

The Great Storm  
16th October, 1987.



The Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society. September 1989.

**The Great Storm**

16th October, 1987.

Recollections of the event by:

Valerie Allen of Riverside Road, Sidcup;

Anne Brunton of Carlton Road, Sidcup;

Elizabeth Fleet of Penshurst Road, Bexleyheath;

Margaret Gillies of Orchard Avenue, Belvedere;

Audrey Henderson of Longlands Road, Sidcup  
as told to Beryl Williams;

John Mercer of Eynswood Drive, Sidcup;

Philip and Phyllis Nash of The Grove, North Cray;

Frances Oxley of Beverley Avenue, Sidcup;

Mary and Eric Percival of Valliers Wood Road, Sidcup;

Margaret White of Barton Road, North Cray

and

Jane Woods of Orchard Close, Bexleyheath.

Illustrations:

Drawings by Iris E. Morris.

Grateful thanks are given to:

Frances Oxley for instigating the project;

the above contributors for their articles;

members of the Society who contributed the photographs  
from which drawings were taken

and Eric and Mary Percival for the production of the book.

I.E. Morris, Editor.

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## Preface

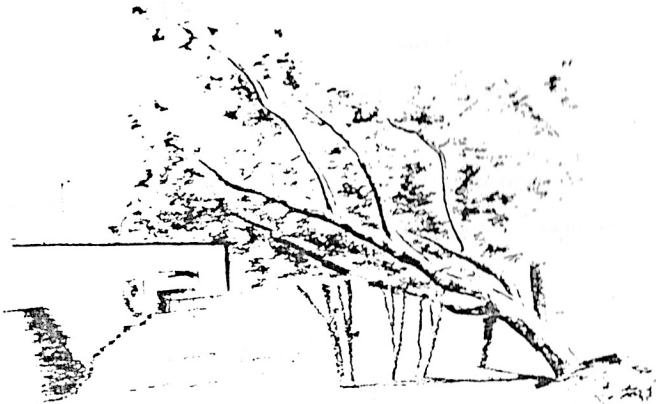
A number of books, mainly photographic, have been produced about the Great Storm of 1987. However, Frances Oxley, Honorary Secretary of the Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society had the idea that the experiences of that night should also be recorded in words - not only for our own pleasure but for the interest of later generations.

How right she was.

Although the contributors have written about the same small space of time their experiences were quite different. The articles reflect the personal observations and emotions of that night but, without the writers being aware of it, they also show why this flourishing Society is such a compatible group of people.

Iris E. Morris.

Honorary Chairman.



## A Night to Remember.

My husband was on night work this particular Thursday so I retired to bed with my Ovaltine and a book at about 11.00pm. The weather was pretty bad, raining hard and a slight wind but nothing, as I thought, untoward. Having double-glazing kept out a lot of the sound and after reading for half-an-hour or so I put out the light and snuggled down to sleep. I am not sure what woke me but I looked at the clock and I think it was about 3.30. I switched on the radio and decided to go downstairs and make myself a cup of tea. On reaching the bedroom the light suddenly went out. As the radio was on battery, and I always listen to London Broadcasting during the night when I am unable to sleep, that was still playing. Suddenly the announcer said, "I am not sure what is happening but all the lights in London have gone out". I continued listening to the radio but didn't think to look out to see what was happening in the street. I eventually dropped off to sleep again, switching off the radio, and awoke about 6.30.

What a shock it was when I pulled back the curtains and could see the devastation! Slaters were off roofs all along the street. Riverside Road is edged with trees and most of these had been uprooted. One was draped precariously across my neighbour's car. My husband cycles to Dartford where he works for Thames Water Authority and he eventually arrived back about 7.30 having been driven home by a friend, it being far too windy and dangerous for cycling. He told me of the terrible scenes he had spotted along the way. They had to make some detours, especially along Hurst Road where great big trees had been torn out by their roots.

I prepared our breakfast and then looked out to see my neighbour sitting in her car. I went out to see if she was all right and she said she was listening to the radio to see what hope there was of travelling to London on the train that morning. Of course all trains were stopped because of fallen trees across the lines. It did not seem likely that anyone could get to their offices in London - me included. The telephone lines were dead. I invited my neighbour and her husband in for a cup of tea and we sat talking for about an hour. Luckily the houses on our side of the road had fared better than those opposite. I expect it depended on the exact direction of the gale force winds. We were lucky that our electricity and telephone lines were live again later that morning and as I cook by gas I was at least able to make a pot of tea.

