

THE PINNER GRIMS DYKE

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THE Pinner Grims Dyke is an earthwork of some magnitude of from four to five miles in length, stretching from the neighbourhood of Pinner to Harrow Weald Common. In its original state it consisted of a deep ditch with the excavated earth piled up on the N.W. side. Commencing, or rather disappearing, near Cuckoo Hill, close by the Pinn, the dyke runs in a very irregular fashion, in two unequal stretches, to the upper waters of the same stream. Recommencing on the opposite bank of the river, it heads in the direction of the gravel-capped hill on which Harrow Weald Common is situated. Here it shelves up and stops among the light scrub and trees.

Geologically, the Dyke is placed on the south-eastern margin of a very considerable outcrop of London Clay. At its western end the earthwork faces low-lying Reading Beds, in the centre London Clay, and at the eastern end, light gravels. Further to the south-east there are considerable deposits of gravels and alluvium. To the north-west of the Dyke there is an appreciable area of London Clay with alluvium in the river valleys.

Moreover, the Dyke encloses the headwaters of all streams flowing north-westwards. There is absolute insistence on this point. Where necessary the Dyke includes the headwaters of south-easterly flowing streams but this seems due to the desirability of making a satisfactory line for the earthwork.

Of recent years the Dyke has been much mutilated. Almost a mile has been completely obliterated near the centre, whilst very recent building activity at the western end has made its exact location there a matter of

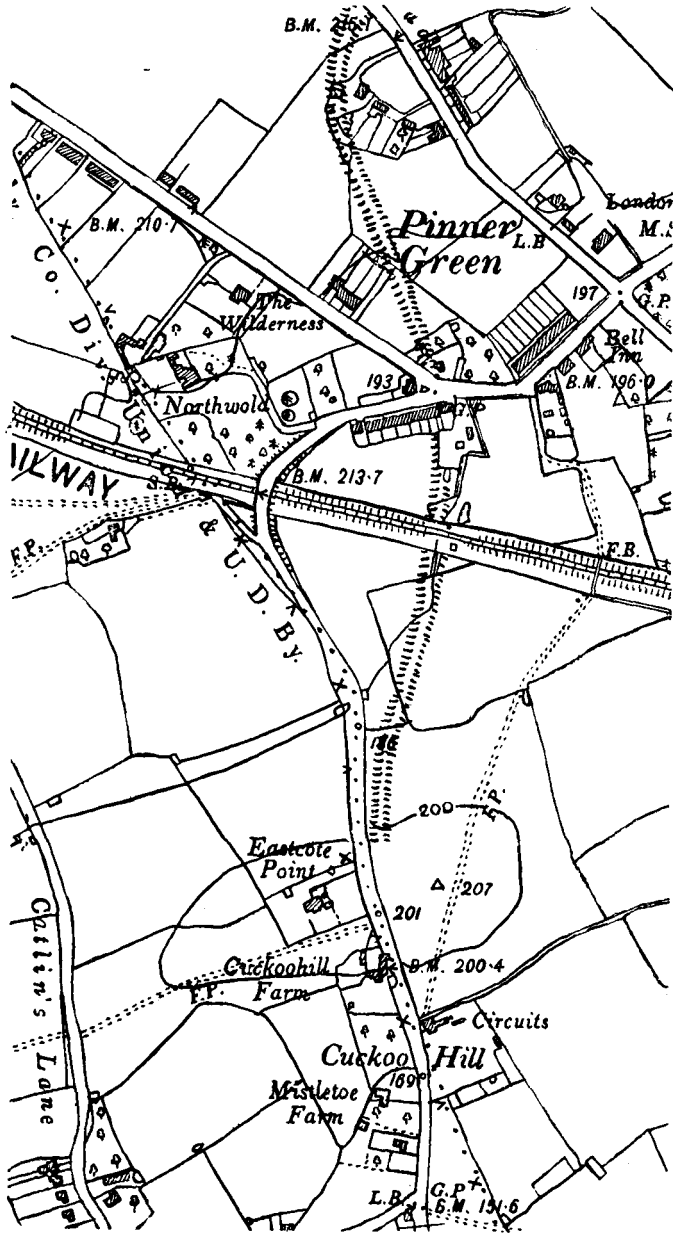


Fig. 1. From Cuckoo Hill to Pinner Hill Road.

some difficulty. Fortunately a large part of the earthwork crosses the Grims Dyke Golf Club, where its preservation is a matter of concern. The eastern end is situated in the grounds of Grims Dyke, the residence of Lady Gilbert. Here considerate treatment has preserved a very important section of the earthwork, which must have suffered little damage from man or time.

