

VOLUNTEER FOCUS

Tackling scrubland and mental health stigma at Grime's Graves

Robin Sullivan, Community Engagement Officer, tells us about new partnerships with Norfolk Wildlife Trust and MensCraft

Brightening a dreary day

On a grey and drizzly day at the end of February, [Grime's Graves](#) wore a sombre look. Grime's has now been closed for over a year while major site improvements take form. Ongoing construction efforts are protected under tarpaulins and, as the sheep seeking shelter outnumber visitors, the atmosphere at site lacked its usual liveliness. However, a ray of hope arrived this February morning in the form of a minibus from [MensCraft](#), a Norfolk-based charity supporting men facing life's challenges or experiencing difficulties with their mental health.



The MensCraft group were a ray of sunshine on a cold February morning; (L - R) Ed, Chris, Phil (EH), Alex, Robin (EH), Adam, Andy, Danny & Jo (EH)

Nurturing connections

Joanna, the friendly receptionist at the Charles Burrell Community Centre initially introduced me to Menscraft. She often guides me around, knocking on doors and introducing me to various local groups. Not just because we hold that magically seductive phrase "we have funding", but because she's what I call a super-connector, a person who knows everyone and has a genuine care for the community she serves.

It was during one such encounter with Chris from MensCraft that the seeds of collaboration were sown. MensCraft run the brilliant initiative The Pit Stop, which since launching in Norwich has grown due to popularity to include satellite programmes across Thetford & Waverly and Kings Lynn. 'The inspiration for these Pit Stops is the idea of men functioning best when they have the solidarity of their

VOLUNTEER FOCUS

own pit crew: other men who they can regularly check-in with for support, understanding, laughter, light-hearted and stimulating discussion and activity.' It was clearly a perfect pairing and their passion really resonated with our community outreach mission at Grime's.

One afternoon, over tea and biscuits, I joined the Thetford Pit Stop group for impassioned discussions about local heritage. Over their weekly Uno game, the conversation flowed effortlessly, touching upon topics ranging from Grime's Graves to one man's brass arrowheads and another's fascination with Anglo-Saxon history. As the afternoon unfolded, the enthusiasm for a visit to Grime's Graves took root. The group eagerly agreed to lend their support in tackling the unruly scrubland surrounding the site. In exchange, we promised them a behind-the-scenes tour of Pit I, along with ample provisions of the best biscuits and copious amounts of tea and coffee!

Making it happen

With logistical support from the National Heritage Lottery Fund for transport, the plan quickly took shape. Chris from Pit Stop coordinated the group, while Kyle from [Norfolk Wildlife Trust](#) provided equipment and guidance for the scrubland restoration project. My job was to coordinate and draw everything together. Our English Heritage Landscape Managers, Robin Bain, and later Phil O'Donoghue, gave their approval and support, and the stage was set for an unforgettable day.

A day of action

On the day, we were joined by Jo Murfitt, Grime's Graves Site Visitor Assistant, whose title hardly encapsulates the breadth of work she undertakes. The Pit Stop group arrived, their enthusiasm undeterred by the rain. We gathered in the Visitor Centre, enjoying tea and exchanging stories. The handling collection sparked lively debates about ancient tools and techniques, bridging the gap between past and present.

We received permission to access Pit I, and guided by Jo and a friendly contractor, we navigated cautiously through the scaffolding and descended into the darkness. With the exception of one individual, whose last visit was 40 years ago, this marked the first thrilling encounter with Grime's underworld for the group.



The group receive instruction before starting their tasks; (L – R) Ed, Kyle (NWT), Danny & Jo

Anticipation grew for our scrubland tasks, and eventually, the rain stopped, allowing us to march out across the undulating landscapes of Neolithic pits and waste tips. Kyle provided an introduction to the wider Brecks landscapes, the rare flora and fauna of Grime's SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and emphasized the importance of our activities for the day, leaving a lasting impression and energizing us for the tasks ahead.

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Making a difference

By cutting and laying the outer hawthorns, we could create a natural living barrier, stopping the resident sheep and deer from getting into the inner area. Here, through seasons of coppicing and regrowth, a new habitat for rare ground-nesting birds will be created. The group set out with saws and loppers; each of us with our tree, working together, giving mini demonstrations of our techniques until each of us shouted "timber"!



Due to the rain, we only had a little over an hour, but through frenzied excitement, we got the first wall of trees down. We admired our work, celebrated one man's herculean efforts to get through the biggest of the bunch, and laughed at how feeble the gloves were against the hardened needles of hawthorn and hurried hands. As we walked back across the landscape suggestions for next season's tasks were the main focus of the group.

The task may have seemed overwhelming at first glance, but by working together the team got the first wall of trees down in under an hour

A heartfelt response

Reflecting on the day's events, the group's response was overwhelmingly positive. "It was the first thing they asked when they got on the bus 'when can we go again?' you have made them very happy and given them some nice memories, once again thank you so much for that, till the next time.... bring it on!" Their gratitude and anticipation for future visits filled us with joy and renewed purpose.

In the end, it wasn't just about scrubland restoration or behind-the-scenes tours. It was about building connections, fostering camaraderie, and creating memories that we hope would last a lifetime. This is the power of Community Action Volunteering. Call it what you like, but it's a fantastic opportunity to build connections with local groups, offering opportunities to those that may like to get involved but need a little extra support in doing so.

As we bid them farewell, we knew that this was just the beginning.

