

# Trawling for memories and responses to extreme weather events

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Snow storms, floods, droughts, heatwaves and hurricanes—all these can have a dramatic effect on our lives and generate a lot of different responses. Now a team of experts are hoping to piece together our responses to major weather events in the hope of understanding what works and what doesn't work in terms of adaptation.

Drawing on historical records and personal recollections the £1m British Climate Histories project, led by Professor Georgina Endfield from the School of Geography at The University of Nottingham, is hoping to explore how and why events like these have become inscribed into our cultural fabric.

With funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Professor Endfield, in collaboration with experts from the University of Liverpool, the University of Aberystwyth and the University of Glasgow,

will be turning the clock right back to the 1700s to trace how perceptions of risk, vulnerability and efforts to improve our resilience to [extreme weather events](#) have changed over time.

Professor Endfield said: "Major weather events are possibly the most interesting aspects of climate change. Through narrative, folklore, myth, legend and poetry—all these different kinds of media—we can learn a lot about what is happening to our weather and how we are affected by and respond to [extreme weather](#) events. We are interested in the way people remember things, and each person may remember the same event very differently, and how our lives might have changed as a result."

## **The British obsession**

The weather is a British obsession and because this obsession isn't new the project team knows there will be a lot of material to explore. Beginning with an exploration of historical archives—such as testimonies, amateur observations and diaries—they will then move onto instrumental weather records and oral histories. They will be talking to [communities](#) in selected case study areas to find out how extreme weather events are remembered and the way in which they have become embedded in the fabric of different communities.

Professor Endfield said: "Our research won't help us predict extreme events but it will give us a handle on the past to help us deal with events that we might experience in the future.

## **Getting communities involved**

The case study areas will be:

- North, west and south west Wales, specifically isolated rural

communities, small coastal communities, upland farming areas at risk from flooding, drought and extreme winters.

- Areas of East Anglia coast and northwest Scotland that have been identified as being at risk of flooding and storm events.
- Central England in areas considered to be vulnerable to flooding, water scarcity and drought
- Southwest England in places projected to suffer most acutely from storm events, flooding and heat waves.

## **Plundering rich archival collections**

Exploring the implications of unusual [weather events](#) for communities in each of these areas and through time will provide insight into the way geographical context, and changing cultural, socio-economic and political circumstances influence relative impacts and response. Some of the earliest instrumental weather diaries in the UK exist for particular locations within these areas and there are rich and diverse archival collections but these have yet to be investigated for climate history purposes.

The funding has come from the AHRC's 'Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past' theme. This theme provides researchers with the opportunity to generate new understandings of the relationship between the past and the future, and the challenges and opportunities of the present by looking into the past.

The team is hoping to create a publically accessible database of memories so people can tap into what has happened in their local community and how their lives may have changed as a result. The work will be completed in conjunction with the Royal Geographical Society (with the IBG), the Met Office (ACRE initiative based at the Hadley Centre) and English Heritage.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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