The Worst of the Weather

Thankfully, the United Kingdom does not normally experience the devastating effects that bad weather can bring elsewhere. It is a cliché that British people love discussing the weather, but this can be borne out to some extent by studying historical documents.

Displayed here are some examples from Manuscripts and Special Collections, focusing on foreign weather conditions. Family collections contain many letters from people travelling abroad, whether as colonial administrators, tourists, or emigrants. They also contain some official reports which were retained in the family collections by aristocrats who had served as government ministers. The University of Nottingham also holds many records relating to amateur meteorology and meteorologists in the East Midlands. The core of these collections was established by Colonel Henry Mellish of Hodsock Priory (1856-1927), whose books and pamphlets make reference to weather and climate all over the world.

For more information on any of the items in the display or to arrange a visit to the Manuscripts and Special Collections Reading Room at King's Meadow Campus see the information at www.nottingham.ac.uk/mss , follow our Twitter feed @mssUniNott, or email mss-library@nottingham.ac.uk.

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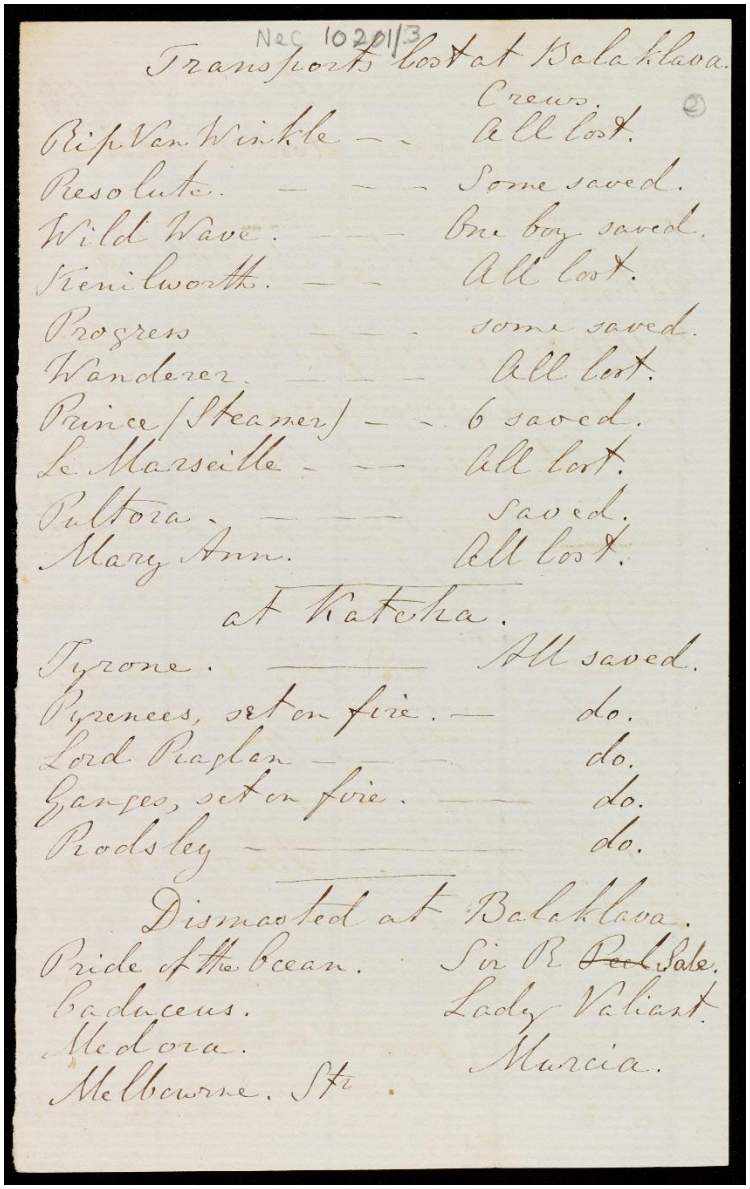

List of transport vessels lost in a storm at Balaklava, Crimea, on 14 November 1854
Newcastle Collection, Ne C 10201/2-3

The huge gale destroyed over £3 million worth of supplies in military transport ships, and killed many people. The aftermath was much discomfort and hardship for troops who were left without the winter equipment they had expected.

The list was sent by Sir James Fergusson in Malta to Henry Pelham-Clinton, 5th Duke of Newcastle under Lyne, who was Secretary of State for the Colonial Office and War Department between 1854 and 1855. Newcastle's papers are a key source for historians of the Crimean War.

