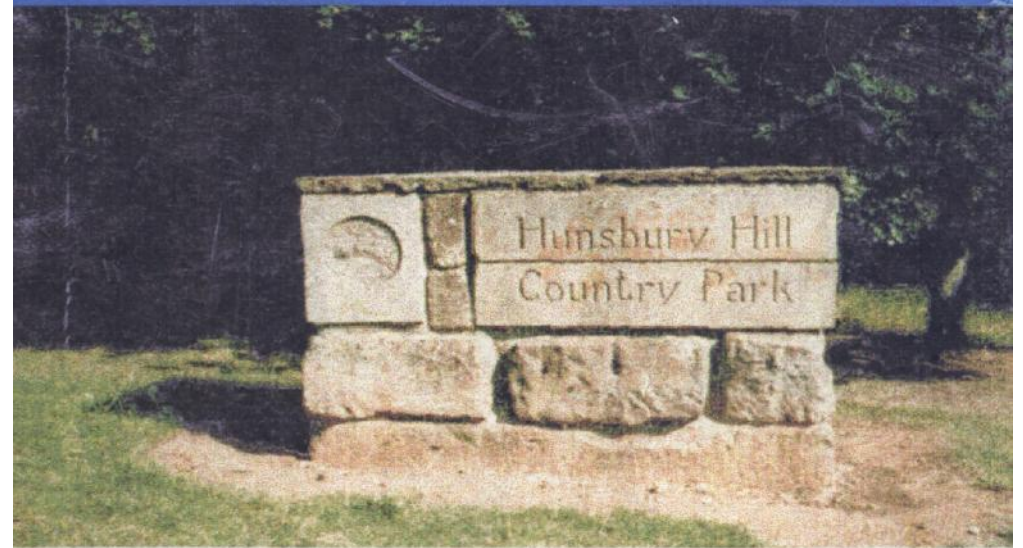




Hunsbury Hill Country Park



Jenna Wood

Mereway Upper School

IN THE BEGINNING....

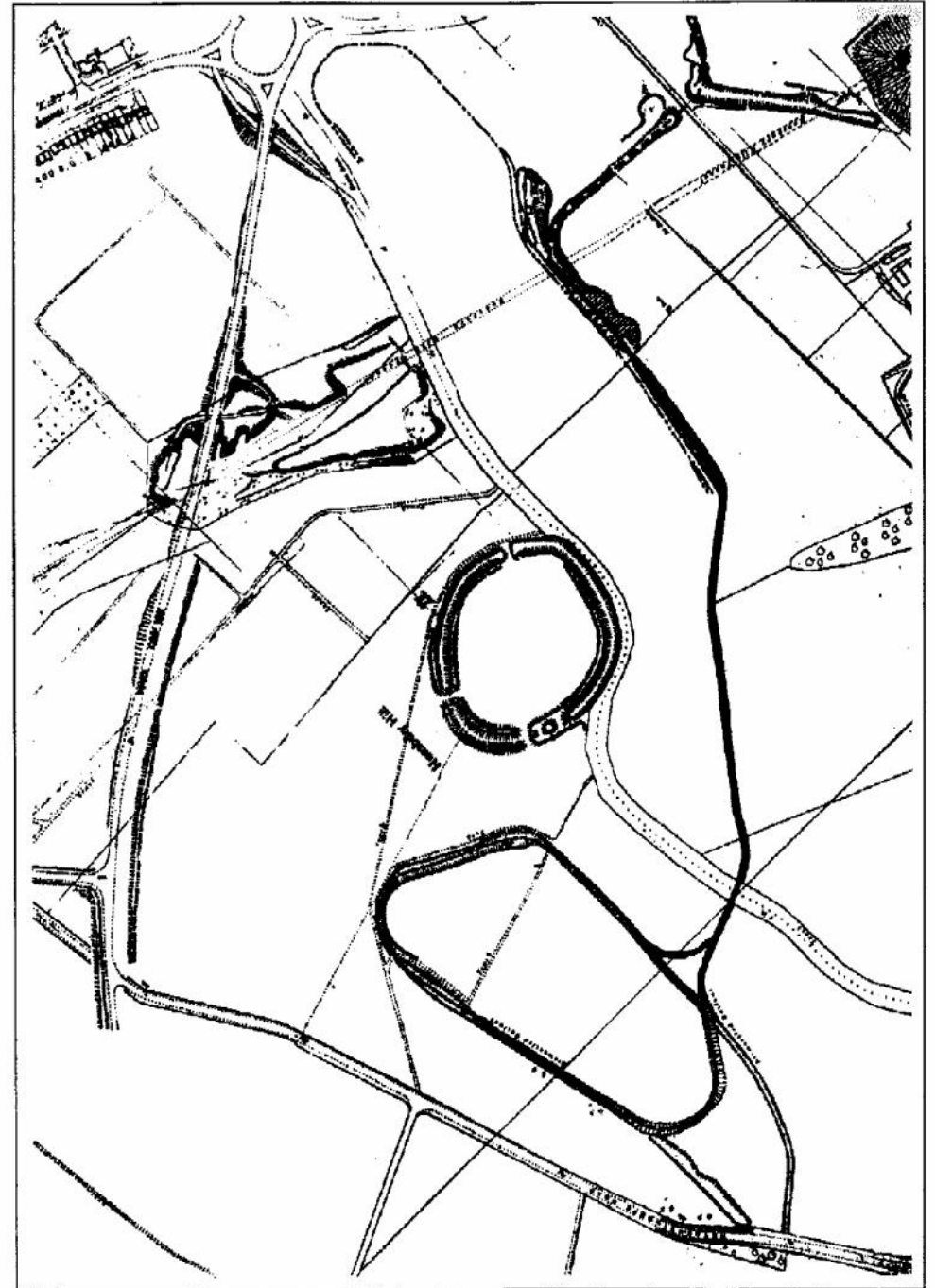
About 150 million year ago, when the earth was in its infancy and dinosaurs lived and played in the original Jurassic Park, an area of land in the northern hemisphere, later to become the island of Great Britain, was forming the bed of a shallow sea.

