

Royal Ordnance, Marchwiel, (34), Wrexham

Historical scoping report

March 2017



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Cover image, Royal Ordnance Factory motif.

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1. Introduction

Townscape has been instructed to undertake an historical analysis of the former Royal Ordnance site Marchwiell, Wrexham. Now referred to as The Oaks. This report explores the historical nature of the former ROF site as a whole to fully understand its historical development and creation, the nature of its operation and processes and to try to understand if all parts of the site became operational.

This report recognises the limited availability of publically accessible sources and evidence to provide for a definitive report due in part to the historical nature of the site and the lack of defense based report and documents.

Much of the archive material for the site was destroyed following decommissioning at the end of WWII in 1947/8 and subsequent regeneration to the now Wrexham Industrial estate. The scope of the report outlines the historical development of the whole site, much of which is now Wrexham Industrial estate.

This report is not a heritage report in its fullest sense but a report that outlines the historical development, construction and operational matters of the site supported by sources and references where available.



Fig 1 Ariel photograph¹ Wrexham Archives, The Oaks not in picture

¹ ROF Marchwiel, RAF Reconnaissance photograph, 2 May 1946, (Wrexham Archives) showing parts of the giant works.

2. History and development

Approved in August 1939, the massive Royal Ordnance factory Marchwiell covered an area of c.1,730 acres or 700ha and was second in size to ROF Waltham Abbey.

The site was chosen for a number of reasons;

- High local unemployment and available labour
- Ground relief and topography meant ease of building
- Distance from large urban conurbations and large populations.
- Distance from mainland Europe
- Good railway links

Contractor McAlpine at a cost of £10.9million built the site. The factory began production of propellants in March 1941. Three units producing nitrocellulose and two units producing nitrocellulose supplied the cordite section. To the south west of the main factory and production units were two smaller tetranitration plants.

Employing more than 10,000 (many construction) workers many of whom were brought in from other sites, the ROF at Marchwiell had its own internal railways system, which was powered by diesel engines to avoid the danger of spark igniting the munitions. The buildings were dispersed and earth bounded over a large and wide area reducing the chances of a chain reaction explosion and also making bombing from the air almost impossible, as a hit on one building would have little or no effect on any others.

Buildings were steel framed with reinforced concrete and brick in fill and most buildings/structures were single storey. The largest buildings in terms of height were the acid section but internally open to the roof. They housed acid towers used for the concentration of sulphuric acid or de-nitrication of spent acids and were ventilated by means of large metal circular vents or roof louvers.

Workers at the ROF were subject to the official secrets act and as such their adherence to it

The design and construction of the site was based on a priority need first, so the more important the production material required were constructed and commissioned in the first phase of construction. Subsequent construction phases produced structures of lesser importance that were more built for diversion than actual production.

