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## Spaces of experience and horizons of expectation: the implications of extreme weather events, past, present and future

Predicting the climate of the future and determining how different communities might be affected by and respond to climate change has become an issue of global importance. There is growing concern over the impacts of interannual climate variability and anomalous and 'extreme' weather events such as droughts, floods, storm events and unusually high or low temperatures. While social and economic systems have generally evolved to accommodate some deviations from 'normal' weather conditions, this is rarely true of extremes. For this reason, such events can have the greatest and most immediate social and economic impact of all climate changes.

Yet extreme weather events are as much social texts as material occurrences - as well as being biophysical events, they are also socially and culturally constructed and interpreted. Geographical context influences how individuals and communities experience the natural world. Different regional circumstances, particular physical conditions, an area's social and economic activities and embedded cultural knowledges, norms, values, practices and infrastructures all affect community experiences, reactions and responses to extreme weather. The impact of extreme weather may even vary between individuals, depending on a multitude of factors, which are in turn informed by cultural and historical experiences.

The way in which an extreme event is experienced and perceived determines whether it becomes inscribed into the memory of a community or an individual in the form of oral history, ideology, custom, behaviour, narrative, artefact, technological and physical adaptation, including adaptations to the working landscape and built environment. These different forms of remembering and recording the past represent central media through which information on past events is curated, recycled and transmitted across generations. In this regard, experience or awareness of unusual or extreme events can effectively condition how people comprehend and respond to the problems of risk and uncertainty with respect to the timing and impact of extreme events in the future.

The construction of regionally specific climatic histories and historical extreme weather events, and investigations of the memories of and responses to these events, must form a crucial component of any research that seeks to understand the nature of events that might take place in the future. These histories are also important if we are to be able to assess how different communities in different contexts might be affected by, comprehend and respond to future events. The purpose of the proposed project, therefore, is to examine the nature, timing and socio-economic and cultural consequences of, and responses to, climatic extremes in the UK. This will be achieved through a series of case study-based investigations across the UK and will cover an extended period between 1700 and the present. This study will employ a combination of archival investigation and oral history approaches in order to construct episodes of extreme weather and to explore whether and how these events affected the lives of local people and became inscribed into the cultural fabric and social memory of selected local communities within the case study regions. We will also explore how the recording of these events has changed overtime and is still changing.

The project will work in concert with a number of non academic partners whose roles necessitate an understanding of the history of extreme events and their cultural implications. Specifically we will collaborate with English Heritage and the Meteorological Office through their Atmospheric Circulation Reconstructions Over the Earth (ACRE) initiative. The project will help both institutions better appreciate the cultural implications of extreme weather in the regions and communities within which they operate and the ways in which they might anticipate future impacts in their work.