

HOW TSUNAMI-PRONE IS THE UK?

Notwithstanding the tsunami menace to the southern coastline posed by a future catastrophic collapse of the Canary Island of La Palma's Cumbre Vieja volcano, it seems that the UK is exposed to a range of local and remote tsunami sources. The tsunami with run-up heights in excess of 3 – 4 m that inundated parts of NE Scotland following a giant submarine landslide off the coast of Norway around 8,000 years ago is now well documented. Others, however, are only now attracting more serious attention. Two historical earthquakes in the English Channel are reported to have generated tsunami, the second - a Magnitude 5.9 quake in 1580 - being charged with sinking 20 ships and drowning hundreds in the coastal cities of Dover, Calais and Boulogne. More recently, in the Summer of 1929, the Brighton Argus newspaper reported one death and a number of injuries arising from a giant wave that appeared from nowhere on a warm, summer's day. In 2002, Simon Haslett of Bath Spa University College in the UK and antipodean tsunami expert, Ted Bryant from Australia's University of Wollongong presented evidence for a major, lethal tsunami striking the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary on 30th January 1607. The event, which is commemorated on plaques in churches in the region, and in numerous contemporary documents, is held responsible for taking more than 2,000 lives and devastating some 570 km of the North Devon, Severn Estuary and South Wales coasts. Haslett and Bryant estimate maximum deep-water wave heights of a little under 4m in the channel, with run-up heights on the adjacent coasts reaching 7.5m. In places, the wave or waves appear to have penetrated several kilometres inland, purportedly reaching the foot of Somerset's Glastonbury Tor, more than 20km from the coast. Confirmation of a tsunami cause for the event remains to be categorically determined and no geological source has yet been identified. Perhaps the best candidate is an - as yet - unrecognised local submarine landslide.

Reference: Bryant, E. A. & Haslett, S. K. 2002 Was the AD1607 coastal flooding event in the Severn Estuary and Bristol Channel (UK) due to a tsunami? *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* **13**, 163-167.