



Bawtry Heritage Group

Preserving our Past for the Future

Registered Charity No. 1188945

DEFINING THE FUTURE OF ROMAN BAWTRY

**M P Maguire
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Note to readers

If you have ventured to pick up and open this paper, thank you! Feel free to read its entirety. However, as a means of helping you get what you want from this work, without feeling compelled to wade through it all, this is a brief guide that may assist you in achieving whatever has motivated you; perhaps saving you time and not stifling your enjoyment.

Part one is for those particularly interested in acquiring the most up to date snapshot of what the area that is now Bawtry was like between AD 71 and AD 410.

Part two examines the wide range of content one can find across an array of sources that compete to promote material that is true about Roman Bawtry. A good proportion of this falls short in having the evidential credentials for us to have total confidence. This section addresses those shortcomings, giving a nod to the existence of this material, but perhaps more importantly, clearing it from blurring the view towards the future and confusing what we know to be sound.

Part three explores what potential remains for building our future knowledge of Bawtry in Roman times, in a manner that will help us increase the scope of a confident picture

and legitimately allow us to expand the story captured in part one.

Whatever your approach to this paper we hope you enjoy it.

***Kind regards
Bawtry Heritage Group.
June 2023.***

Introduction

Time dims our ability to see into the past with certainty. Even when a record is made there are often issues such as the time span between the record and the event, or other issues that skew the tale. The more ancient the events the higher the risk of what really transpired being lost. Sometimes fragments of what claim to be part of the story can be more disruptive than helpful in establishing a real picture and can often lead to distorted narratives and inaccurate speculation. Searching for Bawtry's Roman heritage is testimony to all of these challenges faced by honourable historians.

For those of us who like to look more deeply into the past, whether it's just for fun, or for some more sophisticated reason, the challenges presented by the expanding passage of time result in a complexity that can confuse and sometimes paralyse the acquisition of knowledge and understanding that moves the story forward. This piece to some extent is structured to confront those challenges in an effort to present what we are reasonably certain is true; whilst recognising the endeavours of those who went before us and were not privy to what became known after them. Ultimately the piece is seeking to be brave enough to recognise the components of the story that have substance over those which do not; thereby being in a position to reach a more accurate conclusion and perhaps, more importantly, provide a solid foundation for planning the next steps in our search for Bawtry's true Roman past. "Defining the future of Roman Bawtry" is a very deliberate choice of words that make up the title of this paper.

On the face of it the space that became Bawtry might have been nothing more than a landscape passed through by those on the move during the Roman occupation. But are we sure? Might there be indications that there is more to it than that? Is it possible there are things we have missed, evidence yet to be found? This paper endeavours to suggest opportunities which still remain viable and may assist in devising a plan designed to expand the truth of the story further. A plan based on foundations with substance.

In trying to present the themes of this paper in a manner that makes the history live, parts of the text in the first section are

interspersed with brief fictional “snap shots”. These tales are set in and around the Roman features we know to have existed and aim to be true to the research as it stands today; regarding how the Roman conquerors operated during their time on our patch.

The context of each tale is set within real events associated with the subjugation and assimilation of the land and population, up to the Romans withdrawal in the early fifth century. All the characters that are named are real and did play the roles described. However, the two engineers and the lone Roman soldier are fictional, their thoughts and deeds, whilst applicable to the surroundings and events of the time, are from the author's imagination.

Part One - Bawtry Snapshots. (The known)

Coming North

For anyone who currently lives, works, or plays in modern Bawtry you can be certain that almost 2000 years before you, the Roman conquerors came this way.

By AD 71 the Romans had been in Britain for just short of 30 years and it was time, thought the relatively new Roman Emperor Vespasian, to move north and bring order to them "Brittunculi", "wretched little Brits".¹

As part of that campaign the Roman Army came into what we know as Yorkshire bringing a "culture far more productive and technologically sophisticated in almost every respect from that which it found".² Between AD 71 and AD 117, with the accession of Emperor Hadrian, Yorkshire was very much under Roman military rule and witnessed the building of a major fortress and many other military sites all linked by the Roman roads network. Rutherfurd described Roman roads as the features that brought "order to the barbarian world".³

There is no direct evidence of a settlement at Bawtry in this period. However the space in which the town would eventually emerge a millennium later, was central to this initial military foray and would be touched by the conquerors over the following three and half centuries. To some, who speculate on such matters, perhaps the invaders impacted this location more than it just being a strip of countryside the professional Roman soldiers passed through en-route elsewhere. To date we have not discovered conclusive evidence that helps prove that. Perhaps there was a settlement triggered by Roman activity? Maybe we have been looking in the wrong places?

¹ P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, page 125.

² P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, page 118.

³ E Rutherfurd - London (A Novel), Lavender Hill Chapter, page 1060.

To subdue the northeastern side of the island the Romans ventured forward along two routes on their way to what would become York. This was the place best located strategically to launch operations further north and where the

Romans built a "great fortress".⁴ Ermine Street or RR2⁵ was the most direct route stretching due north from the fortress at Lincoln all the way to the Humber Estuary. If the estuary had not presented such a formidable natural barrier, complicated further by a tidal flow that restricted boat crossings to a very narrow window of time each day, Roman Road 28a⁶ might never have been needed.

Roman Road 28a headed west, as a spur off Ermine Street just north of Lincoln, crossing the Lincolnshire Wolds on its way to York via Littleborough, Doncaster and Tadcaster. It became a heavily used route for the conquerors as they moved north up the eastern side of the country. Road 28a came through the space that would one day be Bawtry crossing the River Idle just east of the modern day railway viaduct and most likely curving right up onto the higher ground heading for Rossington Bridge and Doncaster.

Bawtry Snapshot - AD 71

As the lead engineer for the new road, that would much later be known as Roman Road 28a, pondered the problem before him, he knew that for the empire it was not a totally unique circumstance; however, it was for him. He had the manpower and a priority status had been given to the project. Troops and provisions needed to move north swiftly and with limited fuss. The direct route north from the fortress at Lincoln could not be relied upon alone.

In AD 71 building a road in Roman Britain was much like anywhere else in the empire, labour intensive and requiring much in the way of natural resources. Firstly, the foundation surface needed to be levelled which required a well supervised excavation. This was followed by laying out the line the road was to take, usually marked

⁴ P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, page 118

⁵ RR numbers were dedicated to all identified and suspected Roman Roads in Britain by Ivan Margary in 1955.

⁶ Margary's number for the road from Lincoln to Doncaster and on via RR 28b and 28c, to York.

by a low bank of stones 3 metres apart or for a more substantial highway 7 metres. After the preliminaries it then took huge quantities of stone and gravel and a workforce of some 500, construction legionaries, labouring slaves and prisoners. Working over a period of nine weeks such a well ordered team could construct a stretch of road around 22 kilometres long.⁷ With time being of the essence this section of road building was challenging even in its most basic form. Today the engineer had to

consider the additional challenge of building a 'floating' or 'corduroy' road. The reason for this was an obstacle prepared by nature over many millennia, long before the Romans came, that would eventually be known as the Humberhead Levels.

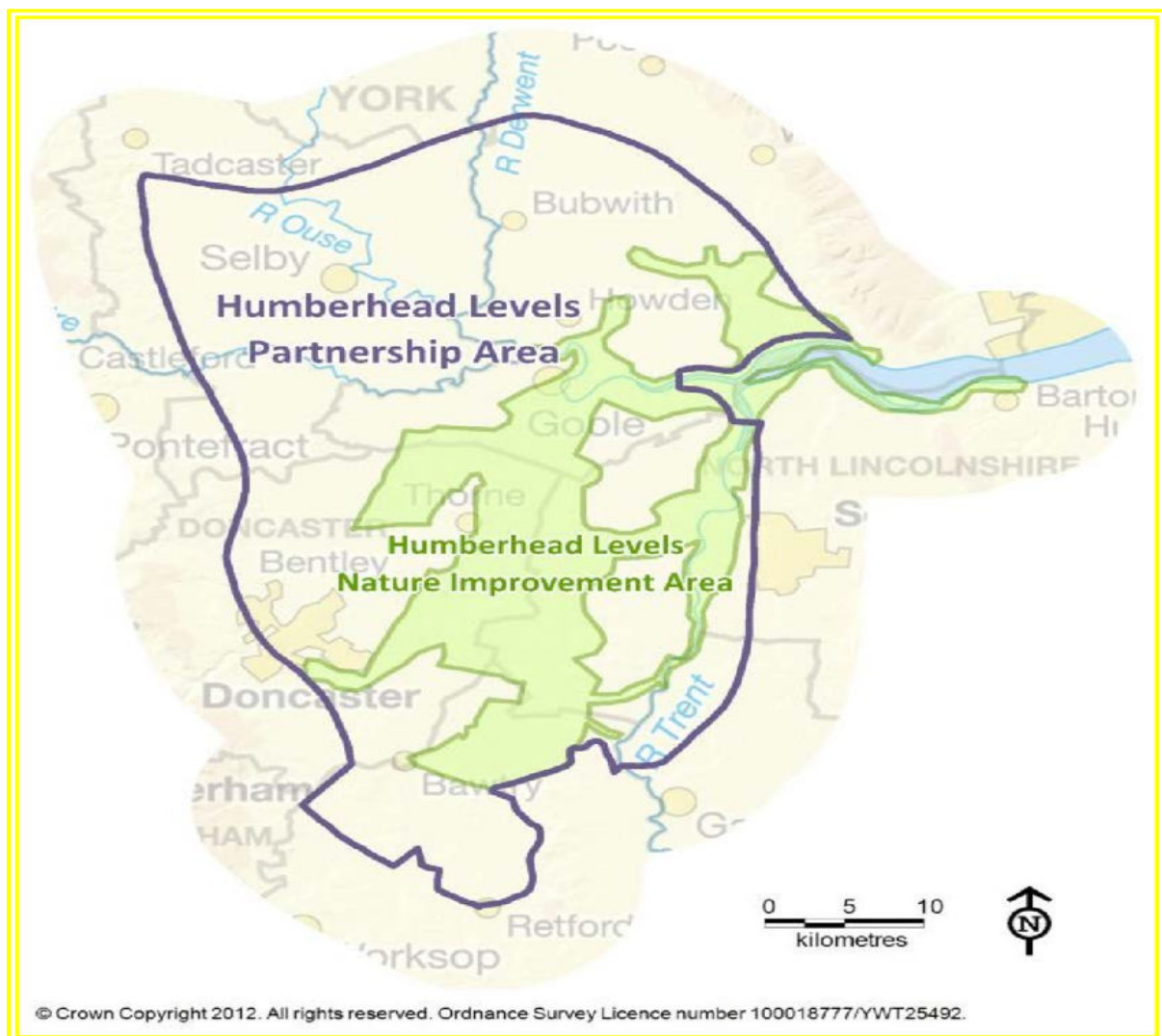


Figure One - Humberhead Levels shaded green. Note Bawtry on the southern edge.

