



Exceptional weather events

Type of event:

Rainfall / flooding

Date:

December 1802

200-year anniversary of severe Dublin flooding

Although the newspaper account of widespread flooding in Dublin shown on the right could refer to the recent past in Dublin, it is actually a 200-year old report taken from *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* of December 1802. The 'heavy and unremitting rain' referred to was a fall of 75mm in a 30-hour period over the 2nd and 3rd of that month, which led to what F.E. Dixon described in his 1953 article *Weather in Old Dublin* as 'the most serious of all Dublin floods'. This amount represents what would normally be expected to fall in the entire month of December in Dublin. Most of what was then the central area of the city was covered by floodwater, with 3 metres of water reported in the lower Castle Yard and Patrick Street, where 'boats were plying to save the lives of poor people'.

This exceptional rain of early December followed very wet weather during both the summer and autumn of 1802- a year 'characterized by great vicissitudes'. This meant that river levels were already high before heavy rain commenced early on the 2nd and continued until 7 o'clock the following morning. Although direct weather readings for this period are sparse, contemporary accounts from newspapers and journals indicate the severity of the event. Two ships sank at the North Wall, while all of the major rivers around the city, the Liffey, Poddle and Dodder burst their banks. Among the objects witnessed floating down the Liffey were a dead horse, sheep, pigs, calves, roofs of houses, millwheels, a coach and a cradle, while a young man drowned after being swept into the flood at Leixlip. Ironically, on the same day as the rain fell, a decision was taken by the Wide Street

Commissioners, formed 45 years earlier, to 'open and improve the quays and old buildings adjoining the River Liffey, at the foot of Winetavern Street, between the Wood-quay and the Merchants-quay'. The following day, the stone-built Ormond bridge on the Liffey was washed away by the flood (*shown below with the newly-constructed Four Courts in the background*). Other bridges to meet a similar fate were at Celbridge, Lucan and at Ringsend, where a bridge 'of very solid and judicious construction' had been erected in stone after previous flooding in 1787. According to reports, the floods were concentrated in county Dublin and its immediate surroundings.

See also:
Bardon, J and Conlin, S **Dublin: One Thousand Years of Wood Quay** (Belfast 1984)
Dixon, F.E. 'Weather in Old Dublin' **Dublin Historical Record**, XIII, 3&4, 1953
Patterson, W **Observations on the Climate of Ireland** (Dublin 1804)
Walker's Hibernian Magazine, Dec. 1802 & Jan. 1803
Wilde, Sir William (ed.) **Census of Ireland 1851**

STORM AND INUNDATION.
Dec. 4.] The tempestuous weather experienced from Wednesday night till late on Thursday, together with the heavy and unremitting rain during that period, have produced various disastrous occurrences near the metropolis, and in the interior of the country. Some mills and other works a few miles from the capital, situated within the range of the flood, have been materially injured, and in some instances altogether destroyed.—We are concerned to state, among the damage of this kind effected in the neighbourhood of the capital, that the backs, weirs, &c. at Old Bawn paper-mills, are entirely swept away.—Nearly an acre and an half of Mr. Wildridge's meadow, adjacent to the mills, has been severed from the rest by the violence of the flood, and carried completely off!
'The Belfast mail-coach was yesterday morning, in coming to town, obliged to stop from five o'clock until nine, upon the road between Turvey



Ruins of Ormond Bridge. Built, 1683.