

## THE ROMAN FORT AT SCAFTWORTH, near BAWTRY

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**A**N ancient encampment at Scaftworth was noted by John Chapman in 1774 on his map of Nottinghamshire. By 1813, when Peck wrote<sup>1</sup>, it was no longer to be seen, the banks and ditches having doubtless been levelled as a result of the land being taken into cultivation. During the war the site was rediscovered from the air, and in 1948 trial trenching by one of the present writers produced a small quantity of Roman pottery.<sup>2</sup> The work described in this first report, whilst still of an exploratory character, has thrown further light on the plan of the defences and on the dating of the site.

### THE SITE (Grid Reference SK/658927)

The fort is situated within a bend of the Idle, near to the point where the Roman road from Lincoln to Doncaster crossed the river. The land hereabouts is low lying, only 17 feet above sea-level, and is still frequently subject to floods; but the subsoil of the site itself is sand, showing that an area of relatively drier ground was carefully chosen to accommodate the fort. On the air photograph (see plate) this patch of sandy ground is indicated by the light coloured areas, due to the parching of the crop over poor soil. The exact line of the Roman road is lost between the neighbourhood of the Barrow Hills and Bawtry but it is likely that it passed not far to the south of the site (see map, fig. 1). This point is discussed in a later section.

### THE PLAN OF THE DEFENCES

The air photograph shows that the fort was defended by triple ditches. The innermost of these was found by measured survey to enclose an area of 205 ft. by 185 ft., or a little under an acre. As can be seen from the plan (fig. 2), this area was not precisely rectangular, the main deviation being the alignment of the S.W. side. The widths of the ditches varied between 10 ft. and 15 ft. and the breadth of the whole system

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<sup>1</sup>W. Peck, *A Topographical History of Bawtry and Thorne*.

<sup>2</sup>*J.R.S.*, 43 (1953) p.114.



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*Photo by J. K. St. Joseph*  
THE ROMAN FORT AT SCAFTWORTH FROM THE AIR

from 65 ft. to 75 ft. No measurements of the two outer ditches were taken in the northern part of the site, where they were obliterated in part by modern drains and banks.

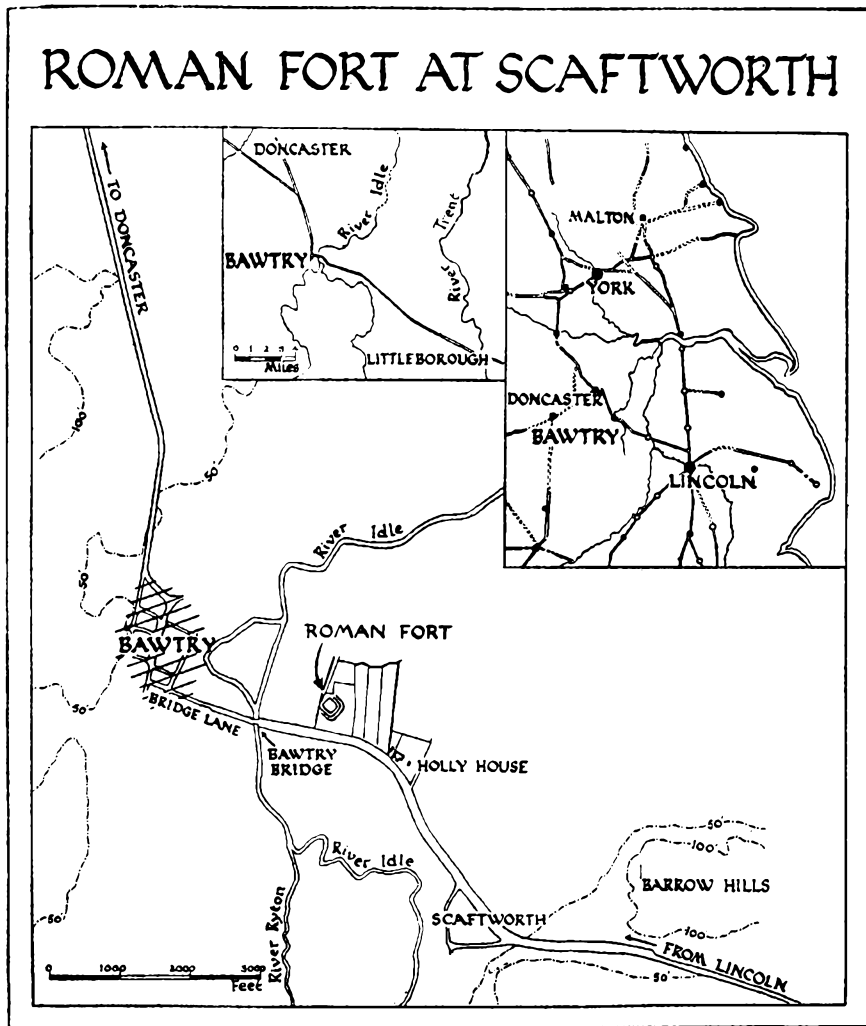


FIG. 1

At the southern corner the line of the defences was continued by two ditches which appear to have cut off part of the sandy area to form an annexe, bounded on the other side by lower

