

GALES AND FLOODS POUND SOUTH COAST

Britain's South Coast takes a pounding as, whipped by a fierce February gale, the Channel turns on its wildest face.

The gale pounces on shipping off the East Coast. Near Berwick, the Norwegian motor ship RASK is swept onto the rocks at Scremerston Point and wrecked. Coastguards and fishermen brought the 14-man crew to safety by breeches buoy. The sea claims the ship's cargo - mostly timber.

Further South a breach in the River Medway (caused by heavy rain) brings the sea to the garden of England. The fast-flowing water threatens widespread areas around Maidstone. The South Coast's premier port - Southampton - is also hit. The liner WASHINGTON is holed below the waterline when, caught at the height of the storm, she is driven against the quayside. All along the coast, the gale leaves in its wake much damage to valuable property. Tons of shingle litter the storm-swept promenades.

Near Folkestone, ancient Sandgate Castle succumbs to the invasion from the sea. Battered by successive storms, the 16th century bastion is reduced to rubble on the beach. The keep lies open to the next attack, as the South Coast prepares to meet another edition of the sea's wintry blast.