





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

## The Hunt for Roman Bawtry Desktop Review Stage Four - The Scaftworth Fortlet - "Morbio"?

INITIAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS	REVIEW COMMENTS, OBS and ADDITIONAL POINTS
<p>This desktop stage will focus exclusively on the reported discovery of a Roman structure first identified in 1774, and commonly known today as Scaftworth Roman Fortlet. The structure is situated 1,000 metres to the east of the modern town centre, on the eastern side of the river Idle.</p> <p>Image one shows the structure's position with regard to the river and the modern town, whilst image two presents the markings captured by aerial photography in the 1970's</p>  <p>Image One</p>  <p>Image Two</p> <p>Like the shrine/temple covered in desktop Stage Three, the fortlet stands in its own</p>	

right as an important feature in our landscape during the Roman period.

In this report the detail of this discovery will be covered, as with the shrine/temple, as a single feature. However, perhaps more importantly for the objectives of this project, two questions demand attention above all others and any conclusions drawn from them might carry more significance than those about the feature itself. These questions are,

1. Is it a military facility?
2. Does its presence enhance the conclusions already made about Bawtry as a Roman settlement?

Key sources supporting the exploration of these questions include.

Bartlett and Riley - The Roman Fort at Scaftworth near Bawtry.

Van de Noort and Ellis - Wetland Heritage of the Humberhead Levels an Archaeological Survey.

M Cole - Geophysical Survey Holly House Farm, Scaftworth, Notts.

BHG paper - Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry.

### **Bartlett and Riley (L ref 1)**

In their report from the late 1950's they described the location of "the fort" as "situated within a bend of the Idle near to a point where the Roman road from Lincoln to Doncaster crossed the river".

The sketch map at image three shows the fort located to the east of Bawtry, just north of the modern Gainsborough road. The innermost ditch of the three depicted is described as enclosing an area 205 feet by 185 feet; the authors note that the structure is "not precisely rectangular" due to a deviation in alignment on the south western side.

The link presented here provides an additional general online summary, taken from the BHG website.

<https://www.bawtryheritagegroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Scaftworth-Fort-pics-text.pdf>

Some of the findings in this report might prompt consideration for amendment.

## ROMAN FORT AT SCAFTWORTH

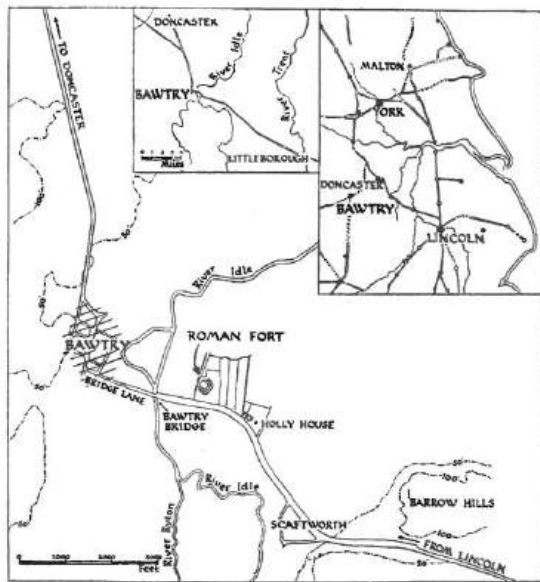


Image Three.

It cannot be said that the archaeological activity of Bartlett and Riley was extensive or intensive. However, what this project can take from this work is that the site, first discovered in the 18th century, was Roman and that it was at its height during the final quarter of the 4th century CE.

Image four presents a sketch plan of the enclosure and Bartlett and Riley use it to make the following submissions.

1. That the gap evident in the southwestern side of the structure "is unlikely to be an entrance". It is not made clear if this had been a working hypothesis of theirs which was subsequently dismissed. But given that Bartlett and Riley both assumed, incorrectly, that the Roman road ran south of the enclosure that is possible.
2. Two trenches were dug in the eastern half of the interior and a possible post hole and a number of hearths were noted. No detailed examination took place due to a lack of time.
3. Investigations in the western half of the interior led to the conclusion that the light patch evident on aerial photographs, see image two, was

due to the decay of a previous turf rampart.