The Dyke has been divided for analysis into six sections, which are described in turn, together with their geological and geographical features. The maps are taken from the Ordnance Survey 6 inch sheets. The analysis covers the Dyke from west to east.

In this section, the earthwork is nowhere very distinct. Intense building activity together with considerable levelling, has made its exact location very problematic. Changes in the colour and texture of the soil would seem to make the course of the dyke immediately to the east of the road from Cuckoo Hill to Pinner Green. The track can be followed from about the highest part of the hill.

It then heads in the direction of the junction of this road and the Northwood road in the centre of Pinner Green. From this point it slowly merges into the Pinnerhill Road, where it turns due east. From Pinner Green it may be seen in a number of gardens as a low mound, the ditch having disappeared. It has been completely destroyed for about 200 yards at the northern end of the section, and the site is now covered with newly built houses.

Geologically this fragment commences on a narrow outcrop of London Clay which here forms a narrow island, descends slightly to some Reading Bed outcrops, and then climbs on to the London Clay once more, the whole section acting as a bridge across a low-lying piece of land. The variation in height, however, is small, and probably entailed little change in vegetation in ancient times.

The condition of the earthwork in this section is very unsatisfactory. Over considerable distances there is hardly a ridge on the surface, and in no case can a reasonably preserved section be seen.

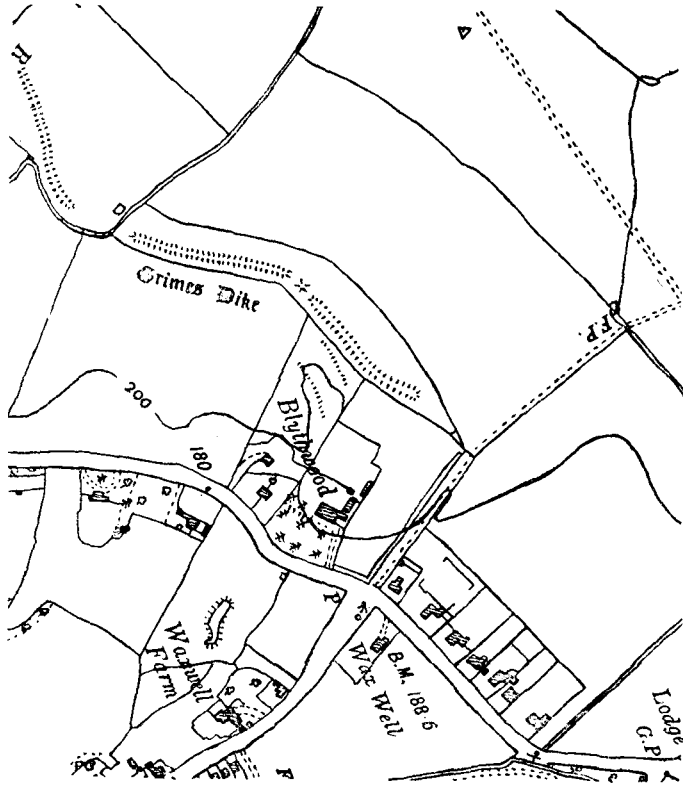


Fig. 2. From Pinner Hill Road to Blythwood, near the Pinner-Hatch-End Road.

The Dyke first appears, at its western end, adjoining and to the east of, Pinner Hill Road. The slight rise on which House No. 53 stands represents the now denuded bank, whilst the depression on the south, exaggerated to form a level base, is occupied by House No. 51. Originally the earthwork extended for upwards of 200 yards in

an easterly direction, but the bank is now levelled and the stump surmounted by Houses Nos. 34 and 36 of The Close, whilst Nos. 38 and 40 follow the line of the bank, though to the north of it. The ditch has been almost obliterated by the horticultural pursuits of the inhabitants. The low lying land to the west of Pinner can be seen clearly from this fragment of the Dyke.

