

DIGITISATION OF EARLY SCOTTISH DATA

A collection of Scottish records covering the period 1857-1913

In 1856 the Scottish Meteorological Society set up a network of stations to help in the 'investigation of the meteorology of Scotland'. Observations were taken daily, and the monthly returns were sent by the observers to the Society. The earlier forms are stored loosely in boxes but from 1866 these forms were bound together in a series of very large and cumbersome "Red Books", two for each year. Each book contains up to 12 monthly forms for 50-60 stations and each form contains a month's data for one station for common meteorological elements including temperature, pressure, wind, visibility, weather diary and humidity. From 1864 onwards, monthly summaries and reports based on the data were published in the Journal of the Scottish Meteorological Society, but these books are the only source of daily data. The forms were folded and sent through the post which means as well as the data some of the forms also contain stamps and postmarks which are very valuable.

Digitisation

In 2014 the National Meteorological Library & Archive committed significant funds to a project to digitise the forms and Red Book volumes before their transfer to the National Records of Scotland archives.

Digitisation provides much greater public access to the data through the Met Office digital library and archive whilst at the same time preserving the original content. The original order of the bound forms has been digitally preserved but in addition we have created an access version that is organised by station name rather than by volume giving easy access to station data across the whole period. The stations have been organised by the historic county names as existed at the time the forms were created.

The data contained in the books is unique and represents a valuable source of weather data for the period. Continued use was causing damage to the forms leading to loss of some data. Many of the forms are fragile and are particularly vulnerable along the lines of where they were folded for posting. This combined with the size and quantities of the forms in each book make them vulnerable to tearing when the pages are being turned. Because of their value, many of the stamps have been cut away from the forms with the loss of some data.

In addition to the Scottish stations which also included some lighthouses, the collection also contains returns from foreign stations including stations in Syria, Cyprus, Jerusalem and Iceland. Some Welsh, Isle of Man and English stations such as London and Kew are also included. Again, this is thought to be the only source of daily data and is therefore extremely valuable for research purposes.