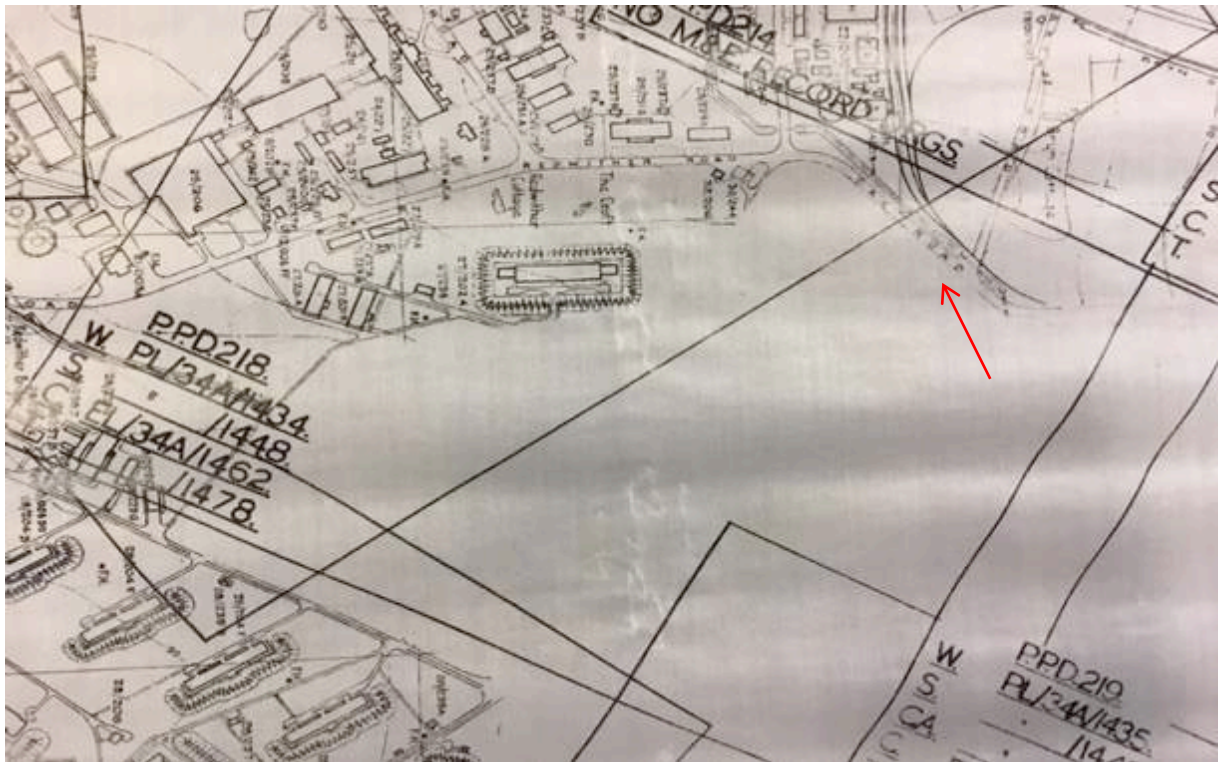
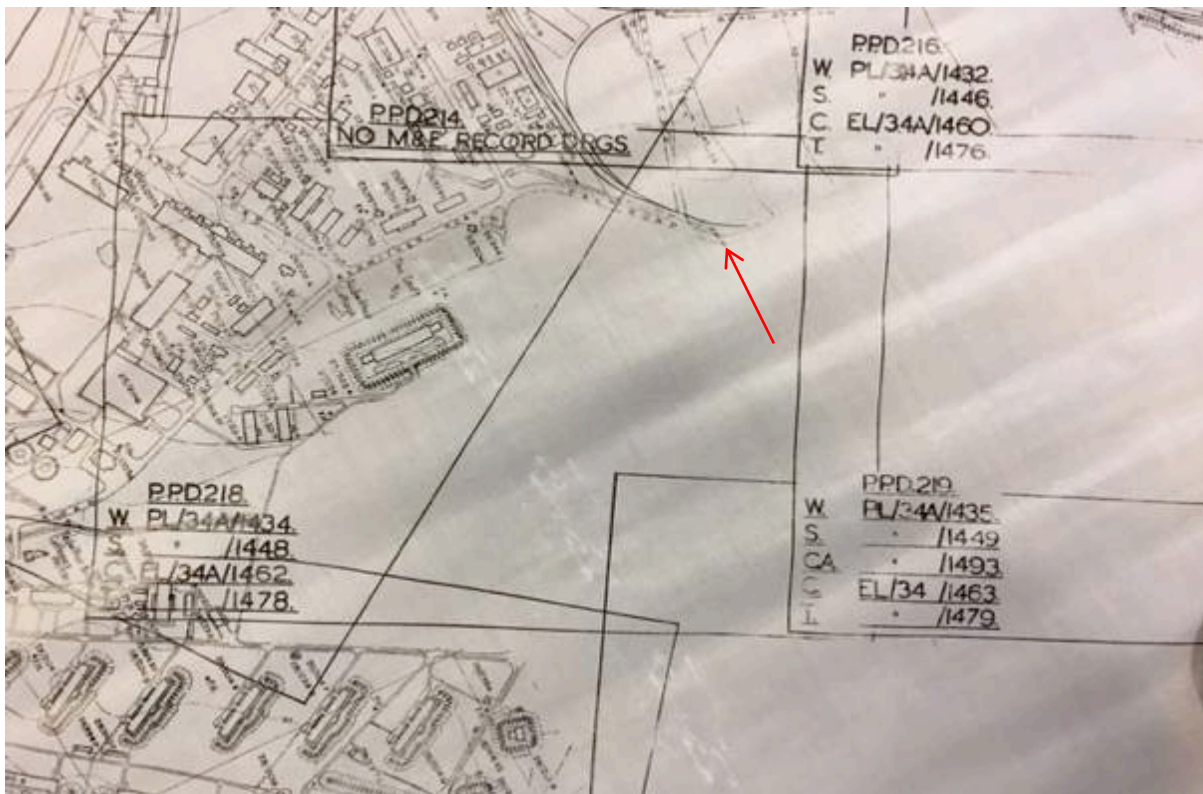


Fig 2 above, Fig 3 below



Figs 2 and 3 are extracts from original construction drawings Ministry of Defence held at Wrexham Archives, dated June 1941. The plans show ROF Marchwiel under construction with subsequent phases yet to be constructed. The red arrow shows Oak Road and the subsequent development of this phase south of Oak Road is yet to be completed.

3. Factory design and operation

The factory was laid out in accordance with the explosives act and in anticipation of possible ariel attack by the Germans. Personal accounts WW2 Memories appended recount that no bombs were dropped on the site, with diversions employed elsewhere in the Wrexham area and a single bomb dropped in Rhos.

Important sections of the site were duplicated and buildings and structures were designed to resist incendiary bombs and blast and to comply with blackout regulations. The blackout led to poor ventilation in many buildings and operatives generally has to work under inadequate artificial lighting. The site comprised of dozens of dispersed units known as houses grouped by process and most surrounded by large earthen banks as a protection against German wartime bombing raids.

A network of service roads, truck ways and standard and light gauge railways lines connected the units. Water and other mains services were run in a ring ditch round the factory perimeter with buried connections.

²ROF Marchwiell produced cordite for use in propellants and was one of three new cordite factories commissioned in 1939 to boost production outside of Waltham Abbey, Bishopton, Wrexham and Ranskill.

The cordite facility was principally made up of three nitrocylcerine factories and two nitrocellulose sections together with a tetryl nitration plant. The most distinctive buildings within the factories were those of the acid sections (nitrocylcerine). They were the tallest, often standing 3 storeys high, though internally open at the roof. Their function was to house the tall acid towers used in the concentration of Sulphuric acid, massive steel frames passing through its successive platforms supported these towers. Crane gantries were also fitted for periodic maintenance

The site operated on a number of differing products namely, acid, nitroglycerine, nitrocellulose, magazines, stores and sidings, together with administration offices, accommodation housing and workshops. Personnel facilities and welfare consisting of staff canteen seating 100 persons and a central kitchen serving six dining rooms of which five catered for up to 300 persons and another for 50. In addition, a medical block with doctor and dentist with other first aid posts and cleansing posts scattered within the site.

Other buildings included laboratories, police and security positions and housing, telephone exchange and stores. Stocking and storage provisions became a large land use for the site with provision for 10,000 ton of coal and 2,000 ton of Sulphur to be maintained on site at any one time.

ROF Marchweil, like many other ROF sites were carefully designed to a standard design which enabled rapid construction in a phased process according to demand of products. The site was secured by a number of pillboxes to the perimeter of the site.

