



**Bawtry Heritage Group**

Preserving our Past for the Future

Registered Charity No. 1188945

**ROMAN BAWTRY – SPECULATION &  
THEORIES UNPROVEN BY ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
EVIDENCE**

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Although not as rich or as well-known as southern England, evidence of Roman activity in Yorkshire is very substantial. Locally, this includes roads, the remains of Roman Doncaster (Danum), a major fort at Rossington, villas at Oldcoates and Stancil, and extensive potteries at Cantley. Around Bawtry, there is evidence of Romano-British field systems.

There also exist a number of claims by antiquarians and other observers of the existence of Roman works or sites in Bawtry and its immediate vicinity. These traditions, evidenced by maps and written accounts, date back to at least the 16th century and were the subject of enthusiastic investigation and review by antiquarians. Many of them were described in 19th century works, and some of these are still referenced in modern accounts. The evidence for these claims is mostly the identification of visible earthworks as being of Roman origin, often with a description of Roman artefacts said to have been found at the sites. In some cases, however, there is no account of how or why the author asserts a Roman (or any other) attribution to a site. Some of these claims have been demonstrated to be unjustified yet they persist in being repeated in modern accounts by individuals and organisations one would have thought ought to “know better”, because of the absence of archaeological evidence or, worse, the existence of contradictory archaeological evidence. This is confusing and misleading for conscientious students of Bawtry’s history. This paper seeks to review the claims and theories about Roman works in Bawtry in an attempt to resolve some of that confusion.

Hard evidence of Roman activity in and around Bawtry does undoubtedly exist, such as the small fort at Scaftworth. These sites are not comprehensively described in this paper. Bawtry Heritage Group’s Mick Maguire has written a paper “Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry” which contains full information.

### **The nature of archaeological evidence and its significance**

Of necessity, a broad interpretation of the word “evidence” in the context used above is required. The interpretation of earthworks – in relation to Roman works, these are typically linear banks and ditches – by their physical appearance alone is highly subjective. Some earthworks are quite distinctive – such as the typical “playing card” shape of a Roman fort with its rounded corners – but many are not. A single example may be ascribed, by different commentators, to be of Iron Age, Roman, medieval, or even modern date. A modern judgement about whether a site is “Roman” or not is, of course, made impossible if the earthwork is no longer visible and there is no other evidence unless the site is excavated.

Expert analysis of artefacts found at a site will usually assist in categorising it as belonging to a particular time or culture. Pot sherds are quite common and are valuable in this respect. Their differing characteristics – in their constituent materials, methodology of manufacture, and style – allow archaeologists to identify them as belonging to particular cultures and, often, dates. Coins – which are found less often - have the same sorts of distinctive characteristics, often enhanced by a the year of manufacture being incorporated in the design. Where such artefacts are found in an undisturbed level in the ground – a “horizon” in archaeologists’ vocabulary – that horizon may be reasonably confidently dated. Surface finds of such items are less valuable, because they are not “in-situ” but a preponderance of them, all of the same period of manufacture, may inform an approximation of the date of a site.

There is, however, some difficulty here. That is the accuracy of the information presented. Even in modern accounts, the specific location of “finds” is not always presented – even if it was recorded in the first place. The reliability of historical claims must therefore be viewed with caution, especially if

the artefacts themselves can no longer be examined because they have been lost – which is usually the case. Detailed and scaled drawings of finds made by a competent hand may be of value in the absence of the artefacts themselves, but such images were not usually presented in antiquarians' accounts.

Archaeological excavation is the only way of definitively identifying the nature of an earthwork. Its overall structure can then be ascertained, and its relationship with other features in the ground may be assessed. Excavation will sometimes reveal artefacts in undisturbed ground, such that the deposits may be chronologically sequenced or even dated. If the artefact in question is itself dateable, so much the better. Some antiquarians doubtless did excavate – but not in the fashion of modern archaeology, the methodology of which is a very tight discipline. Archaeological excavation alone, however, is not sufficient to provide hard evidence; the process must be properly recorded. That is, it must be described (and illustrated) and clear differentiation must be made between what is observed and how those observations are interpreted. The work must then be made available to third parties so that they may make their own analysis, informed by the factual observations. This is “peer review” – a vital part of modern archaeology.

### **Antiquarians**

It is not intended to be critical of the originators of claims that various “works” in the Bawtry area are Roman. Archaeology is a very modern concept; its techniques and disciplines, increasingly dependent upon science, did not exist much before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Individuals who took an interest in the history of the world around them were a product of the Age of Enlightenment, where “natural philosophy” attracted the attention of those who (usually) had a decent education, enquiring minds, time and inclination to study. Such individuals were frequently quite wealthy, who did not have to “earn a living” or whose occupation left them a good deal of spare time. They were usually male, and many were clerics. They became known as “antiquarians”. Their less principled associates were concerned simply to unearth buried artefacts which might be of interest or value – these were treasure hunters. Both groups did substantial damage to historic sites by concentrating on the artefacts they found rather than the contexts they found them in.