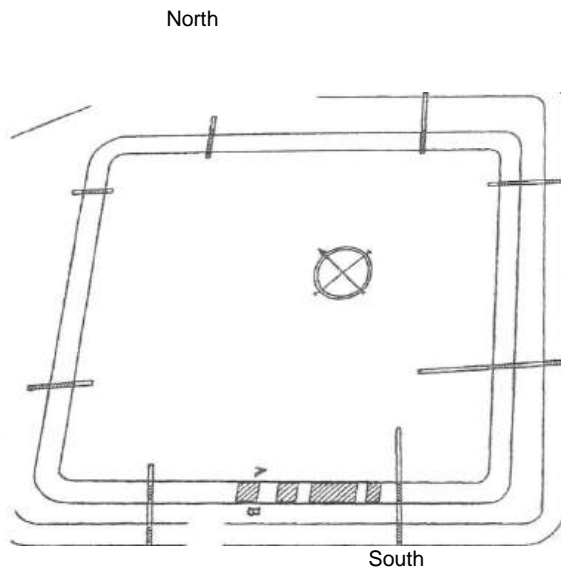


Image Four

Bartlett and Riley examined a cross section of the inner ditch on the south side, labelled A and B in Image four, and presented in section as image five. They concluded that the Roman levels were at 5 and 6.

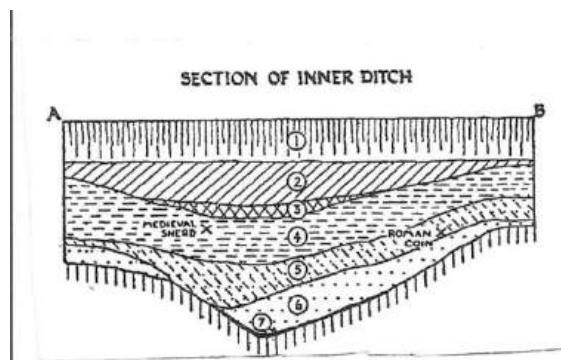


Image Five

Marked on the cross section is the location of a single bronze imitation coin of Julian the Apostate dating between 360-363 CE. Also at this level a range of pottery was discovered and is depicted and numbered at image six. The table below image six summarises the conclusions of the report regarding each find.

Adjudication query regarding the reference to imitation?

This was taken from the Bartlett/Riley which states "identified for us by Dr J P C Kent as a bronze imitation of a silver siliqua of Julian the Apostate (360-363 A.D.)". Example below.

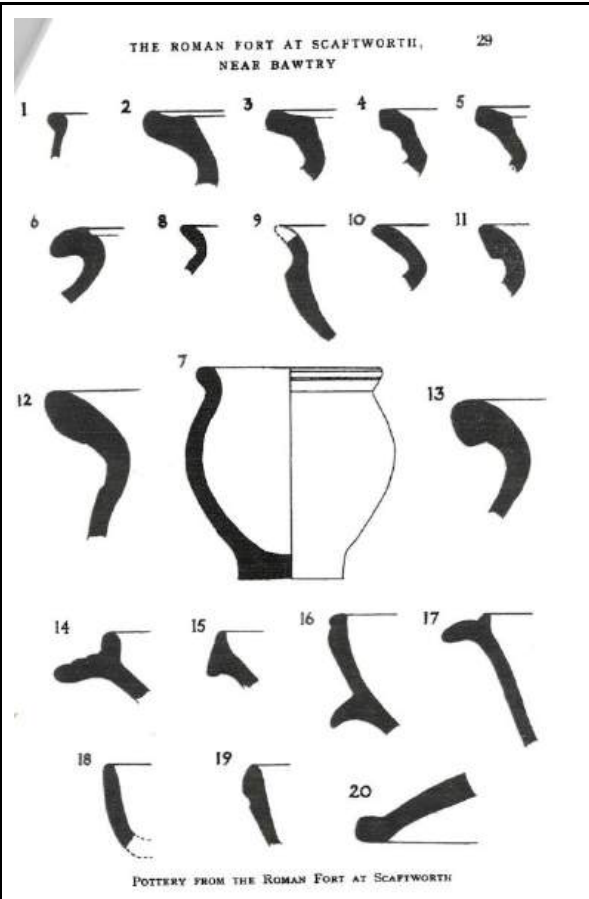


Image Six..

