

Unprecedented late spring heatwave, May 2026

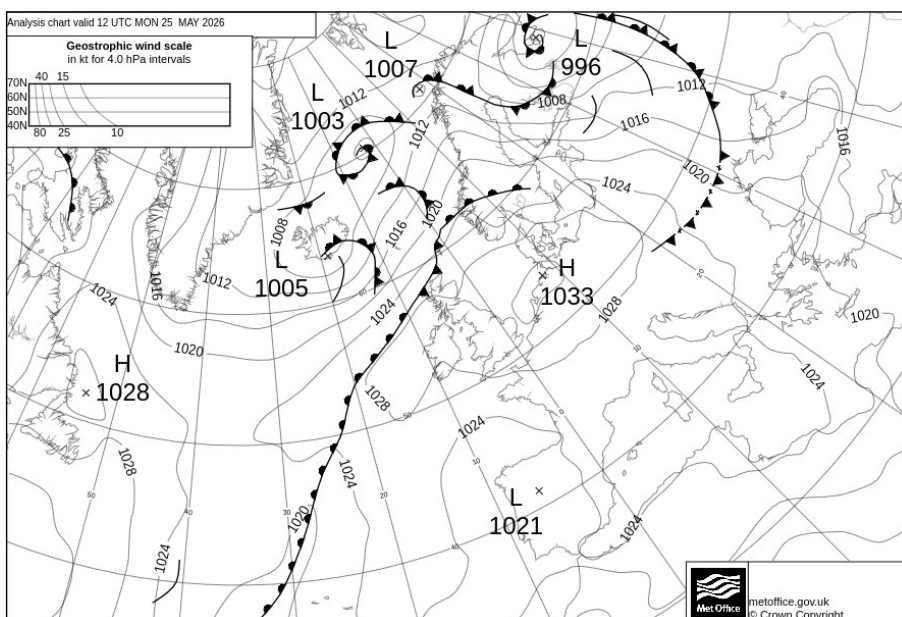
In late May 2026, much of the UK experienced a record-breaking heatwave for the time of year, with high pressure established and warm air moving north from the near continent. Temperatures widely reached 28 to 30°C or more from 24th to 28th, peaking on 25th and 26th. This event set a new UK maximum temperature record for May of 35.1°C at Kew Gardens, Greater London, breaking the previous national record by a margin of over 2°C. A new UK minimum temperature record for May of 21.4°C was also set – also by a margin of over 2°C. This was the first time a ‘Tropical Night’ (daily minimum air temperature above 20°C) has been recorded in the UK in May. Taking into account the time of year – i.e. the fact that this event occurred in spring, not summer – this was one of the UK’s most extreme high temperature events in the UK’s observational records, falling not far short of the heatwave of July 2022 when 40°C was recorded in the UK for the first time.

Impacts

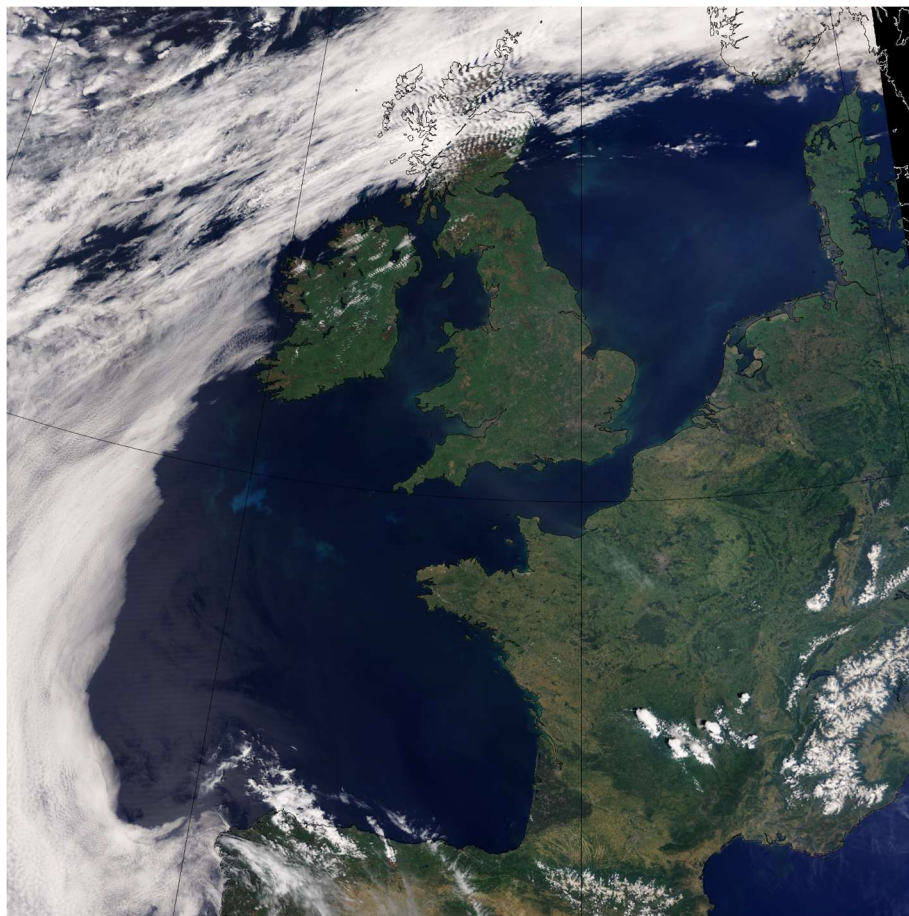
Many members of the public escaped from the heat to beaches around the UK’s coastline as well as rivers and lakes. However, at least nine water related deaths were reported during the heatwave from swimming in open water, most of which involved children. In late May, in contrast to the high air temperatures, water temperatures would still be low, increasing the potential for cold water shock. Around 18,000 properties in Kent and Sussex were reported to have faced disruptions to water supplies due to a surge in water demand and critically low levels in some storage reservoirs. The heat made conditions difficult for the elderly and vulnerable with the UK Health Security Agency issuing its first amber heat health alert of 2026, covering much of central and south-east England. Age UK issued advice to stay indoors between 11am and 3pm.

