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## RECENT WORK AT GRIME'S GRAVES, WEETING WITH BROOMHILL

by Frances Healy

*Works undertaken by the Department of the Environment and, subsequently, by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission in connection with the maintenance of the Grime's Graves flint mining complex (site 5640) have provided opportunities for archaeological observation and investigation.*

### 1. The excavation of a cable trench, 1982-3

A trench approximately 30cm wide, 55 cm deep and 285m long was dug by hand for a mains electricity cable to be laid from the entrance to the guardianship area to the Custodian's hut (Fig. 1). Towards its south-eastern end the trench cut three pits, none of which was visible from the surface. They were flanked by dump deposits which consisted mainly of chalk and sand in varying states of admixture, comminution and weathering, and which were identical in section to the dumps of upcast surrounding Neolithic mine shafts excavated elsewhere on the site (e.g. Mercer 1981, fig.4). An antler pick was found in a layer of chalk rubble and flint nodules.

No pits were observed in the remainder of the trench, between the car park and the entrance (Fig. 1). The entrance lies, however, at the bottom of a dry valley in which the topsoil is deeper than on the higher ground to the south, so that, for a distance of 50m from the entrance south-eastwards, the bottom of the trench did not always reach below topsoil. This depth of soil may obscure traces of mining or related activities. That such occurred throughout the length of the trench is indicated by the undoubtedly incomplete collection of 1795 pieces of struck flint made from the upcast. This was, not surprisingly, most frequent at the south-east end, where it reached densities of up to 185 pieces per 10m length of trench; but densities of up to 80 pieces per 10m persisted up to the entrance.

The remaining 750m of trench (site 19205), from the entrance to the monument north

to the B1108 road, cut no archaeological features and yielded much lower densities of struck flint.

The evidence of the part of the trench which lay within the guardianship area emphasises that flint-extraction and flint-working at Grime's Graves took place over an area far larger than that where pits and shafts are now visible on the surface. Its full extent will be demonstrated by the results of geophysical surveys and excavation carried out from 1972 to 1977 as a part of a five-year programme of research on the site conducted by the British Museum (Sieveking *et al.* 1973).

Fuller reports on the excavation of both parts of the trench have been placed in the Norfolk sites and monuments record. Finds from the part within the guardianship area have been deposited in the H.B.M.C. store at Castle Acre Priory; finds from the remainder in Norwich Castle Museum (accession no. 336.983).