The bank stops abruptly to allow a small stream to pass, and recommences again on the other side. The gap has been altered in the interests of agriculture, but is still marshy, and there seems little reason to doubt but that it is original. The next section, running in a north-easterly direction, is well preserved; the bank is fairly high and the ditch, occupied by a hawthorn fence, is comparatively deep.

This section, which is about quarter of a mile in length is divided on the Ordnance Sheets into two parts of almost equal length. Certainly the bank is missing at this place, but the ditch passes unmistakably between the two seemingly isolated fragments. Alterations for field drainage would seem to account for this destruction.

The earthwork ends about 100 yards immediately to the rear of Blythwood, having occupied since passing the stream, a long rough meadow. An extensive, though old, sandpit slightly impinges on the ditch about 50 yards from the end. The ditch in the last section is extremely muddy and frequently holds water.

The Dyke in this section follows roughly the line of the 200 feet contour, the land falling away towards Pinner and the west. The earthwork is situated on the south-eastern edge of a small plateau, connected to the main watershed of London Clay, the securing of which would seem to have been the primary object of this section. The more westerly section recedes from, whilst the eastern section follows the line of Reading Beds which appear immediately to the South with the rapid fall of the land.

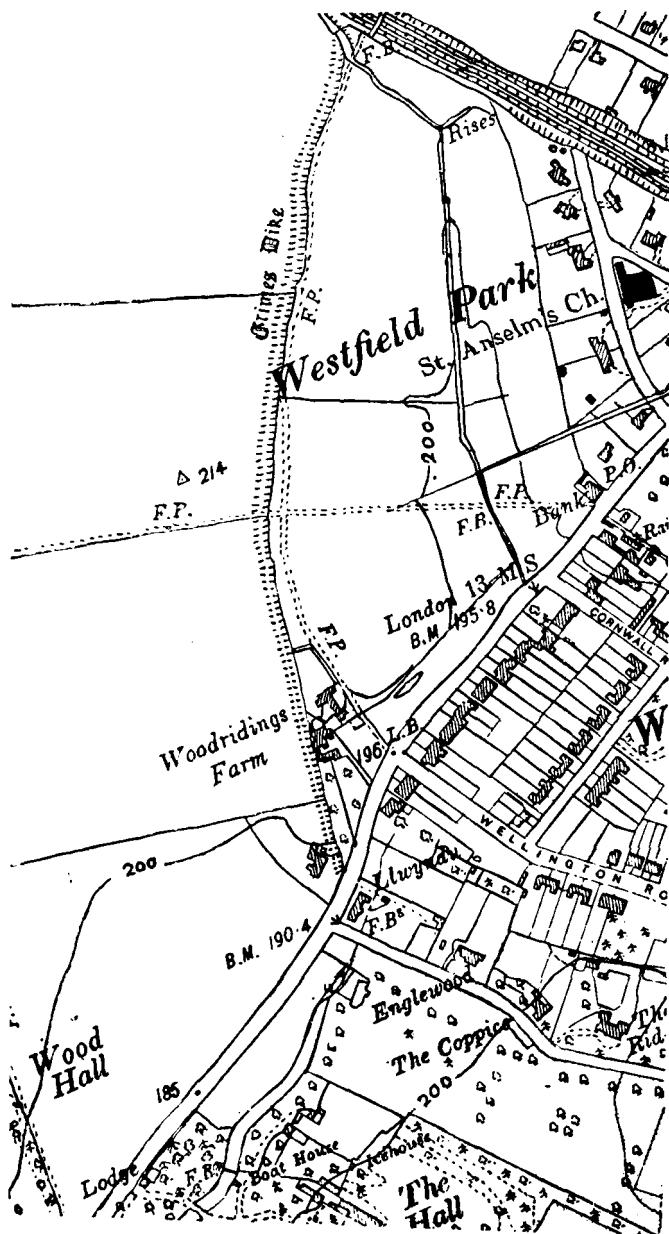


Fig. 3. From Woodridings School for Girls to the London and North-Western Railway, 300 yards north-west of Hatch End Station.

Although a small stream crossed the London Clay about a third of a mile to the west of the Dyke, it is not until the head waters of a stream which runs to the west of Ruislip are reached that any appreciable fall in the land occurs.

