



Met Office



Christmas

National Meteorological Library and Archive
Factsheet 5 — White Christmas

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In 1914 the archive was established as the official custodian of meteorological related records. It holds historic weather records on behalf of the nation and is an approved place of deposit under the Public Records Act.

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Are you dreaming of a White Christmas?

Snow at Christmas is deep-seated in British culture. Many of us long for the likes of the scenes depicted on traditional Christmas cards and in works like Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' or 'Pickwick Papers'.

The interest in snowy Christmases has its origins in the colder climate of the period 1550–1850 when Britain was in the grip of a 'Little Ice Age'. Winters were particularly persistent and severe – 1813/14 was the last winter that a 'frost fair' was held on the River Thames in London.



For most parts of the United Kingdom, Christmas comes at the beginning of the season for snow. Wintry weather is more likely in the deepening cold of early January. White Christmases were more frequent in the 18th and 19th centuries, even more so before the change of calendar in 1752 which effectively brought Christmas day back by 12 days.

What is a White Christmas?

For many people, a White Christmas means a complete covering of snow, ideally falling between midnight and midday on 25 December.

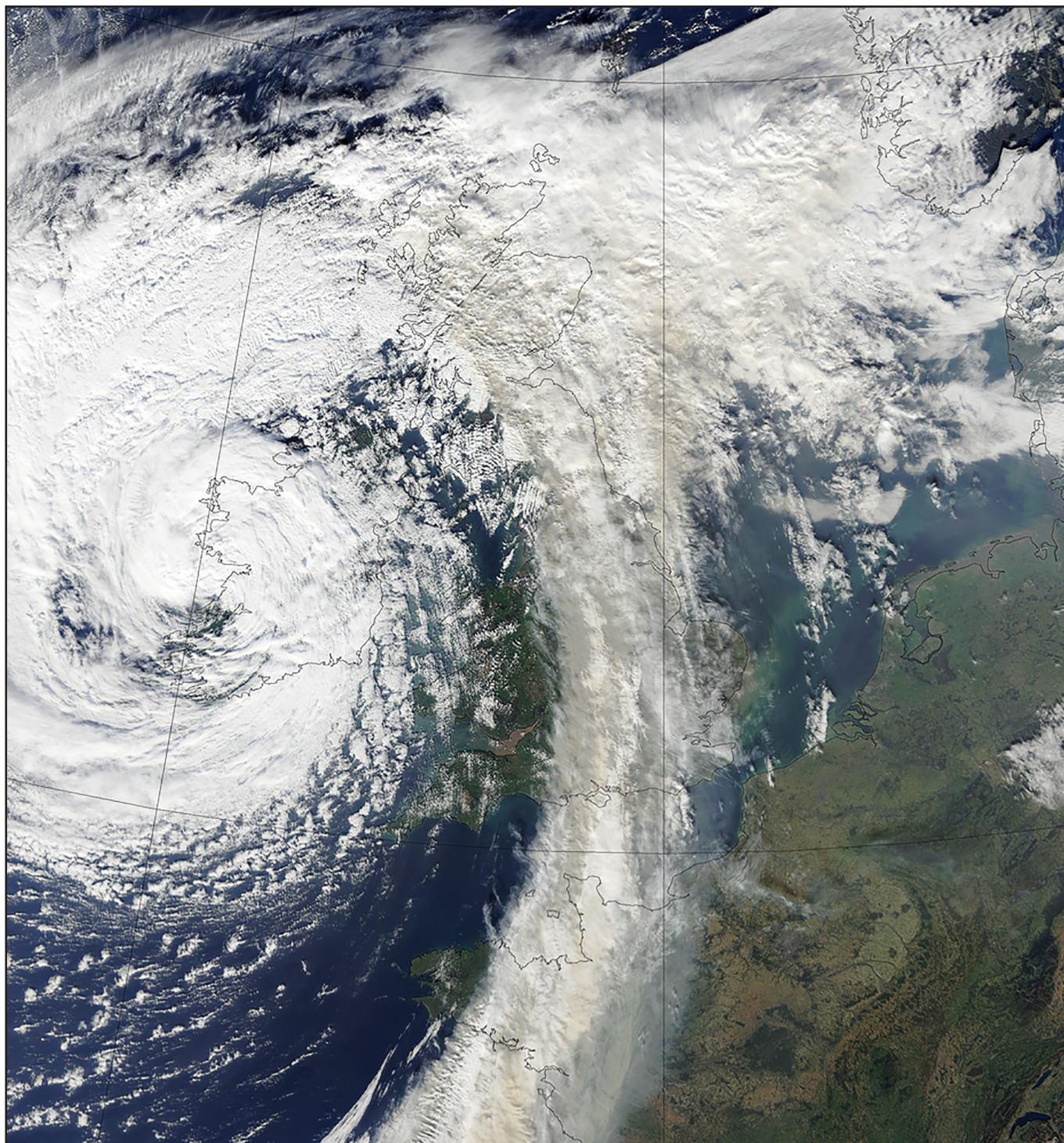
However, the definition used most widely, notably by those placing and taking bets, is for a single snow flake (perhaps among a mixed shower of rain and snow) to be observed falling in the 24 hours of 25 December.