Vessel Type	Volume found	Date	Image six Nos.
Beakers	1	None given	1
Lid-seated Jars	5	Mid 4th century. With the exception of number 6 which is very late 4th century* (see note)	2,3,4,5,6.
Small Beakers with everted rims	3	None given	7,8,9.
Medium sized Jars with	2	None give	10,11

everted rims			
Large Wide-mouthed Jars	2	Mid to Late 4th Century	12, 13
Mortars	2	4th Century	14, 15
Bowls imitating Samian	1	3rd - 4th century	16
Straight sided Flanged Bowls	1	4th Century	17
Platters	2	None given	18,19
Lids	1	None given	20

In addition to these finds the report also draws attention to “surface finds” describing “several fragments of flagons of colour coated ware” and “several fragments of..... .Samian form”.

\* Compared to “Huntcliff Ware”, named due to its association with the Roman Signal Station at that location in East Yorkshire. See image seven. This pottery type is a definitive dating piece indicating activity in the last two decades of the fourth century.



Image Seven.

The narrative accompanying the pottery in the Bartlett and Riley report presents the material as widespread in origin, from Leicester to Hadrian's Wall. For a number of ware types it cites Scaftworth's commonality with pottery present at other Roman Signal Stations in Yorkshire.

The catalogued pottery from the fortlet does, to some degree, chime with that extensively studied at the shrine/temple site and covered

in desktop Stage Three, page 11 under the heading “Dating”. However, observations from Bartlett and Riley when compared against those from Wetlands Archaeological Watching Brief (2007) L ref 2, an interesting question is presented. Were the two sites contemporary features in the Roman landscape?

The Watching Brief analysis when seeking to place a time span on the shrine/temple’s active period emphasises that the presence of Type H ware from Swanpool indicated the site remained active up to the mid 4th century. However, the absence of Crambeck Ware cast doubt on how long it was after 340 CE that the shrine/temple was active. Additionally, the Watching Brief states that the shrine/temple site emerged in the mid 3rd century.

The Bartlett and Riley pottery analysis at Scaftworth is almost predominantly, fixed on a period of activity between the mid 4th and the late 4th century. Crambeck Ware, absent in the Watching Brief analysis, is reported in the Bartlett and Riley report as associated with 4 Scaftworth samples; numbers 13, 15, 16 and 17, and depicted in image six above. This observation pushes towards a conclusion that the fortlet was functional decades after the shrine/temple ceased to be active. The evidence hints at the possibility that the two structures might have overlapped by a decade or so, but perhaps no more.

In the Bawtry Heritage Group paper “Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry”, see the BHG website, an imagined “snapshot” of an auxiliary cavalry trooper paying a visit from his billet at the fortlet, towards the end of his time there to the nearby shrine/temple was maybe less likely given the dating analysis above.

To what extent does the 1950’s Bartlett and Riley report answer the 2 highlighted questions on page 2 above and repeated here?

1. Is it a military facility?
2. Does its presence enhance

the conclusions already made about Bawtry as a Roman settlement?

In support of the second question concerning evidence of a Roman settlement at Bawtry. The report firmly places human activity on this site in the late Roman period and is therefore complementary to the conclusions drawn about the eastern side of modern Bawtry in the final pages of the Stage Three report; in particular the zone of interest highlighted in image nine of that report, on page 19.

Similar to the reports explored in desktop Stage Three, L ref 1 of this report is far from definitive about the structure being a military fort. It begins summing up by saying, “the most likely assumption on the purpose of the site is that it was a small fort guarding the crossing of the river Idle”. However, it goes on to present an alternative conclusion describing that it could possibly be a “defended civil site” and making comparison with Norton Disney Villa (Lincs) and Ditchley Villa (Oxen). Although the point is made that neither of these have defensive ditches of the type found at Scaftworth. The report finally concludes that “pending an examination of the interior, when more certain information should be obtained the site may be classified provisionally (our emphasis) as a small fort”.

