

Living with

# The Floods

16-page look-back on the heaviest downpours for a generation



*LIVING With The Floods is our comprehensive account of this winter's horrendous flooding.*

*With waters finally subsiding we have recorded six amazing months in this 16-page supplement.*

*We recall how homes and businesses across the district have coped since torrential rain first hit back in October.*

*Conditions worsened, reaching a peak in February, which saw the worst flooding for half a century.*

*Our photographers and reporters have been out and about, taking pictures and meeting the victims during the ordeal. Here is the result of their work – a month-by-month account of our wettest winter.*

Compiled by  
Amanda Wills



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# OCTOBER – Living with the



## Day we had half a month of rainfall in a few hours

■ Aubrey Harris and daughter Nancy at Gorrell Tank, Whitstable 2/5524E/



*...brings  
results*



**A Kent Messenger  
Group supplement**

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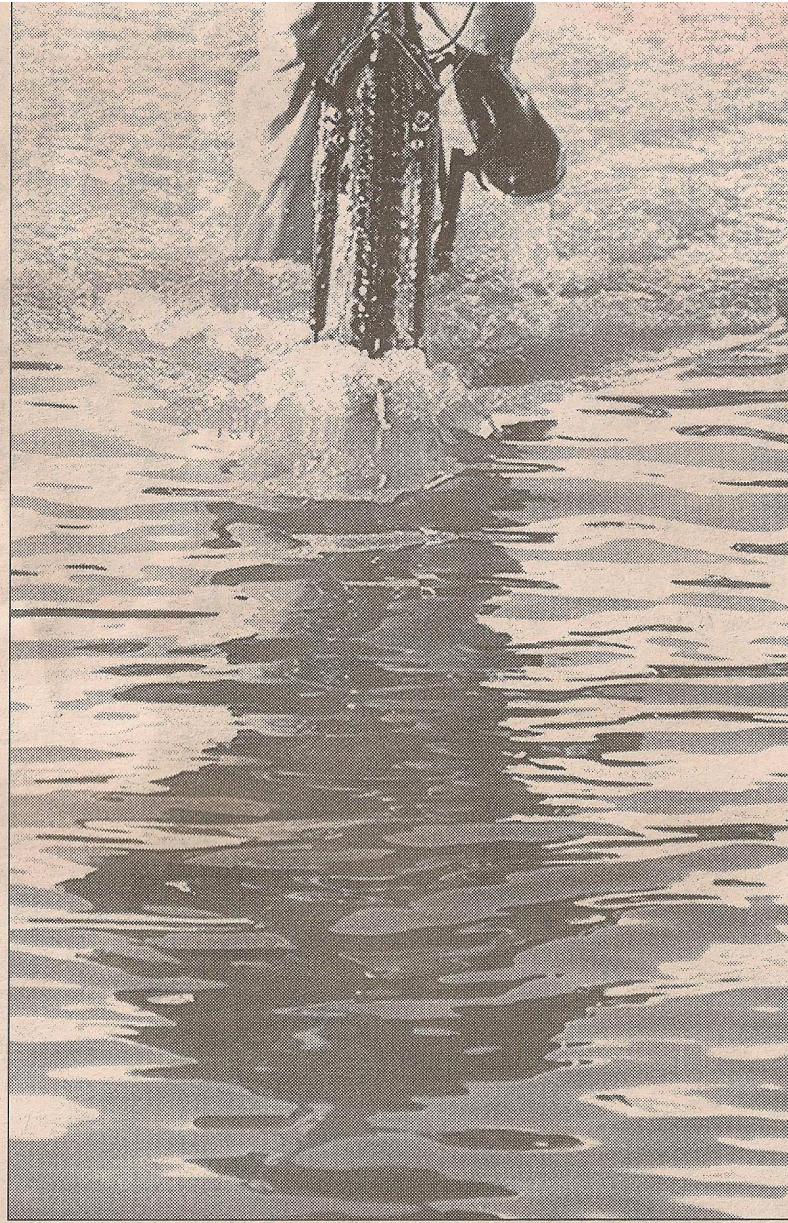
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■ A young cyclist shows his amphibious talents in Gorrell Tank

**O**CTOBER marked the start of this winter's flooding nightmare, and Whitstable was the first town to suffer.

Torrential rain, coupled with high tides, caused chaos in the seaside town. Homes were flooded, roads were closed and businesses were washed out.

On one day alone Whitstable had 33mm of rain – almost half the average rainfall for the whole month.

Many will remember the Gorrell Tank car park being restored to its

original reservoir state as drains backed up and the tide raced in.

Cars were stuck as water reached the doors and at one point people were even swimming in the car park.

People living in a new development of homes in Birkdale Close, Chestfield, were trapped in their houses after the road disappeared under water.

Canterbury and Herne Bay escaped the worst of those floods, for although some of Herne Bay's main roads were closed only a handful of homes were affected.

But by the end of the month the



■ A passer-by surveys Reservoir Road 25A/5508E/00 Picture Barry Duffield

# MARCH – Living with the Floods



■ A field at Littlebourne resembles a lake after the flooding

# Going, going . . . or is it?

**B**Y THE beginning of March the waters were subsiding, although the flooding problems were still far from over.

Homes in Littlebourne were flooded with sewage after emergency pumps repeatedly broke down and many homeowners and businesses along the Nailbourne Valley and beside the Little Stour were still pumping out and mopping up as river levels refused to fall.

Seven parish councils, whose areas

were victims of floods, joined forces to produce a joint plan of action.

Each promised to produce an action plan for its area, reporting on river and culvert blockages as well as silt and obstructions.

A party of county councillors toured stricken areas including Littlebourne, the Nailbourne Valley, Barham, Bishopsbourne, and Wickhambreaux.

They also looked at the sea defences at Whitstable and new housing at Chestfield before reporting back to the county council's scrutiny

committee. The councillors admitted being shocked at what they had seen.

Meanwhile, Barham villagers were consulted about a temporary bridge that could be built over the ford – and angry residents were able to demand answers from flood action officials during a public meeting at one of the blackspots: Chestfield.

People have been warned that problems could last until the summer, but by the end of March it looked as though the end of the ordeals could at last be in sight.