Weather data

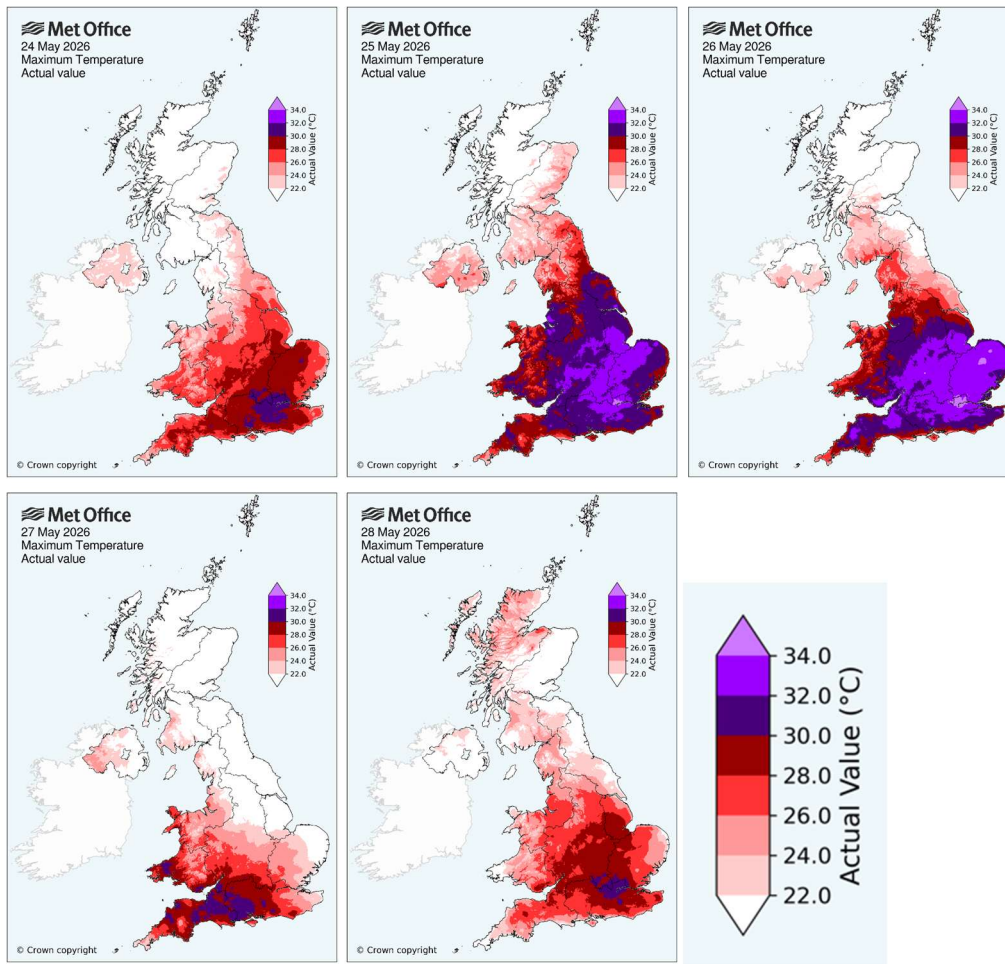
The analysis charts at 1200 UTC 25 May 2026 shows the UK situated in a warm, dry airmass under an area of high pressure extending north from continental Europe.



