

WEATHER AND THE NATURAL WORLD

People working in agriculture or horticulture have always been very aware of the impact that the weather can have on their livelihoods. Poor weather affected the growth of crops, the health of livestock, the availability of water and fodder, and prices at market.



The River Trent during the great frost, 1896, by Thomas Hammond. East Midlands Collection Oversize Not 3.D28 HAM.

Farmers, gardeners, and estate managers were, therefore, keen observers of the weather and often kept detailed records of atmospheric conditions, as well as notes on the timing, productivity and quality of harvests and the prices raised for different products year on year. Scholars have used records of harvest dates and prices as ‘proxies’ for identifying changes in the weather in the past. From such sources we learn of the challenges that extreme conditions could bring.

“The intense frost continues, unluckily without snow and I must fear that the turnips will be injured” (Diary of Henry Pelham Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle under Lyne, Ne 2F 5/1, 12 February 1838).

The effects of weather on trees, from single garden or churchyard specimens to large plantations or forests, can be explored through a variety of documentary sources. When they uprooted trees, strong winds could quickly render familiar landscapes unrecognisable.

Some animals, such as leeches, have been used as weather prophets or ‘prognosticators’.

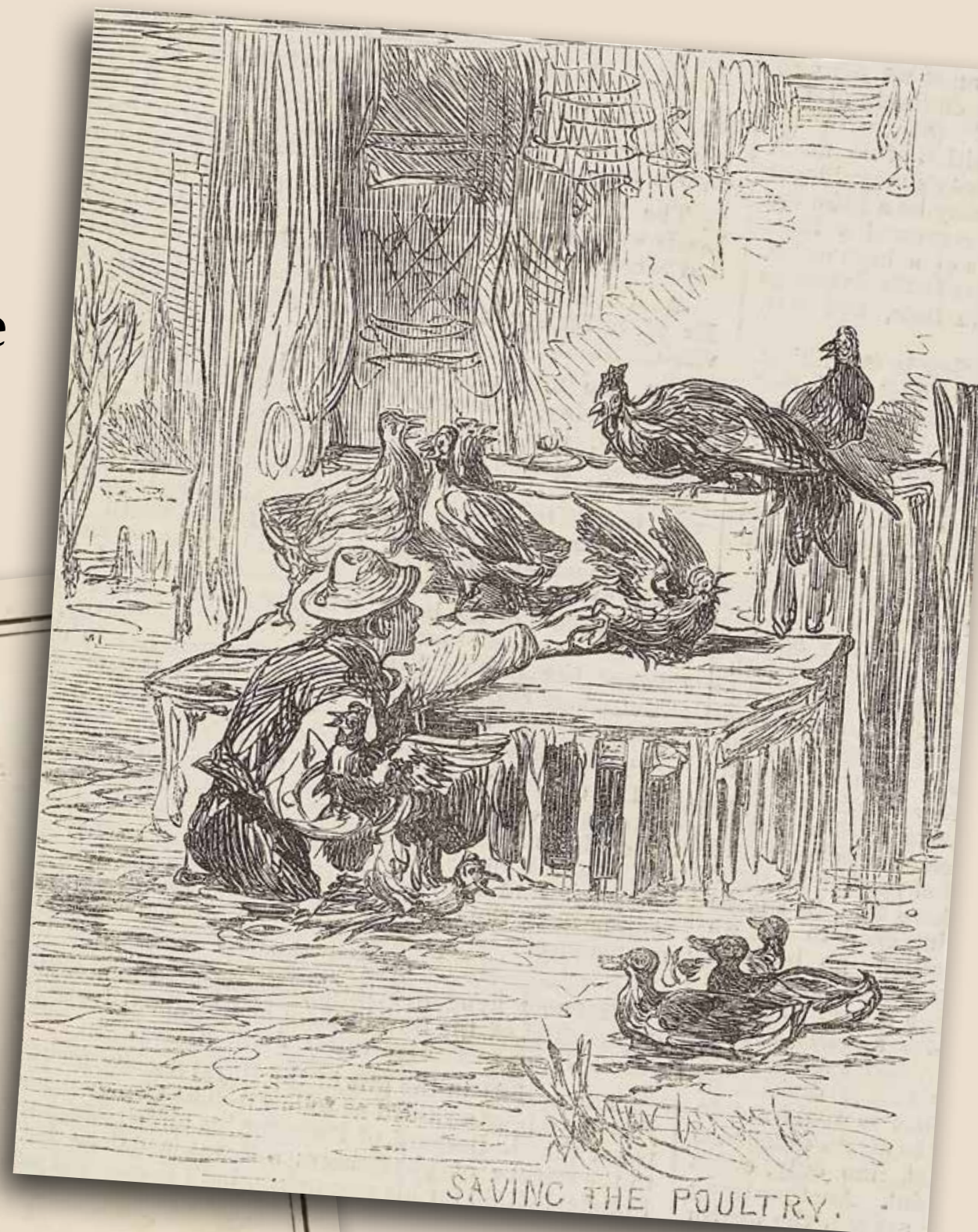
“Put a common horse leech... into a twelve ounce phial fill’d two thirds full of water, and tie a piece of linen over the mouth of the phial ... observe it every morning. If it lies still in a lump at the bottom of the phial the

WEATHER EXTREMES

Making and breaking
records in Nottinghamshire



Detail from “The Floods in the East Midlands”, *The Illustrated London News*, 16 December 1876. Central Store 1 Periodicals.



Engraving from Hayman Rooke, *A continuation of the annual meteorological register: kept at Mansfield Woodhouse from the year 1801 to end of year 1802*. East Midlands Special Collection Not 273.C42 CON.

weather will be fair that day – if it gets above the water, rain will soon follow; and if it wriggles and frisks about much it denotes that stormy weather will soon proceed” (Letter from William Burton to John Achard, 6 January 1750, Pl C 37/39).