⁷ P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, page 161

Building westward the intrepid road builders had reached the southernmost section of the 'Levels'. The River Idle, as it was to become, ventured into this terrain en-route to what would be the River Trent, the Humber Estuary and eventually the North Sea. Putting the river obstacle aside, the wet marshy land making up the Humberhead Levels had been shaped towards the end of the last ice age, forming from the melt waters of the retreating ice which had formed Lake Humber. The lake over time began to silt up giving way to an environment where trees flourished. Around 2000 years before the Romans, freshwater began to submerge the woodlands, accelerated not by increases in rainfall, but by deforestation at higher levels; "fewer trees means more rainwater reaches the rivers and flows into lowland areas".⁸To cross this type of environment at the southernmost end of the levels the Roman engineer faced his additional construction challenges, he needed to span the unstable marshy ground from the point where it rose in the east back towards modern Lincolnshire, across to the higher ground west of the river. Not a huge distance it must be said, 500 metres or so; Roman planning had been sufficiently astute to ensure the alignment of the road from the east arrived at a point where the river's floodplain narrowed. However, it was challenging enough to present a major issue for the Roman Army and the passage of supplies needing to move northward swiftly and unhindered. The engineer's thoughts were focussed as much on the impact failure might have on his future career prospects if a timely delivery of what was required could not be achieved. He wondered if he was up to the task.

In arriving at a solution the engineer was helped by one particular natural resource. Trees. To build a floating road trees particularly, Alder, Willow and Poplar were essential components. He had the appropriate trees in abundance and a sufficiently large workforce to wield the axes and fell what was needed. He was also in a position to dig the huge quantities of turf that would be required in the latter stages of the build. Having materials well suited to a wet environment made it possible to breach this natural obstacle ensuring the alternative route north was viable. Meeting the pressing schedule was another challenge altogether. The army was hot on his heels.

⁸YSJ Peat online blog.

The engineer utilised all of his workforce in gathering the large quantities of natural materials and applying them in methods already tried and tested, although not in the conditions faced in this remote outpost of the empire. The trees, all felled by hand axes, could fortunately be used in their raw state, saving time. The largest timbers collected were hauled into place and formed three parallel rails running east to west along the road's intended alignment. Masses of smaller stems were then interlaced at right angles across the rails reinforcing the structure before large amounts of brushwood was utilised, tightly packed on top of the frame to make it as even as possible. Finally layer upon layer of local cut turf lifted the road above the floodplain providing safe passage for the men and equipment destined for York.

Reviewing his work whilst observing the first sections of the Ninth Legion under the command of Petulius Cerilias⁹ traversing this new section of road, the engineer accepted this was a rough and ready solution constructed against the clock. But at this moment haste ruled over aesthetics, the need to be north quickly out trumped everything else. Whatever might be said by any Roman road building purists he and the hundreds who laboured for him had achieved their goal.

Remaining North

As Rutherford suggested, roads defined Roman Britain. Roads helped to ensure the men and materials needed to subjugate the island could move with ease. Also roads provided the essential arteries along which the lifeblood for a stable well governed environment flowed once local and regional submission had been achieved .

RR28a's trajectory through what would eventually become built up areas in the northern end of Bawtry is difficult to pin down precisely. The road alignment on the eastern side of the river is better defined following the excavations undertaken in 1983, 1991 1995 and 1997.¹⁰ However, as Mike Hagan from the Roman Roads Research Association shared with the Bawtry Heritage Group (BHG)

⁹ By AD71 he was the Roman Governor of Britain.

¹⁰ Excavations conducted by Kennedy (unpublished), Dearne and Van de Noort.

in June 2022; “the course of the road between the river and the environs of Bawtry is less secure, and to the best of my knowledge no archaeological investigations have taken place. It seems most likely that the line of the road.....across the river simply continued up the slope west of the river, changing direction at the top to head northwards towards Rossington”. Mike shared with the BHG a visual “best guess” utilising Google Earth.



Figure Two - Potential alignment of Roman Road 28a west of the River Idle. Courtesy of the Roman Roads Association. Sourced from Google Earth.

Whilst there is nothing to dispute Hagan's submission for the northwestern trajectory he is the first to acknowledge that no archeological evidence exists to support it. That said the evidence secured from the eastern side of the river supports his hypothesis and does negate previous speculations about the road's route following the path of the current Gainsborough Road to a point somewhere within the grounds of modern day Bawtry Hall. Additionally, given this position, it also seems flawed to claim that the best evidence of any Roman period settlement in Bawtry is likely to have been in what is now the southern end of the town. On the contrary any evidence of settlement is perhaps more likely to be found in the northern section. Interestingly, if Hagan's best guess is close to correct the road's alignment is outside the boundary drawn to represent the current Bawtry Conservation Area presented in the 2008 appraisal.



Figure Three - Bawtry Conservation Area 2008.

There are some points of interest here regarding the search for new Roman evidence which prompts further academic discussion. We will explore these later.

By 100 AD most of the 8000 miles of Roman roads had been completed across the country and by 122 AD the appearance of Hadrian's Wall well north of the river Idle crossing, is an indication that the Romans, 50 or so years after the floating road was built, were well on the way to assimilating Yorkshire into the wider empire.¹¹In terms of people, Ottaway informs us that population in the area later to become Yorkshire was fluid and also very small "rather less than present day Bradford".¹²

As for our location the Romans had come this way and left their mark, a road well utilised. We know that after the rush northward in the early 70's AD RR28a remained prominent in the landscape and was used sufficiently to require a significant upgrading to make it sustainable. We know this because of the evidence discovered by archaeological digs conducted east of the river. This work throws light on to developments that took place sometime between 180 - 200 years after the initial road had been laid.

Bawtry Snapshot-AD 250-280

A new engineer ponders a new engineering problem. This time however, there was no pressure from a tight military schedule. Although problems still remained for those governing this area at the far edge of the empire, much had occurred to calm the early tensions and any need for constant military intervention. Precisely when things had become more settled is not a question the engineer could have answered. However, the nature of their work indicates that it was.

The engineer observed the floating road which had remained in place for almost two centuries. Of course it had been repaired as required, but essentially it retained the construction principles adopted by the pioneers who had built it back in the days of the Emperor Vespasian and Governor Cerialis. On his agenda today was not only how to ensure this vital artery into the heart of the country south of the great estuary¹³ would be sustained for centuries more, but additionally, how he would construct a more modern means of

¹¹ Dates via Historic UK Online -Timeline of Roman Britain,

¹² P Ottaway -Roman Yorkshire, page 163.

¹³ This being the Humber Estuary.

straddling the river.¹⁴

Piece by piece was to be the approach in respect of the road upgrade. The engineer's life was easier than his predecessor some 200 years before. There was no immediate pressure as already mentioned. Cementing the progress made in the first two centuries of occupation was now less about conquest and more about the maintenance of control and assimilation. This engineer was not of the conquering Ninth Legion; they had left the island sometime in the early second century for duties on the European mainland. By the time this major road upgrade was underway our area of interest was within "Britannia Inferior"¹⁵ now occupied in the military sense by the Sixth Legion, with York "being the only candidate to become the capital of this area of the province".¹⁶ York by the end of the second century was becoming as much a civilian centre as it was a military fortress. Roman Road 28 was as important now as a main route to this emerging hub as it ever was during the days of the conquering soldiers late in the 1st century.

The second engineer set out to build a more robust structure in sections, described centuries later as "compartmentalised."¹⁷ This approach is clearly evident as the sections were defined by wooden pegs six metres apart, each section being filled with tons of compacted gravel. This road across the Idle floodplain would be more stable and easier to maintain. Pretty much along the same alignment as the original construction the work of the second engineer was to result in the construction of a causeway riding above the marshy waterlogged surface. On completion of the road upgrade the engineer and his well hardened team were confident that this incarnation would outlive its predecessor and last well into the decades that followed.

Building a bridge was a different prospect. The art of wooden bridge building across natural barriers had been cracked by Julius Caesar back in 55BC when his campaigning army required a sustainable method of traversing the mighty river Rhine.¹⁸ The engineer facing

¹⁴ The understanding is that the river was crossed via a ford up to this point.

¹⁵ Lower Britain, P Ottaway- Roman Yorkshire, page 204.