I live opposite the fields running along the river Cray to the Five Arches and the surrounding area was absolutely devastated. It must have been some force to tear up three hundred year old oak trees by their roots. Along the lane connecting our road with North Cray Road there is land owned by Thames Water which is fenced with thick steel wire. It was just twisted out of all recognisable shape. They had planted trees destined for Bryant & Mays Matches but I am afraid they were all torn out and the whole area was heartbreaking to see.

I have included with this article some photographs taken by a friend in Sidcup Cemetery at Albany Park. Luckily none of our family graves were damaged in any way. Many of the beautiful monkey puzzle and other trees have disappeared and some of the larger monuments were broken, with many graves disturbed. Nature can sometimes be cruel to tear up trees by the roots which have stood for two or three hundred years and destroy monuments, some of which were over a hundred years old.

I realise that we in our district were lucky in that no actual property was destroyed. It must have been heartbreaking for those people who lost their homes. I think we were all thankful that the hurricane occurred in the night. Had it been the previous evening when people were travelling home from work one hesitates to guess at what the death toll may have been. I have not seen such devastation since the bombing in the war and hope not to encounter such conditions again. I learnt afterwards that one or two of the neighbours were really frightened and they wondered how I was faring if I was on my own. However, no one tried to come across to see if all was well. So much for good neighbours - but that's life.

Valerie Allen, Riverside Road, Sidcup.



On Thursday 16th October, in the evening, there was a very strong wind, not too much to worry about, but I was glad nevertheless to see Keith, my husband, return from his evening of choral singing. All was well until the early hours (approximately 4 a.m.) when we were both woken by winds, the like of which I had never heard. Outside our front door there is a tall Scots Pine and that was being blown sideways, at an alarming angle, due to the relentless raging of the wind. Suddenly there was an enormous crash and banging on the rooftop. I was quite convinced our large and elegant Copper Beech tree in the back garden had been uprooted and hit the roof of the house. I went into our daughter Fiona's bedroom expecting to find her covered in leaves but she was, to my amazement, fast asleep as was her young brother. On looking out of the little back bedroom I could see an enormous Sycamore tree lying across the full width of the side road that leads to the Adult Education Centre for mentally handicapped adults. It was then I realised that there was no electricity - help! Where were the candles my mother sent me from Africa because of the last power cut? They were in the kitchen drawer. Located and lit I made a cup of tea for Keith and me which we sat drinking in bed, wondering what was going to happen next. At 6.30, with the wind not so strong, we listened to the radio to hear of a catalogue of disasters throughout Kent and the South East of England.

Opening our front door we were confronted with an enormous branch, which had fallen off our Scots Pine. Unable to get out of the front door we went to the back door and into the garden. Our greenhouse, expertly erected by Keith three days before, was now minus most of its glass but fortunately the shell was still attached to the base. On further inspection of the back garden we found that numerous panels of our fencing had been blown down but we were able to repair them immediately. Our lovely Bramley Apple Tree was all but down, but with the aid of a car jack we managed to get it to a more upright position - all the apples having fallen off during the wind. (The next year it gave us a wonderful crop).

By 8.30 a.m. most people were up and about viewing the road and their houses and gardens with consternation. Saws were to the ready, tea made and there was a general air of nervous excitement. Generally there wasn't much structural damage. Poor Mrs. Earll had lost her roof tiles. We lost a chimney pot and tiles. The chimney pot is now an attractive feature in her garden - having landed intact on the grass.

By now no one had electricity or telephones but listening to the radio we were told that there were no buses or trains running. Consequently there was no work or school that day, much to the delight of the street's children. The morning was spent clearing up and sawing up some of the larger trees. One neighbour had her car demolished by a large Cedar of Lebanon, planted in 1895, the same year as the old house, Savernake, was built. The next neighbours had trees blown across their cars but no real damage.

During late morning another large branch fell off the Scots Pine, narrowly missing Keith and giving us both a fright. The next day, Saturday, our neighbours called us over to their house. We were able to see a very big branch, hanging like the sword of Damocles from the Scots Pine. It was far too high up for us to deal with - this was a Fire Brigade job. We drove round to the Fire Station to ask their advice, to be told that they'd follow us home and deal with it. They were preceded by an excited and jubilant five year old boy. On arrival and after inspection it was still too high to deal with safely - so "Simon Snorkel" was sent for. This is the engine with the long ladder, used for evacuations and high fires, and the firemen dealt with the branch most effectively from this high perch. It created quite a stir and people came from up and down the road to view the spectacle of five firemen at the top of the ladder grappling with the branch.

