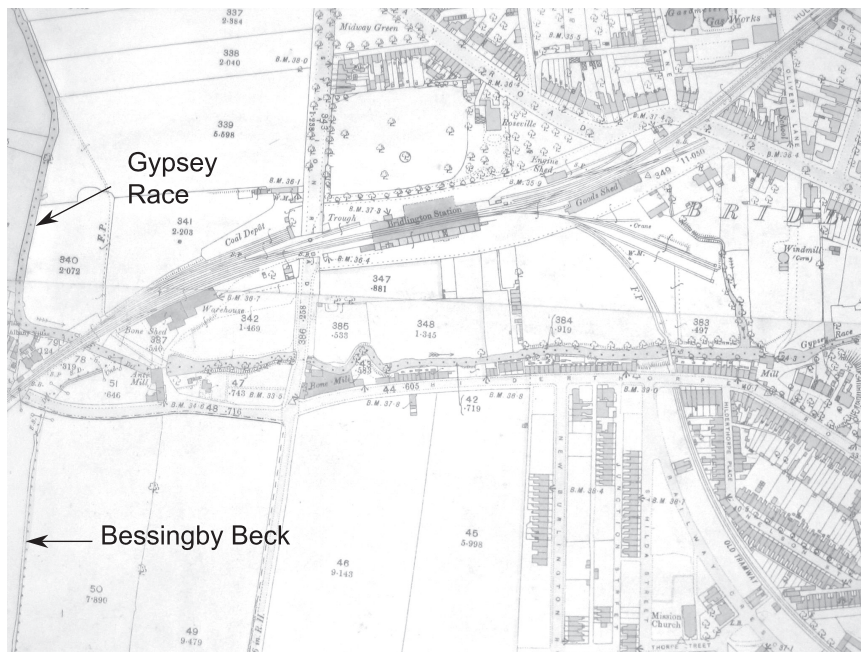


Did the Priory divert the Gypsy Race?

Considering the Priory's water mills in the 1200's, we have a quandary. We know the Priory constructed a "fosse" at this time to feed a water mill. This is assumed by Purvis to be Little Beck as the only obvious fosse (manmade watercourse) in the area. But the mills are described as being "close by the sea" and this doesn't fit with Little Beck. Is there another candidate for the "fosse"?

The surface geology map of the area shows an alluvial plain associated with the Gypsy Race which does not reach the sea at the harbour but runs mainly south past Bessingby towards Auburn. There are narrow strips of alluvium reaching the sea just south of the harbour but sometime in the geological past the Gypsy Race continued south following the route now occupied by Bessingby Beck.



Consider too this 1895 map. Note how the Gypsy Race makes a sharp 90 degree bend and heads straight for the harbour. Note also that the

Bessingby Beck follows the path the Gypsy Race was following. This section of the Bessingby Beck was a substantial stream as the photograph below of the dry stream bed taken from the railway bridge



shows.

Maybe this was the route of the Gypsy race until monastic times. The Bessingby Beck is still present west of Kingsgate south of the built up area as a naturally meandering watercourse with about the same potential capacity as the Gypsy Race.

The land levels where the Gypsy Race diverts from the Bessingby Beck are worth studying. Ground levels are higher along the harbour route. You can judge this by comparing to the railway line levels which over this stretch fall towards Carnaby at 1 in 2677.

Let's consider the gradient of the Gypsy Race as it is today. The natural tendency of a water course to fall less steeply as it flows to the sea is suddenly interrupted as the Gypsy Race takes a dive towards the harbour starting from where the Bessingby Beck once connected. It falls only 5 metres in the 3.2 km up to this point but then falls 10 metres in only 1.2 km to the harbour. Whilst it might be theoretically possible to get this effect with an eroding coastline it wouldn't be to this extent.

Indeed Earles Dyke and the Barmston Drain show no tendency to do this at all. Referring to the 1895 map there are three water mills shown on this short stretch and there is a fourth nearer the harbour which is not surprising given the fall available. The nearest water mill upstream at this date was at Boynton two miles away.

From the Chartulary we know that the Priory constructed a fosse to supply a water mill and they had water mills “hard by the sea shore”. Here are three extracts from the Chartulary.

“Edinell grants that Prior & Convent may bring the water which comes down from Rudestain to Castleburun “through the middle of the lands he has on the west of the toft which Hilda Leueday holds from the Prior & Convent in Bridel[jington], and may make a fosse in the land as wide and deep as they think fit, to receive the water.....”

“Grant & Confirmation by T. de Arches to the Canons that they may have a water-course to their mill, as granted by Edinell his brother through the middle of his lands in Brid[jington], and carry it to the old fosse on the south side of the same vill, as is contained in Edinell’s charter.”

“Grant by William the smith, son of William the smith of Brid[jington], in pure and perpetual alms, ...(a piece of land)...in order that the Canons may make a fosse for bringing water from Ruddestain to Castelburun, and they may fill and repair such fosse when necessary.”

Castleburun was the name given to the Bridlington harbour area which at the time was a separate hamlet.

Comparing the Edinell charter to the map drawn by Purvis based on the Chartulary we can see that Purvis regarded the Little Beck as the fosse constructed by the Priory. Clearly he felt “the water which comes down from Rudstain to Castleburun” was just a description of the Gypsy Race. The T. de Arches charter confirms the fosse was to provide water for a mill. It also states it ends by connecting to an existing fosse. This could be the monastic drain at the Tesco car park area. Could it be that these charters should be read as though the fosse is to bring water from Ruddestain to Castleburun for the first time, that is divert the Gypsy Race from its Bessingby Beck route?

It is difficult to see how a watercourse as insignificant in size as Little Beck could require such detailed charters. The above are just extracts. The original charters refer to the provision of bridges, and the disposal of spoil, and land swops for land taken. Considering also the amount of land given to the Priory at the foundation, which included land from the Lord at Easton, it is likely that the land over which Little Beck runs was already owned by the Priory. Edinell’s full name was Edinell de Aubeni, that is “from Auburn”, which may suggest his lands were further to the south than Little Beck.

Summarising the case for the Gypsy Race diversion we can see that:

- Surface geology shows the Gypsy Race once followed the Bessingby Beck route.
- The Gypsy Race makes an unnatural sharp 90 degree bend, which lines it up with the harbour.
- Bessingby Beck lines up with the Gypsy Race at this bend.
- Land levels at the junction would make Bessingby Beck a more natural route than the harbour route.
- Bessingby Beck is large enough to take the Gypsy Race flows.
- The Gypsy Race does not fall less as it nears the sea as a natural stream would.
- Documents say monastic water mills are “hard by the sea shore” & that a fosse was constructed to feed them.
- The diverted section fall is ideal for water mills and there were 4 in the 1800’s on this stretch.
- Documents refer to taking water “from Rudestain to Castelburun” and this could refer to a Gypsy Race diversion.
- The Little Beck excavation would end at a connection to the monastery drain and not at Castelburun, and Little Beck looks more like a drainage ditch than a mill stream.

So what do you think?

Bro Rick Hudson

Map reproduced from 1895 Ordnance Survey map with the kind permission of the Ordnance Survey. The author also acknowledges the help given by the East Riding County Councils library services in Bridlington