

# THE EXCAVATION OF WALTON PRIORY

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*with comment on the main building by R. Gilyard-Beer, historical commentary by Katharine Davison, and a note on Walton Old Hall by T. M. Felgate.*

## SUMMARY

The site of the Benedictine cell at Walton was stripped in 1971 and found to consist of a small but substantial house of stone and rubble walls. No sign of a church was found and it was concluded, from both the archaeological and documentary evidence, that the cell used the Parish Church of St. Mary's to the south and that the building excavated represented a non-conventual cell.

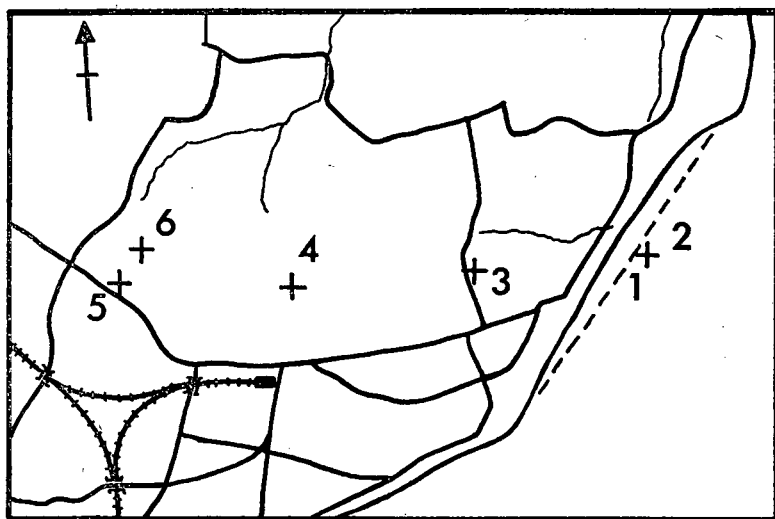
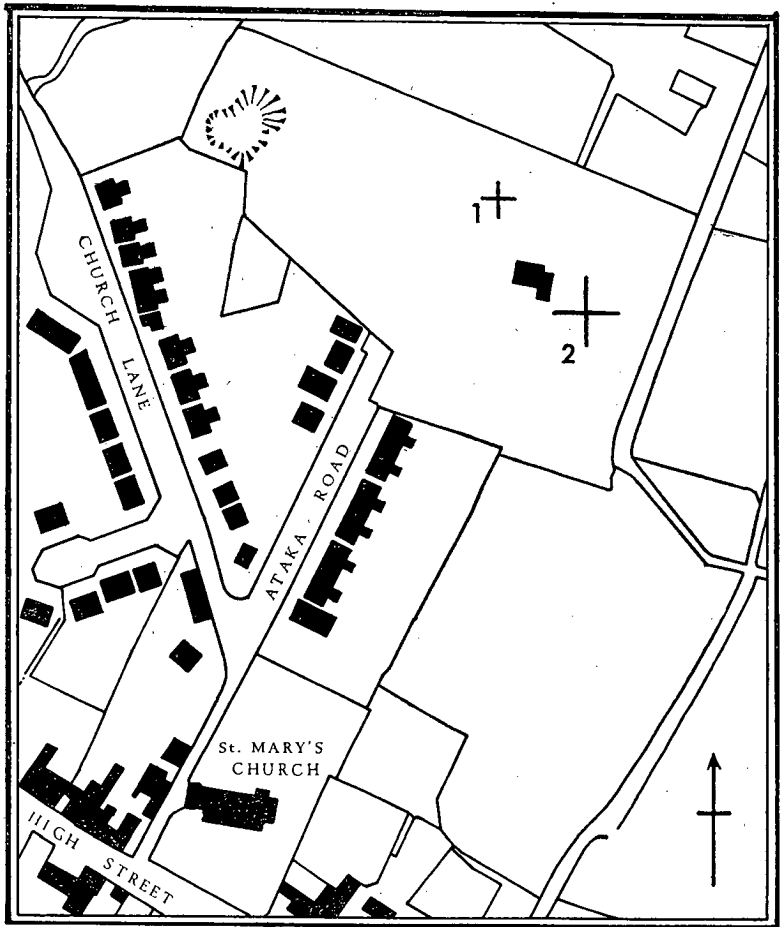