¹⁶ P Ottaway -Roman Yorkshire, page 204.

¹⁷ Current Archeology Magazine, Edition 151, pages 272-273.

¹⁸ Flaxim Historia You Tube 18/3/22.

the river Idle some 300 years later benefitted much from that initial achievement and all the other traversing problems solved by Roman engineers in the years in between.

The Idle bridge was to be made of wood, the surroundings had plenty of it. The correct materials in the hands of skilled carpenters went a long way, allied to a pool of labour sufficient to operate the hoists and pulleys that would ensure the structure, was not only impressive to anyone seeing it, but would be up to the job.

The engineer was demanding of his charges and required the highest levels of craftsmanship. The Idle river did not pose the same challenges as faced by Julius Caesar, it was much shallower and the current had less destructive potential than that of the Rhine. Nevertheless the structure needed to be secure and sustainable.

Free from the pressures of the immediate military needs faced by their predecessors in AD 71 there was more time for this workforce to show off their skills. The engineer, not being a specialist in a handcraft himself, always marvelled at and felt lucky to have men who knew what they were doing when it came to preparing and installing the components of his design. The precision of the carpentry applied to the raw wood that would form the ground timbers on which the all important bridge's supporting pillars would rest, was a pleasing revelation to him and enhanced his confidence in the structure. The carpenters handcrafted near identical rows of six timbers needed at the base of each bridge support. These were firmly sunk into the wet marshy ground and where necessary below the water; giving the structure the strength and stability on which the wooden platform, acting as a carriageway, would rest. With these resources the engineer was supremely confident he could easily span anything between 70 and 150 metres.¹⁹

The engineer was pleased with his work when it was complete. However, he could not have been aware that his endeavours, particularly the road, would long outlive his paymasters and be

¹⁹ P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, speculates the Idle span less than 70m page162 - Current Archeology, Edition 151 speculates on potentially 150m pages 272-273.

utilised down the centuries by many travellers who never experienced Roman rule.²⁰ Or that 20th century man examining the remains of his team's work nearly two millennia later would describe the carpentry on the bridge as "exquisite".²¹

Not a Road in the Wilderness

For sure there were comings and goings along RR28a for over three centuries. There was also off road activity, which we know about for certain. The first indication of this dates back to the 18th Century and the second a rather more recent discovery made in the late 20th century.

John Chapman knew there was a fort between Scaftworth and Bawtry on the eastern side of the Idle river and north of the road to Gainsborough. His map drawn in 1774 clearly shows the feature entitled "Antient Incampment". We must speculate that the encampment feature was at that time visible to him. The earthworks may still have been prominent in the landscape, yet to be extinguished by man's use of the land. It was not properly identified again until aerial photography picked it up during the second world war.

All likelihood points to this being a small military facility built in the latter half of the 4th century. Work completed in 2007 and sponsored by English Heritage and the Archaeological Services, WYAS, reflected on how a broader understanding of Roman military infrastructure was developing in a wider area around Danum (Doncaster). This study reflected upon whether the Scaftworth fortlet, as the Chapman discovery came to be known, may well have been part of a more comprehensive defensive plan against northern sea raiders entering the Humber estuary at that time and moving inland via the river systems. This would be in keeping with Emperor Theodician's efforts in the late fourth century to restore diminishing power in the north, which was carried on by his son Honorius into the early fifth century.²² This rationale makes it plausible for Bawtry to be a fortified location near the Idle crossing of RR28a given that

²⁰ River Idle Washlands, Archeological Watching Brief - Berg et al, 2006, paragraph 2.10 refers to a medieval shoe being found in 1997 by Van de Noort et al.

²¹ Current Archeology, Edition 151, pages 272-273.

²² P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire.



Figure four - John Chapman's 18th Century map.

the river had been navigable to and from the sea to this point for around 6,000 years. The view expressed by the work in 2007 promotes Scaftworth fortlet along with other associated river sites at Sandtoft and Thorpe Audlin as potential Roman defence hubs. Ottaway certainly recognises the potential evidence that military control of the road entering Doncaster from the south "may have been stepped up by the construction of a new fortlet, only 0.4ha in area but strongly fortified with a triple ditch system".²³ This was Chapman's "Incampment" at Scaftworth.

At this time Ottaway places a cavalry unit from "Crispiana in Pannonia"²⁴ garrisoned at Doncaster, citing the Notitia Dignitatum as his source. This fifth century document also provides a tantalising opportunity to place an original name to the Scaftworth fortlet.

²³ P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, page 392.

²⁴ P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, Page 392. From the town of Crispiana in Upper Pannonia, near Zirc in the Bakony region of western Hungary.

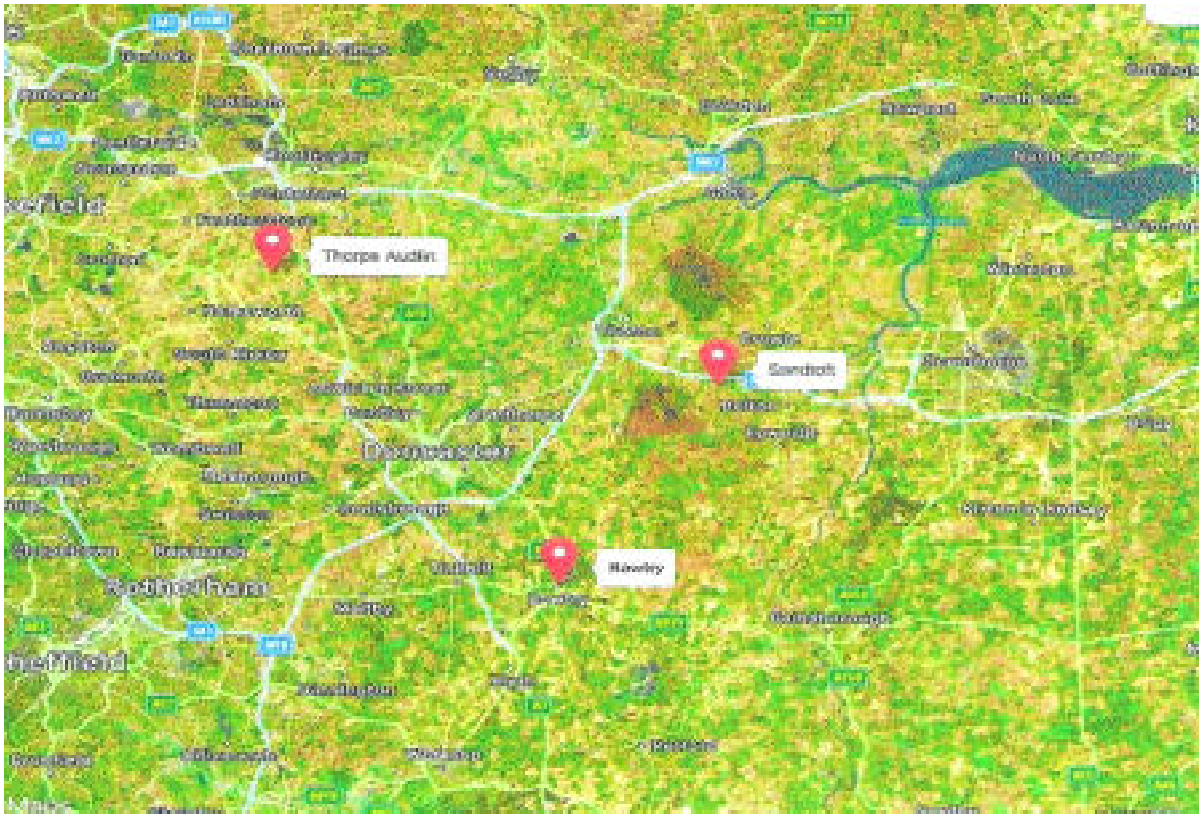


Figure five - From UK Grid Reference Finder.

The Notitia Dignitatum is best described as a register of all offices both civil and military, however its true purpose remains unclear. It contains details of a range of functions such as finance, mints, weaving houses, and lists of stations and names of garrisons. The register allows for the observation to be made that the original name for the fortlet at Scaftworth could well be "Morbio" ("Morbium"). Certainty is impossible to claim but the Roman Roads Research Association of Britain's online Gazetteer presents a logical argument. This is further enhanced by the online reference, Roman Era Names UK under their heading "Morbio". Using the same logic as the Gazetteer entry they also plump for Scaftworth as the most likely location for the Notitia entry relating to Morbio.²⁵ Interestingly their translation of the syllables of Morbio into modern English is "marsh dwelling"; perfectly apt perhaps given the immediate surroundings of the location, not only back in the late 4th century

²⁵ This is based on interpretation of the syllables in the latin word "morbio" given recent credence online via www.romaneraname.uk, updated May 2020, and reference to Morbio being Scaftworth given its positioning in the Notitia listings. See the Notitia Dignitatum section of the Roman Road Research Association online Gazetteer. (*Note Piercebridge was originally considered as the potential location for the Morbio Roman Era Names entry (2015). However it is now cited in these sources as "less likely" with Scaftworth emerging as the favourite.*)

but as it is today. Examination of the register's fragments gives us more; stating the nature of the unit at Morbio was under "Praefectus equitum catafractariorum". "The Prefect of Cataphract Troopers". A cataphract being an armoured horse ridden by auxiliary soldiers. Cavalry.²⁶ Taking into account Ottaway's description of the forces in Doncaster around this time was Scaftworth (Morbio), an outpost for troops from the main Roman Fort some 10 miles further north?

There seems little doubt that there was military activity along this stretch of Roman Road 28a during the very late fourth century and probably into the early fifth century. The area around the river Idle at the location of present day Bawtry was clearly in the thick of this.