During its life as a sea, silt, sand and minerals were deposited on the bed, which over the subsequent aeons turned to rock. A rock composed mainly of chamosite (iron silicate), siderite (iron carbonate) and calcite (calcium carbonate), now known to geologists as the Northampton Sand Ironstone Formation. This process was to significantly shape the history of this area millions of year in the future.

As the millennia passed, the sea retreated, the surface of the earth was twisted and folded by geological forces which resulted in the rocks of the ancient sea bed being raised to the surface to form a small hill.

This hill was the only high ground for miles and, therefore, was an ideal place for pre-historic man to build a home that could easily be defended against other tribes and animals.

Thus the history of Hunsbury Hill began



HUNSBLJRY HILL ('DANES') CAMP

Hunsbury Hill Camp is better known to the inhabitants of Northampton and the neighborhood by the name Danes Camp," an entirely incorrect name that has probably been attached to it since the Rev. Dr Morton, Rector of Oxendon, wrote of it in the "Natural History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire", printed in 1712:-

"I consider it a Camp of the Danes because
I see not to whom else it could belong"

Morton wrote at a time when Archaeology as a science was as yet unborn, and the Danes were occasionally the successors in name to anything whose real origin was unknown.

Bury is the termination given to the names of a large number of camps and earthworks that already dotted the country when the Saxons, Angles, etc., conquered it from about 450 A.D onwards. Barrow, Burg, Borough, Bury, Burgh and Brough, are all from the Saxon word "Burh" meaning an earthwork, and so a fortified place.

The fort at Hunsbury Hill Camp was occupied from as early as the 7~ century B.C. until about 20 B.C, when it was abandoned or perhaps overrun by other tribes. This was also about the time the Roman influence began to be felt in this neighborhood.

The camp is situated towards the end of the high ground on the south side of the Nene valley, and commands extensive views on the north, west, south-west, and north-east. On its south-western and southern sides, is an ancient trackway approximately the same age as the camp if not older, now known as Green Lane.

The shape of the camp, which stands 113m above sea level, can be seen from the map to be oval in plan, with a length of 168m and breadth of 125m.

Hunsbury Hill Camp was fortified by a ditch immediately surrounding it, measuring from 15m to 20m in width from edge to edge, with ramparts of earth on both sides of the ditch. A second ditch on the south-west of the camp, 80m from the inner ditch, measured 9m in width at the top, and was more v-shaped; it was 3.5m to the bottom.

It has at the present time three entrances, two of which are probably original, those on the west and east, the third one on the north, which overlooks the town of Northampton, is considered to be more or less recent, and was probably made as an entrance for agricultural purposes.

Between 1882 and 1885 the Hunsbury Hill Iron Ore Co. began to excavate the interior of the camp. An unexpected wealth of finds were discovered making it one of the richest sites of its kind in England.