FIG. 37.—Map of Felixstowe and Walton showing positions of principal medieval buildings. 1. Site of Castle; 2. Approximate site of Priory I; 3. Old Felixstowe Church (Chapel of Burgh?); 4. Walton Old Hall; 5. Walton Church; 6. Priory II.

## *Topography*

The Priory site lies some 200m to the north of St. Mary's Church and just over half a mile west of the manor house of Walton (Walton Old Hall). The Priory, Walton Old Hall, Old Felixstowe Church



## WALTON PRIORY 1971

100 METRES

300 FEET

FIG. 38.—Map of Walton showing (1) position of priory as marked by Ordnance Survey; (2) position of priory building as found by 1971 excavation.

and the site of Walton Castle lie in a straight line, roughly equidistant from one another at just over half mile intervals. This line forms the watershed with small streams draining away to the north and a long, gentle slope to the south. Trackways, some of them clearly of considerable age, linked these sites before the spread of modern housing. The subsoil is a heavy, loamy, well drained gravel (Fig. 37).

### *Excavation*

The excavation was sponsored by the Department of the Environment in advance of building development on the site in liaison with the Planning Department of the then East Suffolk County and Felixstowe Rural District Councils. Earlier exploration by Ipswich Museum had indicated a substantial building well to the south-east of the site marked on the Ordnance Survey map<sup>1</sup> and surface spreads of rubble seemed to confirm this (Fig. 38). The whole area around the barn was extensively trenched and stripped wherever buildings became apparent (Fig. 39). The area indicated by the Ordnance Survey was also trenched without results; the whole exercise confirming the results of the trial trench by Ipswich Museum in 1968.

The foundations of the walls were found to lie immediately below the plough soil and the spreads of debris were clearly the result of deep ploughing over the structures.

### *The Site*

Slight evidence of earlier occupation on the site was afforded by a single scrap of gritty prehistoric pottery, a number of flint flakes and two 'thumb scrapers'; a sherd of double cordoned, wheel thrown pottery of about the middle of the first century A.D. and three rims of Romano-British cooking pots (Fig. 40, 1),<sup>2</sup> a fragment of a sagging base, tentatively identified as Middle Saxon (Fig. 40, 2) and two rims of Thetford ware (Fig. 40, 3); but no structure or other evidence was found. Fragments of Roman roofing tiles were found in the debris of the priory, but these could easily have been imported to the site from more than one source in Felixstowe. No indisputable boundaries to the site exist today, with the possible exception of the lane running north-south on the eastern edge of the building area, which certainly has the appearance of considerable age. The road to the west can reasonably be presumed to be the western edge of the monastic property.

<sup>1</sup> Notes and information from Miss Elizabeth Owles.

<sup>2</sup> Only one illustrated; the 'Belgic' type sherd and the other two Romano-British rims were very abraded.