Christmas weather – will it or won't it snow?

The likelihood of snow depends on many factors, mainly latitude and height above sea level. Not all of us live in the Scottish Highlands and falls of sleet or snow over low-lying areas are usually confined to between November and April. However, there have been isolated falls as late as June.

Even if snow falls in December, there is no guarantee that snow will 'stick'. On days when snow is falling, the temperature of the air above the ground sometimes remains above freezing – so the snow does not settle for long.

Climate change has brought higher average temperatures over land and sea and this generally reduces the chances of a White Christmas. However, the natural variability of the weather will not stop cold, snowy winters happening in the future. In fact, in terms of widespread sleet/snow falling across the UK on Christmas Day, between 1971 and 1992 there was only one year (1980), whereas in the years 1993 to 2004 there were six such occasions.

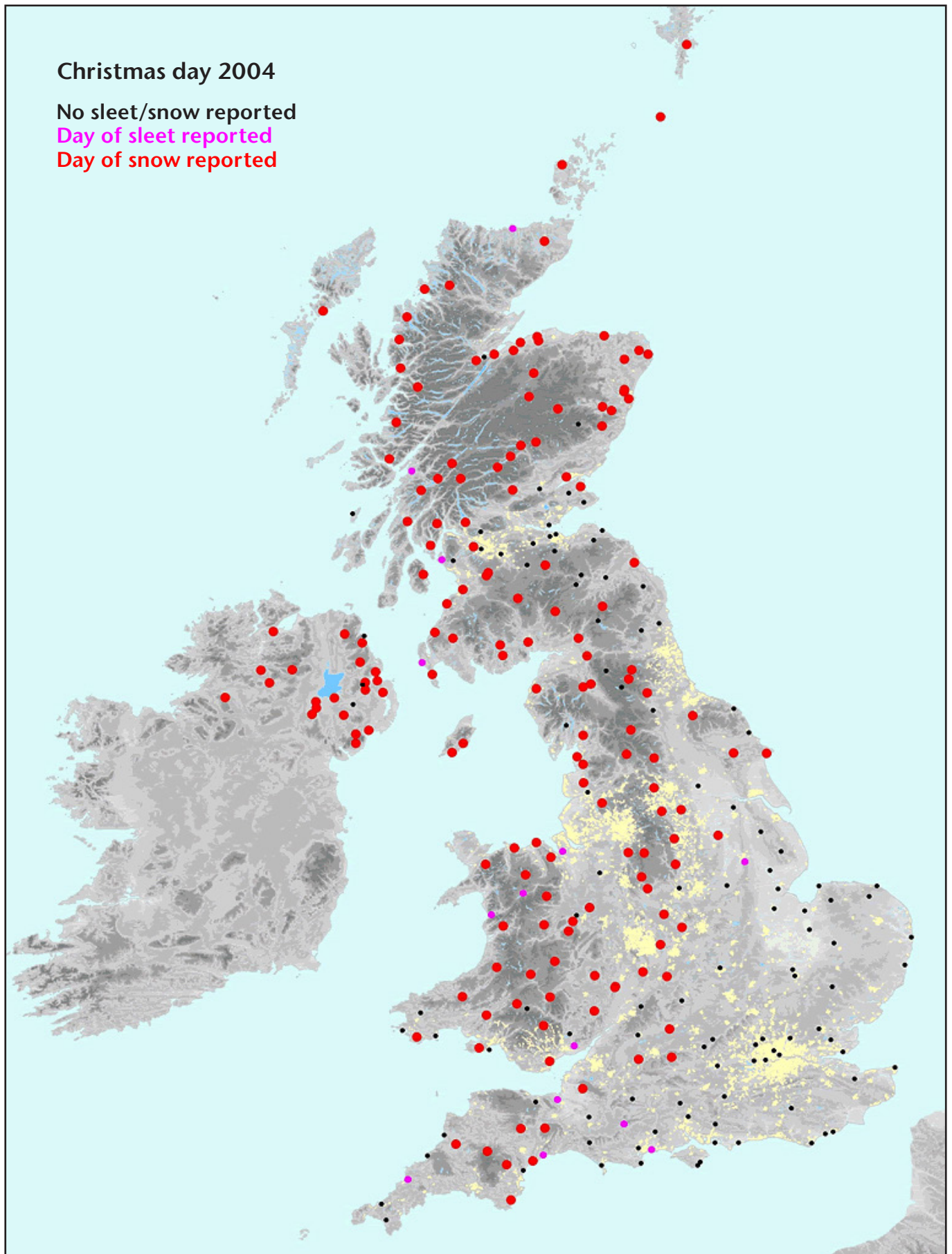


Recent White Christmases across the UK

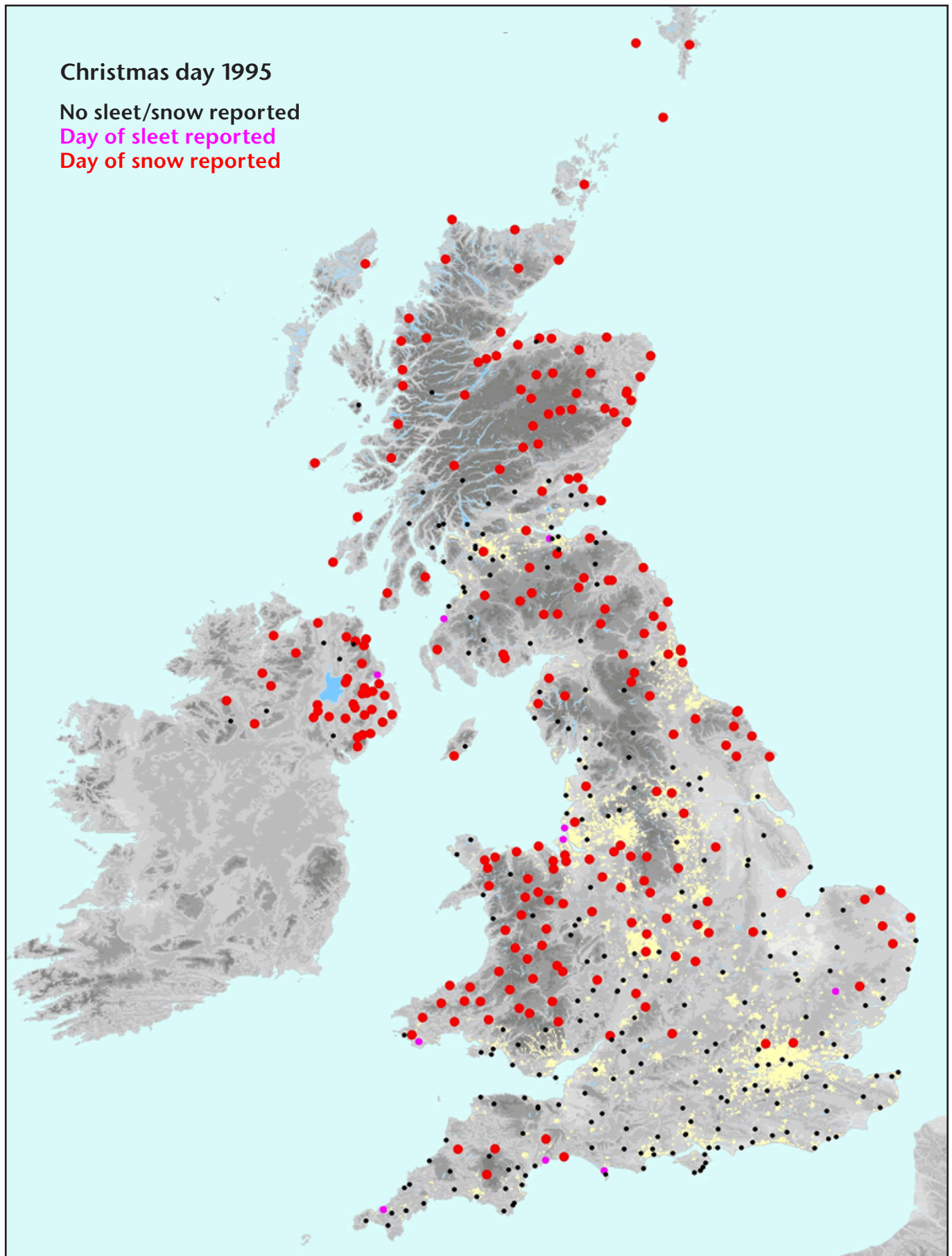
The last time a White Christmas was recorded across the UK was 2022 (last updated September 2023), when sleet or snow was reported at eleven stations (less than 1,000 feet) across three different areas of the UK.