Over most of the camp workmen found in the soil and rubble, above the ironstone, a number of pits 2m in depth, and varying from 2m to 3m in diameter. These pits were filled with black earth and mould, a few of them were walled round with flattish limestone. These pits were evidently for the storage of grain or the reception of refuse of various kinds. It has been computed that there were more than 300 pits.

Most of the remains found in the camp, with the exception of a small collection in the British Museum, are now in the Northampton Museum. The relics from Hunsbury belong, without any reasonable doubt, to the Prehistoric Iron Age.

The following description of the inhabitants may be quoted from "Ancient Britain and the Invasion by Julius Caesar." By H. Rice Holmes

"The Townspeople were well armed, they kept horses and chariots, wore their own cloth, sawed their own timber, made their own earth ware, and grew their own corn; and heaps of slag showed that they had smelted the ore which lay, henceforward, undisturbed for nineteen hundred years."

LIFE IN HUNSBURY HILL CAMP

Hunsbury Hill Camp was the fortified residence of a Celtic king or nobleman and his court. It prospered between the third and first century B.C though the site was first occupied several centuries earlier. Its wealth was apparently based on agriculture, iron production and trade.

The Celtic kings of Hunsbury would have controlled and taken tribute from a wide area of tribal land in central Northamptonshire. It is perhaps no coincidence that as farms and rural settlements were becoming much more numerous throughout the area, Hunsbury was growing wealthy.

LIFE IN A NOBLE HOUSHOLD

The houses of the Celts were circular wooden buildings about 6-12m in diameter.

It is not known how many houses were at Hunsbury because the evidence was destroyed by nineteenth century ironstone quarrying.

One of these houses would have been the residence of the king or nobleman of Hunsbury

Food consisted of a small amount of bread and meat, usually beef or pork, cooked in the cauldron or roasted on a spit. Fish was sometimes eaten, usually baked.

The Celts were well known for enjoying their drink. Large quantities of beer and mead were consumed as well as some wine and milk.

RITUAL AND BURIAL

The death of a noble Celtic warrior was sometimes followed by elaborate burial along with his war chariot, weapons, horse-trappings and food. A burial of this sort seems to have taken place at Hunsbury, for a 19th century observer wrote.

“Inside the camp near the centre were found the skeletons of a man and a horse interred together, and with them was the well made bridal bit and other pieces of metal, and a 5ft length of the tyre of a wheel.”

The Celts had a strong belief that the severed human head possessed magical powers. Heads were preserved as trophies and to ward off evil spirits. A few human skulls have been found at Hunsbury, some with holes drilled through them.

A short distance to the north of the Hunsbury site lay a square double ditch enclosure. This was perhaps a Celtic sanctuary a sacred place for ceremony and ritual.

IRON

Iron was being produced at sites in Northamptonshire using local ore from as early as the seventh century B.C. Production gradually increased until by the second century it was a major industry supplying much of the iron needed by the Celts of southern England. Some may even have been sent abroad.

There is evidence from Hunsbury itself for the production of iron. Slag was found as well as a range of blacksmiths tools. Some of the iron from the site appears to be scrap metal and other objects may represent stock-in-trade.

CRAFTSMEN

A number of specialist craftsmen, metalworkers, potter and carpenters lived at Hunsbury and some of their tools and products have been found. The metalworker is represented by chisels, hammers and a file. A crucible containing bronze has been found together with a stone mould. There is in addition ample evidence for blacksmithing.

FARMING

Much of the land surrounding Hunsbury is likely to have been cleared for cultivation and pasture though it is difficult to say how much of it was being farmed.

Iron tips from plough shares have been discovered at the site and the bones of cattle, sheep and pigs.

When Hunsbury was quarried in the 1880's many large deep pits filled with dark earth were seen across the interior of the site. Some of these were almost certainly dug for grain storage and some charred grains of corn have actually survived.

The capacity of these pits is so considerable that it may be possible that corn was brought here.

