APRIL 1998.

On the 1st of the month a centre of high pressure was situated to the north of the country with a deepening low moving into the South West Approaches. This installed a mainly easterly air flow across the UK with a series of occluded fronts moving slowly north eastwards. Despite the wind direction, the day was relatively mild, afternoon temperatures reaching 10C as a period of moderate rain crossed the region during the late afternoon. By the 2nd the low had deepened appreciably, occluded fronts lying across the country and moving very little. The result was a period of rain overnight on the 1st/2nd, some quite heavy, giving a total of 10.6mm by 09.00 on the 2nd. The afternoon saw spells of showery rain and brief interludes of sunshine which raised temperatures to a quite balmy 14.5C

Pressure remained low over the next two days, the centre moving only slowly across the country from Ireland to the Tyne area by the early hours of the 5th. Both the 3rd and the 4th were days of showers or heavier periods of rain and spells of sunshine, though at no time was it cold. The 3rd produced a total of 4.6mm of rain and almost 6 hours of sunshine, the day time maximum peaking at 12.5C. By the 5th the centre of low pressure lay in the Irish Sea and this fed bands of showers, some heavy and merging into longer periods of rain, across the Midlands giving a fall of 2.6mm for the day.

A rather diffuse area of low pressure dominated the weather over the UK on the 6th and this brought a spell of thundery activity to East Anglia during the late afternoon. Over the Midlands the day was predominantly dry with long sunny periods. This raised afternoon temperatures to a rather warm 14.4C. with 7 hours of bright sunshine recorded. Under clearing skies overnight on the 6th/7th temperatures fell quickly to give a ground frost of minus 1.4C by dawn on the 7th.

Three low pressure systems dominated the weather over the UK early on the 7th. The rather diffuse and slack system over central England migrated towards the Low Countries and Germany, whilst a deepening Atlantic low in Biscay began to move northwards. A further deepening system near Iceland showed signs of introducing much colder air into the country as its development continued. With very unstable air over the UK thunderstorms developed widely during the late afternoon over both the Midlands and East Anglia. Maximum temperatures here reached 13.2C with almost 5 hours of sunshine and only brief, and light, showers.

By the 8th the slack area of low pressure was moving towards Poland with the low to the north now over the Hebrides and moving towards South West England. The day dawned overcast with slight drizzle, thought it had not been a cold night. Further showery activity occurred early around 07.00 GMT, the day then producing spells of brief sunshine and showers, hail falling briefly at 15.08 GMT. By the 9th the low pressure centre lay to the west of the country, its occlusion straddling much of the Midlands and moving only very sluggishly southwards. Continuous moderate rain began at 06.20GMT and was to continue, on and off for much of the day giving an accumulated total of 24.2mm by 09.00 on the 10th.

With the occluded front almost stationary over the south Midlands on the 9th, the rain here was heavy leading to widespread flooding of areas of Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Oxfordshire. Many riverside towns along the lower Severn and Avon were inundated as rivers rose at an unprecedented rate to flood homes and caravan sites. Helicopters were called in by Worcestershire Fire Brigade to assist in rescuing of holidaymakers trapped by the floods, whilst three people lost their lives having been swept away by the torrents of water which swept through the area.

Halesowen lay on the northern end of this occlusion and during the late hours of the 9th the much colder air behind this spread across the north Midlands. By 22.30 GMT the rain first turned to sleet, then snow. Quite substantial snow fell throughout the early hours of the 10th to give a cover of 5cm by 09.00 GMT. The snow continued through the 10th, gradually turning to sleet and allowing a slow thaw to occur. The day was dismal and cold, with further sleet and snow showers, the skies remaining leaden all day, a further fall of 13.4mm occurring by 09.00 GMT on the 11th.

The occluded front still lay across the southern most parts of the Midlands on the 11th though the rain gradually petered out. It was now the turn of the eastern Midlands to bear the brunt of the flooding as rivers in Northamptonshire and East Anglia burst their banks. In Halesowen the early snow showers turned to sleet, then rain and died away completely in the later afternoon to give a short burst of brighter weather with brief sunshine . Skies cleared during the evening leading to a sharp ground and slight air frost, the 12th dawning cloudless, sunny and frosty.

With low pressure firmly anchored in the North Sea a cold, mainly northerly airstream was maintained over the UK. The morning and early afternoon saw almost uninterrupted sunshine before large cumulus and cumulo nimbus brought a rash of snow showers to the area. In the late afternoon from 1727 - 1839 a particularly heavy snow shower brought a covering of