The last 'visitation' was over 300 years ago and I trust that it will be as long again before we have another Great Storm.

Anne Brunton, Carlton Road.

Recollections of the Aftermath of the Hurricane.

Oct.1987.

This story is more like 'Babes in the Wood' with the damaged trees being the Wicked Uncle. My friend and I decided to follow the circular route from High Elms, through Downe and Cudham. It had been clearly marked by Bromley Council but we went only two weeks after the hurricane.

We strode out very confidently and, at first, uneventfully. However, our luck ran out as we entered the wood on our way to Cudham. The entrance was through an alleyway that opened out on to a scene of havoc. Trees were strewn everywhere, leaving craters that resembled a lunar landscape. The problem was to decide which way to go as we had to duck and weave through obstacles in order to reach the end of the wood. We were getting quite alarmed and began to wonder if we would ever see another human being. However, we were in luck and emerged via someone's backgarden. Now was the moment to sit on the wall and eat our apples. This attracted a passing motorist and when we asked the way to Cudham Church she very kindly offered us a lift.

After a rest on Cudham Green we decided to tackle the last leg of our journey. All went smoothly until we entered High Elms woods through the back gate. The main path took us all of four hundred yards. All the 'High Elms' were lying across the track and we lost all sense of direction. We were 'so near and yet so far'. It was then half past three and would soon be dark. We were also getting rather tired. After going round in circles for ages we finally came across a woman walking her dog. She gave us directions on to the golf course and from there we could get to the car park. We arrived back at the car feeling like rag dolls, having used all our mental and physical energy on what would normally have been a pleasant country walk.

Elizabeth Fleet, Penshurst Road, Bexleyheath.



The Great Storm

Thursday was bin day which partly explained my being awakened during the early hours of Friday by the clatter of dustbins bouncing along the road. I got up to investigate and met my daughter in the hall. She had already been on the same errand and checked that our bin was firmly wedged in a sheltered spot. Apart from the bins, the only noise I was aware of was the howling of the wind. It was very noisy, but being well insulated indoors, I did not realise how extraordinarily severe the storm was.

I looked out of the back windows and could see the trees on the skyline silhouetted against the lights from the distant main road, with their branches writhing. Suddenly, complete darkness, as the power failed. The noise continued unabated but there didn't seem to be any point in staying up in the dark, so I set the clockwork alarm by torchlight and returned to bed, but not really to sleep, and waited for the dawn.

For an hour or two the wind was still too fierce for me to feel safe enough to brave the broken glass and tidy my greenhouse. Two panes from the side had jumped out of their spring clips and were resting, unbroken, on the roof. Several others were scattered over the lawn and only a few actually shattered. The big old apple tree, up which my grandchildren had climbed the previous weekend to pick the last of the apples, was completely uprooted, as were several other small trees and shrubs. Many of the trees I had been watching the previous night had gone, including an enormous beech; others were uprooted but resting against each other.

Then the wind dropped, the sun came out and the atmosphere in the streets was reminiscent of wartime comradeship as neighbours compared roof damage and started to chop up fallen trees and shore up others.

Apart from the actual storm, I think I shall remember 1987 as the year we had no autumn. The wind seemed to have scorched and shrivelled the remaining leaves, so we missed all the lovely autumn tints and went into winter bareness virtually overnight.

Margaret Gillies, Orchard Avenue, Belvedere.



## The Great Storm

I awoke at 4.30 in the morning to the noise of a terrible wind and to find no electricity. Thank goodness I keep a torch at the side of my bed. Our son works shift duties and it occurred to me that his alarm would not come on without electricity. I waited until 5.30 and then woke him up, thinking that it would soon be getting light. We then lit an ornamental oil lamp and some candles I had come in useful. I pulled the curtains back and found an orange leaf floating past the window. I then noticed what looked like a bush outside - though it must have been a branch. Then my husband and son came to look at it. They then went outside and called out saying that the tree had come down and was resting on our roof. Neighbours said afterwards that they could see it rocking back and forth and kept thinking it was going to fall at any moment.