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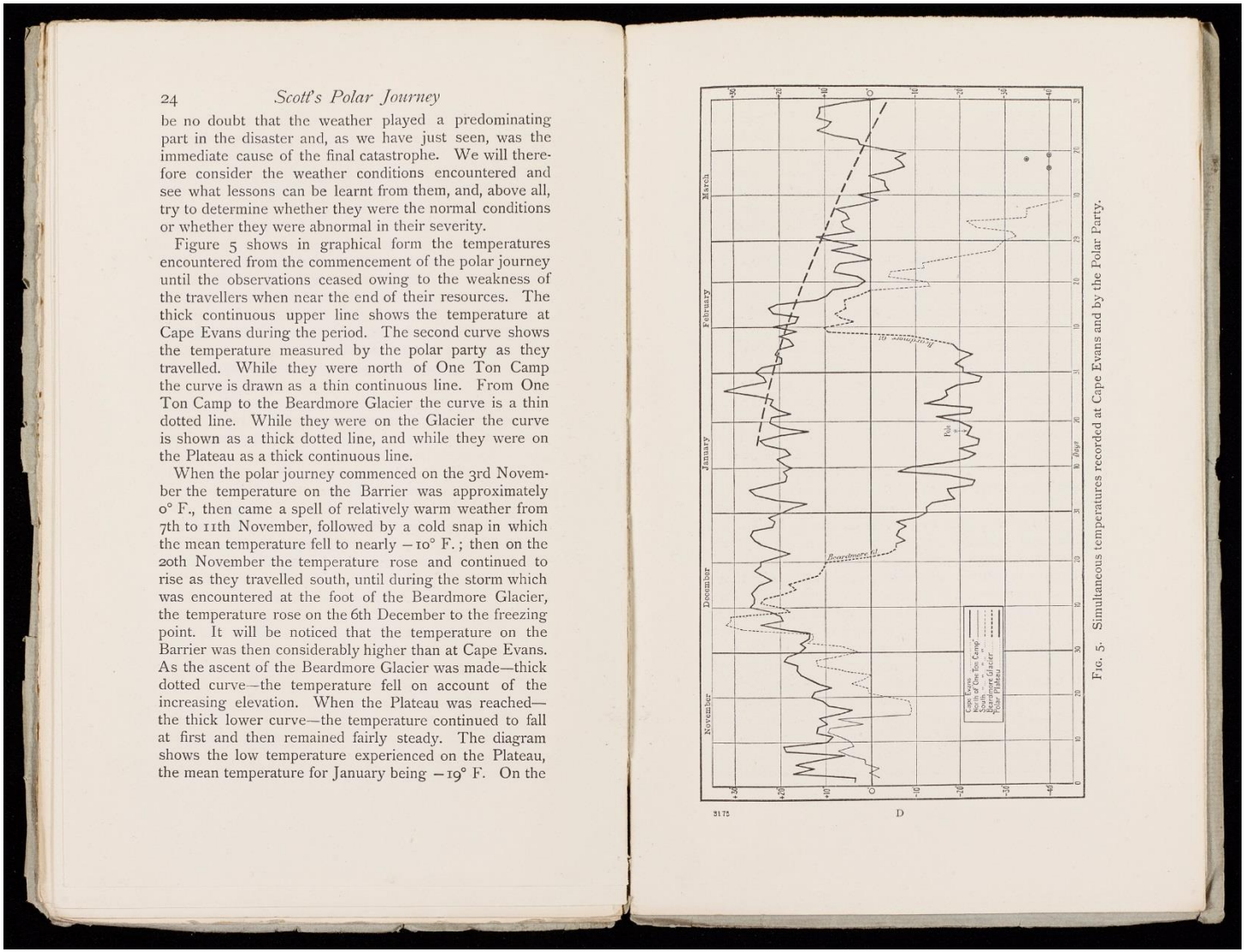

24 *Scott's Polar Journey*

be no doubt that the weather played a predominating part in the disaster and, as we have just seen, was the immediate cause of the final catastrophe. We will therefore consider the weather conditions encountered and see what lessons can be learnt from them, and, above all, try to determine whether they were the normal conditions or whether they were abnormal in their severity.

Figure 5 shows in graphical form the temperatures encountered from the commencement of the polar journey until the observations ceased owing to the weakness of the travellers when near the end of their resources. The thick continuous upper line shows the temperature at Cape Evans during the period. The second curve shows the temperature measured by the polar party as they travelled. While they were north of One Ton Camp the curve is drawn as a thin continuous line. From One Ton Camp to the Beardmore Glacier the curve is a thin dotted line. While they were on the Glacier the curve is shown as a thick dotted line, and while they were on the Plateau as a thick continuous line.