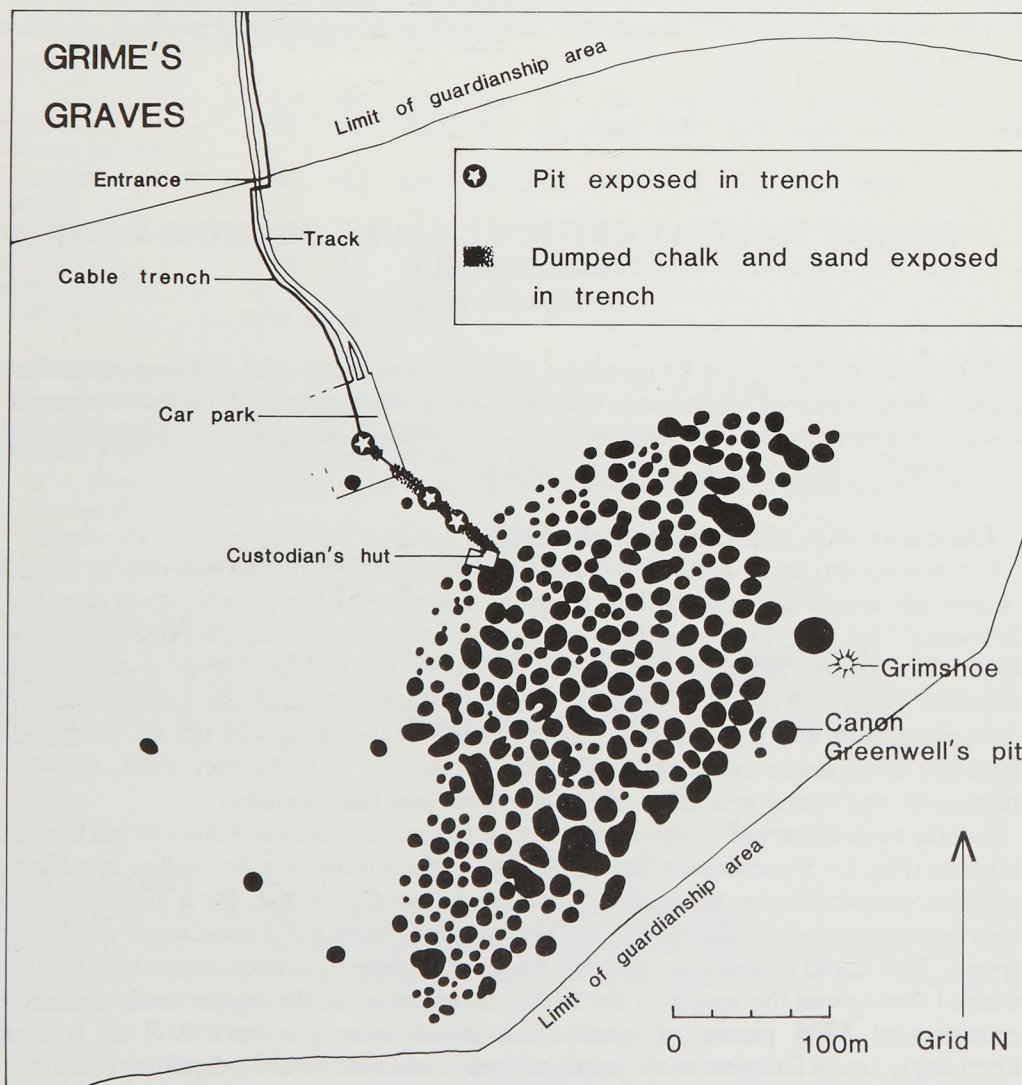


Fig. 1

Grime's Graves, showing the location of Canon Greenwell's pit and of a cable trench cut in 1982-3. Based on Ordnance Survey 1:2500 National Grid Plans TL 8189 and 8190. Scale 1:5000. Crown copyright reserved.