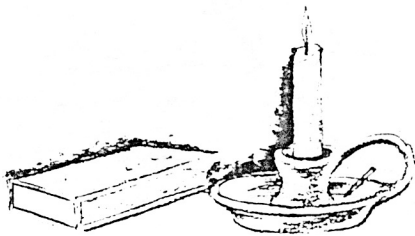
My son thought he would set off for town, but took the car rather than his motor-bike, thinking it would be much safer in view of the scene of devastation which met our eyes wherever we looked. On arrival he found that there was no power for the computers. People were ringing up from abroad unable to understand why it couldn't be stated precisely when the computers would be functioning again.

As the roots of the tree had broken an electricity cable men soon arrived to make things safe. Sparks were flying about all over the place. Emergency wires were put through to the house and later in the day power was restored, thank goodness. The whole place looked like a battlefield. York Avenue, just around the corner, was impassable with trees strewn across the road. For many people going to work was out of the question and some energetic folk made a start on the clearance. With so many trees across the track the trains were not running and the parks were closed. On Sunday the power was turned off once again leaving a lot of irate people without their Sunday lunch.

Before very long the tree was lifted off the house and removed, leaving the stump and roots for some later date. This was done with the aid of a giant grabber. The pavements remained in a dreadful state for weeks to come and one had to be very careful in the dark. It is a very sobering reflection to know just how strong nature is and how grateful we must all be that no-one was hurt.

Audrey Henderson, Longlands Road (as told to Beryl Williams).

Note from Beryl Williams: "As I didn't wake in the storm and nothing dramatic happened to me other than some loose ridge tiles, I approached a lady opposite in Longlands Road, invited her to coffee and then took down her experiences - I hope this will be a contribution. What is more I think I have found a very nice friend."



## The Great Storm

On the evening of October 15th, 1987 my wife and I had a dinner engagement in Hammersmith. We left home in good time but the traffic was extremely heavy the other side of Notting Hill and it made us over an hour late arriving at our hosts' new apartment. As a consequence of our late arrival it was midnight before we left for home. As we emerged into the night we were aware of a rising wind that blew soft and warm. Our journey home was speedy and uneventful. Being late we were tired and slipped into bed at around 1.30a.m.

During the night I awoke a couple of times to the sound of strong winds beating against the bedroom window and the lash of heavy rain but I thought little of it. At my last episode of wakefulness I noticed that the red numbers of the radio clock had gone out and thought sleepily that a power line must have come down somewhere.

We were both awakened at 7.30 by the persistent ringing of our telephone in the hall below. I leapt out of bed in some haste because I am usually up and making the tea by 7 o'clock. Who could be ringing us at this hour?

"Hallo, Dad," said my son, 'phoning from Bishops Stortford. "Are you all right?"

"All right, of course I'm all right, why shouldn't I be?" I was a little testy at the sudden awakening.

"Well, there has been a lot of damage in last night's storm and I wanted to make sure you and Mum were okay".

"Yes, we're okay. No damage here. I'll just take a look out of the kitchen window, and see if I can see anything".

To my astonishment a scene of havoc met my eyes. The double gate into the garden was blown off its hinges and one door lay shattered on the concrete. Two fences were down, our old Bramley Apple was uprooted and imbedded into one fence, the Buddleia was across the lawn and the two cordon apples were spattered all across the flower bed. Miraculously the thin plastic roof of the car port was untouched, nor was there any material damage to the house.

I reported the damage to my son who in return told me that he had lost a number of slates from the roof but little harm in his smaller garden.

There was no power but my wife turned on the battery radio and picked up various news items that grew more alarming as the messages came in to the news room.

She rang her sister in Catford and warned her not to go to work on her bicycle until the police reports were favourable. My daughter was then rung and given a similar piece of advice. An elderly lady who we keep an eye on was also rung to see if she needed any help.

Ironically enough the 16th was the day that Mr. Moynihan was coming to Joyden's Wood to declare it saved and hand it over to the Woodlands Trust. I drove to the woods in spite of warnings from my wife. The wind was still strong but in no way dangerous any longer. Not surprisingly the official opening was cancelled! The woods had suffered a good deal and entry from Somerset Drive was not possible.

John Mercer, Eynswood Drive.



October 15th, a normal evening and we retired to bed as usual, sleeping well until roused to consciousness by a feeling of uneasiness and then an awareness of an horrendous noise, a never ceasing roar, accompanied by a constant smashing of debris on the bedroom window. So fierce was the impact that it was difficult to get the windows clean afterwards. All the time the dreadful roar continued. Philip, looking out into the darkness, reported large trees being beaten to the ground, then straightening up, only to bend again.

