

# EXCAVATIONS AT GRIM'S DYKE, HARROW, 1979

ROBERT ELLIS

## INTRODUCTION

*In November and December 1979 the Inner London Archaeological Unit carried out excavations at the Grim's Dyke earthwork, Harrow, in the grounds of the Grim's Dyke Hotel (N.G.R. TQ 14169288). The work was undertaken at the request of the Department of the Environment and took place in advance of the construction of a new annexe and service road for the hotel, which necessitated the levelling of part of the earthwork, a scheduled ancient monument. Previous excavations of the earthwork have failed to produce conclusive dating evidence<sup>1</sup>, although a date of 5th or 6th AD century is generally favoured (Wheeler 1935, 59; Castle 1975, 267). It has been suggested that the earthwork in Pear Wood, approximately 3km E of the present excavations and of post-Roman date, is an eastern extension of Grim's Dyke (Castle 1975, 267). The purpose of the 1979 excavation was to provide additional dating evidence for the earthwork and to record details of its construction.*

## LOCATION (Fig. 1)

The site was located on the natural gravel beds of Harrow Weald Common, 25m N of the Grim's Dyke Hotel, 3km NW of Stanmore, and 5km N of Harrow. The visible remains of the earthwork in the grounds of the hotel consist of a bank running E-W, approximately 15m wide and 2m high. There is a ditch on the S side of the bank 4m wide and 1m deep. The bank and ditch have been planted with shrubs and trees, and for some of its length the bank is revetted on its N side by a small wall 0.50m high. The ditch, which now acts as a drain, has been re-cut frequently in recent years, making it difficult to assess its original dimensions. Since the construction of the Grim's Dyke Hotel in 1872, the walled area N of the bank has been used as a vegetable garden. The visible remains of the earthwork extend approximately 160m E of the hotel, and there is no conclusive evidence that it ever extended E of this point.<sup>2</sup> The earthwork extends W of the hotel for 250m, where it turns SW for 700m along the E side of Grim's Dyke Golf Course. It originally continued in that direction

for a further 3km, at least as far as Cuckoo Hill, Pinner, but this section has been largely destroyed by recent housing developments (Stone 1935, 284).

## THE EXCAVATION

### Trench 1

The first area to be investigated, Trench 1, was to the N of the bank and was intended to establish if the bank had been cut back to accommodate the present footpath and whether there had ever been a ditch on the north side of the bank.

The northern edge of a shallow linear feature, 68, perhaps a gully, was discovered at the south end of the trench. This was 0.70m deep and ran parallel to the bank and had a fill of grey-brown sandy clay and gravel. It was cut by a shallow pit (excavated dimensions 1.65m long, 1m wide, and 0.70m deep). No dating evidence was found in either of these features. Most of Trench 1 was badly disturbed by recent cultivation, and no other features were found.

### Trench 2 (Fig. 2).

This took the form of a cross-section through the bank. It could not be extended to include the ditch, which lay another 5m to