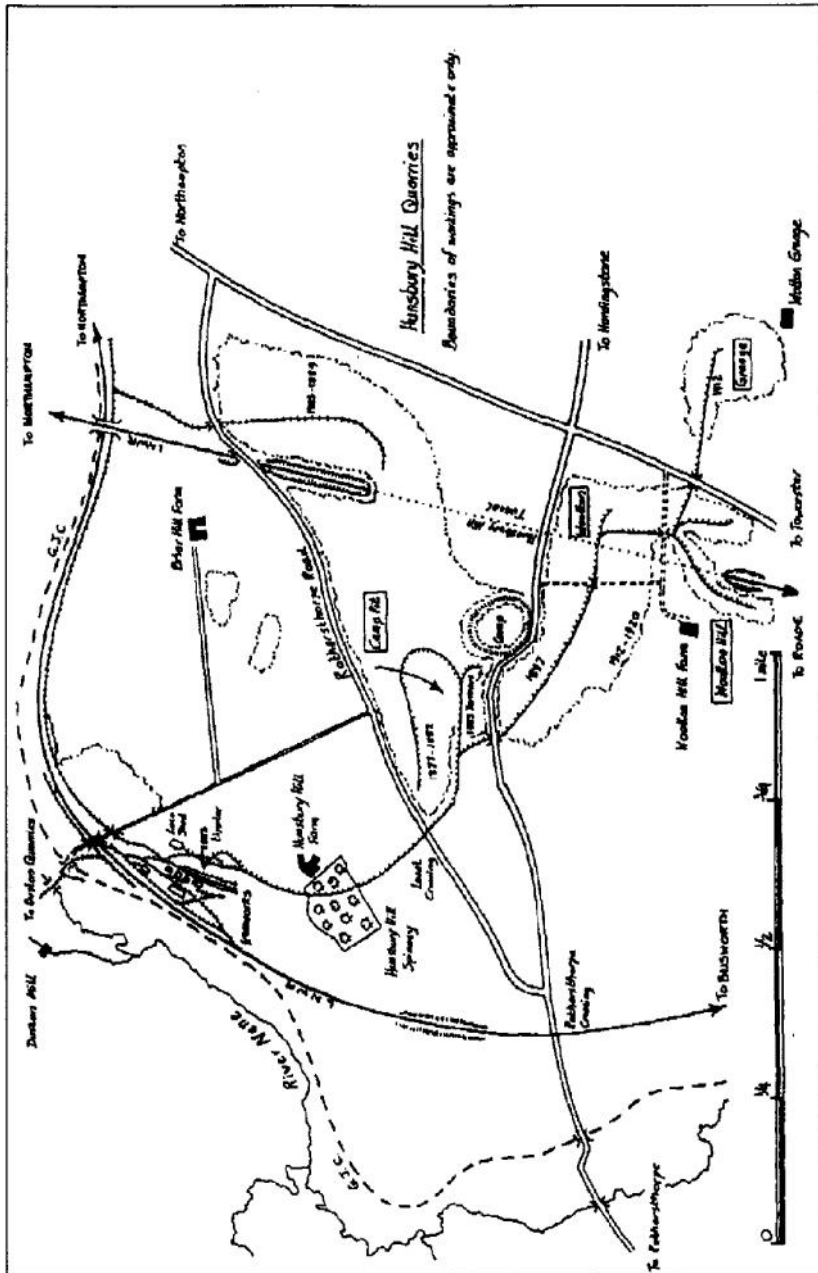
POTTERY

Most of the pottery from Hunsbury dates from the 3rd to the 1st century B.C., it is hand made, without a wheel, and includes a variety of forms, cups, bowls, cooking pots and storage jars. The most ornate and beautiful products of the Hunsbury potters were the carefully decorated bowls made in the 1st century B.C.

SPINNING AND WEAVING

The traditional crafts of spinning and weaving woolen cloth were carried out at Hunsbury. The fleece was removed from sheep with iron shears or a knife before being cleaned and combed. Next it was spun into yarn using a simple hand held spindle. After dyeing, the yarn was ready for weaving, woolen cloth was produced, probably in bright colors, for making into clothes and blankets.

Some of the chisels may have belonged to a carpenter. Woodwork was a well developed craft among the Celts and at Hunsbury large shaped timbers would have been required for buildings, the houses and the early defenses.



HUNSBURY HILL QUARRIES

The presence of outcrops of iron ore at Hunsbury Hill were rediscovered about 1857 or possibly earlier, but it was not until 1873 that they were developed in association with the building of Hunsbury Ironworks.

Initially the furnaces were fed with ore from their immediate vicinity, however, as most of the ore was concentrated on the upper slopes of the

hill, it soon became necessary to develop these deposits, and small workings south east of Rothersthorpe Road were opened in the late 1870s, and a railway line of 3ft. 8in. (1.12m) gauge was laid between them and the furnaces.

For most of its productive life the Hunsbury Ironworks was owned by the Phipps family, who also owned the well-known Northampton brewery. Their control commenced in August 1877, one year after the formation of the Hunsbury Hill Coal and Iron Company Limited.