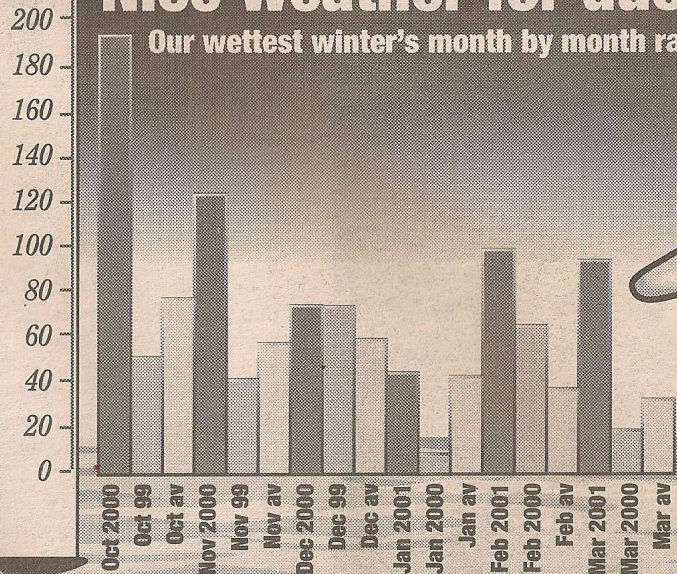


■ Bishopsbourne parish council chairman Malcolm Mitchell talks over the problems with MP Julian Brazier

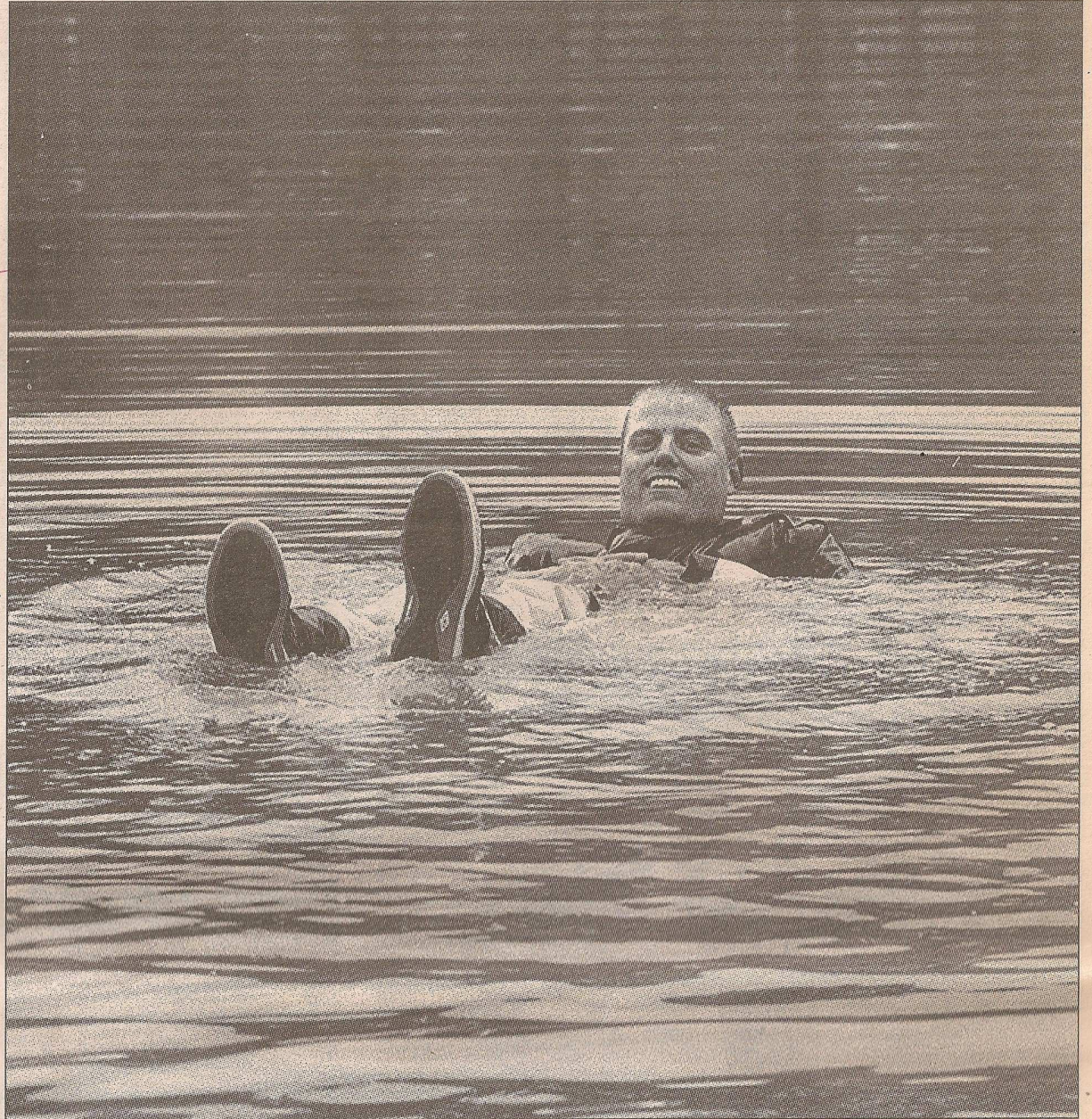
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## Nice weather for ducks!

Our wettest winter's month by month rainfall



# Floods



■ A Whitstable lifeboatman enjoys a dip at Gorrell Tank, Whitstable

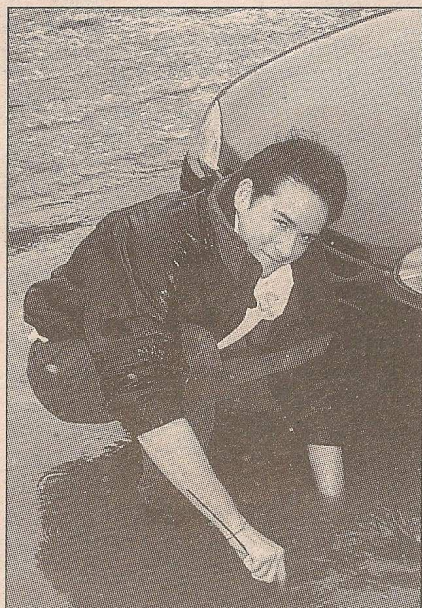
Picture Barry Duffield

flooding was beginning to impact on Canterbury.