This summary of historical and traditional conjecture about Roman Bawtry identifies accounts where a “Roman” attribution to a site has not been informed by archaeological excavation. It would be unwise, however, to simply reject such attributions; they may be correct. An example will readily illustrate this. There exists, a little under 1 kilometre south east from the centre of Bawtry, in the parish of Scaftworth, a site which archaeological excavation has confidently identified as being Roman. There is some debate about its precise nature – probably a “fortlet” but possibly something non-military. No earthworks are visible. The site was identified from aerial photographs taken in the 1940s, which prompted its subsequent excavation. In fact, however, this site was identified as an “Antient Incampment” on a map drawn by one John Chapman in 1774<sup>1</sup> - see Figure 1 below. That label can be clearly seen on his map to the east of Bawtry, enclosed by the westward loop of the River Idle.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapman, John – Nottingham Shire Survey'd - 1774



Figure 1- Extract from Chapman's map of 1774 showing an "Antient Incampment" east of Bawtry

The earthworks must have been visible to Chapman or to another whose account Chapman repeated. The site was "lost" after this time because the earthworks disappeared. It should not be surprising that earthworks prominent hundreds of years ago are no longer visible. In the late 18th century and subsequently Britain's population began to grow very fast. In 1750 the population of Britain was about 6 million; by 1851 it had increased to about 18 million. Then about 41 million in 1901, and 60 million a century later. The consequences of this on the landscape were profound. Land previously unused, or wooded, or simply used for pasture became intensively farmed, with ploughs biting ever deeper. Ancient earthworks – such as the banks and ditches around the perimeter of a Roman fort, or the linear "agger" of a Roman road - were gradually reduced. Often they completely disappeared from sight, although their associated crop marks may remain visible in aerial photography.

The historical traditions about Roman works in or around Bawtry relate to two categories of “Roman” remains - the existence of roads coming in or close to Bawtry, and of forts or other features near or in the town. These traditions are examined below.

### **A Roman road and a “camp” near Scaftworth**

John Chapman’s map of 1774 showing an “Antient Incampment” between Scaftworth and Bawtry is referred to above. John Chapman was a land surveyor, draughtsman and engraver. He made what were regarded as very accurate maps of Durham, Staffordshire, Nottinghamshire and Essex. Scaftworth, although very close to Bawtry, is actually in the county of Nottinghamshire. His was the earliest account to include the Scaftworth Roman feature in a map.

In 1776, Mostyn John Armstrong, a surveyor and map maker, published his “Actual Survey”<sup>2</sup>. This comprised a series of maps showing the country for 3 miles on each side of the post roads. It was really an 18<sup>th</sup> century travellers’ guide, indexing all the post towns the roads passed through, citing the distances between them, and identifying significant inns en route. There was no accompanying descriptive text. Plate 12 of the work shows Bawtry near the top – see Figure 2 below. Armstrong has marked Chapman’s “Antient Incampment”, in precisely the same position as Chapman did, but he describes the feature as a “Roman Camp”.

In his map, Armstrong adds another feature though, not mentioned by Chapman – a “Rom’n Rd.” This takes the form of a dotted line which leaves the present Gainsborough to Bawtry road just south of Everton and proceeds in a straight line north of Scaftworth to the “Camp”, crosses the Idle, and then joins the Great North Road north of Bawtry town centre. Just as the “camp” was evidenced by the visibility of surviving earthworks, the same must have been true of the road. (A major Roman road was usually elevated above the ground level on an “agger”, typically 3-5 feet high and up to 45-50 feet wide. Even if the road observed was not a “major” one, it is likely that in crossing the River Idle wetlands it would have been built upon a significant embankment or causeway.)

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<sup>2</sup> Armstrong, Mostyn John – An Actual Survey of the Great Post-Roads between London and Edinburgh - 1776