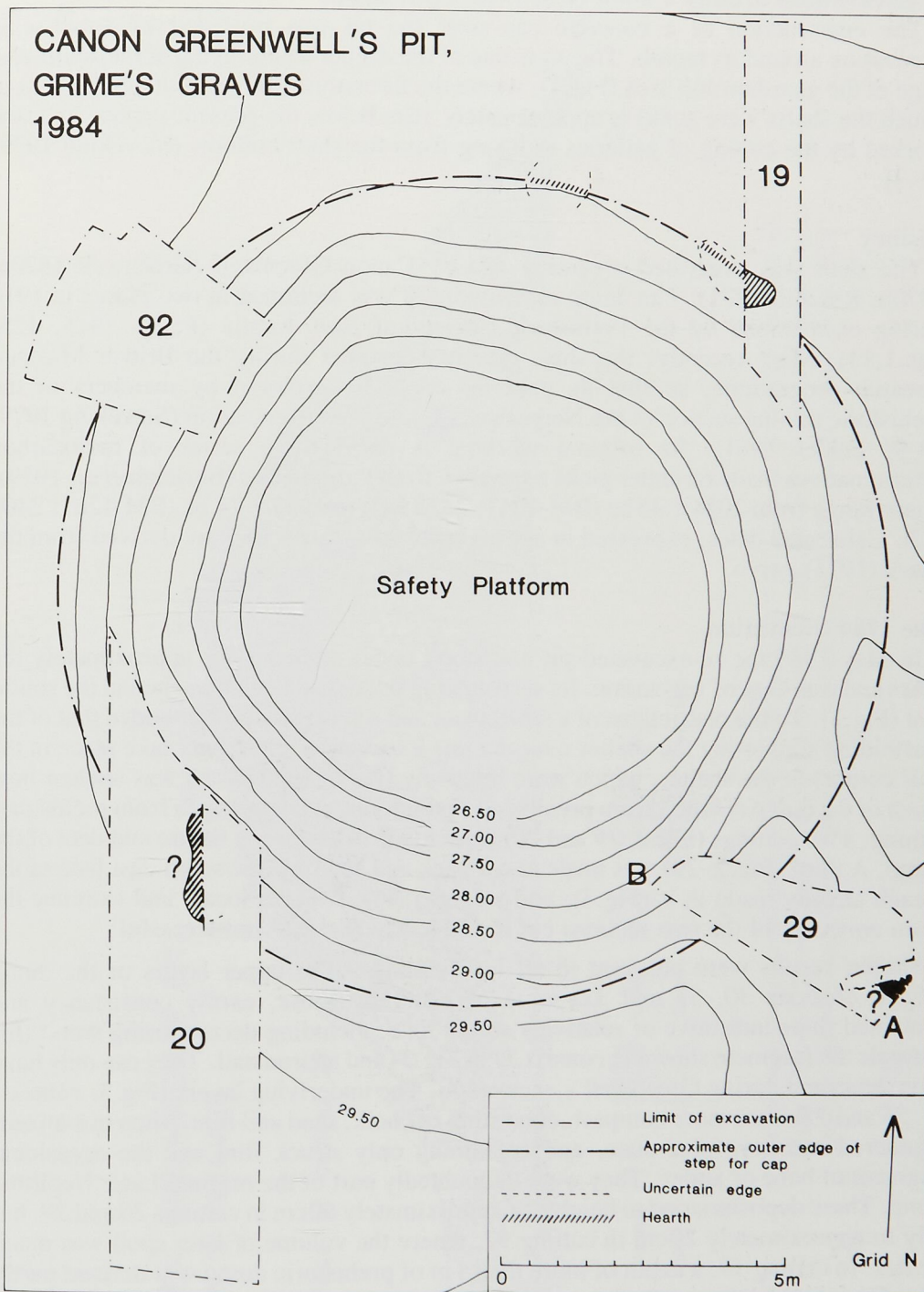


Fig. 2

Canon Greenwell's pit, showing the extent of archaeological and commercial excavations conducted in 1984. The mineshaft continues to a depth of approximately 9m below the safety platform which was then in place. Contours in metres above O.D.; scale 1:125.

## 2. Excavations around Canon Greenwell's pit, 1984

The construction of a concrete cap over the pit was preceded by small-scale excavation around its mouth. The pit is one of the deeper shafts, lying at the south-east edge of the guardianship area (Fig. 1), where the floorstone (the seam of tabular flint to which the shafts were sunk) is approximately 10m below the present surface and was worked by the cutting of galleries radiating from the shaft bottoms (Sieveking 1979, 22-3).

### History

The shaft was excavated a century ago by Canon Greenwell (Greenwell 1870a, 1870b; Rosehill 1871). The dump surrounding it was sectioned in two places in 1914 during excavations by the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia (Peake 1915, 125, figs. 1, 13). Most recently, the shaft was re-excavated during the British Museum research programme, so that its galleries could be explored by members of the prehistoric mining section of the Netherlands Geological Association (Sieveking 1979, 20-9; Felder 1981). Its original working is dated by a series of radiocarbon determinations made on antler picks recovered from the galleries (Burleigh *et al.* 1979). These range from  $2024 \pm 45$  bc (BM-1047; 2525 BC) to  $1903 \pm 71$  bc (BM-1261; 2400 BC). Calibrated dates, expressed in approximate solar years BC, are derived from the Clark (1975) curve.

### The 1984 excavation

In May 1984 the re-excavated pit had stood under a shelter for approximately ten years and was bare of vegetation. Its surrounding dump had been breached in the south-east (Fig. 2). To the restrictions of a small team and a short season was added that of the scaffolding supporting the shelter over the pit. Excavation could only take place in the four corners of the shelter, which were relatively free of supports. It was unclear how much of the dump resulted from previous investigations and how much from prehistoric mining. Two cuttings (Fig. 2: 19 and 20) were made to assess the nature and date of the dump. A third (Fig. 2: 29) was made to cut back and examine the south-east face of the breach already made in it (Fig. 3); and a fourth (Fig. 2: 92) to locate and examine the more northerly of the two sections cut in 1914. The last was unsuccessful.