When the polar journey commenced on the 3rd November the temperature on the Barrier was approximately 0° F., then came a spell of relatively warm weather from 7th to 11th November, followed by a cold snap in which the mean temperature fell to nearly −10° F.; then on the 20th November the temperature rose and continued to rise as they travelled south, until during the storm which was encountered at the foot of the Beardmore Glacier, the temperature rose on the 6th December to the freezing point. It will be noticed that the temperature on the Barrier was then considerably higher than at Cape Evans. As the ascent of the Beardmore Glacier was made—thick dotted curve—the temperature fell on account of the increasing elevation. When the Plateau was reached—the thick lower curve—the temperature continued to fall at first and then remained fairly steady. The diagram shows the low temperature experienced on the Plateau, the mean temperature for January being −19° F. On the

FIG. 5. Simultaneous temperatures recorded at Cape Evans and by the Polar Party.

G.C. Simpson, *Scott's Polar Journey and the Weather*, Halley Lecture delivered on 17 May 1923 (Oxford, 1926)
Mellish Meteorological Collection, QC994.9.SIM

The particular weather conditions in Antarctica at the time of Captain Scott's attempt to reach the South Pole are the focus of this lecture. Simpson calls for meteorologists "to say whether similar conditions exist in this region year after year or whether in this as in so many other experiences Scott was the sport of fate".

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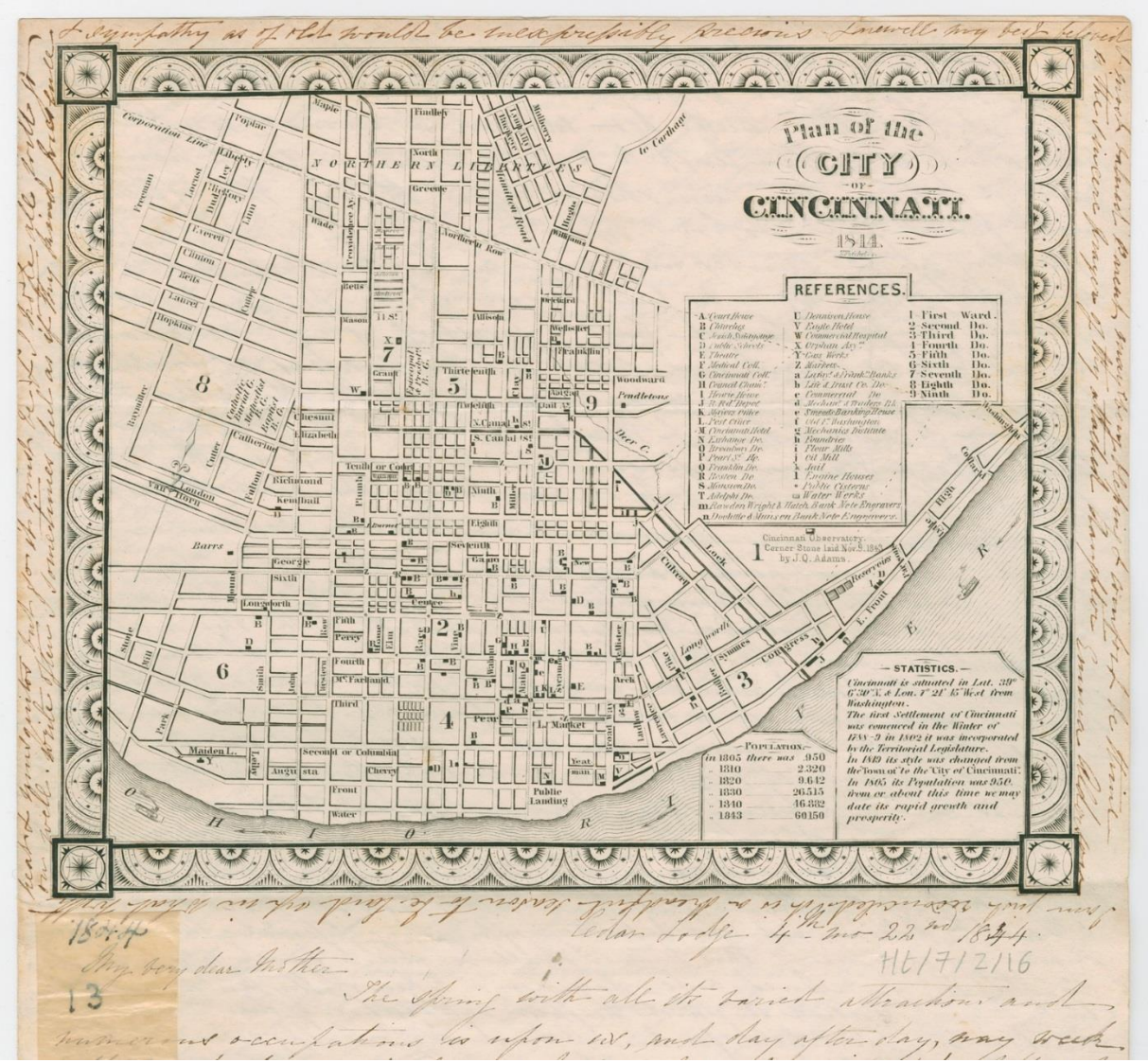

