

Jot & Tittle

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A personal selection of local, British Isles and world, history.

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CLIMATE CHANGE¹

History Today includes an interesting article of which this is an abstract. Environmental historians and climate scientists now recognise the 17th century as a period of intense climate change, the peak of the Little Ice Age – a period of severe cooling between the 16th and late 18th centuries – in which average yearly temperatures in the northern hemisphere plunged by as much as two degrees Celsius. While such a number might seem small, it had massive local effects. The major goal of the 2015 Paris Climate Accords was to ‘hold global temperature increase to well below 2°C’, an acknowledgement that anything beyond this number represents an irretrievable disaster. Historical sources from the coldest period of the Little Ice Age give some insight into a time when a similar climate disaster came close. Historians such as

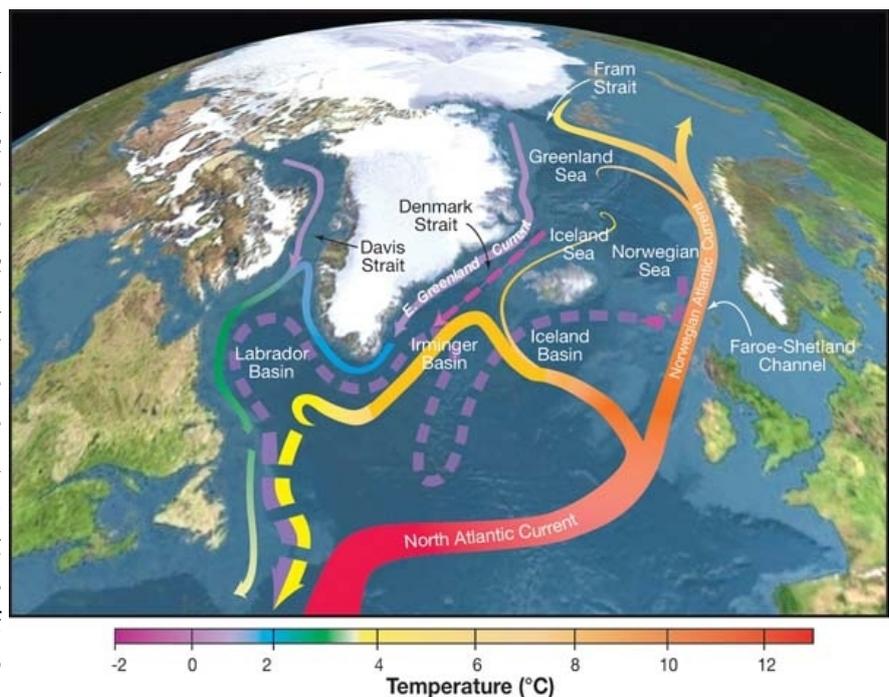
Geoffrey Parker have begun to map out the cultural and historical consequences of the Little Ice Age across the hemisphere, from the Americas to Europe and Asia, most notably crop failure, which led to food shortages and widespread social and military conflict. The global tumult of the 17th century was clearly the result of the climax of a period of catastrophic climate change.

One particularly ominous phenomenon was the darkening of the skies across the northern hemisphere. An unusual spate of volcanic activity around the world hurled enough sulphur dioxide into the upper stratosphere to dim the sun for decades, likely further contributing to the already unusually low temperatures. For those dependent on the light and warmth of the sun for their crops, these combined phenomena must have been visually ominous just as they had a brutal effect on agricultural yields.

German Lutheran popular author, Johann Arndt put forward the obvious interpretation in 1610: *When one now looks at the darkness of the sun and the moon, one should think that ... it is contrary to their nature, and proclaims to us a great wickedness performed on earth.* The dimming of the skies and the celestial bodies that reside there, he argued, must have been the result of some human moral failure. This was a conclusion that could not have been reached through orthodox Lutheran doctrine, which held that divine knowledge can only be found in the scriptures and not through environmental phenomena. Similar interpretations of climate change during the period led to tragic instances of scapegoating. In southern Germany in 1626, a spring hailstorm followed by sudden Arctic temperatures prompted the swift and horrific torture and execution of 900 men and women, accused of creating the storm by witchcraft.

