

No Risk Please: We're British

presentation at

Disaster Risk Reduction for Natural Hazards:
Putting Research into Practice

4-6 November 2009
University College London

Greg Bankoff

Professor of Modern History, Department of History, University of Hull &
Visiting Professor, Department of Languages & Cultures, University of Leeds

g.bankoff@hull.ac.uk

Hull floods



Street scene in Hull, June 2007



5 components of vulnerability



- Livelihood strength & resilience
- Wellbeing & base-line status
- Self-protection
- Social protection
- Governance

7 contexts to vulnerability



- total vulnerability
- economic vulnerability
- technological (technocratic) vulnerability
- social vulnerability
- newly generated vulnerability
- delinquent vulnerability
- residual vulnerability

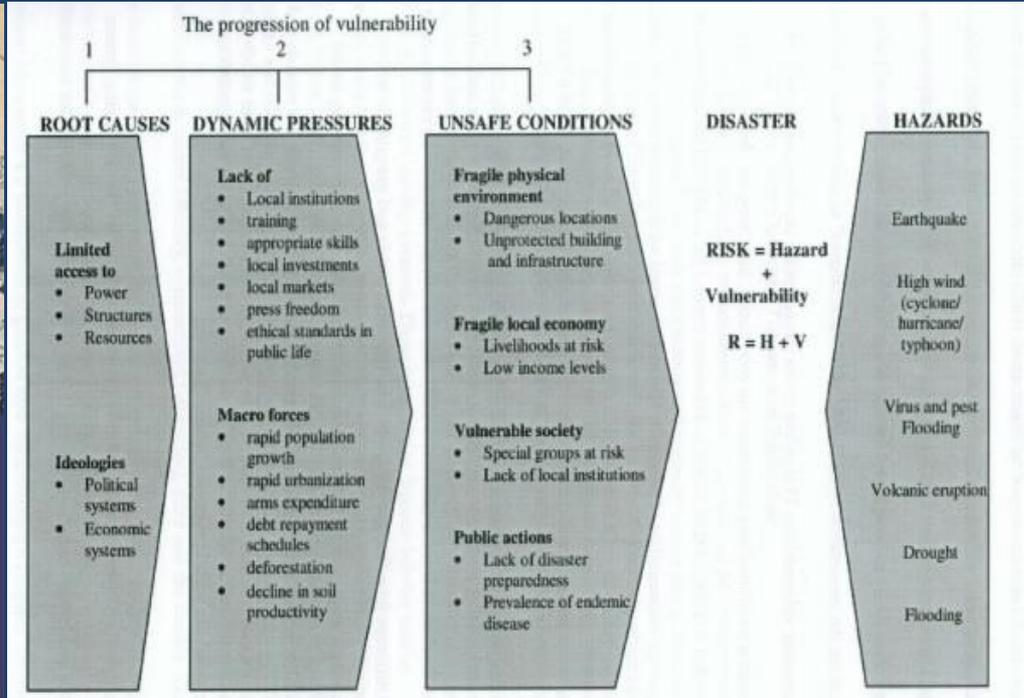
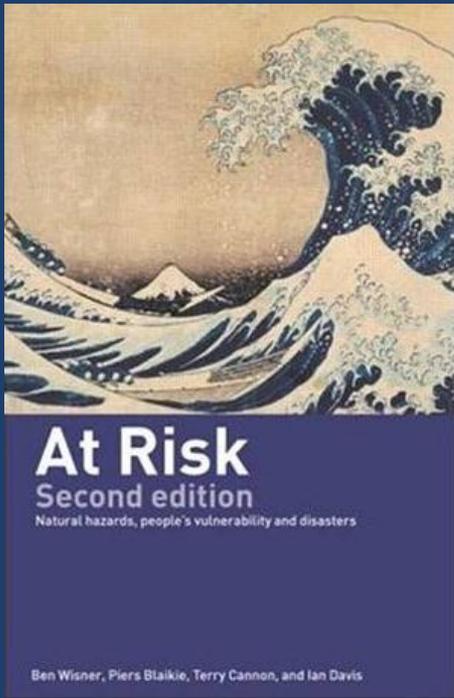
Community & history



Fishing community, Masantol, Pampanga, Philippines 2003



Inherent vulnerability



“Most government agencies...generally still deal with disasters as though they are equivalent to the natural hazards that trigger them; the principal object is the hazard, and the range of underlying reasons for the dangerous situation may be regarded as peripheral, or even irrelevant and immaterial. The factors involved in linking root causes and dynamic processes to vulnerability are seen as too diffuse or deep-rooted to address” (p.61)

What is the historian's role?

