

Bawtry Heritage Group

Preserving our Past for the Future

Registered Charity No. 1188945

Bawtry's History

A Timeline

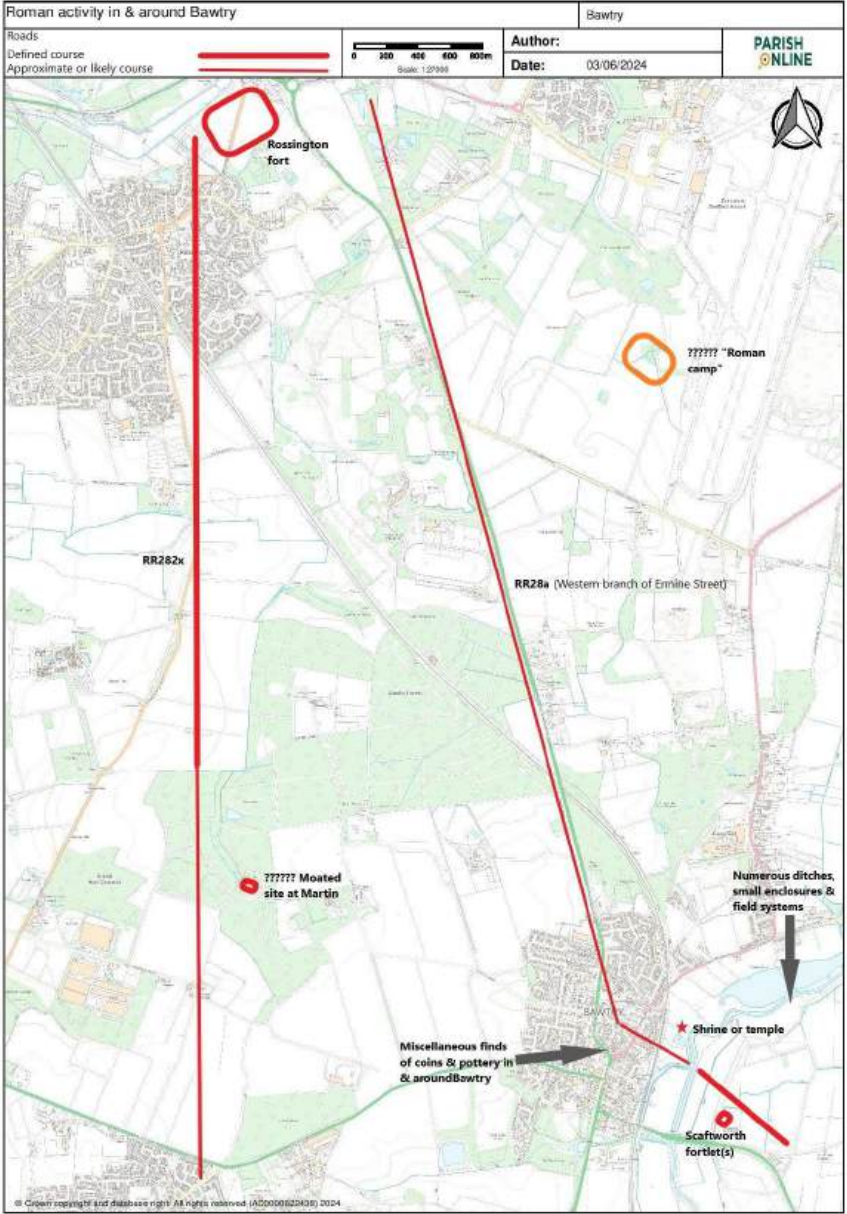
Bawtry in prehistoric times

There is no evidence of prehistoric settlement in what is now Bawtry, but some artefacts found – flint flakes, a stone hand axe, and bronze items – show there was activity here. Iron age field systems exist outside the town.

CE 50 – CE 410

**The Bawtry area in Roman
times**

The Romans came to the area in about CE 50, building a road (RR282x) from Nottinghamshire to their fort at Rossington; this road runs south-north to the west of Bawtry. CE 71 saw the construction of the western branch of Ermine Street, linking Lincoln and York (RR28a). It crossed the Idle near a fort at Scaftworth and entered what is now Bawtry close to South Avenue and leaving near King's Wood.



Scaftworth Fort

Scaftworth is a very small fort and would have accommodated between 100 and 200 soldiers. It was probably positioned to guard the Idle river crossing. A 5th century Roman record suggests it was called “Morbio”. The fort has never been fully excavated.

Aerial image of Scaftworth Fort, with the adjacent Roman road RR28a



A mock-up of Ilkley Roman fort, about twice the size of Scaftworth



Bawtry's Roman shrine, or temple

Distinctive pot sherds, coins, and in-situ stone columns were found on the western bank of the Idle, close to the Roman road. It has not been fully excavated but is probably a shrine or small temple.



A mock-up of a Roman shrine or temple

Was there a settlement at what is now Bawtry in Roman times?

See BHG's Hunt for Roman Bawtry 2024 – 2025, on the BHG website and in the Library Heritage Centre.