² Cocroft Wayne D, Dangerous Energy, The Archaeology of Gunpowder and military explosives manufacture, English Heritage 2000

4. Remaining structures at The Oaks

A
remain
site
are in

their
and to

they



number of
structures
present on the
many of which
a poor
condition and
inaccessible. A
thorough
heritage
investigation is
required to fully
understand
actual function
what historical
significance
may hold.



Fig 4, Brick
Pillbox

Fig 5 Short Concrete tunnel, uncertain use.

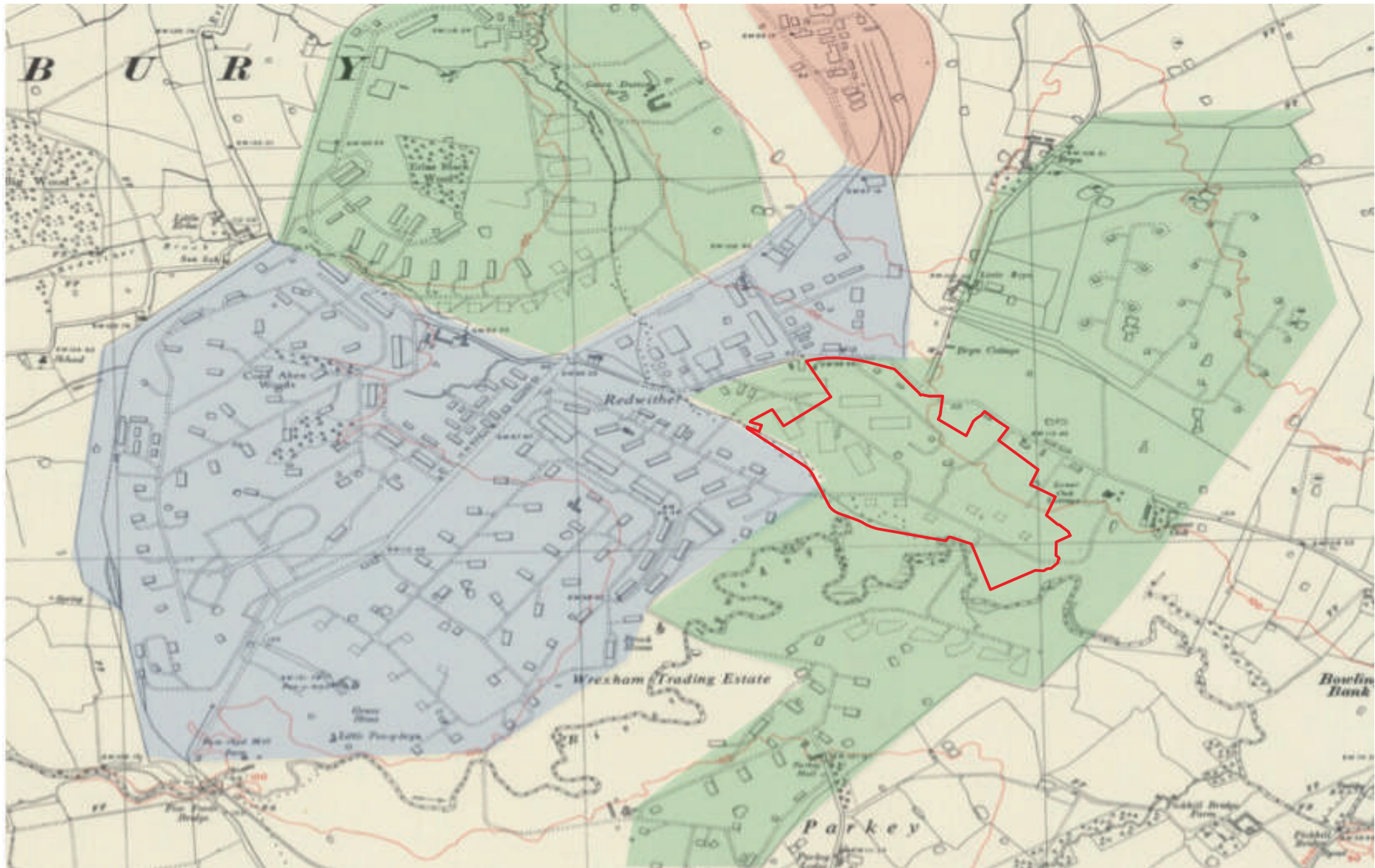


Fig 6 OS Map extract Denbighshire SW 1949, shows the ROF Marchwiel (nts). Overlaid is assumed main operating area of the site, based on photographic and published evidence. Blue overlay comprises main production site. Green overlay, storage and depot facilities. Red overlay is main transport/railway connection



Fig 7 Ariel Photograph 30 May 1958, Source: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. The Oaks site outlined in red.



Fig 8 Ariel Photograph undated, Source: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. (development site not in picture)

Conclusion

The former ROF Wrexham Marchwiell, historically was one of the largest factory sites producing propellants. The site was constructed starting in late 1939 with construction undertaken in phases on a priority needs basis with an unknown date of final completion.

The site had a short production life and the site ceased production in 1946 immediately after WW2 with the eventual regeneration to the now Wrexham Industrial estate. Fig 2 and 3 is a construction plan extract held at Wrexham archives the plans are dated June 1941 and the plans clearly identify that The Oaks site was yet to be constructed.

The factory design followed a set design and production processes. There are no known sources or evidence, which provides detailed understanding of which building was used for which purpose. However, from analysis of historical map data, ariel photography, previous study accounts³ and written accounts available within local history archives, it is possible to identify that the main production sites were generally the larger buildings within the central core area of the site and provided the core propellant material for transportation to shell filling factories.