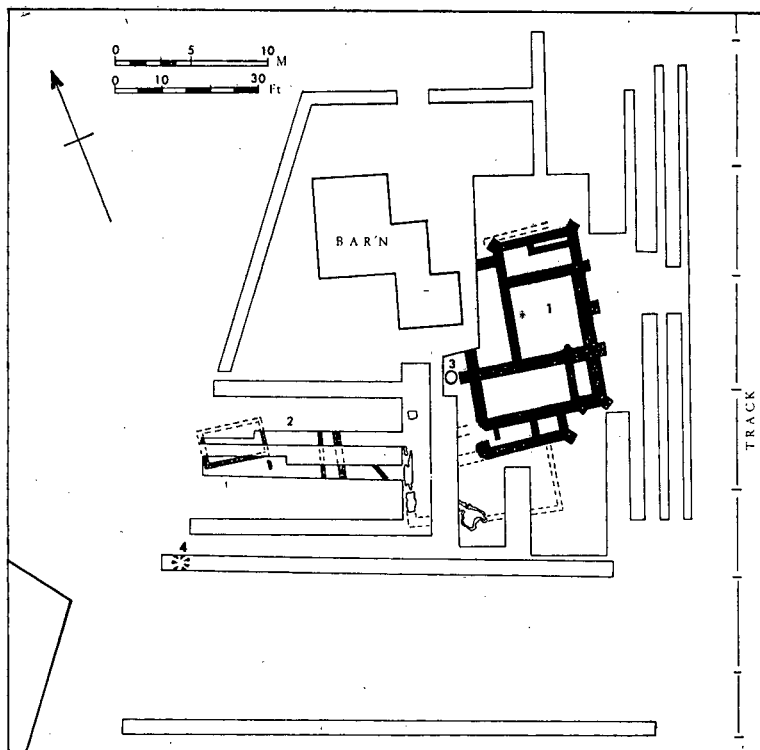


FIG. 39.—Plan showing areas excavated, 1971: (1) main building; (2) secondary buildings; (3) 18th-century brick-lined well; (4) pit with stained glass.

### *The Buildings*

The buildings which represent the monastic cell consist of a substantial main block with slighter structures to the west and south and evidence of earlier, flimsier buildings underneath the main block itself (Fig. 39). The traces of these foundations are very slight, where they are overlaid by the main building the destruction has been virtually total, only in room A were there any indications of this building. On the north side of room C a length of light wall footings in unmortared flint survived to show that the structure was on the same alignment as the later priory house. Fragmentary foundations of a similar character appeared at the south end of the main block and may well have been part of the same complex.

Forty metres to the west of the main block light wall footings of unmortared flint indicated a rectangular building 8m long and 2.5m wide, the long axis aligned east-west (Fig. 39, 2). Between

this and the main block a series of similar footings were found to have been so damaged by deep ploughing as to render interpretation impossible. In all cases, these footings were of unmortared flint and septaria, not more than 30cm wide and must be the simple foundations for sill beams of timber framed structures. Two fragments of re-used, dressed limestone were found in the westernmost building (Fig. 39, 2) and may well indicate a post-medieval date for this building. No other dating evidence can be advanced for these buildings; they could well be the outbuildings of barns and stables mentioned in the documentary evidence.

The major building on the site (Fig. 41) was aligned north-south and consisted of a substantial structure of mortared flints and considerable quantities of septarian nodules used as outer skins to the walls. The thickness of these foundations, of up to a metre, indicates a building of solid rubble walls rather than a half timbered structure and is confirmed by a drawing of the 'Ruins of Walton Abbey' (Plate X)<sup>3</sup>.

The whole building seems to have been thoroughly robbed in the 18th century to such an extent that in some cases the foundations could only be traced by the robber trenches. Great piles of mortar and debris were found on the sites of the principal rooms together with clay pipes and pottery of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Fragments of limestone were rare on the site and probably only related to the structural details.

The plan of the main building (Fig. 41) shows the detail of the outer skins of the foundations where they still existed; the firm lines indicate the positive course of the walls as shown by the robber trenches and the dotted lines the probable course of the walls where the outlines had been greatly blurred by the robbing. Butt joints could clearly be seen at X and Y. The eastern wall of room D was pierced with a mortared aperture, sloping to the outside, presumably a drain. Another, brick-lined drain ran from the northern side of the same room through room C and beyond, to the north. The bricks of this drain suggest a post-monastic, 17th-century date. The eastern extension of room E and the east wall of D had distinctly heavier foundations, although constructed of smaller materials than those of the first phase (rooms A, B, C).

