

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE CURIOUS IN THE COUNTY AND CITY OF CORK AND ELSEWHERE
BEING AN ACCOUNT OF REMARKABLE METEOROLOGICAL EVENTS
AND OTHER OCCURENCES OF NOTE

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There is a vast range of historic documents relating to the history of the county and city of Cork. One of the more interesting aspects of these sources of information for the meteorologist or climatologist is that they often include references to unusual or extreme weather events. These references may occur in a haphazard manner or on a more organised basis; they include consideration of extreme examples of common weather e.g. frosts and gales; unusual natural events such as floods and earthquakes; and rarely seen phenomena like Aurora Borealis.

Before briefly examining some of the more important types of historical documents for the meteorologist, it is necessary to look at the problems of using these data sources. This is particularly true of the pre-newspaper era, roughly before the 1750s where the possibilities of authentication are much less. Some of the meteorological events found in these various sources would occur as far back as pre-christian times. The major problems in using this type of material are: illusory corroboration of events; conflicting information; problems of dating of events particularly with the changeover from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. Descriptions of weather events are often exaggerations, amplifications or distortions from the detail in the original reference whether deliberate or through accidental mistranslation. Material may be from sources with spurious historical authenticity or may indeed be completely erroneous. Because of these problems when using material of this nature, it is preferable to examine the original sources where possible (Bell and Ogilvie, 1978).

Some of the more important types of historical documents for this type of research would include previously completed historical compilations and remembrancers which contain unusual and extreme meteorological events. Examples include Brooks (1949) 'Climate Through the Ages' and Lowe (1870) 'Natural Phenomena and Chronology of the Seasons'. Diaries and journals can also provide important and useful meteorological information (Herlihy, 1980). Two diaries are available from Cork City. The first is that of Mr. John Young published in reprinted form (Doran 1892 and 1893). The diary is a general one but does include mention of extreme events including three Cork city floods. It covers the period from the 3rd October, 1815 to the 2nd January, 1818. The second diary is that of J. Fitzgerald. This is essentially a weather diary and runs from the 1st January to the 30th

September, 1793 during which he records weather on a daily basis. Sagas can also be used for this type of research although with extra difficulties as they often contain a mixture of fact and fantasy (Ogilvie, 1984).

Also of excellent use are old newspapers, particularly from the 1750s to the early 1800s which can provide much corroborative evidence. Unfortunately, they are frequently written in a sensational style, the accuracy of detail depends both on the objectivity of the reporter and the accuracy of the data source (McEwen, 1987). Journals of local history societies can also yield a wealth of this type of information; in Cork's case the Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society provides some of this data. An example of the type of information which can be found in this source is the 'Flood in Cork on the 17th January, 1789' (O'Casey, 1920); and reproductions of travel guides. Institutions, particularly the County Council and Corporation have also records of these types of events whether in formal minutes of meetings or other special reports. A lot of material is contained in local history and folklore literature in the form of scattered references.

Here below is given an account of some of the more remarkable meteorological events that have occurred in the county and city of Cork in addition to several others.

1021 A.D. (1) Shower of wheat in Ossory (Tipperary)

Most Irish annals refer to this phenomenon. A possible explanation of this type of occurrence is that a localised tornado having sucked-up the wheat from a wheat-field would eventually rain it out at a different place.

1134 A.D. (1) Severe Hailstorm in Cashel (Tipperary). Chronicon Scotorum: A shower of hailstones fell in Caisel so that horses could swim on the market place of Caisel.

1281-1282 A.D. (1) Very severe Winter from Christmas to March. Annals of Loch Ce: Very great snow from Christmas to the Festival of Brigid in this year.

1342 A.D. Oct. 11 (1) Paraselenae at Dublin.

Case: On the 11th October, the moon being 11 days old, there was seen by many people in Dublin before daylight two moons in the sky. Of which one was bright and moved to the west in the course of nature. The other, however, was in the east, rounded in the shape of a loaf, and held only a portion of splendour and light.

1412 A.D. (1) Floods in Ireland.

Annals of Connaught: Catherine, daughters of Moelechlainn was drowned by a rushing flood whilst going to Sunday-mass from her own house.

1491 A.D. (2) Wet Summer Season. This year there was such a Famine all over Ireland that it was called "the dismal year"; numbers died of the same during the summer season, which was exceedingly wet.

