



Alistair Hamilton - Rhydymwyn Valley

Rhydymwyn Valley

Photographs and Words by
Alistair Hamilton

Second Edition - 2024

Introduction

For over twenty years, my partner and I lived just a couple of miles from the village of Rhydymwyn; it had the nearest Post Office (sadly now closed) and garage, which meant that I often went to the village. We were vaguely aware that at the back of the village there was a strange site, that was at one time military, and then became something other. One day, we even walked up to the gatehouse (then staffed by a security guard and not an armed soldier as it previously had been) and found that it was possible to get into the site if certain procedures were followed.

Each September we opened our house as part of the Helfa Gelf/Art trail open studio event in north Wales. In September 2014, one of our visitors was the secretary of the Friends of the Rhydymwyn Valley (FORV). She asked me if I would lead a photographic workshop on the site; an offer I immediately declined! She persisted, and got my partner and me down to the site for a look around. Even that first visit inspired me to take a lot of interesting photographs.

I did lead a workshop. And a second one! After that, I visited the site several times and I produced a lot of photographic work during these visits.

There have been many books and articles written about the history of the Valley Works, but they are typically illustrated with a few informative, but visually rather uninteresting, pictures. I decided to produce an artistic work that celebrates the visual variety and sheer strangeness of what can be seen there, but might be of little interest to the historian.

The photographs were taken between November 2014 and February 2017 and processed in the following years.

The 2024 second edition includes small changes to the text and images and a new publication format.

During World War II, the village of Rhydymwyn in north Wales contained one of the world's most closely-guarded secrets. It was called

"M. S. Factory, Valley"

or just the Valley Works.

The Valley Works was a munitions factory. There were many of those operating flat-out at the time. What made the Valley Works different was what was being made there.



In reality, the tunnels are largely empty and deserted, except for a few days each year when visitors are allowed in.



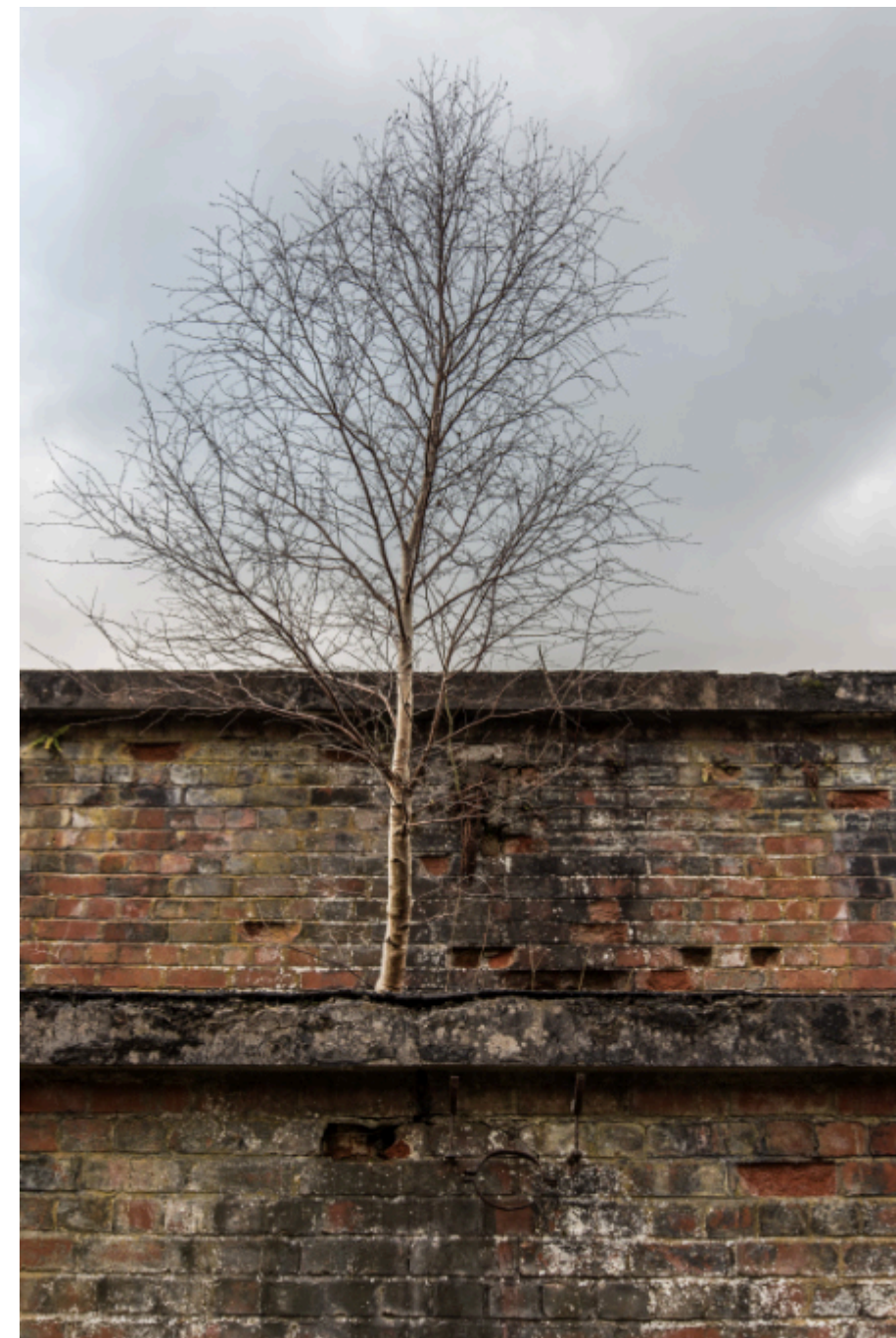
The tunnels are not silent: they echo continuously to the sound of running water, which runs down the walls and collects in pools in the floors. This makes the tunnels feel cold and damp, even on a hot spring day.



To my mind, the one recurring theme is that of re-growth. Even in this place which was built with the sole intention of making machines and chemicals of destruction, nature is reasserting itself and will, in decades to come, become once again the dominant force within the site.



And nature will prevail, even in the hardest of places.



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17 Castle Street, Kirkcudbright, Scotland, DG6 4JA

First Published April 2017
This edition, January 2024

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ISBN 978-1-7384965-0-1