There are indicators for a settlement on the eastern boundary of modern Bawtry during Roman times:

- The nearby fort at Scaftworth and the shrine at Bawtry
- Agricultural settlements between Bawtry and the fort
- Echoes of Roman river use -a 4th century boat found at Mattersey Thorpe in the 1980's, and the Roman canal at Byscarrdyke which opened access between the rivers Trent and Idle
- Bawtry being ideally located as a transport hub for Roman mined lead from Derbyshire en-route to the North Sea via the Idle, Trent and Humber

CE 450 - CE 600

Settlement by Angles

Gradually the Angles begin to settle most of what is now South Yorkshire and beyond.

CE 616/617

Battle of the Idle

Bawtry is the location of the Battle of the River Idle where Æthelfrith, King of Northumbria, was killed by King Rædwald of East Anglia. (It was probably Rædwald who was subsequently interred in the famous ship burial at Sutton Hoo.) The battle was said to have been particularly savage – ‘it was said that the river Idle ran red with English blood’.



Anglo-Saxon warriors
– the central one wearing the famous helmet found in the ship burial at Sutton Hoo; likely King Rædwald's burial place.

CE 702/703

Synod of Austerfield

This Church council was called to try to resolve a long running dispute about the see of York – Bishop Wilfrid had been expelled. It was attended by King Aldfrith of Northumbria and bishops, abbots and priests from all over England. Wilfrid's expulsion was confirmed. The choice of Austerfield as the venue hints at the location there of an important church which pre-dates the present St Helena's.



**The church of St Helena at Austerfield, site
of the synod of CE 702/703**

CE 700 – CE 1066

Vikings!

This was the period when Norsemen raided England, eventually settling in the North. There is no evidence of Viking settlement at Bawtry, but there is evidence they used some tributaries of the Trent, and the river crossing at Bawtry would have been attractive to them. Bawtry may have been a river trading settlement in the Viking Danelaw.



In 1905 this Viking axe was found at Bawtry

CE 1086

Why is Bawtry not in the Domesday Book?

An obvious reason is that Bawtry did not exist at that time – but there are other possibilities:

- Because it was subsumed within the Hexthorpe entry – Bawtry was then part of Hexthorpe Manor.
- The entry for Martin records 10 households – but there is no evidence of a deserted village there. Could this have been Bawtry?
- Because Bawtry had been obliterated in the “harrying of the North” of 1069/1070. This was William 1’s vengeance on the rebellion of the North, especially Yorkshire. It has been described as a medieval genocide.
- Because the Domesday survey was not complete. Some settlements, where there is hard evidence of their existence at that time, were omitted for reasons unknown.

CE 1100 - CE 1213

Bawtry – a Norman planted town

A “planted town” was a town planned and laid out in Norman times; its principle characteristic being a distinctive grid pattern of streets – such as occurs in Bawtry. The first documentary reference to Bawtry was in a charter of 1199. King John granted a charter for a fair in 1213.



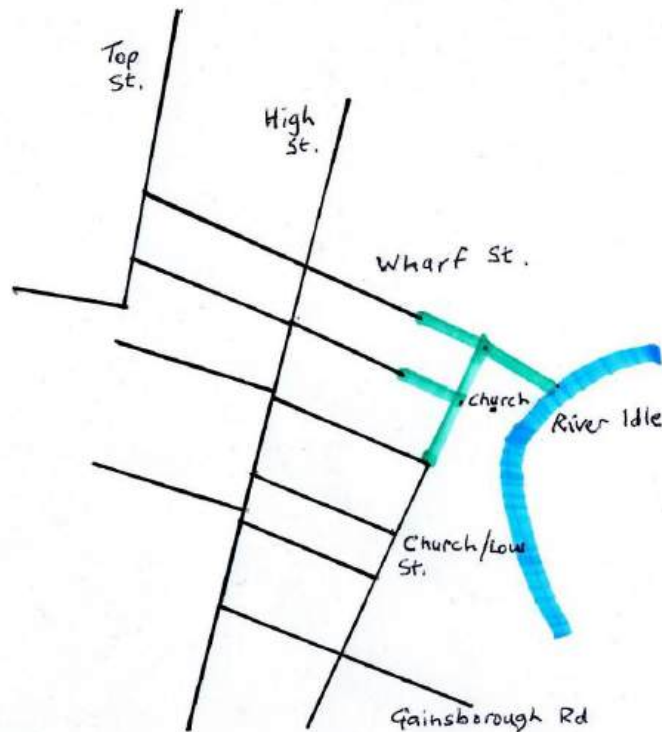
Bawtry's grid street plan

The town has a north-south spine, with Top Street in the west, High Street in the middle, and Church Street in the east. At right angles to this north-south spine, and connecting its three elements, are several other roads, alleys and other thoroughfares.

An earlier settlement?

In most planned towns the church was at or near the middle; in Bawtry it's off to one side. This probably reflects the fact that

Bawtry already existed as a riverside settlement, servicing a busy wharf. The church's dedication to St Nicholas, the patron saint of mariners, supports this. It may be that there is a much older church underneath the existing one.