Ironstone working was actively pursued on the Hunsbury Hill Farm site, up to the edge of Briar Hill Farm, but not beyond.

About 1883 Pickering Phipps III, the company chairman, purchased Hunsbury Hill Farm, and quarrying operations were extended to the area around the ancient earthworks of 'Danes Camp', which was scheduled as an Ancient Monument under an 1882 Act.

There were numerous archaeological finds in the surrounding area, and, Pickering Phipps took a sympathetic interest and rewarded all workmen making finds, so that archaeologists benefited (at that time) by the most thorough excavation accorded to a site of this kind.

During the period of excavation of the ironstone, 1882-87, over three hundred articles were discovered, including iron weapons, implements and remains of slag that indicated the smelting of iron in bygone centuries. At 'Danes Camp' the stone was at first worked as outcrop, but then increasingly underground, and when the pit was approaching exhaustion a further and much larger area was acquired, this covered 710 acres and extended eastwards from the Grand Union Canal, bounded by 'Green Lane' (Mereway) on the north, and the stream to the south, as far as the

Northampton-Stony Stratford road, but excluding Wootton Hall and grounds in the north east corner.

A tramway (railway) left the works on an embankment climbing up the hillside to Hunsbury Hill spinney, where it curved fairly sharply towards Rothersthorpe Road, which was crossed by a level-crossing.

Between here and Green Lane, to the south, was Danes Camp', the surrounding area was known as 'the Old Mere,' while Green Lane was called 'Mere Way'.

A branch line crossed 'Mere Way' and followed the ironstone bed beneath rising ground, over the LNWR Northampton-Road line tunnel, and then beneath the Towcester road, via a low tunnel, to the most distant workings near Wootton Grange.

Sam Warwick, who started work as a 'horse boy' at Hunsbury Hill about 1904 at the age of fifteen, recalled, in a Northampton Ironstone Railway Trust Newsletter in February 1977, the hard work of those days, which was from 6.00am to 5.00pm.

There were no hollidays, no work (and no pay) on wet days, no pensions, no sick pay, compensation for injury sometimes but not always and the sack or suspension for offences.

His wages were of the order of six shillings (30p) per week when he started, later, when in charge of the calcine bank, he received 24 shillings (£1 .20) per week.

All the quarry work was manual, the overburden was removed by pick and shovel and carried away by the familiar barrow and plank method, and the ironstone was loaded into wagons using long iron forks, the larger pieces being loaded by hand.

When full, the loaded wagons were pulled up the gradient out of the pit by horse in the charge of a 'horse boy', the wagons were then allowed to run in pairs by gravity across Hunsbury Hill to the works, under the charge of a brakesman riding on the 'bumper', the brake being operated by foot. At the furnace end the wagons were weighed and emptied. The empty tubs were hauled back to the pits by horses, these animals were mostly obtained from the brewery when they were too old to haul the heavy drays.

In 1912 three locomotives were obtained to the railway's original 3ft. 8in. (1.12m) gauge, and reduced clearance of 8ft.5in. (2.57m) from rail level, to pass the small bore of the tunnel under the Towcester road.

Operation of the railway was then much simpler, the locomotive took empty wagons to the working face and returned with a rake already filled, which were emptied at the ironworks.

World War 1 was a time of crisis for Hunsbury ironworks, the furnaces were damped down in October 1915 because of the 'unsatisfactory state of the pig-iron market', though the depletion of iron ore reserves and call up of employees for the armed forces were also suggested as possible reasons. However, under orders from the Ministry of Munitions, the furnaces were relit in June 1917, and former employees were released from the forces.

The end of the war put a vastly different complexion on matters, demand fell off sharply and the plant needed a fair amount of renewal. Pickering Phipps was in favour of continuing, but was overruled by other directors, who preferred to confine the family fortunes to the more profitable concern of brewing.
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The furnaces were blown out on the 28 January 1921, even so, Pickering Phipps intended to reopen the works as soon as trade improved, but he died a short time after the closure.

Richard Thomas and Company Limited acquired the ironworks (which had remained derelict, complete with most of the equipment, locomotives, railways, etc., since 1921) in September 1935. Hopes that the ironworks might be reopened soon dwindled as the months of idleness lengthened, and eventually the works were demolished.

The company decided to concentrate their attentions on the Finedon area, for this purpose taking narrow gauge rails, a locomotive and some twenty wagons from Hunsbury Hill. It is not clear whether the whole of the narrow gauge railway was lifted at this period, but it seems likely, as some of it must have been taken up.



