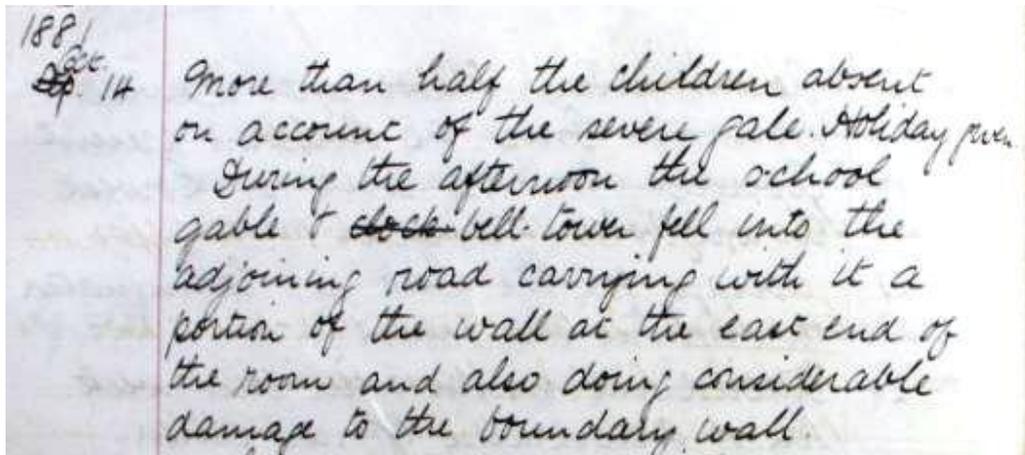


The Gale of October 1881

There have been some unusual weather conditions in recent years but they are not unprecedented.

For example, the headmaster of St Helen's School (Mixed) made this entry in the school logbook for 14 October 1881.



'More than half the children absent on account of the severe gale. Holiday given. During the afternoon the school gable & bell-tower fell into the adjoining road carrying with it a portion of the wall at the east end of the room and also doing considerable damage to the boundary wall.'

On 22 December of the same year Rev. C.W. Harvey, M.A., E.M.S. read a paper titled 'The Gale of the 14th of October, 1881, and its Effects in Hertfordshire' to a meeting of The Hertfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club.

He opened the paper with the statement that 'From a meteorological point of view the year 1881 may most decidedly be regarded as an "annus mirabilis". He cited three examples:

1. On Tuesday January 18, in the South of England, there was an 'easterly gale and heavy snowstorm which for two or three days impeded, and in many cases, stopped, all traffic by road and rail.'
2. A heatwave on Friday July 15 produced temperatures of 97° in Greenwich, 101° in Alton, Hants, and 91° in Watford.
3. On Friday October 14, the 'British Isles was visited by a terrific gale' which blew from west to east from about 7.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.

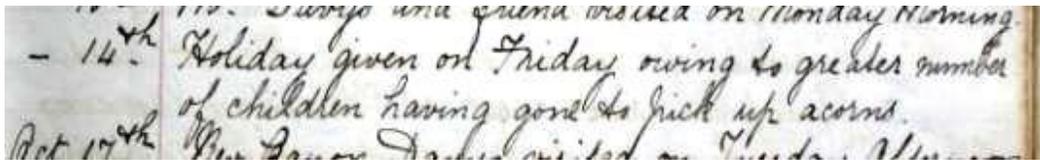
Rev. Harvey described the impact of the gale on 17 districts in Hertfordshire, including Wheathampstead.

District IX. WHEATHAMPSTEAD.—Great fears were at one time entertained for the church spire; its injuries, however, only amounted to the lead being torn off and hurled on to the roofs below to their considerable damage. The most serious calamity occurred about 3.30 p.m., when the bell-turret of the National Schools, a massive stone structure erected in 1862, was simply torn from its position and hurled bodily into the road below. Happily no injury was done to life or limb, the weather being such that the school was closed for the day.

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(Transactions of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club
Vol. II, Part I, August 1882, pp.17-24, from <https://www.hnhs.org/>)

The headmistress of St Helen's (Infants) School was more matter-of-fact about the whole affair.



A photograph of a handwritten note on aged paper, likely from a school ledger. The text is written in cursive and reads: '- 14 - Holiday given on Friday owing to greater number of children having gone to pick up acorns.' There are some faint markings and other text visible in the background of the paper.

Holiday given on Friday owing to greater number of children having gone to pick up acorns.

It seems reasonable to assume that the acorns, which would have been gathered as feed for pigs, were blown down in the gale.