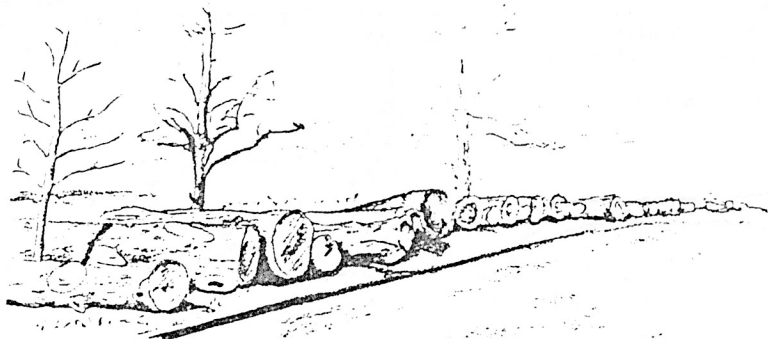
We decided that we might feel better downstairs, so we hurriedly dressed but as we reached the top of the stairs, the lights went out and we found that everywhere was in darkness. Street lights, everything had failed. We felt our way downstairs and to where we knew there were some candles and matches. What a relief it was to be able to see our way around. We thought that we would try a portable radio to find out what was happening. By accident, we tuned in to the Police radio and began to understand the situation.

Gradually daylight broke and the noise lessened. People were venturing out of their homes. Going into the garden we had a strange feeling. Things were different, lighter, and then it dawned on us - the trees had gone. One of two venerable Cedars of Lebanon, which had rather overshadowed us, was missing, uprooted and flat on the ground. A large Holly Tree, two large Mulberries, a Walnut and several tall Conifers which had always been a background to our garden were also uprooted. Fortunately all lay across their respective gardens. A large Blue Cedar tree which had suffered in a previous gale was even more mutilated. The scars, which still show, are a constant reminder of that horrific night.

After breakfast, Philip went off to check that our elderly neighbours, who had lost their trees, were O.K. and to offer help, and I went off with my camera into the Footscray Meadows. The atmosphere was reminiscent of War Time. People were out chatting, commiserating and exchanging experiences. It was impossible to get near the Church, everywhere was a tangled mess of fallen trees and debris. Trees that had been home to squirrels, birds and insects, gone in a flash. Uprooted trees were scattered about over the Meadows. There appeared to be no pattern. In an avenue of trees, groups had gone in some parts and in places only the odd one had blown down and yet again some sections had not suffered any loss. Looking towards the river to a group of Poplars and Alders, it was sad to see the tops of these tall trees showing white against the blue sky, just as if an electric flail cutting machine had torn off the tops of their branches. It was a pleasant sunny Autumn morning, especially cruel when one remembered the night and looked at the devastation all around. Yet, thankfully, no one in our area had been hurt.

Today the dismembered trunks of these majestic trees lie in piles, dusty among the weeds, bearing no resemblance to their former beauty.

Philip and Phyllis Nash, The Grove, North Cray.



As I came home to Beverley Avenue, Sidcup, on the night of the 15th October, 1987, there was a terrific downpour of rain and the wind was in evidence, at that stage, blowing at the normal rate. During the early hours of the 16th, I awoke and went downstairs to secure the lid of my dustbin as I was then aware that the wind was blowing extra hard. I managed to return to sleep for an hour or so but the din outside woke me again. By this time I was really feeling quite frightened and was not surprised when my sister appeared saying that she also felt scared. We bunked up together in my bed and neither had any more sleep. We just lay and listened to the ferocity of the wind wondering when everything would return to normality. Came the dawn - it did - weatherwise.

Our telephone was still live and various kind people rang enquiring if we were O.K. We realised that the electricity supply had been cut off, so the hunt went on for candles, matches and a battery radio for us to hear the news. We had apparently lived through the worst hurricane for several hundred years. The L.B.C. announcer told us that the storm had swept the country, starting with Cornwall and travelling directly north-east to Kent, and East Anglia. Previously there had been an abnormal amount of rain, consequently tree roots were within soft earth and could not withstand the terrific force of the hurricane. Both roads and train lines were blocked by fallen trees lying across them. It was obvious to me that we would not be able to travel to Town. My sister was still worried about this when the announcer said, at about 9 a.m., that the Radio Station had been unable to raise anybody at the Bank of England.

