



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

## **The Hunt for Roman Bawtry Desktop Review Stage Three - The Shrine/Temple?**

<b>INITIAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>REVIEW COMMENTS, OBS and ADDITIONAL POINTS</b>
<p>This desktop stage will focus exclusively on the reported discovery of a Roman structure on the west bank of the river Idle in 2006. The primary source for this stage report is the Watching Brief by Berg et al. For the first time, as far as we are aware, the content and context of the Berg report will be compared with other known evidence which, until this project, has largely been reported upon in isolation.</p> <p>This desktop will seek to consolidate a credible emerging hypothesis regarding the Roman period on the site that is now Bawtry; that warrants strong consideration of there being an economically active and settled environment much earlier than had been originally thought.</p> <p>This stage should be read in conjunction with previous stages but most particularly Stage Two, Parts 1 and 2.</p> <p>In the desktop report for Stage Two, Part Two focus on the River Idle floodplain revealed strong circumstantial evidence that led us to conclude that there is a likelihood that people were settled during the Roman period, not just within the 1.7km zone set by this project, but also within the confines of today's built up area.</p> <p>In June 2019 the Environment Agency produced a report entitled. River Idle Washlands SSSI - Water Level</p>	

Management Plan. (Note, SSSI stands for Site of Special Scientific Interest) (L ref 1). Three brief paragraphs in section 5 of this document make reference to the findings of the Watching Brief conducted 13 years earlier in 2006. It repeated the conclusions of this activity by stating the following.

“There are important archaeological sites just outside the plan area at Newington and Misson, and there is evidence to suggest a Roman presence at Bawtry village. During recent\* Environment Agency enhancement works within the Bawtry unit of the SSSI, some Roman archaeological remains were discovered. The planned scrape creation was amended to avoid further disturbance, and a geophysical survey was undertaken to assess the likely extent of the remains. This concluded that the finds and structural material identified during the watching brief do not appear to be located within a wider area of archaeological activity and that this may have been the site of a single, stand-alone structure, possibly a shrine”.

*\* The asterisk is our inclusion. “Recent” being 13 years previously; a period in time that has now extended since 2019 by a further 6 years at the time of writing this report.*

Compared to the individual evidence amassed as part of stage two, evidence relating to this stage is substantial in all aspects. One might describe the individual finds explored in Stage Two as ‘background noise’, notwithstanding some of them being significant echoes. However, when considered individually their impact is minimal. It is only when examined collectively that one might consider that their combined noise prompts substantive conclusions. The archaeological site found adjacent to the Idle and its associated artefacts, provide a substantial “shout out” in its own right; an indicator that one might find difficult to ignore. This monument, we submit, becomes even more significant when it is placed in context among other surrounding indicators that surfaced in stage two.

As we conduct this review in 2025 and reflect on the phrase “difficult to ignore” it is

hard not to conclude that it has been. Perhaps this work will reignite interest?

Image one presents the parameters of the main find of interest in 2006 considered to be a shrine or temple.



Image One.

L ref 1 describes the site intrusion as a “planned scrape”. The finds were substantial and led to the Watching Brief Report (2006), L ref 2, to describe the pottery alone, as being of an “unusually high proportion of bowls/dishes and beakers.....similar to assemblages recovered from Romano-British villas and towns, indicating a higher status of origin than the normal rural assemblages recovered in this region”. It is not surprising in a project titled, “The Hunt for Roman Bawtry”, that this single statement is of significant interest.

Before we start to analyse the significance of this monument in its wider surroundings we will lay out the Watching Brief findings in some detail to demonstrate the significance of this plot in its own right.

#### **Finds from Area 1 of the Watching Brief Site in 2006**

There were two significant areas of examination covered by the watching brief activity. Area 1 measured 71.5m x 33m and was located at about 20 metres from the river. It was on the western side and northeast of Area 2, which measured 55m x 37m and revealed no archaeological finds or features.

### The Roman Structure

It was discovered on a raised area of sandy clay indicating that the structure was on a promontory with water or marsh on three sides. The evidence of a structure was revealed by the presence of dressed stone columns, some thought to be in situ, and a padstone. The report, although stating that the depth of the upright columns discovered could not be established, did state, "it can be assumed that shorter upright column bases *may* survive beneath the machine level". Image two below shows the extent to which the Watching Brief activity exposed the remains of the structure.