Gusts of wind up to gale force 10, which wreaked havoc across the region, were followed by yet more rain. Flooding victims included residents of Cherry Garden Road, who were left with raw sewage surging through their gardens as heavy rain left drains in the city unable to cope.

The coast road between Whitstable and Faversham was also under water and once again Chestfield and parts of Herne Bay were affected.

Little did we know this was a dress rehearsal; the worst was yet to come.



■ A student living in Salisbury Road, Canterbury tries to clear the drains



■ Residents of the appropriately-named Reservoir Road, Whitstable, prepare to defend their homes

22A/5508/E/00

Picture Barry Duffield



# NOVEMBER





# Red alert as rivers bring tales of woe



■ The river Stour at Chartham Green, which saw some of the worst early flooding

13A/5858E/00



■ The A2 Boughton bypass becomes a lake has the heavy downpours cause chaos

11A/5787E/00

**T**HE first week in November brought with it another deluge, which saw Canterbury on red alert as the River Stour threatened to engulf parts of the city.

The already-swollen river burst its banks in the worst flooding for 15 years.

The Army was on standby to help evacuate stranded residents and homes and businesses were barricaded with walls of sandbags.

But perhaps the worst affected were the villages along the River Stour – Littlebourne, Chartham, Sturry and Fordwich.

The reservoir upriver at Aldington, near Ashford, had over-topped, leaving them vulnerable.

In Fordwich firemen commandeered a boat to rescue a mother and son and their six dogs from their flooded home.

Hundreds of sandbags were sent out to those at risk and the Lord Mayor, Jenny Samper, went on a walk-about to see for herself the worst affected areas.

Later that month, Environment Agency chief Binny Buckley joined MP Julian Brazier on a flood fact-

finding mission in Whitstable, Sturry and Thanington.

In Stodmarsh, wildlife, such as water voles, snakes, weasels and shrews, was under threat at the waterlogged national nature reserve.

Within a week there were new victims as another river began to flow with a vengeance.

Because of the relentless rain, the Nailbourne, which, according to legend flows only once every seven years, was making up for lost time.

Known locally as the Rivers of Woe, the Nailbourne usually flows in only January and February – and only after a very wet winter.

True to its name, it brought grief to villagers living close to the banks.

Barham and Bishopsbourne were among the worst hit.

In Bishopsbourne, villagers spent an afternoon standing in chest-high water clearing a fallen tree from the river to save their homes from flooding.

And locals began to dread the thought of spending their Christmas under siege and under water.



■ Trevor Gardiner outside his home at Littlebourne

10/5789E/00



■ Lord Mayor Cllr Jenny Samper surveys the Westgate Gardens from Tower House

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■ Richard Johncock surveys a grim scene in Ask, Canterbury



# Nailbourne nightmare

■ Phillippa Burniston and Sue Dawkins don their wellies to wade through The Street, Bishopsbourne





**B**Y DECEMBER the danger of flooding had subsided in the main urban areas, but people living along the Nailbourne had no end to their nightmare in sight.

By this time the river was running faster and heavier than at any time in living memory and they had been coping with flooded roads, gardens and houses on a daily basis.

Pumps at Bishopsbourne and Bekesbourne were running 24 hours a day to cope with the water and upriver at Sibton Park, Lyminge, the cricket club's clubhouse was waist-deep in floods.

The cricket pitch was under 7ft of water at its deepest point. Some four acres of land were flooded with an estimated 1,650,000 gallons of water weighing 73,000 tons.

Later in the month the Little Stour

burst its banks at Littlebourne, flooding homes, and there were reports of a "sandbag war" in the village as unscrupulous residents pinched the precious bags from their neighbours.

Once again the Army volunteered to step in and soldiers from 36 Royal Engineers, based at Maidstone, surveyed the area along the Nailbourne and Little Stour. Royal Mail swapped vans for four-wheel drive vehicles to enable post to be delivered to the worst hit areas.

Malcolm Mitchell, chairman of Bishopsbourne parish council, summed up a lot of people's feelings when he said: "You've heard the expression 'Come Hell or High Water' - well we've got them both this week."

He and fellow villagers had been talking about cancelling Christmas. But a week later they were vowing to celebrate - come what may.



■ Kevin Sharman, of Kelsey Farms, helps out in Wickhambreaux





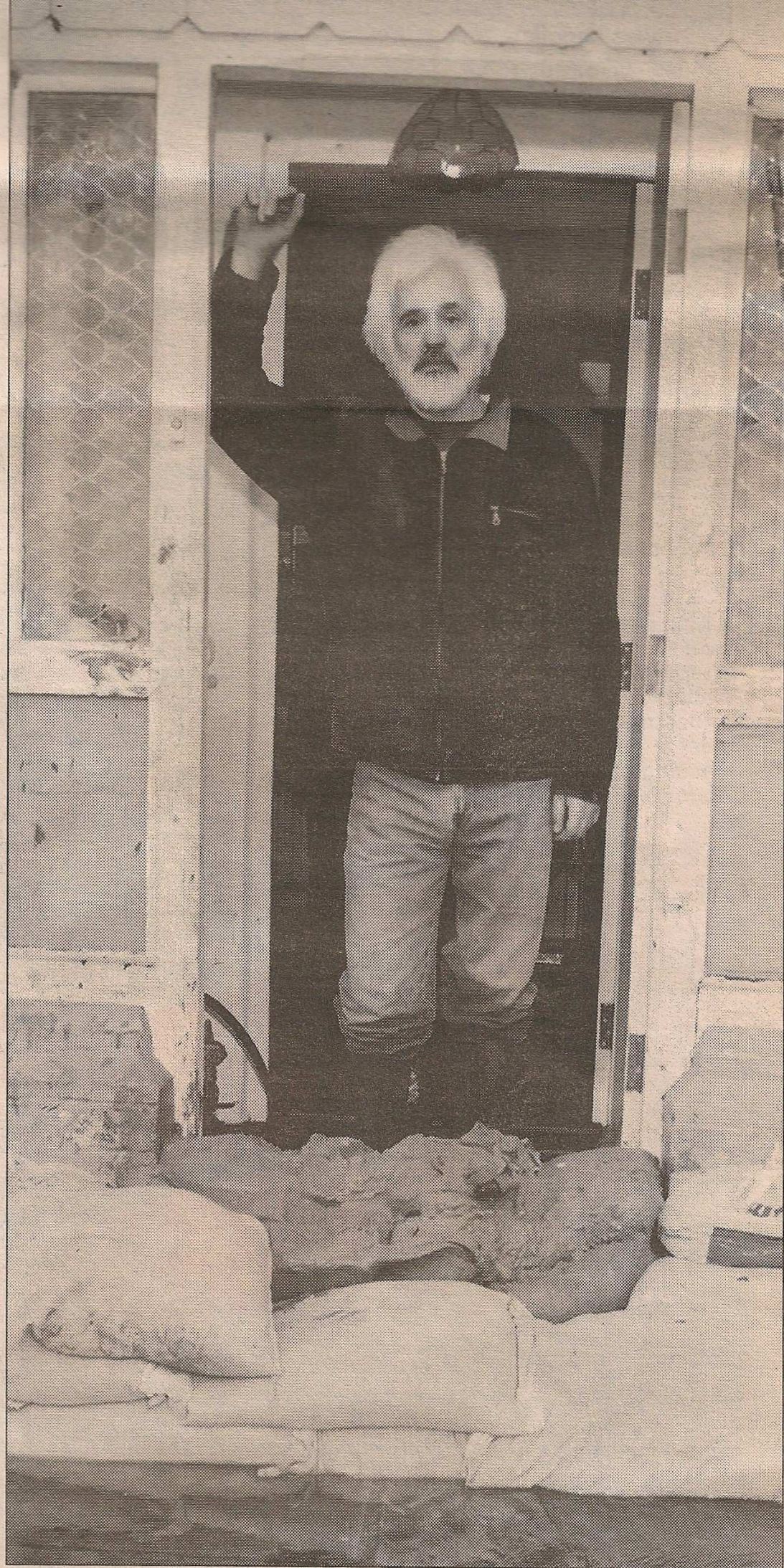
■ The Nailbourne at Kingston, near the Black Robin pub, caused chaos for drivers