A wagon team at the Green Lane crossing in 1900, showing loaded and empty wagons, horses, drivers and brakemen.



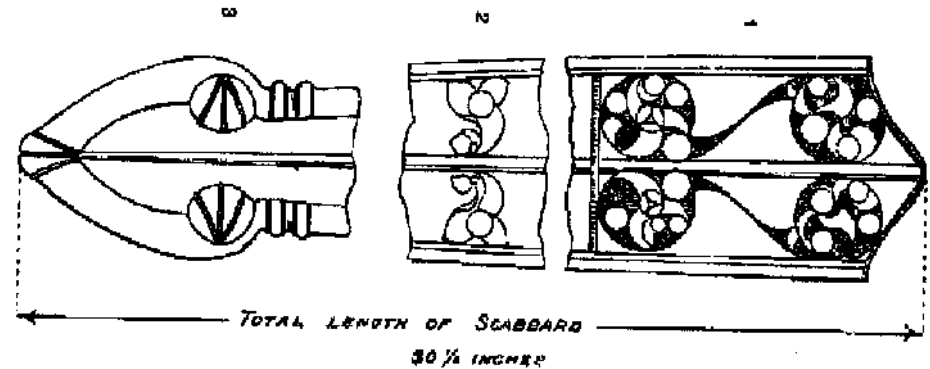
The furthest workings of the quarry were at Wooton Grange, the photograph shows how they appeared in 1966. This area has now been built on.



Northampton, the first of the set of three locomotives supplied new in 1912 to work the main quarry

The closure in 1921, occurred long before the modern interest in industrial railways was born. When the railway enthusiasts came later to pick up the history of this bygone line the former workers of the pit had disappeared into the growing population of nearby Northampton. These two factors, however, had a happy outcome when the Rushden Railway Society had the idea of reviving a former ironstone line as part of the railway preservation movement. The early demise of the ironworks and its associated railway meant that there had been no restoration of the route to agriculture, and the Northampton Development Corporation were able and willing to give financial support to the scheme.

As a result, while many elements of the early history are imperfectly known, physical details of the route of the railway and its appearance are to be seen today... and for many years to come.



Details of Sword Scabbard from Hunsbury.

1. Top or Locket.
2. Embossed Ornament.
3. Chape or Bottom.



THE COUNTRY PARK

THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Northampton was designated for expansion to provide homes for people in housing need in London. A master plan was published in 1968 which showed that the town would house a further 100,000 people of whom 70,000 would be newcomers. In other words, a target population of 230,000 by the 1980's.

The development programmed was undertaken by the Northampton Development Corporation in partnership with the Northampton Borough and County Councils. The new development was to be primarily located on the eastern and southern edges of the town.

The Master plan suggested that new residential and employment areas should be within easy reach of a wide range of recreational facilities and that the many fine natural features should be thought of as part of the general recreational potential.

The Development Corporation developed the Master Plan recreation proposals in two district plans - one for the eastern district and one for the southern district, published in 1973. The southern district was to accommodate about 40,000 people, a proportion of the residents owning their homes, others renting them.

The district was developed in three major residential areas, one of which was called Hunsbury, being built around the slopes of Hunsbury Hill. Hunsbury was to house about 20 000 people and stretch from the new A43 round in an arc to the A508 at Wootton.

The central feature of the Hunsbury area was Hunsbury Hill Park and the elevated wooded circle of 'Danes Camp', an iron age hill fort. Landscaped footpaths radiated from the park into the residential areas that lie alongside, bringing the park within easy walking distance of all the population.

With in this park was a disused mineral railway line and the Development Corporation proposed to retain this disused ironstone railway system creating an opportunity for reinstatement of a rare, narrow gauge track as an element of real interest in the park. It also thought that it may be possible to establish a museum related to the ironstone workings, the railway and Danes Camp.

The Development Corporation proposed to develop the district shopping on the southern margins of the park. The railway line ran very close to the district centre, and was ideally placed to become part of this important community, shopping and recreation group.

THE PARK TODAY

Today the park has its Iron age fort and ironstone railway, but it also has many leisure facilities for the residents of Hunsbury.

One of the facilities the park has is a picnic and barbecue area, where built in barbecues and tables prove to be very popular with families at weekends.