Several causes have been proposed: cyclical lows in solar radiation, heightened volcanic activity, changes in the ocean circulation, variations in Earth's orbit and axial tilt (orbital forcing), inherent variability in global climate, and decreases in the human population (such as from the massacres by Genghis Khan, the Black Death and the epidemics emerging in the Americas upon European contact).

the LIA was preceded by an exceptional intrusion of warm Atlantic water into the Nordic Seas in the late 1300s. The intrusion was a consequence of persistent atmospheric blocking over the North Atlantic, linked to unusually high solar activity. The warmer water led to the breakup of sea ice and calving of tidewater glaciers; weakening of the blocking anomaly in the late 1300s allowed the large volume of ice that had accumulated to be exported into the North Atlantic.



GOING DUTCH²

Located entirely below sea level, the history of Canvey Island has been dictated by the creeks and the Estuary that surround it. It is basically a reclaimed Island south-east of Basildon in Essex and now part of the Thames estuary's right bank. In the early 17th century the Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden brought land reclamation methods from the Netherlands to England, to undertake work in the Fens and



at Canvey. With him came Dutch labourers and their families, many of whom settled on the island. Two cottages built by the labourers remain, from 1618 and 1621, both of them listed at Grade II (above).

THE ULTIMATE PHARAOH³

Ramesses The Great (reign 1279 – 1213 BC) wasn't the type to hide behind palace walls. He fought at the front, leading his army in the massive Battle of Kadesh against the Hittites. Thousands of chariots clashed in this historic confrontation. Though the battle ended without a clear winner, Ramesses made sure his version dominated, carving tales of his heroics as an ancient warrior into temple walls. After Kadesh, Ramesses and the Hittites opted for peace.



Their treaty, signed by Ramesses II and King Hattuşili III, was etched into clay tablets in 1269 BC. It's the world's first known peace agreement. The original is kept at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, though the United Nations owns a gleaming copper replica.

Ramesses didn't just build temples; he created masterpieces. The Ramesseum, an enormous mortuary temple constructed on the west bank of the Nile River, is his pièce de résistance. Yes, Ramesses the Great started building his own mortuary temple before his death. It's dedicated to both the deceased king and Amon, the Egyptian God of War. A 17-metre-tall statue of Ramses II once crowned the temple, though today all that's left are fragments.

Abu Simbel is another jaw-dropping example of his ambition. The ancient temples are carved into a mountainside and align perfectly with the sun on specific days, flooding the inner chambers with light. The entrances are flanked by larger-than-life



rock carvings of Ramesses II, along with imagery of his wife, Nefertari, and children. Inside the temples are sculptures celebrating his heroic leadership at the Battle of Kadesh. Like we said, Ramesses II was big on self-promotion.

With roughly 100 children, Ramesses ensured his bloodline's dominance. His sons and daughters helped cement alliances and manage the vast empire. Family gatherings probably needed seating charts, and lots of them. Few rulers in history matched Ramesses' 66-year reign. He outlasted rivals, expanded Egypt's reach and secured his reputation as a living god. By the time of his death, his people saw him as eternal. Ramesses' tomb wasn't left untouched by time. Grave robbers stripped it, but his mummy survived, later found in a secret cache. His remains now rest in Cairo's National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation, a physical reminder of his reign. Ramesses mastered ancient PR. His inscriptions painted him as an unbeatable warrior, smiter of enemies and favourite of the gods.

Basically, he knew how to control his narrative. Ramesses didn't just glorify himself; he honoured his queen, *Nefertari*, in a way few pharaohs did. Her temple at Abu Simbel celebrates her as his equal. The inscription calls her 'the one for whom the sun shines', a rare public display of affection in ancient times.

Ramesses' long life wasn't without its challenges. Many of his children and wives passed before him. His advanced age left Egypt in a stable state, though finding a successor wasn't easy after such a long reign. Ramesses outlived his 12 oldest sons, reigning until the extraordinary age of 96. His mummy shows signs of severe and degenerative arthritis and a wicked case of smallpox, suggesting his last years were somewhat less than comfortable.

URBAN MYTH⁴

Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, 1864 -1892 (right) was the son of the Prince of Wales and Queen Victoria's grandson (see J&T No.139). The official reports show *Eddy* as an all round 'good egg' but the rumours, eagerly seized on by the press show a very different character: indolent, *disinterested in learning and averse to doing anything useful*.

