

Did you Know?

Disaster! 31 January 1953

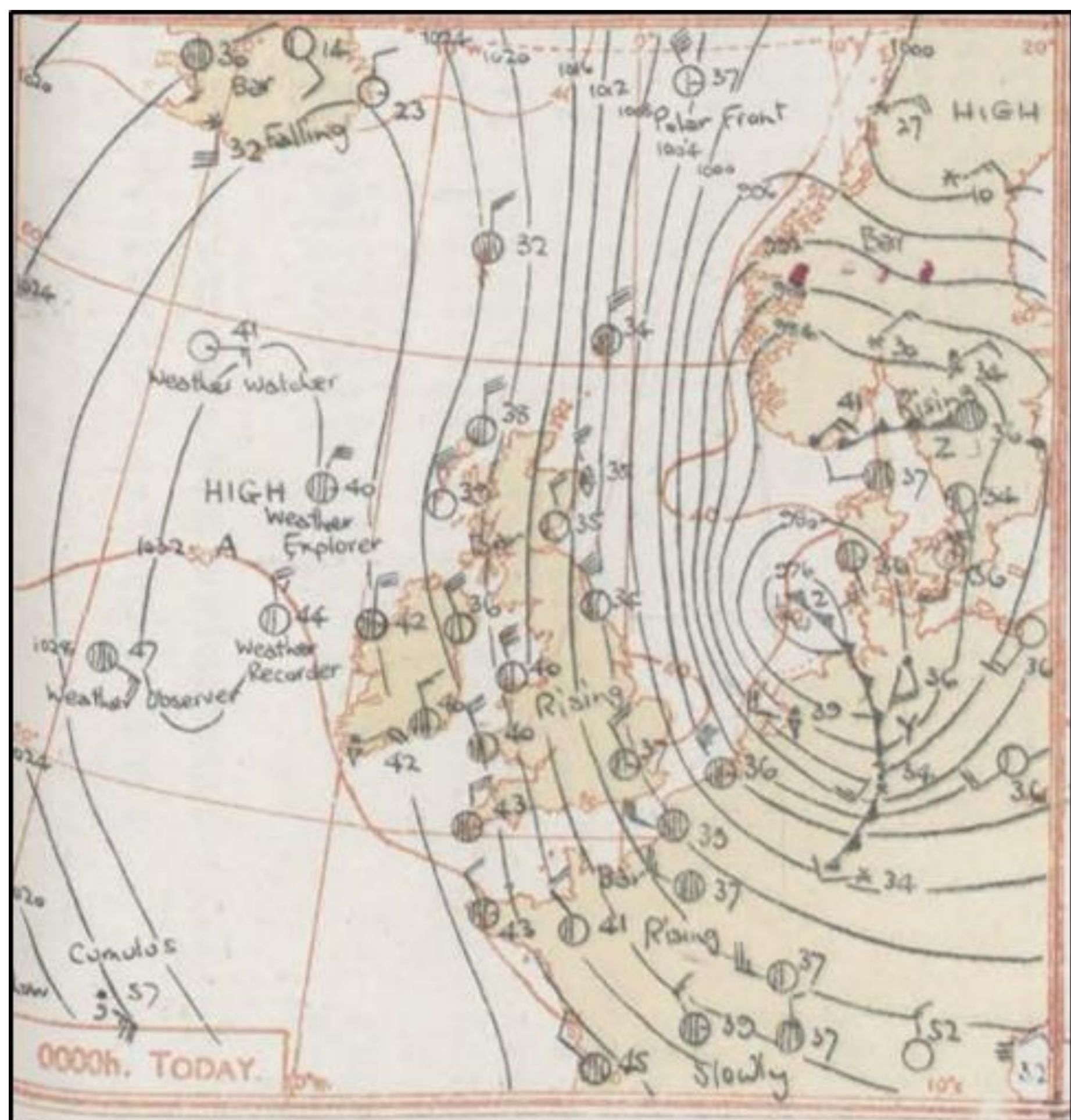
On this day 41 people died at Felixstowe, Suffolk when their homes in the West End area of the town were flooded. In Essex, Canvey Island was inundated, with the loss of 58 lives. Another 37 died when the seafront village of Jaywick near Clacton was flooded. In England, 307 people were killed in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Nineteen were killed in Scotland.

WHY?

A tidal surge raced down the East Coast into the southern North Sea, where it was exaggerated by the shallower waters.