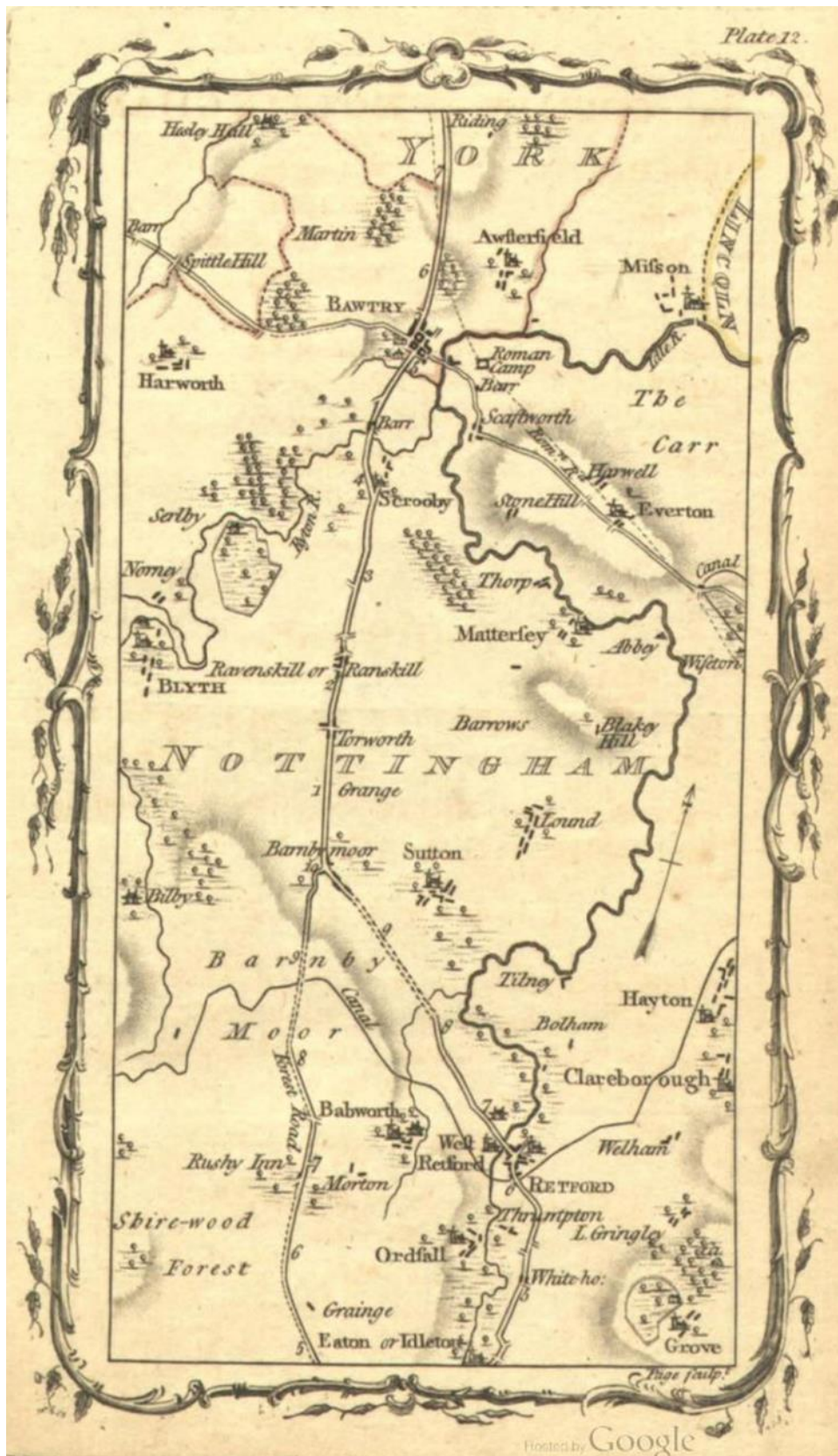


Figure 2 - Armstrong's map of 1776 from "An Actual Survey"

This site is also referred to in two works by William Peck. He was a regional historian who was dissatisfied with histories of the area that had been published previously, feeling they omitted

important material. To correct this, he published a history of Bawtry in 1813<sup>3</sup> followed by a history of the Isle of Axholme in 1815<sup>4</sup> which also contained material about Bawtry. Both were printed in very limited numbers, by subscription. The earlier work included a map of Bawtry and surrounding area; see Figure 3 below.

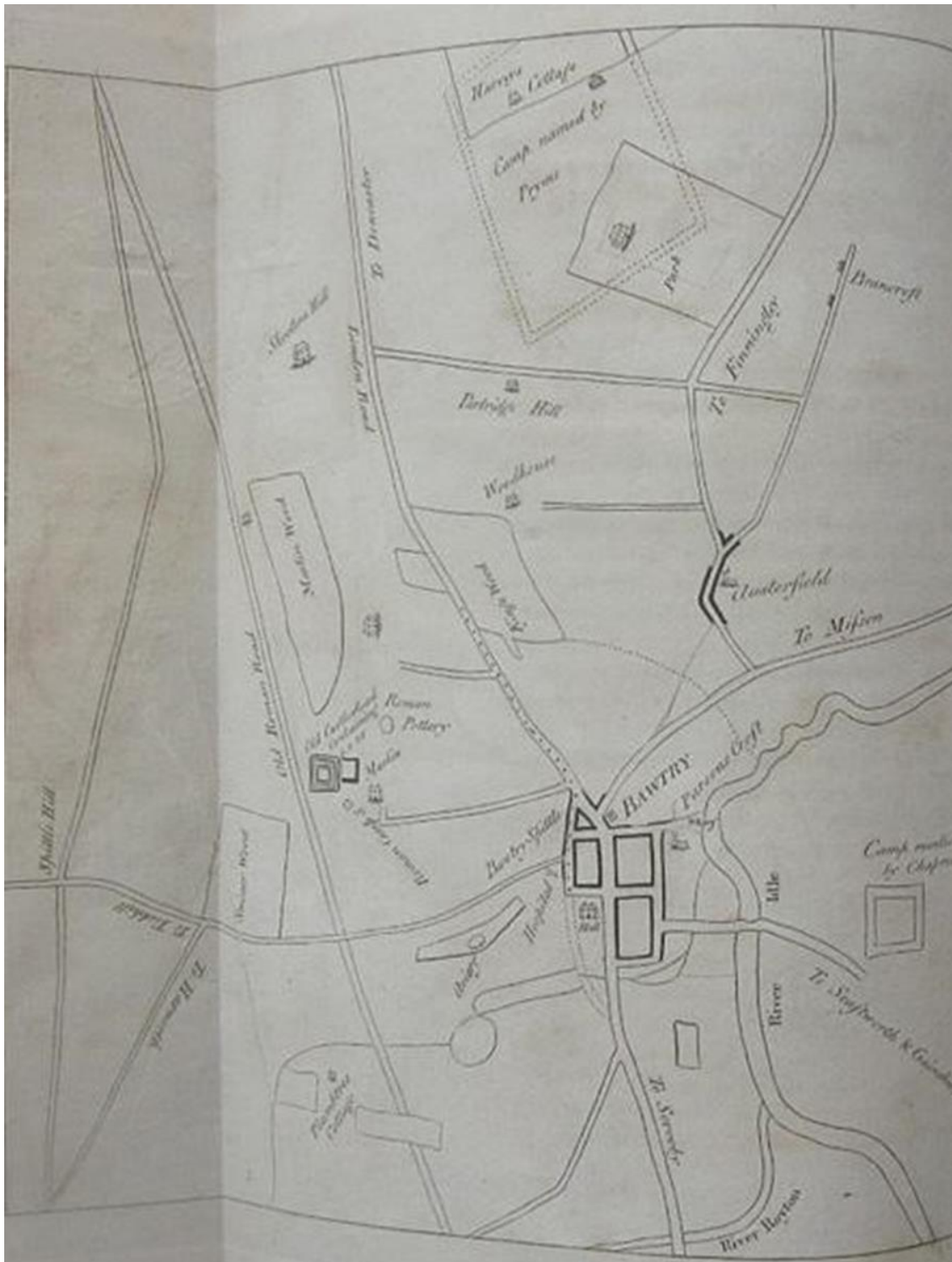


Figure 3 - Peck's map of Bawtry & surrounding area, 1813

<sup>3</sup> Peck, William – A Topographic History of Bawtry and Thorne with Villages adjacent - 1813