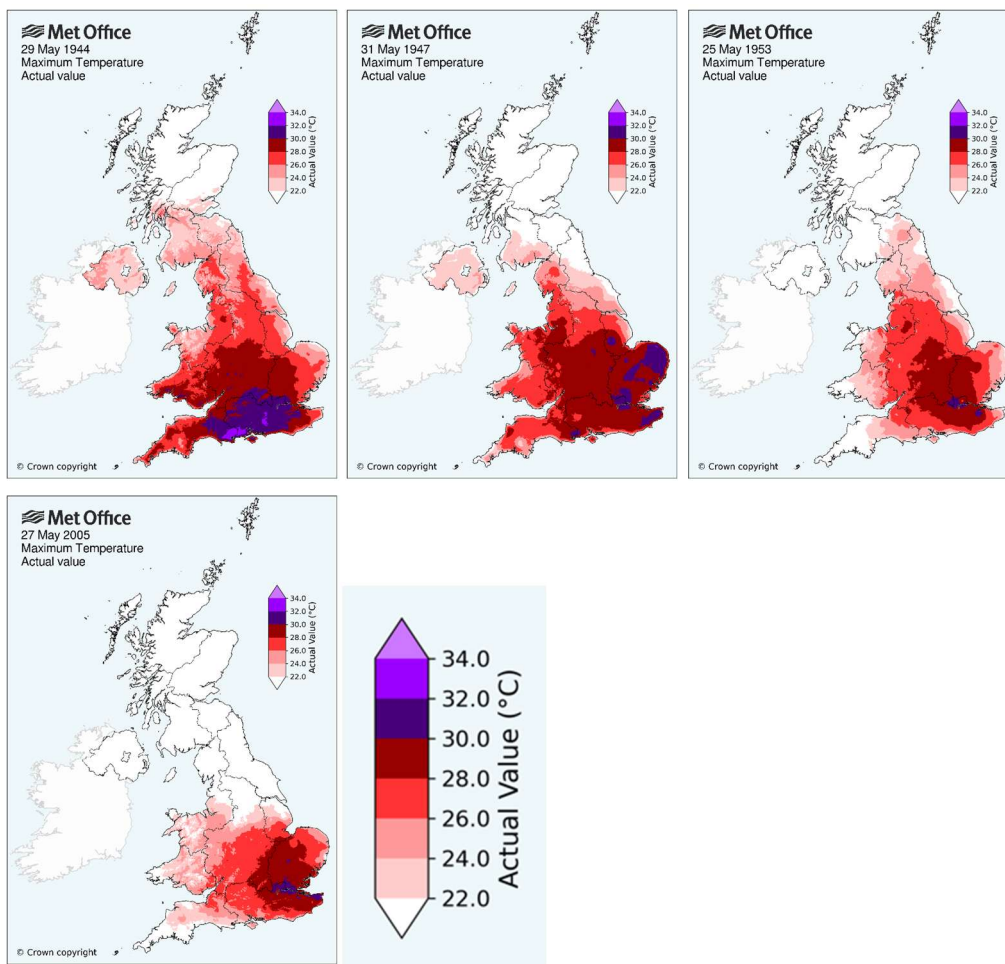
The visible satellite image at 1318UTC on 25 May 2026 shows the UK and most of the near-continent cloud-free except the northern half of Scotland. Snow can clearly be seen in the Alps and Pyrenees, with some developing cumulus over central France. During this spell, many UK weather stations recorded 12 to 14 hours of sunshine per day – strong at this time of year – contributing to the soaring temperatures. Image copyright Met Office / NOAA / NASA.



