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CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

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Our climate is changing. Nine of the ten warmest years in the UK have occurred since 2002; in Scotland the most recent decade (2008–2017) has been on average 4 per cent wetter than 1981–2010 and mean sea level around the UK has risen by about 16cm since the start of the 20th-century (<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/collaboration/ukcp> headline findings). The recently published UK Climate Projections (UKCP2018) provide the most up-to-date assessment of how the climate of the UK may change during the 21st-century, with warmer mean temperatures; hotter, drier summers; warmer, wetter winters and more frequent extreme weather being the continuing general trends. The outcome of these trends is wide ranging – rising sea levels, the migration and proliferation of pests, diseases and invasive species, the drying out and desiccation of soils, wild fires, flooding and more frequent storms – and all present significant challenges and impacts to the historic environment.

It is essential, therefore, that we learn to adapt to climate change in ways that increase our knowledge of the historic environment and increase our capacity to deal with the changes. There are benefits to be gained from this process, but our success in achieving these will be dictated by our ability to identify new ways of working. For example,

cross-sectoral working is being encouraged by governments; community groups are being supported to identify, record and interpret eroding archaeology in coastal locations; and pro-active maintenance of historic structures is being advocated.

It is encouraging to see a growing community of researchers, academics, professionals and enthusiasts talking about the historic environment and climate change, both within the UK and across the globe, for example through the growing Climate Heritage Network (<http://climateheritage.org/>). The following series of articles provides examples of the increasing amount of work now taking place in the UK. We start with a joint article setting the scene at government level in Wales, Scotland and England where heritage and climate change are devolved responsibilities, though all, together with Northern Ireland, continue to work in close collaboration. We follow with a series of articles showcasing different case studies and projects all aimed at increasing our knowledge of the historic environment and our capacity and resilience to deal with the impact of climate change on it.

The theme for this edition of *The Archaeologist* came from a session at ClfA2019 in Leeds, ‘Adapting to climate change – how do we create a positive legacy?’ You can view the conference session videos on the ClfA website at www.archaeologists.net/conference/2019