

2 Rose Cottages, 20, Barnham Road

Chris and Sally Eldridge Flooding Memories 30th December 1993

We returned from visiting Sally's parents on the Isle of Wight over the Christmas period and had no real inkling of how the day would unfold into such a nightmare for us and many other residents in Barnham.

Although we had lived in Barnham since 1975, we hadn't really understood the real threat that flooding in Barnham posed for ourselves or others. The fact that it had rained heavily on that day didn't really ring any alarm bells for us. It wasn't until mid-afternoon that we started to realise that flooding may affect us. The rife was high, but even then we were not unduly concerned because we had known it to be high previously with no consequences. However, this was to be a very different outcome for ourselves and many others.

As the afternoon wore on, the rife continued to rise very rapidly and breached the dwarf wall and began to flood the road and the car park and extend to all the back gardens of Rose Cottages. We had no sandbags to try and prevent ingress into the house via vents and doorways. Our lowest vent was the airway for the boiler which we tried to block up with timber and earth, but this failed and that was the first point of entry into the house.

After this point the battle of prevention had been lost and the water inside the house began to rise rapidly. We took a few items that we could carry upstairs, and shoved the kids' pyjamas in a bag and made a decision to leave because we did not know how high the water would get.

I switched off the electricity at the mains and got the kids ready to go and I opened the front door which allowed more water in. We then all waded out of the house towards dry ground outside of the Barnham Hotel, wet but safe.

John and Jane Donabie were kind enough to put us all up for the night, so we took the kids to their house to get dry and warm and then returned a little later. By this time the RNLI had arrived with their inflatable dinghy to assist in rescuing people. They were concerned about our neighbour Miss Collins, so Sally went in the dinghy with them to see if she was at home. As it thankfully turned out, she had already left earlier in the day with her landlord.

Sally then reminded me that we had two guinea pigs in the shed, so I waded back into the water in the back garden (which by this time was waist deep) to rescue them. Thankfully the hutch was on a bench so the water had not reached them. I was able to get them out and wade back to Sally with the guinea pigs safe and sound. Sadly two days later they both died, probably through shock.

Our car, which was parked outside the house, was also semi-submerged, so that was also a worry for us as that left us with no transport.

Unable to do anything more, we went back to the Donabie's for a hot meal and hoped things would look better in the morning.

When we did return in the morning, it was a very pleasant surprise to see that all the water had gone, but the relief of seeing that was soon gone when we opened the front door to see the utter devastation that the flood water had left behind. Sally burst into tears. There was mud and slimy water everywhere, furniture was overturned, cupboard doors opened, belongings strewn all over the ground floor, an awful smell; the scene was something we never wanted to see or experience again.

We spent the next six months living at 6 Woodside, thanks to the kindness of Liz Spencer, before we were able to return to our home. Thankfully we were fully insured so we did not have that further worry on our shoulders.

The emergency services were brilliant as they always are and were wonderful both on the day, and clean up the next day. Also Jean Goad, our local councillor, was wonderful in assisting with the supply of skips to get rid of all the rubbish and arranging for Council Tax payment suspensions whilst we were out of our property.

We had local TV in the house the next day doing an interview with Sally, which was a great benefit because the cameraman's light was a Godsend in allowing the electrician (Pete Stares) to reconnect us to the mains.

It was an awful experience, for us and many others in Barnham, and hope that it is never repeated.

Chris and Sally Eldridge
October 2020