Letter from Emma Alderson, Cedar Lodge, Cincinnati, U.S.A., to her mother Ann Botham, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, 22 April 1844

Howitt Collection, Ht/7/2/16

Emma emigrated from Staffordshire to the U.S.A. with her husband in 1842, and her detailed letters paint a vivid picture of her life there. In this letter, she wishes that her mother could enjoy with her "the fine climate", and describes the onset of spring in Ohio.

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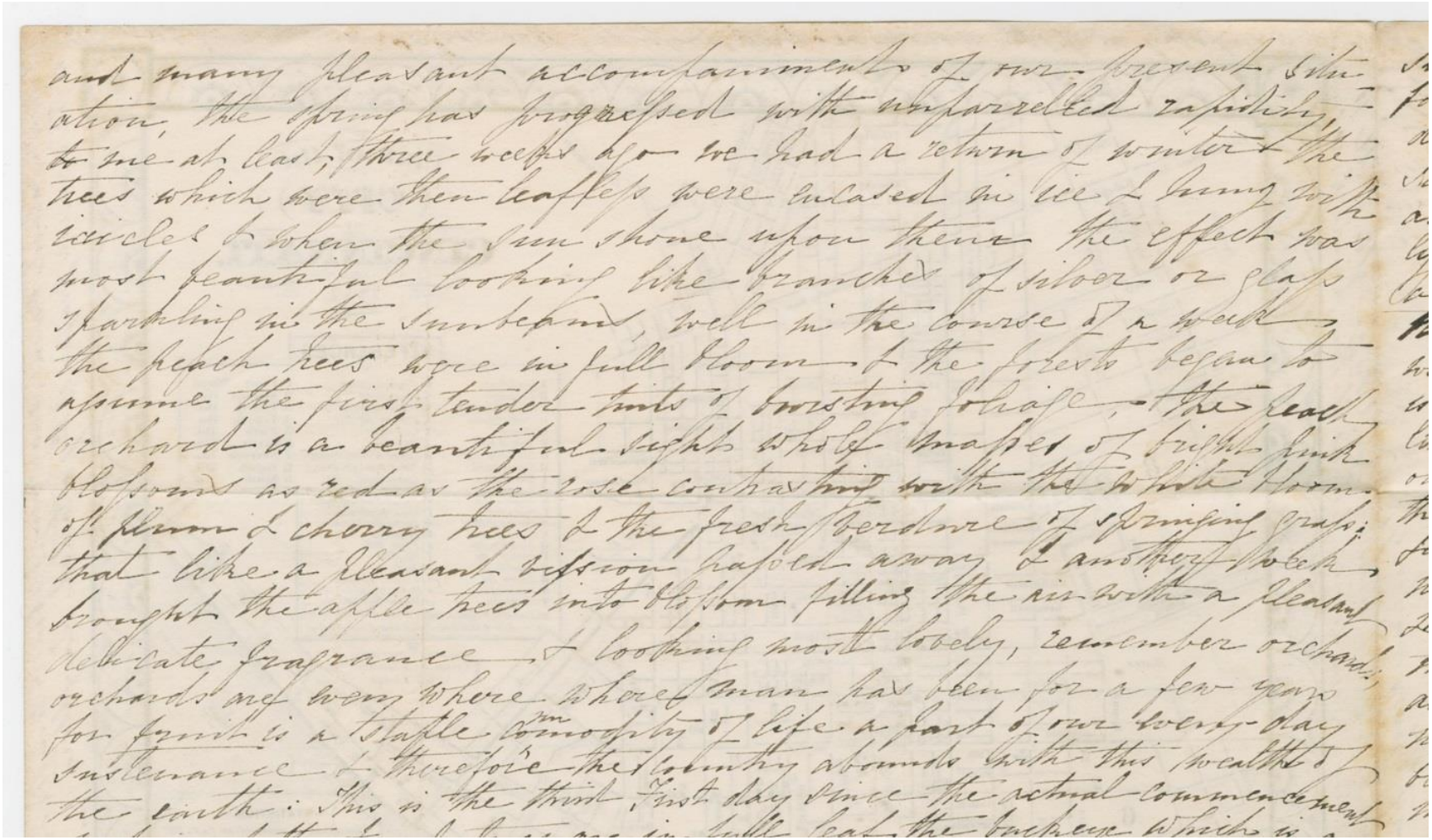