"A possible Temple" speculates Ottaway, before conceding "or shrine".²⁷ Is the second tangible piece of activity in our area within close proximity to the main road. Temples are rare and substantial structures and there is no certainty on that issue as things stand. However, it is indisputable that something of substance stood close to the Roman 28a highway from the late fourth century and is considered in all probability to have had a religious in function.

In 2006 archaeological activity conducted on the river Idle wetlands led to this find, thought to be not only of religious significance but also worthy of a reappraisal of Bawtry as a Roman site. It prompted the following comment; "The site's close proximity to a strategically important Roman road and river crossing together with the nature of the finds make this a site of major regional and national importance".²⁸

The report accompanying the watching brief, like Ottaway, falls short of presenting a definitive answer to that question regarding it being a temple or shrine, but pointed to strong indicators that lean to there being a significant religious/ritual element to what they had found.

Their exploration discovered dressed stone columns, two potentially in situ and the presence of a padstone all of which points to a

²⁶ Roman Britain online - Ilkley section.

²⁷ P Ottaway - Roman Yorkshire, page 372.

²⁸ River Idle Washlands, Watching Brief - Berg et al, ASWYAS 2006.

significant structure. Pottery finds associated with the site were not only significant in their quantity but also in their nature. Vessels associated with burial and ritual were discovered along with incense burners (tazze). 653 shards of pottery were discovered from a single context, described in the report as, "remarkable and unusual for the rural sites in the region". This was enhanced further by the statement, "the range of material present is also remarkable suggesting this is not an ordinary "rural, domestic site". The volume and variety of pottery at the site leads to an expert interpretation, when considered against other archaeological comparisons, that this site was representative of a villa site or a small town.

In addition to the pottery a total of 71 coins were discovered and although not conclusive an interpretation of there being one or more hoards was not ruled out. Given the nature of the pottery and the alignment in dating between the pots and the coins an interpretation that these may be part of votive offerings is not thought to be unreasonable.

The watching brief report is decisive in its conclusion that more of the structure identified by the dressed columns lies in situ at a greater depth. It acknowledges the absence of any settlement discovered as yet but concludes, "the results of the watching brief would confirm a nearby settlement of some stature".²⁹

Bawtry Snapshot - AD 400 - 410

It wasn't a great distance for the soldier to walk. The need for his errand had been on his mind for sometime and today was his opportunity to get it done. He had been at his current post for the last few months and he hoped his time was coming to an end. He wasn't from these parts and had never really become accustomed to the bleak climate. Viewing this individual today we might have guessed he was of eastern european origin, modern day Hungary perhaps? The soldier was part of an armoured cavalry division, a

²⁹ Important note - The watching brief report recognises that to date no evidence of a substantial settlement at Bawtry has been established. It speculates on how this area would have been more prudent than the Scaftworth fortlet as a location better able to defend the strategic importance of the river and RR28a. Against this suggestion the report draws into question the long held interpretation of the Scaftworth fortlet being a military site at all. Additionally the report noted that the pottery, dating from the mid/late 4th century, was also rare. The report concluded that this also enhanced the site's importance.

section of the Danum force billeted at the relatively new fortlet, Morbio.

Lately the sense of isolation associated with being stuck out on the very edge of the civilised world was becoming harder to bear and more threatening than it had been for over 300 years. He felt sure withdrawal was imminent; the men on the ground could feel that any confident sense of control felt by their leaders was ebbing away. It had been for some time despite imperial efforts over the last few decades to shore things up. This ordinary auxiliary might be uncertain as to why major change for the occupiers of this island province for over 350 years was in the offing, but the fact that it was could not be disputed.

The soldier's intent this fine clear morning, for once it was not raining, was to do his bit to help move change along, he would like to go home. As he walked the short distance from the fortlet's northern eastern gate heading west along the road that had served this area as a main thoroughfare for three centuries he clutched his small lead scroll and strode with purpose towards the bridge across the river. A short distance beyond that point he left the main road on its northern side and walked the short distance to the shrine.

The soldier had been posted to the fortlet known as Morbio, aptly named given its location in wet marshy lands east of the river. He was there to fulfil an important function, along with his fellow comrades, of which there were around 100. Their mission was to ensure the security of the important routeway, the major road heading west and then north across the river; a routeway essential for supplying the wherewithal to those seeking to maintain civilised order further up the country. The river was an enticing back door to any enterprising raiders giving them direct access into the conquerors' heartlands south of the northern frontline. It had to be watched by forces on hand ready to firmly slam shut the door and repel those seeking to undermine the empire. This reluctant soldier was part of that force.

As like all soldiers of this time the gods were important to him as allies, confidants and influencers of fate; that is why our soldier was

about to leave his message.

Personal inscriptions scratched into lead, pewter and other materials had been common for two centuries³⁰ often referred to as "curse tablets". His scratched message was short and simple with two clear pleas to the designated god. One element vitriolic and violent towards his, as yet unseen enemy, the other a strong personal plea. It read, "Daemones demergat - Pro mea salute".³¹ He was sure the god would be attentive and ready to provide on both counts. He placed his tiny scroll in a space between the stone blocks that made up the impressive shrine structure. This was not a fleeting ad hoc development, this had been thought out, invested in, it was meant to last. The soldier's offering was one of many that adorned the shrine's spaces, others, some much larger, like incense burners and pots some of which contained nourishment; others the contents evaporated or long since past their best. Many items were damaged having either been presented in that condition or the passage of time had taken its toll. What was obvious on the day the soldier came is that this sacred spot, in the marshy land close to the river, was revered and utilised by many wishing to demonstrate faith, allegiance or like him to place a request to the higher authority the shrine was built to honour.

It was not unusual for soldiers to attend such places, although this was the first time our man had visited this site, given he had not been in the area very long. The gods were important to those serving in the Roman military, perhaps providing a sense of security, protection and comfort. Something that remains evident, might we suggest, 2,000 years later and especially poignant when the individual is a long way from what they would call home.

His task complete, the soldier retraced his steps back to Morbio, hopeful that his justified requests would be heard and acted upon. He was right to be confident time was closing in, whether dictated by the gods or otherwise. The curtain was about to fall not only on the Roman domination of Yorkshire but Britannia itself. What was to become known as the "Dark Ages" was about to begin.

³⁰ Wikipedia. (Evidence of such was found by Berg et al at the Bawtry shrine site in 2006).

³¹ "Drown the Devils, For my Safety".

Part Two - Evidence verses Educated Speculation. (The proven, the unproven, the possible and the questionable)

Context

As explored in the introduction to this paper, clearing the fog of time and the inevitable red herrings that make the fog even murkier is a challenge when seeking to tell the definitive tale about a spot like Roman Bawtry. It is not only the time span that hampers progress but the fact that those we are studying marked our landscape for well over 300 years and a lot happened! Much is forgotten and lost forever when all these factors combine. This part of the paper seeks to explore a number of interpretations of how the space that is now Bawtry was impacted during this period. Much of this has been written in the 20th century and what becomes clear as our knowledge has developed, is that some of the interpretations made in good faith, become increasingly unlikely whilst others hover in an academic space we might best describe as, informed speculation not supported by tangible evidence. By way of example, there is no doubt that as described in part one there is indisputably a substantial stone Roman structure just to the west of the RR28a highway on the western side of the river Idle, it is very likely the structure had a religious function, but perhaps not definitively proven; whether it was a temple or a more modest shrine, no-one can yet say for sure.

Roads

Enough has been said in part one about the true direction of RR28a which is supported by archeological evidence gathered in the last quarter of the twentieth century.³² This supported knowledge negates the earlier held belief that the road from the east followed the line of the current Gainsborough Road into the area occupied today by Bawtry Hall at the southern end of the town, before, as claimed, turning sharp right and following the course of modern day Top Street onward to Doncaster. There is no tangible evidence presented for this conclusion and with the discovery of RR28a, built upon by the subsequent archeological activity, any robust foundation for this theory

³² 1983 Sheffield University, Kennedy (unpublished), 1991 Sheffield University, Dearne, 1995 and 1997 Hull University, Van de Noort et al.

has steadily wilted³³ It is difficult to understand why the true trajectory of RR28a over 300 years was so confused or unmentioned given that its presence and alignment was plotted with a fair degree of accuracy, when compared to the modern archeological and lidar findings as early as 1776 by A J Moyston,(figure 6).³⁴ Other work conducted by antiquarians dating back to the 16th century and collated in a Bawtry Heritage Group paper compiled by David Kirkham in January 2023 provides additional support regarding the existence of RR28a from the east, although many of the references are imprecise when fixing a location.