In fig 6 we have made an assessment according to available evidence to determine the main production centers and uses of the site. Outside these main production centres the remainder of the site was constructed in the later phases and used for either storage facilities, minor works, or indeed acted as decoy structures.

This report has sought to provide an account to the nature of the manufacturing of propellants at ROF Wrexham and to determine which parts of the site were the main production facilities. Whilst ROF Wrexham covered a huge land area, it is recognized that not the entire constructed site was in constant use and parts of the site were used to act as decoys and not used at all, which I believe is the likely use of The Oaks site.

From evidence available, I consider that the site The Oaks, was one of the final phases of construction within the whole works. It is likely that due to the rushed nature of construction and priority demands on other parts of the site, The Oaks was never fully completed nor operational and that production was focused on the more central parts of the site. Personal accounts appended, also state that no bombs were dropped on the site.

This report is limited in its evidence due in part to the lack of any historical archive material and available resources.

Jason Kennedy BSc MA MRTPI IHBC

Director

Townscape: Chartered Town Planning & Heritage Consultants Ltd.

6 March 2017

³ Gifford, April (B3041A.02) June 2000 (B3041A.04), The Oaks, Wrexham Industrial Estate, Desk Based Assessment of Archaeology.

Appendix 1

Personal WW2 Accounts

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Contributed by BBC Community Studio Wrexham

People in story: Gwen Maddocks, Fred Churchill, Jack Shaw

Location of story: 'Wrexham'

Background to story: Civilian

Article ID: A9023429

Contributed on: 31 January 2006

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My name's Gwen Maddocks and I'm 81.

I think it must have been just pre-war, and they decided to build a Royal Ordnance Factory on the outskirts of Wrexham, and they took a lot of farmland to build it on. They left those farms there because it was camouflage when they started to build those factories, because they had cordite and gun cotton and a nitro-glycerine plant, and there was a great big chemist block. It was a very big factory and they employed thousands. When they were building this place, of course they had to find accommodation for all the people they were bringing in. My father, at that time, had a job as a billeting officer for one of the firms, and he had a lot of difficulty placing people, because it was compulsory, I think, at that time, to take them if you had room. Unfortunately, we only had one small bedroom that was available, and my father, if he was in difficulty knowing what to do with people, he used to end up bringing them home. The first two I can remember were scaffolders, and my mother showed them where they were sleeping, and they decided they'd share. And more often than not, we'd have two men sharing one little bedroom. So you can imagine that it wasn't very convenient, because in those days there was no bathroom, and it was an outside toilet.

I think the way we used to manage was because they obviously had to go and start early, so they were out of the house before I got up. I'm talking about 1939 now, or 1940, and I was still in school then, so I had to get up and get to school. It's all rather hazy, but we must have managed.

I can remember most of these men, but I can't remember all their names. But I do remember we had two nice blokes - a plumber and his mate. The plumber was called Fred Churchill and his mate was Jack Shaw. They seemed to be there quite a long time. In fact, Jack stayed longer than Fred, because Fred was married, and he found accommodation somewhere in the vicinity for him and his wife. But instead of losing them, they used to come round on a Sunday night to play cards. So the family grew! I left school when I was nearly 17, and I managed to get a job in the Royal Ordnance Factory. That was 1941 - about August, I should think. If the blinking Germans had got that instead of Minera mountain I wouldn't be here to tell this tale now.

It was where the Trading Estate is now, all that area was the ROF - in Marchwiell, just off the Holt Road.

Well, eventually, I managed to get a job in cash office, and that's the part I can most remember, because I really loved my job, and we had a coining machine, which was every time you pressed one of the buttons, and held the pay packet, which was a

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/29/a9023429.shtml>[16-Mar-17 10:02:48 AM]

BBC - WW2 People's War - Memories of the war in Wrexham

trick I might tell you, make sure you hold the pay packet where the coins come out, because when you first learn, you're so busy pressing half a crown that it goes all over the floor instead of into the pay packets! So, after making a few mistakes, I was very proficient at this, and I used to love to get on that machine, otherwise, I used to have to end up checking the pound notes and the ten shilling notes into the pay packet, and sticking all the envelopes down, and I didn't particularly like that very much.

Then, every Thursday, we used to have to stay overnight, so that we could pay the different shifts as they came off. I think the first one was paid about 11 o'clock, and then the next one was six o'clock in the morning, and then the afternoon was about three perhaps- or half three, I can't really remember- and then there was a day shift that was about five. So by Friday afternoon you were worn out and very bad tempered, so it wasn't a very good time to ask anybody any questions.

It was wonderful, looking back, it really was. All my teenage years were spent during the war. And the whole atmosphere- that's the point that we can't seem to get over to people- the whole atmosphere was totally different. Everybody only had one purpose on their mind, and that was to win the war. So everybody was very friendly and helped one another. There was none of the nastiness that seems to go on today. But, there we are, perhaps it's because we're getting older, and we can't tolerate it the same..

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People in story: Betty Goodchild

Location of story: 'Wrexham' 'Marchwiel, Wrexham'

Background to story: Civilian

Article ID: A9023528

Contributed on: 31 January 2006

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📷 Story with photo

I'm Betty Goodchild, and I'm 84.

There was one incident when a plane came down. It had circled Wrexham, on fire, and it came down behind Cefn Park Hall, on the Cefn Road in Wrexham. There was no Queen's Park there then, it was all farm land. And this plane came down- and of course, as youngsters, we had to go and have a look at what had happened. And there were bits of metal all over the place. I picked this piece of metal up and took it home. And my father made a cross of it, and put it on the shed door. He said 'Those boys were somebody's son- even Germans.' He was tender hearted about it.

I didn't want to go away from home. You had to go into something or other.. the ATS, the airforce, WRENS, or into a factory, so I had to sit an exam- a little test really- and I was sent to the admin block at the Royal Ordnance Factory, and I did the income tax, national insurance, and national savings.