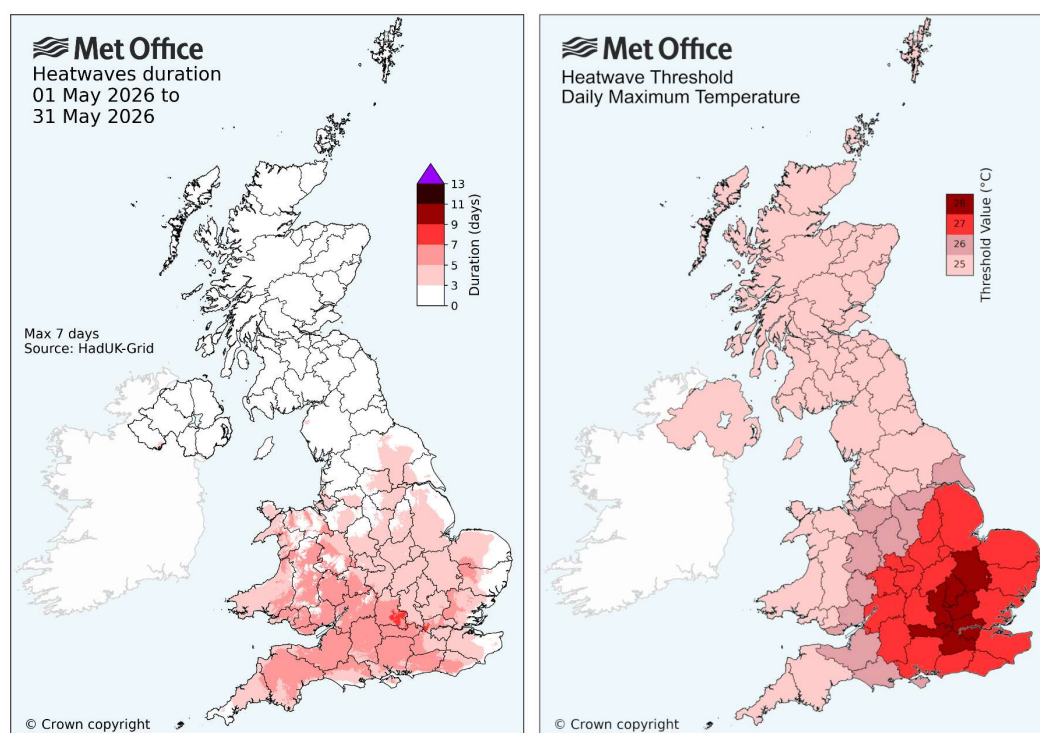
The maps below show daily maximum temperatures from 24 to 28 May. Temperatures reached 28 to 30°C widely across southern England, with the heat extending at times into Wales and part of northern England. The two hottest days were 25th and 26th, where 32°C was recorded widely across central southern England and 34°C in Greater London – with 34.8°C at Kew Gardens on 25th followed by 35.1°C on 26th. A key feature of the heat was how extensive it was: on 25th, temperatures reached 30°C in north-east and north-west England with 31.3C at Whitby, North Yorkshire and 31.1°C at Myerscough, Lancashire, while on 26th it reached the far south-west of England and west Wales with 30.1°C at Camborne, Cornwall and 30.2°C at Porthmadog, Gwynedd. Overall 100 weather stations across the UK reached 30°C on each of these two days. It is extremely unusual to see heat as extensive and widespread as this in the UK outside the months of July and August: in digitized observational records* held by the Met Office the only days with 100 stations exceeding 30°C in June are 25 to 29 June 1976 and 30 June 1995, with none in September, and none in May, until 2026. (*It is possible earlier dates in June or September may come to light as more historic data pre-1961 are digitized; for example 2 September 1906 when 35.6°C was recorded in the UK).