Image Two

The conclusion that the structure may be a Romano-Celtic temple or shrine is inferred by the artefact evidence, primarily pottery and the structure's location. Dealing with the latter, paragraph 6.7 on page 7 of the site report signals the close proximity of water/marsh on three sides being an indicator that the location was important in its own right and may possibly reflect a ritual purpose dating back long before the Roman structure came into being. Bird states "In general, temples or sacred sites are found at characteristic locations which include

- in towns, at town gates and at prominent sites near towns;
- by roads;
- at boundaries;
- on hilltops or prominent locations, including hillforts;

- at or near earlier monuments such as barrows;
- by water, especially springs;
- associated with trees and groves;
- at or near villas.”

These observations are from his paper Roman Religious sites in the Landscape L ref 3.

One could argue, at first glance, the Bawtry site does encapsulate some of the features identified in Bird's list of characteristic locations; indicated with green highlights.

Beyond the structure and its location some aspects of the artefact evidence prompt the shrine/temple hypothesis based on the following:

- A. Two two pottery sherds, possibly tazze. This is based upon comparative analysis of an example highlighted by M J Darling in 1999 and presented in a report capturing discoveries relating to finds in the Lower Defences in Lincoln, published by the Council of British Archaeology (CBA), in Research Report 144 (1999) L ref 4. The Watching Brief analysis compared Darling's interpretation with two shrine site bowls, “flanged with plain upright rims like DR38's.....the form of the body can be compared to a vessel from Lincoln, which had a pedestal base which Darling suggested may have been used as a tazza (1999, fig 35 no. 309)”. The analysis goes on to add, that the vessels may be tazze and how this is “an attractive interpretation enhanced by signs of localised burning around the rim of one and the rim and body of the other. It would account for the rather shallow form - too shallow for a bowl - and their small diameter”. The image below is taken from the CBA report and is Darling's Fig 35 no. 309 against which the two site finds were compared. Tazze as well as being used as air fresheners are also associated with ritual sites.

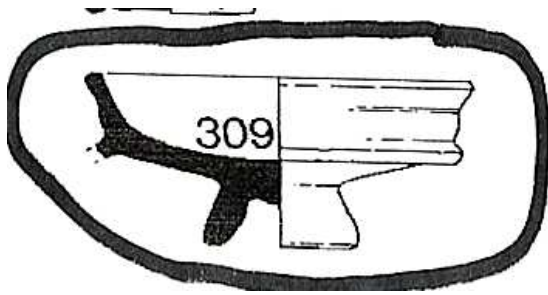


Image Three.

- B. One sherd of the 371 found on the site and described as “GRB ware” (medium grey ware) is identified in appendix four of the Watching Brief report as a “headpot”. The identifying feature being a pushed out moulded decoration, probably an “eye and top of the nose”. The report points out that such a vessel is particularly associated with ritual and burial sites.
- C. The potential for one or more hoards of coins to be votive offerings. However, paragraph 6.6 of the report is quick to point out that this interpretation does not carry the same weight that the location and pottery evidence does. In fact it states, “this interpretation is made with the knowledge of the pottery and the structural evidence rather than any intrinsic aspect of the coin assemblage”.
- D. Nine lead fragments that may be remains of “curse tablets”. As the report points out these are often “associated with ritual sites and water”. Whilst curse tablets are a possibility the report acknowledges that none of the nine are folded or rolled, or have any identifiable inscriptions or markings.
- E. The extent of burning across the entire pottery assemblage is considered “unusual”. This is predominantly owing to the burning being evident on a lot of the finer wares. The report concludes that this fact does make the site unique when considered against other comparison sites; although it does not commit to a definitive

explanation. Two fragments not highlighted in the vessel table below, were considered to be burnt roundels of OBB fabric similar to the supposed tazze referred to at item 'A' above, reinforcing the possibility of the site at Bawtry being associated with ritual.

The above factors all serve to explain the Watching Brief's expressed belief about the site being the remains of a possible Roman shrine or temple. However, it is worth noting that this falls short of a definitive conclusion. The report's summary only goes as far as stating that the columns indicating a structure along with associated finds "may have had a religious function." Even with the array of expert analysis engaged in the compilation of this report the conclusions amount to what might best be described as an informed hypothesis about what was discovered. Frustratingly, this remains the position today. The report summary was, however, bold enough to prompt consideration of this site having a status of national importance, but to date the position arrived at in 2006 remains undeveloped.