There were about sixty wages clerks in our office. There were 3 tables of cordite girls, because that was the biggest factory, but if anyone was ill, the pay rolls had to be ready for cash office for Thursday, and you would have to leave your job and go and help them. I also used to do all the records for the new people coming in to the factory. And I can remember the men were all from Gorseinon- I didn't even know how to spell it in the beginning!- in South Wales. And there were so many Jones's and their initials- it was very difficult.

During my years at the ROF I used to have to fire watch at least once a week or a fortnight. Well, we had to be on standby and keep looking out in case of any flames coming.. you know, incendiary bombs, used to be dropping towards the end. And we would be there all the night, and supposed to keep awake, but a few of us would perhaps have a nap for an hour, and the other two would keep watch, and then we'd take it in turn.

We worked hard, and we played hard, didn't we? Because we'd work many a night til 8 o'clock and Saturday and Sunday til four- non stop. You didn't go running out and making your face up during your working hours. You had your hour for lunch and you worked hard, because you had to clock in and out at lunchtime.

But the girls- they were wonderful really. I can remember I had two pairs of dancing shoes, a black pair and a gold pair. I think everybody that took size four feet borrowed those. And they'd come and say 'Can I borrow your shoes?' and I'd say 'Hang on, shout and ask 'Who's got Betty's size four shoes?' because I never knew who had them! In the end, well, you'd never seen anything like them. Especially the black ones- because they used to put chalk on the dance floor- so you can imagine

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/28/a9023528.shtml>[16-Mar-17 10:00:57 AM]

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on black shoes- what it would look like.

It was a marvellous atmosphere for everybody in those days. If you'd got anything, and others hadn't and needed, you'd lend them anything.

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Pensioner recalls the night the Germans bombed Osbourne Street, Rhos during WWII - Wrexham History

Pensioner remembers the night the Germans bombed his street

LIFE in the village of Rhos was very different 70 years ago.

Europe was at war and bombing raids by the Luftwaffe were frequent

In the early hours of August 30, 1940, German bombers were heading for Liverpool and dockland sites on the River Mersey.

In an effort to draw the planes away from these heavily populated and strategically important sites, the men of the home guard would make their way to the nearby uninhabited mountains and light fires that it was hoped would dupe the enemy into thinking they had reached their targets.

And it worked – you can still see the craters in the mountainside to this day.

However, on this particular night, one of those missiles landed not on the mountain but on Rhos itself – on Osbourne Street, to be precise.

Gareth Jones was six and living on Osbourne Street at the time.

“At night we would hide under the stairs and shelter there until the all-clear was sounded. You could hear the planes going over.

“It was very scary – my younger brother was three at the time and he was terrified

“That night, after we’d heard the all clear, I remember distinctly going up to the middle bedroom and looking out of the window.

“In those days you could see the mountain from there and it was completely ablaze.”

What Mr Jones didn’t know at that point was that a bomb had hit the ground just a few yards from his house.

It had fallen between his neighbour and neighbour but one’s house but had not – yet – exploded.

Living next door was Gwilym Parry, who was 15 years old. He lived with his parents while his grandparent s lived in the other house.

“The bomb landed at about 1am,” Mr Parry recalled. “It landed right outside the two houses.

“I slept through that and the next morning the ARP man, who was a teacher at the local school, told my father he could fill in the hole.

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“About 10 minutes before that, the rescue party from the Hafod colliery had come up but they left soon afterwards as there wasn't anything they could do.”

Despite the presence of the unexploded device, life that morning on Osbourne Street continued as normal.

Mr Parry, who had a job in Wrexham, set off for the bus while the younger Mr Jones was preparing to go to school.

Mr Jones recounted what happened next: “My mother had answered the door to a lad who came to call for my eldest brother to go to school.

“The bomb exploded and she was blown straight down the hall to the back of the house.

“The boy who came to see my brother, his bicycle was later found on top of the telegraph pole.

“There was all this rubble everywhere because one side of the house had been blown in. My father carried my brother and I to safety.”

Mr Parry, meanwhile, had already left for work.

“I caught the 8.22 bus to Wrexham and I was on it when I heard the explosion,” he remembered. “I'd left school and gone to work at Burton's otherwise I'd have been home.

“I remember the teacher saying to me, it's a good thing you'd left because otherwise you'd have still been at home.”

He didn't find out what had happened until he reached Wrexham.

“The police came to get me at work,” said Mr Parry. “They said ‘don't worry – your mother and father are OK’.

“My father was knocked back on the stairs and was trapped between two walls. He was knocking on the wall which was how they found him.

“Mr Jones from next door came and carried my mother out of the building.

“My grandfather and grandmother were killed, Dorothy Reid had been coming up from Church Street and had stopped to talk and among the others who were killed were three young lads.

“My parents spent were quite badly injured and spent four or five months in hospital. We had to stay with family in Wrexham.

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"We moved into the new house in October 1948 – it was built by the War Damages Committee."

It is almost impossible to imagine what it felt like to be sheltering with your family and to hear the planes going over on their bombing runs.

But, for the likes of Mr Jones and Mr Parry, it was a nightly occurrence.

"I remember one night it was cold and there was no wind and you could hear the home guard up on the mountain," said Mr Parry. "You could see the fires up there.

"You could sometimes hear the planes going over and the bombs dropping.

"It was quite scary sometimes. My grandfather used to say it'll never come to Rhos and then he was killed by the bomb."

On that August night in 1940 the Home Guard appear to have succeeded, however, one of those bombs landed not on the mountain but on Osborne Street in Rhosllannerchrugog.