To the south-east, the land falls away to a small gorge through which the Pinn finds its way to the west and the Colne. The Pinn has eroded the later levels and large tracts of gravels are exposed in these river valleys. The eastern end of the Dyke rests very close to these gravel outcrops.

About one mile to the north-west the Dyke is backed by Oxley Woods, a gravel capped hillock rising from the London Clay which supports a light undergrowth and scattered trees.

The termination of the Dyke at the approach of the 200 foot contour is the signal for the ground to fall rapidly away south-eastwards to a small stream, flanked by water meadows, on the opposite bank of which at about the same altitude as it terminated, the Dyke recommences.

The Dyke recommences on the east side of Woodridings School for Girls on the main road from Pinner to Hatch End. The road bends considerably from its line to avoid the end of the earthwork, which may possibly indicate its original termination. The bank is good, though the ditch has almost vanished. It continues in a north-easterly direction, passing behind Woodridings Farm and is soon joined by a footpath which occupies the slight hollow representing the ditch.

About 300 yards from the London and North-Western Railway, the Dyke is intersected by Colbourn Avenue, House No. 2, being built on the denuded bank. From this point, roads have been built on each side of and parallel to, the earthwork, the houses of which have gardens running down to the bank of the north-west, and to the ditch on the south-east, with a footpath between. With the exception of a modern break, 100 yards

south-west of Colbourn Avenue, for drainage purposes, and that made by Colbourn Avenue the bank is still in fairly good condition enclosing a series of low, flat meadows on the north-west. Twenty-five yards from the railway both bank and ditch disappear completely.

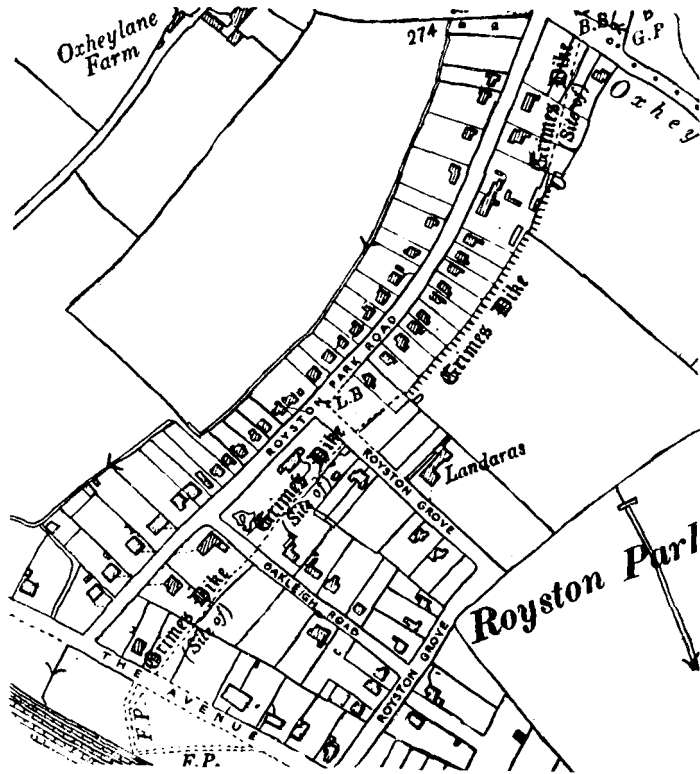


Fig. 4. From a point on the London North-Western Railway, 300 yards north-west of Hatch End Station to the south-west corner of Grims Dyke Golf Course.

This section of the dyke crosses a rather featureless tract of country. The earthwork commences less than 200 yards from some Reading Beds exposed by the Pinn. To the south-east flows a small feeder of the Pinn, while to the north-west the land slowly rises to the watershed

between Oxley Woods and Stanmore Common, whilst a shallow valley facing and running due south, partly divides the earthwork from Oxley Woods.

The subsoil is entirely *London Clay*, but in the valley immediately to the south-east, Reading Beds appear, and the Dyke seems to turn purposely when it reaches their northern end.

Up to 25 yards from the railway the bank is plainly discernible, but from this point onwards for over a quarter of a mile no vestige of the earthwork now remains. The construction of the railway obliterated one section, and the remainder disappeared with the growth of a large residential area. The course was probably through the grounds of *Lanedale* in *The Avenue* underneath *Carrick House* in *Oakleigh Road*, to a scattered line of elms which meets *Royston Grove* about 50 yards from its junction with *Royston Park Road*.