L ref 1 in section 5 repeats the conclusion that the structure is "possibly a shrine" and, as such, a single stand alone feature with no other structures located within the area of archaeological activity. This latter conclusion was based on a magnetometry survey, conducted at the time. The observation is made in L ref 1 that "structural features are generally more likely to be identifiable by resistance surveys". The 2019 document concludes this point with the statement, "it may be worth carrying out a small scale, detailed resistance survey to verify this". At the time of writing this research has not discovered any record of such a follow up survey taking place.

### **Roman Pottery from the Site in a Broader Context**

#### Volume

653 sherds dating between the 3rd and 4th century CE were collected from Area 1,

context 1001, as labelled in L ref 2. The assemblage recovered suggested civilian rather than military origins; going further to say that the “Bawtry ceramics (were) comparable to assemblages from villas and small towns”.

R S Leary described, in appendix 4 of L ref 2, the quantity of pottery found in one feature as “remarkable”, along with the range of material. The table below presents the range of finds identified in the pottery analysis indicating the quantities ascertained by a minimum vessel count.

Vessel Type	Min Vessels
Bowl	32
Bowl/dish	2
Bowl?	1
Beaker	12
Beaker/Jar	1
Dish	2
Flagon	1
Flagon?	1
Facepot	1
Flask	1
Medium-mouthed jar	30
Jar/Flagon	1
Jar/narrow-mouthed jar	1
Jar/wide-mouthed jar	No number given.
Lid	1
Lid/Bowl	1
Lid/bowl/tazza	2

Mortarium	4
Narrow-mouthed jar	4
Wide-Mouthed jar	4

The result is a total of 21 vessel types and around 102 vessels.

The vessels highlighted green are those the report specifically referenced as potentially associated with ritual.

The pottery analysis is definitive in its general description of the finds relative to the site and the fact that all artefacts were recovered from a single context, stating, "the quantity of sherds is, of itself remarkable and unusual for the rural sites in the region where small groups of pottery are often recovered" Along with the range of material it concludes "this is not an ordinary rural, domestic site".

The report expresses the view that the "fine ware" selection "is large for rural sites in the region", noting a group of table ware sherds made from "quartz-tempered buff ware", finer than the normal South Yorkshire fabrics and from an unknown origin.

Although the pottery finds are predominantly from South Yorkshire kilns there are significant finds of Dales and Nene Valley ware, with finds from, Mancetter-Hartshill in north Warwickshire, Swanpool in Lincolnshire, and finds from Oxfordshire, with a small amount of Dorset black-burnished ware; described as "type one". In highlighting the wide range of wares located on the site the report also made comparisons with other local sites presenting interesting differences; further illuminating the uniqueness of the Bawtry site. In particular the report referenced Nene Valley colour coated wares which were described as a "large group" on the Bawtry site and considered "unusual for rural sites in the region". The report table accompanying the narrative on quantities of wares displayed the following in relation to

Nene ware on the site.

Description	Vessel Count	Weight	% rel count	% rel weight
Lower Nene Valley mortarium (Probably).	1	103.5g	0.2%	0.7%
Nene Valley colour coated ware.	34	738g	5.2%	4.8%
Worn Nene Valley colour coated ware or parchment ware.	2	54.6g	0.3%	0.4%
<b>All the items collectively.</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>896.1g</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>

In comparison other important sites locally accounted for the following percentage of items of Nene Valley ware; explaining why the Bawtry shrine /temple site was considered an outlier.

Location	% of Nene Valley Ware
Dunston's Clump	0%
Holme Hall	1%
Scrooby Top	1%
Sturton-le-Steeple	3%
<b>Locations combined</b>	<b>5%</b>

The issues to be grappled with here are why was this range of high status Roman pottery evident in the quantities found? How did it get here? And what does it tell us about the site?

Did this wide range of pottery at Bawtry, some of which was high quality from near and far, arrive at this site because travellers deposited or lost it on route to elsewhere? Or is its presence driven by an agenda related to the site? Are the deposits a sign that local inhabitants were responsible, or is it an echo left by a transient population? At this moment these are questions we can only speculate as to the answers. Even if the identity of the structure found on the site

was more certain, it is likely that these questions would remain. What we can say for sure is that for at least a century during the Roman period this location had significant human activity associated with it.