<sup>4</sup> Peck, William – A Topographical Account of the Isle Of Axholme - 1815

Peck refers to Chapman's map, showing the "camp" at Scaftworth, in his 1813 work, on page 59. He says:

*"Over the river Idle, between the bridge at Bawtry and Scaftworth, Chapman, in his map of Nottinghamshire, has inserted a camp, which was visible at that time but now obliterated."*

Visible in 1774, the earthwork had been "obliterated" by 1813, only 39 years later by the deprivations of the plough.

Even though Peck shows "the camp mentioned by Chapman" on his map, he does not make any reference to a Roman road at the same location and neither does he show it on his map, which did, however, include a different route he supposed to be Roman, to the west of Bawtry. He labelled this "Old Roman Road". Just as the "camp" earthworks were no longer visible, the same was probably true of the adjacent road. He did, however, write about the bridge over the Idle just outside Bawtry. On pages 13-14 of the 1813 work he wrote:

*"A wooden bridge was erected over the river Idle, on the road between Bawtry and Scaftworth, in 1738 ..... In 1807 it was so much decayed that a new one was found necessary ..... The erection of a stone bridge of three arches was agreed upon.... In the year 1810 the foundation was laid on 144 piles ..... driven below the bed of the river about six feet ..... When the workmen were digging the foundation, it was discovered that, at some distant period, the bed of the river, at that place, had been covered with wood and gravel; as there were piles of oak found five and others six feet driven into the ground, upon them were placed beams of oak of great thickness with other cross pieces of wood, over these was laid a great quantity of gravel, by which means a secure foundation had been obtained. On digging still deeper, were found a great many coins, daggers, spurs, bridledbits, horseshoes, &c.; from which we may infer that there has been a ford there at an early period."*

Peck did not elaborate on what he meant by "an early period". It is therefore not known whether he believed this to be "Roman".

Both the "camp" and the road were mentioned by Thomas Bailey who was a Nottingham newspaper proprietor. In 1853 he wrote a history of Nottinghamshire<sup>5</sup>. At page 1250 of Volume 4 of this work he says that the open lands of Scaftworth were enclosed in 1773, at which time

*"...several specimens of Roman antiquities were found, as parts of urns, a spear, &c. This discovery seems, in some measure, to settle a formerly controverted point as to the origin of some architectural remains existing near the village; there being every reason now to believe that they are the ruins of a Roman fort, or station, standing on the route of the road from Doncaster to Littleborough."*

This account was reiterated by Francis White, who published a history of Nottinghamshire in 1864<sup>6</sup>; the reference appears on page 379. In the Victoria County History of Nottinghamshire of 1906<sup>7</sup> it is stated that the Scaftworth earthwork was similar to one at Martin, about 1 mile north-west of Bawtry.

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<sup>5</sup> Bailey, Thomas – Annals of Nottinghamshire - 1853

<sup>6</sup> White, Francis – Nottinghamshire History, Directory and Gazetteer, and Directory of Nottinghamshire and the Town and County of the Town of Nottingham - 1864

<sup>7</sup> Page, William (editor) – Victoria County History of Nottinghamshire - 1906



(Volume 1 page 303) (See below) It also mentions a number of “specimens of Roman antiquities” found there.

This Roman site, “re-discovered” in aerial photographs in the 1940s, has now been the subject of several archaeological excavations which confirm the “camp” and adjacent road are of Roman origin. The “camp” is now known as Scaftworth Roman fortlet, and the road was part of the “western branch” of Ermine Street, which was the major Roman road linking Lincoln and York. The detour through the Bawtry area and Doncaster avoided a ferry crossing on the Humber Estuary, which would not always have been passable in poor weather conditions.

### **A Roman road and a “camp” between Austerfield and Finningley**

There is a tradition going back hundreds of years of a Roman “camp” between Austerfield and Finningley, with accounts of significant earthworks and finds of Roman coins, pottery and weapons. This site is more than 3 miles from Bawtry. It is included in this paper because it is evident that there was some confusion between it and the Roman site featuring a Roman fort and an adjacent road near Scaftworth.

John Leland was a poet and antiquary, best known for his “Itinerary”, written between 1538 and 1543<sup>8</sup>. In this work he described everything of historical interest that he saw in very extensive journeys around England and Wales. At pp 125-126 of Volume 6 of his “Itinerary” he describes his attempt to identify the route of the Roman road between Lincoln and Doncaster. (This road being the Western branch of Ermine Street, now designated RR28a by Margary.)

*“Then after it has left Gainsborough .... It goes to Marton ..... and here it crossed the Trent into Nottinghamshire, in which county I cannot discover any tracts of it. .... However, it must have in all probability crossed this corner of Nottinghamshire from Marton to Bawtry in Yorkshire, not far from which stands Osterfield or Austerfield, and near that a large square formation, perhaps a Roman camp, with the remains of a military way, by it's pointing seeming to be part of that we are in search for between Marton and Doncaster.”*

Abraham de la Pryme was an antiquary and curate (a common combination) active in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. His “Diary”<sup>9</sup>, started in childhood and continued throughout his life, contains his observations and analyses of local history in these counties. At pp 220-221 of his “Diary” he wrote:

*“..... I found ye last week an antient town called Osterfield, on this side of Bawtry, and, hard by it, a great foursquair Roman fortification.”*

He also states the Roman road from Caistor (via Lincoln) to Doncaster “*runs not farr off*”. Pryme gives no further description of what he saw. The account is almost identical to that of Leland 160 years earlier, but Pryme does aver he saw these remains himself. It is unlikely, in any case, that he would have had access to Leland’s work because at that time it was not published; it existed in manuscript form only.