1. Patterns of past hazards/disasters
2. Uncovering nature of inequalities
3. How people coped with hazards in past (resilience)
4. Re-examining “court” or official histories
5. Encourages us to look comparatively across cultures
6. Reminds us disasters are processes as well as events
7. Role of hazards/disasters as catalysts of change in society



Inherent vulnerability in UK

Motor Insurance
Scottish Automobile
General Insurance Co. Ltd.
EDINBURGH
GLASGOW ST., NEWCASTLE

YORK EDITION

The Northern Echo

YORK EDITION

MONDAY, 8 JUNE, 1931. ONE PENNY. F

FOR RELIEF FROM RHEUMATISM
GENASPRIN
THE SAFE BRAND

ALL BRITAIN SHAKEN BY AN EARTHQUAKE.

THE GREATEST FOR CENTURIES.

ALARM IN THE NORTH-EAST.

PEOPLE RUSH FROM THEIR BEDS.

LITTLE DAMAGE AND NO LOSS OF LIFE.

An earthquake visitation—a rare occurrence in England—shook the country from end to end early yesterday. It is said to be the greatest that has been felt in this country since the 17th century.

From Aberdeen in the north to as far south as Jersey the shock was felt, the tremors lasting, in most cases, for some seconds at varying times round about 1.30 a.m. The shock, according to Reuters, was also felt in France, Belgium and America.

No serious damage was reported and no loss of life occurred. Considerable alarm was caused, and many people left their houses until all thoughts of danger had passed. Officers slept peacefully through the disturbance.

The South-Sea had its share of the earthquake, although no serious damage is reported.

In Wellington, Northampton, Chichester and South Shields violence started on foot.

People were seen to get to the streets of a Wharfedale church in Fife. This is about 100 feet high, and after the quake the tower part was seen to be slightly out of the perpendicular.

Southport Police Station was roused through the tremors, and officers as they thought that a riot had been expected of the town.

Remarkable tremors got abroad. One way that there was a terrific landslide at Whitby; another that two trains had been derailed at York. Both rumours were entirely without foundation.

Throughout yesterday the telephone operators at the Northern Home Office were busy answering inquiries from all parts of the North-Sea.

While some people did not realize what the extraordinary vibrations meant, most realized that they were an earthquake tremor, and feared that disaster may have overtaken a neighbouring district.

Happily, the Northern Echo was able to resume its regular publication.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY.

SHOCK CENTRED OFF EAST COAST.

"BRITAIN NOT COMING IN AN EARTHQUAKE ZONE."

Mr. Frank Bugeby, F.R.A.S., the astronomer to the University of Durham, was consulted with regard to the earthquake yesterday.

"I was not disturbed by the event," he told the Northern Echo, "but the earthquake records that the disturbance occurred about the middle of the night, about 1.30 a.m. The shock is thought to have been relatively and the vibrations felt up to the north as far as the North-Sea, to the south."

"I am only relating it by consulting some of the others who were present at the time," he said. "The shock seems to have been centred on the Eastern coast. It seems as though it may have been just off the coast, or not far from it."

Mr. Bugeby explained that the point of origin was very probably about a little way from the coast, and that the shaking was very local, and that the shaking was very local, and that the shaking was very local.

The earthquake was very local, and that the shaking was very local.

HOW THE NORTH-EAST FARED.

NO SERIOUS DAMAGE.

The following earthquake occurrences are reported from the North-Sea:

WHARFEDALE.

HOW IT FELT AT SEA.

AS THOUGH ANOTHER SHIP WAS PASSING VERY CLOSE.

The boatsmen of Southport in 1911 was exactly recalled during the north-west which, according to official observations, began at 1.25 a.m. and lasted for ten seconds. Many people were at the quays that day and it was a very unusual experience. It was a very unusual experience. It was a very unusual experience.