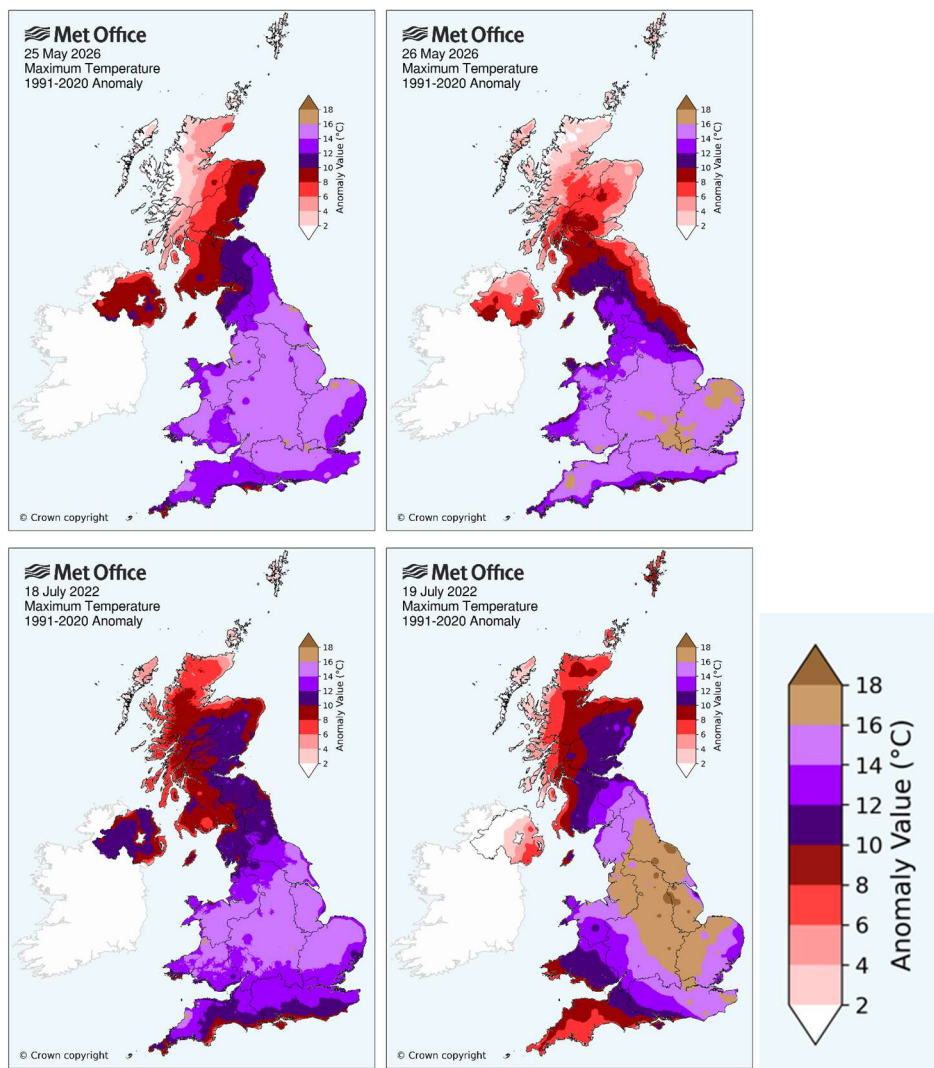
The maps below show other examples of May days in the UK where 30°C was reached, including 29 May 1944 (a week before the World War II D-Day landings in Normandy), 31 May 1947, 25 May 1953 (a week before the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II) and 25 May 2005. Although these maps are broadly comparable to 24 and 27 to 28 May 2026, they are far less extreme than either 25 or 26 May 2026. The previous UK May daily maximum temperature station record of 32.8°C was on 29 May 1944, shared with 22 May 1922 (a map is not available for the latter date as currently the HadUK-Grid dataset on which this is based only goes back to 1931 for daily maximum temperature).



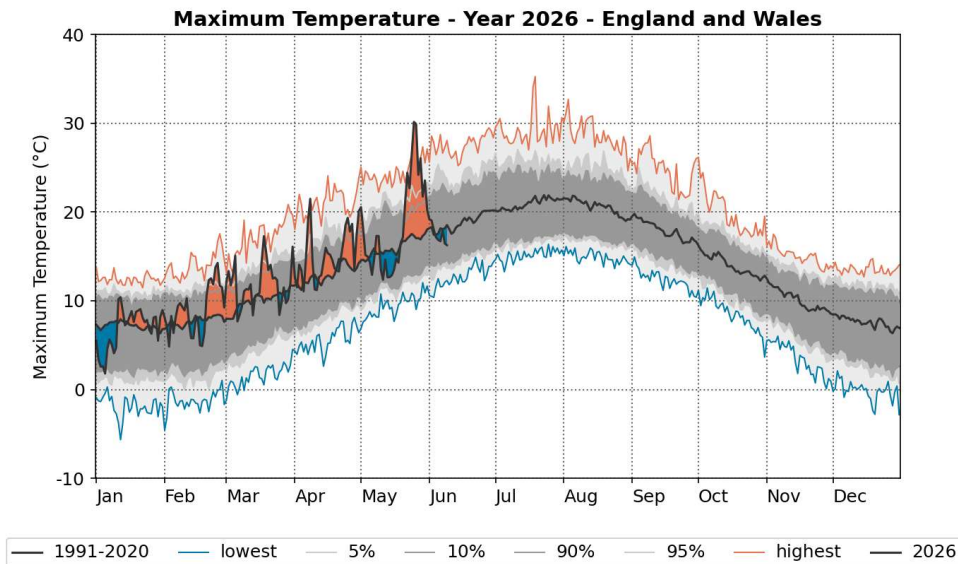
Most of southern England and Wales officially experienced a heatwave from this event, as shown in the map below, with some areas recording five or more consecutive heatwave days. A UK heatwave threshold is met when a location records a period of at least three consecutive days with daily maximum temperatures meeting or exceeding the heatwave temperature thresholds as shown on the map. Defining a heatwave in this way is a useful mechanism to provide the media and public with consistent and reliable messaging.