The bank appears about 100 yards further along this line, and runs parallel to *Royston Park Road*, the houses on the south side of which back upon it. It is here in good condition, with a well preserved ditch. It reaches and disappears at the south-east boundary of *Ashburnham* in *Royston Park Road*, the remainder of its course to *Oxhey Lane* having been obliterated by buildings and gardens, though its probable course was close to the north side of *Rothsowrie*.

The country traversed by this section is again very flat, there being only a gentle rise as the Dyke progresses north-eastwards. Immediately behind the earthwork there is a small stream and shallow valley, whilst beyond this the land rises gradually to the main watershed. At the north-eastern end of the section the earthwork enters and clings to the south-eastern side of a shallow re-entrant, the whole facing uphill.

Geologically the Dyke crosses *London Clay* over the whole section, indeed to the North-west and south-east there are very extensive outcrops exposed.

From Oxhey Lane the Dyke runs in a north-easterly direction across the Grims Dyke Golf Course, and exhibits the best preserved section of its whole course. It runs parallel to, and about 25 yards from, Wealdwood Road or Old Redding Road for about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a mile.

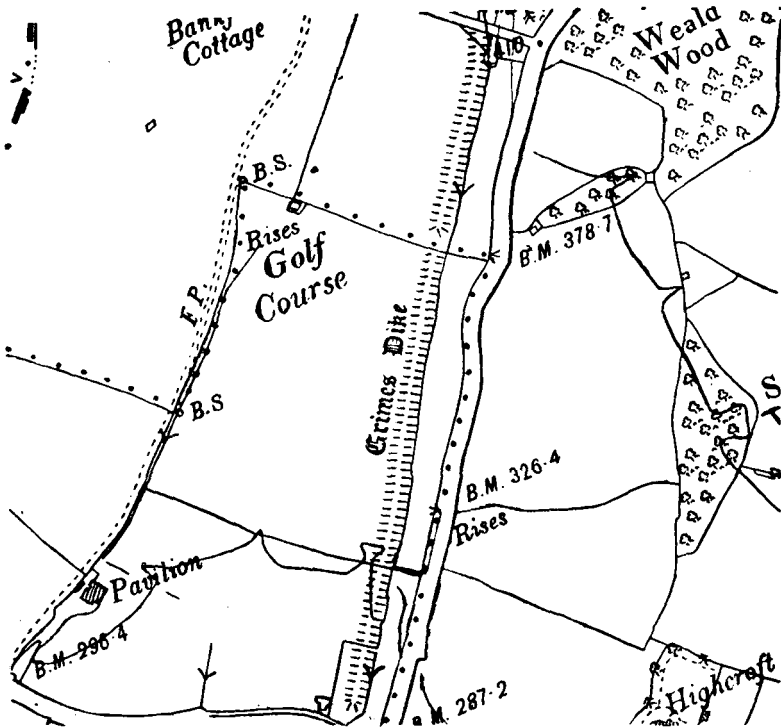


Fig. 5. From Oxhey Lane along the eastern boundary of Grims Dyke Golf Course.

About 50 yards after entering the Golf Course, traces of a spoil trench appear on the north side of the Dyke, the reason would seem that owing to rather high ground to the south-east, sufficient earth was unobtainable from the true ditch to form an adequate bank. The bank throughout this section is broad and high, and unusually well preserved, whilst the ditch is deep and seems, especially at the north-eastern end, to have little silt in it.