An Old-world Royal Court.

VICTORIAN FOSILS RETURN TO FASHION.

There will be an old-world atmosphere about the fetes of the decoration which will attend the King and Queen's coronation which the King and Queen will hold on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Just now will be the most favoured fete, and they will be held on the Victoria park. Some of the fetes are held on the Victoria park. Some of the fetes are held on the Victoria park.

A NORTHERN DEBATE.

One of the biggest Court fetes will be held in the morning at the Victoria park. Some of the fetes are held on the Victoria park.

PRINCESS MARIE LOUISE.

Princess Marie Louise, who is being to be married to the Duke of York, will be present at the coronation.

WHAT THE GERMAN TALKS MEAN.

CO-OPERATION IN TRADE AND FINANCE.

NO PACT.

CHEQUERS ARRAY OF EXPERTS.

There will be an old-world atmosphere about the fetes of the decoration which will attend the King and Queen's coronation which the King and Queen will hold on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Just now will be the most favoured fete, and they will be held on the Victoria park. Some of the fetes are held on the Victoria park.

A NORTHERN DEBATE.

One of the biggest Court fetes will be held in the morning at the Victoria park. Some of the fetes are held on the Victoria park.

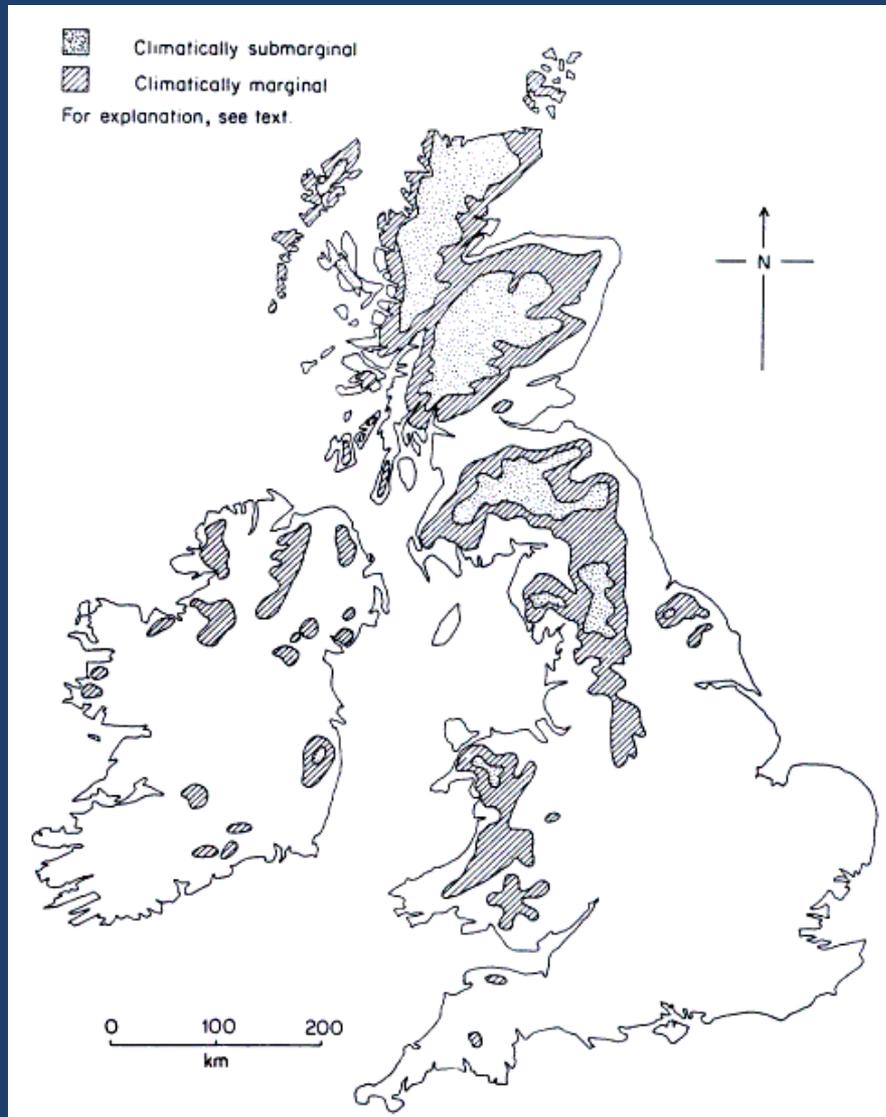
PRINCESS MARIE LOUISE.

