
16 Felixstowe

Grid reference [TM 303 342]

The Edwardian holiday resort of Felixstowe owes much of its charm to the Red Crag hill on which it stands overlooking the sea. The seaward side has been steepened by erosion over many centuries to form a cliff-line, used to grand effect by hotels and also the Seafront Gardens, with their rockeries and terraced paths.

Natural springs are an important feature here: water percolates down through the sandy Crag until it reaches an underlying layer of impervious London Clay and emerges to feed ornamental pools and cascades. The iron-rich water had reputed health-giving properties, so Felixstowe gained fame as a fashionable spa in Edwardian times.

The water also tends to make local slopes unstable and prone to landslips, as it lubricates the upper surface of the London Clay. This can be seen at Fagbury Cliff [TM 270 347] overlooking the Container Port, where tree growth has been disturbed by subsidence.

The Red Crag contributed to the town's prosperity in the mid Victorian period through the brown phosphatic nodules known as 'coprolites'. Ground up, these were used as fertiliser, and prompted a mini 'gold rush' in local parishes. Interestingly, the nodules contain high levels of uranium, which is why Felixstowe is the hot-spot for radioactive radon gas in Suffolk.

The London Clay is underlain by the Harwich Formation which contains bands of lime-rich cementstone 'septaria'. Slabs of this rock may be seen washed up on the lower beach north of Cobbold Point. Two centuries ago, it was extracted from local cliffs and estuary shores and even dredged up from the seabed as a raw material for making 'Roman cement'.

Landguard Point is the southernmost tip of Suffolk, an elongated mass of sand and shingle banked against a concrete breakwater. It is part of a SSSI designated for the value of its vegetated shingle habitat. Two hundred years ago it was an active coastal spit, building out where the tidal waters of the Orwell and Stour estuaries met the southward longshore coastal current, with saltmarshes developed in its lee and offshore shingle banks at its tip. The marshes are now reclaimed and underlie Britain's biggest container shipping port, while the dynamics of the spit have been tamed by the breakwater.

Figure

(Figure 44) Red Crag outcropping in East Cliff, c.1905, before the Seafront Gardens and Spa Pavilion were constructed. Image courtesy Suffolk Coastal District Council.

(Figure 45) The Dripping Well, as seen during the heyday of the Seafront Gardens in the 1930s. Suffolk Coastal District Council

(Figure 46) Landguard beach viewed from the breakwater. Studies have shown that sediment moves southwards down the coast as far as this point, then moves offshore rather than continuing across the mouth of Harwich Harbour into Essex.



Red Crag outcropping in East Cliff, c.1905, before the Seafront Gardens and Spa Pavilion were constructed. Image courtesy Suffolk Coastal District Council.



The Dripping Well, as seen during the heyday of the Seafront Gardens in the 1930s. Suffolk Coastal District Council



Landguard beach viewed from the breakwater. Studies have shown that sediment moves southwards down the coast as far as this point, then moves offshore rather than continuing across the mouth of Harwich Harbour into Essex.