Similar results were obtained in all four cuttings. The upper layers of the dump (Fig. 3: contexts 30, 31 and 32) were of generally loose, earthy consistency and contained finds indicative of relatively recent date, including decomposing wood (for example the fragment shown in context 31 in Fig. 3) and an iron nail. They can only have been deposited during Greenwell's excavation. The underlying layers (Fig. 3: contexts 33, 35 and 37) were more compact, consisting of chalk, sand and flint, often in a mixed, weathered and concreted state, and containing only struck flint and the occasional fragment of bone or antler. They were undoubtedly part of the original Later Neolithic dump. These deposits stood to heights of approximately 60cm in cuttings 20 and 29, but only to approximately 20cm in cutting 92, where the volume of later spoil was much greater. In cutting 19, a depth of more than 1m of prehistoric dump was derived partly from Greenwell's pit, partly from an adjacent pit or pits.

An old land surface (Fig. 3: context 39) was sealed beneath the dump in all four cuttings. In cutting 20 it included a darkened area containing occasional flecks of charcoal and burnt bone (Fig. 2). This may have been a briefly-used hearth, but proved ephemeral on excavation. A more substantial charcoal patch was found in the south-east

CANON GREENWELL'S PIT,  
GRIME'S GRAVES  
1984

SW Face of cutting 29

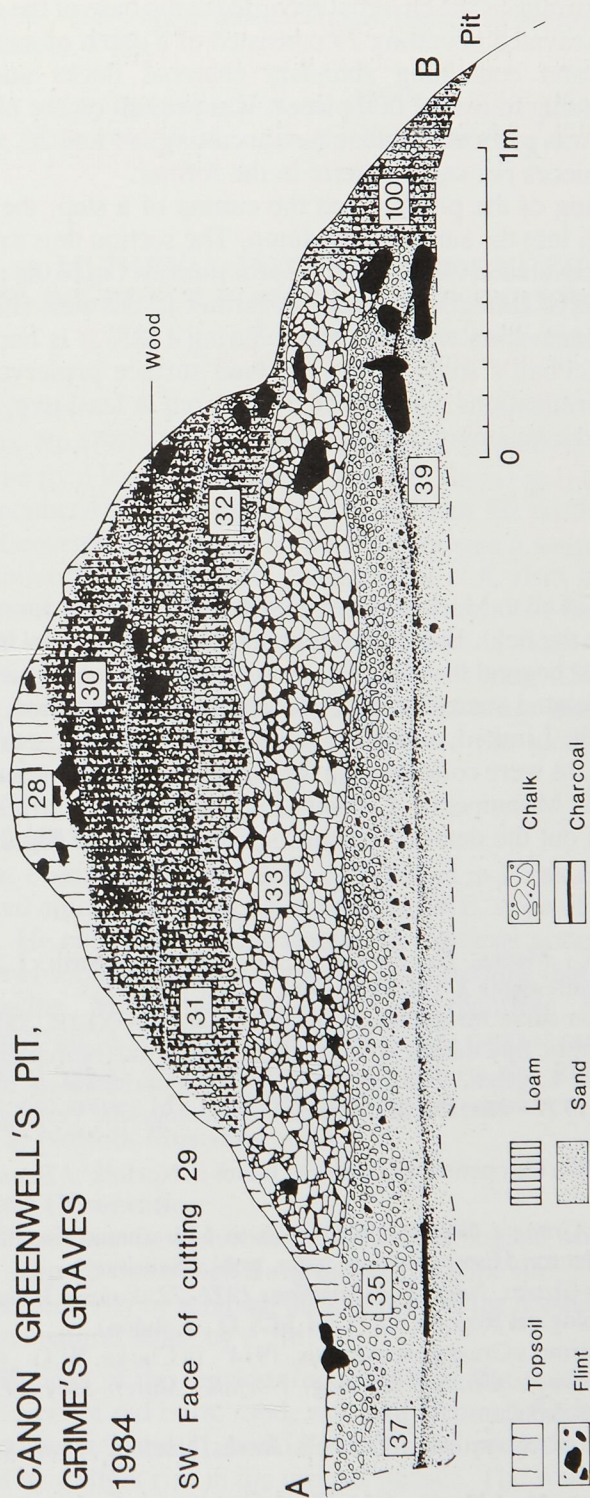


Fig. 3

Section through the dump surrounding Canon Greenwell's pit. Context 28=topsoil; contexts 30, 31 and 32=spoil from Canon Greenwell's excavation; contexts 33, 35 and 37=upcast from Neolithic flint-mining; context 39=old land surface; context 100=recent tumble. Scale 1:25.

