

## **Climate and Weather: Science as Public Culture**

Conference at the Maison Française d'Oxford  
7 – 9 January 2013

### **Call for Papers**

This is the third conference in a series devoted to historical and contemporary perspectives on the communication of science and technology.

Climate and weather provide a particularly rich and challenging case study to complete the conference series. The climate sciences are characterised by complexity: in their professional networks; their conceptual models; and the logistics of their large-scale data and computing needs. Yet few modern scientific disciplines attract the same level of public engagement, in both everyday life and passionate debate on the future of the planet. Moreover, their status at the intersection of policy, scientific controversy and the public sphere is not a recent development: the same issues and fault lines ran through meteorology from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century onwards.

Shifting interests within the history of science and the development of environmental history have greatly expanded the field in recent years. The conference will provide an opportunity to reflect on these historiographical developments via a specific focus on the communication of weather and climate from the 18th to the 21st centuries. Papers are invited to address three themes in particular:

**Commodification of meteorological knowledge** - The recent period has been rich in new connections between meteorology and the market: weather derivatives and weather insurances to manage the 'cost' of weather, as well as wind mapping for the installation of wind farms and wind modelling for energy trading, among other things. Can we trace a long history of the nexus between meteorology and the economy broadly conceived? For instance: the study of price cycles, the anticipation of harvests, agricultural insurance for storms and gales, weather forecast for maritime companies, the selling of meteorological instruments, calendars and almanacs, the climate as a commodity in the context of the rise of tourism practices.

**Media** – The diversity and transformation of means to represent and present weather, from the central aggregation of dispersed data in numerical tables to innovative cartographical strategies, and from new broadcast media such as radio and television to the use of museums as venues for public communication, are key features. Special attention could be paid here to the public controversies raised by the gap between demands for reliable prediction (weather forecasts, climate simulations) and uncertainties in data and models.

**Historicizing climate history** – In relation to climate change, the history of climate and weather events is receiving increasing attention. However, the practices of collecting and assessing data concerning extreme seasons, meteorological disasters and atmospheric parameters (temperature, rainfall etc.) has a long history. These practices were widespread in the 18th century within the scholarly tradition of "chronology" and in the community of natural philosophy, and from the early 19th century onwards among historians, orientalists, natural historians and practitioners of the new

discipline of ‘climatology’. The conference will explore this long-term history of weather and climate reconstruction and history. Special attention will be paid to the construction of thermometric memory: in addition to the new media of registration, how was an instrumental regime created to assure the continuity of thermometric measures? What kind of architectural settings, gestural knowledge and instrumental protection allowed the comparability of measurement across time? How has public engagement with climate history developed and been negotiated?

Offers of papers should include a title and an abstract of up to 300 words, and be sent to Thomas Le Roux ([thomas.leroux@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:thomas.leroux@history.ox.ac.uk)) by 15 September 2012. The programme will be announced at the beginning of October 2012.

Funding for travel and accommodation will be available, in particular for doctoral students. The conference will last from Monday 7<sup>th</sup>, evening – with a reception at the Museum of the History of Science including a private view of the exhibition “Atmospheres: Investigating the Weather from Aristotle to Ozone”– to Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup>, beginning of the afternoon.

Organised by the Maison Française d’Oxford, in collaboration with the Museum of the History of Science, and with the support of the French Embassy, London.

### Organising Committee

Pietro Corsi, Oxford University  
Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, Imperial College, London  
Robert Fox, Oxford University  
Stephen Johnston, Museum of the History of Science, Oxford  
Muriel Le Roux, ENS/IHMC, Paris – Maison Française d’Oxford  
Thomas Le Roux, Maison Française d’Oxford  
Fabien Locher, CRH (CNRS/EHESS), Paris  
John Perkins, Oxford Brookes University  
Viviane Quirke, Oxford Brookes University

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