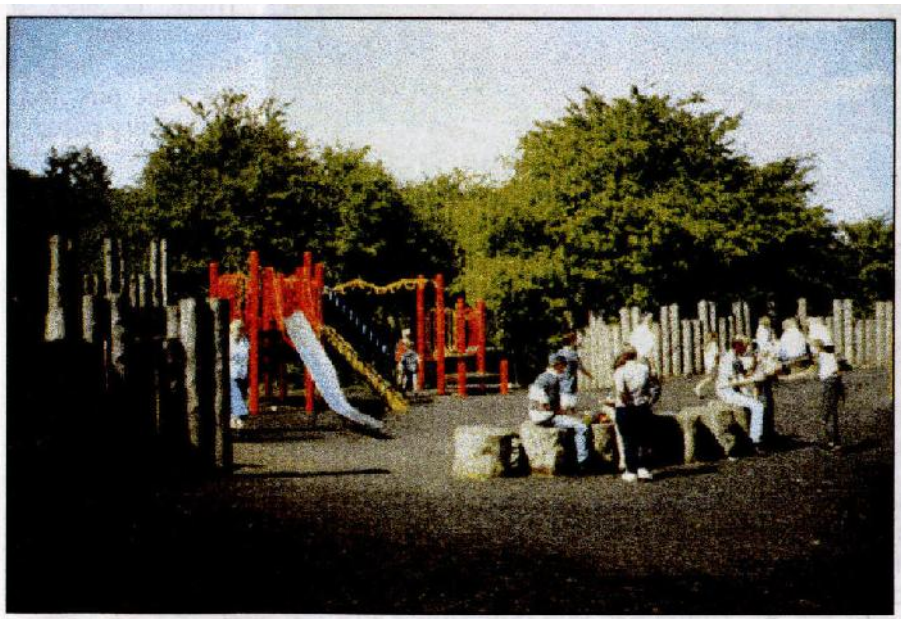
Close to the picnic and barbecue area is a large open space where the more energetic can play rounder's, badminton and cricket, and during the week you will find children playing football.



There are other large open space near the edge of the park which are very popular with children and their parents.

The park is also used by many dog owners as it is within easy walking distance for the local residents, the open spaces providing an area for their dogs to run free.

Hunsbury Hill Country Park has many play areas for children. The first, close to the barbecue area, is quite small and is mainly for the younger children with small swings, slides and other equipment,



The second area, built to resemble a fort, caters more for the older children with climbing frames and long slides.

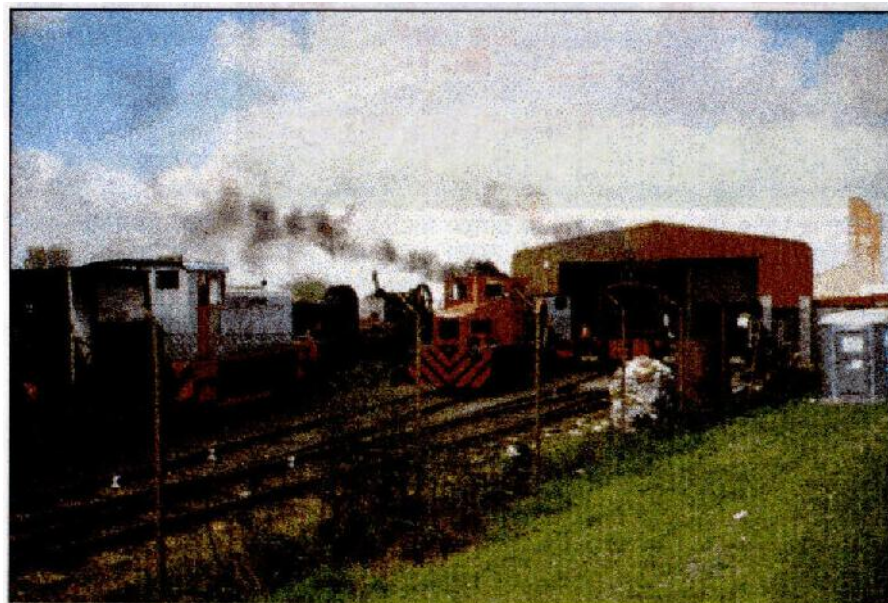
There are many paths which meander all around the park, which, because the park covers a large area, take a while to explore. However, you are unlikely to get lost as most of the paths meet up with one another.

There is also a circular path that takes you around the Iron age fort, this is very popular with cyclists, because of its many small steep banks and long flat areas which are used as cycling tracks.

The park is certainly a main leisure attraction for the residents of Hunsbury, although it attracts many visitors from further a field. They come to see the museum and railway which gives hourly steam train trips around the park. These trips prove very popular at Christmas time when they have a Santa special.