Princess Marie Louise, who is being to be married to the Duke of York, will be present at the coronation.



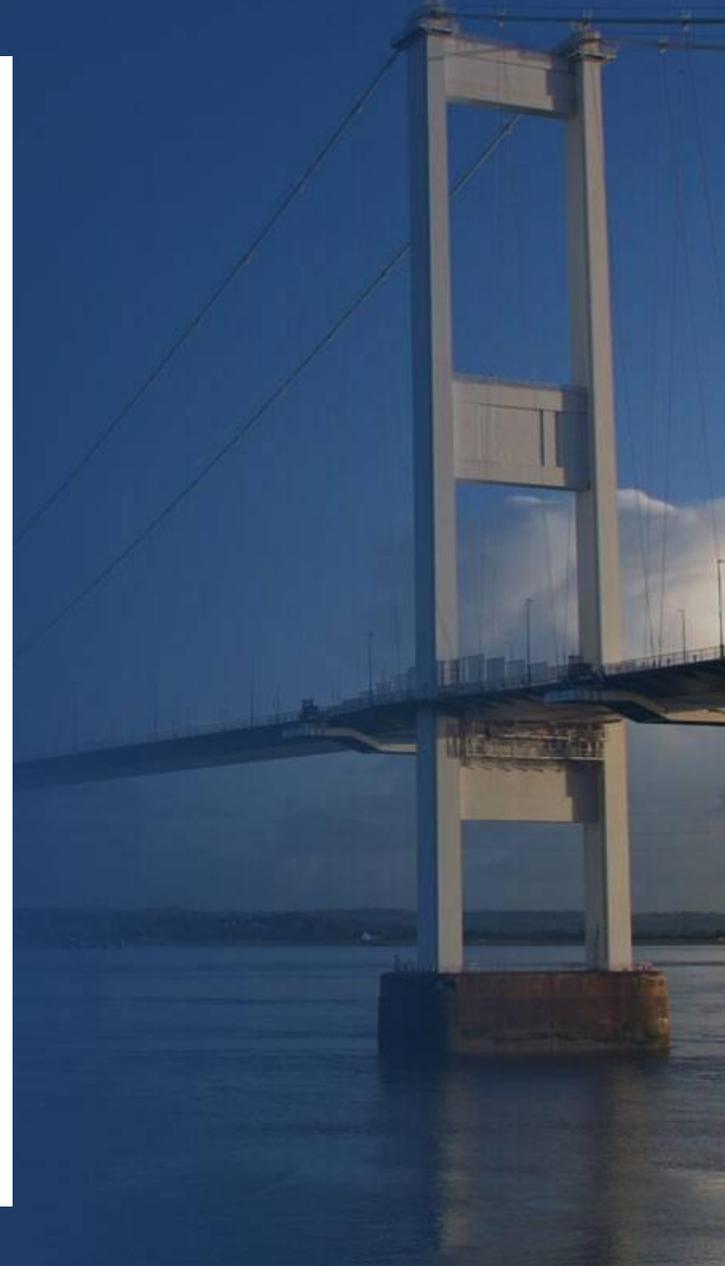
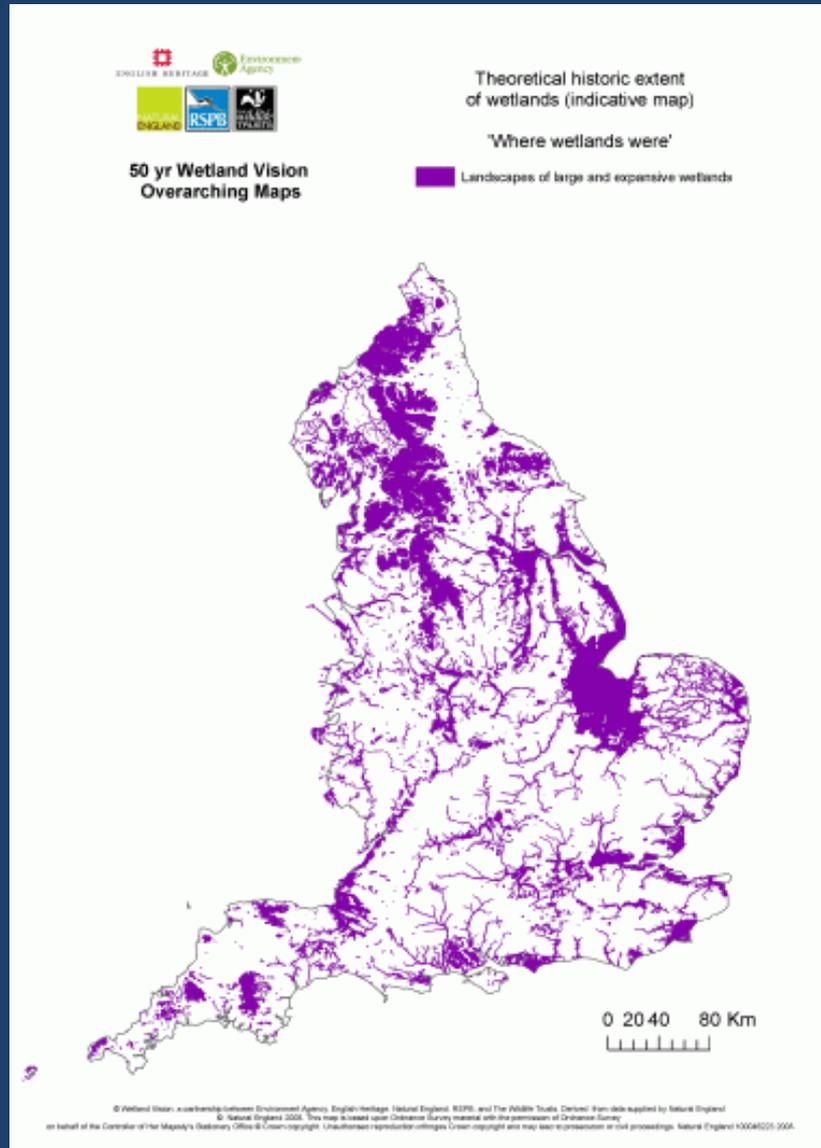
So-called Dogger Bank Earthquake in North Sea off Hull, 1931

