



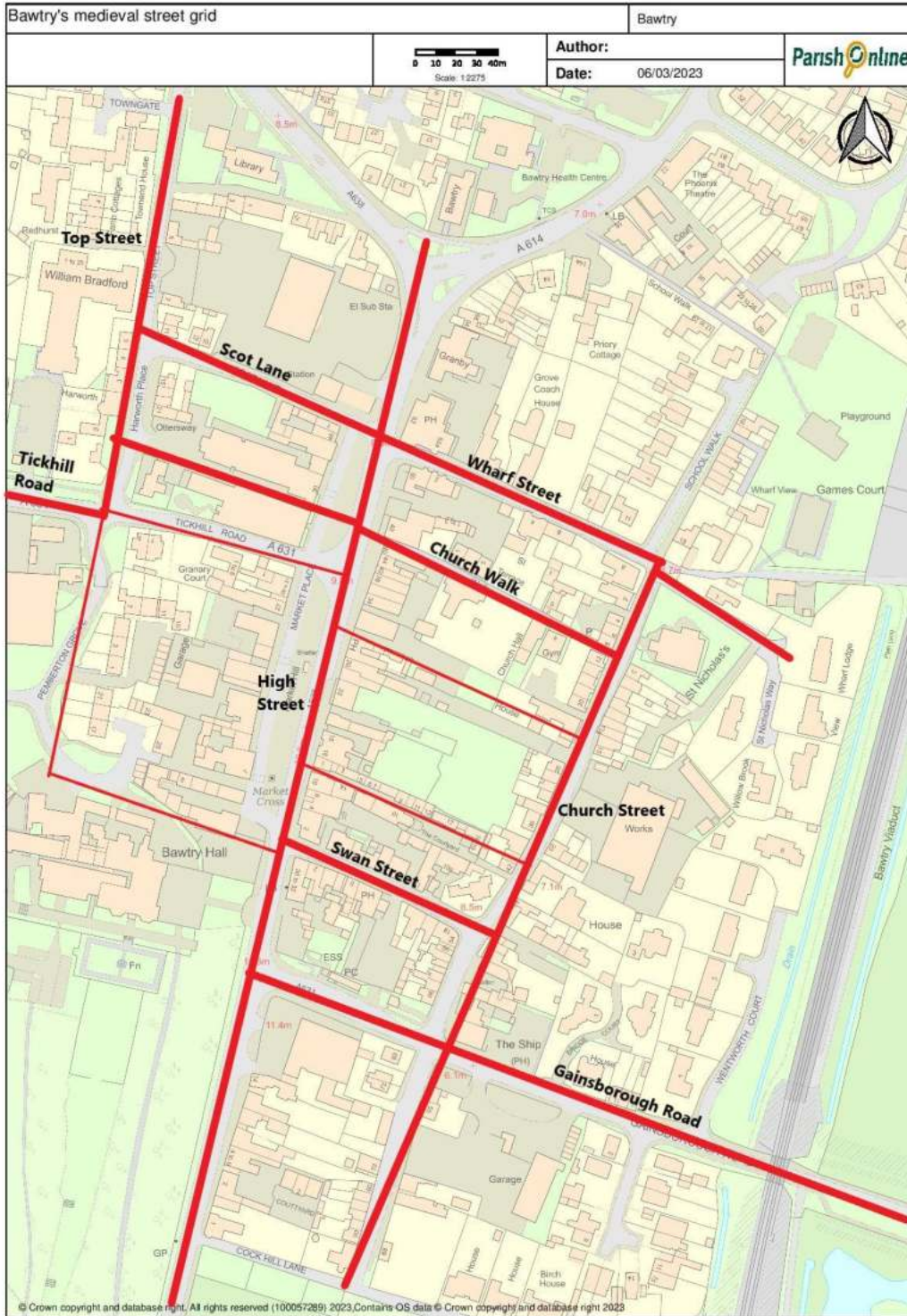
**Bawtry Heritage Group**  
Preserving our Past for the Future  
Registered Charity No. 1188945

## **BAWTRY – A NORMAN PLANTED TOWN**

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In most towns, major roads enter from all directions. The pattern formed where they meet or cross each other will determine the spatial organisation of the settlement, with development filling the frequently irregular spaces between them or tracking along them. Minor roads at the centre will tend to connect the major elements of the development if they are not located on the major routes. In ancient towns, these may be a market place, or a castle, or a major church. As the significance of such sites change over time, so does the layout of the town. It evolves organically.