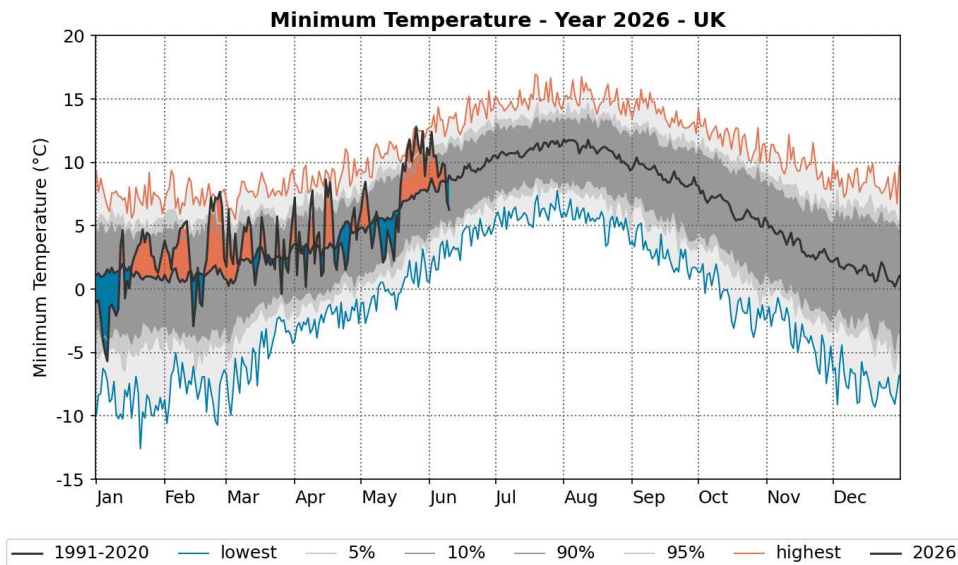
The focus of the most extreme temperatures was on 25 and 26 May 2026. The maps below show daily maximum temperature anomalies for these two dates against the 1991-2020 May average – and equivalent maps for the July 2022 heatwave when 40°C was recorded. On both 25 and 26 May, daily maximum temperatures were widely around 15°C above average (e.g. a daily maximum temperature of 32°C compared to a May average maximum of 17°C). While not quite as extreme as 19 July 2022 – when temperature anomalies in some locations reached +18°C – the anomalies of +14 to +16°C were overall fairly comparable in spatial extent. Temperature anomalies as high as this in the UK are exceptional and will almost inevitably be record-breaking.



The chart below shows average daily maximum temperatures across England and Wales for 2026 so far against all other years from 1931, and shows how extreme this event was, with the spike for May 2026 close in size to that of July 2022 (the most prominent peak in the red line). The England and Wales average daily maximum temperature on 25 May 2026 was 30.2°C, making this the 15th highest value in a daily series from 1931, with all days hotter than this in either July or August. 26 May 2026 was 29.9°C, ranked 21st highest. The daily maximum temperature anomaly relative to the monthly 1991-2020 average for England and Wales on 25 May (+14.1°C) was the second highest in this series from 1931, exceeded by only 19 July 2022 (+14.4°C). On this basis, taking into account the time of year, this was one of the most extreme high temperature events in the UK's observational records, falling not far short of the July 2022 40°C heatwave.



Daily minimum temperatures were also very high, although with a more spatially variable pattern – as is often the case. On 25 and 26 May, between around 15 to 25 stations recorded daily minimum temperatures of 18°C or higher, while this event also saw a ‘Tropical Night’ (a daily minimum temperature of over 20°C) recorded in the UK in May for the first time. The chart below shows mean daily minimum temperatures for the UK in 2026 so far.