9A/6524E



■ Judith Mitchell surveys her Bishopsbourne home

6/6213E/00

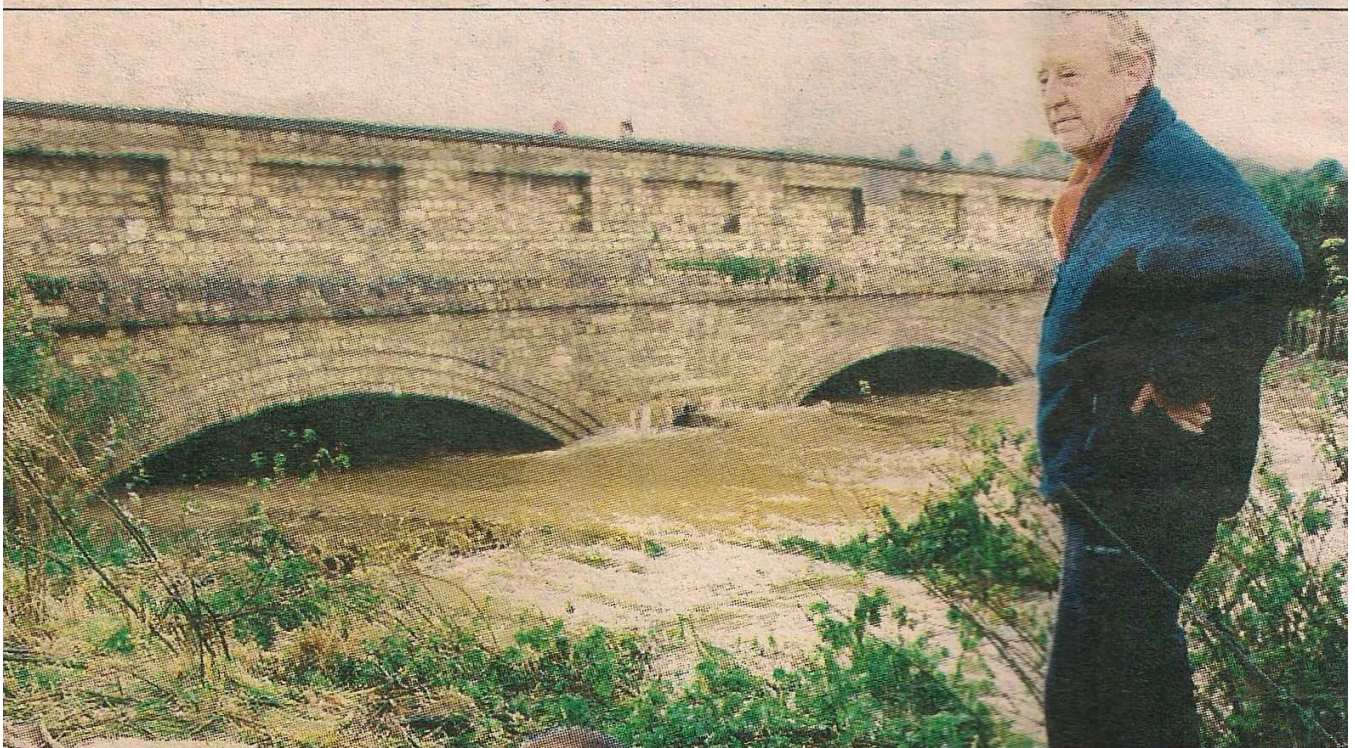


■ Jan Debont at his sandbagged Wickhambreaux home



■ Drivers negotiate Stone Street at Stelling Minnis

6a/5858/E/00



■ Alan Bradley inspects the swollen river at Chartham  
1a/5858/E/00 and a Whitstable  
lifeboatman spent most of the day rescuing cars  
3a/5524/E/00