Not so Bawtry. Like many medieval towns, Bawtry has a number of valuable historic buildings which are deserving of recognition and protection. What is very rare about the town though is a grid layout dating back over 800 years. This distinctive layout helps tell the story of the emergence and development of a very particular style of urban living and a spatial organisation. It is evidence of a Norman "planted" (i.e. "planned") town, made about 1200; evidence of someone devising and implementing a very particular grand design. The centre of Bawtry is shown in Figure 1 below, with the elements of the grid highlighted in red.



*Figure 1 - Bawtry's medieval street grid*

### Elements of the grid

- The town has a north-south spine, with Top Street in the west, High Street in the middle, and Low Street (which is now called Church Street, and previously Nether Street) in the east.

- At right angles to this north-south spine, and connecting its three elements, are several other roads, alleys and other thoroughfares, including Scot Lane, Wharf Street, Church Walk, Swan Street, Gainsborough Road, and the western part of Tickhill Road. These named thoroughfares, most of which remain as public roads, are in bold red in the map.
- In lighter red are marked the locations of other thoroughfares which have not survived as public roads but are evidenced by other means, notably the preservation of characteristic building lines, or the survival of pedestrian routes.
- Between High Street and Top Street these are the public bridleway which today penetrates the Crown Hotel from High Street to Top Street and, evident from 19<sup>th</sup> century maps, a line just to the south of the present Dower House Square – obliterated by the construction of the Dower House itself.
- There are also at least two other thoroughfares between High Street and Church Street – the yard behind what used to be the Timber Joint, and the Courtyard. Cock Hill Road, on the southern extremity of Bawtry, could be a third but this may be a road that post-dates Norman Bawtry.
- The part of Tickhill Road between its junction with Top Street and High Street appears to be part of the original grid, but possibly is not. As a major thoroughfare it was a recent creation, named New Road on 19<sup>th</sup> century maps. It could, of course, have followed an earlier route.
- Bawtry Hall, constructed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but possibly on the site of an earlier house, may obscure an earlier grid element.

A grid plan such as this is characteristic of a Norman planned town, where an existing settlement has been fundamentally reworked, or a new town created. Such settlements, fashioned according to a preconceived plan, are known as “planted” towns.

It should be noted, however, that grid developments were not unique to the Normans.

- In a new development – as opposed to one that had grown organically – the Romans usually adopted a chequerboard pattern, with the town arranged around two principal streets at right angles to each other and lesser streets arranged parallel to them, dividing the settlement into more or less equally sized squares.

- The Anglo-Saxons sometimes also favoured grid layouts in their new towns, or burghs, of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. These were essentially military, defensive developments, sited and constructed to defend against Norsemen. Most featured very substantial defensive ditches and banks around the perimeter.

Not all Norman planted towns had grid layouts – estimated between 20 and 30% in England. This probably reflected the fact that it was very rare they used a completely virgin site. Where a grid layout was used, the grid components tended to be rectangular rather than square. They did not have any defensive element, unlike their Anglo-Saxon predecessors.

### **The significance of the new Norman town of Bawtry**

Bawtry is first mentioned in a charter of 1199; it was then styled as "Bawtre". The new town was sponsored by John de Busli or his son-in-law Robert de Vipont, Lord of the Manor and custodian of Tickhill Castle. A charter for a 4-day fair, at Pentecost, was made in 1213. Reference in that document was also made to a market, but the earliest surviving actual charter for a market dates to 1247. The church of St Nicholas was built (or rebuilt?) around 1200. If it had been a wholly new foundation it is likely it would have been sited near the centre of the new town.

One hundred years after the Norman Conquest the economy of Northern England was recovering and Bawtry was one of many new towns planted at the end of the twelfth century. They were designed for the mutual benefit of the King, the landowner, and of the new townsfolk to provide an efficient way of marketing surplus food and other goods. Sited at the highest navigable part of the River Idle, Bawtry's function as an inland port probably emphasised the significance of trade in this consideration. Most planted towns were granted the right to have a weekly market and an annual fair – but they had to pay the Lord of the Manor to exercise these privileges. He/she would also profit from renting out the land, from levying taxes on mills, bakehouses, weigh houses, ferries, road and river tolls etc. A new town was a big money earner for the landowner.

A mill was one of the Lord's money earners. There was a mill in Bawtry at this time; it is referred to in some of the contemporary records. Sadly it did not survive and it is not known whether it was a water mill or windmill. It could well have been the former – the River Idle flowed much faster then than it does now.