His life was peppered with unfortunate incidents. He was reported as being involved in the 1889 *Cleveland Street Scandal* when a male brothel was raided by the police. His father interfered with due process and the newspapers whilst Eddy was sent on a tour of India. There was also reported an affair with a chorus girl from the Gaiety



Theatre that resulted in her committing suicide by drinking carbolic acid! Another scandal that surfaced after his death was his association with *Gaiety Girl* Maude Richardson, forcing the Royal Family to pay her off. He was taken ill in 1890 with no disease mentioned but it was widely believed to have been *gleete*, then a term for gonorrhoea inflammation and discharge.

Of course the most notorious rumour was that he was behind the *Jack the Ripper* atrocities. The police however did not include him in their investigations. In Salisbury there is a local variant of the story. Fisherton Asylum *for the reception of insane patients* (later the Old Manor) at that time housed 672 patients making it the largest private madhouse ever in the UK. It was believed that Eddy was forcibly removed to Fisherton after the last Ripper death, that of Mary Kelly. A Southampton Doctor claimed in 1970 that he had papers that proved Eddy's involvement in the case but these were destroyed by his son on his father's death.

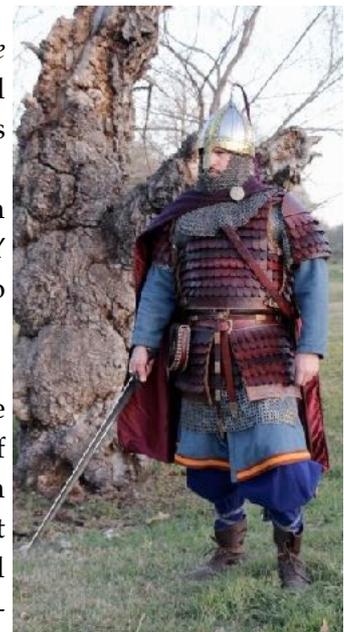
History shows us how unreliable testimony can be and especially where the Royal Family is concerned. Ever since Prince Albert, the royals have put on a front that tries to play down anything scandalous. The Netflix series *The Crown* has tried to show the reality behind the scenes but the reliability of their portrayal must at least be questionable.

STORMIN NORMAN⁵

Domesday Book was written by scribes on parchment in the usual abbreviated Latin. It formed two volumes: Little Domesday (in three parts) covering East Anglia and Great Domesday (in two parts) the rest of England excluding the far north. For some unknown reason, Winchester and London were excluded. It would have taken a flock of sheep some 500 to 800 strong, to provide the parchment.

b When we see an attempt to write in a medieval style such as *Ye Olde Tea Shoppe*, you may wonder how the Ye came about? Well the Gothic alphabet contained a *thorn* (left) that was pronounced *th*. With the advent of printing, the first type came from northern Europe where the thorn did not form part of the alphabet. It was thought by printers that the **Y** was the nearest to thorn and hence **the** becoming **ye**. So even when you see Ye it should be pronounced the!

The 1066 division of spoils by William the Conqueror and the subsequent Harrying of the North (1069 - 1070), displaced a lot of Anglo-Saxon warriors. Many fled abroad especially to Byzantium where they joined the Emperor's Varangian Guard. It is believed that some 250 boatloads took this option. In Domesday there are recorded only two Anglo Saxon secular tenants in chief. Right: modern re-enactment of the largely Norse, Varangian Guard.



1. Timothy Grieve-Carlson is Assistant Professor of Religion at Westminster College, Pennsylvania and the author of *American Aurora: Environment and Apocalypse in the Life of Johannes Kelpius* (Oxford University Press, 2024). Painting: RTGY24 Frost Fair on the Thames with Old London Bridge in the distance, painting by unknown artist, circa 1684. <https://tallbloke.wordpress.com>. A portion of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation [image credit: R. Curry, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution @ Wikipedia].
2. Courtesy of Historic England and Wikipedia.
3. Courtesy of Sky History and Historicaeve.com. Photo of statue by National Geographic and mummy by YouTube.
4. Courtesy of *Bloody British History, Salisbury*, David Vaughan (History Press 2014) and Wikipedia. 1891 portrait courtesy of National Portrait Gallery.
5. Thanks to *Domesday, 900 years of Norman Heritage* (Millbank Publications 1986).

NEXT EDITION



Trained Bands and the Mendlesham Church armoury.



Skinner's Horse, the Yellow Boys of the East India Company.



Queen Anne's Bounty, still helping impoverished clergy.



Portus Adurni memorial.