Church of St Nicholas

Bawtry was then part of the parish of Blyth and the church was built around 1200, as a “Chapel of Ease” to Blyth.



Matthew Paris' map of Britain made in CE 1255



Bawtry was part of the parish of Blyth, then known as “Blia” or “Blid”. The map shows Doncaster to the north. The text in red translates as “Branches of the River Trent”.

CE 1300 – CE 1600

“a bare and poor market town”

Bawtry continued to function as an inland port, but was not prosperous. John Leland, writing in the 1540s, said he had visited “Bawtre, a bare and poor market town”.

CE 1536

The Pilgrimage of Grace

This Catholic revolt against Henry VIII's religious policies, especially his dissolution of the monasteries, involved around 30,000 rebels. Although it was eventually defeated, the revolt shook the foundations of Tudor rule. In October 1536 the rebels were camped at Doncaster. Some of the King's forces, sent to pacify them, were stationed at Scrooby. On the 21st of that month the Earl of Shrewsbury, who led that contingent of Henry's army, met his generals at Bawtry to discuss their tactics.

CE 1541

Henry VIII's "Great Northern Progress"

Having pacified the North, Henry toured the country to show he was back in control. A Royal Progress involved thousands of people – the royal party itself, courtiers, soldiers, clerics, waggoners and victuallers. The Great Northern Progress of 1541 passed through Bawtry.



Henry VIII in procession

CE 1603

**King James VI of Scotland
(James I of England) in Bawtry**

After the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, King James VI of Scotland travelled south to ascend to the English throne, as King James I. He was met at Bawtry by the Sheriff of Nottingham, who escorted him further south.

1600s

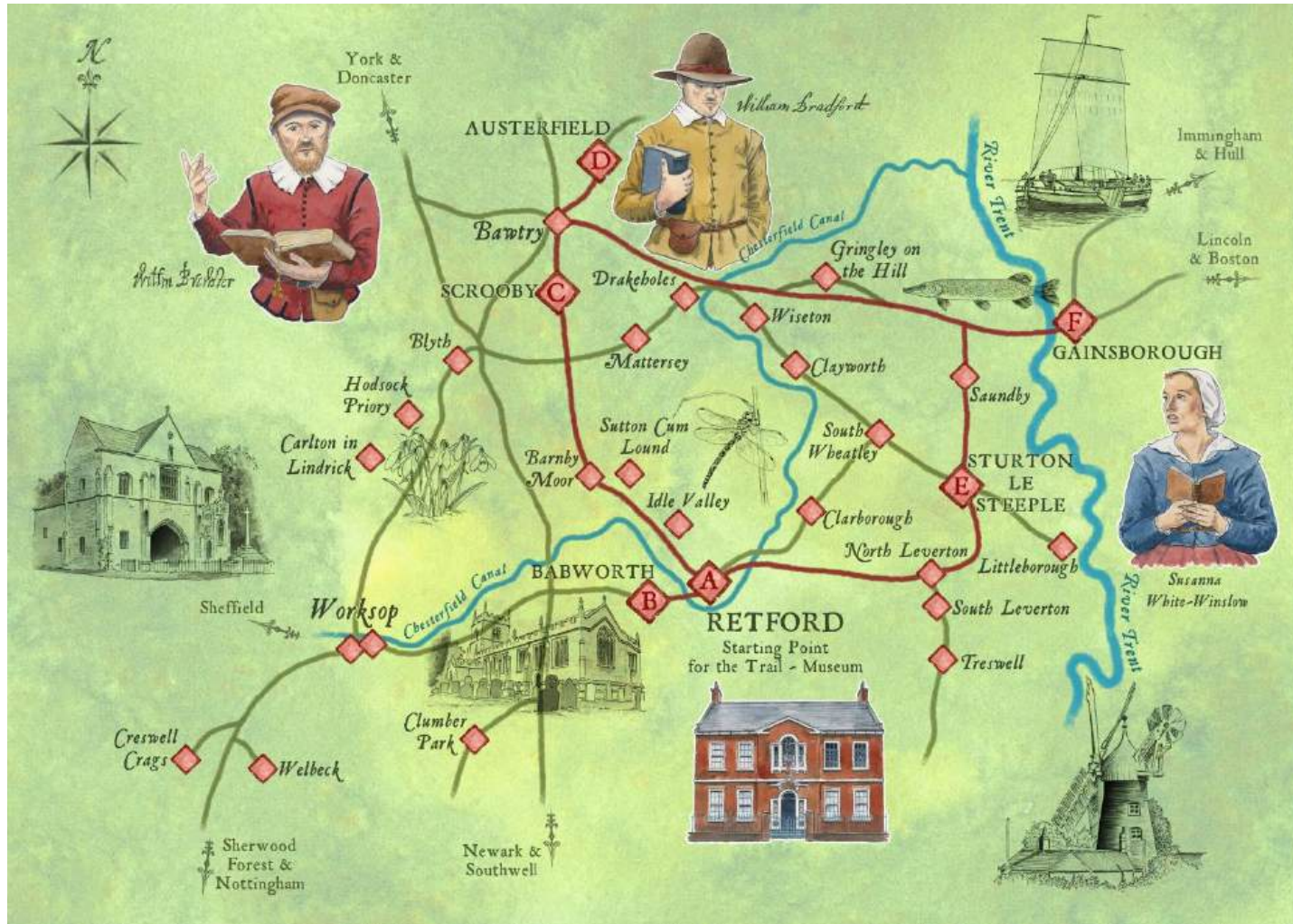
Revival of river trade

Trade on the River Idle began to revive in the early 17th century. Coal, lead, timber and wool were sent by pack horse to the port of Bawtry. There, it was loaded onto sailing barges and taken to Hull via the Trent and the Humber. From Hull, it was shipped to London, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and Spain.