Planted towns created with a grid pattern are not particularly rare in England - but what is rare is the survival of that pattern to the present day. Barnsley and Rotherham are also regarded as planted towns, but neither

has Bawtry's distinctive grid layout. Doncaster was also subject to substantial Norman re-working, with the new borough being laid out alongside the Roman road, and some grid elements remain visible, but they are distorted by the castle site in their midst and later growth, particularly growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Bawtry was successful as a planted town, but never really grew out of it as many others did. The distinctive grid layout therefore remained readily visible. As an example of a Norman planted town Bawtry is therefore pre-eminent in Yorkshire. Indeed, it is of national significance. David Hey, a prominent regional historian, stated that Bawtry is "without doubt one of England's best examples of a new town of the Middle Ages".<sup>1</sup>

### **Bawtry's origins**

It is unlikely that Bawtry was a completely virgin site, but nor was the Norman planted town a total reworking of an existing town. Rather, the reality probably lay between the two – the planted town was probably sited adjacent to an earlier settlement, incorporating some of the earlier elements in its eastern extremity, around the northern end of Church Street.

A number of factors point to this earlier origin:

- The west-east elements of Bawtry's street grid are not quite perpendicular to the north-south elements. They are all parallel with each other but in the west they are skewed slightly to the north, and in the east they are skewed to the south. In fact, they share precisely the same orientation as ancient field systems and boundaries immediately to the north of Bawtry. These field boundaries have been dated to the Iron Age. Therefore, the layout of Norman Bawtry appears to have respected the orientation of a much earlier settlement area.
- There is significant evidence of Roman activity in and around Bawtry. There is the small fort at Scaftworth, and – probably – a shrine or temple just to the east. A major Roman road goes through the town. Roman artefacts have been found in the town itself – part of an amphora in the Market Place, a coin and a few pot sherds in Church Street, potsherds and coins at Martin.
- Excavations in Church Street in 1990<sup>2</sup> (opposite the church; conducted as part of the construction of the terrace of modern houses there) mostly identified buildings dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century or later –

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<sup>1</sup> Hey, David "The Making of South Yorkshire" 1979

<sup>2</sup> Dunkley, J A & Cumberpatch C G – Excavations at Church Street, Bawtry 1996

but underneath them were elements of earlier ones. Crucially, the orientation of these buildings did not respect the grid layout of the new town – they were clearly earlier. They were demolished, and the new grid system superimposed upon them.

- The present church of St Nicholas appears to have been constructed around 1200; perhaps a few years earlier. In terms of the planted town, it is at the extreme eastern margin of the town. If that planted town was wholly new, it is likely a much more central site would have been selected for the church. It is therefore possible that the church was re-constructed at this time – i.e. there was an earlier church on the site.
- That earlier church – now underneath the one we see – would have served a small settlement adjacent to the old course of the Idle and sustained by river trade. A strong clue to that is the church's dedication – to St Nicholas, the patron saint of mariners.

It is therefore possible that the new town laid out by the Normans was sited adjacent to a small older settlement, as depicted in Figure 2 below.

