

## **Cottesmore Ironstone Mining Industry**

Extracted from "The Ironstone Quarries of the Midlands – Part 7 - Rutland"

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The Rutland ironstone quarries were all in the Northampton Sand seam and all but one were started after 1900, with a wide variety of owners.

The Midland Railway constructed a mineral branch off their Syston to Peterborough line to serve the quarries. It commenced just north of Ashwell Station and ran for 3 miles to a railhead near Cottesmore on the Ashwell Road - the current location of the Rocks by Rail Museum. It was completed in October 1882, initially to serve the Cottesmore Quarries, but was later used by the new quarries at Burley (after WW1) and Exton Park (after WW2).



## **Cottesmore Quarries**

Ownership:	Sheepbridge Coal & Iron Co Ltd	From 14 April 1932
	Frodingham Iron & Steel Co Ltd	From October 1934
	Appleby-Frodingham Steel Co Ltd	From 28 June 1946
	United Steel Cos Ltd	From 1 July 1949
	U.S.C. Ore Mining Branch	

The Sheepbridge Coal & Iron Co opened discussions with Lord Gainsborough of Exton Hall in 1879, signing a lease on 25 November 1880 for land within the Cottesmore parish. Iron ore production commenced in 1882 and a royalty of 6d a ton was paid from 1885.

The ore was found beneath 6 feet of cover, which was removed by hand. It was shallow enough to be outside the jurisdiction of H. M. Inspector of Quarries. Before the Midland line was completed the ore was carried by horse and cart to Ashwell Station. The Cottesmore system was the last one of any size to be worked by horses from the outset over a narrow gauge tramway system. Steam locomotives were introduced in November 1922 and Frodingham introduced mechanical excavators in 1933.

A new lease with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners was obtained on 26 November 1914, for 41 acres of Cottesmore Glebe, lying north of the Ashwell Road and west of the road to Market Overton. The lease was transferred to the Frodingham Steel Company on 31 March 1933

The quarries were closed from June to December 1926, in the aftermath of the General Strike, but were finally closed in 1964.

### **Old Exton Park railway track next to household waste tip on Oakham to Cottesmore Road.**



## **Burley Quarries**

Ownership: Bell Brothers Ltd  
Dorman Long & Co Ltd From April 1923  
Dorman Long (Steel) Ltd From 3 October 1954  
United Steel Co Ltd, Ore Mining Branch From 1 September 1957

In 1899 the Staveley Coal & Iron Co Ltd considered leasing 450 acres of the Burley Estate, but did not take it up, one of the main difficulties being the necessity to build cottages for the workers.

Bell Brothers Ltd leased from the Hanbury Estate of Burley, about 500 acres of land to the east of the Cottesmore to Oakham road and in November 1919, a labour force of 12 men constructed a tramway system from the Midland Railway Cottesmore branch (officially titled Cottesmore Gorse Exchange Sidings) to the quarry area, along the track beside what is now the council waste disposal site.

Production ceased in July 1962 and the land was restored to agricultural use. The engine shed was sold to Burley Estates for the storing of farm equipment.

## **Exton Park Quarries**

Ownership: United Steel Co Ltd, Ore Mining Branch  
British Steel Corporation Midland Group From 1st July 1968  
British Steel Corporation General Steels Division From 29th March 1970

The last ironstone quarrying area in the Midlands to be developed as a separate undertaking, in accordance with the accent on large-scale operations being pursued in the years following WW2. The presence of the iron ore bed had been known in the previous century, but the considerable distance from any railway had hampered development. However United Steel considered it worthwhile to justify heavy capital expenditure. Their ambitious proposals met with much local opposition, but the company eventually obtained the required authority and agreed a lease with the landowner, the Earl of Gainsborough. Work commenced with stripping turf in December 1948.

The ironstone occurred practically over the whole extent of the park and great pains were taken to make operations as inoffensive to the environment as possible. A 9-mile circular railway was planned around the perimeter, out of site in a deep cutting, with the face to be worked from the inner side. The full circle was completed in 1956. It had been planned to extend the site further east, involving the demolition of Cottesmore House, but this did not take place.

The original target of extraction was 10,000 tons of ore per week, but by 1971 this was down to 5,000 tons, due to the volume of imported ore to Scunthorpe. Closure was originally planned for June 1972 however production eventually ceased in May 1973. During the steelworkers strike in April 1972 the men at Exton were employed in lifting track on the northern section of the loop.

During January 1974 a BSC gang under foreman G. Rose (who had been responsible for laying the railway line from the quarry to Cottesmore sidings, some 33 years earlier) were lifting track within the quarry and finished on Friday 8 February 1974. Restoration of the site continued slowly and was virtually completed by the autumn of 1975.