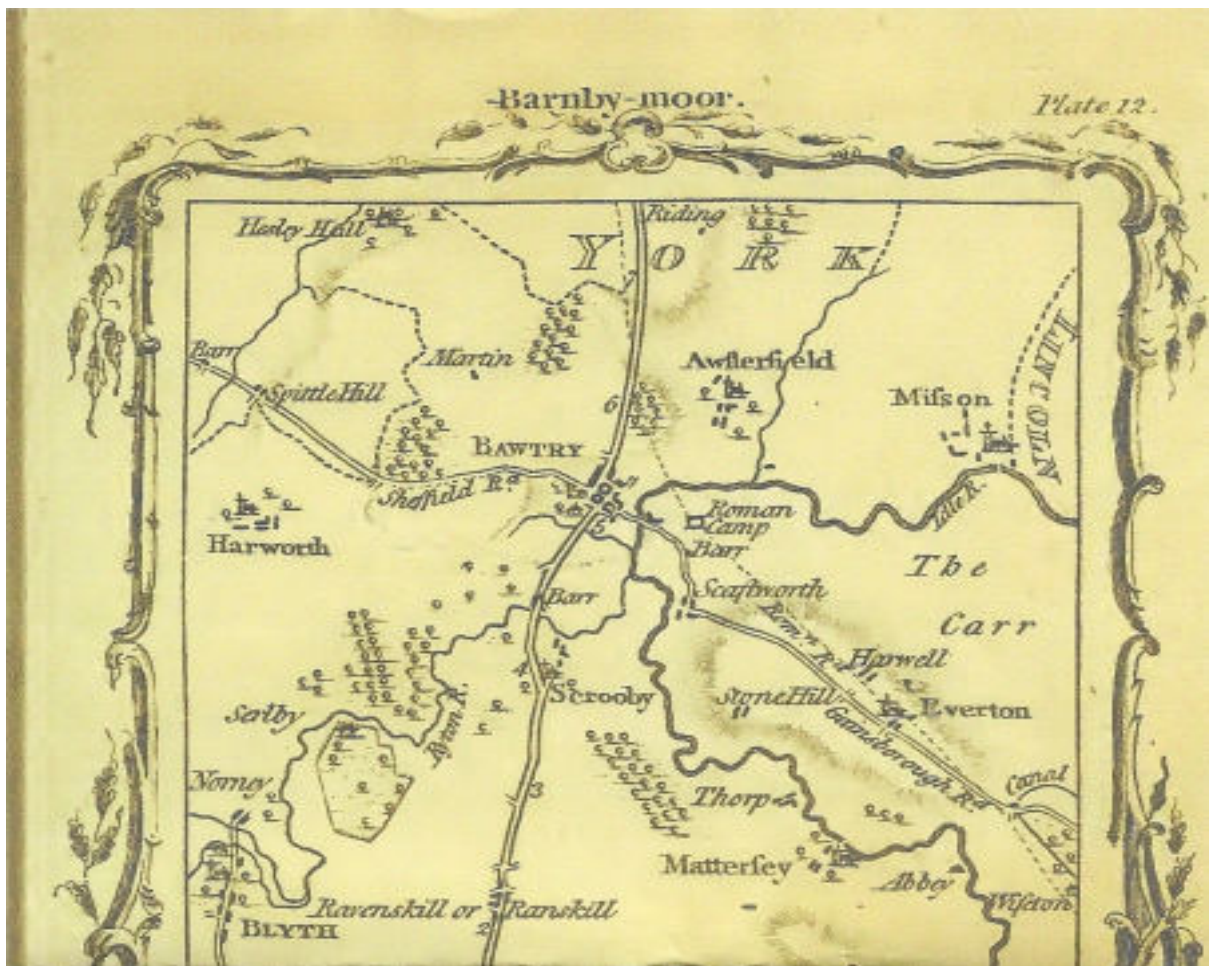


Figure 6 Plate 12 from Amstrongs "Actual Survey" showing RR28.

³³ D.Kirkham's paper Jan 2023 refers to Peck's record of diverse finds during the construction of the stone bridge on Gainsborough Road. These are not dated but could be one indication of how this early interpretation of the roads trajectory took hold before the 20th century activity.

³⁴ D Kirkham's paper for the BHG 2023 referencing Moyston's 1776 map supporting RR28 trajectory from his "Actual Survey".

Mike Hagan from the Roman Roads Research Association was very definitive when making an informed conclusion about Roman routes through Bawtry during his liaison with the Bawtry Heritage Group in June 2022. Referring to RR28a he stated, "there is no evidence of any other Roman road through Bawtry, and a recent discovery means that old ideas about one possibly approaching from the south are wrong". The evidence he presents as "a recent discovery", which he believes negates speculation that a Roman Road entered Bawtry on a similar trajectory to the modern day Great North Road has been gathered by The Roman Roads Research Association, and published in their *Itinera Journal* 2021.³⁵ It is based primarily on a LIDAR survey conducted by Tim Jeffery and Mike Haken.³⁶ The survey captured a route between the Roman fortresses at Osmanthorpe (Nottinghamshire) and Rossington Bridge (South Yorkshire) and is thought to date from the 50s AD. The journal surmises that this road might even be the first Roman incursion into Yorkshire. What is laid out clearly in the RRRRA journal is that this road lies west of what would eventually become Bawtry and does not breach the modern town environment. In summary the Lidar survey identifies three clear routes: Osmanthorpe to Bilsthorpe, a route supported by excavations reported on by the Trent and Peak Archaeological Unit (TPAU) in 1999, followed by a section between Ollerton and Blyth, and finally a length of Roman road heading south from Rossington Bridge. This latter section was identified by crop marks recorded by the West Yorkshire Archaeological Services WYAS as part of their study of crop marks on the Magnesian Limestone 2007. When aligned to other known details covered in the piece the Lidar survey provides the RRRRA with what it considers to be sufficient evidence to conclude that all these features are a single Roman road.³⁷ This discovery is supported to some degree, in the antiquarian writings referred to early, with Peck identifying an "Old Roman Road" to the west of Bawtry on a north south alignment, on a trajectory between Blyth and Rossington Bridge.³⁸ This evidence, as Hagan claims, strongly undermines the long held belief of a Roman Road entering central Bawtry from the South. It also brings into question the common assumptions often made that Top Street, Bawtry has its origins in Roman times.

We cannot leave the topic of Roman roads without addressing the claims made for Top Street being evidence of a Roman road in the

³⁵ Roman Roads Research Association *ITINERA* Volume 1, 2021.

³⁶ LIDAR. Light Detection and Ranging.

³⁷ Full report - Roman Roads Research Association *ITINERA* Volume 1, 2021, pages 352-354

³⁸ D Kirkham's paper for BHG 2023.

heart of the modern town. Reference is made in the Bawtry Conservation Appraisal Document Part Two (2008) to the alignment of modern Top Street being, "the only clue to the existence of the Roman Road that once drove along this land in a northerly direction".³⁹ Part 1 of the Appraisal had stated with some assurance that this is the line of a Roman road.⁴⁰ Interestingly, these claims are based predominantly on the alignment of the Great North Road discussed in the paragraph above, rather than specific tangible evidence. It is true that sections of what we know as the Great North Road started life during the Roman period as Ermine Street, but it is clearly documented that Ermine Street on its route to Lincoln and then York diverted west of the route taken by what would be the Great North Road in the future just south of Grantham, at Colsterworth.⁴¹ From there Roman Ermine Street followed a direct route to Lincoln. Margary's map of Roman Roads in Britain (figure 7) shows clearly that Ermine Street is the only evidenced route from the south, up the eastern side of Britain (black line); it does not go anywhere near Bawtry. Further inspection of this map clearly shows RR28a branching from Lincoln and heading north westward towards the Idle, Bawtry and Doncaster some 39+ miles away (blue line). Despite this evidence there does remain a consistent and persistent reference to Top Street being of Roman origin and by association evidence of a road from the south hidden beneath Bawtry Hall. David Hey's book "Making of South Yorkshire"⁴² makes the claim that the early town planners, sometime in the 12th century, redirected the Roman Road south of the town into the "large rectangular marketplace that formed the core of the new settlement". However, source material providing supporting evidence is not referenced. The persistence with regard to Top Street being of Roman origin is contradictory when compared against the volumes of evidence that would tend to suggest that the story of the Romans and their roads through Bawtry has an alternative reality.

The weight of evidence negating Top Street being of Roman origin includes the 4 archaeological digs conducted between 1983 and

³⁹ Bawtry Conservation Appraisal Part 2, 2008.

⁴⁰ Bawtry Conservation Appraisal Part 1, 2008.

⁴¹ Wikishire. *At Colsterworth the Great North Road diverges west of the Roman road and continues through Grantham, Newark, Retford and Bawtry.*

⁴² D Kirkham's paper for BHG Bawtry in Roman Times 2023.

1997 which demonstrate beyond any doubt the main Roman road through Bawtry came from the east around 71AD and remained so for the 300+ years. It did not follow a route through the southern end of the modern town. This archeological evidence is also supported by the Lidar work undertaken by the Roman Roads Research Association on the road west of Bawtry and reported in their 2021 Journal outlined above and reinforces further the conclusion that no Roman Road entered Bawtry or by default Top Street from the South and that what might have been the first Roman Road into Yorkshire although it passed relatively close it was some distance outside what became modern Bawtry, off to the northwest.