### Dating

The analysis of the pottery leads very firmly to a dating period for the site, which falls between mid 3rd century CE and the mid 4th century CE. The absence of vessels such as “cupped rim jars” along with the amounts of Dales ware point to a period late in the 3rd century when human activity on the site emerged; perhaps aligned to the upgrading of the Roman road RR28a? A small amount of gritty grey ware linked with Swanpool Type H - double lid-seated jars is considered by the analysis to be a sign that the site “was still receiving ceramics in mid 4th century”. Image four presents a small fragment of this type found at a dig in central Doncaster in 1970. The Watching Brief report concluded that the absence of “Crambeck ware”, most common in the late 4th century CE points to the likelihood of human activity at the site having ceased by then. The analysis report, with some degree of precision, states “The absence of any East Yorkshire pottery.....points to a date not long after the mid 4th century and before these wares became more common. Therefore a date in the first half of the 4th century probably towards AD340 is likely”.

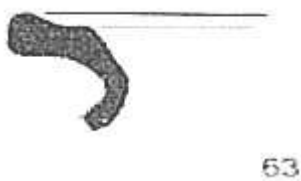


Image four. Small rim of double lid-seat jar, as identified by Webster and Booth 1947. Example from the Doncaster DS Children's Library Trench 1970. (L ref 5).

### Forms

“Bowls/dishes and beakers were unusually prolific”- 38 and 13 respectively in the minimum vessel assessment, see the table above. All found along with flagons, flasks, jars, tazze etc. An eclectic mix of domestic

pottery but not in an ordinary, rural domestic setting, as far as we are able to say This observation is supported by the following:

1. That sherd average weight is above the average for the region.
2. That all sherds are relatively well preserved.
3. That the assemblage is well abraded and therefore not freshly deposited.
4. That the wide range of pottery wares and forms in this setting raises questions about whether this is an indication of active trade or people coming to the site for a specific purpose; or a combination of both?

The report leaves this topic explaining the need for further analysis via comparison with data from “normal domestic sites” and those “found at ritual sites”.

### **Coins**

One coin was found in the vicinity of one of the in situ columns, having been struck in the mid 2nd century. The remaining 70 coins were all discovered from a long strip of ground and scattered within an area 30 metres in length and approx 10 metres wide on the eastern edge of the patch of ground where the in situ columns were found. The report acknowledges that this group might be a single hoard, notwithstanding that the composition of coins is not consistent with this interpretation. It does not rule out the possibility that the coins make up more than one hoard scattered by the effects of ploughing.

### Dating

As with the pottery the report acknowledges that the “group neatly spans a period from the mid 3rd century CE to the 340's”.

### Condition

Regarding the single find, a “Sestertii”, which analysis indicates is of a type often present in mid 3rd century hoards. Concluding that owing to its minimum wear it is unlikely to have been out of circulation

much after 200 AD. Most of the coins recovered are reported as “severely corroded” and a mixture of “officially struck and irregular issue”. Typical for Romano-British sites.

### Conclusions

As mentioned previously the coins could be votive offerings rather than wealth deposited for safekeeping. This however, is allied to the analysis applied to the pottery finds as opposed to any specific observations applied to the coin finds.

### Lead Finds

Nine pieces of flat lead fragments were recovered from the site. There is no dating analysis with these finds. However, the potential link with the practice of leaving “curse tablets” made of this material makes them worthy of mention. Curse tablets are small lead or pewter scrolls inscribed with a prayer requesting intervention from whichever deity is being honoured.

The report notes that the lead fragments are very small and show no signs of having been rolled as would be usual and none had any indication of a prayer inscription.

### Other finds

The report records other finds such as iron nail fragments and medieval pottery.

### Summing up on the 2006 Watching Brief.

The record above is a summary of the 2006 report. Whilst understandably falling shy of being definitive in its conclusions there is no doubt that this site, on its own, places Roman period human activity within the 1.7km zone designated by this project.

Alone it does not place a settlement within the modern town but, does it contribute towards resolving the question of whether a settlement existed, when taken out of isolation and placed alongside other evidence?

