Hunston cut off by snow

December 1962 through to March 1963 was known as the 'Big Freeze of 63', snow started falling on Boxing Day 1962 at about 8pm in the evening until around midday the next morning. Because the two feet of snow arrived over the Christmas holiday period the roads were not cleared and Hunston became completely cut off. It became a very festive time with lots of children enjoying the first truly white Christmas they had experienced, with many improvised sledges made from dinner trays or even scrap car doors, the only 'Hill' of significance being Chichester road at the north end of the village which quickly became a polished surface of ice.



The Spotted Cow – January 1962

The canal completely froze over and within two days the ice was about 6 inches thick and it was possible to walk from Chichester or Birdham on the ice surface. Some tried ice skating or even ice cycling, lots of fun for humans and dogs but not for the birds, in particular the ducks and swans had a hard time crash

landing and skidding on the ice but their food source was covered over. The ducks occupied the boat house by Reid's Bridge as the water was not frozen and it was a safe roost away from the bitter freezing winds, the residents of Swan cottage took to feeding the water fowl that congregated there.



The Central Stores Post Office – January 1963

Two days before the New Year the weather turned for the worse with severe blizzard conditions over the entire south from Kent to Cornwall. The snow was driven by the easterly winds of up to 80 mph forming deep drifts up to six feet deep. The Church and Farm became inaccessible as Church Lane by the Rectory became filled with a snow drift to the top of hedgerow level. January 1963 was the coldest month of the twentieth century with average temperatures of -2 °C with peaks of -15°C at night. Myself with two friends walked to our junior school at Kingsham as there were no buses running. When we arrived we found we were the only three pupils as the school was closed, we were met by a reporter from the Portsmouth Evening News who took our photograph in front of the school gates before we walked back to Hunston. That evening our photograph was all over the front page of the paper with the subtitle 'School closed'. The school was closed because half the classrooms were temporary timber 'Nissen' huts that only had coal fired burners for heating, there were no coal deliveries so the classrooms were too cold.

February added to the bad conditions by another 36hr blizzard, this effectively undid all of the snow clearing that people had done by whipping up snow from surrounding fields and causing drifts with

further road blockages. Temperatures were still at record lows and many of the running streams were now freezing over and even water pipes that were buried two feet down became frozen solid.



Flooding after the thaw – March 1963

Then, just as quickly as it came, the freezing weather stopped in early March followed by a very rapid thaw. This in turn led to flooding in the whole area. The main road in front of the Spotted Cow became flooded when the roadside stream burst over on to the road.



Church Lane to Spire Cottage – March 1962

Similarly the snow in and around church lane rapidly melted and the lane effectively became a river from the main road to Spire Cottage.

About the author

Edward 'Ted' Read moved to Hunston when he was seven years old with his family on their return from Nigeria in June 1959. Ted's Father 'Ernie' Read was the village Postmaster from 1959 to 1964, he and his wife Mary lived in Frensham House. The Post Office was also known as 'Central Stores' and was a small grocery shop which was part of their house. The property and business were sold to a developer in 1964, the garage and adjoining garden were converted into the current post office that exists on the present site. Hunston residents in the early 1960s were still associated with many military sites in the area such as Tangmere, Thorny Island and Portsmouth. Ernie was the secretary of the local British Legion which held its meetings in the village hall, he was very modest about his service background but he was retired as RQMS from the Parachute regiment in 1946 in Palestine. He was a veteran and had fought in many war activities including battles in North Africa, Burma, Italy and Arnhem. At the wishes of his Dutch friends in the Arnhem Association his ashes were interned at Oosterbeek cemetery when he died in 1985. Ted now lives in Lymington and runs a small international business writing software and designing electronics.