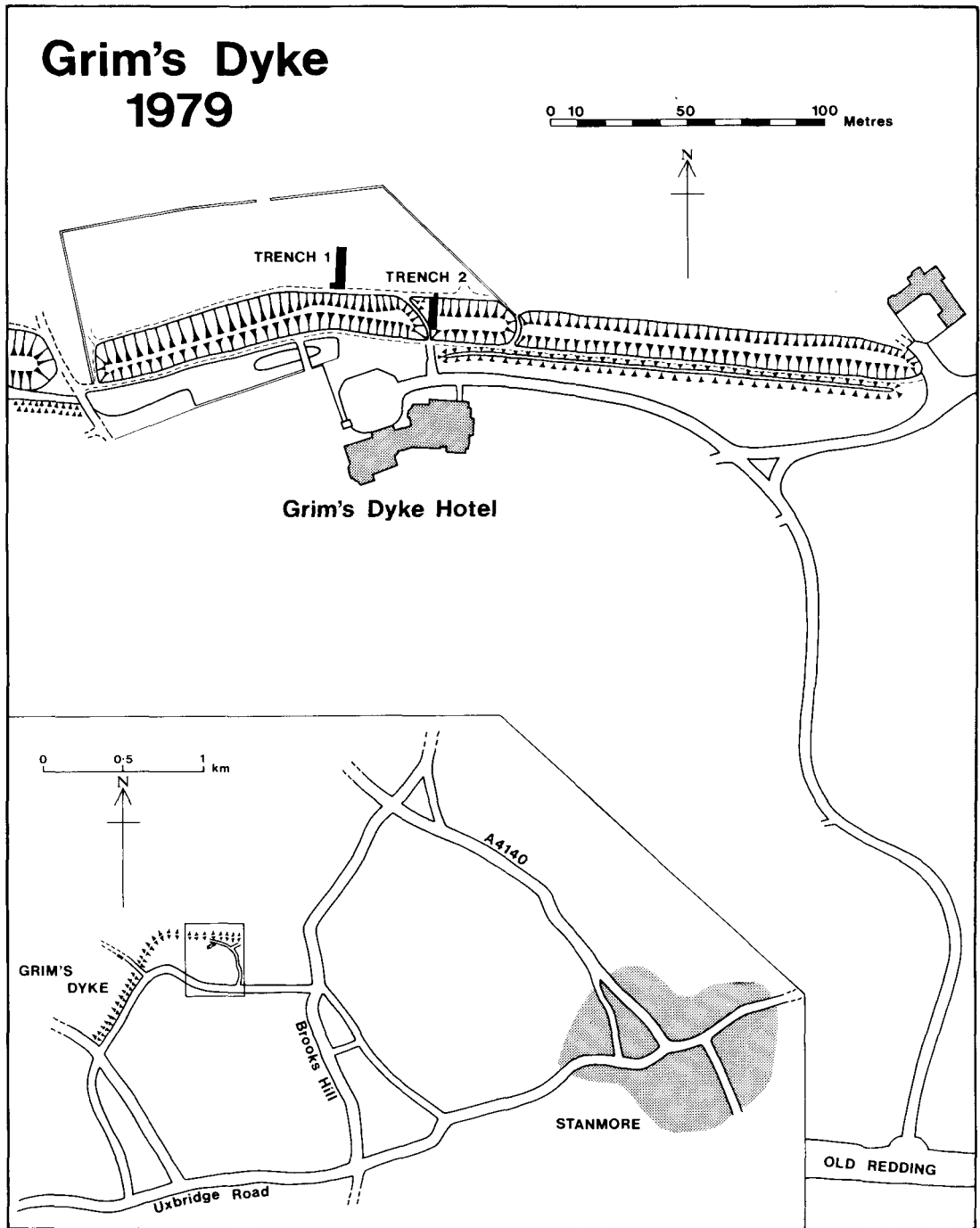


Fig. 1. Grim's Dyke 1979: Site location.

the N. Beneath the bank and cut into the natural subsoil was a small round-bottomed ditch or gully, 225. This was 1.20m wide and 0.40m deep; it extended E–W across the trench a distance of 1.20m before it was cut by a modern pipe-trench. It was not possible to excavate W of the pipe-trench. No dating evidence was found in this feature.

At the N end of the trench and also underlying the bank was an irregular depression, 220. This was 3.50m long, 1.45m wide, and 0.80m deep. It was filled with wet gravel and clay, and contained no dating evidence; it was possibly of natural occurrence. In general the bank was made up of thin layers of brown gravel mixed with varying amounts of sand and clay, overlying the orange-stained gravel subsoil. No evidence was found for a buried ground surface or turf line. Two layers within the bank, 214 and 215, produced two abraded sherds of pottery, probably of Iron Age date. One layer within the bank, 213, was particularly interesting. It consisted of a dense blue-orange clay mixed with a small quantity of pebbles, and within it was a roughly circular area of burnt red clay, 0.50m diameter and 20mm thick. Overlying this was a layer of small charcoal fragments 10–20mm in depth. It had the appearance of a hearth, although the extent of the burning would suggest only brief use. The bank survived to a maximum height of 1.85m above the natural subsoil, although the upper 0.40m was a topsoil associated with the recent cultivation of trees and shrubs.

### INTERPRETATION

Because of the paucity of dating evidence from the site, the dating and interpretation of some features are made difficult. The gully, 68, revealed in Trench 1 ran parallel to the bank and may have been associated with the earthwork. The original N edge of the bank was not discovered, nor was there any evidence for a ditch on its N side. In Trench 2, the gully, 225, probably pre-dated the bank rather than being associated with an early phase of construction. The bank appeared to have been built in one phase, probably