There is obviously the presence of the

Fortlet close by across the river in the east. Whilst noted here, that will be covered in its own right in stage four. For now what can we learn when we place the shrine/temple in a landscape busy with the other smaller contributors explored in stages one and two of this project? The remainder of this stage report will focus upon this question.

### **Presenting the wider picture**

As stated at the beginning of this report the shrine/temple site is most significant when considered alongside its contemporary landscape. This statement does not diminish the site's individual potential. A complete understanding of it would enhance our local knowledge of the period, and perhaps the potential to advance the national understanding of ritual sites.

Image five presents human activity in the Roman period reported in the Humberhead Levels An Archaeological Survey 1997. The 5 red markers represent 8 plots, indicated as S1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 where a total of 101 sherds of domestic pottery was recovered; all contemporary with the dating attributed to the putative shrine/temple structure. All these plots come from a landscape identified from aerial surveying marked with field systems, ditches and enclosures. Pages 9-10 and pages 26-29 in this project's desktop stage two, part two report, December 2024 contain more detail. Note that plots S6-9 are attributed the same grid reference; the blue circle denotes the 100 metre perimeter afforded to six figure grid references. A table with the full list of Roman artefacts found at this location is available on pages 27 and 28 of the stage two part two report.



Image five. The green marker indicates the location of the shrine/temple.

Image six presents other known sites within the same landscape. The Fortlet, yellow circle, which will be reported on in stage four. Shoreline timbers on the west bank of the Idle in close proximity to the shrine/temple site, yellow rectangle. These were identified via fieldwalking in 2021 and reported on in the stage two, part two report on pages 14-16. There is no evidence that they are Roman and could of course be earlier or later; but their proximity to the shrine/temple site means they are difficult to ignore. The route of RR28a, red line, first identified in 1984 and reported on in the stage one report; along with the wooden bridge timbers discovered in 1997 by Van de North et al, see pages 46- 47 stage two, part one, with more detail in the BHG 2023 paper Defining the Future of Roman Bawtry, see the BHG website.



Image six adds the fortlet, river timbers and RR28a

Image seven expands the area slightly and reveals the position of 8 Roman coins discovered in 1840 during the construction of the stone bridge on Gainsborough road, red marker 'GB' and covered in detail on page 26 of the stage two, part one report. The Bridge Lane excavation, red marker 'BL' conducted in 2012, remains the site within Bawtry's built up area revealing the most Roman period pottery; see pages 42-43 of the stage two, part one report. Image seven also highlights the postcode area of Bawtry central, redmarker DN106HP, turquoise circle. The significance of this location emerged during the community garden search phase of the project; reported in full on pages 44-47 of the stage two, part one report. The narrative there presents an eyewitness account from a Bawtry resident who found what he believes were Roman tesserae whilst laying the foundations for a greenhouse. Several years later he reported seeing a Roman mosaic floor, in situ, at another location very close to his greenhouse. This floor matched the blue and white coloured tesserae pieces now under the greenhouse. With this local evidence in mind perhaps we should remind ourselves of the Watching Brief's statement that, "the quality of the pottery assemblages at the shrine/temple site is comparable to those that usually relate to villas". Is it fair to claim that our garden search discovery

adds an additional highlight on the list formulated by Bird regarding usual features in and around ritual sites and referred to on pages 4 and 5 above? Resulting with an added highlight now reading.

- In towns, at town gates and at prominent sites near towns;
- by roads;
- at boundaries;
- on hilltops or prominent locations, including hillforts;
- at or near earlier monuments such as barrows;
- by water, especially springs;
- associated with trees and groves;
- at or near villas."

Does this small additional highlight strengthen the hypothesis that the 2006 structure is related to ritual activity and therefore a shrine or maybe a temple?

The marker M5071 is taken from the Nottinghamshire HER reference of the same number. This site is briefly mentioned on page 10 of stage two part two. The record, labelling it as the location of a "possible" Roman settlement, see L ref 6. The site is something of an outlier and is situated outside the eastern edge of the 1.7km zone.



Image seven adds sites related to Gainsborough road, Bridge Lane, DN10 6HP and Notts HER M5071.

These images present an array of individual evidence relating to contemporary 3rd and 4th century Roman domestic and agricultural activity on what is now the eastern boundary of the modern town. To be certain of making any definitive claim that there was an organised settlement

**Adjudication comment. "Very persuasive".**

during the Roman period would probably benefit from additional exploration. However, it is difficult not to view what is presented as compelling and that it points to concerted human activity during the Roman period.