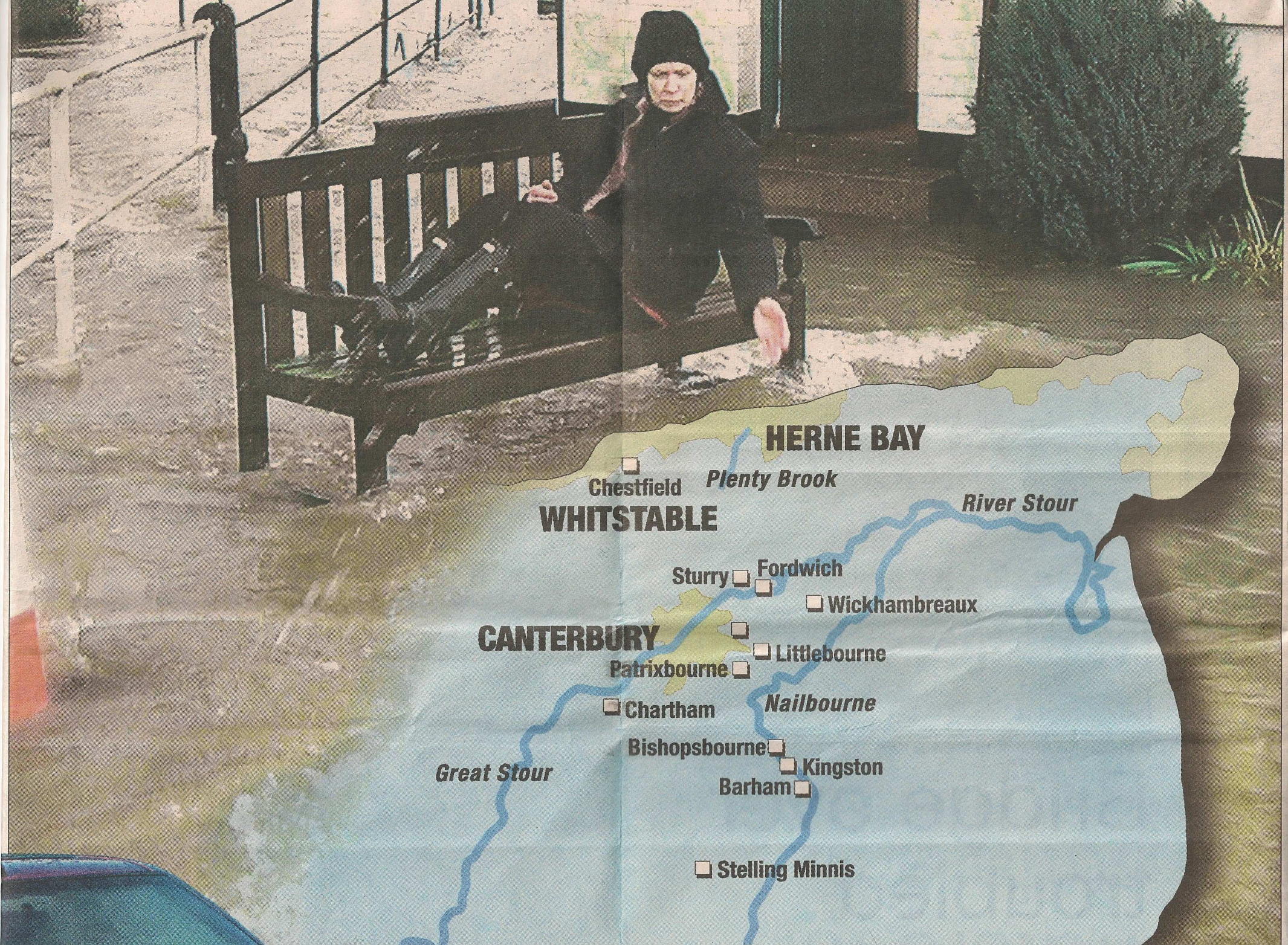


■ Alan Bradley inspects the swollen river at Chartham 21a/5858/E/00 and a Whitstable lifeboatman spent most of the day rescuing cars 13a/5524/E/00



■ Jill White takes refuge from the Nailbourne as it t





**HERNE BAY**

Chestfield *Plenty Brook*

**WHITSTABLE**

*River Stour*

Sturry  Fordwich

Wickhambreaux

**CANTERBURY**

Littlebourne

Patricbourne

*Nailbourne*

Chartham

Bishopsbourne

Kingston

Barham

*Great Stour*

Stelling Minnis

White takes refuge from the Nailbourne as it turns into whitewater rapids alongside the Black Robin, Kingston





ailbourne rages through Barham

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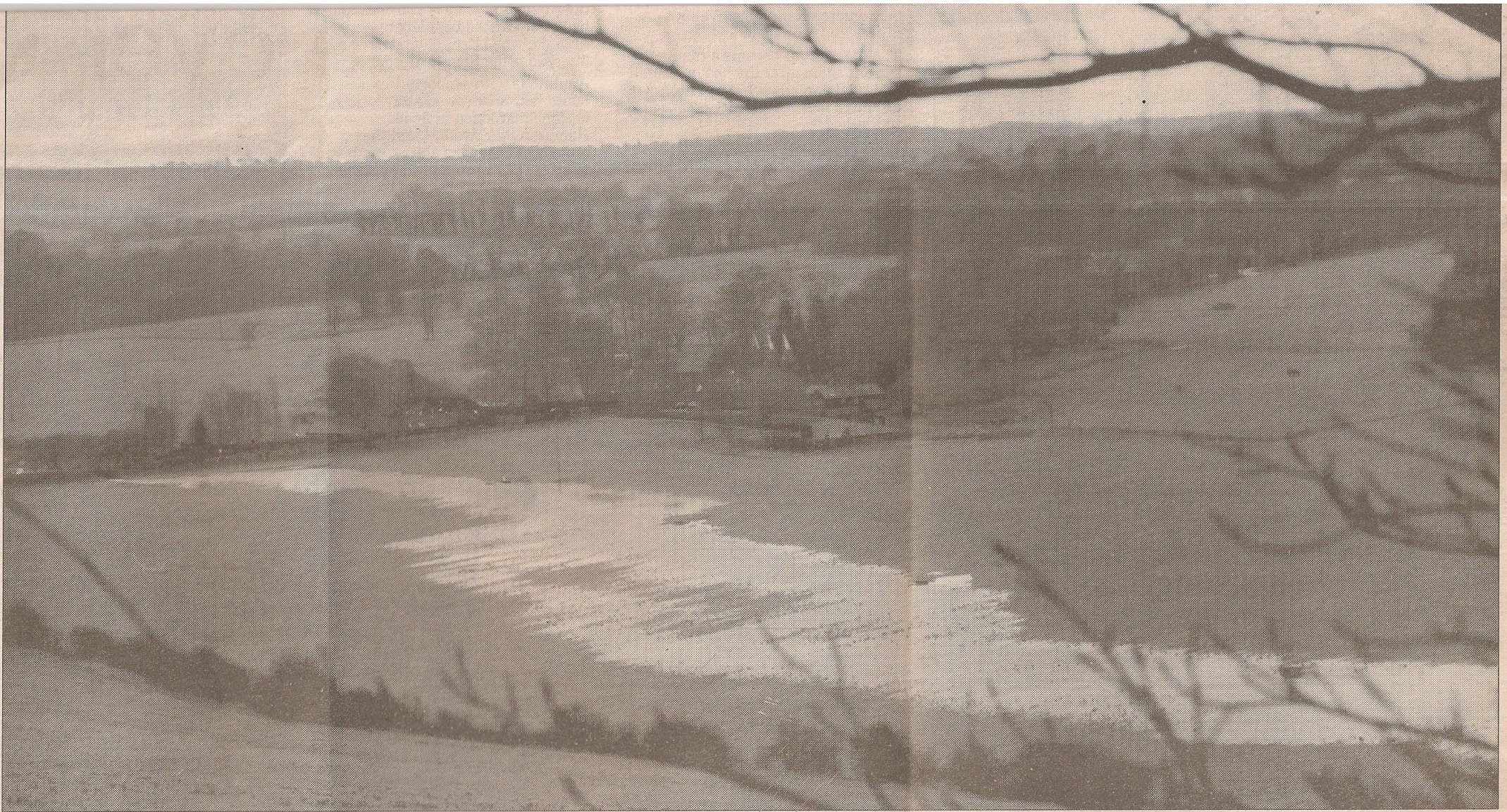