Neighbours started popping in, telling us of damage in our local roads. Whether we were sheltered or just fortunate, our road came through almost unscathed. We ventured out at about 11.30a.m. and were not surprised to find brick walls and trees down in Allandale Road. In Days Lane the Rev. Cunliffe, Vicar of Holy Redeemer, could not move his car out of the garage as there was a tree in front of the door. We noticed in Ellison Road, a medium sized van had had a tree crash into the middle of it.

When we returned home from the sortie, the electricity supply had been restored. I then decided to take a walk further afield, taking in the Oval, Burnt Oak Lane and Marlborough Park Avenue. The storm had done its worst. Roads were impassable and some houses had trees fallen against the front doors. Unless residents had a back door they must have been trapped. It truly felt like visiting "The Graveyard of the Trees". It was all very sad and one felt our locality would never be the same.

In the morning, for some reason, it seemed irreverent to photograph these scenes of disaster, but in the afternoon I sallied forth again, this time in the car with the aim of recording the calamity for the Local History Society. By this time many roads were opened up due to the Highways Department and residents pushing the trees towards or onto the pavements. I intended seeing what had happened at Lamorbey Park but could not turn left from Marlborough Park Avenue into Burnt Oak Lane as an enormous tree had fallen from a playing-field, across Burnt Oak Lane and, yes, into the bedroom of Mr. Eric Hind's house (W.E.A. Rep.)

I drove to Sidcup Station where there was a notice stating that one or two trains were going up to London from Orpington, but none from Sidcup due to the operation of trees being lifted from the line. On my way home, I noticed that several trees were down in the glade and the magnificent tree, in the grounds of the old Holy Trinity Church School, that I had so often admired whilst waiting for a 51 bus, had lost some of its branches. As I was due to attend a class at Crayford Manor House that evening, I contacted the Principal, Mr. Law, who said that he had been unable to reach the tutor, Mrs. Saynor of Shoreham, Kent. For some unknown reason I was able to 'phone her from Sidcup and make contact. It seemed she was in a state of siege - no light - no heat - no hot water - no hot food but, yes, she would be making her way to Crayford from out of the Darent Valley.

As the intrepid Mrs. Saynor was going to 'make it' from Shoreham, there seemed no reason why I shouldn't have a go from Sidcup. Before I left home, I filled my largest flask with boiling hot water so that she could have a hot drink on arrival home. One of the glorious Cedar of Lebanon trees had crashed in the grounds of Crayford Manor House, fortunately not towards the building. Not in the usual context, but 'How are the mighty fallen' occurred to me several times during the day.

Ever the optimist, I decided to take part in the arranged Sunday ramble which went on a circular tour from Westerham, dropping south. Four of us turned up and we decided to set off. It was a lovely day and the ramble proved quite exhilarating. Footpaths were no longer apparent, one had to crawl under or over trees to forge ahead. When we came out on to a road it was interesting to speak to young residents who were working with a will in order to clear this main artery to Oxted. Telephone lines were hanging down everywhere, they had no electricity supply (I believe this went on for two weeks) and so we quite appreciated it when these young people remarked, "It's a World War III atmosphere".

News had been coming through over the weekend that some lives had been lost and considerable damage to property had taken place, particularly in Sussex. We all 'Thanked God' that the full force of the hurricane had hit during the 'wee small hours' when most of the population was tucked up in bed and accounted for.

As a postscript to the above, I recall several months later visiting Chartwell, Sir Winston Churchill's former home. On entering the car park one's eye was drawn to the hill opposite where, magnified several times over, the scene reminded me of a box of matches having been spilt. The great trees that had probably been painted by Sir Winston had given in to a mighty angry force.

Frances Oxley, Beverley Avenue, Sidcup.



We awoke early, it must have been about 4.30, with the feeling that there was something wrong. It slowly dawned on us that the room was in darkness. Now we have one of the clock radios where the time is always shown in illuminated figures. This was in darkness, so we switched on the bedside lights - nothing happened. It was then we heard the sound of the wind and objects being blown along the street. We decided it might be wise to get up, so we found a torch, lit a decorative oil lamp, which happened to be full of paraffin, and then had a trip to the garage to find a Gaz lantern. Next came breakfast. No point in trying to use the toaster. Fortunately we cook by gas so tea was made using a saucepan to boil the water. We put on the T.V. to see how things were!! Having finished a romantically lit meal we heard the first of the tiles falling off the roof. Now we live in a chalet type house and when a single tile slides from the top of the roof it sounds as if the whole house is falling down. Only five came down but it was a worrying time. We found a battery operated radio but did not seem able to find any of the usual stations. It was at this point that we noticed that our neighbours some we rarely see, were gathering in the middle of the road. We joined them to discuss the amount of damage we had all suffered. We saw that at least half of the telephone lines were down but that no serious damage had been done to any of the houses. There was great camaraderie - reminiscent of the blitz! - so we've been told.