Any extensive and intrusive examination of the enclosure’s interior has not happened since the Bartlet and Riley report. But there has been surface activity, a review of the evidence and serious historical research. The question remaining is to what extent does any of this advance Bartlett and Riley’s educated assumption that Scaftworth had a military purpose and does any of it build upon the evidence relating to a Roman settlement at Bawtry?

#### **Geophysical Survey 1995. (L ref 3)**

In 1995, following geophysical surveys conducted by the Humber Wetlands Project, specifically aimed at dating the abandonment of RR28a, additional surveys utilising the application of magnetometry and



resistivity technologies were carried out by M Cole on the fortlet site. The report, "Holly House Farm, Scaftworth, Nottinghamshire. Report on Geophysical Survey October 1995". L ref 3 reports on this activity which covered the majority of the enclosure's interior. Resistivity covering the central area across 17 individual grid areas, with magnetometer survey covering the same area, plus an additional 7 squares, 3 to the northern end and 4 to the southern end of the plot.

The results of this activity can be read in detail at pages 4-6 in L ref 3. In summary the conclusions we can take from this work in relation to the objectives of this project are very limited. The survey was inconclusive in being able to map the full extent of the triple ditch system. Exploration of the interior revealed some evidence of a structure although it prompted the comment that it was "not aligned with the ditches of the enclosure and not rectilinear in form as might be expected of a Roman structure". The survey failed to identify any obvious entrance to the enclosure although noting an "apparent gap" in a section of the outer ditches on the northern edge. This did lead to speculation that any entrance might be "by means of a bridge".

Additionally, magnetic susceptibility testing which seeks to attribute human activity, such as burning, via soil analysis was also inconclusive, as were samples taken via augering.

The report does close with a paragraph highlighting the "striking similarities" with a triple ditched enclosure surveyed at Lees Rest in 1992, see L ref 4. Unlike Scaftworth this feature does have an obvious entrance. The 1992 report considers this to have been a 1st - 3rd century farmstead rather than a military site, which towards the end of the 4th century, may have become a site of religious significance, given the discovery of a head from a statue thought to represent the god Mercury.

This comparison is limited in supporting any conclusive position on the Scaftworth site, other than perhaps fueling speculation about

the voracity of any conclusions about Scaftworth being military. Robert Van de Noort and Steven Ellis reporting on the archaeological survey in the Humberhead Levels, 1997 expand on that speculation.

**Van de Noort and Ellis - Wetland Heritage of the Humberhead Levels an Archaeological Survey (Chapter 16). (L ref 5)**

Whilst this report describes the Scaftworth fortlet site as “the most impressive” in the Scaftworth landscape it does question the conclusions that the site was one with a military purpose. It uses the surveys reported on in the section above as underpinning this position; reminding us that the surveys “failed to locate traces of a stone-built internal structure”, as one would expect at a military settlement. Alison Deegan in an extract from the report for The Nottinghamshire Mapping Project L ref 6 does address the possible lack of structures in the definition she presents for features described as fortlets. She describes them as “accommodation for small detachments of troops with no administrative facilities”. Might Deegan’s observation explain the more minimal requirements of a military outpost which might leave a footprint less substantial than a legionary fort?

The Van de Noort report goes on to reinforce the argument against it being a military site, claiming that the “shape, depth, morphology and palynology of the ditches imply a function of delineation or demarcation and drainage, rather than defence”. It presents that the site’s location as important for strategic defence, is weakened by the fact that a more logical location would have been on the western bank of the Idle close by the river crossing.

The report floats the hypothesis that “possibly Scaftworth is a type of settlement of intermediate rank in late Roman society”. An environment it suggests where status was defined by “the long term traditions of construction of field-systems largely consisting of ditches and possibly archaeologically unrecognisable features such as hedges and low banks”.