Mapping vulnerability—Uplands

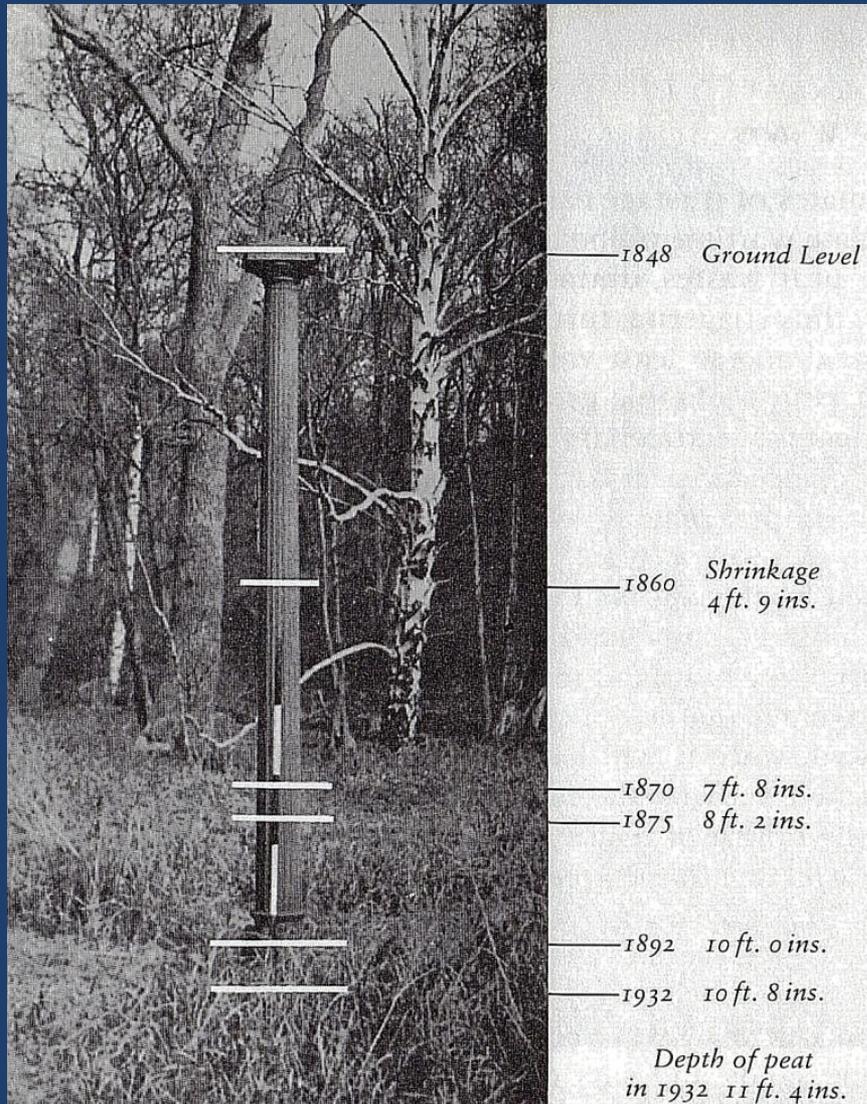


Areas marginal for oats cropping in the British Isles (after Parry 1978)

Mapping vulnerability—Wetlands



Rapid subsidence



Holme Post, Cambridgeshire showing peat wastage

Mapping vulnerability—Floods



Shading shows likely extent of flooding from overflowing rivers and exceptionally high seas if there were no flood defences
Source: Environment Agency

“As a general rule there is nothing very much that can be done in England to prevent floods from natural watercourses...It would be far cheaper to pull down the buildings in areas liable to flood and build them elsewhere than to attempt any scheme sufficient to control the river.”

D. Barker, *Harvest Home: The Official Story of the Great Floods of 1947 and their Sequel*. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1948, p.85