■ Looking west toward Canterbury at the flooded Great Stour

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■ A car is semi-submerged in Aldridge Close, Greenhill



■ For the first time in memory the Petham Nailbourne flows through near Kenfield overflowing into the fields

# FEBRUARY – Living with t



## It can't keep raining!

■ A gallant resident in Greenhill helps out as flash floods hit Herne Bay



■ Jill White, landlady of the Black Robin, Kingston kg1772nl 09-02-01.jpg

**N**ONE could quite believe that more rain could fall, but fall it did – and the misery continued.

Once again a month's rainfall fell in 24 hours and left large parts of the district submerged. February's flooding blackspots included the beleaguered Nailbourne Valley, Sturry and Fordwich.

The River Stour became a raging torrent again after the heavy rainfall and tidal swell doubled its size, although most of the city escaped unscathed.

However the same could not be said for Herne Bay and Whitstable.

Whitstable suffered some of the worst flooding it had seen since the 1950s.

The torrential rain made it almost impossible to reach parts of the town and at times areas of Chestfield were cut off. For villagers

it was the ninth flood in 14 months. The Bends between Whitstable and Herne Bay became a lake – the cold brown water bonnet-high in places.

Herne Bay woke to scenes of utter devastation. With the Plenty Brook bursting its banks, elderly and disabled people were trapped in their homes at Cherry Gardens and had to be carried to safety by firemen, who later commandeered a dingy to bring them to dry land.

A minibus with schoolchildren on board had to be towed away after it became marooned in floods at Hampton Pier Avenue, and the Memorial Park lake almost doubled in size. They were the worst floods the town had experienced in decades.

Greenhill suffered its worst floods ever, said residents.

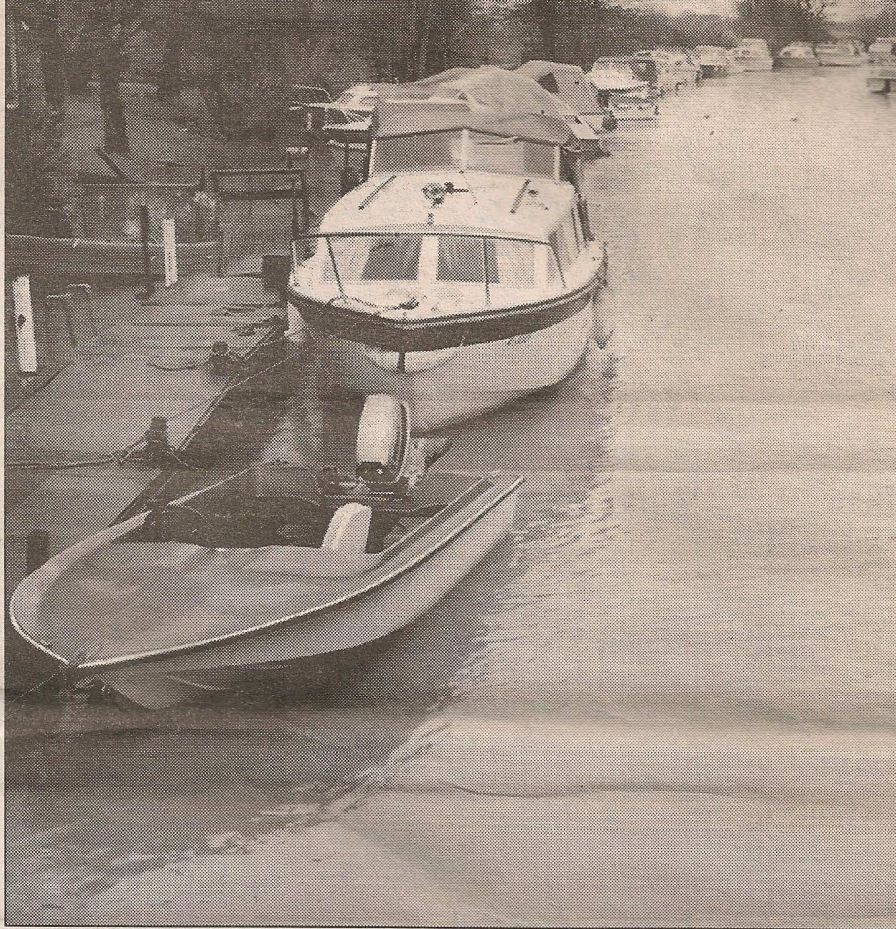
Government Minister Elliot Morley toured the district, promising more money for the worst hit areas.