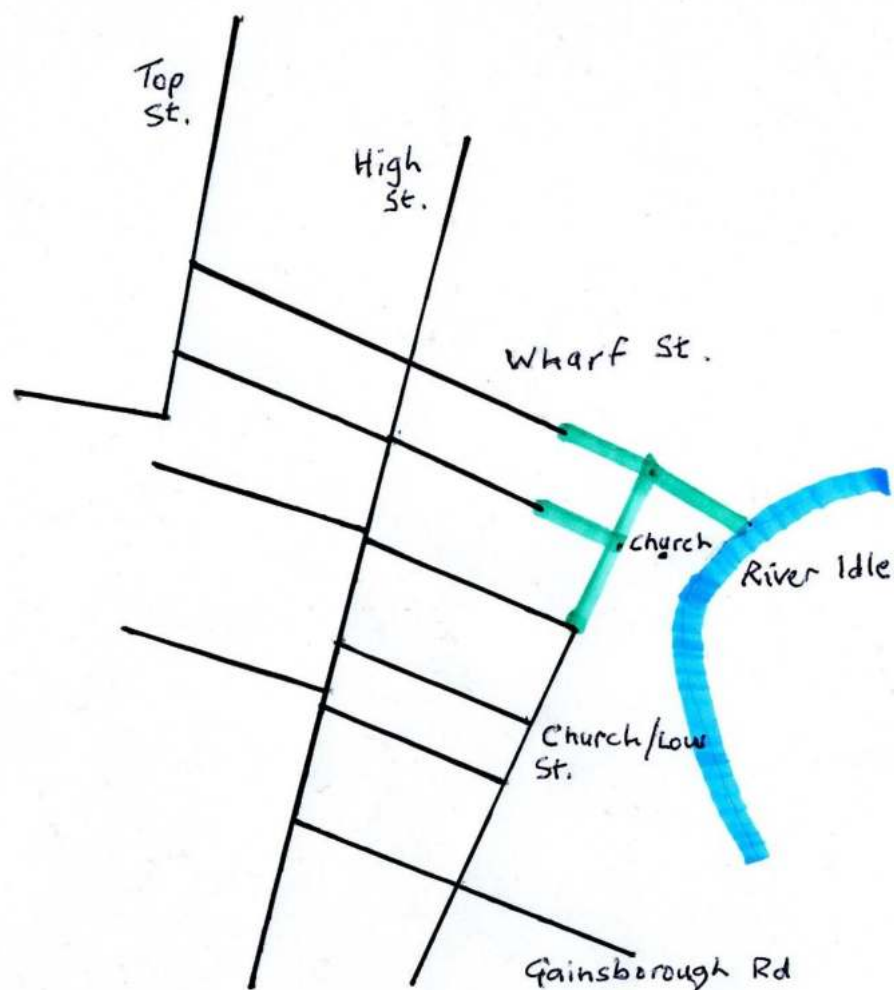


Figure 2 - Bawtry's probable original settlement (in green) and the new town

## Bawtry and Domesday

Bawtry is not mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086. This could be interpreted to mean that Norman Bawtry was a wholly new settlement, laid out on a virgin site. But – that would be an unsafe conclusion to reach, for the following reasons:

- The Domesday survey was not complete. Some settlements, where there is hard evidence of their existence at that time, were omitted for reasons unknown.
- In 1086 the land around what is now Bawtry was in the Manor of Hexthorpe, along with Austerfield, for which there is an entry. It could be that this entry includes Bawtry.
- Similarly, there is an entry for Martin – which is just 1k north-west of the centre of Bawtry. The entry records “10 villani” at Martin – as cited in Domesday, villani (villagers) were the heads of households. Assuming an average of 5 individuals in each household, this means Martin had a population of about 50. There is now a single farm there, with no evidence of a “lost village”. Could this record actually appertain to Bawtry?
- Bawtry might have been a significant settlement prior to the arrival of the Normans, but one that was laid “waste” in the “Harrying of the North” of 1069/1070. That was a series of ferocious military campaigns instigated by William 1 to subjugate northern rebels, who supported the last Wessex claimant to the throne, Edgar Eatheling. Settlements, towns and farms were destroyed in what would be described today as a “scorched earth policy”. Some estimates are that as much as 75% of the population were driven out, killed, or died in the subsequent famine because their crops had been destroyed, and characterised the campaign as a medieval genocide.<sup>3</sup> An authoritative account of 50 years later says 50,000 were slaughtered by William’s army, and 100,000 people subsequently starved to death.<sup>4</sup> To put that into perspective, the total population of England at this time was probably only around 2.5 million. The “Harrying of the North” was reckoned to have been most severely applied in Yorkshire. As the first part of Yorkshire reached from the south, it may be Bawtry was marked for special attention by being wiped off the map, such that there was nothing left to record in 1086’s Domesday survey. Mention has already been made that Bawtry may have been deemed to be part of Austerfield in Domesday. Part of the Austerfield Manor was known as “Austerfield Waste”.

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<sup>3</sup> Kapelle, William E – The Norman Conquest of the North; The Region and its Transformation 1000-1135 - 1979

<sup>4</sup> Vitalis, Ordericus – The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy 1114-1141



Could that have been Bawtry? Such a theory is supported by change in the reported value of the estates held by Robert, Count of Mortain, who owned the Manor of Hexthorpe, which included Austerfield – and possibly what had been Bawtry. That value was £239 in 1066 – but this had dramatically reduced to £33 in 1086.<sup>5</sup>

## Burgage plots

The rectangles of the grid created by the street layout of a planted town were divided into long and thin plots of land, typically each hosting an individual residence, shop or workshop, or a linear combination of such buildings. These are known as "burgage plots". They were not a Norman invention, being also characteristic of Saxon settlements.