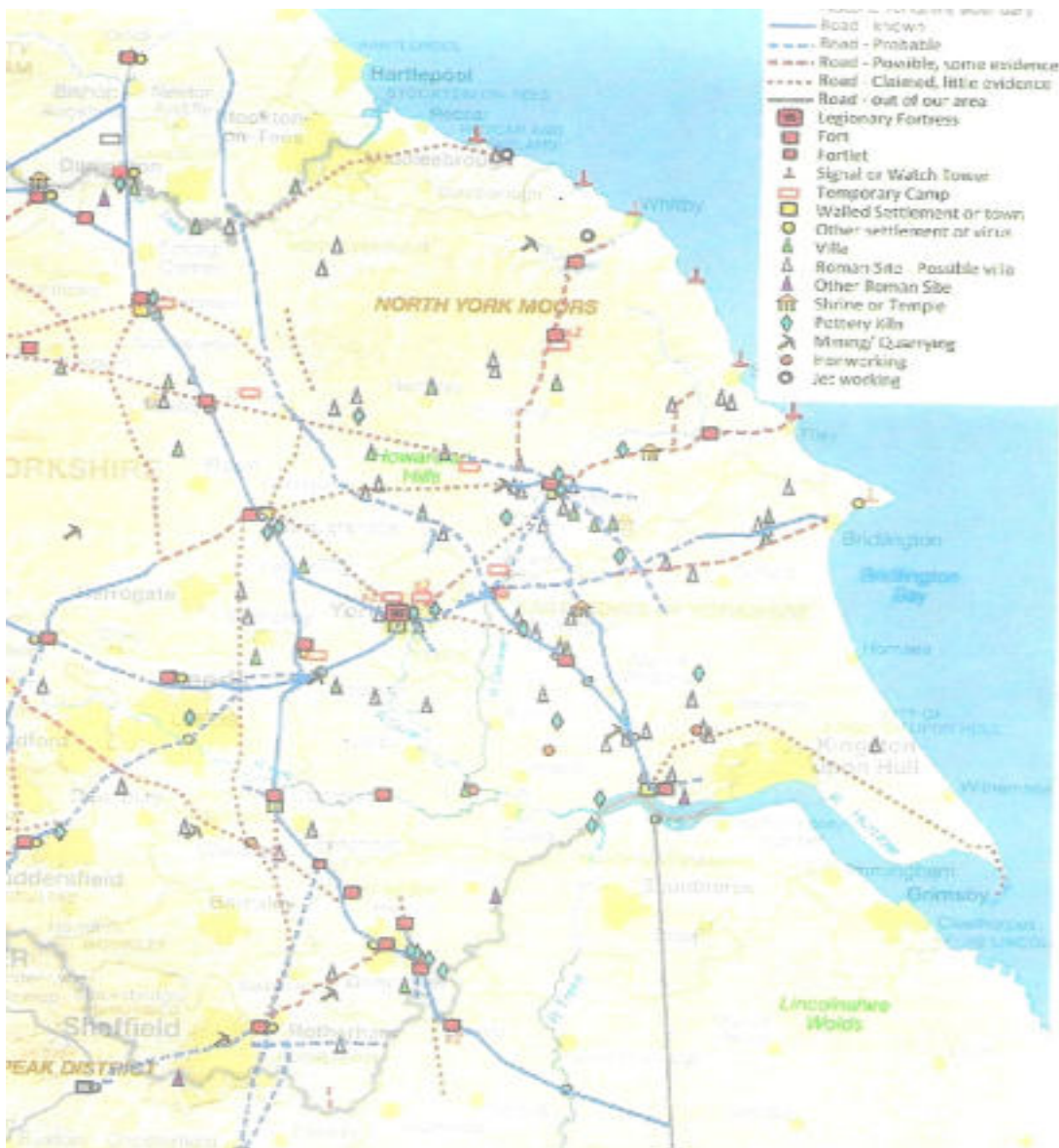


Figure 7 Margary's Map showing Ermine Street heading due north from Lincoln to the Humber Estuary. The legend shows that the dotted red line south of Bawtry is a "road claimed, little evidence".

Finally, work conducted by Wessex Archeology on the site of the McCarthy and Stone development in 2017⁴³ stated in its summary. "Although Top Street is suspected of being a Roman thoroughfare, no archaeological remains or artefacts dating to the Romano-British period were identified". One might claim, with accuracy, that the trenches dug during this most recent activity did not encroach into the vicinity of the current street. However, given the work was within the relevant area and trench three came within feet of the Top Street thoroughfare; finding nothing is difficult to dismiss as insignificant when weighing up all the facts as they currently stand in this debate.

The volume of evidence makes it difficult to suggest with any evidential weight that Top Street is part of the town's Roman history. It seems that what may have been legitimate speculation when this was first considered is less robust today; furthermore in planning to advance our knowledge and understanding of the area in the Roman period persistence with the view is a distraction.

At a public meeting designed to explore the story of Roman Bawtry organised by the Bawtry Heritage Group in October 2021 the possibility of a road from the west was debated. The catalyst for this was the trajectory of a road from Brough on Noi to Templeborough, RR710b. This was researched as part of a discussion paper submitted to BHG in July of that year⁴⁴ referencing the South Yorkshire Historic Environment Framework⁴⁵ as the source. This document speculated that extensions this Roman road may have followed a route towards Bawtry via Catcliffe and Oldcoates. Unfortunately hard facts to support this claim fade well short of Bawtry. It is perhaps worthy of note that this discussion took place without knowledge of the RRRA's Osmanthorpe to Rossington Bridge evidence referred to earlier in this section which clearly identifies a road west of Bawtry but not from the west to Bawtry. One could reasonably conclude that this discovery reduces further the likelihood of a Roman road from the west entering the

⁴³ Land to the West of Top Street Bawtry, South Yorkshire - Archeological Evaluation Report - Wessex Archeology November 2016.

⁴⁴ M P Maguire, Roman Bawtry BHG discussion paper 2021

⁴⁵ The South Yorkshire Historic Research Framework 2021 - Iron Age and Romano British 800 BCE - 42 BCE and Roman 42 BCE - 409 AD.

environs of Bawtry.

To complete this section on roads it should be mentioned that the Bawtry Conservation Appraisal Document Part One also refers to a road heading towards Finningley.⁴⁶ There is no reference for such a road and no other evidence is presented. BHG research has found no evidence to support such a road at this time. David Kirkham's paper explores a number of references in the writings of antiquarians regarding their thoughts and observations which may point to the genesis of this inclusion in the appraisal document.⁴⁷ It seems evident that these records are difficult to pin down and are often confused with other aspects of the Roman tale elsewhere, such as the Scaftworth Fortlet and RR28a. In short the substance for a Roman Road leading from the environs Bawtry to the catchment of modern day Finningley are unsubstantiated.

Strangely no mention is made of the Roman Road 28a and its route from the east within the Conservation Appraisal? This is a position one might consider surprising given the wealth of archaeological evidence and other references made over the two centuries prior to the document's publication in 2008 and the pivotal importance the tangible evidence presents for this routeway being the spine of Roman development in the town's history.⁴⁸

Forts

Forts?

There is just one fort!

If it only were that easy.

Scaftworth, or if you prefer to embrace the rationale, Morbio, is actually outside the boundary of the modern town. The clue is in the 20th century name. Given this situation, what foundation, if any, does Bawtry have to claim a heritage link with this late Roman

⁴⁶ Bawtry Conservation Appraisal Part 1 2008.

⁴⁷ These include the writings of John Leyland 1543, Abraham de la Pryme and William Peck.

⁴⁸ This might be due to the fact that all evidence of RR28a sits outside the designated conservation area? See figure 3 page 9.

feature? I would suggest that just because you would have been able to see it from the eastern edge of the town, when it was present in its full glory, is insufficient to make such a link. The rationale for a heritage link I believe is grounded in the broader debate concerning why Bawtry exists at all. We know that early man came this way.⁴⁹ For those of you who have stuck with this narrative from the beginning, you know the Romans did. Bawtry Heritage Group's own research on the Saxon Battle of the Idle two centuries after the Romans, reveals that the two sides of that argument with a high degree of certainty met on this spot to settle their dispute.⁵⁰ One could go on, citing those who came because of the river traffic and those who used Bawtry as a way point travelling north or south during the coaching era and onward into the mechanically propelled vehicle age; before the A1 bypass reduced the attractiveness of the old Great North Road for those in a hurry. In short Bawtry, it might be argued, emerged as a place because it was a routeway, a crossroads. Linking this to the fact that Bawtry and the space it occupies, has always been a place on a boundary, its geopolitical position has through the ages been significant because it has been a spot where different political entities and those travelling elsewhere came together. For these reasons I believe the case for Morbio being entangled with the historic tale of Bawtry is fundamentally sound.

The problem I'm afraid does not unfortunately end there, as modern research presents an unexpected fly in the ointment, posing the question: is it a military fortlet at all? It is certainly Roman but whilst identified initially as a "purely military post" by Bartlett and Riley in 1958, conclusions drawn by Berg et al in 2007 force one to consider that the site might have had "a civil agrarian" purpose. Its triple ditches being for drainage rather than defence.⁵¹ Other than posing the need for more study Berg et al do not really expand, which leaves their speculation hanging. The foundation of their argument being in relation to the structure's distance from the river and the expectation that a defensive feature such as this would be closer.

Historic England however, is clear in its description of the

⁴⁹ River Idle Washlands, Watching Brief - Berg et al, ASWYAS 2006. Paragraphs 2.1-2.3.

⁵⁰ BHG Paper The Battle of the River Idle 616 AD (Bawtry's Battling Saxons, M P Maguire Sept 2021.

⁵¹ River Idle Washlands, Watching Brief - Berg et al, ASWYAS 2006.

monument scheduled within their records. The listing summary states; "the site appears to be a purely military post".⁵² They describe it as being of "national importance".

Whilst the speculation of Berg and colleagues cannot be dismissed outright, particularly as the observations and finds at the site remain short of conclusive.⁵³ The weight of evidence and informed rationale leans towards it being a Roman military fortlet being the favourite interpretation as things stand.

Recorded interpretations of this site do not end there. Work conducted in 2007⁵⁴ raised the issue of there being more than one fortlet. Interestingly, this study which also reviewed and categorised aerial photography across the region identified other potential fortlet sites, including what it labelled as "Scaftworth 2" describing it as being in close proximity to "Scaftworth 1". Unfortunately the report is not more precise in identifying the location of this second feature and the aerial photography was not published with it. Was Scaftworth 2 the first Morbio or the second or something else altogether? For now we can only speculate.

