



Press Release
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18th century ships' logs predict weather forecast

150 years ago Charles Darwin's 'Origin of the Species' revolutionised how we view the natural world - now his voyages on HMS Beagle are influencing modern research on the evolution of our climate.

A ground-breaking partnership between JISC, the University of Sunderland, the Met Office Hadley Centre and the British Atmospheric Data Centre sees historical naval logbooks being used for the first time in research on climate change. The logbooks include famous voyages such as the Beagle, Cook's HMS Discovery and Parry's polar expedition in HMS Hecla.

The UK Colonial Registers and Royal Navy Logbooks (CORRAL) project has digitised nearly 300 ships' logbooks dating back to the 1760s. The accurate weather information they contain is being used to reconstruct past climate change – hitherto untapped scientific data.

Research team leader Dr Dennis Wheeler of the University of Sunderland comments: "The observations from the logbooks on wind force and weather are astonishingly good and often better than modern logbooks. Of course the sailors had to be conscientious – the thought that you could hit a reef was a great incentive to get your observations absolutely right!

"What happens in the oceans controls what happens in the atmosphere – so we absolutely need to comprehend the oceans to understand future weather patterns," he added.

Ships' logbooks were the main resource used to monitor the weather in the oceans. Officers on these ships kept careful records of the daily, and sometimes hourly, climate conditions. What that means today is modern researchers are able to find out what the weather was like anywhere in the world on a particular day.

Ben Showers, JISC digitisation programme manager, said: "There is a lack of high-quality digital material for those studying historic weather data. By making these logbooks and lighthouse records available online, from The National Archives and the Met Office respectively, JISC aims to help researchers address the challenges of climate change and open up this historic resource to everyone via the website.

"The Royal Navy logbooks online are an exciting part of JISC's £1.8 million investment in enriching digital resources, a set of 25 projects which enhances online content for better teaching, learning and research."

Oliver Morley, Director, Customer and Business Development at The National Archives agrees: "The logbooks have long been of interest to historians and naval enthusiasts and the fact that they are now being used for scientific research is a great example of how archival information created for one purpose can be reused for something entirely different".

The logbooks include great explorers such as, Bligh, Cook and Flinders, and give unique accounts of life on board ship with plenty of footnotes and personal observations about life on board and the places and people they encountered on their voyages of exploration. A fully searchable version of the logbooks will be available on [The National Archives' website](#) in 2010.

The researchers are now transcribing the officers' observations so they can begin work with the Met Office on analysing the data to feed into research on climate change.

To view the CORRAL project website go to: <http://www.corral.org.uk>. The logbook images are online at <http://badc.nerc.ac.uk/data/corral>.

Ends

JISC

The project is part of JISC's digitisation programme which has invested just under £2 million to develop the range and quality of digital resources available to students and researchers in colleges and universities. The project aims to do this by digitising collections and enhancing existing resources for use in learning, teaching and research.

JISC inspires UK colleges and universities in the innovative use of digital technologies, helping to maintain the UK's position as a global leader in education. www.jisc.ac.uk)

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University of Sunderland

Dr Dennis Wheeler won the Royal Meteorological Society's 2009 Jehudi Neumann Prize for his research into climate change. The University of Sunderland climatologist is internationally renowned for his groundbreaking research into how weather has changed over history.

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The National Archives

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<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline>

The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). As the official archives of the UK government, it cares for, makes available and 'brings alive' a vast collection of over 1000 years of historical records, including the treasured Domesday Book.

Not only safeguarding historical information, The National Archives also manages current digital information and devises new technological solutions for keeping government records readable now and in the future. It provides world class research facilities and expert advice, publishes all UK legislation and official publications, and is a leading advocate for the archive sector.

At the heart of information policy, The National Archives sets standards of best practice that actively promotes and encourages public access to, and the re-use of information, both online or onsite at Kew. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensures that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also www.opsi.gov.uk