The bomb landed at about 1 a.m. but, initially, failed to explode. Despite having an unexploded bomb in the street the locals carried on as normal. However, at about 8:20 a.m., the bomb exploded causing severe damage and the loss of seven lives.

Susannah HUGHES Died 31 Aug 1940 age 67 Died at her home, Stanley Villas, Osborne Street. Daughter of the late Mr & Mrs John Lloyd, of Church Street; wife of William Hughes (see below).

William HUGHES Died 31 Aug 1940 age 67 Died at his home, Stanley Villas, Osborne Street. Son of the late Mr & Mrs Thomas Hughes, of Erwgerrig. Husband of Susannah Hughes (see above).

William Henry HUGHES Died 31 Aug 1940 age 12 Died at Osborne Street. Son of John & Alice Hughes, of Belmont, Duke Street.

Donald JONES Died 31 Aug 1940 age 11 Died at Osborne Street. Son of George & Annie Ellen Jones, of 2, Cemetery Road.

Kenneth Thomas PEMBERTON Died 31 Aug 1940 age 13 Died in Osborne Street. Son of Robert Allen Pemberton, & Mary Ann Pemberton, of 5, Afon Terrace, Afonogoch.

Dorothy REID Died 8 Sep 1940 age 34 Died in the War Memorial Hospital, Wrexham, from injuries sustained at Osborne Street. Daughter of the late Robert Reid. Lived at Bro Dawel, Victoria Street.

Eliza Jane (Lizzie) RICHARDS Died 31 Aug 1940 age 58 Died at Osborne Street. Wife

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Pensioner recalls the night the Germans bombed Osbourne Street, Rhos during WWII - Wrexham History
of Edward Richards, of Glaslyn, Osborne Street

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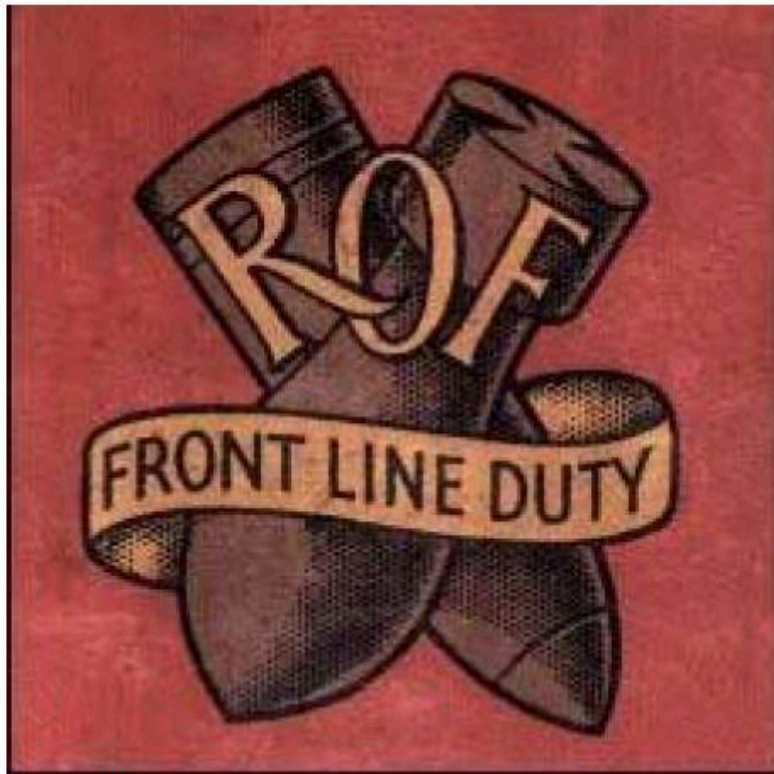


Ladies of the Lodge Knitting for the Troops 1940

CATEGORIES

<http://www.wrexham-history.com/pensioner-recalls-the-night-the-germans-bombed-osbourne-street-rhos-during-wwii> [16-Mar-17 10:16:24 AM]

Royal Ordnance Factory - Wrexham - Wrexham History



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Work on the new Royal Ordnance factory at Wrexham began soon after the outbreak of war in 1939. Located where the Industrial Estate is today, during the Second World War, Wrexham's ROF facility made cordite, an explosive propellant for shells. ROF Bishopston, ROF Ranskill and ROF Sellafield being the three other propellant factory's.

The complex was spread over a large area to minimise any damage from aerial attacks. Any existing farm buildings were left in situ while the main buildings were camouflaged to deter reconnaissance. The buildings were designed to resist incendiary bombs and blast, with thick walls, with no windows only small shuttered openings and reinforced roofs. Then surrounded with earth banks both to deflect blast and to direct any explosion from within buildings upwards, some were designed with weak end wall joints for this purpose. The site was chosen for its distance from European bombers while having good rail networks and a rural location that provided a good supply of labour but in a wide spread area.

To connect the site to the national rail network, a large marshalling yard of 10 separate roads, and these connected to the works internal network of rail lines. A passenger platform was built for military usage. All the cordite produced at the plant was taken by

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Royal Ordnance Factory - Wrexham - Wrexham History

these sidings, along the Wrexham and Ellesmere Railway and then to Crewe. For shunting works, Diesels were used instead of Steam engines as they were less likely to ignite any stray cordite, however it is known the works had possession of an 1859 0-4-0ST known as Victory.



□ 6th September 2016

The site was well defended, both on the ground and from the air, several Type 2 Pillboxes still remain in the area, found in areas untouched by modern industrial developments, and the entire site was under a mile away from RAF Wrexham, which was home to at least one fighter squadron, for defending the regions industrial assets from bomber attack.

After the war, the need for cordite ceased, and so did the production facilities at Wrexham. Much of the buildings were left in place, abandoned, and agriculture again took over the fields surrounding the area.