I now left for work. My usual route was to drive through Ellison Road. This was impossible as fallen trees blocked the road in both directions. A quick change of direction led me into Halfway Street on my way to Woolwich. Avery Hill park looked a complete mess with many fallen trees and small branches littering the road and grass areas. It was an uneventful journey until I came to Shooters Hill Road which was completely green due to leaves and branches lying across the road - plus several trees which

partially blocked the road. However, all cars were being driven with care so we managed to get past all the obstructions. When I arrived at work some staff were already there and on unlocking found that we had not suffered any damage - the old Victorian warehouses were built to withstand a siege. There were several problems: we did not have any power. This meant (1) no telephones, (2) no computers, (3) no heating and, most important of all, no tea. (One ex boy scout did light a fire later in the morning and made a welcome brew up). Power was restored at about 11.30 and I left at 1.30 - planning to climb on to the roof to replace the tiles. I was very pleased to find that Mary had already organised a roof repairer to do the job.

Mary got to work at Avery Hill College. The large dining hall windows were shattered. One student, who had just received a car, found it with a tree crashed through the middle. His family couldn't help remarking that his grandmother and his mother had the car for years without even a scratch, whereas immediately it came into his possession a tree fell on it! At lunchtime, some of the bursars who come from outer London, had their first hot meal and hot drinks. During the weeks that followed the only hot food they had was in the college canteen. We went to evening classes during this time and, there also, some of the members had been without hot food and drink and enjoyed the facilities of Lamorbey Adult Education Centre even more than they normally did.

At a time like this odd items that we have taken for granted come to the surface. For instance, we now realise why Sevenoaks called Sevenoaks. The ancient name - Seovenaca - was derived from seven oak trees which stood outside the town. Six were lost in the storm. We also took our dogs for their walkies in Oxleas Woods only to get completely lost - all the paths had changed direction or had no direction at all - and we had to rely on our dogs to get us out again!

Mary and Eric Percival, Valliers Wood Road, Sidcup.



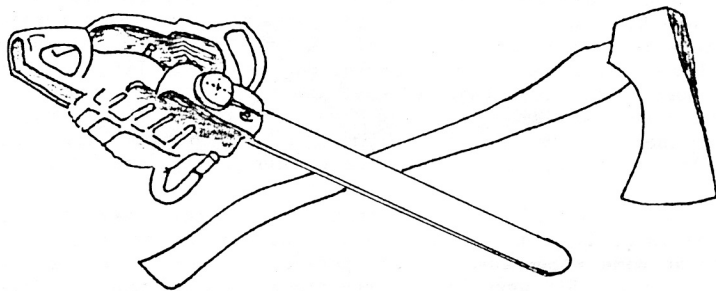
### The Great Storm

The weather forecast that evening hadn't been particularly interesting, perhaps strong winds but certainly no more than that, so I was surprised to be woken in the early hours of Friday the 16th of October, 1987 by what seemed an extremely strong gale and getting stronger by the minute. Facing fairly open country we feel the elements on the front of the house and this was certainly whipping around it. Always being inquisitive as to what is happening outside, I was soon out of bed and looking on the front garden I was surprised to see the forsythia and other bushes being bent double with the force of the wind and their branches touching the ground. Anything loose was caught up and whipped along the road as the wind became a noisy, rather unpleasant scream. When I went downstairs it roared down the chimneys making it seem more unpleasant than upstairs. Would it take the roof off or cause a chimney stack to crash down, one wondered? I thought of opening the back door to see what it was like outside but decided against it. I might not get it shut again and there was always the danger from loose tiles etc.