■ Robert Spencer and mother Anne stand in a cattle field at Garring

# JANUARY - Liv





■ The swollen River Stour at Grove Ferry

14A/6524/E/01

# Bridge over troubled waters for sufferers

**T**HE New Year brought some relief for flood-weary homeowners – in Bishopsbourne at least.

The village won its battle to get a temporary bridge built over Rose Lane so a way in and out of the village was guaranteed even when water levels were rising.

Elsewhere, the Petham Nailbourne was flowing for the first time in 64 years and a package of work was promised to alleviate flood problems in Chestfield.

The city council was in the news – for admitting there were faults in its handling of the problem.

Although officers said they had done their best in difficult circumstances

they were criticised for not acting quickly enough, and not liaising with other authorities, such as the Environment Agency and Southern Water.

By January, the cost of the flooding across the district was expected to top £200,000, and 30,000 sandbags had been issued to areas at risk.

During the month the council decided to set up a special scrutiny panel to investigate flood-related issues.

Key roles were to ensure organisations worked together, hold investigations into specific flooding problems and review the council's policies, strategies, emergency plan and operational procedures to consider what changes were needed.

OUSE







■ Driving along Stone Street proved treacherous *kg0514gw8-2-01jpg*



■ Warrant Officer Henry Thomas bails out a cottage at The Green, Littlebourne  
kg1764n109-02-01.jpg



■ Julie King surveys the garden of her home in Spenser Road, Herne Bay

22A/6954/E/0



■ Our reporter Dianne Stingmore interviews a resident of Spenser Road

26A/6954/E



■ The flooding takes hold in St Peter's Lane, Canterbury

35/6973/E/01



■ Cherry Gardens, Herne Bay

17/6952/E/01

# MYSTORY



*Weather forecasts have become compulsory viewing or listening for the countless victims of the floods, who hear them with bated breath, praying for a dry spell. For months they have watched helplessly as their homes and businesses have disappeared under feet of water. It has been a frustrating, and in some cases heart-breaking time. One person who can vouch for this is Malcolm Mitchell, a former Kent Messenger Group editor and current chairman of Bishopsbourne parish council.*

*Here he describes what it is like living with the floods.*

**I**T CAME like a thief in the night, stealing our complete way of life. And the nightmare has been with us ever since.

Insidious is the word. It rained, mud poured off the fields, filling the village drainage system. It rained again; more mud; and again, and more mud.

By the time the real rain arrived in November, the water had nowhere to go. The drains were full, the sewers chock-a-block. The earth itself was filled to overflowing.

Suddenly, what was a puddle or two in the garden became an 18-inch deep lake and then a river; pouring over the patio, down one side of our 500-year-old cottage, round the front and joining another stream rushing down the main village street.

Panic is setting in. Judith says we need sandbags. We ring the city council flooding hotline only to hear it only deals with coastal flooding. Yes, but what about sandbags? No, we don't do sandbags as a matter of course, but we can tell you where to buy them, or you use pillow cases or even your wife's tights!

It was the first (but not the last) time I lost my temper with officialdom over the five months of the flooding. I slammed down the phone; there was nothing I could say that was not a swear word.

**S**andbags did appear – 50 of them for the whole village! More phone calls, more imprecations, more sandbags were delivered. Funny (peculiar, not ha-ha) how sandbags mostly appeared only after dark, delivered to a flooded village by men without wellingtons.

Water was threatening us on three sides. Saturday night, sandbags and floodboards deployed we sat back to watch a film. Not for long. Suddenly

The last thing we had expected. Suddenly, we were back in action. The carpet was peeled back. Pallets acquired to make compost heaps were rushed in, furniture piled on top. Like rulers on thrones we continued to watch the film.

Next day the fire brigade came, pumped and departed having decided they could achieve nothing. "There are millions of gallons out there trying to get through your house," said one man cheerfully.

We installed our own pumps – in the sitting room, in the dining room, in the kitchen and on the patio (to keep water away from the kitchen door).

**W**ith four inches of water sloshing about in the sitting room we decided to move upstairs, where we have remained ever since. We are likely to be there well into the summer.

There was so much water in The Street that those of us with smaller cars could neither get in nor out unless we had managed to get a car out before the water rose. Those who did faced having to wade through a foot of water to reach their vehicles.

Pumps were brought in to keep sewer levels down and prevent sewage backing up into homes and gardens. Another pump did much to reduce water levels at the Frog Lane end of the village.

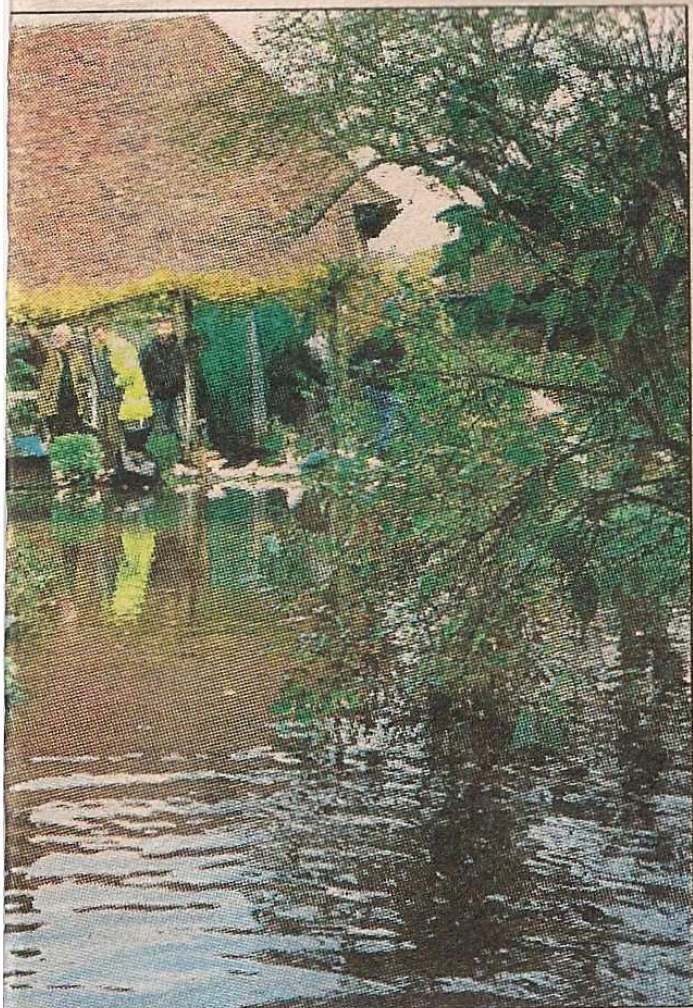
Christmas came and went; not much to cheer about, although fortunately the Mermaid pub remained open throughout, despite suffering its own flooding. It was somewhere to gather and swap horror stories. We wondered what we ever talked about before the floods came.