Query from adjudication. Is this wording correct? - what else was there in the “Scaftworth landscape”?

The report quoted covers a large number of individual finds it labels as Scaftworth. By way of example Scaftworth 10 is the fort, Scaftworth 5 is RR28a and Scaftworths 2, 4, 6,7,8,9 and 11 are reported on in desktop Stage 3 and captured in image 8 of that document.

On pages 411 and 412 the report lends support to the potential for an entrance to the enclosure being adjacent to RR28a on the northern boundary; recognising a substantial area of hardstanding running between the outer ditch and the road. On page 428 it uses this observation to further reinforce this interpretation as a status symbol for a civilian complex alongside a major road. The report claims that this conclusion is attributable to other Roman multivallate settlements and cites one close by at Hatfield Chase.

Deegan embraces some of these arguments presented in the Van de Noort work such as the artefacts being compatible with domestic rather than military sites. However, she emphasises that some of the observations made in L ref 5 such as U-shaped ditches, as found at Scaftworth, being atypical of military constructions can be challenged. She cites work by Swan and Welfare (1995) who suggested that V-Shaped cuts were not an “inviolable rule for all military ditches”. She reports that Swan and Welfare, in 1995, observed that “U-shaped ditches are known in military contexts, apparently as a response to specific circumstances such as a high water table”. This is highly likely to have been a potential factor at Scaftworth given its location in the Humber Wetlands close to what was then a free flowing river Idle.

Clearly there is an academic debate yet to be resolved, illustrated in L refs 3, 5 and 6 about the function of the Scaftworth site making it difficult to come to a definitive answer to the question of Scaftworth’s function. The debate concerning function is examined further in the 2023 research conducted by the Bawtry Heritage Group.

### **Defining The Future of Roman Bawtry**

This is the title of a Bawtry Heritage Group (BHG) paper completed in June 2023. This paper drew upon work completed by English Heritage and WYAS in 2007 which was titled Archaeological Cropmark Landscapes of the Magnesian Limestone (section 8), (L ref 7) This work reflected upon the likelihood of the Scaftworth site being part of a wider military

network providing a comprehensive defensive plan to deter North Sea raiders. L ref 6 promotes the idea that Scaftworth along with Thorpe Audlin and Sandtoft provide a so-called defensive hub. The BHG paper recognises, via Patrick Ottaway's book Roman Yorkshire 2018, that the military efforts being made by Emperor Theodician in the late 4th century to restore Rome's waning power in the north chimes with the L ref 6 hypothesis.

Ottaway, in his book, identifies that a cavalry unit from what is now modern day Hungary were billeted at the main fort in Doncaster (Danum). His source for this was a document called the Notitia Dignitatum. This is a 5th century document best described as a register for all offices both civil and military across Britannia. Its true purpose is unclear but it records places with diverse functions such as weaving houses, military stations, mints etc.

Study of the Notitia Dignitatum reveals that the Roman name for the Scaftworth site could well be "Morobio"? Below is an extract from the online platform Roman Era Names relating to Morbio see [www.romaneranames.uk](http://www.romaneranames.uk)

## Morbio

**Attested:** *Morbio* (twice) in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, where the *Praefectus equitum catafractariorum* was based.

**Where:** Probably the Roman fort at Bawtry (also known as Scaftworth) at SK65919276, where the Roman road from Lincoln to Doncaster crossed the river Idle near its limit of navigation from the river Trent. This location outranks the Roman forts at Roall SE56432521 near the modern A19 main road from York to Darlington, previously guessed here, and at Piercebridge guessed by Rivet & Smith.

*This entry was last attributed with editing in May 2020.*

Note the Roman Era Names database has the following acknowledgement for this

entry.

**Notes:** Thanks to Mike Haken for suggesting Bawtry.

Mike is the Chair of the Roman Roads Research Association (RRRA). The link below takes you to the section of their expansive website that covers the Notitia Dignitatum. By scrolling down to chapter 40 (XL) in the list you will see the entry for Morbio at 21 with Danum listed at 20. Note the entry for Danum attributes at this location the presence of “[Praefectus Crispianorum](#)”. Translated this is “Prefect of the Horse” and supports the reference made by Ottoway in 2018.