After about two hours the wind subsided and then suddenly all the street lights went out and there was total darkness. This was somewhat unnerving, something very serious must have occurred to cause this. As morning came and we found we were still without electricity we heard that hundreds of power lines were down and public services such as transport, power and communications were disrupted. Schools were closed because of damage and many people had to be rehoused. Roads were blocked by fallen trees and debris, but I didn't know anything of this when I went down the garden to see what damage we had received. I came back into the house and said to my husband, with a melodramatic sob in my voice, "Oh, it's awful, the plum tree is bent over and the apple has great boughs lying on the ground." He looked at me with surprise, not being used to seeing me weep over the environment! Little did I know that most of my neighbours had trees blown down, tiles off the roofs, fences down and out in the countryside large oaks and elms were lying on their sides with the whole area of root pulled out and exposed, or with their great branches slashed off. The hurricane seemed to have swathed through a corridor of countryside and here the loss of fine trees was particularly sad. There was much damage but fortunately very few deaths.

This was a night I will remember - the night southern England was hit by a real hurricane. I'm glad I didn't miss it.

Margaret White, Barton Road, North Cray.



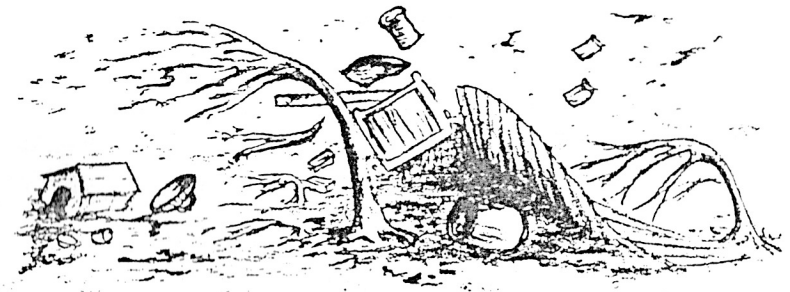
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I awoke in the early hours and realised the wind was too loud. I looked out of the bedroom window and saw next door's conifers lying flat across our garden. The dividing fence had disintegrated and appeared to be scattered across gardens. I turned on the light and five minutes later the power went. At about 4 a.m. my son telephoned from his third floor flat overlooking Fanny-on-the-Hill in Welling to say that he had no light, the water was being sucked from the toilet cistern and he could hear tiles being ripped from the roof. I was to receive no more telephone calls for forty eight hours as shortly after this our lines came down. However, my son did receive a telephone call immediately after speaking to me telling him to report to work in the City. His journey between 4.30 a.m. and 5.00 a.m. involved his driving with road signs being blown into his windscreen; negotiating a darkened Blackwall Tunnel and realising just how many trees there were in central London, about half of which seemed to have blown down. He arrived at work to find that the emergency generators, which were charged to provide emergency power to the major communications networks of the stock market, had burnt out due to the violent voltage fluctuations. It was only later we realised the enormous efforts the electricity supply industry had been making to keep control in this violent situation until, ultimately, the lines feeding London all failed, resulting in a total blackout.

The wind had abated by about 8 a.m. and the people of Orchard Close, Bexleyheath were out examining the damage to homes and cars. There were plenty of tiles scattered about, but fortunately although we had lost part of our garage roof, there was no damage to the roof of the house. As we walked to my mother's in Elsa Road, Welling to see how she had fared, we noticed how the force of the 'hurricane' seemed to have formed paths of damage. In some places substantial brick walls were down, whereas in other places wooden fences were standing. Few people went to work that day. The line was blocked at Bexleyheath, and most people were glad of the opportunity to stay at home, trace dustbins and fences, and search for builders. With reputable builders overloaded with work, it gave an opportunity for every 'cowboy' in the district to offer building services at exorbitant prices.

Although we all made our own running repairs to property, the impact of that morning will last for many years. Everyone is saddened by the damage to our local parks and woods, and later in the year our own usual holiday to East Anglia revealed areas of devastation. Of course we had seen it all on television, but to actually witness empty space where we were used to seeing gothic arches formed by elm trees means that we have suffered a loss which will never be replaced in our lifetime.

Jane Woods, Orchard Close, Bexleyheath.



### Illustrations

- Preface: Maple Crescent, Sidcup.(I.M.)  
Page 6: Looking down the Lime avenue in Footscray Meadows.(J.M.)  
Page 7: The Glade from Halfway Street.(F.I.O.)  
Page 9: Across the Cray above Five Arches.(J.M.)  
Page 10: North Cray and Footscray Meadows.(P.N.)  
Page 12: Woolwich Road, Belvedere.(M.G.)

The remaining drawings are original.

### Acknowledgements

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