and probably marshy ground. Unfortunately the intersection of these annexe ditches with the outer ditch of the fort could not be examined because of farm work in progress at the time of the excavations.

The air photographs shows a gap in the middle ditch on the S.W. side but, while this also was not examined during the excavation, it is unlikely that it represents an entrance. In this area the line of the outer ditch becomes weak and then ceases, probably because the ditch filling here consists of little but sand and does not contain the vegetable matter and silt which elsewhere produced crop-marks, and the gap in the middle ditch is also probably a similar abnormality.

#### THE INTERIOR

The dark area in the southern part of the interior seen on the air photograph was caused by a layer of dark coloured soil containing much occupation debris. Two of the trenches dug in 1956 cut into this area for a short distance, but its examination was not undertaken because of shortage of time. Contrary to expectations, these cuttings showed that the Roman level at this point had been little disturbed by ploughing. One possible post-hole and a number of hearths were noted.

Between this dark area and the inner ditch the photograph shows a light band about 16 ft. wide which must mark the site of the rampart. Beneath the top soil in this zone was yellow sand with occasional short, dark layers, which may have been the remains of decayed turves from the base of a turf rampart.

#### THE DITCH SECTIONS

The ditches were sectioned in many places and a similar general sequence of deposits in the filling was seen in most cases, though there were considerable individual variations. The diagram (fig. 2) illustrates the stratification of the inner ditch filling on the S.W. side, where a considerable length of the ditch was emptied.

##### (a) *Post-Roman Levels*

Layer 2, immediately below the plough level, seemed fairly recent and was probably put into the ditch when the field was

