

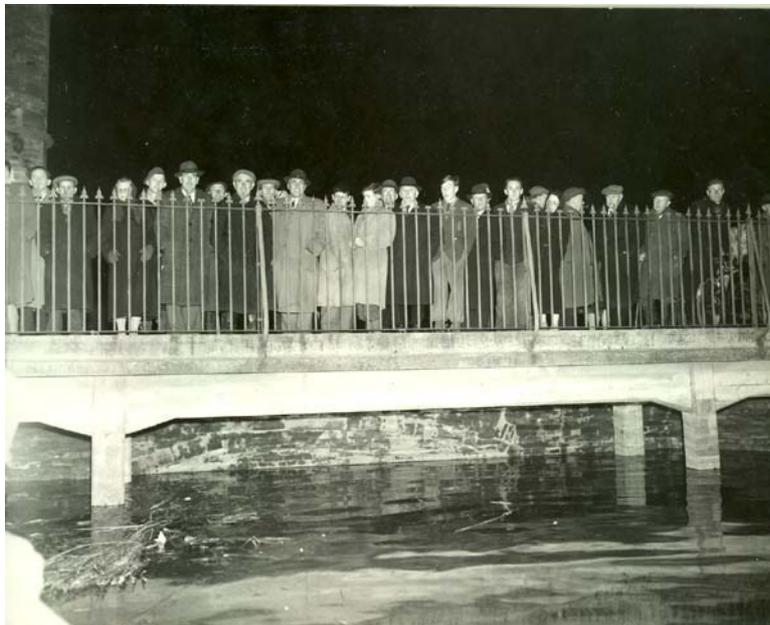
The 1953 Floods at King's Lynn

On Saturday 31st January 1953, King's Lynn and the entire East Anglian coast was hit by a disastrous sea surge. After a day of gale force winds and high tides down the entire east coast, a surge of water flooded over the tops of the Great Ouse's harbour quays at half past six in the evening, with devastating consequences to South Lynn and the Friars.



Flood warnings were put out at half past five, an hour before the deadly surge struck. The force of the water was so great that it picked up cars in South Lynn's Queens Avenue, and smashed them into fences. Those who did not have time to prepare adequate sandbag defences for their homes faced a severe situation.

Wind whipped waves on the South Quay, King's Lynn, 1.5 hours before flood tide in January 1953



Crowds anxiously watching for the high tide at King's Lynn's South Quay.

Witnesses remember the streetlights of London Road exploding as the water rose higher plunging the area into darkness. People armed only with torches, were shouting in panic as they tried to help their neighbours and friends, as dead animals floated down the streets.



London Road, King's Lynn became a river on the night of 31st January 1953

A former resident of Diamond Street remembers being in her lounge at the time of the flood. The water was up to her waist within only a few seconds. Many people fled to their upstairs rooms to escape the icy water, which reached depths of six feet.

Fourteen elderly residents of South Lynn were unable to escape their flooding ground floors, and drowned in their homes. Another elderly victim was found dead on his stairs, possibly due to shock. These deaths occurred in houses in Langham Street, Queens Avenue, Diamond Street, Wisbech Road, Portland Place, Hockham Street, Ouse Avenue, and Winfarthing Avenue, all of which suffered extensive damage during the flood. Lynn's Borough Coroner said: "This is a mournful day for the borough".



Members of showmen's families rescued from their caravans sheltering in a house in Page Stair Lane, King's Lynn, following the 1953 flood.

People attending a dance at the Corn Exchange saw the water sweeping into the Tuesday Market Place, and managed to escape, some even carrying their dancing partners to dry land.

Filmgoers at the Pilot Cinema (the former 'Zoots' nightclub) were unable to leave before 2.30am when they were given notice that it was safe to do so.



The aftermath of flooding in Wisbech Road, South Lynn, 1953.



Pet food being issued following the 1953 flooding at King's Lynn.

The following day, army lorries toured the flooded streets, rescuing mothers and children from upstairs windows and taking them to the evacuation centre, which had been set up in Gaywood Park Secondary School

(now Park High School).

People claimed that wartime comradeship was strong amongst the rescuers and residents, with some policemen working for more than forty hours at a time.

When the water level in the worst hit areas dropped, people returned to their ruined homes, devastated by the effects of the flood. Although the RAF provided portable hot air dryers to assist the drying of drenched houses, much of the damage was immense, and very few of the residents had insurance to cover their losses.



A car partially submerged by flooding near King's Lynn, 1953.



Flooding in fields near King's Lynn, 1953.

On Monday, 2nd February, two days after the flood, the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, and the Duke of Gloucester visited the worst hit areas, and also the evacuation centre, where homeless families had been accommodated since the disaster.

The tidal surge on that January evening in 1953 also caused devastation to other towns in Norfolk, including Hunstanton and Great Yarmouth, resulting in 100 deaths throughout the county.