

1953 - Tidal flooding in the Thames estuary & Canvey Island

On 31st January 1953 three elements were linked in a fateful combination. It was the night of a spring tide, a deep atmospheric low pressure over the North Sea had been raising water levels, and northerly gales were driving water down the coast.

As it funneled into the narrower areas of the North Sea between England and Holland, water levels grew higher. At its peak the surge was 2.5 metres above the high spring tide level. This was more than the defences at the time could stand and spelled disaster.

Along the East Coast, over 300 people died, 24,500 houses were damaged and over 30,000 people were evacuated.

Outside the towns and villages, thousands of animals were drowned and great tracts of farmland were made infertile by the salt water.

All of Canvey Island lies in the tidal flood plain. The population of over 11,000 had just one bridge linking the Island to the mainland. Most of the homes were bungalows.

Shortly after midnight the defences were overwhelmed, and very rapidly the island was underwater. By the following morning every single house had been evacuated, and event had claimed 58 lives.



Surge moves down the East Coast towards the Thames estuary



Surge tide approaches the Thames estuary



Surge tide enters the Thames estuary