Reference can be found via desktop study of the Doncaster Local Plan: Archaeological Scoping Assessment, to a "possible" fort within 250 metres of the modern town centre "possibly within the grounds of Bawtry Hall, and the site of.....the current Masonic Hall". Other than referring to a half acre site "which probably guarded river traffic" the documents are scant on source evidence for this conclusion referring to unspecified finds and crop marks noted in 1976 indicating a "bigger and earlier fort". If this fort did exist, when considered along with all the other comprehensive information brought together in this document the story of Roman Bawtry would be more than enhanced, it would be transformed! However, before we get too excited the evidence is largely speculative. The BHG discussion paper submitted by D Kirkham in January 2023 refers to reference of an early fort beneath the ground of Bawtry Hall made by Dr Paul C Buckland in 1986 and that this to some degree supports earlier observations made by Peck. The paper goes on to

⁵² Historic England, Scheduled Monument Listing 1018529.

⁵³ Historic England, recognises that excavations thus far have identified "much occupation debris" and that a number of "hearths" have been recorded.

⁵⁴ River Idle Washlands, Watching Brief - Berg et al, ASWYAS 2006.

reveal that an earthwork in the appropriate vicinity is labelled as "Roman Bank Earthwork" on contemporary Ordnance Survey maps, and a feature which does not appear to have been subject to archeological excavation. The paper reports further on other modern interpretations that consider the site to be medieval not Roman.⁵⁵ Although tempting to claim as evidence of Roman occupation in the heart of modern Bawtry, the observations, although noteworthy, are fragmented and largely speculative and somewhat off being reliable.

The BHG discussion paper Bawtry in Roman Times presented by D.Kirkham also provides detail from antiquarian reports about a Roman Camp or Station at Martin, about a mile to the northwest of Bawtry.⁵⁶ The paper presents Peck's description of the feature in some detail and a plan of what he saw is recorded as being rectangular 75 yards by 70 yards with an inner ditch and outer ditch, somewhat unusual for a Roman Military or agrarian construction? Peck was also specific about finding Roman Pottery, blue in colour. Whilst White recorded the finding of three silver Roman coins of "Antonius, Adianus and Faustina". The feature is of sufficient interest for Historic England to list it as scheduled. However, their listing describes it as a "medieval moated site".⁵⁷ Despite Peck's references to Roman pottery and White's coins, Historic England makes no reference to this in the listing. We might speculate that Peck's and White's observations of their finds cannot be verified. Could it be that these finds in any event are not associated with the structure but with the traffic that travelled on the Roman Road from Osmanthorpe to Rossington Bridge which, given the road's trajectory, is a very short distance from this site and is clearly defined as Roman.

It seems fair to suggest that the much discussed site at Martin at this time is not heavily supported by verifiable evidence as being a Roman structure associated with the historic development of Bawtry.

There is a suggestion of a fort or some sort of Roman structure

⁵⁵ No references are given.

⁵⁶ Antiquarian sources include Peck 1815, Francis White 1864, Bailey 1854 and the Victoria History of Nottinghamshire 1906.

⁵⁷ Manor Holt Moated Site. Historic England Schedule list number 1012453.

associated with Austerfield. Notwithstanding Austerfield is not Bawtry, examination of there being something of significance within a short distance seems appropriate. D Kirkham reviewed the evidence surrounding this find, the genesis of which dates back to the mid 16th century when John Leyland recorded a "large square formation, perhaps a Roman Camp."⁵⁸ He goes on to identify the antiquarian Abraham de la Pryme writing some 160 years after Leyland recording in his "Diary of My Own Life" that he had discovered at Osterfield (Austerfield) "a great foursquair Roman fortification."⁵⁹ Additionally Peck in the early 19th century supported Prymes record referring to information from a Bawtry resident.⁶⁰ Kirkham's research notes that reference to this structure survived in Ordnance Survey maps until 1918. In concluding his research Kirkham recognises that further modern day ratification of these records is not possible, given that the best known location for this site lies predominantly under Doncaster Sheffield Airport or is obliterated by a quarry site. Historic England's Research Records at Monument Number 320766 reiterate much of what is captured in Kirkham's account. Interestingly the research record names one L. Spilsbury Esq, of Bawtry, as Peck's 1763 Bawtry informant.⁶¹

Given the historic record captured over three centuries, the case for a Roman military site at Austerfield is compelling, if for our modern day standards a little elusive. As stated earlier Austerfield is not Bawtry but it would be foolish not to capture the potential this find has in relation to factors relating to Bawtry's link to Roman activity given the minimal distance to Austerfield. The most likely interpretation at this time is that the structure was related to RR28a, a thoroughfare in existence for over 300 years who knows what structures came and went along its route during its heyday.

At this time it seems fair to take the stance, if one accepts the premise made in the opening paragraphs of this section, there is evidence of Bawtry's Roman heritage being able to claim only one fortlet.

⁵⁸ D Kirkham describes Pryme as an antiquarian and curate and refers to his diaries that spanned his lifetime. BHG paper Bawtry in Roman Times January 2023.

⁵⁹ D Kirkham referring to Peck's work of 1813 and 1815. BHG paper Bawtry in Roman Times January 2023.

⁶⁰ D Kirkham referring to Peck's work of 1813 and 1815. BHG paper Bawtry in Roman Times January 2023.

⁶¹ Historic England Scheduled Monument Listings.

Concluding Part Two

In presenting this aspect of the paper the endeavour has been to embrace the wealth of information, potential evidence, endorsed facts and academic speculation that is out there favourably. Seeking to provide readers with a sense of the challenges faced by those trying to piece together an accurate and cohesive story. As I bring this section to a close my personal view remains that the true tale of Roman Bawtry centres on the facts presented in Part One and that it is these features that currently provide the substantial hooks from which hang further plans of exploration that might blossom and bring the true picture into even sharper focus.

Part Three - Bawtry's Roman Future. (What, how and where next?)

A useful maxim when seeking to advance a credible and sustainable tale, designed to expand our knowledge of Bawtry's Roman heritage, would be, to use the 'known' as a signpost towards the 'unknown'. Given the limitations of the BHG such a primary principle would be the most efficient and maximise our chances of successfully expanding upon the facts that we can be confident in. There might be pleas not to ignore the potential of experimenting with speculative hypotheses, but in circumstances where the tangible foundations are weak, and the results are highly unlikely to advance our knowledge beyond the negative results we already have, it is difficult to justify making such an approach a priority in any plan.

The notes from the BHG discussion group on Roman Bawtry held in October 2021 captured the principle promoted in the paragraph above stating the following; "Working with information that you can be confident in enables a purposeful plan to develop, through which, the story can grow and not be bedevilled by wasted energy and red herrings."⁶²

Following this discussion group enquiries made through Doncaster Metropolitan Council⁶³ led to productive liaisons with South Yorkshire's Archeological Service (SYAS) and the Roman Roads Research Association (RRRA). Through these engagements our knowledge has advanced and a greater level of certainty concerning the development of a definitive story has been enhanced. Examples we might give to support this claim would be.

- Engagement between Zac Nellist of SYAS with the BHG in May 2022 resulted in not only an understanding of the support his organisation might be able to provide but also the sound professional advice it can impart. Zac was largely supportive of the guiding principle for future research alluded to in the opening paragraphs of this section broadly agreeing with the 'known to the unknown' maxim. He did provide a cautionary

⁶² Notes of the BHG Roman Bawtry discussion group 12/10/21.

⁶³ As it was then. Now the City Council.

nod towards not being too pure in our search for very ancient truths/certainties across a wide time span. The record of our meeting captured in summary the realities associated with seeking to establish a cohesive tale to Bawtry's Roman past; in particular the legitimacy of dispelling what appear to be speculative conclusions that have a tendency to become accepted as fact over time. Zac was sympathetic to fears that Bawtry's true story may be inaccurately presented in a manner that may potentially skew the validity or productivity of future activity. He advocated the view that whilst new explorations rooted in known and substantiated evidence was logical; retaining an open mind in any search for the truth was always advisable. His take was that it was legitimate to identify the aspects of the tale that had a weaker foundation in terms of evidence alongside those with a strong or irrefutable base and to present the story in that context, which in itself helps to tell a cohesive story.⁶⁴ Hopefully this paper reflects that steer.

- Via RRRA liaison, greater clarity has emerged regarding what has often been a tangled narrative concerning Roman roads in the area; reinforcing that, for Bawtry, the one from the east was the main and only route.⁶⁵ No other route can, with any substance, be claimed to have come from the south, and in the west an early road clearly came nearby but did not directly impact the site on which Bawtry emerged. Additionally, the premise that Top Street is Roman in origin is further negated by recent archaeological activity which reinforces RRRA conclusions.
- Introduction to probably the most up to date script on Roman Yorkshire presented in Patrick Ottaway's 2018 publication. This work not only embraces and promotes the 'knowns' presented in Part One of this paper. It also introduces us to the tantalising information contained within the Notitia Dignitatum.
- Easy and informed access to the SYAS Historic

⁶⁴ BHG notes of the Teams meeting with SYAS' Zec Nellist, May 2022.

⁶⁵ RR28a.

event/monument Records (HER).

This preliminary work conducted between 2021 and 2022 has provided a sound basis upon which to argue that any approach for future endeavours designed to broaden the true Roman story of this area should be focused on what has been proven by a convincing measure of hard evidence.

At a number of points in this paper hints have been made questioning whether our geographical exploration of Roman activity in Bawtry has been focused in the right areas. By way of examples, there would seem little to support the southern end or central Bawtry being the primary areas for such focus going forward. The archeological studies on the eastern border of the town in the late 20th and early 21st centuries lead the way here following a strategy which has advanced the story with evidential substance.