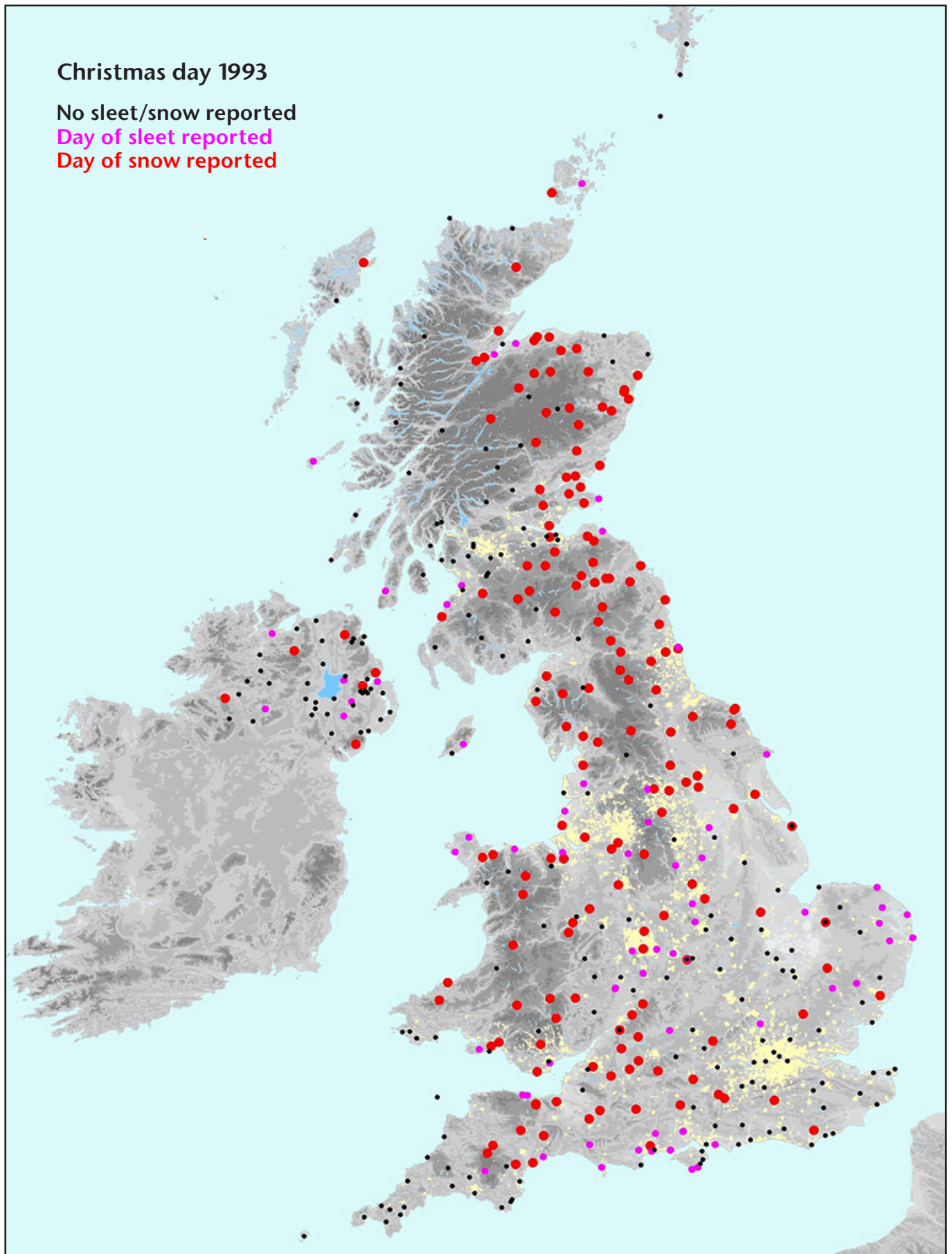
The last widespread White Christmas across the UK was 2004, which had sleet or snow falling over many northern and western areas. A map showing the distribution of climate stations which reported either sleet or snow falling is shown below.