of cutting 29, but scaffolding prevented its further excavation. It may have formed part of the same episode of burning as the charcoal recorded at the base of the dump in Fig.3. An undoubted hearth excavated in cutting 19 consisted of a depth of nearly 100mm of blackened, hardened sand containing abundant charcoal flecks and burnt flint. Knapping debris, amounting to over 3,000 pieces, was present on the old land surface in all four cuttings, and was particularly abundant in cuttings 19 and 20, with an overall density of at least 160 pieces per square metre in the former.

The subsequent capping of the pit involved the cutting of a step, the outer edge of which is shown in Fig.2, into the surrounding dump. The section thus exposed showed that the hearth partly excavated in 19 extended approximately 1m to the north-west and revealed a further hearth of similar character 2m farther to the west (Fig.2).

A full report on the excavation will be written during 1985. It is hoped that it will include Dr. Richard McPhail's study of the old land surface preserved beneath the dump, radiocarbon determinations made on charcoal from at least two of the hearths, and a detailed study of the knapping debris.

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### Acknowledgements

Thanks are given first of all to Mark Newton, assistant supervisor, for unflagging and enthusiastic assistance in the field. Ernie Cunningham, Eddie Kerry and Roy Lockwood also worked with a vigour beyond the call of duty. John and Val Lord, custodians of the site, were a much-appreciated source of help and support. All members of the staff of Messrs Sindall (Norwich) Limited, who constructed the pit cover, were consistently helpful and co-operative, as were colleagues in the Norfolk Archaeological Unit and the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. Andrew Wittrick (H.B.M.C. Drawing Office) carried out the detailed contour survey on which Fig.2 is based.

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## **A MEDIEVAL POTTERY PRODUCTION SITE AT BLACKBOROUGH END, MIDDLETON**

by Andrew Rogerson and Steven J. Ashley

### **INTRODUCTION**

The site (Co. No.17915) lies within the parish of Middleton at c.14m. O.D. along the N.E. side of the road leading from Blackborough End (Fig.1) to Wormegay, close to the base of a pronounced slope to the S.W. which forms the north side of the valley of the Nar. The peat-covered flood plain of the Nar, perhaps a source of fuel for firing pots, reaches to within c.200m., while the ground to the N.E. rises steeply to a height of 40m. O.D. The subsoil is freely-draining Sandringham sand of the Lower Cretaceous, the nearest deposit of Gault clay, a likely source of potting material, being 1.2km. away to the N.E. (British Geological Survey Solid and Drift Map 1:50,000. Sheet 145 and part of 129). The site of the Benedictine Priory of St. Mary and St. Catherine (founded c.1150) is situated c.700m. to the S.E. However the medieval archaeology of the surrounding area remains unexamined.

### **Circumstances of Excavation**

The site was discovered by Mr. John Smallwood in February 1982 when, in driving past, he noticed amongst soil cut back from the N.E. edge of the road much red burnt sand and ash. He collected a small amount of medieval pottery and realised from the discolouration of some sherds and the evidence of burning that the site was a production centre. Following Mr. Smallwood's prompt reporting of his findings to the Archaeological Unit, a small-scale excavation was carried out by the authors and two assistants, David Wicks and Thomas Cheetham, on the 16th-18th February. We are grateful to the site owner Mr. A.R.Mitchell for permission to excavate. The finds have been donated to Norfolk Museums Service.

### **Excavation and Observation**

The site had been heavily disturbed before archaeological work began, firstly by a 3m. wide and 2m. deep service trench along the length of the site, parallel to and c.12m. N.E. of the road, and secondly by scraping back of parts of the northern edge of the road which was cut into the natural slope by c.2m.

The battered sides of the service trench showed that a c.1m. depth of stratification consisting of layers of red burnt sand, ash, and charcoal flecked sand, occurred in two areas (Fig.1; contexts 1 and 2), both of which, and particularly the south-eastern one, were mirrored by a slight rise in the ground surface. The southern area ran through the south-eastern boundary and was visible as a dark soil mark in the adjacent arable field (gridded survey; contexts 18-25). N.W. of the northern area the service trench cut