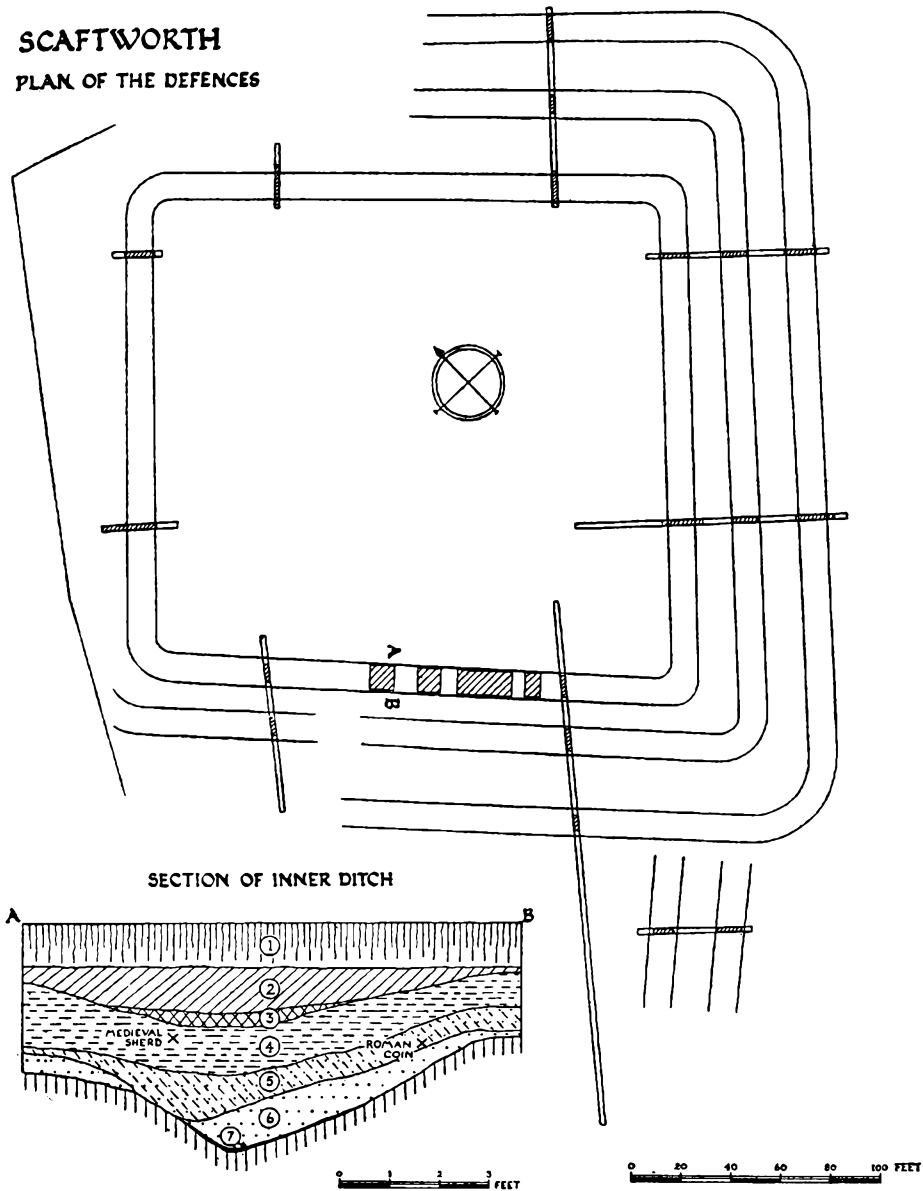


FIG. 2

taken into plough. The thin layer 3, consisting of clayey sand with ferruginous concretions, was a feature of almost all ditch sections and was probably the surface before the field was levelled. It appeared from the nature of this deposit that the ditches must often have contained standing water. Layer 4 represents the filling which occurred after the Roman occupation and before the silting of the ditches ceased and the surfaces became stable at the level of layer 3. Both layer 3 and layer 4 contained very occasional fragments of Roman pottery. Layer 4 in some sections contained bands of peat which probably accumulated in standing water.

(b) *Roman Levels*

Layers 5 and 6 contained fragments of Roman pottery, most of which was on the inside of the ditch and near the level where the coin was found. This pottery must have been deposited at an early stage in the history of the ditch because the initial rate of silting would be rapid in a subsoil of loose sand. On the N.E. side of the fort, layer 6 contained much vegetable matter which again indicates the former presence of standing water. Layer 7 was a thin dark grey clayey silt which contained occasional sherds of Roman pottery and a few scraps of charcoal.

THE SMALL FINDS

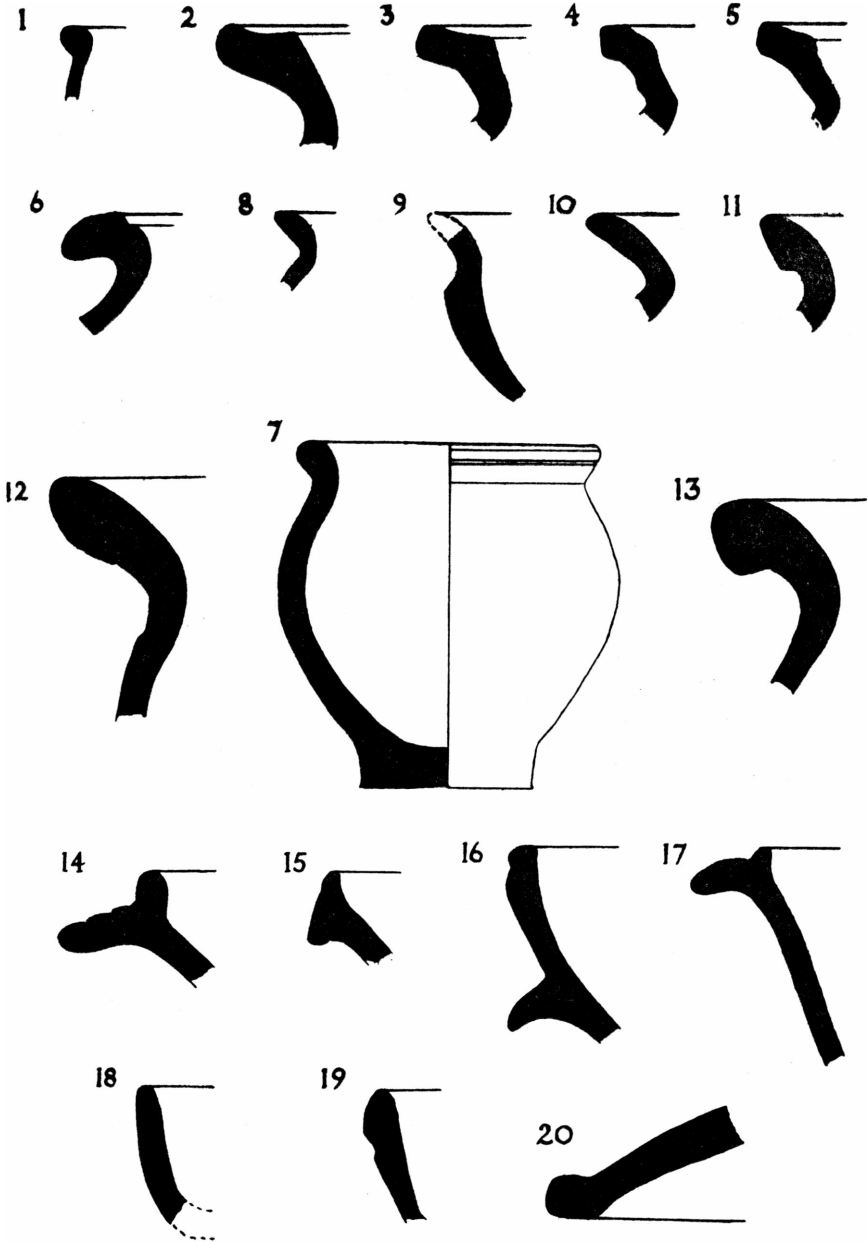
Apart from fragments of querns which will be published elsewhere only one small find of consequence was discovered, the coin mentioned above. Though in extremely poor state this was kindly identified for us by Dr. J. P. C. Kent as a bronze imitation of a silver siliqua of Julian the Apostate (360-363 A.D.). Obv. . . . . NVSPTAC, bust, pearl-diademed and draped to τ. Rev. VOT/X/MVLT/XX within wreath. Below LVC.