Just below the northern margin of his map of 1813 William Peck<sup>10</sup> shows the “Camp named by Pryme”. At page 60 of his 1813 account he says that a Bawtry resident informed him that in about 1763 the

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<sup>8</sup> Leland, John – The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary – 1538-1543

<sup>9</sup> de la Pryme, Abraham – Diary of My Own Life – 1680-1704

<sup>10</sup> Peck, William - Peck, William – A Topographic History of Bawtry and Thorne with Villages adjacent - 1813

“breastwork” of this feature was “upwards of a yard high” – but since then the enclosure had been “quite obliterated”. In his 1815 account, he states that when this area was enclosed

*“Several curious remains of arms were found near the site of the great camp, such as parts of swords and heads of battle axes.”*

He also refers to a spearhead. He illustrated the latter.

At pages 5-6 of his 1815 account<sup>11</sup> Peck says:

*“From many enquiries respecting the Roman camp at Austerfield, I have been able to trace the site, which was part of Austerfield high common and Finningley Park. The Roman road named in the above essay (he refers to Leland here) might probably come from Marton, pass over Gringley hills, through Scaftworth, and by Bawtry near the present bridge, through the Idle, and meet the Roman road that comes from Littleborough-ferry to Doncaster; some remains of which are very visible on the side of Serlby wood, in a direct line to Doncaster.”*

This is probable evidence of the confusion between the Austerfield/Finningly site and that at Scaftworth. Peck complicates it even further by reference to the supposed Roman road south of Bawtry, running alongside Serlby Wood and northwards, passing to the west of Bawtry and Martin.

These historical accounts have informed a modern archaeological assessment for Doncaster Local Plan, prepared in 2019. It refers to the “camp” between Austerfield and Finningley, which it describes as Roman, and states that it was marked on the 1892 Ordnance Survey map. In fact, it survived on OS maps until 1918, when it featured on the 6 inch map as the “Site of Roman Camp”.

It would appear reasonably certain that there was a significant earthwork at this site, and if Peck’s account is accepted, it was associated with Roman finds. Modern archaeological investigation – to resolve the nature of the earthwork – is not possible because the site is now obliterated by Doncaster Sheffield Airport and, to its east, extensive gravel quarrying.

### **A north-south Roman road to the west of Bawtry and another entering Bawtry from the south**

This tradition has two elements. One is a north-south road running west of Bawtry, approximately between Blythe and Rossington. The other is a conjectural routing of the “western branch” of Ermine Street. This approached Bawtry from the south east. This is now known to have passed north of Scaftworth, but some accounts have it (or another, possibly earlier iteration of the road) passing to the south and then cutting west across the present Great North Road, possibly close to Hawk’s Nest. These accounts then have the road turning sharply to the north, through what are now the grounds of Bawtry Hall. It then followed the line of the county boundary through the grounds of Bawtry Hall, the line of Pemberton Grove and Top Street and thence to Rossington Bridge and Doncaster along the Great North Road.

The belief that a Roman road passes south to north through the present grounds of Bawtry Hall, and exits along what is now Top Street to join Doncaster Road (the Great North Road) is supported by a modern regional historian, David Hey. In his “Making of South Yorkshire”<sup>12</sup>, at page 58, he writes:

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<sup>11</sup> Peck, William - A Topographical Account of the Isle Of Axholme - 1815

<sup>12</sup> Hey, David – The Making of South Yorkshire - 1979

“Bawtry was established as a deliberate act of town planning (prior to 1199) .... The planners diverted the Roman road from its original course (which is marked by the county boundary) into the large rectangular market place that formed the core of the new settlement.... The road out of the northern end of the market place swings left to Top Street, which follows the alignment of the Roman road, and then continues towards Doncaster as the Great North Road.”

He illustrated this in the map at Figure 4 below.