A "burgage" was a town rental property owned by the lord of the manor. (After "borough" or "burgh" for a town; a "burgher" was a member of the privileged elite of a town, who rented such plots.) The plots were rented out simply as land – it was up to the tenant to build upon them.

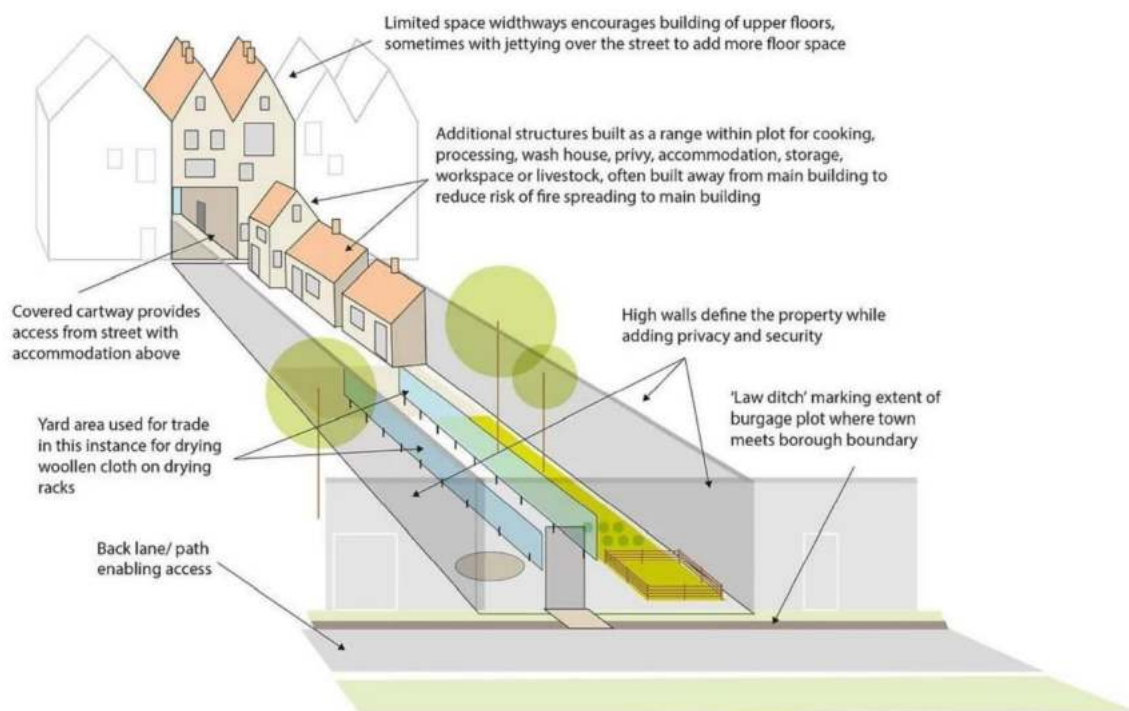


Figure 3 - graphic illustration of a typical burgage plot

Figure 3 is a graphic illustration of a typical burgage plot (in this example a trade oriented one) showing its constituent parts. (The illustration is

<sup>5</sup> Palmer, John & Slater, George – Domesday Book Yorkshire 2011

sourced, with permission, from the <https://www.burgageplots.info> website.)

In these plots the 'head' of the plot (on the main street frontage) is occupied by the principal building, whilst the 'tail' (at the opposite end) adjoins a lesser street or back lane. Extensions behind the principal building would be frequently added. Then might come outbuildings of various sorts - wash house, privy, storage, workshops etc. Burgage plots often also accommodated some space where a few animals might be kept, or vegetables grown.

### **The evolution of property boundaries**

In planted towns later development has generally fitted within the the original property boundaries, either by direct re-use of established burgage plots or by the subsequent continuation of their alignments by later development. Whilst the styles of buildings within individual plots has evolved since they were originally laid out, the pattern of plots has remained more stable.

Erosion of the original pattern can, however, occur in two ways:

- Adjacent plots may be amalgamated. This can only happen when they become available to new tenants or owners simultaneously.
- More easily achieved is the division of a plot along its length, which can occur at any time by the tenant or owner choosing to rent or sell one end of the plot – effectively creating a plot with a head at each end rather than a head and a tail.