Dr. Kent writes that the original from which this was copied was issued at Lyons in the last months of 362. It is likely that the copy was strictly contemporary with the prototype.

THE POTTERY

(a) *Fabric*

Four main types of fabric were found, in the following order of frequency of occurrence :



POTTERY FROM THE ROMAN FORT AT SCAFTWORTH

- (i) Normal grey and buff self-coloured wares, generally rather soft ;
- (ii) Grey and black calcite-gritted ware ;
- (iii) Colour-coated wares, usually cream core with brown colour coating ;
- (iv) Hard, buff, self-coloured ware.

One small scrap of Samian was found.

The frequent occurrence of calcite-gritted ware is a normal feature of late deposits of pottery (compare the Yorkshire signal stations<sup>1</sup> and the Gt. Casterton late 4th century destruction layer<sup>2</sup>). The colour-coated wares do not include any fragments with white trailed slip decoration, which is a feature of the 4th century Swanpool<sup>3</sup> (Lincoln) kilns and did not succeed barbotine decoration until the 4th century at Leicester.<sup>4</sup>

(b) *Description of Fragments Found*

*Flagons*

Several fragments of flagons of colour-coated ware were found in the surface layers and these lend significance to a small fragment of flagon handle found at the base of the inner ditch on the S.E. side of the fort and made of cream ware with brown coating. Colour-coated flagons may be compared from Swanpool (B 1-3)<sup>5</sup> and Gt. Casterton villa, late 4th century destruction layer (nos. 1-3).<sup>6</sup>

*Beaker*

No. 1 Diameter 2¼". Cream core and dark brown coating.

Lower filling of centre ditch, S.W. side of fort.

This small fragment of rim probably belongs to one of the beakers of Castor ware type which were in use from the early third century onwards at Leicester<sup>7</sup> (fig. 32, 29-34), and on Hadrian's Wall.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Arch. J.*, lxxxix, 220 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Corder & Gillam, *The Roman Town and Villa at Gt. Casterton, Rutland*, 1950, p.24 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Webster & Booth, *Ant. J.*, xxvii, 61 ff.

<sup>4</sup>Kenyon, *Excavations at the Jewry Wall Site, Leicester*, p.119.

<sup>5</sup>Webster & Booth, *op. cit.*, p.66.

<sup>6</sup>Corder & Gillam, *op. cit.*, p.28.

<sup>7</sup>Kenyon, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup>Gillam, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th ser., XXXV, p.188, types 49-58.