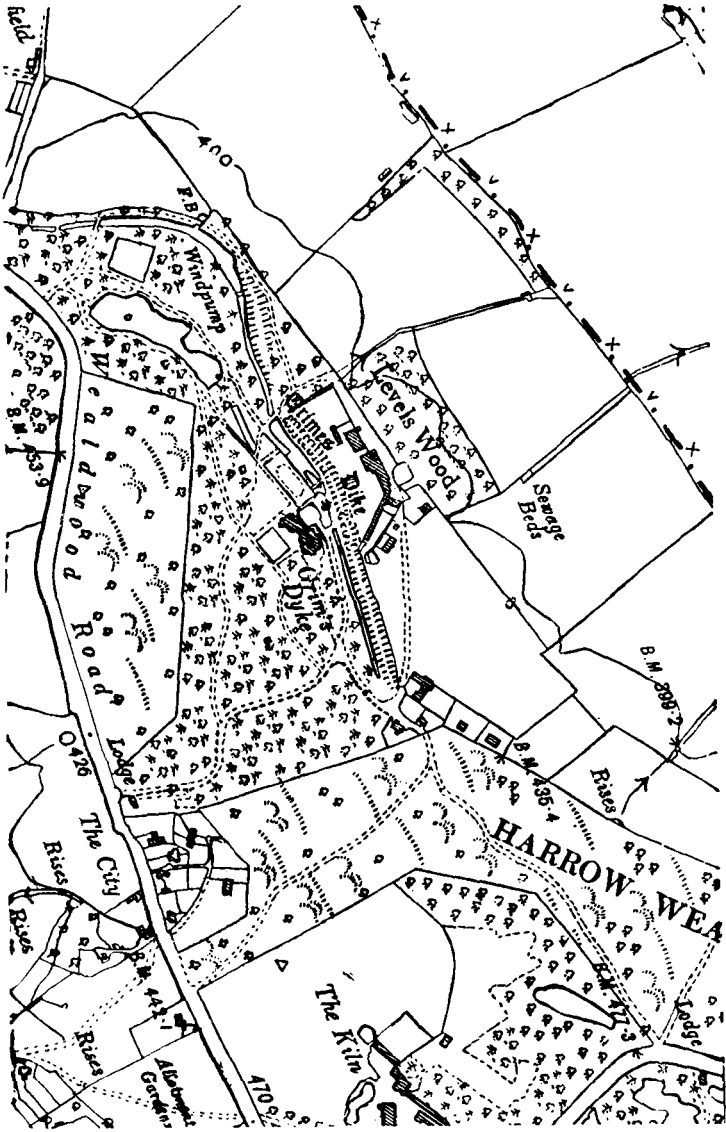


Fig. 6. From the south-western end of the grounds of Grims Dyke to the north-eastern and adjacent to Harrow Weald Common.

On reaching the south-eastern corner of the Golf Course the Dyke has climbed 110 feet in about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile. To the north there is a shallow and almost dry valley, behind which lies the main watershed. To the south-east the land rises very rapidly and the earthwork both looks and seems very awkward as it clings to the valley-side, overtopped as it is over the entire section by this high and well-wooded land.

The entire section, with the exception of the last 50 yards at the north-eastern end, traverses London Clay, which extends for a considerable distance on both sides of the Dyke. The north-eastern end of the section reaches the gravel beds which overlie the London Clay on the high ground.

The bank is interrupted by a road which leads to Bankfield Cottages, but immediately reappears in the grounds of Grims Dyke House. The whole area is thickly wooded and the earthwork has been well adapted to the requirements of a large garden. For 250 yards the bank is low and the ditch muddy. Then for the following quarter mile the ditch has been dammed, forming a long, narrow lake, the bank, which is very broad, acting as a barrage on the north-west. About 200 yards from the dam the earthwork makes an almost right-angled bend, with the result that it runs almost due East.

Immediately in front of Grims Dyke House the ditch assumes its muddy character once again, the earthwork still remaining in good condition. About 300 yards from here the Dyke gently shelves up, and seems to have had its original ending. The condition of the earthwork throughout this sector is uniformly good, the bank in particular being in an excellent state of preservation.

The gravel which caps the high ground over which the Dyke runs is still covered with light wood and ferns. At the beginning of this section the Dyke crosses the watershed and follows another re-entrant. This valley

faces and flows due westwards, so in following it the Dyke changes its direction from north-eastwards to almost due east. The position of the Dyke in this valley is similar to that in the previous section. It