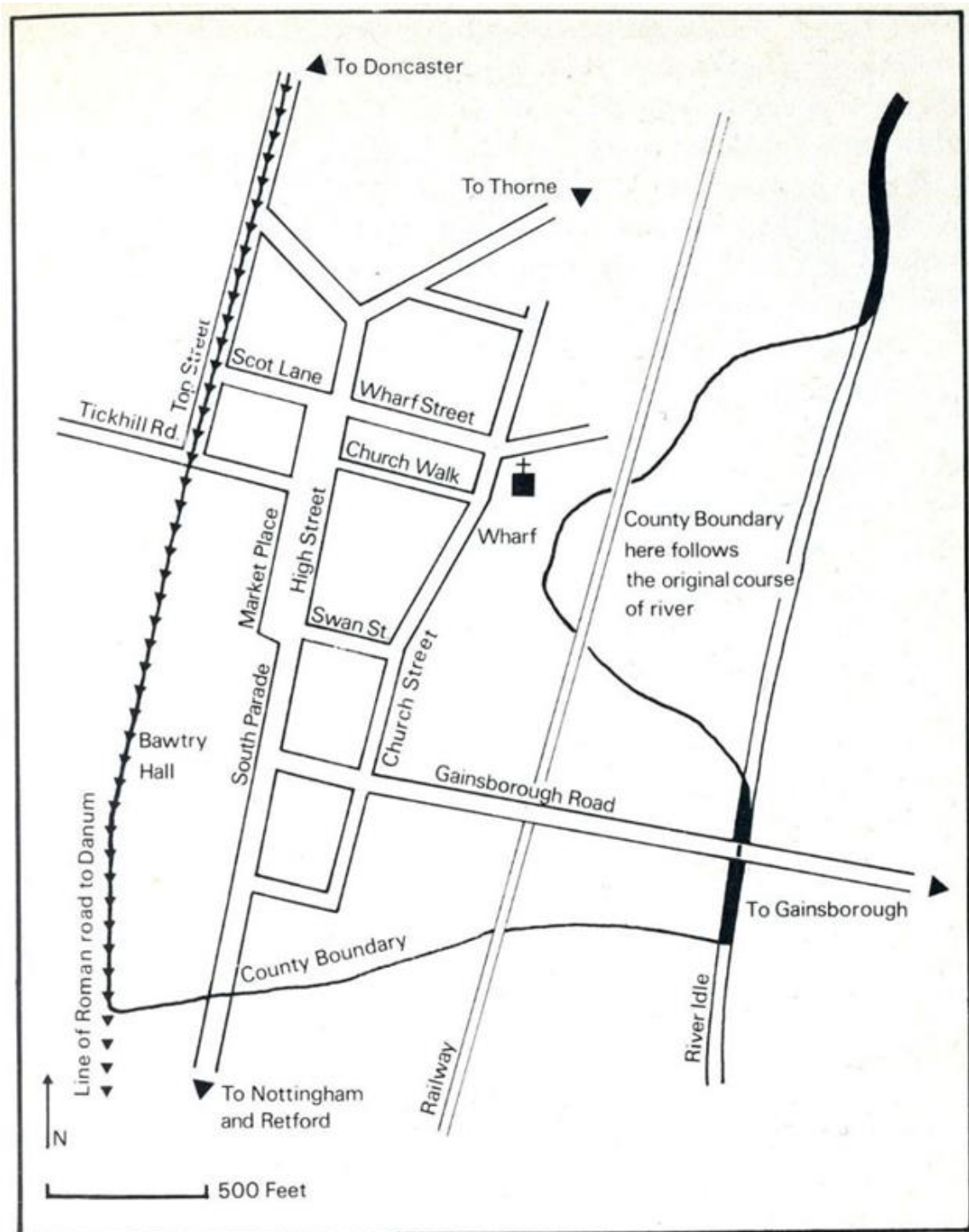


Figure 4 - Map of Roman road in Bawtry - David Hey, 1973

Hey's updated this account in 2003<sup>13</sup>. This work therefore post-dated the archaeological investigation of the site at Scaftworth, including the identification of an element of the "western branch" of Ermine Street. Curiously, he makes no mention of this - but he must have known his "Top Street" Roman road was not the Bawtry element of Ermine Street. Conceivably, he may have considered it to be a different iteration of it, although he does not mention that. In this context, it is important to remember that the Roman occupation of Britain lasted in excess of 350 years. During such a long time, many roads may have changed their route.

There has not been any archaeological investigation of Top Street. An excellent opportunity was missed in 2015, when construction of the William Bradford retirement complex was commenced. There was an archaeological "Scoping Assessment" for that project, which identified as "*almost certain*" that Top Street represented the route of the Roman road.<sup>14</sup> Three archaeological trenches were subsequently made, and whilst evidence of 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> activity was found, "*no archaeological remains or artefacts dating to the Romano-British period were identified.*"<sup>15</sup> This is hardly surprising though, given the fact that the trench nearest to Top Street stopped 3 metres short of the modern road!

As stated above, Peck refers to a Roman road approaching Bawtry from the south. On his map (Figure 3) he shows this "Old Roman Road" running from the middle of the bottom of the map in a straight line to the top left of the map. From his account it is evident that he believed this road was located about half a mile east of Blythe, from where it ran north along the east side of Serlby Park, and then through the eastern part of what is now Bircotes and along the western edge of what are now the grounds of Bawtry Hall. It then crossed Tickhill Road at or around Swinnow Wood and then continued north past Martin (passing a "Roman camp" there – see below), then joining Stripe Road towards Rossington.

Dr Paul C Buckland is a professional archaeologist. While a lecturer at the University of Sheffield, he published a history of Roman South Yorkshire<sup>16</sup> in 1986. When discussing the "western branch" of Ermine Street, which approaches Bawtry from the south east and then turns north to Doncaster, he suggests Bawtry's medieval layout also suggests a route continuing southwards along the edge of Serlby Park and then beneath the modern A1/A635 towards the Roman fort at Broxtowe in Nottinghamshire. In this context he also speculates that an early Roman fort may lie beneath the grounds of Bawtry Hall.

There is certainly a north-south oriented earthwork along the eastern edge of Serlby Park, which is labelled as "Roman Bank earthwork" on contemporary Ordnance Survey maps. This earthwork would appear to mark the line of the routes described by Peck and Buckland. It does not appear to have been the subject of archaeological excavation, however, and, despite the name, it is now believed to be a medieval park boundary. Presumably Buckland disagrees with that assessment. There are no other visible indications on the ground today to suggest an ancient road followed the path marked by Peck or described by Buckland, although there does exist a tantalizing possibility of something in the grounds of Bawtry Hall, which could link their accounts. DMBC's Archaeological Scoping Assessment of 2019<sup>17</sup> refers to a 1893 map of the the Hall's grounds which shows a raised earthwork running along

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<sup>13</sup> Hey, David – Medieval South Yorkshire - 2003

<sup>14</sup> CgMs Consulting – Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (of) Top Street, Bawtry, South Yorkshire - 2015

