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# Isle of Wight County Press

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# AMOUNTS MILLIONS

**Sea fury as winds gust at force 15**

## Homes gutted in damage trail

**WITH DAMAGE** running into millions of pounds in the Island, local authorities believe it could take months before things are back to normal after the devastating hurricane force winds. The county was among the worst places in Southern England to feel the smashing force of gales topping 100 mph, leaving a trail of disaster which included the devastation of Shanklin Pier.

As 999 calls began swamping switchboards in the small hours last Friday emergency services were kept at full stretch, and at 2.30 am County Hall staff set up an operations nerve centre to co-ordinate efforts.

Working in conjunction with other authorities, the control office alerted council workmen at 4.30 am to be available for a dawn start at 6 am, and two specialist contractors were on the roads even earlier.

In charge of the operations room, Mr. R. McInnes, principal engineer for roads maintenance, and Mr. R. Draper, highways maintenance engineer, were staggered at the scale of the damage.

Mr. McInnes told the County Press: "By 8 am there were reports of 180 trees across highways, and by noon this had increased to around 300."

"To make things even worse, we lost contact with our mobile units because of a total break in communication between 9 am and 11 am through aerial trouble."

However, with the help of the Southern Water Authority, who established a link via their St. John's Road premises in Newport and also provided mobile control vans, County Hall were able to re-establish communication.

**EARLY START**

During the morning 80 council workmen, 30 transport drivers and 11 firms of contractors were at full stretch.

By making such an early start they had cleared enough of the tangle to open routes between the main centres of population by mid-morning, with police helping to direct diversions.

At the peak of the storm some 200 roads were fully or partially closed by trees and debris, and in some places — notably Church Street, Ventnor — damaged buildings made it necessary to close streets to traffic.

The more spectacular sites included Victoria Avenue, Shanklin, with 20 large specimens straddling the road and garden walls, the Underhill Drive, Apseham Cutting on the Middle Road between Newport and Calbourne, Calthorpe Road, Ryde, and the Nettlesome area.

Mr. McInnes went on: "By Friday night we had reduced the number of blocked roads to fewer than 100 and by Saturday evening to below 20."

**WITHOUT BREAK**

"Much of the work was tough and ready — we cut through main trunks and pushed them aside to make a way through, then came back later to do a complete job."

Because of a profusion of electric cables festooning shattered branches, some of them Southern Electricity power lines and others British Telecom installations, no work could continue after dark.

The SEB seconded an engineer to the department to help with operations and co-ordinate power cut-offs to provide safe working areas.

Highways operations continued throughout the weekend without a break in daylight hours and are still in progress, with the Underhill Drive proving the biggest job of all.

As this work goes on, a survey of traffic signs and street light damage is being undertaken for the preparation of a repairs plan expected to last several weeks.

**PRIORITY**

Priority will be given to instances where large trees have uprooted footpaths and damaged walls and fences.

Mr. P. Richardson, county surveyor, explained: "It is inevitable that the public will be querying liability for damage to their properties from fallen trees and debris, which will be another job for County Hall to assess."

"A number of lessons have been learned which will form the basis of reports to committees."

"The very fortunate timing of the storm, when people were not travelling, resulted in an effort to get property rather than loss of life or injury."

He paid tribute to the efforts of everyone connected with the highways operations for "an extraordinarily well done job."

Holidaymakers at the Mountfield Holiday Park, Norton Green, Freshwater,

residential and mobile vans badly damaged and a replacement and repairs bill expected to reach £30,000 to £40,000.

Mrs. J. Jones, who with her husband, David, owns the 81-van site, said: "The crashing started at about 2.30 am as oak trees began falling."

With two greenhouses blown down and three more badly damaged, Mr. John Ralph, owner of Ralph's Garden Centre, Watergate Road, Newport, retrieves a pane of glass from a pathside — but thousands more lie shattered. Pictured with him at the start of a clearing-up operation is an employee, Mr. John Reynolds.

**SEEKING AID**

MR. BARRY FIELD, MP, has been making approaches at Ministerial level in an effort to get Government aid for the Island.

The IW Conservative Office in Newport thought he might also make further efforts with the assembly of Parliament on Wednesday, possibly by raising the matter in the House.

He is also to launch an appeal for money to provide saplings to replace trees which were destroyed in public places.

Local businesses will be approached for donations, and organisations will be invited to hold fund-raising functions.

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**Pier wrecked but new plans may go ahead**

**TORN APART** by the hurricane, this is what Shanklin's Victorian pier looks like today. Under the water lies the theatre. The amusement arcade has been blown away. Along the beach the roaring winds scattered tons of debris from the shattered 1,200ft. structure. More drifted out across the bay.

But the £4½ million redevelopment plan for the 93-year-old pier put forward by owners Leading Leisure to South Wight Borough Council only days before the disaster could still go ahead.

"The bigger part of our scheme involves the landward end which is still standing," pointed out Mr. S. Tegg, managing director of the Southampton company's leisure and entertainments division.

Proposals for this section include a new amusement arcade, a flume ride, disco, fast food area, cafeteria and bar, with a seafront foyers to a multi-storey car park and block of flats.

But he stressed that until a thorough assessment had been carried out on the stricken pier, no decision could be made. (Report page two).

By dawn ten of the caravans had suffered a similar fate and were virtually written off, with others damaged less seriously.

Some of the visitors had to be moved to bed and breakfast accommodation. Then the partners, Mr. and Mrs. J. Roberts and their son, Paul, began assessing the damage.

"It was unbelievable, like a tornado," said Mr. Paul Roberts, "sixty-foot fir trees and an oak were completely uprooted... quite shattering."

Mrs. Roberts said the cost of replacing each van would be about £4,000.

"We have 40 caravans and chalets, so this gale has affected a very substantial part of our business," she commented.

"Our park looks as if a bomb has hit."

Almost a carbon copy disaster struck the Waverley Caravan Park at Old Road in East Cowes, with a dozen



THIRTEEN people were taken to island hospitals with minor injuries and shock caused by the gales, reported County Hall.

Between midnight last Thursday and 10 am last Friday ambulances were called out eight times, although not all to storm incidents.

Mr. M. Dennes, deputy chief officer, told the County Press: "One of the calls was to an elderly woman in Love Lane, Bembrige, but when the ambulance men returned to their vehicle with her, they found that one tree had fallen in front of it and another behind."

"The vehicle was trapped until local firemen came and dragged the trees clear. Then they accompanied it all the way to hospital at Ryde."

"It took one-and-a-half hours to get there, stopping repeatedly while firemen cleared the roads — a marvellous effort on their part."



**Stop Press**

**WOMAN'S BODY FOUND: MAN QUESTIONED**

ISLAND police set up an investigation into a possible murder at Ryde yesterday after the death of a middle-aged woman whose name was not disclosed.

They were called to a house in Reed Street, Oakfield, where the woman's body was found.

As the CP went to press a man was helping police officers with their inquiries at the Newport headquarters.

Detective Chief Inspector Paul Nicklin, head of the island's CID, took charge of investigations at the scene.

Firemen dealt with 260 emergency calls during and after the storm, many — like this one at Pound Head Road, Ryde — to clear trees from rooftops before covering the gaping holes with canyas.

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