

Dripping West Berkshire mops up after the Big Flood

Night of fear as the rain came down

A MAMMOTH mop-up operation has been underway around the district to clear the debris and chaos wreaked by last Thursday's flash floods.

Thunderstorms and torrential rain left a trail of destruction throughout the night, leaving houses and cars half-submerged and thousands of homes without power.

Thirty Aldermaston families had to be evacuated when two million gallons of water from the drainage of a huge ornamental lake were unleashed into the heart of the village.

The residents, who had earlier staved off a downpour of hailstones "as large as golfballs", froze as the torrent rolled through the main street, drenching their homes and gardens with up to four feet of water.

Police blocked off all roads and a 20-strong-team of firemen battled throughout the night to pump out the deluge, which fast

**Story by
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turned streets into rivers.

Fire divisional officer John Harrington, who was in charge of the operation said there had been fears during the night that more rain was on its way.

He said the torrent came from an 11 acre man-made lake at Aldermaston Court, owned by Blue Circle plc, flattening an eight foot village wall in its path.

Mr Peter Howes, of the Street, saw it happen. He said "I have never seen anything like it in my life. It just came down in one big torrent, which was so powerful it ripped up the tarmac and sent walls crashing down.

"Bricks were flying everywhere and cars were being washed down the road. Insurance claims are going to run into hundreds of thousands of pounds," he added.

The worst hit homes were in The Street and Church Lane.

Drenched

Resident Mr Simon Maw, who is presently trying to sell his house, said, "It all happened so fast. A lot of the houses front the road and the ground floors were completely drenched — some with several feet of water."

AWE Aldermaston tried to block the flow as it cascaded through the grounds but the force of the two million gallons proved too strong.

Police frogmen searched the entire village looking for casualties. No-one was hurt although many residents narrowly escaped injury as the wall collapsed.

A 91-year-old woman had to be carried from her home by stretcher and treated for shock by ambulancemen at the scene.

She was later taken to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading and spent the night recovering in a local old people's home.

Mop-up

Electricity supply was cut and remained off for most of the following day as the massive mop-up began, carried out by an army of district council workers.

One local farmer arrived with his tractor, carting in sandbags to barricade off homes and stop water seeping in.

Evacuated residents bedded down for the night in the village hall, at Blue Circle Manor Hotel or at the local pub, the Hinds Head.

Landlord Mr Martin Bartlett and wife Jan, raced round to block up the front of the pub with planks and curtains. The couple had hoped to unveil a new £30,000 restaurant on Saturday night.

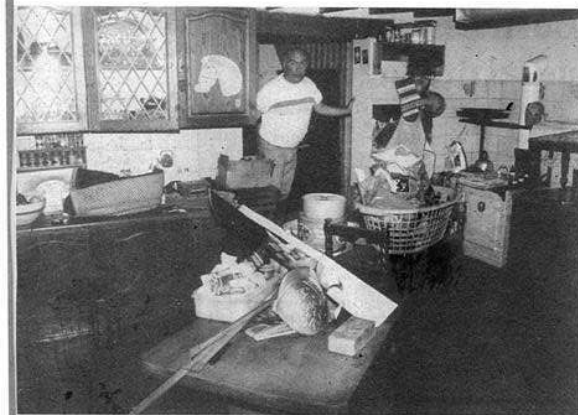
Mrs Bartlett said, "We have had up to four feet in the cellar but the bar is at a higher level and seems to have escaped. Our main fear was for the restaurant."

"We have served up re-

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Taking a breather during the clear-up operation



Peter Howes and his ruined kitchen



Gardens awash after the deluge



Bags to do in the morning



Water still pours through the streets of Aldermaston as residents and emergency workers see the devastation in the cold light of dawn



Shattered walls and ruined gardens in battered Aldermaston



Aldermaston resident Mr Bob Jones grimly surveys the damage to his home and car