Detail from second page of letter from Emma Alderson, Cedar Lodge, Cincinnati, U.S.A., to her mother Ann Botham, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, 22 April 1844
Howitt Collection, Ht/7/2/16

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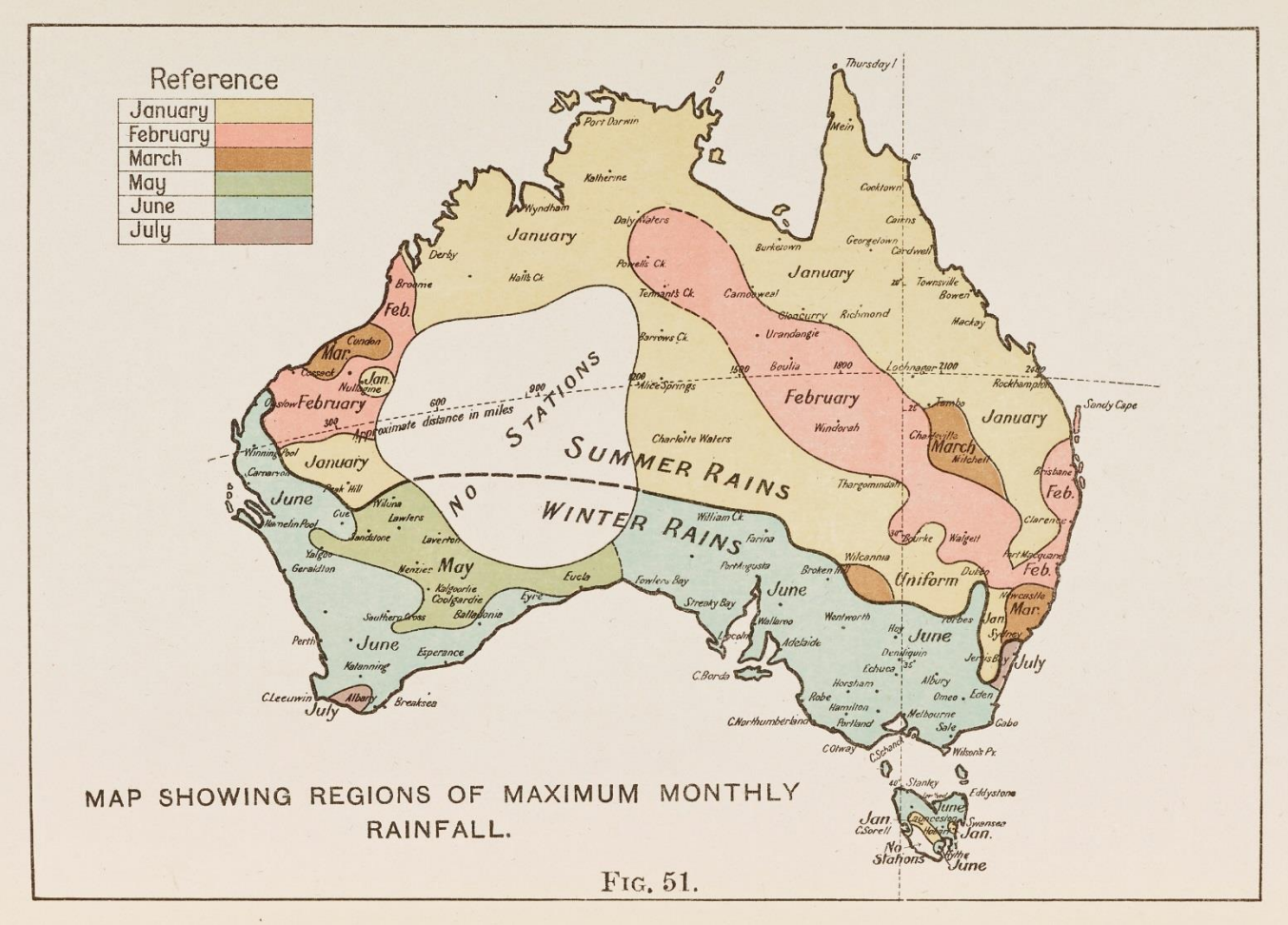

Map showing regions of rainfall, from H.A. Hunt, Griffith Taylor and E.T. Quayle, *The Climate and Weather of Australia* (Melbourne, 1913)
Mellish Meteorological Collection, QC992.A1.HUN

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