

# WATER WATER



Mrs Fay Vanstone, of The Street, throws a bucket of water out as she mops up in her home.

## A frightening tidal wave of destruction

AS the massive million pound mopping-up operation got underway on Friday, the dazed locals, numbed by disaster, began to pick up the pieces of their shattered community.

Dr Cedric Brown of The Street had a brook flowing through his back garden which suddenly became a raging torrent. He explained: "We were literally fighting against the storm — the house was full of neighbours pulling up furniture and things and then there was a sudden tidal wave."

"It's gone through all the cupboards, paperwork and God knows what else."

Dr Brown added: "Occasionally we do get floods from the stream but it's never come into the house before. The problem is that there's a huge lake at the top of the hill — it's so big that once it gets out of control, there's no stopping it."

Pensioner Kathleen Wells' house was in the path of the torrent. She and her neighbours were evacuated by police as the flood smashed through a six feet high wall, sending bricks hurtling towards her home.

Kathleen stood watching the wall buckling under the weight of water which had built up behind it. She said: "It was really frightening with water pouring through holes in the wall, but then the whole lot came down. It was like a river in spate going down this road."

She added: "The fire brigade thought that if it came

down here it could knock the cottages down. That was why they evacuated us."

Fay Vanstone of The Street was desperately trying to move furniture at the time it struck. She said: "It was dreadful. We've been flooded in the past but never like this. There was no warning at all — it was pretty frightening."

Now she is desperately worried that her insurance company won't pay for the repairs to her home. She added: "My house has been ruined and there is still water under the floorboards. I hope that the insurance is going to cover it but I'm not sure it will."

But one thing that the catastrophe did reveal is the tremendous community spirit

in Aldermaston, with friends and neighbours banding together.

Ursula Waechter left her own home on the hill to go down to the bottom of the village and join others holding planks against people's doors and windows in a vain attempt to stop water from flooding inside.

And David Kelley, whose home is at the lowest point in the village, helped nearby pensioners clean up their homes before returning to his house which was swimming in two feet of water.

Now the villagers want to know why the flood happened and they want action taken to ensure that it will never happen again.



The scene of devastation in Church Road where water continued to pour through the breached wall on Friday morning.



The big clean up at the hairdressers.

# Everywhere!

THE tiny village of Aldermaston is counting the cost of the devastating floods which hit it at the end of last week.

Millions of gallons of water poured through the main street after bursting through a wall in Church Road. Thirty homes were evacuated as the water rose to three or four feet in places.

Torrential rain on Thursday evening sent water gushing from an ornamental lake at Blue Circle's Aldermaston headquarters into an overflow stream.

Under normal conditions the water would have flowed away under Church Road and on to the Kennet. But the stream could not cope with the sheer weight of the water and it exploded through the wall on to unsuspecting residents.

The fire brigade had already been called to deal with floods in Aldermaston, but they were unable to cope with the continual stream of water which rushed through back gardens and into homes.

A spokesman for the fire brigade said: "Where we normally get flash floods, water comes as quickly as it goes, but because the lake was continually flowing, there was now way of diverting the large amounts of water coming through the village."

Officers could only limit the damage by sandbagging homes as dozens of people were evacuated to Aldermaston Court Hotel, the village hall or went to stay with friends.

On Friday morning, the water was still streaming down the main street and around 20 homes had been flooded to a depth of 18 inches.

The fire brigade was joined by teams from Thames Water, Newbury District Council and Berkshire County Council as the big mopping up operation began.

Council officers worked most of the night and into Friday to dry out houses and make sure everybody was housed. Council chief executive Paul McMahon paid tribute to all the emergency services.

"It is dreadful when a natural disaster like this occurs, but it is heartening to know that the various emergency and back up services can work so well and quickly to sort things out," he said.

Because of the risk of further flooding, fire crews remained on the scene right



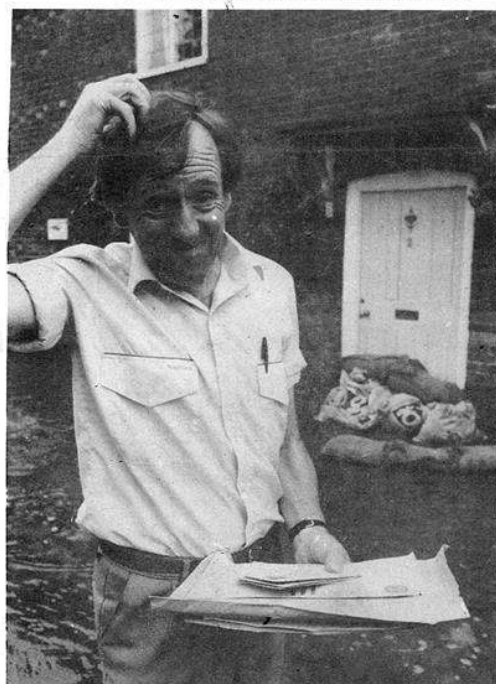
Under water — even the garages were not spared the full force of the flood.

through until Saturday lunchtime.

Damage to furniture and carpets in homes is expected to run into many hundreds of thousands of pounds and some homes may also have suffered structural damage due to the floods.

Berkshire County Council could also face a bill running into many hundreds of thousands of pounds as flood water ripped up tarmac and ruined roads across the county.

County director of highways and planning, Bob Clarke, said: "This is a completely unforeseen emergency for which we have no money. It will have to come out of the ordinary highways maintenance fund. There is not much money anyway, now there will be even less."



Village postman, Walter Way, had his work cut out on Friday morning getting those letters delivered on time.



Local youngsters Andrew Taplin (10) and Benjamin Thompson (12) managed to see the funny side on Friday morning when they went for a splash.

**PHOTOS:**  
Steve Smyth  
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## High hopes sink

ALDERMASTON village have been telling the frightening tale of how their homes were engulfed by storm waters.

For local publican Martin Bartlett it shattered a dream. He was due to open his new restaurant at The Hinds Head on Friday but saw months of work and £100,000 washed away in seconds.

Mr Bartlett said: "The bar is a write off, the carpets and everything are soaked. Everything was brand spanking new in there. It's just a total write off."

"All the beers are contaminated. The cellar was full up. At times it was four or five feet deep. They have been pumping it out all night."

Despite all the devastation there was still room for community spirit and Mr Bartlett kept his pub open for people who wanted a coffee to keep them going.

He added: "A few bottles of brandy went last night, that's for sure."

Opposite the pub two cottages bore the full brunt of the water as it raced down the hill. Despite valiant attempts to stem the flow, carpets and furniture were ruined by 18 inches of water.

Local potter Michael Willey said: "It was coming in the front door. We were mopping it up but it just got higher and higher. People came down and we took the furniture upstairs."

The house was first affected by flood water at about 6 pm and Mr Willey thought they had managed to cope with the problem but then the lake burst its banks at the top of the hill.

"We thought we were winning then we realised we were not. Eventually it just kept getting higher and higher."

Next door Andrew Woodley was helping clear up at the home of his parents-in-law where a line around the building showed where the flood-water had reached.