A number of fragmentary and complete floor tiles, measuring 10cm and 12cm square were found loose in the rubble of rooms A and D. All were plain, glazed dark green or pale yellow with bevelled sides. Two fragments of ridge tiles, one from the rubble in

<sup>3</sup> S.R.O. (Ipswich), 'The West Prospect of the Ruins of Walton Abbey', from the plan of Felixstowe and Walton, 1740, by Joshua Kirby. Inevitably this was wrongly copied by Hamlet Watling who states the original to have been in the British Museum.

room A and one outside room C, have stepped ornaments as finials and may recall the annual accounts of William Waterford in 1499 which record the ornate tiling of half the hall (see below, p. 147). A fragment of a similar ridge tile was recovered from the ruins of Walton Old Hall by Mr. Felgate in 1968 (below, p. 152). Small fragments of stained glass occurred in the rubble throughout the main building and a considerable quantity was recovered from a pit to the southwest of the main building area (Fig. 39, 4).

The main building had two phases: *Phase 1*. The first phase consists of a hall (room A), a chamber block to the south (room B) and another projecting to the east (room C). This last has a rectangular foundation in the corner, on the north side, which is probably the site of a staircase. The hall, A, seems to have been provided with a fireplace about a third of the way along the east wall, but no traces of the doorways that must have connected with the other rooms could be found. *Phase 2*. The second phase shows extensive remodelling of the earlier structure, with butt joints obscuring the diagonal buttresses at the eastern end of the southern chamber B. This addition had massive foundations, slightly wider than those of phase 1 and 80cm thick; more than twice that of phase 1. This addition added only 4m internally to the length of this chamber but allowed the whole eastern wall of the building to be brought in line with the east end of room C, providing a large hall D. One butt joint can be seen in the small additions (F) to the south, but the extensive robbing in this area precludes a complete appraisal of the degree of remodelling here, except to say that the easternmost room, with its diagonal buttress, certainly belongs to phase 2.

In order to make sense of this remodelling, it is suggested that the phase 1 hall was demolished, but its eastern wall was retained for the new hall D. This interpretation would seem best to fit the 18th-century drawing of the 'West Prospect of the Ruins of Walton Abbey' (Plate X). The drawing shows a two-storey building whose west side is pierced with a large double door, suggesting a division at about a third of its length, from the north. This would fit the plan of the first phase of the main building, being an original doorway from hall A to room C, which was retained as an outer door after the remodelling of phase 2. The buttresses on the north corner could thus also be accommodated, that beside the double door being based upon the remains of the north wall of hall A; otherwise a diagonal buttress might have been expected at this point. The drawing also shows the west wall to be propped up with timber; this might well reflect the unequal thickness of the east and west wall of hall D and the pressures exerted by the roof. The ruins which appear to be shown to the south are difficult to interpret as the detail is obscured, but they are in the correct position to be the remains of the south chamber (F) complex, abandoned and ruinous

