

Note 1: The May to October 1257 super volcano impact, reflected in Contemporary English weather accounts. Had the climate already showed a downturn prior to its eruption?

“1255/6 A great gale and rain the whole winter from the feast of all saints until Whitsun-this is likely to refer to Nov 1st 1255 to June 4th 1256

1256 severe thunderstorms July 25 gales on Oct 5th and Oct 26th which was unprecedented overturned houses and shook down stones. Possibly mirrors a great storm from Oct 26th 1254

Another thunderstorm on Nov 16th and on Dec 28th, this latter one was very severe with much flooding it was accompanied by a fierce whirlwind. ‘the thunder sounded a sad prophecy for it was in the middle of winter and the cold was more like that of February. Unsettled weather then lasted for three months.’

1257 From the first day of February until the first of May the whole of England was turned into a bog and a quagmire by the turbulent winds and the foul storms. Excessive rains in summer with much flooding, destruction and loss of hay. Another chronicler noted that before the octave of St Benedict (during Lent) there commenced such floods of rain that the earth was drowned, bridges, houses and mills borne away, roads made impassable. Probably lasted until August as some crops were saved.

Mathew Paris notes; ‘the past year was sterile and meagre, whatever was growing was choked by the floods of Autumn for there was neither a temperate nor a serene day, nor was even the surface of the lakes hardened up by the frost as is usual, nor were icicles hanging, but there were continued inundations of rain until the purification of the blessed virgin.’

1258 The serene air of autumn (1257) and its temperateness continued until the end of January, so that nowhere and at no time was the surface of the water frozen up. But from that time to the end of March the north wind continually blew. Frost, snow and intolerable cold prevailed, the face of the earth was bound up, cultivation was suspended and young cattle were killed.

The north wind blew continually, when April, May and the principal part of June had passed the flowers of plants had scarcely germinated.

Great tempest of flooding rain, snow, ice, thunder and lighting on the 12th of June causing great flooding on the River Severn around Bristol and Shrewsbury. Much loss of life.

General scarcity and expense of wheat due to inundations of previous year. In 1258 Autumn crops nearly rotted by Autumn rain. Very late and tedious Autumn on account of the continual and persistent rains.

Matthew Paris notes; ‘now this past year was very dissimilar to all previous years, that is it was unhealthy and mortal stormy and exceedingly rainy, so much so that although in summer time the harvest seemed promising, by the time of autumn continual heavy rains choked the crops.’

Another chronicler remarked of 1258

“ Almost continual rains up to 15th Nov. This caused a very late harvest. There was as a result of this cold wet year an ‘appalling famine’ probably the worst in English history. 20000 people starved to death in London alone and people even ate the bark off trees in the forests (John de Oxendes -Anglo Saxon chronicles, 1859 edition)

However as can be seen, the records for England illustrate that very poor conditions are noted in many of the six years before the eruption and ceased around a year after, as recorded here;

In 1259 everything grew in moderate abundance and the dry weather presented an unexpected sufficiency.
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Undoubtedly 1258, was terrible, but it was accompanied by lurid sunsets and unpleasant fumes, which were partly a source of Paris' comment about it being like no other year because, as he himself observes, there was atrocious weather before this volcanic event. So it is likely the volcanic eruption accentuated the already poor weather, rather than necessarily caused it