The combined closure of ROF Wrexham and the army returning caused much unemployment in the area, with major redundancies in the area's coal mines due to increasing motor travel.

In all, there's probably about thirty or forty buildings still standing in fairly decent condition and I'd estimate that these represent about 5% of the original total, the site was massive. On the map above, just the extreme bottom right remains and a section to the east that's not shown. All structures are completely stripped apart from one I found which was guarded by overgrown hawthorn, rose hip and bramble and even then not much to see. Pillboxes, guard houses and access tunnels jump out of the undergrowth on either side of the site's internal road and rail system, though all track has long been lifted. Other buildings are more obscure in their purposes, probably acid treatment, paper scrolling, loco sheds and lookout towers or other such uses no doubt.

Royal Ordnance Factory – Wrexham

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Royal Ordnance Factory - Wrexham - Wrexham History



ROF Wrexham May 1946

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Memories of being at Borrás in Wrexham

by wxmcommunitystudio

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Contributed by wxmcommunitystudio

People in story: James Andrew Ford, Betty Ford

Location of story: 'Falmouth', 'Hamilton', 'Borrás, Wrexham', 'Birkenhead', 'Liverpool', 'North Africa', 'Sicily', 'Italy', 'Lyon'

Background to story: Royal Air Force

Article ID: A9021818

Contributed on: 31 January 2006

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I'm James Andrew Ford, and I'm 90 odd. I was 90 last September, 2005. Originally, I'm from Hamilton. I went nearly everywhere in the Mediterranean area. I was in the RAF. You get posted here, you get posted there, six months here, three months somewhere else, but it was all the RAF, basically.

I got sent down to Falmouth, by mistake, to work in air and sea rescue. That was rough. Going into the channel, picking up chaps that had been downed. German or British. That didn't last long, because I wasn't air and sea rescue, I was just an RAF bloke who was handy, that's all. (What was your job in the RAF?) General. General everything. I've been a cook... I've been everything bar the kitchen sink! I actually started off as air crew, but my eyes let me down. I found out one of my eyes was dodgy, so I ended up as ground crew, and then I moved to general ground crew. You just moved around.

I went to Borrás, in Wrexham. Borrás was a very small air training base for officers. It became a night fighter's station. I came in 1941. There was nothing much doing, until the Germans started bombing Wallasey, Birkenhead and Liverpool. They came back this way, and we could never catch them. Well, this station was night fighter, so what we used to do was, the Gerries used to go into the North Wales mountains, to try and get back to Germany, and if there were any left over, they used to drop their bombs on the Wrexham area. They weren't very successful. They were after Marchwiell (the munitions factory) and they were after Monsanto's.

So the night fighters used to meet the Germans above them, and down them. They were quite successful, I believe, to chase them off. After that, they went back in the Shrewsbury direction.

After that, I went overseas, to North Africa, along with the so called Yankees. That was 1943, or 1944, I can't remember the exact dates. We went to Sicily, but didn't stay long. In fact, it was a bad place. Full of disease. The Germans purposefully left people poxed up, so that the British troops would go in. In fact, Montgomery stopped our men going in to Sicily, because he said that there were more men in the sick bay than there was wounded. It was purposefully done.

We didn't go to Casino, thank God. That was a bad time. Fair play to the Gerries, they didn't half hold on to it. We bombed and bombed and bombed, but they held on. The Poles had a bad time, a lot of men killed. Things were bad there.

From there, we went to Northern Italy. I ended up in Milan, then higher up, towards the Austrian borders. We met some of the Russians. Rum lot, they were! They were

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/18/a9021818.shtml>[16-Mar-17 10:00:34 AM]

BBC - WW2 People's War - Memories of being at Borras in Wrexham

a bad lot. You couldn't take their word for anything. Towards the end of the war, there were a lot of loose soldiers. We called them bandits. They belonged to nobody. They could be Austrians, Germans, Russians.. just floating around. If you gave them money, they'd fight for you, if you didn't, they wouldn't. And the Russians.. a lot of Eastern European people.. well we had about a thousand. We handed them back at the Austrian border, and they handed back the so-called Europeans. The Russians were very cruel. No messing at all. They used to shoot the lot. I remember them shaking hands with our officers, and the Russians went over a hill, and we could hear them. They went into a wood, took them over, and we could hear the machine guns going. We couldn't see them. But no Russians came back. They shot their own. They could be anybody, they'd been freelancing for years, because Europe was in a mess, and you didn't know who was what, and some went to Germany, some went to Britain, and some went to Italy. But after that, I came back to Blighty, thank God. Things weren't good. I was nearly captured at a place called Lyon, towards the beginning of the war. We weren't there five minutes, and the Germans surrounded us. We were given duff information. We thought we were moving into an aerodrome, and the Gerries just sat back and watched us. Our CO, Tomlinson, came from round here (the Wrexham area). There's still some of his family in the Cheshire area. They were farmers/ milk people.. cheese and all that. He was a damn good CO. He was sharp. To us, an old man, but he wasn't an old man at all. He must have been in his forties. I was one of the lucky ones. I got out. I managed to get out, and went to Dover, to Shorncliffe Barracks. It was a hell of a place. I'd have been better off as a Prisoner of War! It was very rough indeed. We were treated like dogs. When we arrived down there, all we had down there was tins of M and V- a mixture of vegetables and meat. We had no money. You couldn't go to the NAFFI. There was no NAFFI to go to. You couldn't even chat up a girl! It was hopeless. Eventually, I was sent to Norfolk. That was quite a good camp, but the Germans were always raiding it. That got me very bitter about the Germans. They used to slip in about four or five o'clock, machine gun the streets, when the children were coming out of school. We got very bitter. I didn't mind fighting the Germans, but when you saw them machine gunning the kids coming from Sunday school... I met the Mrs. Betty, because she was helping troops from Liverpool. Many of them had been badly burnt on oil ships. They were coming in to Clatterbridge. She was a nurse, I think she must have been. I met her in Wrexham after that. Funny how it works out. She's a good girl. She ended up in the Royal Observer Corps.