1510 A.D. (3) Flood in Cork, April. In this month, there happened great inundations of water which overturned trees, houses and bridges. Probably the earliest known flood incident in Cork City.

1517 A.D. (2) R. Lee Frozen. In the winter of this year happened a great frost, so that all other rivers of this county were frozen up for several weeks particularly the Lee and Avemore, (i.e. "the Blackwater").

1539 A.D. (2) R. Lee Almost Dried Up. This Summer was so dry in Ireland that the Lee at Cork was almost dried up and several other rivers also, for want of rain.

1633 A.D. (2) Flood. There was this winter a prodigious flood in the river Lee which, among other damages done to the city of Cork, carried away both the north and south bridges and the castles erected thereon.

1673 A.D. (4) Sea Monster Captured at Dingleicouch. In 1673 (Co.Kerry) A true and perfect account of a miraculous sea-monster or wonderful fish lately taken in Ireland. Bigger than an ox, yet without legs, bones, fins or scales, with two heads and ten horns of ten or 11 feet long, on eight of which horns there grew knobs, about the bigness of a cloak-button, in shape like crowns or coronets. To the number of 100 of each horn, which were all to open and had rows of teeth within them and in all other parts wonderful and unparalleled. The length of this sea-monster horns and all was full 19 foot and in bulk or bigness of body somewhat larger than a horse (Figure 1). The creature actually found is a giant squid of the order Decapode and genus Architeuthis and may in fact measure up to 60 feet in length including length of tentacles. The reason for the creature supposedly having two heads is that they mistook a set of eye-like markings on the main body for a head. This is in fact used to scare away predators. The real head is the smaller one. The normal location of these creatures is in tropical of sub-tropical deep-sea areas so it is quite unusual to find it in such northern waters.

FIGURE 1.
SEA MONSTER
CAPTURED AT
DINGLEICOUCH
CO. KERRY IN
1673.



(Decapoda , Architeuthis)

1683 A.D.³ R.Lee Frozen. This year there was a most severe frost, the river Lee was frozen many weeks and carnages passed over from the ferry-slip to the east marsh.

1697 A.D.⁵ June 7. Bog burst at Charleville, Limerick. Forty acres moved over some good ground, burying it 16 feet deep. A very wet spring was the cause.

1713 A.D.⁵ March 10. Sinking of a Hill at Clogher, Ireland. Four and two-thirds acres sunk, probably owing to the constant great rains last Autumn and Winter.

1727 A.D.³ March 14. Flood at Cork City. There happened one of the greatest inundations known in this city. Before that time, the water was one foot two inches over the highest part of the quays.

1739 A.D.² R. Lee Frozen. The river Lee was frozen up towards the end of the year by the hardest frost in the memory of man.

1750 A.D.⁵ February 23 Aurora Borealis at Cork. Of an intense scarlet colour.

1789 A.D.⁶ January 17 Flood. A great flood in Cork city occurred as a result of the melting of a great fall of snow, dissolved by a heavy fall of rain which continued 24 hours. Most of the flat of the city was covered by between 5 and 7 feet of water. This caused extensive damage to the city including the knocking down of a number of houses. There was only one casualty during the flood. This was a man called NOAH who was drowned.

1803 A.D.⁷ December 25. Gale in Spike Island. Loss of a man-of-war 'La Suiffisonte'. Sixteen guns. Ten casualties.

1816 A.D.⁸ January 30. Gale in Kinsale. Loss of the transports 'Lord Melville' and 'Boadicea'. Over 200 casualties.

1853 A.D.⁹ November 2. Flood at Cork city, Mallow. This was the largest and most damaging flood incident in the history of Cork city. Flooding also affected Mallow on the same day. At the height of the flood, all of the island between the two channels in the city and much of the land on either side of it was covered in 5 to 7 feet of water. Except the Mardyke where the water was 8 to 10 feet high with 8 m.p.h. current. A 20-ton barge was deposited in a back garden on the Western Road some 50 yards from the main channel. Casualties were in excess of 25 including 11 who were washed away when the old St. Patrick's Bridge collapsed and 10 when part of Camden Quay was washed away. An enormous amount of damage was done to the city in terms of businesses and buildings and the city took a number of years to recover from this. The flood was caused by a month of exceptionally high rainfall including an enormous discharge of freshwater from the upper Lee valley.

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