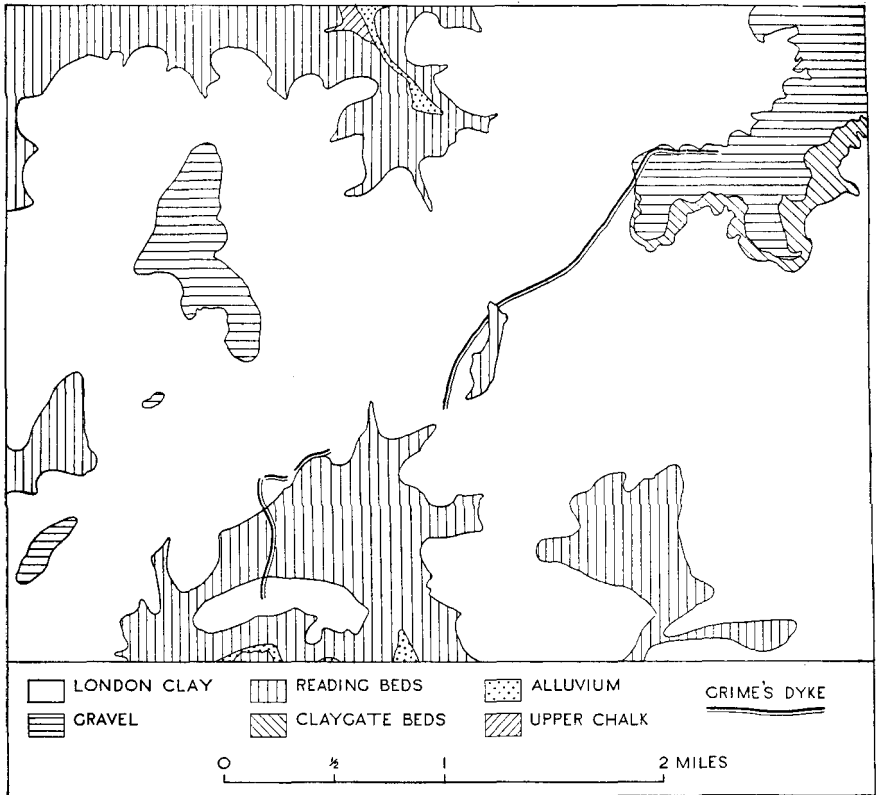


Fig. 7. Geological Map of the Region traversed by the Dyke.

still faces southwards and uphill, and backs onto a valley which is comparatively broad and deep. The end of the earthwork seems to correspond to a rapid steepening of the valley-side. This would render cultivation of the sloping sides extremely difficult, and it is probably safe to assume that the clearing of the valley had not progressed beyond this point.

The position of the Dyke, in this section, as regards geology, is of the utmost importance. The earthwork is placed just on the fringe of the gravel, thus enclosing all the London Clay of the valley to the north-west. Nowhere has the Dyke been drawn across any considerable stretch of gravels it has merely followed the line of the London Clay, though to the south and on the gravel.

The feeder to the north of this section, after joining its main stream, runs through a broad, flat valley, with patches of aluvium superimposed upon Bagshot Beds. To the south, a number of small streams, including the Wealdstone Brook and the Pinn, which in front of the two westerly fragments of the Dyke is about 10 feet broad, have cut small valleys through the clay, thus intersecting the land with low watersheds formed of London Clay, with patches of Reading Beds and alluvium appearing in the bottom of the valleys.

POSSIBLE EASTERLY EXTENSIONS OF THE EARTHWORK.

Any reference to the Middlesex Grims Dyke which did not mention the name of the late Mr. Cruickshank would be incomplete. I have been privileged in that I have been able to read his MSS. notes, both published and unpublished which he made on the earthwork, and have spent considerable time in walking the ground which he mentions the Dyke crosses.

He seems to have worked on the theory that the North Middlesex County Boundary represented the line of lost portions of the dyke. This fact is important, as in no point of the undisputed existing remains does this coincide with the actual earthwork. Here and there along this county boundary he was able to find undulations and mounds which he fitted into this scheme, but I feel that the evidence thus obtained is very thin, especially as in one place outside Barnet his "dyke" was undoubtedly formed by gravel digging. In no instance should I say that any of the suggested fragments were obviously parts of the dyke.

But in suggesting that some of the extensions noted by Mr. Cruickshank may not be part of the Grims Dyke, I think it is possible that with excavation some more fragments may be discovered. However, I consider it unlikely that any large section will be found running in an easterly direction, for, as Dr. Wheeler has pointed out in his work on the Chiltern Dyke system, archaeological evidence for an early Saxon occupation in west Essex is very scanty, and it is likely at the time of the building of the earthwork it was largely virgin forest.