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Appendix 2

Landowners Personal Account

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

FROM ROGER GRAHAM-PALMER – CHAIRMAN CEFN PARK DEVELOPMENTS LTD

THE OAKS SITE - OAK ROAD - WREXHAM INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Before the 2nd World War, the Oaks Site was farmland and belonged to Mrs Mary Fenwick. The Oaks Site was requisitioned from Mrs Fenwick in 1940 and she died shortly afterwards. Mrs Fenwick left the retained land at Cefn Park Estate to her son Col Roderick Fenwick-Palmer CBE.

During the war the Oaks Site, together with much other land nearby was developed into a Royal Ordnance Factory (ROF) for the war effort. It was a very low density development to ensure that if one part was attacked, the whole factory would not be put out of action and it is thought that the factory covered 600 acres (but apparently much more) the majority of it requisitioned from Cefn Park Estate (Mrs Fenwick) by the Ministry of Supply in 1940. However I make it absolutely clear that in the past 50 years that I have been connected with the site I have never heard that it was attacked by enemy action of any description. I have never heard of any German bombs being dropped on any part of the ROF or any surrounding land including Wrexham itself.

In the 1960s some of the requisitioned land was offered back to the original owners; some of it was already being developed into modern factories and was not offered back. The Oaks site was a part that was offered back and purchased by Col Fenwick-Palmer.
Col Fenwick-Palmer.

Col Fenwick-Palmer let the Oaks site, then some 70 acres to farmers, Mr and Mrs Colley who lived in the Oaks House, now sold, and they ran sheep on the land and endeavoured to keep the hawthorn and brambles under control. However, it was not an economic unit and when Mr and Mrs Colley died the land became derelict.

In October 1968, Col Fenwick-Palmer died and I inherited Cefn Park Estate which included all the former ROF land that was bought back after the war in its raw damaged state.

In 1974 The Secretary of State for Industry (Mr A Wedgewood Benn) through his agents The Welsh Development Agency had a requirement to acquire 160 acres of the former ROF to provide industrial land for unemployed former miners in Wrexham. I was the owner of that land and before the purchase was completed, I transferred the land into a company called Elfosark Investment Developments Ltd and the directors subsequently changed the name to Cefn Park

Developments Ltd. (The Company). The Company then sold 160 acres of the former ROF land to the Secretary of State for Industry.

The Oaks site was transferred into the Company but it was not included in the sale to the Secretary of State. It was retained by The Company.

The directors of The Company were of the opinion that The Oaks site may also sell if the ex ROF buildings were demolished and some of the money arising from the sale was utilised to this effect. Planning permission was obtained to demolish the partly sunken magazines which were surrounded by blast banks and a contract was drawn up by some consulting engineers in Liverpool and after tenders were received the contract was awarded to Jones Bros of Ruthin, Civil Engineers.

At the same time in 1974, the factory for Kelloggs was being constructed nearby and the builders had large amounts of clean clay that they were digging out of the foundations for disposal.

The magazines were blasted, the reinforcement then cut with oxy-acetylene and removed in large sections and towed and pushed with very large machines to form a bank alongside the Redwither Brook. The magazines were about 12 ft below ground level, were made of reinforced concrete and had floors that were 12" to 18" thick. The blast banks were pushed back into the holes left by the magazines. One of the magazines was only partially constructed and another had had the hole prepared and the blast banks formed but construction had not begun. This is clearly shown on the Ordnance Survey maps prepared at the time.

It follows that The Oaks site was probably one of the last areas of the ROF to be developed and was never completed. During the clearance of the site (I was there every day) there was no indication of any un-exploded ordnance or ordnance of any kind whatsoever. It may be that this part of the ROF never came into production at all. I remember getting an insurance policy to cover the contractors from unexploded ordnance for £50 which would indicate that the risk was assessed as very low. The value of the contract was £33,000 or thereabouts but some of the tenders came in for over £100,000.

The original site sloped gently down towards the Redwither Brook. The wall made of the reinforced concrete demolished magazines formed a good buttress and the clay from the Kelloggs site was used to raise the level of the whole site up to the top of the buttress and make it more level. There was also a bund near the house and the contractors brought a scraper to remove the bund and further level the site.

Wrexham and East Denbighshire Water Company (the Dee Valley Water and now Severn Trent) had taken over the Llwyn Onn waterworks which was originally constructed to feed the ROF and W&EDWC also had taken over the water pipes that went round the ROF. There are process, fire and potable water mains. The magazine had a water supply and this had to be cut off by W&EDWC before the demolition took place. Subsequently, W&EDWC abandoned some pipes going through the middle of the site as they became too far under the ground as the level was increased. (They hadn't read the papers they were sent)

There were also electricity supplies to the magazines and the water workers were busy recovering those as well as the lead pipes and there was quite an altercation about this as the W&EDWC was using our Company's time for recovering not only the water pipes but also the electricity lines too. (Water Company employees get scrap value as a perk) Subsequently I was invited to become a non-executive director of W&EDWC.

Following the recovery of the site the Company had an approach from the American Company Union Carbide to build a substantial factory to make frankfurter skins for the European Market but their application was turned down by the Alkali Inspector. (The factory subsequently went to Northern France and blew up.

The Company sold part of the site to their neighbours Brake Engineering and that sale covered the cost of recovering the site to date. Brake Engineering have built part of their factory over one of the recovered magazines. They found some lumps of concrete but nothing unmanageable.

Roger Graham-Palmer
17th March 2017