The Morbio entry shows it being occupied by “[Praefectus equitum catafractariorum](#)”. Translated as “Commander of the cataphract cavalry”. With this in mind the “snapshot” of a soldier visiting the shrine in the BHG paper might still be plausible.

<https://roadsfromainbritain.org/notitia.html>

If one accepts the credibility of these sources they present a strong foundation for the claims that the Scaftworth site, Morbio, was in fact a location which housed military personnel in the 4th century.

For the purpose of this report Historic England (H.E.) has the final word in the debate about function. H.E. lists the Scaftworth feature as a “Roman Fort”. It was scheduled in 1953 and the record was last updated in 1998, see L ref 8.

### **Scaftworth (Morbio) in its Contemporary Landscape.**

We have already explored the Scaftworth site in relation to the shrine/temple and concluded that if they were contemporaries it may have only been for a short period of time.

We have also mentioned the location of the site being within the zone referred to in the desktop Stage Three page 19, image nine and at Stage Three, Observation Three. These highlight the immediate areas west

and east of the river Idle being central to understanding the significance of human activity from the 3rd century CE to the late 4th century CE in the space that is now Bawtry.

It would be pointless to repeat the evidence compiled and presented in previous desktop reports again here. However, this desktop has served to add to the picture emerging, by identifying that human activity was evident on the Scaftworth, (Morbio), site during the late Roman period. There may still be a debate to be had regarding the specific function of what is the largest site in our landscape associated with the Roman occupation. Exploration for an answer may well help us to define, with greater accuracy, whether Bawtry was a scattered rural economy, which the military and officialdom passed through, or whether there was a substantive economic settlement that emerged in the last 150 years of occupation.

#### **Observations and Conclusions from Desktop Stage Four.**

**Observation One** - It is difficult for this project to judge whether additional methods of archaeological exploration of the Fortlet site would add to what we already have regarding the objectives of the project.

It would be useful to hear the professional views of experienced archaeologists as to how they would go about further exploration of the site with the objective of better understanding its function.

**Observation Two** - Should the BHG be considering the promotion of the site under the title "Morbio" rather than "Scaftworth"?

**Conclusion One** - In comparing the relationship of this site to other Roman features in the immediate landscape, the evidence seems to point towards settled human activity over a sustained period. This considered alongside the potential explored in Stage Two, Part Two that the river may well have played an economic part in life at this time, the argument for an organised economic settlement at Bawtry in this period becomes more compelling.

M P Maguire 31/3/25	
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#### Stage Four Research Reference Library and Information Links.

Further information on the items referred to here can be obtained at request via the BHG, at [bawtryheritagegroup.com](http://bawtryheritagegroup.com)

Library Reference Number	Details
L ref 1	The Roman Fort at Scaftworth near Bawtry - J E Bartlett and D N Riley. 1958.
L ref 2	River Idle Washlands-Bawtry, South Yorkshire, Watching Brief, Berg et al ASWYAS 2007
L ref 3	Holly House Farm, Scaftworth, Notts. Report on Geophysical Survey, October 1995. - M Cole.
L ref 4	Lees Rest Enclosure, Near Chalbury, Oxfordshire. Report on Geophysical Survey, November 1992. - Andrew Payne Bsc. PIFA.
L ref 5	Wetland Heritage of the Humberhead Levels, An Archaeological Survey 1997, Chapter 16. - R Van de Noort and S Ellis.
L ref 6	RCHM England- The Nottinghamshire Mapping Project 1999. Extract by Alison Deegan.
L ref 7	Archaeological Cropmark Landscapes of the Magnesian Limestone. Section 8, 2007- Ian Roberts, David Berg, Alison Deegan
L ref 8	Historic England Scheduled Monument Record 1018529

#### Online resources.

<https://www.romanroads.org/>

<http://romaneranames.uk/>

<https://www.bawtryheritagegroup.co.uk/>

**Other resources**

**Roman Yorkshire, Patrick Ottaway, Blackthorne Press 2018.**