*Lid-seated Jars*

- No. 2 Diameter 9". Soft ware, much pitted, grey core and dark grey surface; very roughly made; originally calcite-gritted. Layer 5, inner ditch, N.E. side.
- No. 3 Grey core, black surface; rough calcite-gritted ware. Occupation layer, S.E. corner.
- No. 4 Diameter 6". Grey core and surface; rough calcite-gritted ware. Occupation layer, S.E. corner.
- No. 5 Grey core, black surface; hard sandy ware. Layer 4, inner ditch, S.W. side.

Similar lid-seated jars, with characteristic squarish edge to the rim occur in the 4th century deposits at Catterick<sup>1</sup> in both calcite-gritted and hard grey ware. Rims of the same shape, made of calcite-gritted ware, are frequent at the Gringley site, which is of mid-4th century date, and in the Swanpool kiln material (type H), where, on the other hand, the fabric was grey ware.

- No. 6 Diameter 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Grey core, black surface; soft, much pitted ware. Lower filling of "annexe" ditch.

This vessel, which is made of calcite-gritted ware somewhat different from nos. 2-4, is a good example of the "Huntcliff" jar (Signal Station type 26)<sup>2</sup>, which dates from the years 370-400 A.D.

*Small Beakers with Everted Rim*

- No. 7 Diameter 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Grey core and surface, Occupation layer in S. corner.
- No. 8 Diameter 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Grey core and surface: fine texture, smoothed surface. Marshy ground to W. of "annexe".
- No. 9 Body fragment. Grey core and black surface. Uneven pitted ware. Occupation layer in S. corner.

These small jars or beakers represent a class common at Swanpool (c 16-31), and No. 9 can be closely matched in both shape and fabric by an unpublished Swanpool fragment in Lincoln Museum.

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<sup>1</sup>Gillam, *Y.A.J.* XXXIX, p.259, nos. 32-4.

<sup>2</sup>Hull, *op. cit.*, p.242.

It is difficult to find exact parallels elsewhere and though small beakers of this general shape occur throughout the Roman occupation at Leicester (fig. 26, nos. 1-3, 22) none matches the rim profile as well as the Swanpool fragments.

*Medium-sized Jars with Everted Rims*

No. 10 Diameter  $7\frac{1}{4}$ ". Light grey core, grey surface ; hard ware, inside of rim polished to a metallic lustre. Layer 7, inner ditch, S.W. side.

No. 11 Grey core, black surface ; hard ware, inside of rim polished. Layer 6, inner ditch, S.W. side.

*Large, Wide-mouthed Jars*

No. 12 Diameter 14". Grey core, dark grey surface ; soft ware with occasional pits. Layer 6, middle ditch, S.E. side.

No. 13 Diameter 15" approx. Grey core, patchy orange or grey surface. Layer 5, inner ditch, S.W. side.

The shapes of these fragments of storage jars resemble Swanpool D.37-43 and Gt. Casterton late 4th century layer, no. 26. Further north, similar jars were made at Crambeck (type 4) in the earlier phase before 370 A.D.<sup>1</sup> An example from the Wall is dated to 350-400 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

*Mortars*

No. 14 Soft ware, grey and pink core, buff slip. Layer 5, inner ditch, S.E. side.

This type of mortar with reeded flange was widely made and was a variant of the universal north-country 3rd and 4th century hammer-head type. It can be closely matched by examples with cream slip from Swanpool (A. 1-4) and Crambeck (type 6) though in the latter case no slip coat was used. Fourth century specimens from Margidunum<sup>3</sup> and a late 3rd—early 4th century type from the Wall<sup>4</sup> may be compared also.

No. 15 Diameter 8". Buff core and surface ; hard and fine ware. Layer 4, inner ditch, S.W. side.

<sup>1</sup>Corder, *Ant. J.*, xvii, 392 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Gillam, *Arch. Ael.*, 4th ser., xxxv, type 190.

<sup>3</sup>Oswald, *Ant. J.*, xxxiv, p.61, nos. 63-70.

<sup>4</sup>Gillam, *op. cit.*, type 278.

From the shape and fabric it seems certain that this was a small wall-sided platter or mortar made between 370 and 395 A.D. at the Crambeck kilns (type 7) and it much resembles a fragment in the Malton Museum drawn in the first Crambeck report.<sup>1</sup> A second fragment, more damaged, either Crambeck type 7 or 8 has traces of decoration in brown paint in the SSS pattern on the flange.

*Bowls imitating Samian Form 38*

No. 16 Diameter 10". Light grey core, grey surface.  
Occupation layer in south corner of fort.

