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Divers stand in the sea near a bastion of Walton castle, which the sea has engulfed but not entirely destroyed.

Submerged Roman fort yields up some of its secrets

By Don Black

everything. Not a trace remains; Walton has vanished." If the research done at Walton castle is anything to go by, the Ipswich team can produce results of scientific value from the sport they enjoy most.

LONG submerged in the sea off Felixstowe, a Roman castle has yielded up some of its secrets to a team of amateur divers.

Yesterday, when a low tide exposed great chunks of a corner bastion, they concluded their first season of survey dives.

The divers have found that at least two walls still extend unimagined distances from the tumbled bastion—after 17 centuries of assault by armed men, stone robbers, cliff falls and the pluck and knock of powerful waves.

Yesterday's high wind, gusting to gale force, whipped the sea against the masonry with such strength that further serious study is having to be put off until next year.

Walton Castle, as the place was known, will be explored as far as the ramparts that stood on its seaward side, the first to fall to erosion of the soft cliff on which it stood.

light under the sea may still perhaps be found the ghosts of men and shadows of the sunken stronghold.

"Seaward of Felixstowe Ferry, the Roman castle of Walton once stood guardian against the raiding ships of the Saxon. These walls, bound with mortar no less hard than the stone itself, were proof against the storms of a thousand years.

"In Walton castle, in 1338, Edward III lodged royally just before he sailed for France in the campaign of Crecy. Above the scarred walls, even then ancient, the banners floated, and under shelter of the castle lay its own harbour, Wadgate haven, crowded no doubt with the barrelled masts of medieval shipping.

"The sea has overwhelmed



Miss Elizabeth Owles, archaeological assistant at Ipswich Museum, examines a slab of bonding tile brought up by the divers. Now encrusted with barnacle and weed, it used to lie between courses of septaria.

Fifteen dives

Ipswich branch of the British Sub-Aqua Club has made 15 fully recorded dives to the ruins since May. Its members, working in an average depth of 12ft, with visibility ranging from eight foot to nil.

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They have discovered that one wall runs for about 80 yards almost parallel with the shore, and that the other wall extends more than 40 yards out to sea.

The divers plotted their finds on a large sketch map. When I showed this to Walton's historian, 88-year-old Mr. Samuel Wall, he declared: "This is wonderful. I was under the impression that the greater part of the masonry, septaria, was dredged away in the 1860's to make cement."

"Boatmen told me that there was nothing there except what could be seen at low water."

Miss Elizabeth Owles, archaeological assistant at Ipswich Museum, has been advising the club on what to look for and how to record any finds. She says the walls are about nine feet thick.

Red brick

To help the divers identify Roman masonry, as opposed to natural formations, Ipswich Museum told them to look for layers of red brick. After removing a large amount of marine growth their search was successful.

"We have many more measurements to take and we want to bring out loose pieces of wall, if possible a good cross-section of bricks and stone," said the club's diving officer, Mr. Geoff Errington (26).

Geoff, a former naval diver, has travelled with some of his companions to Burgh Castle, near Gorleston, to see the layout of a similar fortification which is preserved on dry land.

Two in chain

Burgh and Walton were built in the 3rd century A.D., two in a chain of forts from the Wash to the Solent that were intended to protect Roman Britain from Saxon invaders.

Both Suffolk strongholds were later used by the Normans, who built keeps inside the walls. But these additions have disappeared, that at Walton having been dismantled by King Henry II in about 1174 when he put down a baron's rebellion.

The advancing sea completed his destructive work in the early part of the 18th century. It continues to threaten the shore below the clubhouse of Felixstowe Ferry golfers.

While firm evidence of the fort's layout and history is limited, romantic writing on the subject abounds almost as much as that about Dunwich or Lyonesse.

"Suffolk Sea Borders," published in 1928, includes this account of the approaches to the Deben estuary:

'Lost Atlantis'

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Roman castle fortifications discovered by divers

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Ipswich branch of the British Sub-Aqua Club has made 15 fully recorded dives to the ruins since May, its members working in an average depth of 12ft. with visibility ranging from eight feet to nil.

They have discovered that one wall runs for about 90 yards almost parallel with the shore, and that the other wall extends more than 40 yards out to sea.

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finds on a large sketch map. When this was showed to Walton's historian, 89-year-old Mr. Samuel Wall, he declared: "This is wonderful. I was under the impression that the greater part of the masonry, septaria, was dredged away in the 1860's to make cement.

Miss Elizabeth Owles, archaeological assistant at Ipswich Museum, has been advising the club on what to look for and how to record any finds.

"Underwater archaeology is incredibly difficult in this country," she said. "Virtually nothing reliable is known about Walton Castle and any hard facts from the divers are most welcome.

"Old books and prints on the subject are open to suspicion. Perhaps the divers will find the position of the main gate . . ."

Miss Owles believes the map shows the walls running a little too tidily.

To help the divers identify Roman masonry, as opposed to natural formations, Ipswich Museum told them to look for layers of red brick. After removing a large amount of marine growth their search was successful.

"We have many more measurements to take and we want to bring out loose pieces of wall, if possible a good cross-section of bricks and stone" said the club's diving officer, Mr. Geoff Errington (26).

They may do that by at-

taching five-gallon cans to the masonry and letting the incoming tide provide the lift.

When they made their first dive, they found that the wall running seawards appeared to be about nine feet thick and four feet to five feet high. Later, several points were seen where the brick runs in two bands of three layers.

Weed clings to the higher parts and there are crabs and the occasional lobster living among the ruins.

Many pieces of masonry lie throughout the area. These have been far too numerous to plot and are evidently scattered far out to sea and to the north of the main ruins.

Walton was built in the 3rd century AD, with Burgh Castle, two in a chain of forts from the Wash to the Solent that were intended to protect Roman Britain from Saxon invaders.

Both Suffolk strongholds were later used by the Normans, who built keeps inside the walls. But these additions have disappeared, that at Walton having been dismantled by King Henry II in about 1174 when he put down a barons' rebellion.

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"In Walton castle, in 1338, Edward III lodged royally just before he sailed for France in the campaign of Crecy. Above the scarred walls, even then ancient, the banners floated and under shelter of the castle lay its own harbour, Wadgate Haven, crowded no doubt with the barrelled masts of medieval shipping.

"The sea has overwhelmed everything. Not a trace remains; Walton has vanished."

The sea on Sunday was surprisingly warm, 40 degrees F, the same temperature as the divers find in water-filled gravel pits in summer.

But they were glad to leave the turbulent conditions at Felixstowe for their normal Sunday training session at Fore Street baths, Ipswich.

Castle fortifications recovered by divers

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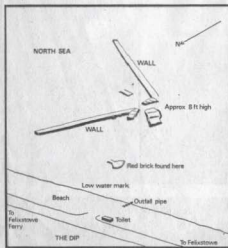
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Some of the diving team that has explored the ruins: (left to right): Geoff Errington, Simon Tallowin, P.C. Arthur Clements, Arthur Cook, Police Sergeant Donovan Stubley and Gerald Dodson, who lives in Langer Road, Felixstowe.



An artist's impression of Walton castle remains, as discovered so far, based on a survey started this year by amateur divers. Rubble lies thickly in the angle of the submerged walls. A toilet block newly provided by Felixstowe Urban Council and an outlet pipe are illustrated as the best available reference point on the shore. Contrary to appearances, they are not connected; the pipe carries a freshwater stream that once served the Roman garrison.



Miss Elizabeth Owsley, archaeological assistant at Ipswich Museum, examines a slab of bonding tile brought up by the divers. Now encrusted with barnacles and weed, it used to lie between squares of septaria.