Notwithstanding that the Scaftworth (Morbio) fortlet remains a site with definite Roman secrets yet to be uncovered, the obvious areas for any strategy involving work on the ground would have to include the Shrine/Temple site and the environs in the northeast sector of Bawtry. So, what can we do?

In 2006 conclusions drawn on the potential of the shrine site certainly raised expectations but up to the present efforts to expand our understanding of the find and what potential, if any, it provides for influencing the story remain inert. Field walking in the vicinity has identified a number of timbers (figures 8, 9 and 10), running along the western bank of the river only metres away from the shrine location. A number of photographs have been taken of these in situ and shared with the SYAS. Zac Nellist from the SYAS in discussion with the BHG stated that he had visited the site and agreed that the timbers seemed likely to be part of a revetment or jetty, but that dating them was beyond his capacity without access to dendrochronology. He did not dismiss the possibility that what was photographed was an echo which could conceivably be related to the shrine site and the Roman period.

Additionally whilst field walking in this area should not be dismissed in relation to such activity expanding our understanding of what

Berg and his team found in the ground it is unlikely to prove productive in increasing our knowledge of the structure. Interested outside parties seem to be the most likely possibility when seeking onsite exploration. What is surprising given the conclusion made in the River Idle Washlands, Watching Brief, is that the shrine site is not listed as scheduled by Historic England, or in their most recent Risk Register published in November 2022.⁶⁶ Whether some activity can be encouraged with regard to the timbers mentioned earlier to ascertain the potential of a link to the shrine site, who knows? Maybe there should be objectives for the BHG? Such activity depending on the results might encourage interest that prompts further examination of the site. Additionally, it might be worth exploring the process for and benefits of scheduling with Historic England.⁶⁷



Figure 8 Timbers on the west bank of the Idle close to the shrine site (BHG 2022).

⁶⁶ Historic England Online.

⁶⁷ The Shrine site is vulnerable given the environment it is in, plus its location is public knowledge and open to the risk of “nighthawks”.



Figure 9 Timber on the west bank of the Idle close to the shrine site (BHG 2022).



Figure 10 Timbers on the west bank of the Idle close to the shrine site (BHG 2022)

Reviewing the regional Historic Events Record and Historic Monuments Record for Bawtry in the Roman period is rather sparse.⁶⁸ The most recent archaeological activity being on Church Street 1996⁶⁹ and Top Street 2017.⁷⁰ Both provided nothing concrete that would encourage any further proactive activity aimed at finding evidence of Roman occupation within the modern town centre. However, there is perhaps a case for promoting such activity on the northeastern side of the town. The BHG discussion group referred to earlier undertook an exercise seeking to plot potential sites within the built up areas that make up this section of the town. This was based on our knowledge of the likely trajectory of RR28a, being the

⁶⁸ Courtesy of SYAS.

⁶⁹ Excavations at 16-20 Church Street, Bawtry. Dunkley and Cumberpatch 1996. Minimal sherds of pottery and a single coin taken from a medieval context.

⁷⁰ Land to the West of Top Street Bawtry, South Yorkshire - Archeological Evaluation Report - Wessex Archeology November 2016. Nothing Roman found.

most logical and likely substantial Roman structure to have attracted human activity within its proximity. After all, the shrine described as a structure of substance was found on the western side of the river close to the road. It would be naive to think such activity might be feasible in the short term. However, might we promote more localised activity within the gift of the BHG that in turn might attract a stronger position and influence the interest of outside sources with the knowledge and resources?

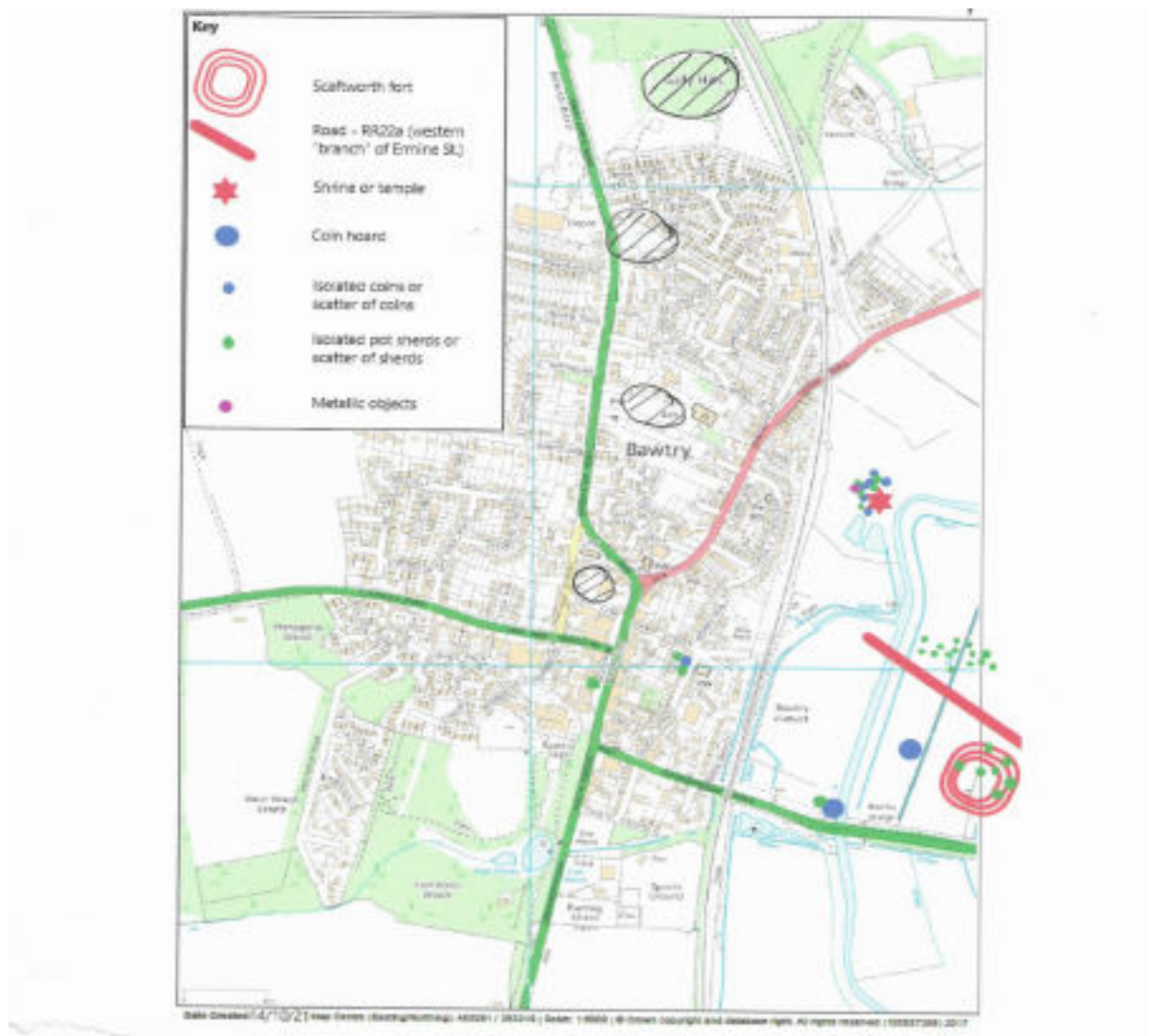


Figure 11. Working map recorded as part of the BHG discussion group on Roman Bawtry Oct 2021.

Figure 11 is a map produced by the BHG at the discussion group in October 2021 which features areas of uninhabited plots of land, marked as shaded areas, that might have potential for further

exploration.⁷¹ Additionally, what if anything lies within the gardens of residential properties within this sector of the town, is it worth asking the question.

⁷¹ Note the potential open plots are shaded black. The map also indicates an area near Top Street in the centre of the town. The potential here was considered before we had access to the 2017 excavation findings.

Part Four - Closing Comments. (More to do)

Gathering and reviewing facts to tell a chronological story about the past is what we call the study of history. Would it be fair to conclude that engaging with those stories in the pursuit of what we call 'heritage' requires more than the requirement to collect and review? Whatever the historical tale, making a link between the facts that make up the tale and its importance as a heritage link to a person, group, place, or event, requires consideration beyond just knowing when and where it happened. Heritage is about recognising and embracing the importance of history as a tool to analyse and grade the value stories from the past have on influencing and shaping destiny; allowing us to draw conclusions about why something came to be, or why something should be preserved as a reminder.

Applying the philosophical rationale presented above to the historic tale of Roman Bawtry presents an array of challenges this paper has sought to address. Such as separating fact from speculation and grappling with a wide span of time, that lead us to form opinions and make educated interpretations. Searching for the heritage premium is an additional and demanding layer of academic endeavour, more than just collating, ratifying and reporting.

The objective to comprehensively define the heritage value the Roman occupation has brought to the space and ultimately the place that became Bawtry, remains only partially explored by this paper. The sense that the contribution of the Romans, similar to others through the ages, is centred on Bawtry's attraction to draw traffic, be linked to a natural political boundary, and perhaps because of those things, be a place important enough to protect is only a start towards achieving what some of us might believe to be the ultimate goal. Some of us dare to think that out there, elusively below the surface, the evidence is there to prove the Romans created within the space that is modern Bawtry, somewhere families and communities did more than just pass through. That it was a place where human activity strived to live, work, play and eventually die. Searching for the evidence that would help us settle this once and for all, is a major challenge and we may be wrong. If

the Bawtry Heritage Group doesn't stay focused on teasing out the answer, who else will?. There is much more to do!

Many sources have contributed to the narrative presented in this paper. The BHG would submit that this is the most comprehensive piece of work that has sought to present a cohesive story, that seeks to define the Roman heritage of Bawtry to date.

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