<sup>15</sup> Wessex Archaeology – Land to the West of Top Street, Bawtry, south Yorkshire – Archaeological Evaluation - 2016

<sup>16</sup> Buckland, Dr Paul C – Roman South Yorkshire – a Roman Sourcebook - 1986

<sup>17</sup> Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council - Doncaster Local Plan: Archaeological Scoping Assessment - 2019

the western side of the grounds. It suggests this earthwork “*may be a type of ha-ha.*” A ha-ha was an earthwork frequently found on formally landscaped estates to enclose an area where deer were stocked. There does not appear to be any evidence, however, that Bawtry Hall’s grounds were ever landscaped in this way, or that deer were ever kept there. The earthwork appears to follow the parish boundary, a characteristic of some ancient routes, and one which Hey relied upon in his scenario of a Roman road emerging from the grounds of Bawtry Hall and going along Top Street.

On that basis, another widely respected modern historian of Roman roads, Ivan Margary, also identifies the possibility that a Roman road runs north-south through the grounds of Bawtry Hall, the road being related to Ermine Street again. In his account of Roman roads of 1973<sup>18</sup> he writes:

*“It is not now clear how the road crossed the Idle valley to Bawtry, whether to the north of Scaftworth on or near the present road, or to the west of the village, as the road into it from the east suggests, with a sharp turn northward into Bawtry, and more investigation is needed there. It may well be significant that the county boundary which follows the Great North Road for some distance north of Bawtry, where it is the Roman road, continues straight on southward into the town along a side street to the west of the market-place, whereas the present main road curves into this by a short connecting link, clearly suggesting that the other is the earlier line and so indicating the likelihood of a crossing of the Idle west of Scaftworth from a point on the south of Bawtry.”*

In fairness, it should be stated that Margary wrote this before the identification of the section of Roman road to the north of Scaftworth fort by archaeological excavations which commenced in 1983.

The earthwork in the grounds of Bawtry Hall does not appear to have ever been the subject of archaeological investigation and it is not known if it survives today.

In his paper “Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry”<sup>19</sup> Mick Maguire reports that a LIDAR<sup>20</sup> survey conducted in 2021 provided evidence of a Roman road running south-north (between Osmanthorpe in Nottinghamshire and Rossington) to the west of Bawtry. It would appear this feature may be Peck’s “Old Roman Road” marked on his 1813 map.<sup>21</sup>

### **An East-West Roman road through Bawtry**

In his “The Making of South Yorkshire”, at page 18, David Hey<sup>22</sup> writes:

*“It is certain that (there was) a major east-west road .... coming from Lincoln via Littleborough (Nottinghamshire) and crossing the Idle at Bawtry, it followed the line of the agger that is visible in the fields between Oldcotes and Firbeck ....”*

Unfortunately, he did not explain the basis for his certainty.

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<sup>18</sup> Margary, Ivan – Roman Roads in Britain - 1973

<sup>19</sup> Maguire, Mick, Bawtry Heritage Group – Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry - 2023

<sup>20</sup> LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is a laser-based technique increasingly used in archaeology to detect land surface features from aerial surveillance.

<sup>21</sup> Peck, William – A Topographic History of Bawtry and Thorne with Villages adjacent - 1813

<sup>22</sup> Hey, David – The Making of South Yorkshire - 1973

In his update to “Roman Roads” of 1979<sup>23</sup>, Margary supported this, identifying a road from Derbyshire to Catcliffe (Sheffield) to Oldcoates (where there is known to be a Roman villa), designated RR189, & possibly extending to Bawtry, designated RR28. He stated the agger of the road is visible for ¾ mile in fields along the north side of the present Firbeck-Oldcotes road; 24 feet wide & 1 foot high. The earthworks are not visible today and Historic England suggests they may have been destroyed by mining.<sup>24</sup> An aerial photograph<sup>25</sup> does show a probable Roman road as a cropmark near Firbeck Hall.

If such a route did exist in Roman times, it must have turned quite sharply northwards after leaving Harworth to connect with the western branch of Ermine Street at Bawtry. There is no suggestion where this may have occurred, nor where the connection may have been.

### A Roman “camp” and pottery off Martin Lane

Peck mapped (see figure 3) a road he described as Roman running north-south to the west of Bawtry. He said it ran alongside another “Roman camp” at Martin, about 1 mile north-west of Bawtry. At

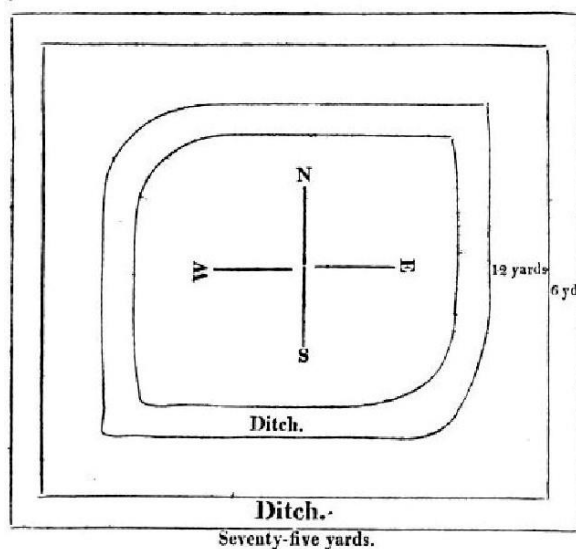


Figure 5 - Peck's sketch of a Roman "camp" at Martin

*several smaller stations are adjoining, but of late years the ditches have been filled up. A little to the north-east are traces of Roman pottery, many broken vessels of various forms are now found, several pieces I have seen, they are made of blue clay and slightly baked."*

pages 4-7 of his 1815 work<sup>26</sup> he described and illustrated rectangular earthworks 75 by about 70 yards in dimension, each side comprising two parallel ditches, the outer one being about 6 yards wide. About 12 yards inside this earthwork, was an inner ditch. He said the “camp” was

*"now covered with trees and underwood, which have contributed to preserve it visible to the present time; the ditches are nearly grown up, though they evidently had been deep. This place most probably was a station to defend the Roman road that passed a little to the west;*

Figure 5 above is Peck's sketch of the earthworks.