CE 1580 - CE 1620

Separatists and the Pilgrim Fathers

Two of the separatists who boarded the Mayflower bound for the New World in 1620 came from villages near Bawtry –William Bradford was from Austerfield and William Brewster was from Scrooby. Bawtry had been at the centre of separatist activities since the 1580s.



Key Pilgrim Fathers locations around Bawtry

Late 1600s - mid 1800s

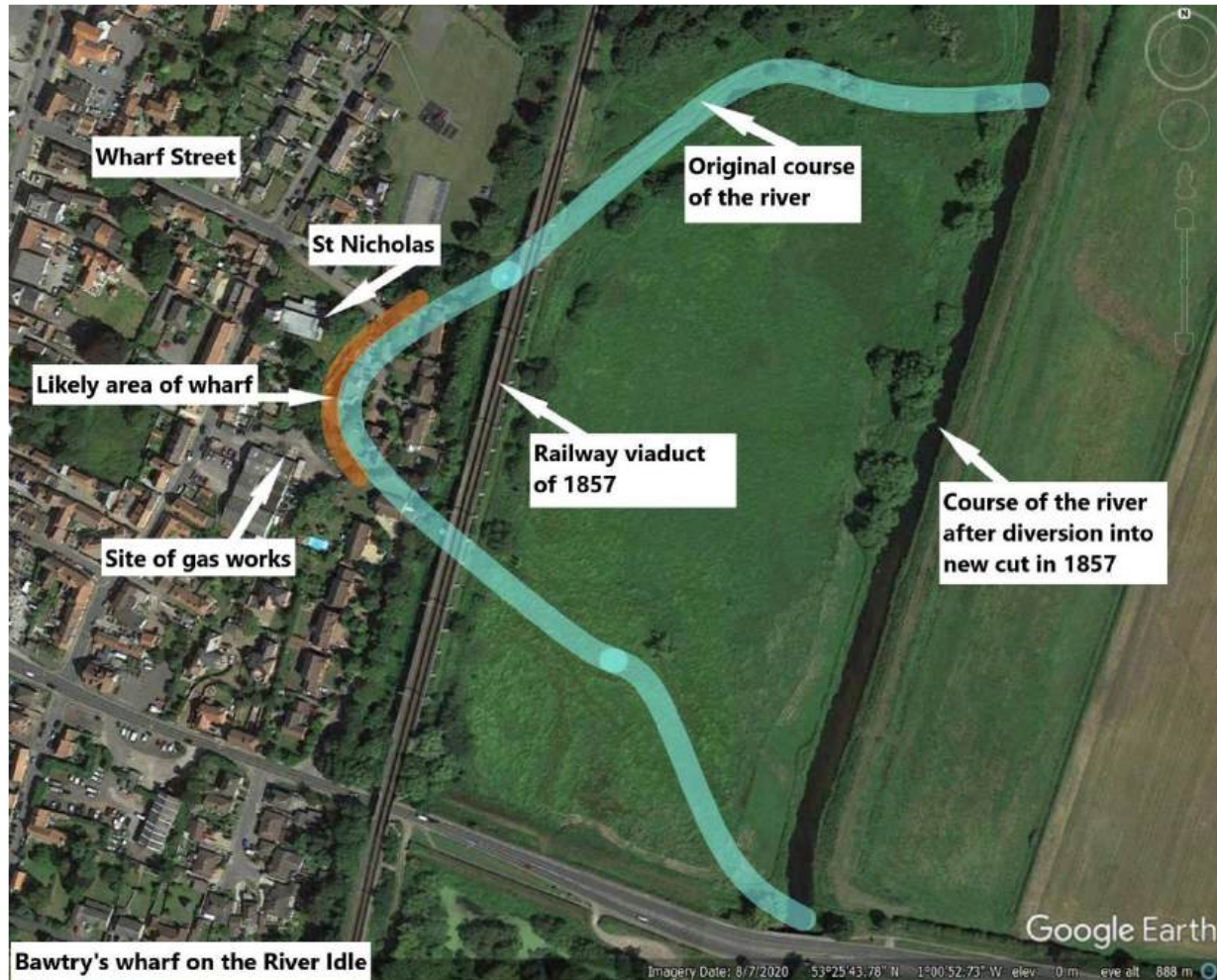
Bawtry at its peak

In Daniel Defoe's "Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain", published between 1724 and 1727, he describes "Bawtry" as a little market town, at the very first entry into the county, a town with "two blessings that make it a very well frequented place" with "good inns and places of entertainment". The two "blessings" were its location on the River Idle and on the Great North Road.

