

Hexthorpe - Riverside Retreat

Walk summary: This trail explores Hexthorpe's Industrial and Leisure heritage, following along the river Don, exploring Hexthorpe Flatts Park and concluding with a woodland loop around a historical wetland.

Distance: 2.6 miles / 4.2 kilometres

Duration: Approximately 1 hour

Terrain: This trail uses parkland, roads and unpaved footpaths, which can get muddy in winter months. Please note this walk involves crossing through a short railway tunnel and over a ramped footbridge.

Nearest Car Park: Free parking can be found outside the main entrance to Hexthorpe Flatts Park, Urban Rd, Doncaster, DN4 0HH.



1. Hexthorpe Flatts Park - A Day off on the Don

Our walk starts at the main entrance gates to the park. Walk through the park entrance and along the tree-lined avenue ahead.

Hexthorpe started as a small village, but in the Victorian & Edwardian era the establishment of the nearby Plant Works led to the village becoming a busy and bustling railway community. Rows of terraced streets were built to house railway workers and their families.

Working at the Plant would have been noisy, physical, labouring work. To keep their workers in good spirits and health, extra-curricular activities would have been provided by the employer, the Doncaster Corporation. The Corporation owned the land here, an old slate quarry, and it was decided to landscape the area into a pleasure-ground, providing the workers with a tranquil place for recreation and rest on weekends and holidays.

Promenading along the central tree-lined avenue, of plane trees and sycamores, the park would have revealed all sorts of entertainment and delights! Tearooms, bowling greens, tennis courts and playgrounds made the park a holiday destination, with people coming to enjoy it from near and far.

Go directly over the crossroad paths when you reach them. You may wish to take the opportunity to explore the Dell, which you will soon pass on your right.



2. An Evening at the Dell

Thousands of visitors flocked to enjoy the park on its opening day, on an August bank holiday in 1902. By the late 1920's, the popular park was improved further with the addition of the Dell, the park gates and the aviary.

The Dell, with its bandstand nestled amongst an elaborate garden, was created in 1927 and would have featured regular musical productions, dancing, brass bands and illuminations for years to come. It is still used for events today.

Seating once circled the central bandstand, and the area was surrounded by an artificial river, complete with mini waterfalls, fountains and footbridges. The water was fed into the Dell from the nearby river Don by a wind-pump. In 2001, the Dell was awarded Grade II listed status for its importance as a historical park.

Continue along the path ahead to reach the river Don.

3. Hexthorpe Rowing Club

Rowing boats could be rented by families to enjoy the Don, sailing from where the rowing club exists today. Take a peek at the mural on the rowing club, created by local artist Dan Fraser Jones to celebrate the river Don.

Follow the path that runs along the riverside.

4. Riverside Walk

Look out for river wildlife along the riverside path. The river Don here is a fantastic spot to take a moment in nature. Look out for river birds such as Kingfisher and Grey Heron and fish rising to the surface to snatch up emerging flies.

Across the river is a large wetland known as Sprotbrough Ings. In 2025, Don Catchment Rivers Trust created a new pond on the Ings to help create space for river nature. The pond is connected to the river Don by a small stream and a fish-friendly flap valve, which allows fish in and out. In times of flood and high water, fish can now escape up the stream and take refuge in the calmer pond.

When you see a steep footpath on your left, take it to reach the railway tunnel. Go through the tunnel and turn left up the footpath to reach St Peter's Road.



5. Return to Hexthorpe Flatts Park

Take a left on St Peter's Road and continue through the green space.

This area was once part of the series of slate and limestone quarries which became Hexthorpe Flatts Park.

Continue along the path and take the left onto Oswin Avenue. Follow the road and as it curves to the right, you will spot a paved footpath leading off the main road. Take the footpath to cross over the railway bridge and back into Hexthorpe Flatts park.

6. Hexthorpe Bowl

You'll soon pass Hexthorpe Park's Bike Track and Skating Bowl, two later additions to the park.

Follow the path straight ahead and you will reach the crossroad path from earlier in your walk. Continue straight over and walk ahead until you spot a small exit for the park onto Bramworth Road. Follow the road ahead to reach the river.

7. The River Don - A Working River.

Take a while here to admire the River Don and imagine how much it has changed.

The River Don was vital in creating the thriving industrial town of Doncaster. Factories and workshops lined the waterways, using them to transport goods and import raw materials by boat. Steam trains, Kilner glass jars, Harvester Tractors and confectionery like Doncaster toffee, were some of the important goods created by the river in Doncaster.

The river was also used to cool materials and dispose of factory waste products, which polluted the water. Growing industry needed many workers, and Doncaster's population boomed. Household waste from the growing population ended up in the river, and sewage became another major source of pollution. By the 1970's industry across the Don Catchment had turned the river into a hotbed of sewage, heavy metals, oil, and chemicals. So much industrial pollution filled the river that it could no longer work as a natural ecosystem and wildlife all but disappeared.

By the 1980's new laws and regulations meant water quality began to slowly improve. In the past few decades, 26 of the 30 lost fish species have returned, including Atlantic Salmon. River birdlife including grey heron, kingfisher and cormorant can be regularly spotted here, hunting fish. Important mammals such as otter have returned which are indicators of a thriving and working river ecosystem.



Walk through the allotments and continue along the main path into a woodland area.

8. Hexthorpe Ings

The word “Ings” comes from Old Norse, meaning wet meadows or water meadows.

This name tells us something remarkable. Long before industrial Doncaster, this landscape was shaped by Vikings who settled in the river valleys of South Yorkshire. You’re walking through a landscape that carries over a thousand years of history.

The path you will be following around the Ings was once the way to an old river ferry crossing to Newton, one of many in the Doncaster area which would help people to cross the river.

Take the path on the right and go down some steps, continue along the route around the Ings.

As part of Don Catchment River’s Trust All Hands on the Don project, work to restore the wetland here has taken place, with volunteers helping to reinstate the lost paths and improve access. Volunteers have worked to remove overgrown willow trees, which were drying out the site and have created new habitats for nature to thrive.

When you reach the crossroad footpaths, take a left turn and continue.

9. The Plant Works

You’ll soon pass the site of the Plant railway works on your right, now a new housing estate.

Hexthorpe Ings was once part of a much larger wetland, until the Doncaster Plant Works was built here in 1853 for the Great Northern Railway Company. The huge works spanned across the riverside and included carriage shops, boiler shops, wheel smithies and brass foundries. At first, the Plant was used for repairs and maintenance, but the workers here soon made history, building the world’s fastest steam engines. The Flying Scotsman, the first locomotive to reach 100 miles per hour, and the Mallard which on the 3rd of July 1938 became the world’s fastest steam locomotive, achieving a top speed of 126 miles per hour, were both built here.

Continue along the path, passing a pond on your right. You’ll soon complete your circular route around the Ings and reach the path you started on by the allotments.

Retrace your path back along Bramworth Road, walking past the small park exit we used earlier and continuing a little further. Take a right turn on the next road to reach the main entrance of Hexthorpe Flatts Park.



References

- Grace's Guide [online] Available at: [Doncaster Works - Graces Guide](#), Accessed [2026]
- The Hexpress, Past issues [online] Available at: [Hexthorpe – THE HEXPRESS](#), Accessed [2026]
- Historic England [online] Available at, [The Dell, Doncaster, Non Civil Parish - 1001501 | Historic England](#), Accessed [2026]