In addition to the illustrated piece, several fragments of similar bowls were found on the surface and this copy of a Samian form was evidently as usual at Scaftworth as it was in 3rd and 4th century pottery elsewhere. Either the Swanpool (e.g. D.33-36) or Crambeck kilns (type 5a) could have been the source of the present example.

No traces of painted decoration (cp. Swanpool D.36) were seen. Bowls of this type were Hull's signal station type 6.

*Straight-sided Flanged Bowls*

No. 17 Diameter 7". Light reddish brown fabric, unevenly fired. (Probably) Layer 5, inner ditch, N.E. side.

This common type of bowl can again be matched at Swanpool (cp. D.7-12), which is a possible source, because two fragments of similar bowls in colour-coated ware found in the top soil were very like several colour-coated examples in the Swanpool collection (D.1-6).

The type was exceedingly common at Crambeck (type 1) but there was no sign at Scaftworth of the wavy line burnished inside about half the examples found at the Crambeck kilns. The bowls were also common at Great Casterton in the late 4th century deposit (nos. 35-37), in the signal stations (Hull's type 7) and at many other sites<sup>2</sup> in the 4th century.

*Platters*

No. 18 Diameter 6½". Buff core, with brown colour-coating.  
Layer 4, inner ditch, S.E. side.

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<sup>1</sup>Corder, *Roman Pottery at Crambeck, Castle Howard*, pl.V, no. 132.

<sup>2</sup>e.g. Gillam, *op. cit.*, types 228-232.

The fabric of this example resembles that of the colour-coated flagon and beaker fragments already mentioned. Pieces of other colour-coated platters were found and again Swanpool is a possible source (compare E.2-5). Almost identical platters were made at the recently discovered kilns at Stibbington, near Castor (Peterborough Museum, unpublished).

Colour-coated platters are also included in the Gt. Casterton late 4th century deposit (nos. 40, 42) and they date from the 4th century at Leicester (fig. 32, no. 2).

No. 19 Grey core and surface.

#### *Lids*

No. 20 Diameter 6½". Grey core, black surface. Rough ware, much pitted. Occupation layer, south corner.

This lid is made of calcite-gritted ware similar to the lid-seated jars.

#### *The Date of the Site*

From the comments made in the discussion of the pottery it is clear that this is a fourth century site. All the dateable pottery types belong to the 4th century and two examples, the Huntcliff jar (no. 6) and the small wall-sided mortar or platter (no. 15), belong to the late 4th century, probably after 370. The Gringley pottery, which is dated to mid 4th century by the coin evidence, matches the Scaftworth collection in many ways. It is unwise to depend too much on the evidence of the single coin of Julian II found at Scaftworth, but it probably provides a *terminus post quem* and the Scaftworth fort is likely to belong to the second half of the 4th century.

#### *The Significance of the Site*

The most likely assumption on the purpose of the site is that it was a small fort guarding the crossing of the river Idle. The alternative is that it was some kind of defended civil site, such as the Norton Disney villa<sup>1</sup> in Lincolnshire or the Ditchley villa<sup>2</sup> in Oxfordshire, but in neither case do the defensive ditches much resemble those of the far stronger

<sup>1</sup>*Ant. J.*, xvii, 138 ff.

<sup>2</sup>*Oxoniensia*, I, 24 ff.

Scaftworth station, and pending an examination of the interior, when more certain information should be obtained, the site may be classified provisionally as a small fort.

The river Idle was navigable as far as Bawtry, which was once a flourishing small inland port until its trade was diverted to other routes by canal building in the eighteenth century. The Scaftworth fort may have been established because the site was a minor focus of communications by road and water, or else purely as a defensive measure to prevent the river crossing being blocked by hostile forces.

*The Line of the Roman Road*

The road from Lincoln to York which passes through Bawtry is an alternative route to Ermine Street, which runs almost due north from Lincoln and involves a ferry over the Humber. Ermine Street is presumably the older since the Bawtry road forks off it a few miles north of Lincoln instead of following its own line from the first.

The line of the road is well established all the way from Lincoln to York, except in a few places, one of which unfortunately is the part between Scaftworth and Bawtry. The road from Lincoln can be followed as far as the western end of Barrow Hills, but the village of Scaftworth then attracts the modern road southwards. It seems likely that the original road passed to the south of the fort, and crossed the river Idle near the present Bawtry bridge. The land near the river is very low lying and must have been marshy, and the bridge is at the best crossing point. The road then possibly followed Bridge Lane, and turning north near Bawtry Hall, ran up the present county boundary to join the main road to Doncaster, which is certainly Roman.