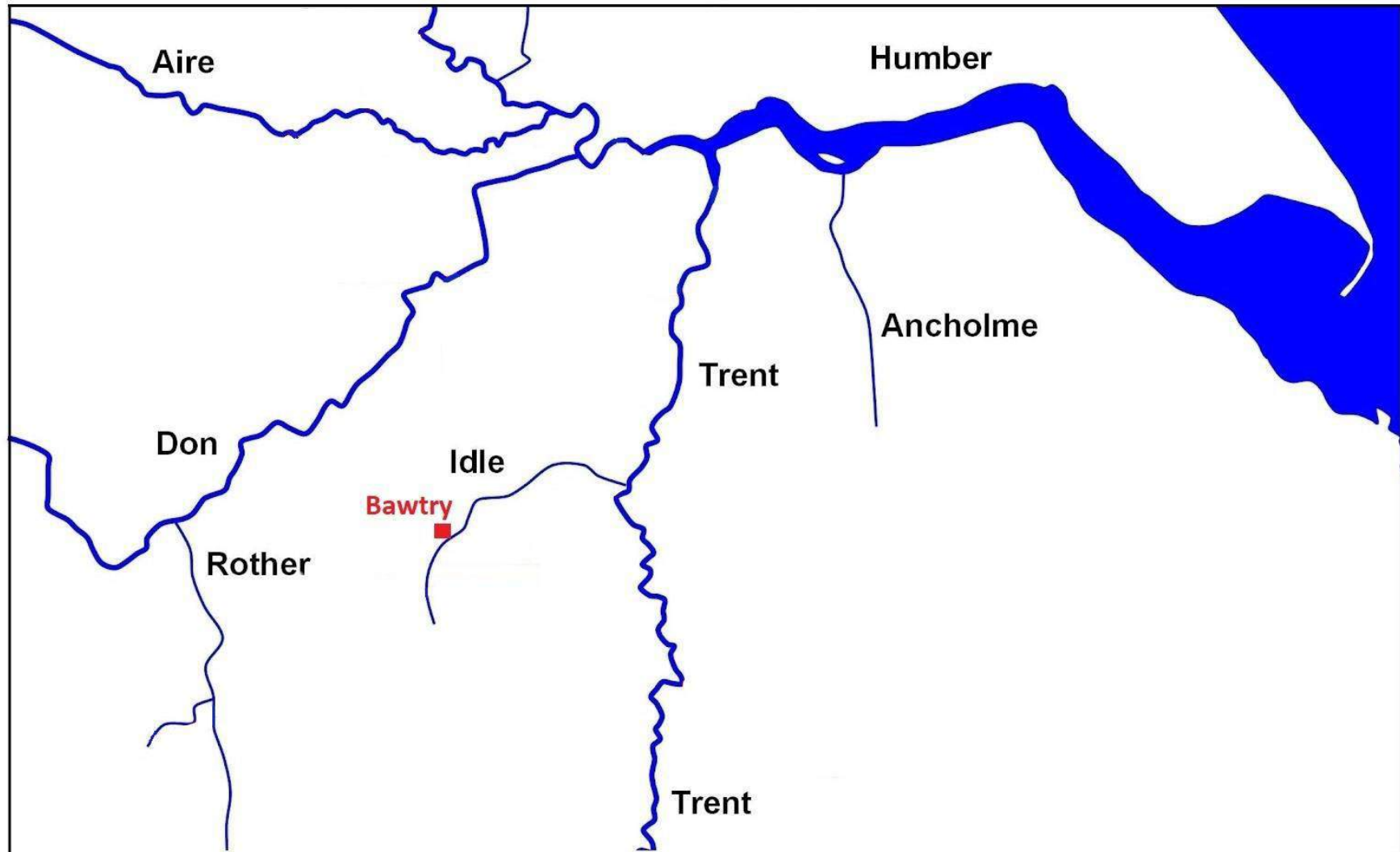
Defoe continued:

“This makes Bautry Wharf famous all over the south part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, for it is the place whither all their heavy goods are carried, to be embarked and shipped off.” This river trade-induced prosperity was reflected in the construction of numerous very fine buildings in the town, including the imposing 8-bay house (now The Pantry Brasserie) in the Market Place (opposite Womacks) and the Dutch House on the corner of Wharf Street and Church Street.

