

## Background and Context

During the afternoon of Monday 16 August 2004, heavy rainfall in north Cornwall caused a flash flood in the village of Boscastle on the north Cornwall coast, within North Cornwall District Council's area of responsibility.

The first rainfall was recorded above Boscastle at about 12.30 p.m., with heavy rainfall over a concentrated area.

It is estimated that over 1,400 million litres of rain fell in just two hours.

The River Valency, which runs through the centre of the small village, quickly became a torrent and overflowed. An estimated three-metre depth of water poured through the village, washing away cars, trapping residents and tourists and leading to a major rescue operation.

Some 20 Grade II listed buildings were affected to varying degrees.

## How the Topic was Handled

Overall co-ordination of the emergency services and statutory authorities by North Cornwall District Council (NCDC) was successful, and the input and sensitivity of individual emergency services was excellent.

Initially, however, it was difficult for the National Trust (NT) to contribute to the process in the first 24 hours. The Environment Agency and NCDC moved in quickly with heavy clearance equipment, possibly with little sensitivity for historic elements or materials salvage.

In the initial stages, access for NT staff to the harbour and to NT properties was denied for what was felt to be too long. Relatively quickly, however, the NT's direct labour force were able to help and speed up the recovery process.

English Heritage was encouraged to give appropriate advice to residents who owned listed properties damaged by the flood.

A direct line telephone number to the Local Authority's consultant historic building advisor was published.

## Lessons Identified

- There was a need for someone to be dedicated to "natural/historic environment" issues involved in Cornwall County Council / NCDC emergency planning at very outset, not 1 or 2 days later – especially given Boscastle's Conservation Area status.
- Emergency Planners need to be fully aware of the NT's potential for support and input – at District and County levels.
- Liaison with press departments of other involved organisations is essential at the earliest possible stage, to ensure appropriate media profile, and to influence external messages.
- The importance of keeping a detailed diary to record key events and decisions, as they happen.

- The need to reconsider some of the unsustainable practices of the recent past, such as locating a hard surface car park within the flood plain.
- The importance of existing local knowledge/community contacts, etc, proved extremely useful.

## Contacts for Further Information

Preventative Conservation Adviser (Technical)  
National Trust  
Tel: 01793 817771  
Website: [National Trust](#) [External website]

[North Cornwall District Council](#) [External website]

[English Heritage](#) [External website]

## Additional Documents

[Multi-Agency Lessons Identified Report - Major Flooding at Boscastle and Surrounding Areas of North Cornwall, 16 August 2004](#) [PDF]