The table below show UK and national temperature records set during this heatwave. Records were set for the highest daily maximum temperature in May for England, Wales, and the UK overall, and for the highest daily minimum temperature in in May for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the UK. Often when records are broken this tends to be by a small margin, but for this event the margin in some cases was very large, with the UK’s daily maximum and minimum temperature records for May both being exceeded by more than 2°C. All official records are available at <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/uk-climate-extremes#?tab=climateExtremes>

Record type for May	Station	Value (°C)	Date	Previous value (°C)	Previous station and date
UK and England highest Tmax	Kew Gardens, Greater London	35.1	26 May 2026	32.8^^	Camden Square, Greater London 22 May 1922 Horsham, West Sussex 29 May 1944 Tunbridge Wells, Kent 29 May 1944 Regent's Park, Greater London 29 May 1944
Wales highest Tmax	Hawarden Airport, Flintshire	32.2	25 May 2026	30.6	Newport, Monmouthshire 29 May 1944
UK and England highest Tmin	Camborne, Cornwall	21.4	27 May 2026	18.9*	Folkestone, Kent 31 May 1947
Wales highest Tmin	Aberdaron, Gwynedd	18.9	26 May 2026	18.6	Llanbedr, Gwynedd 17 May 2002
Northern Ireland highest Tmin	Killowen, County Down	15.9	28 May 2026	15.6	Killowen, County Down 26 May 2012

^^34.8°C was recorded the previous day 25 May 2026 at Kew Gardens, Greater London

*21.3°C was recorded the previous day 26 May 2026 and 19.4°C the day before that 25 May 2026, both at Kenley Airfield, Greater London

Most stations in the UK's network in England, Wales and the east of Northern Ireland set new May maximum temperature records, including many long-running stations. The table below lists stations with 100+ year record lengths and the margin by which the previous May record was exceeded: margins as large and widespread as this are only experienced during the most extreme events. For most of these stations the previous records were long-standing, from 1922, 1944 or 1947. The shading on the table denotes record margins of at least 2°C.

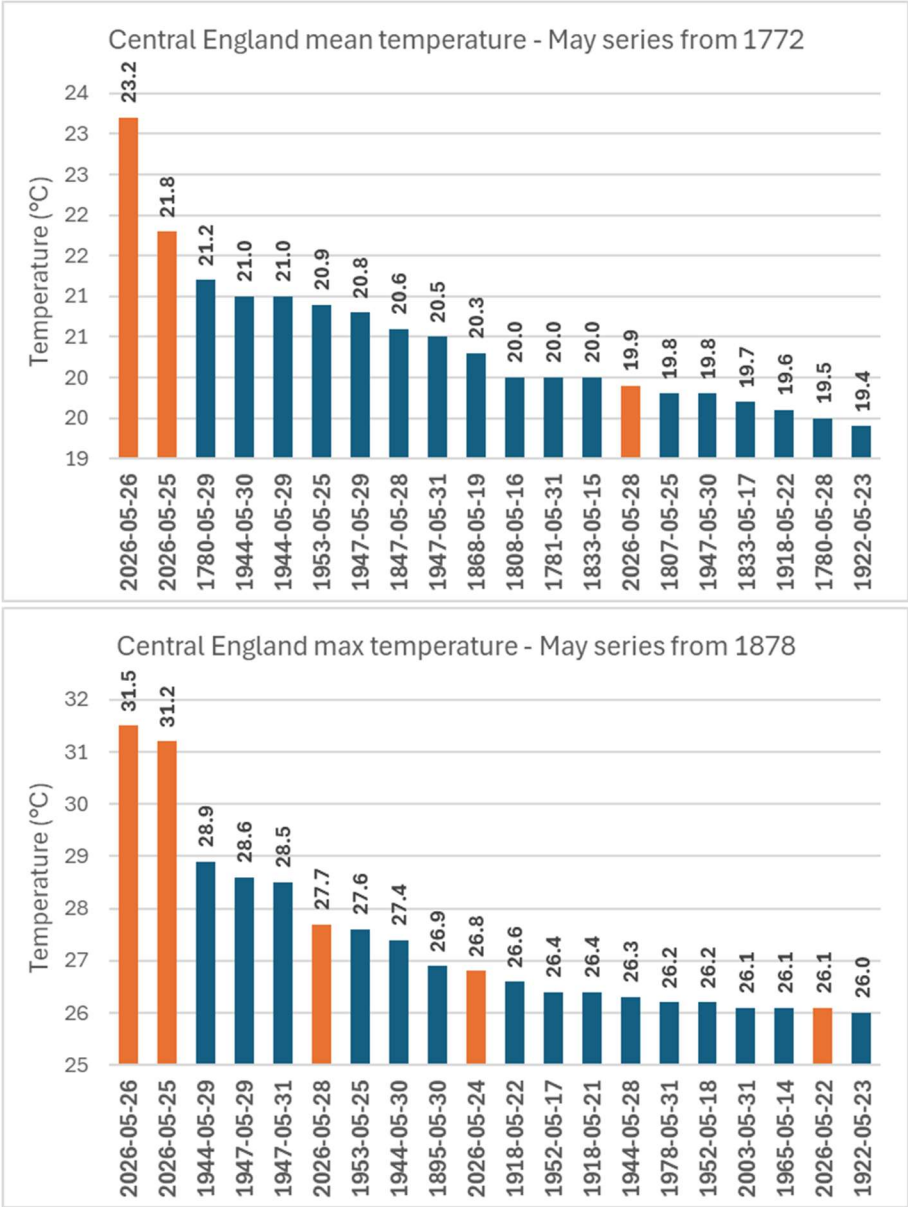
Station	Value (°C)	Date	Record margin (°C)	Previous value (°C)	Previous date	Record length (years)
Oxford	33.7	26 May 2026	3.1	30.6	30 May 1947	170
Armagh, County Armagh	26.3	25 May 2026	0.1	26.2	23 May 1989	159
Durham	29.7	25 May 2026	1.9	27.8	31 May 1922	144
Bradford, West Yorkshire	30.9	25 May 2026	2.6	28.3	29 May 1947	113
Rothamsted, Hertfordshire	32.5	26 May 2026	2.5	30.0	31 May 1947	112
Wisley, Surrey	33.8	26 May 2026	2.1	31.7	29 May 1944	111
Cranwell, Lincolnshire	32.3	25 May 2026	1.7	30.6	31 May 1947	111
Woburn Bedfordshire	32.9	26 May 2026	3.5	29.4	31 May 1947	110
Morpeth Cockle Park, Northumberland	27.7	25 May 2026	2.1	25.6	31 May 1922	110
Buxton, Derbyshire	29.9	25 May 2026	2.7	27.2	29 May 1947	109
Cambridge Botanic Garden	34.0	26 May 2026	2.9	31.1	22 May 1922	105
Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire	32.8	26 May 2026	2.8	30.0	29 May 1944	102
Cromer, Norfolk	32.0	25 May 2026	1.4	30.6	23 May 1922	102
Plymouth, Mountbatten, Devon	29.8	25 May 2026	3.7	26.1	31 May 1947	102