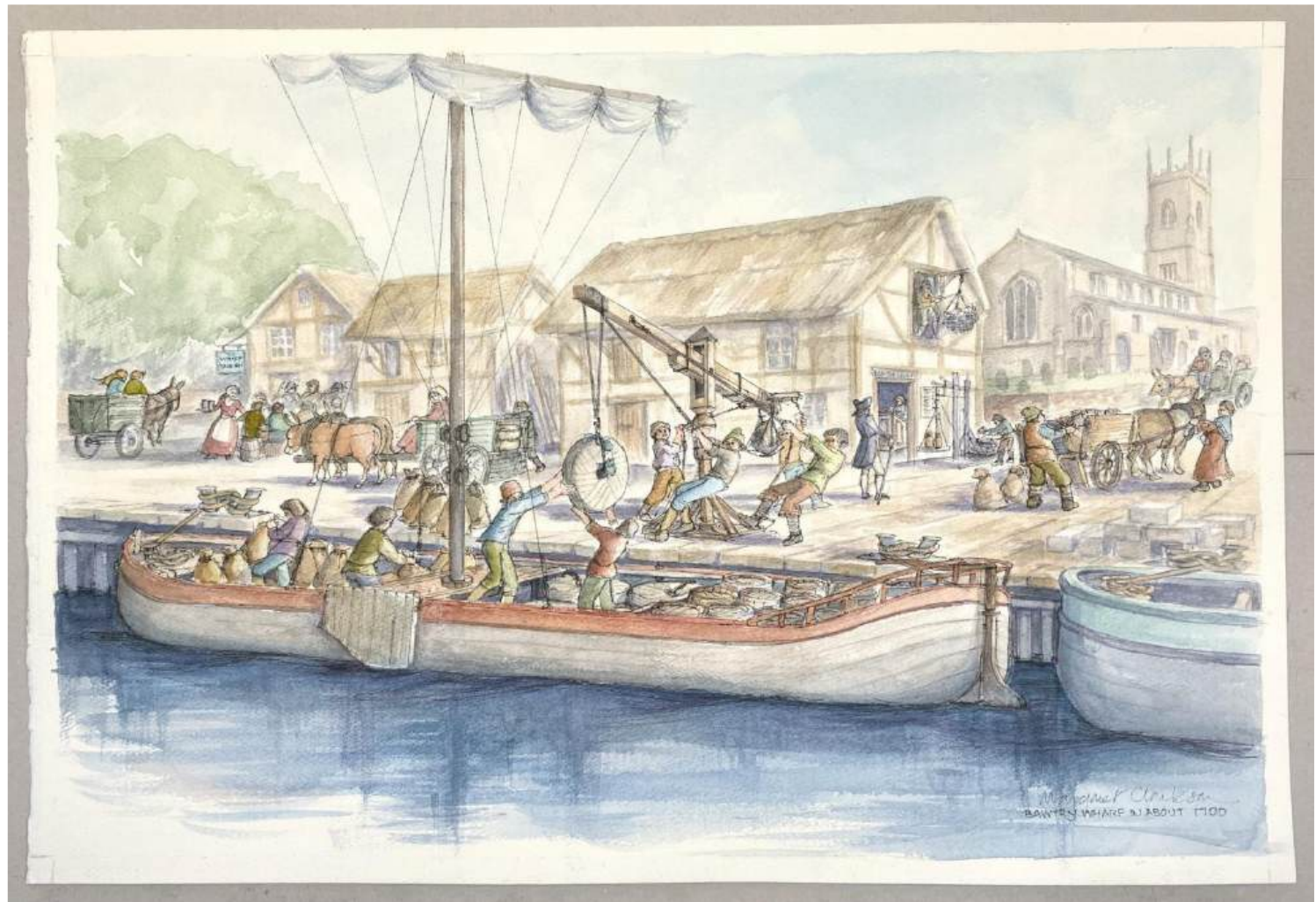
Bawtry wharf and the original course of the River Idle



Bawtry's access to the North Sea



**Bawtry
wharf in
c. 1700 –
painting
by
Margaret
Clarkson**





The Pantry Brasserie – formerly a fine house
built in 1691



Copyright: Stan Walker 2011

The Dutch House –
built
about
1690, but
refronted
around
1750

Late 1600s – mid 1800s

The Coaching Era

Through the 18th century river trade began to decline, but the second of Defoe's two blessings saved the town – its location on the Great North Road. In the late 1600s and through the 1700s Bawtry became an important coaching centre, where horses were changed and passengers refreshed. Numerous inns competed with each other for the coaching trade.



The Swan Inn was the earliest and biggest of Bawtry's coaching inns. It dates back to the late 17th century. 18th century outbuildings of the inn survive between the Courtyard and Swan Street.

The Crown Hotel

Built in the northern part of the Market Place in the late 1700s, this inn survives in its entirety.