Map evidence suggests that until the 20th century, development within these areas of burgage tenure was largely piecemeal in character. This has resulted in areas where earlier buildings stand alongside later townhouses and 20th century retail units, all sitting within the medieval plan form.

### **Setting out the new town**

In medieval England the basic unit of measurement was a rod, pole or perch - about 5 metres. The name varied by region and 40 rods, poles or perches equalled 1 furlong. This was probably dictated by the maximum practical length of an oak house beam. Most burgage plots are either of that width, or multiples of it. Those ancient measurements are therefore fossilised into our modern town.

The town grid would have been laid out by a surveyor or engineer, a manorial agent using the rod/pole/perch as the unit of measurement to plan the development.



Figure 4 - The King instructing a surveyor or engineer

Figure 4 is a 14<sup>th</sup> century image of the 8<sup>th</sup> century King Offa of Mercia. It shows the king instructing a surveyor or engineer, who is holding some surveying tools - a pair of dividers and a square.

Between 1298 and 1206 Lambert of Ardres wrote a history<sup>6</sup> in which he describes an engineer, "Master Symon the Dyker", setting out new elements of the town of Ardres, near Calais in about 1200. He said:

"Master Simon the Dyker, so learned in geometrical work, pacing with rod in hand, and with all a master's dignity, and setting out hither and thither, not so much with that actual rod as with the spiritual rod of his mind, the work which in imagination he had already conceived ... and ever in the forefront, the masters of the work, weighing all that was done in the scales of their geometrical plan."

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<sup>6</sup> Lambert of Ardres – History of the Counts of Guines and Lords of Ardres

## What the new town looked like

The illustration at Figure 5 shows a set of burbage plots with houses – possibly shops – at their heads. With the exception of the church, the buildings are timber framed.

