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report

## A DEVON DISASTER

Some of the worst floods Devon had ever experienced took place in August 1952. The first two weeks of the month had been unusually wet with a record rainfall. Exmoor, the large area of moorland above the small seaport of Lynmouth, had taken as much water as it could hold. The whole area was soaked to saturation point.

Two streams running down from Exmoor, the East Lyn and the West Lyn, meet at Lynmouth. They join and run as one stream into the harbour and out into the sea. With the amount of rain falling, these streams quickly became flooded and were in danger of bursting their banks.

The town of Lynmouth was at its busiest and full of holidaymakers. These holidaymakers and the people of Lynmouth were in for the most terrifying night of their lives.

On the evening of 15th August at about 8.30pm, the rainfall became torrential and an exceptionally fierce thunderstorm developed. The sky became so black that lights had to be put on in the village.

As darkness fell, the stream became a raging torrent and at 9 o'clock the lights failed. In complete darkness, except for the light of flickering candles, the people could hear the roar of the flood and the crashing of houses as they fell and were swept away. All the boats in the harbour were smashed or washed out to sea. The harbour wall and its tower vanished. Trees, bridges and rocks weighing as much as 30 tonnes, animals and people were all washed away.

Furniture and motor cars were smashed to pieces and carried out to sea.

When morning came, the rain had stopped and the survivors went out to look at the damage. The streets were filled with the debris of the flood. Huge boulders of rock, fallen trees and the twisted remains of cars and furniture made the streets impassable. Thirty-four people had died and many were lost at sea. Six bridges had been smashed, 93

houses flattened or so badly damaged as to be

useless, and 132 motor cars had been carried away to sea.

Over 114 000 tonnes of debris had to be moved to restore order. Plans had to be made and work carried out to put right the damage and make sure that such a flood could never happen again. The work cost almost a million pounds, but this did not take into account the personal cost to the people of Lynmouth who had lost family members, homes and possessions. The whole country had a powerful reminder of the force of nature and the havoc it can wreak.



Continued on p115