taken.

The month of August lived up to its reputation as a poor month for holidays. Only one day was hot with an air maximum above 25C, though 15 days did cap 21C. To add to the poor feel of the month, the 31st produced the longest duration of August rainfall on record, whilst night-time temperatures were decidedly on the cool side. All of this fell far short of the superb August of 1976 with its 13 days above 25C, and 15 days with more than 12 hours of bright sunshine. Counter-balancing this in 1976 was the severe drought and the almost continuous spate of fires in this area, particularly on Cannock Chase, and the Clent and Malvern Hills, some of which were accidental, others deliberately started.

However, in view of the well-above-average June and July weather, the Summer of 1994 was the best in the area for 18 years in general terms, lying marginally behind that of 1976. Holidaymakers remaining in this country were, for once, treated to warm, sunny days for almost two-thirds of the season. It was, eventually, the driest Summer since 1976 and the fifth sunniest on record. So good had it been that much of the grain crop in Hereford-Worcester had been harvested by the end of August.

Autumn began with quite unusual weather. September was both wet and cool. The 14th turned out to be the wettest September day on record with 72.7mm of rain in 24 hours, which was also the second wettest day on record. In fact, in 42 hours of continuous rain from the 13th to the 15th, the total fall was 86.5mm. In complete contrast the September of 1959 totalled a mere 4mm, with 11mm in 1986 and 12mm in 1964. This year's heavy rainfall led to problems even in cities. Underpasses in the City of Birmingham were flooded to a depth of several feet, and properties along the Severn Valley prepared for yet another inundation.

Despite a wet end to the month, October was drier than average, with over two-thirds of the month's total fall occurring in the last 10 days. As a bonus, the 10.4 hours of sunshine on the 4th set a new October record in the area. On the down side, the clear skies led to low overnight temperatures, and eventual monthly means were depressed by as much as 1C. In comparison, October 1st 1985 saw an air maximum of 26.3C, the latest date on which the temperature has topped 25C for this site.

Statistics turned turtle in November, which was an exceptional month. It was by far the warmest on file here, records being broken for the mean maximum, mean minimum and mean daily temperatures. Reputedly, the Midlands experienced its warmest November for over 300 years. Two nights were exceptionally mild, the 19/20th seeing an overnight minimum of 12.4C and

the 13/14th an overnight low of 13.2C, both higher than the mean minimum for a typical July.

There was no air frost recorded, only the second such incidence in 39 years, with just 3 on the ground. In contrast, last year produced the coldest ever November day when the air failed to rise above -2C at all, the month also recording 19 ground frosts. This November was a dull month, with 14 sunless days, mainly ensuing from the heavy blanket of cloud overlying the area for much of the period, and from a spell of anticyclonic gloom at the month's end.

Gardens continued to bloom, cattle to graze even on hill pastures, and wild-life normally seeking hibernation if not actually in it, still foraging for food in the hedgerow bottoms. All extremely pleasant, but quite unnatural.

And December continued in the same vein with abnormally warm air from the

Azores streaming across the country. Temperature records continued to tumble. The night of the 11/12th saw a minimum of 11.7C, breaking the record set in 1986. Though days were anything up to 7C above average, the all-time high of 15.3C set on 28 December 1974 was still not breached:- by a margin of less than one degree ! Conditions reverted to normal from the 14th. with ground frost becoming more prevalent as temperatures fell back. The month eventually ended with air frost at two-thirds of expectation and ground frost well above the 30-year mean.

Rainfall totals were well above normal with rain on 19 days. The end of the month saw widespread flooding along the Severn and Wye as surface water from the Welsh Hills (some areas had over 100mm of rain in three days) drained southwards.

Though not seeming sunny, the month broke about even, the number of sunless days being better than expectation.

Snow was recorded on one day (the 31st) though there was no incidence of either hail or thunder.

In summary, the year as a whole ended in twelfth position in the last 39 years approximating to both 1967 and 1972. It was rather warmer than average, slightly drier and with well above average sunshine. A year when agriculture suffered no major weather-based catastrophe, holidaymakers were given a fair crack of the whip, and the public at large were unable to fire broadsides at those who have to attempt to forecast for this most fickle of climates.