Whether or not the Grims Dyke extended further in an easterly direction will, I think, affect little the conclusions which may be drawn from the existing fragments.

ALIGNMENT.

The methods employed in the construction of the earthwork are very obscure. There seems to have been no use made of direct alignment over any one section of the entire Dyke, though the fragmentary condition of the centre precludes any statement on that part. Also the comparative shortness of the earthwork is a factor which must be taken into consideration.

If any feature is characteristic of the Dyke as a whole, the tendency to curve slightly over short distances ought to be mentioned. This occurs in the easterly of the two detached fragments, behind Woodridings farm, in the grounds of Grims Dyke, and to a lesser degree over Grims Dyke Golf Course. When considering these fragments, it seems that their peculiarity is due to a desire on the part of the builder to avoid all natural obstacles, for in the case of the isolated fragment and the Woodridings section the Dyke faces low-lying ground at no great distance, whilst the other two examples tend to skirt high ground. (The wide curve in the westerly fragment merely joins two outcrops of London clay and avoids swampy, or possibly marshy ground, by

following the highest ground available.) These fragments scattered as they are throughout the entire earthwork, suggest that the construction of the Dyke was the work of one individual.

Local physiographical conditions therefore seem to have dictated the layout of the Dyke. There was no alignment of any kind, the builder wishing only to define clearly a fertile stretch of clay-land, and in doing so the tribal territory was extended as far as the lie of the land would permit.

PARISH BOUNDARIES.

No part of Grims Dyke has been used as a parish or county boundary, although the indeterminate west end comes close to the Pinner-Northwood parish boundary. The county boundary between Middlesex and Hertfordshire from the railway at Hatch End follows the line of the eastern half, about quarter mile north of the earthwork. The parish boundary between Harrow Weald and Hatch End crosses the earthwork near the centre of the Grims Dyke Golf Course and seems to have little relationship with it.

HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS.

In attempting an historical summary a variety of considerations must be brought forward.

An outstanding feature of the Dyke is that it is drawn across a neck of London clay, from useless gravel deposits to equally unproductive marsh lands. This makes it clear that the clay land had been largely cleared for agriculture and that the unfertile areas were ignored by the Dyke builders.

Again, the traditional use of a dyke is for defence, but in the case of the Pinner Dyke this can easily be proved not to be so. The ditch faces south-eastwards, and the work was obviously undertaken by a community living in the north-west. The Dyke, however, was built without the least concern for the most elementary

military requirements. For a considerable length it is commanded by higher ground, and at others local physical conditions have not been utilised to the full. It is also of importance that the Dyke crosses London Clay. On Offa's Dyke, where the clays were largely forested, the dyke was only drawn across open spaces, usually in river valleys. At Pinner we find areas open, or partly open, either because of geological or physical conditions are disregarded and the dyke drawn across the clay land.

The problem of dating the Dyke must next be faced. It can be said immediately that in no portion of its length does the Pinner Dyke resemble any definitely known pre-Roman earthwork, with their slavish adherence to contour, and their partiality for a ditch with banks on both sides. With equal certainty can a possible Roman origin be denied, nor does it coincide with any known Saxon boundary line. We are left then with that vague period, the time of the Pagan Saxon, extending from the end of direct Roman rule to the emergence of the East Saxon Kingdom, as the only possible claimant for the construction of the Pinner Grims Dyke.

We must conclude, therefore, that the builders of Grims Dyke were members of an agricultural community, whose nucleus lay somewhere to the north, slowly moving southwards, clearing the fertile clays of their primeval forest. On reaching the neighbourhood of Pinner they became aware of the influence, perhaps hostile, of a power which lay to the south. It was the proximity of this power which necessitated the tangible and visible definement of their possessions. It was for this reason that the Grims Dyke was drawn across the very watershed at Pinner which divides the northward from the southward flowing streams.

As for the location of the power to the south, if our estimation of the date of the earthwork be correct, we are bound to admit that the only possible claimant can

be London, which, as Dr. Wheeler has suggested, may have possessed some sub-Roman civilisation possessing the attributes and powers of Government.

In conclusion, I should like to thank Dr. R. E. Mortimer Wheeler, Keeper of the London Museum, who not only made possible the necessary research, but who directed and furthered the work in every possible way.