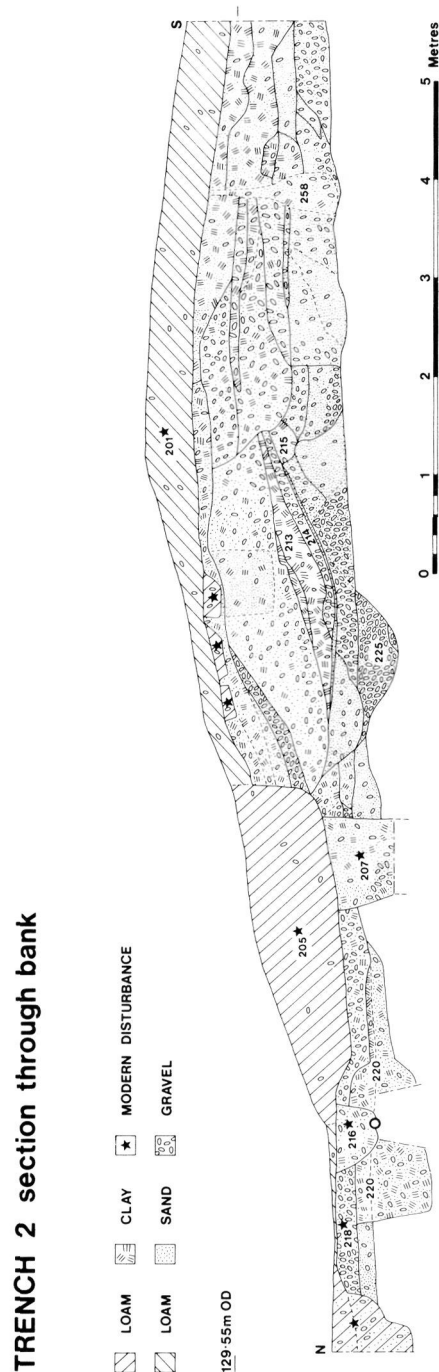


Fig. 2. Grim's Dyke 1979: Section through bank.

incorporating material from the ditch. The function of the hearth, 209, if such it was, is not known. There was no indication of trampled earth around it, which, combined with the limited extent of burning, would suggest that the hearth was in use only for a short time during the construction of the bank. It is possible that the layers to the extreme S of the section, including 258, have some structural significance, although they may be the result of later disturbance. The condition of the pottery from the bank was such that it is not possible to be more specific about its date. The charcoal from the hearth, 209, was submitted for radio-carbon examination, with a resulting date of  $ad\ 50 \pm 80$  (HAR 3747). The results from a single sample should not be taken as conclusive, but this date is not inconsistent with the findings of the 1957 excavations on the same earthwork at Pinner Green, where Iron Age and Belgic pottery was discovered. On this evidence it would appear that the Grim's Dyke earthwork pre-dates the Pear Wood earthwork, which is of post-Roman date, probably 5th or 6th AD century.

## NOTES

1. In 1957 an excavation conducted by Mr P. G. Suggett at Montesole Playing Fields, Pinner Green, produced a small quantity of Iron Age and Belgic pottery, which was subsequently lost. No dating evidence was recovered from an excavation in 1962 at Mill Farm Housing Site, Pinner Green (Castle, 1975, 276, Note 28).
2. An eastern extension of Grim's Dyke, and an extension W from Pinner towards Ruislip have been suggested (Braun 1936, 379; Castle 1975, 267; Sharpe 1919, 17).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BRAUN (1936), H. S. Braun 'Some earthworks of North-West Middlesex' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* NS 7 (1935) 379-92.  
 CASTLE (1975), S. A. Castle 'Excavations in Pear Wood, Brockley Hill, Middlesex, 1948-1973' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 26 (1975) 267-77.  
 SHARPE (1919), M. Sharpe *Middlesex in British, Roman, and Saxon Times* (London 1919).  
 STONE (1935), H. J. W. Stone 'The Pinner Grim's Dyke' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* NS 7 (1935) 284-301.  
 WHEELER (1935), R. E. M. Wheeler *London and the Saxons* (London 1935).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The I.L.A.U. would like to express its thanks to the following people who worked on the excavation: Simon Drought, Jim Heathcote, Alex Hooper, Eneas Mackintosh, Frank Moran, Martin Pearson, and Malcolm Reid. Thanks also to Mr Fanchini, manager of the Grim's Dyke Hotel, and to Grandrooms Ltd., for their co-operation and indulgence. The published drawings were prepared by Dorrie Orchard.

The site records are deposited with the Inner London Archaeological Unit.

*The Society is grateful to the Department of the Environment for a grant towards the cost of publishing this report.*