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# The Great Storm

Last updated: 27 August 2009

In 1938, Aberystwyth was hit by one of the worst storms in its history. Houses on the seafront were devastated and the pier was shortened by 200ft during the gales.

Local historian **William Troughton** has spoken to those who remember the hurricane-force winds and here's his story.

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"The late Victorian houses of Victoria Terrace now preside over a tranquil scene that belies the events that took place here on Friday, January 14th 1938, a day that started no different to any other January day in Aberystwyth. Leaden grey skies stretched to the horizon, merging into a grey, grumbling Cardigan Bay. Towards evening the wind stiffened from the south west and every breaker seemed to crash with greater force than the last each backwash throwing the pebbles together, hissing and swishing them down to meet the next wave.

As the night wore on the wind increased, howling through gaps in the door frames and casement windows of sea front houses, rippling even the heaviest of curtains and sending the heat from myriad coal fires racing up the chimney. Parlour chairs were drawn closer to the hearth as occupants read, dozed or listened to the wireless. Little did they know that when the weak winter sun next shone it would be on a far different scene from that of the night before.

Those who witnessed the events of sixty years ago agree that the storm reached its crescendo at about five o' clock in the morning. Winds were estimated at ninety miles an hour. There was talk of a tidal wave striking the coast, later reinforced by the account of a Royal Navy tanker disabled by a large wave.

For the residents of Victoria Terrace the storm broke with incredible ferocity. Basements were soon flooded and large stones driven against windows up to second floor level, breaking the glass and letting in gallons of water. Front doors were smashed to matchwood as boulders and paving slabs were hurled against them and the sea cascaded in up the stairs to first floor level.

**Prom Washed Away**

Wave after wave entered the houses flooding the basements to a depth of several feet and smashing all furniture before them.

Shortly after anyone brave enough to be viewing the scene saw the promenade collapse, to be washed away in a few short minutes.

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**Under Siege**
Though the ordeal of the occupants of Victoria Terrace was considerable, just a mile away to the south a far greater drama was unfolding. On the beach at Tan-y-bwlch stood a small cottage, home for the last thirteen years to Mrs Linnett, her two daughters and their cat.

As the storm increased in ferocity and the sea broke around them the three women decided to abandon their cottage and seek refuge with their neighbours. No sooner had they wrapped their winter coats around them and slipped on their wellingtons than there was a deafening crash as the front door was burst open by an enormous wave. The two daughters escape was now hindered by their waterborne furniture. The next wave brought the roof down, pinning them firmly under the heavy roof beams.

Their plight was noted shortly after by the driver of a passing train. At his next stop he alerted the emergency services who were able to free two of the women from the wreckage of their home, the family cat scrambling free at the same time. Mrs Linnett was found behind the cottage holding on to a table, semiconscious and only feet from the swollen River Ystwyth.

**Devastation**
As dawn broke the extent of the destruction was clearly visible as was the need for urgent action to prevent the sea doing any more damage. The end of the pier had vanished and every property from the King's Hall north was damaged, those on Victoria Terrace having suffered the greatest damage.

Work rapidly commenced on a protective coffer dam and continued well into 1940. The total bill came to £70,000 or some £2.5m by today's standards. The expensive lesson of 1938 has been well and truly learned and today the promenade is stronger and well protected by an apron of boulders making a repetition of the events of sixty years ago a near impossibility."

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Bill Jones from Watford contacted us in February 2007 with his memories of the great storm:

"We lived in Caradog Road at thetime. I was 8 years old. I well remember being taken to the sea front on the Sunday afternoon,and later to see the cottage from a distance. I know my father who worked at the N.P bank and knew the ladies very well. He was very worried.I did not sleep that night I was very frighened. Later in life I joined the Royal Navy for

38yrs,and saw how cruel the sea could be, but I will never forget that time in 1938."

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- **Photos of storm damage in 1937...**

# The storm of 1937

Last updated: 09 September 2009

Edward Drinkwater sent us these photographs of a storm that hit the town on 28 February 1937. If you know anything about this storm please email us at **wales.mid@bbc.co.uk**.

- **More old photos of Mid Wales...**

Storm damage on the promenade

1 2 3 4

Edward:"Here are my mother's photos of a storm in 1937...

## your comments

**Dafydd Williams of Biggleswade**
As a child of 13 years old ,I was stayingwith my aunts at 8 Victoria Terrace at the time of the great storm of 1937. I can still remember the waves breaking down the front door of the house and leaving by the back door with the sea pouring through the house
Wed Jan 13 10:57:21 2010

**This site is now closed and cannot accept new comments.**

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Damage after a storm on 28 February 1937

1 **2** 3 4

Edward:"...she was born in Aberystwth and left in 1926 to go into service in Wolverhampton..."

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Storm damage after a storm on 28 February 1937

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Edward:"...her siblings all but one remained in Aber. They lived in Prospect Street..."

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1 2 3 **4**

Edward:"...the group photo shows her standing far left..."



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