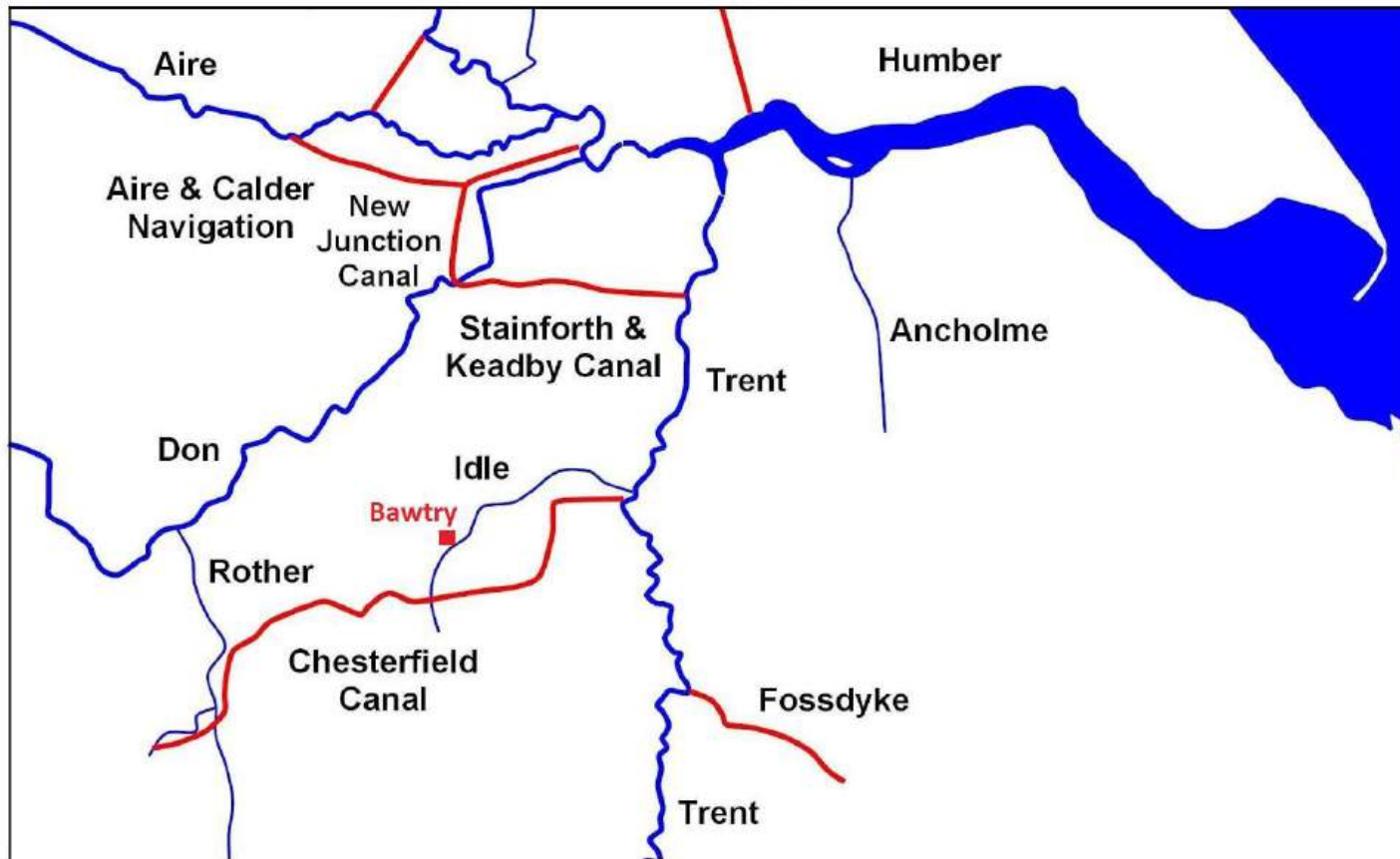


CE 1777

The opening of the Chesterfield Canal

This marked the beginning of the end of Bawtry as a port. Exporters from Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire found it much easier and cheaper to use the new canal rather than sending their goods to Bawtry by pack horse for onward shipping.

The Chesterfield Canal – compromising Bawtry's importance as an inland port



CE 1785

Construction of Bawtry Hall

The Hall was probably built upon the site of a medieval manor house, or an even earlier construction. Its grounds incorporated much of the land which previously formed part of the estate associated with the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene. On this land the large double barn visible from Tickhill Road was erected, as part of the Hall “Home Farm”.



Bawtry Hall was designed by William Lindley, a Doncaster architect, for Pemberton Milnes. He was a woollen cloth merchant from Wakefield.

CE 1848 and CE 1857

Demise of Bawtry wharf and coaching

These years sounded the death knell for Bawtry wharf and severely reduced the town's coaching traffic. In 1848 The Great Northern Railway came to Bawtry, crossing the low-lying eastern margins of the town by a viaduct built of timber. The trestles of this viaduct bridged the Idle, severely compromising the functioning of the wharf.

In 1857 that viaduct was rebuilt in stone and timber; the structure which can be seen today. That construction necessitated the diversion of the river, 300 metres to the east.

With the river gone, the wharf was wholly redundant. At the same time, Bawtry's coaching traffic became severely reduced as a result of the migration of travellers from roads to the railway.