In addition, seeking to establish greater clarity the potential importance of the river during this period would surely be a worthwhile endeavour in its own right; along with an objective to establish firm conclusions about how settlers organised themselves and interacted at this location 1700 years ago.

If we remove the two outliers S1 and M5071 from image seven to produce image eight below, a sense of the intensity of Roman activity on modern Bawtry's eastern border, in and around the trajectory of RR28a and flow of the river Idle becomes clear.



Image eight zooms in on the collective of Roman period references on the immediate eastern boundary of Bawtry.

It is worth revisiting the statement made in the 2006 Watching Brief at paragraph 6.8, which stated, “there is a total absence of evidence for any Roman presence, military or civilian, on the current site of Bawtry, yet the results of the watching brief would confirm a nearby settlement”. This statement based on the relatively unintrusive review of the site is far more bold in its conclusions about a settlement unearthed by the ‘scrape’. The use of the word “confirm” (our underlined emphasis)

being far stronger than the word “possible” used to make a conclusion about the structure with the in situ pillars. The addition presented in these pages regarding the extent of Roman period activity makes the 2006 statement about the potential for a thriving community in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE more compelling.

Both parts of this project's stage two report express the view that the eastern border of the modern town may not have been recognised to the extent that it should have been in the recent past; when subjected to archaeological review. Image nine below presents an area measuring 0.782 sq km situated well within the 1.7km central perimeter set for this project. Should this area be considered as the town's number one hotspot for any intrusive exploration aiming to bring further clarity to Bawtry's Roman past?



Image nine

### **Stage Three Observations.**

**Observation One** - Any pronouncement that the structure discovered by the Environment Agency activity in 2006 is a shrine or temple seems premature, given the lack of any robust conclusion being made then. The report, which remains the only reference to the site's potential, is now

19 years old.

**Observation Two** - The observation made at number one based on the work conducted by this project should surely reinforce a case for building on the 2006 hypothesis for not only the local heritage narrative but also the regional and national understanding of the period.

**Observation Three** - This report clearly builds upon the findings of stage two part two regarding the importance of the river Idle and its potentially historical role in the development of a settlement at Bawtry. The evidence collated within this report certainly prompts questions regarding the potential for the river's emergence as an economic resource much earlier than previously considered.

### **Stage Three Conclusions.**

**Conclusion One** - The conclusion made on page 37 of the stage two, part two, consolidating the findings of the full stage report, is further enhanced by this report. The presence of a settlement not only within the 1.7km boundary but within the modern built up area in the Roman period is likely.

**Conclusion Two** - At the conclusion of this stage it is becoming evident that the Bawtry Heritage Group needs to consider a strategy for sharing the findings collated within the full range of this project. Ensuring that these endeavours are

1, Communicated to the local conservation office for Doncaster. Supporting the improvement of understanding as to what is required to maximise and preserve the area's heritage and historical archive.

2. Communicated through regional outlets such as the South Yorkshire Archaeological Service to ensure the outcomes of this work is available to be scrutinised for its value in informing future archaeological activity important to local, regional and national studies.

M P Maguire 26/2/25.	
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### Stage Three Research Reference Library Information and Links

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

Library Reference Number	Details
L ref 1	River Idle Washlands SSSI - Water Level Management Plan, revised 2019.
L ref 2	River Idle Washlands - Bawtry, South Yorkshire, Watching Brief Berg et al ASWYAS 2006.
L ref 3	Roman Religious Sites in the Landscape, David Bird (Undated)
L ref 4	The Defences of the Lower City - Excavations at the Park and West Parade 1970-72 - and discussions of other sites excavated up to 1994. Rge Archaeology of Lincoln VII - 2 CBA report 114, 1999.
L ref 5	Doncaster Sites Pottery Report with Figures Oct 2020
L ref 6	Nottinghamshire HER M5071

### Online Source

[https://www.academia.edu/36138649/Wetland\\_Heritage\\_Humberhead\\_Levels\\_Palaeoenvironmental\\_Survey](https://www.academia.edu/36138649/Wetland_Heritage_Humberhead_Levels_Palaeoenvironmental_Survey)