Values have not been individually checked, it is possible some suspect data may be present

The picture for highest May minimum temperatures was more mixed but also included several 100+ year stations setting new records including Durham, Bradford and Rothamsted (Hertfordshire).

The Central England Temperature (CET) series provides a long-term perspective of this event based on a 250+ year daily mean temperature series from 1772. The chart below shows that 25

and 26 May 2026 were, by a wide margin, the two warmest May days in this series, while the second chart shows they were by far the warmest May days for daily maximum Central England Temperature in a series from 1878 – exceeding the previous record by over 2°C. On these charts, days in May 2026 are highlighted orange.



The table below shows the UK’s highest maximum temperature on record for each calendar month of the year, as of June 2026, based on observational data extending back to the second half of the 19th Century. Three of the 12 months of the year fall in the last five years (2022, 2024 and 2026), five are in the most recent decade (2017-2026) and eight are in the 21st Century so far (since 2001). The fact that recent years feature prominently in this table is clear evidence of how extreme temperatures are particularly affected by the UK’s warming climate. The shading on the table denotes records set in the last five years (red), other years of previous decade (pink), and other years of 21st Century so far (pale pink). Records for only four months remain from the 20th Century, and, notably, the new May record of 35.1°C was only 0.5°C short of the UK record for June, set in summer 1976. It seems probable that these earlier records are on borrowed time.

Overall, this events fits into the pattern that is to be expected as the UK’s climate continues to warm – and a key aspect which this event highlights is the potential for hot summer weather to extend earlier in the year, into late spring.

Month	Station	Value (°C)	Date
Jan	Achfary, Sutherland	19.9	28 January 2024
Feb	Kew Gardens, London	21.2	26 February 2019
Mar	Mepal, Cambridgeshire	25.6	29 March 1968
Apr	Camden Square, London [^]	29.4	16 April 1949
May	Kew Gardens, London	35.1	26 May 2026
Jun	Camden Square, London Southampton Mayflower Park	35.6	29 June 1957 [^] 28 June 1976
Jul	Coningsby, Lincolnshire	40.3	19 July 2022
Aug	Faversham, Kent	38.5	10 August 2003
Sep	Bawtry, Hesley Hall, South Yorkshire [^]	35.6	2 September 1906
Oct	Gravesend, Kent	29.9	1 October 2011
Nov	Trawsgoed, Ceredigion	22.4	1 November 2015
Dec	Achfary, Sutherland	18.7	28 December 2019

[^]Denotes some reservations about the record value quoted. The full set of official records for the UK are available at <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/uk-climate-extremes>

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