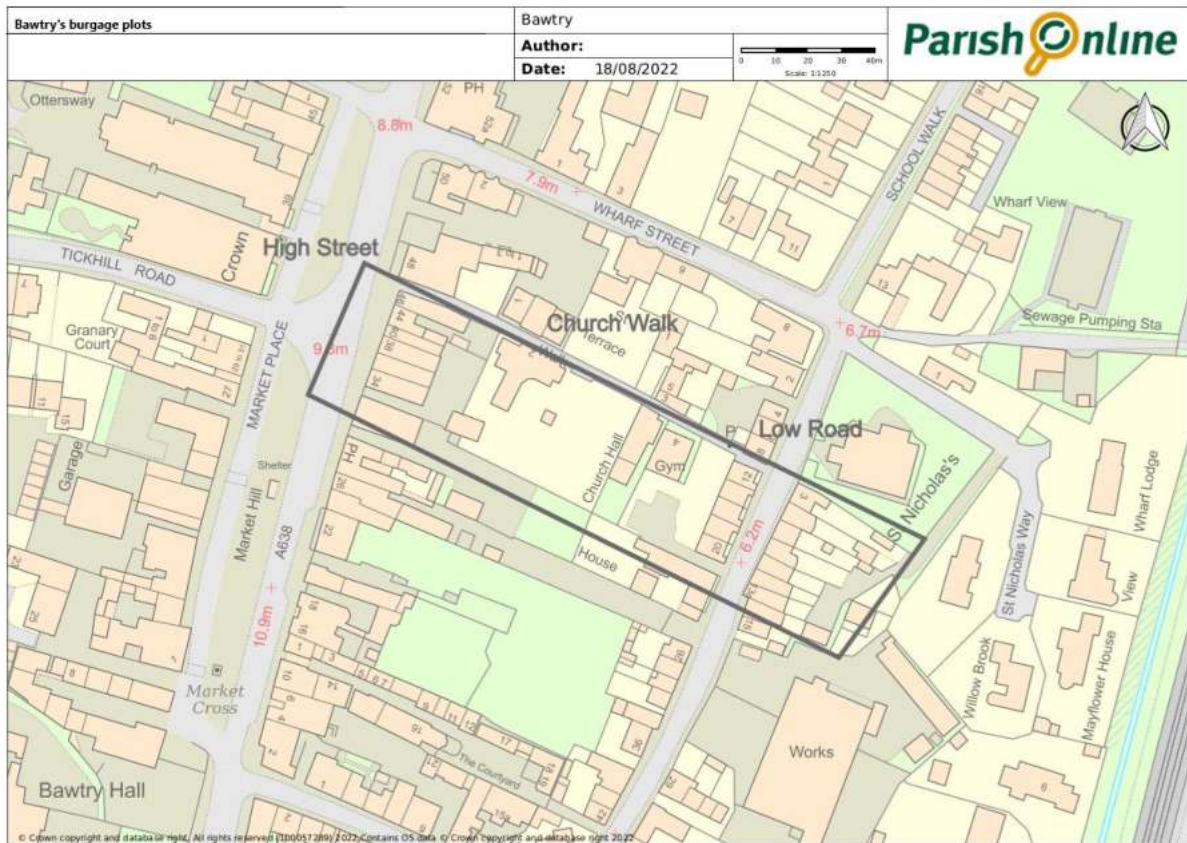


*Figure 5 - a typical 13th century settlement*

The Lord of the Manor's house might have been built of stone too. In timber framed houses, the walls between the frames would have been wattle and daub. The roofs were thatched. The illustration also shows some deterioration of the burbage plot layout at top right. As will be seen later, this has also happened in Bawtry.

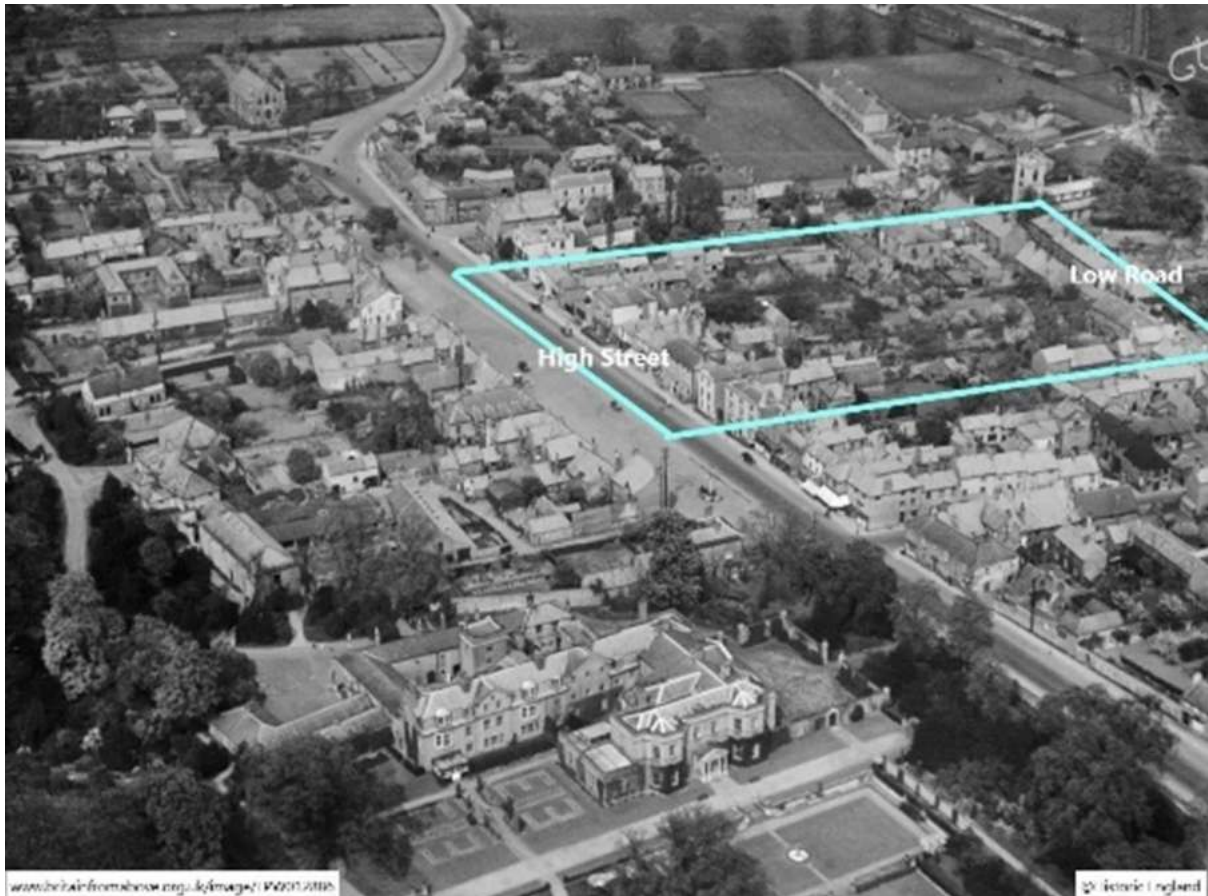
## Bawtry's burbage plots

The majority of Bawtry's burbage plots have a width of one or two rods and are laid out perpendicular to the three north-south linear streets of Top Street, High Street (with its rectangular market place), and Low Street (now Church Street). Length was determined by the distance between the principal streets.