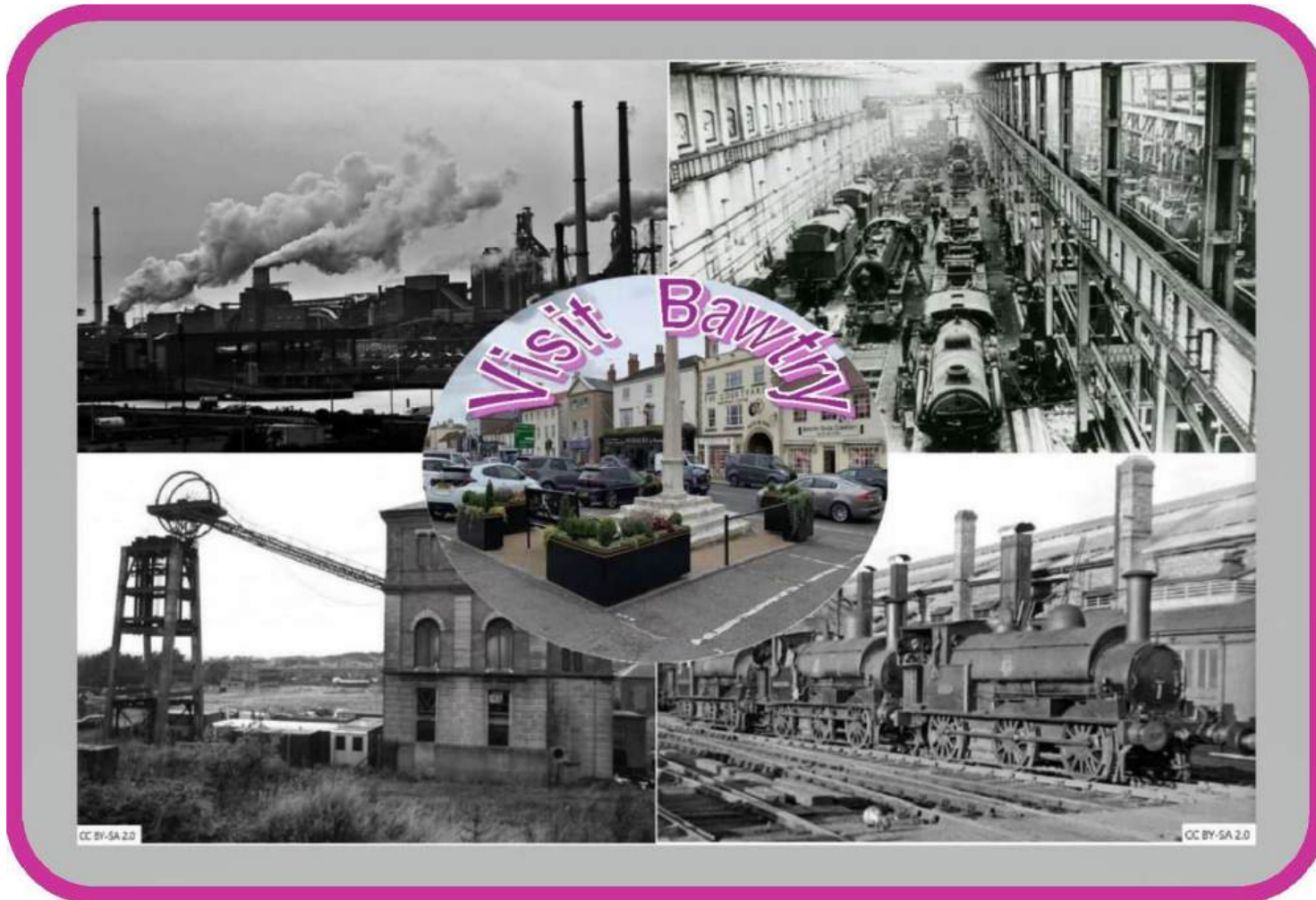
The railway viaduct of 1857

CE 1853 - CE 1880s

Bawtry almost became an industrial town

The Great Northern Railway needed a manufacturing site and workshops in the North. They considered siting them at Bawtry – but eventually, in 1853, decided to locate them at Hexthorpe. What became known as the “Plant” could have been at Bawtry. In the 1880s, there was exploratory boring for coal at Martin. Coal was found in commercial quantities – but a pit shaft was not sunk there, with a decision to access it from Harworth or Rossington collieries instead.

What nearly happened



CE 1940 – CE 1983

Bawtry and the RAF

The Ministry of Defence acquired Bawtry Hall in 1939. In 1940 it became the Headquarters of No. 1 Group of Bomber Command, responsible for about a dozen operational RAF bases, mostly in north Lincolnshire. This role continued when RAF Strike Command was created in 1968. At the base's height, more than 300 people were stationed there, two thirds of them RAF personell and the remainder civilian employees.

Many of the famous “thousand bomber” raids of World War 2 were planned and directed from Bawtry. During the “Cold War”, several of the squadrons commanded from Bawtry operated the UK’s nuclear deterrent.

RAF Bawtry’s last operational role was co-ordinating the “Black Buck” operations to bomb Port Stanley airfield during the Falklands War of 1982.

RAF Bawtry's badge



Two of the legendary aircraft operated by squadrons controlled by RAF Bawtry:



The Avro Lancaster



The Avro Vulcan

Contemporary Bawtry

In modern times, Bawtry's position on the Great North Road remained of importance, with several cafes and garages opening on High Street to service motorists passing through. The A1 bypass opened in 1961, significantly reducing traffic. It has now built up again, with Bawtry serving as a dormitory town to Doncaster, offering specialised shopping and nightlife.

Bawtry today

