TEMPEST data

Quality Statement

Owing to the nature and volume of the data, it is to be expected that some errors in transcription and data input remain in the downloadable files. We advise users to interpret narratives with care, and to consult the original documents where the phrasing or dating is crucial to their research.

Data was extracted from original archival sources and entered into the database by the project team (comprising 8 individuals) through an online form (admin application) that had a number of required fields (document reference and repository, type, date, place and weather type), as well as other optional fields. Each member of the project team has entered data and this, as well as the refinement of our method and the database fields as time as progressed, means that there are inevitably some inconsistencies within the data entry. Errors are also to be expected given the volume of material, although summary views, automated and non-automated checks have helped to eliminate many of these.

The temporal distribution of the data is a product of the available data, the changing nature of weather record making and archiving as well as our own research method. For this reason, we would encourage caution in any attempt to use the database to determine any changes in the frequency of extreme weather events over time. In many cases the database contains multiple accounts of the same weather event but these have not been explicitly connected within the system – again this complicates any analysis of the temporal distribution.

Wherever possible exact dates for both the timing of weather events and the creation of source documents has been used, but there are many cases where only a partial date is available (the minimum required for an event to be included is a year). Defining the start and end dates of weather events has been difficult in some cases, particularly with periods of unusually hot, cold, wet, dry or stormy weather recorded within daily records (diaries), or with slow onset thermal events. Each team member has used his/her experience in making these judgements and although multiple, independent references to the same event in the system go some way to addressing this issue, we would encourage users to interpret the start and end dates as a guide only.

In order to achieve the change from the Julian to Gregorian calendar 11 days were omitted from the year 1752, i.e. the day after the 2 September 1752 was 14 September, in accordance with the Calendar Act of 1751. Until September 1752 the New Year began on 25 March (Lady Day) but dual dating was commonplace for many years before, adding a further layer of complication to events that took place from 1 January to 24 March, and making 1751 a short year running from 25 March to 31 December! Scotland had changed the start of the year to 1 January in 1600. Where clear, we have used the Gregorian calendar date, providing further details in the notes section.

As with dates, place references should be taken as a guide only, the potential for error arising from changing place names, boundaries and spellings, as well as mistakes or misinterpretation during transcription.

Users should be wary about the changing language of the weather over time and should keep searches as broad as possible, for example reference to a ‘hurricane of wind’ does not always suggest wind speeds of what we would today recognise as hurricane strength. Although archival research has been structured through a search for events perceived at their time of occurrence as ‘extreme’, when transcribing information from original documents a very broad interpretation has been employed, meaning that many of the events may not necessarily be truly ‘extreme’ in nature.

Lucy Veale and Georgina Endfield, August 2017