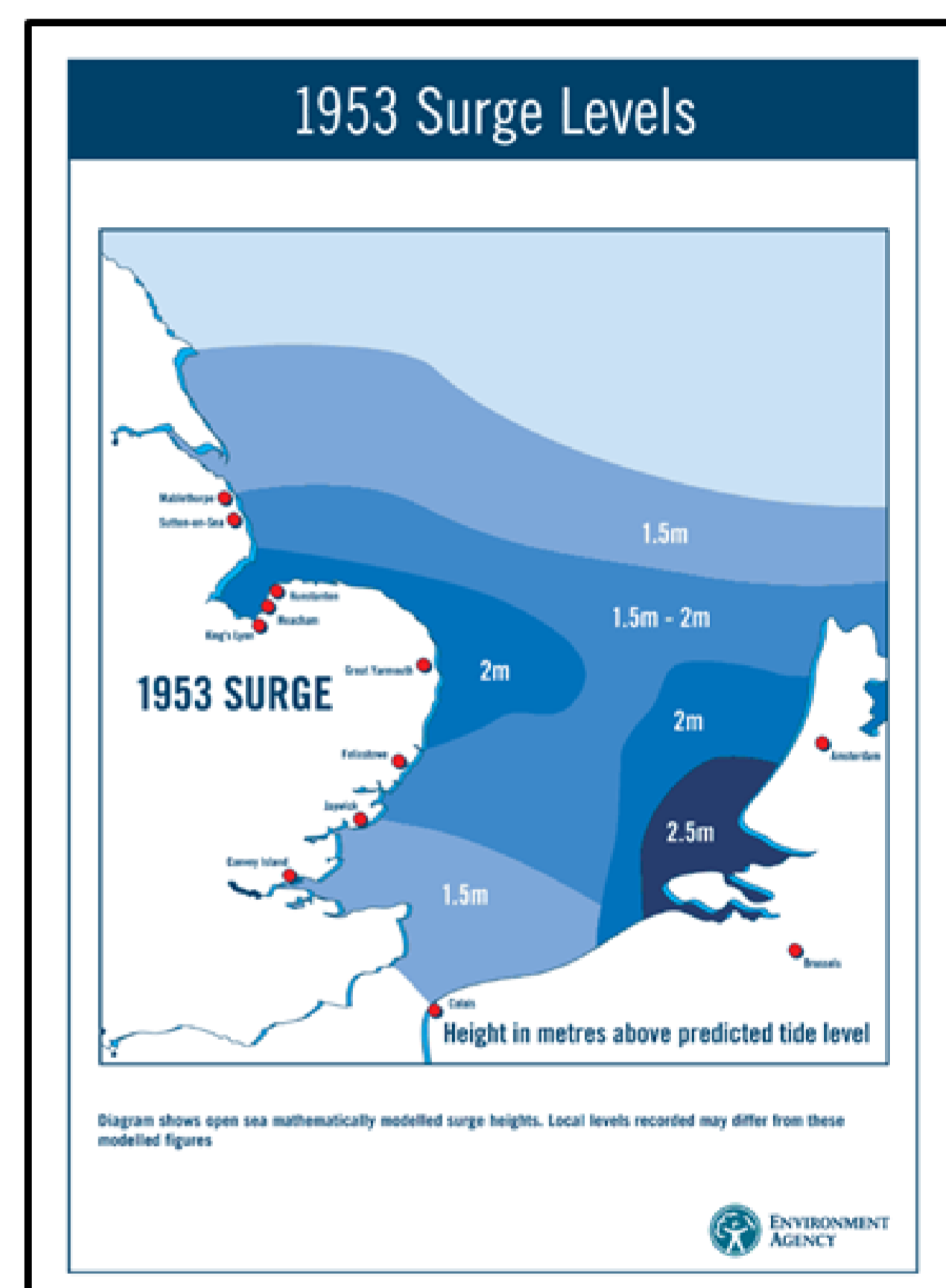
In the low-lying Netherlands the situation was even worse.

The Netherlands has 20% of its territory below mean sea level and 50% less than 1 metre (3.3 ft) above sea level and which relies heavily on sea defences. An estimated 1,836 people lost their lives, mostly in the southern province of Zeeland, and 100,000 more were evacuated. An estimated 30,000 animals drowned, and 47,300 buildings were damaged, of which 10,000 were destroyed. Twenty-eight people were killed in Belgium.



What happened?

A rapidly moving deep **LOW PRESSURE** system over the North Sea allowed the water to rise and caused a strong storm surge - the largest ever recorded on the UK east coast.



Although not an especially deep system, it moved close to land and generated strong, sustained **north-westerly gales** which, along with **spring high tide** in the night of 31st January, made the storm surge worse. The combination of **wind, high tide, and low pressure system** led to a water level of more than 5.6 metres (18.4 ft) above mean sea level in some locations.

Did you Know?

Just outside The Longshed is a Dutch barge called *Twee Gebroeders*



It shares its name with a ship famed in the folklore of the Netherlands



The Schielands High Sea Dyke along the River Hollandsche IJssel was all that protected three million people in the provinces of South and North Holland from flooding in January 1953.

A section of this dyke, known as the Groenendijk, was not reinforced with stone. The water level was just below the crest and the seaward slope was weakened.

Volunteers worked to reinforce this stretch, but the Groenendijk began to collapse under the pressure around 5:30 am in the early morning of 1 February 1953. Seawater flooded into the deep polder. In desperation, the mayor of Nieuwerkerk commandeered the river ship *de Twee Gebroeders* (*The Two Brothers*) and ordered

Captain Arie Evegroen to plug the hole in the dyke by driving his ship into it. The mayor's plan was successful, as the ship was lodged firmly into the dyke reinforcing it against failure and saving many lives. The ship was recovered after the dyke was restored and there is a sculpture called *A Narrow Escape* at the Groendijk to recall the events.

The story of the Dutch boy plugging the dyke to save the town had its real-life hero in Captain Evegroen.