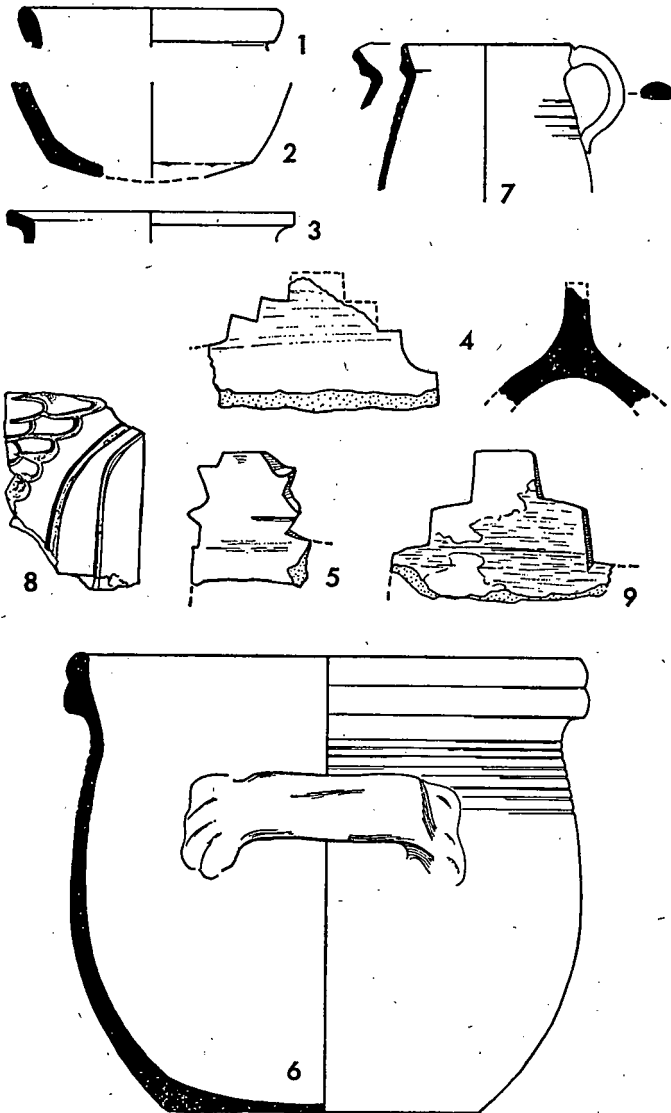


FIG. 40.—Finds. Nos. 1-7 from Priory, 1971; 8 and 9 from Old Hall, 1967-1968.  
Scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

by the 18th century. The building depicted would therefore consist only of hall D and room C.

#### *Small finds*

Very little was found on the site of the priory buildings, other than a quantity of post-medieval potsherds and clay pipes. Three 14th-century green glazed body sherds and an unglazed fragment of the base of a cooking pot were the only medieval evidence, other than the floor tiles and ridge tiles noted below.

- Fig. 40, 1. Romano-British. Folded-over rim of a cooking pot in soft grey fabric. Two other eroded rim sherds were also recovered.
- Fig. 40, 2. Sagging base, possibly of Ipswich ware, in grey-brown fabric, rather soft for Middle Saxon wares.
- Fig. 40, 3. Thetford ware rim. Two other comparable rims were recovered from the area of the main building.
- Fig. 40, 4. Stepped finial of ridge tile. Spots of green and brown glaze. Cf. that from the Walton Old Hall site (no. 9). In rubble in hall A. For a possible date see below, p. 147. Similar examples have been found at Snape Priory (Ipswich Museum, 966.26).
- Fig. 40, 5. Stepped finial of ridge tile, spots of brown glaze. Outside north wall of room C.
- Fig. 40, 6. Orange-red ware with clear glaze internally and externally. Heavy reeded rim with zone of horizontal lines on the shoulder and two horizontal handles. Found in the rubble of hall D, associated with clay pipes in the early 18th century.
- Fig. 40, 7. Rim and shoulder of jug in fine, sandy, red ware and a bright, clear glaze. Upper portion ribbed, handle a flattened oval. Dating as for no. 6.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to record his grateful thanks to Miss E. Owles, formerly of Ipswich Museum; to his assistants, Miss K. Davison, Mr. G. I. Moss and Miss J. Walker (Mrs. Sewter); to Mr. T. M. Felgate for his local knowledge; Mr. J. G. Hurst and Mr. R. Gilyard-Beer for their help and advice. The speed with which the excavation was carried out depended largely on the cheerful hard labour of the volunteers.

#### THE BUILDINGS OF WALTON PRIORY

by R. Gilyard-Beer, O.B.E., M.A., F.S.A.

The history of this religious house shows that from its foundation until the early 14th century it was a fully conventual priory asso-