NORTHAMPTON IRONSTONE RAILWAY TRUST

The Northamptonshire Ironstone Railway Trust was formed as a registered company, limited by guarantee and registered as a charity, on 12th November 1974, and really stemmed from Rushden Historical Society. The Trust was established to preserve, restore and operate parts of the railway connected with the Ironstone Industry of Northampton and similarly to preserve and restore items of a static nature including maps, documents, photographs, drawings and other exhibits to cover the Ironstone Industry of Northamptonshire as a permanent public exhibition and museum for the advancement of technical, historical and general education and for the permanent preservation, display and demonstration of steam and other railway locomotives, rolling stock equipment, machinery and relics of historical, operational and general interest and education value.



The Railway compound and Museum

When the trust first moved to Hunsbury the surrounding area was all open fields, there was not a house in sight. The area is now very different, new housing estates have been built and the fields and woods have been developed into the Hunsbury Hill Country Park.

The Trust found that the old cuttings had been abandoned and most of the original narrow gauge track had been lifted. It took the group of railway enthusiasts four or five years to dig out the cuttings and lay some track.

The railway has a fenced compound just inside one of the gates to the park, which encloses a large shed, a yard equipped with several sidings, a number of locomotives and items of rolling stock which together form an outdoor display.

There is also a short platform where passengers can board the train for a trip around the park.

In the beginning the Trust received a lot of help from Northampton Development Corporation who were developing the park as a leisure facility and looked on the railway and museum as part of its plans for Hunsbury Hill.

The Corporations help came partly as cash and partly labor. Then with this help the track was laid in stages, the loop line being built in the late 1970s/early 1980s, then 14 years ago, an extension line was added. The large shed was also put up at about the time the extension was completed. The total length of the track is now 2 ¼ miles.

The Northampton Ironstone Railway Trust has the only two working traction engine railway locomotives in the world.

On the left wall of the shed as you enter is a row of display cases containing models showing how local iron ore was extracted, and on the far side is an increasing number of machines and equipment. There is also a small shop selling light refreshments and souvenirs, along with tickets to ride on the railway, and the back wall is covered with cabinets containing photographs and maps of the area in earlier times.

There are nearly 70 members (including a resident in Germany) who receive NIRT news which is published quarterly, although only about 10 or 12 members help in running the railway.

Although the Trust achieved a lot in the early years it seemed that the trust had lost its way, then in 1992 there was a change of management, and Mike Smith became Chairman, and with him came Sir Vincent which was nearing the end of a rebuild. Everything changed, the site was been cleared up and equipment not needed either sold or disposed of.

The Trust have now built an inspection platform outside the shed and brought in machines to help with the restoration projects. After the arrival of Sir Vincent which brought steam to the line, the engine was followed by the Blue Circle and then Yvonne and some new diesels. Then in 1990 a locomotive by the name of Vigilant came to Hunsbury and, after a period in

store, work to restore it started in 1995. In 1921 the name of the engine was changed to Trym, but will change back to Vigilant when the restoration is completed. The overall estimate is that there is two more or years worth of work, and the group certainly intend to have Vigilant in steam again by 2014

Since 1992 things have moved forwards for NIRT, so what does the future hold ? The Trust cannot extend the length of track, and so they have decided to build up the collection of industrial motive power and improve the existing site.



Yvonne at work

NORTHAMPTON ROAD & RAIL STEAM FESTIVAL

On a pleasant Sunday morning in April, the people of Far Cotton are widely awakened by a loud rumbling noise which gives the impression that Northampton is about to suffer its first major earthquake. However, on looking out of their windows they are relieved to discover that it is only the procession of traction engines on their way to the Northampton Road and Rail Steam Festival being held at Hunsbury Hill Country Park.

This two day event is organised each year by the Northampton Ironstone Railway Trust and attracts many people from all over the country.

Each year as well as the traction engines, the festival also includes classic cars, motor cycles and tractors, together with a vintage fun fair, real ale bar, models and crafts. The Railway Museum also run their normal train trips around the park.



All the fun of the Fair

Each year as well as the traction engines, the festival also includes classic cars, motor cycles and tractors, together with a vintage fun fair, real ale bar, models and crafts. The Railway Museum also run their normal train trips around the park.



This event has grown from small beginnings to a major event in the steam enthusiasts calendar, bringing people from all walks of life and all ages together, to make an enjoyable and fun weekend.