After much arguing, the council agreed to put in a temporary bridge at the bottom of Rose Lane to ensure us at least one entrance and exit. As January turned to February

did more than just put us back to square one. It sunk us deeper than ever into the water. The Nailbourne (Elham Valley's Waters of Woe) burst its banks, sending a torrent down the main street, blocking both ends of the village, despite the bridge, despite the pumps.

**W**e were isolated again, with mothers having to carry their children and shopping across muddy fields to get in and out of the village. Small cars (and some big ones) were unable to get in or out for more than 11 days.

More houses than before flooded. We suddenly had eight inches of water in the sitting room, long bare of furniture, with varying depths through the rest of the ground floor, including, the hub of our universe, the kitchen.



the Mitchell's garden

It looked as though we would have to abandon the house. With a flock of chickens, a cat and a dog we decided to tough it out.

The stress has been enormous. Nerves have become frayed as biceps swell with the constant moving of sandbags and ditch digging, day after day, week after week. Then there were the minor irritations; the television broke down, the computer, then the central heating.

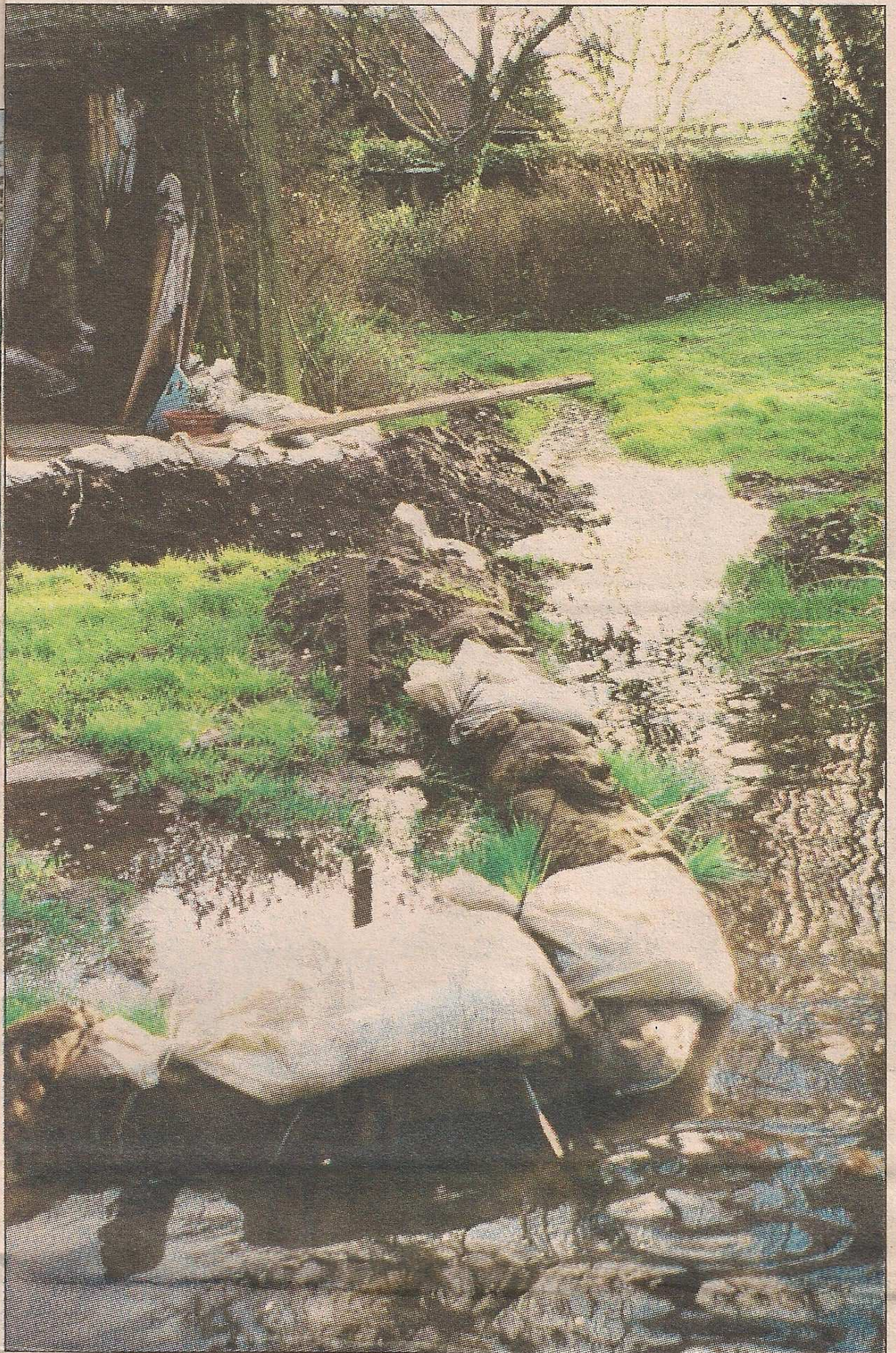
**S**till, our friends have rallied around, offering us accommodation and respite in the form of meals and shoulders to cry on. Now it is April. The weather is (hopefully) drier. The trees and shrubs are coming into leaf, which will lead to a more rapid evaporation and drying out process.

Meanwhile our garden has more trenches and sandbags than the First World War Somme battle.

Indoors, we are drying out with dehumidifiers in every room. It has, in turn, brought fresh misery. Skirting boards have been ripped out as have shelves. Panelling in the hall that took us a week to erect has been junked. In the kitchen plaster will have to be cut out and replaced to the height of four feet and our tailor-made fitted kitchen cupboards and drawers have gone.

We watch weather forecasts with trepidation; swearing when rain is mentioned and cheering when sun or even cloud are promised.

If we don't get a heatwave summer there is every chance that we will find ourselves back to square one come November. Until then we can only hope that the nightmare of the last five months or so really is a 60-year event and that it won't happen again for another 60. Some hope!



■ Trench warfare at Bishopsbourne – but this time the enemy is the water