1995 saw a White Christmas being recorded widely across the UK. A map showing the distribution of climate stations which reported either sleet or snow falling is shown below.



1993 also saw a White Christmas being recorded widely across the UK. A map showing the distribution of climate stations which reported either sleet or snow falling is shown below.



White Christmas information across the UK since 1960

White Christmas information for areas of the UK since 1960 is shown in the following table. For the purpose of this table, a White Christmas has been indicated when sleet or snow is reported to have fallen on 25 December at multiple official climate stations across the area (only stations with an altitude of less than 1,000 feet have been used).

A map showing the areas in the table is shown below.



Year	Southeast and Central Southern England	Southwest England	Midlands	East Anglia	Northwest England	Northeast and East England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Western Scotland	Eastern Scotland	Northern Scotland
1993	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1994	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1995	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1996	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
1997	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1998	-	-	Yes	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1999	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2000	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2001	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2003	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2005	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2007	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2008	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2008	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2010	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2011	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	-	Yes	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	-	-	-
2014	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	-	Yes
2016	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes
2017	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-
2018	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2020	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	-	-	-
2021	-	-	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes
2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes

White Christmas information for capital cities across the UK since 1960

White Christmas information for capital cities of the UK since 1960 is shown in the following table. A White Christmas has been indicated when sleet or snow is reported to have fallen on 25 December.

Year	London	Cardiff	Belfast	Edinburgh
1960	-	-	-	-
1961	-	-	-	-
1962	-	-	Yes	Yes
1963	-	-	-	Yes
1964	Yes	-	Yes	-
1965	-	-	-	-
1966	-	-	Yes	-
1967	-	-	-	-
1968	Yes	-	-	Yes
1969	-	-	-	-
1970	Yes	-	-	-
1971	-	-	-	-
1972	-	-	-	-
1973	-	-	-	-
1974	-	-	-	-
1975	-	-	-	-
1976	Yes	-	-	-
1977	-	-	-	-
1978	-	-	-	-
1979	-	-	-	-
1980	-	-	Yes	Yes
1981	-	-	-	-
1982	-	-	-	-
1983	-	-	-	-
1984	-	-	-	-
1985	-	-	-	-
1986	-	-	-	Yes
1987	-	-	-	-
1988	-	-	-	-
1989	-	-	-	-
1990	-	Yes	-	-
1991	-	-	-	-

Year	London	Cardiff	Belfast	Edinburgh
1992	-	-	-	-
1993	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
1994	-	-	-	-
1995	-	-	Yes	Yes
1996	Yes	-	Yes	-
1997	-	-	-	-
1998	-	-	Yes	Yes
1999	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
2000	-	-	-	Yes
2001	-	Yes	Yes	-
2002	-	-	-	-
2003	-	-	-	-
2004	-	Yes	Yes	-
2005	-	-	-	-
2006	-	-	-	-
2007	-	-	-	-
2008	-	-	-	-
2009	-	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	Yes
2011	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	-
2013	-	-	-	-
2014	-	-	-	-
2015	-	-	-	-
2016	-	-	-	-
2017	-	-	-	-
2018	-	-	-	-
2019	-	-	-	-
2020	-	-	-	-
2021	-	-	-	-
2022	-	-	-	Yes

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