

Craven Herald

19 May 1911

Severe thunderstorm: much damage: sheds and houses flooded

On Saturday night the most terrible thunderstorm ever experienced in the district within the memory of the oldest inhabitant broke over the town, being accompanied by torrential rains and devastating floods. About 8.30 terrific flashes of lightning, followed by awful crashes of thunder, caused much alarm, and portended the subsequent disaster. The rain literally came down in a deluge, and from the hill sides overlooking the town the various streams soon overflowed their banks. The roads, as well as becoming like river courses, notably on the south eastern side of the town, and the turbulent water ploughed up great holes in the sides of the road three feet deep, drains became blocked, and scores of tons of debris were swept into the valley. Coming down from Mill Brow a large tree trunk was borne along for half a mile and blocked the watercourse at a bridge close to Selbourne Terrace. The water swept a large portion of the bridge away, and dashing down the street rushed into the houses on one side of the road to a depth of three feet, and swept coal houses on the other side into the stream. A tremendous volume of water coursed down Stoneybank Road, and converging with other streams in Water Street made that thoroughfare resemble a street in Venice. Most of the houses and shops in Water Street were flooded, and very serious damage was done at some establishments, notable Miss P Windle's, milliner etc and Mr Wm Smith's drapery emporium, Ireland Square, which is a side street abutting on Water Street, of a cul- de- sac nature, suffered most of all, the water entering every house, and in some reaching over the boiler. Furniture of all descriptions was floating about, and provision stores were destroyed. There was a remarkable scene on the "Fairground", where a travelling company had a large tent pitched for living pictures and other dramatic exhibitions. The performance had to be abruptly stopped, owing to the flood sweeping over the ground, and many of the people had to be carried out to a place of safety. A company of gipsies who were encamped on the ground were in serious danger of being carried away, and narrowly escaped with their lives, as the beck course was just behind them. In Stoneybank Road an old man, Joseph Green, who occupies the only cellar dwelling in the district, was only saved just in the nick of time. He was seated in his chair in front of the fire and had fallen asleep. When the neighbours entered the old man was sitting three feet deep in water, totally unconscious of what had happened. A cellar next door, unoccupied, had several tons of gravel swept into it by the rushing stream. Two of the largest sheds were flooded, but not deep enough to do much damage. All the four sections of the Victoria Shed, 2,000 looms in all, occupied respectively by Messrs A J Birley Ltd, Seal Manufacturing Company, Mr C Shuttleworth & Earby Manufacturing Company, were sufferers in this respect; and also the Grove Shed, occupied by Messrs R Nutter & Company. Work was not resumed at most of them until Thursday morning. On Sunday morning the fire brigade was on duty in Ireland Square with two hose pipes playing on the street to clear away the refuse. The surveyor (Mr J E Aldersley) with his staff was engaged in removing the gravel from the streets and the obstruction at Selbourne Bridge. Mr A J Birley, the chairman of the Urban District Council with CIs Fielding and Judd were also superintending operations and giving instructions. Very serious damage was done to the roads, and the steam roller was requisitioned on Monday morning for the necessary repairs.