At page 680 of Francis White's history of Nottinghamshire<sup>27</sup> he wrote of the site at Martin:

<sup>23</sup> Margary, Ivan – Roman Roads in Britain - 1979

<sup>24</sup> Historic England Research Records – Monument Number 1047053; Hob Uis: 1047053

<sup>25</sup> Pastscape entry Oblique aerial photograph NMR SK5589/4 (17809/22) 25 Jun 2003

<sup>26</sup> Peck, William - A Topographical Account of the Isle Of Axholme - 1815

<sup>27</sup> White, Francis – Nottinghamshire History, Directory and Gazetteer, and Directory of Nottinghamshire and the Town and County of the Town of Nottingham - 1864

*“Here is the site of a Roman Station, where in 1828 three silver coins of Antonius, Adrianus & Faustina, were found, together with part of a Roman vase, and numerous pieces of Roman pottery. The form of the fort or station may still be directly traced...”*

Similar accounts appear in Bailey’s history of 1854<sup>28</sup> (Volume 4; page 362) and in the “Victoria” history of 1906<sup>29</sup> (Volume 1; page 302), the latter describing the feature as *“a square camp with double vallum and fosse.”*

A Historic England record from 1928<sup>30</sup> reads:

*“A moat situated in Manor Holt. The exact date or for what purpose this moat was used for none can now tell. Some say it surrounded a Roman Fort or Camp, others it surrounded a Baronial residence ... foundations of walls are still visible.”*

An 1957 observer (A H Oswald<sup>31</sup>) described the site in the following terms:

*“... double rampart and slight ditch of Iron Age appearance, but I would not like to rule out possibility of its being Roman”.*

In 1981 this earthwork at Martin was Scheduled as an Ancient Monument. Historic England’s listing calls the site “Manor Holt moated site”<sup>32</sup>, which is described as a rhomboidal island, about 40 m square, surrounded by a 10 m inner moat and a rectangular outer moat 100 m by 70 m, with a possible causeway in the north west corner. The monument is described as a medieval moated site. Reference is made to 13<sup>th</sup> century documentation (which is not specified) that it was the centre of a Manor. Irritatingly, the Listing makes no mention of the Roman pottery and coins reportedly found at this site. The earthworks are very overgrown, but said to be still visible. The plant growth (trees) is so extensive that the fabric of the monument is said to be “declining”.

Historic England’s listing admits that if the monument is actually a medieval moated site, the form of the earthworks (ditches and revetments) would make it unique in South Yorkshire and unusual nationally. A similar caution must be applied to the suggestion it is Roman – it is certainly too small to be a Roman fort. One may consider that 19<sup>th</sup> century assessments that the pottery found was Roman may well have been mistaken, but the very specific detail attributed to the coins reportedly found there must strongly suggest a Roman connection. In his Paper “Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry” Mick Maguire<sup>33</sup> suggests these finds could actually be related to the Osmanthorpe to Rossington Roman road which runs just to the west of Manor Holt.

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<sup>28</sup> Bailey, Thomas – Annals of Nottinghamshire - 1853

<sup>29</sup> Page, William (editor) – Victoria County History of Nottinghamshire - 1906

<sup>30</sup> Historic England – Research Records – Manor Holt – Hob Uid: 321045 – Virtual Catalogue Entry to support NAR Migration – Revised Object Name Book - 1928

<sup>31</sup> Historic England – Research Records – Manor Holt – Hob Uid: 321045 – Virtual Catalogue Entry to support NAR Migration – Letter J Bartlett - 1957

<sup>32</sup> Historic England – Scheduled Monument List entry number 1012453

<sup>33</sup> Maguire, Mick, Bawtry Heritage Group – Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry - 2023

Although apparently in a poor state, this is clearly a significant monument. Surprisingly, it is not mentioned in the other histories referred to in this paper.

### **Assessment and Conclusion**

A number of traditions of Roman works have been examined in this paper. It would seem reasonable to assess the likelihood of them being “accurate” as follows:

- A Roman road and “camp” at Scaftworth - this tradition has been proven to be justified by archaeological evidence.
- A Roman road and “camp” between Austerfield and Finningly - this tradition is likely to have been correct but modern development and quarrying has destroyed any archaeological evidence there may have been.
- A north-south Roman road to the west of Bawtry - the supposed “ha-ha” running north-south along the western margin of the grounds of Bawtry Hall – if it still survives – is a tantalizing possibility. Very recent LIDAR surveying appears to support the case for such a road.
- A Roman road entering Bawtry (town) from the south and following the line of Top Street - this tradition appears to be unsupported by any archaeological evidence.
- An east-west Roman road through Bawtry - this tradition appears to be unsupported by any archaeological evidence.
- A Roman “camp” and pottery off Martin Lane - a significant earthwork certainly exists, but it is very unlikely to be of Roman origin.

The sensible conclusion must therefore be to treat “traditional” accounts with care and a degree of scepticism, but not to reject them simply because they lack evidence provided by archaeological excavation. The antiquarians sometimes got it right!



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