Building in resilience



Nottingham from the east, by Jan Sieberechts c.1700

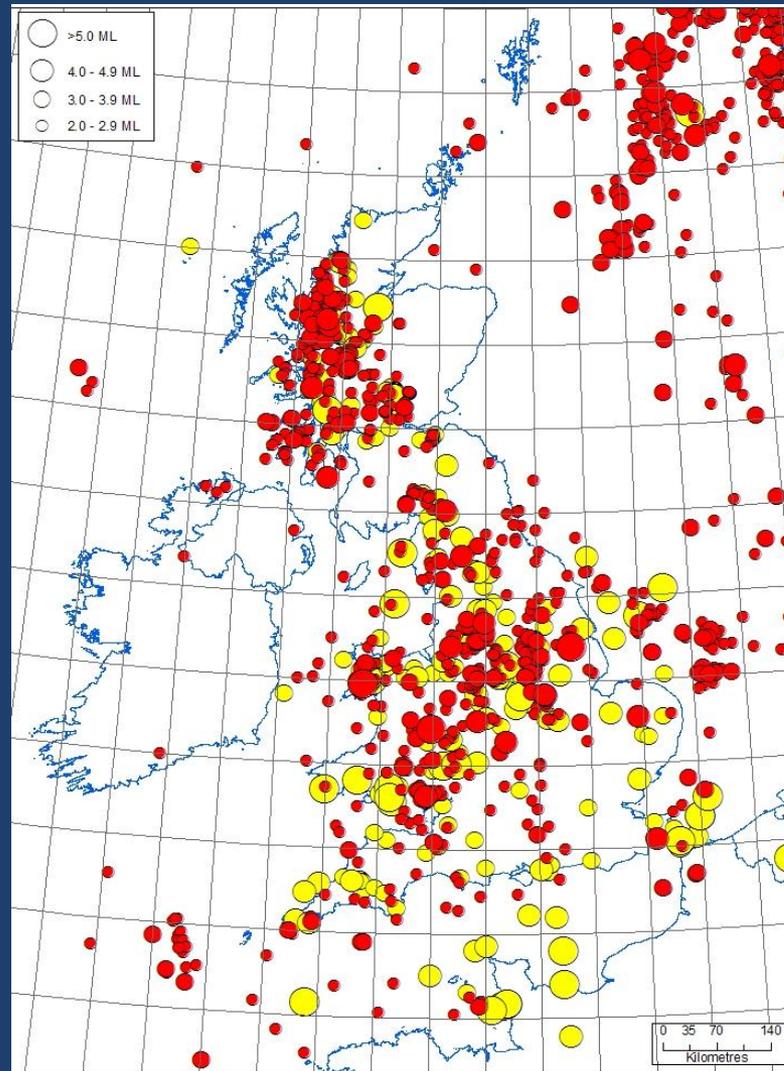


Mapping vulnerability—Coastal Erosion



Holderness Coast showing its retreat since Roman times

Mapping vulnerability—Seismicity

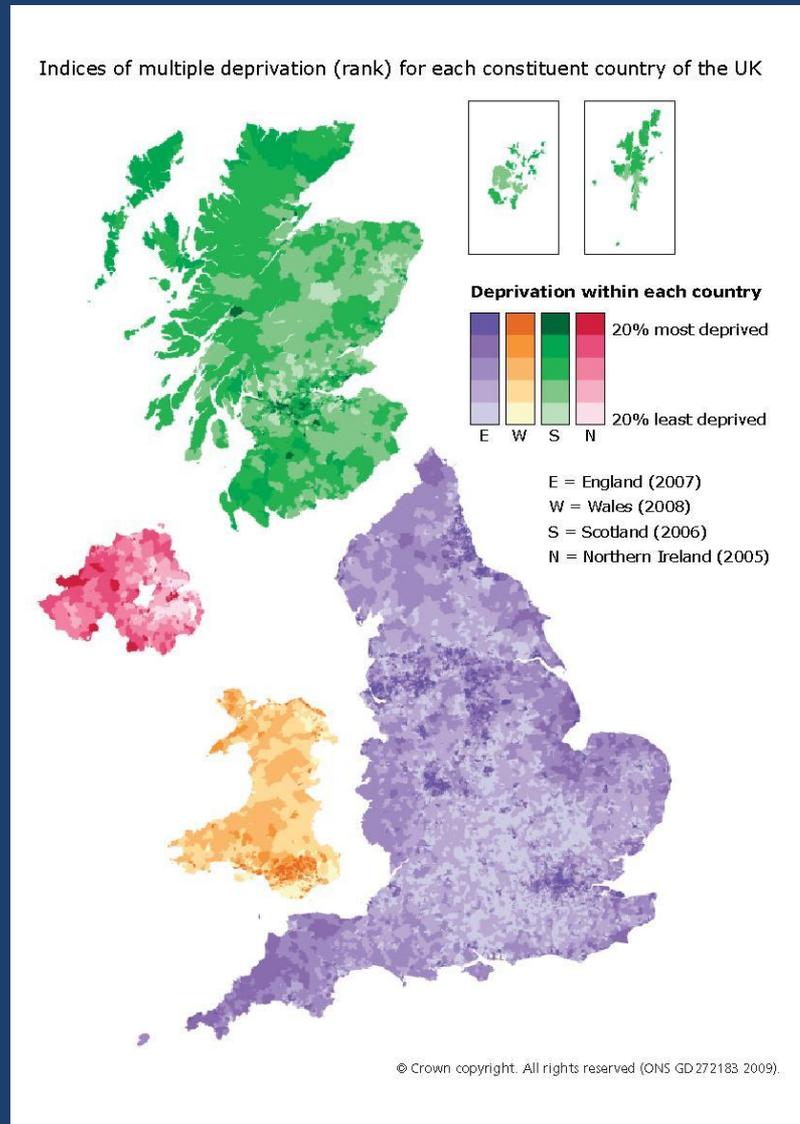


Historical seismicity since 1832

Source: British Geological Survey



Culture of complacency?



“Background vulnerability” – Predictive



Houses of Parliament, London