*Figure 6 - Bawtry's burgage plots*

Some of Bawtry's burgage plots can be seen in Figure 6. The marked area highlights two sets of plots - those running between High Street and Low Street, and another set running east from Low Street. The latter are smaller, but apparently better preserved than the former, with few buildings at the end of the tail. The map shows there has been erosion in the centre of the plots between High Street and Low Street but the street frontages survive in their original dimensions. These larger plots have, however, mostly been divided along their length, the buildings at the head (on High Street) being mirrored by others (generally smaller) at the tail on Low Street.



*Figure 7 - Aerial photograph of Bawtry taken in 1925 showing burgage plots*

### **Bawtry's burgage plots in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – still surviving.....**

The image at Figure 7 is an aerial photograph of Bawtry taken in 1925. The area bounded in blue corresponds with the larger of the two sets of burgage plots highlighted in the previous map at Figure 6 - i.e. those between High Street and Low Street. The resolution of the photograph is not good but it is possible to see in it the typical elements of burgage plots described above and illustrated in the previous graphic. The principal buildings are on High Street, most with extensions and outbuildings behind. There are also open areas visible. At the tail of the plots, fronting Low Street are more buildings, but of lesser size (and status) than those fronting High Street.

**..... but eroding fast**



*Figure 8 - Aerial photograph of Bawtry taken in 2022 showing burgage plots*

The obliteration of the centre of the plots is graphically shown in the image at Figure 8, which is an aerial photograph of Bawtry (courtesy of Google Maps) taken in 2022. The area bounded in blue corresponds to that depicted in the map at Figure 6. The boundaries of the plots survive at each end, evidenced by the building lines shown on the map – but in the photograph they are largely hidden by recent contiguous building or at least roofing. In the middle portion of the set of plots most of the boundaries have disappeared. A large grassed area straddles what were five or six individual plots. The building lines of the church hall and the gym straddle two or three plots.

As well as the middle portions of the plots merging together, their presence is becoming less evident on the street frontages.

The visibility of the divisions has just about survived at the High Street end - see Figure 9 below.



Figure 9 - High Street end of burgage plots

At the Low Street (now Church Street) end of the larger plots, however, a continuous terrace of modern houses has been constructed. See Figure 10 below.



Figure 10 - Church Street end of burgage plots

Divisions between the ancient burgage plot boundaries are not readily visible from the street, where one is confronted by a long brick frontage straddling the plots. To compound the deterioration, 5 modern houses now straddle what were at least 6 burgage strips.

Comparison between the aerial photographs of 1925 and 2022 shows that the integrity of Bawtry's burgage plots is deteriorating.

The new town of Bawtry was created over 800 years ago. The only building to survive from around that time is part of the Church of St Nicholas. The Norman town does, however, remain highly visible, because its grid layout has been fossilised into the town's existing layout. Sadly, that is not so true of the burgage plots which have become less evident. If modern



development does not respect the layout of Bawtry's burgage plots and their encompassing grid that very rare heritage will be lost.

Important buildings and historical sites are protected in Planning Law – especially the most valuable ones, by Listing or Scheduling. Currently there is no protection for a settlement's spatial organisation – such as Bawtry's grid layout and its constituent burgage plots.

The South Yorkshire Heritage List<sup>7</sup> is an initiative by South Yorkshire Archaeology Service to identify heritage assets that are valued as contributing to the distinctiveness and history of South Yorkshire but that are not protected by statutory national designations, such as Listing and Scheduling. Inclusion on the List can allow the more local significance of an asset to be taken into account in planning decisions that affect it – although it won't provide the same level of protection as national designation.

Bawtry Heritage Group nominated Bawtry's grid layout and its burgage plots as an asset that should be included on the List. Unfortunately, SYHL has responded by saying these features are already sufficiently protected by virtue of being within the town's Conservation Area.

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## **Sources**

The majority of this paper is based upon analysis of maps and photographs, and is original. The following works refer to Bawtry's grid street system, however, in the context of it being typical of a Norman planted town.

## **Bibliography**

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## **Website**

<https://www.burgageplots.info>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://local-heritage-list.org.uk/south-yorkshire>