What’s left after 300 years of manufacturing explosives?

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Revelations in new exhibition of photographs at Royal Gunpowder Mills

Powder, an exhibition of photographs by Open College of the Arts student Sarah Deane, explores the structures and archaeology that remain after 300 years of gunpowder and explosives manufacture at The Royal Gunpowder Mills at Waltham Abbey in Essex. The Mills is one of only three Royal gunpowder factories in the UK and Ireland and is the only one to have survived virtually intact.

The photographs highlight the remnants of the manufacture of explosives since gunpowder production began on the site in the 1660s. The project grew out of Sarah's year as a volunteer in the archive at The Mills photographing artefacts, maps and plans. She took the photographs in the Autumn and Winter to give them clarity without the dramatic effects created by shadows, working on a Saturday when the site was virtually empty.

Sarah grew up in rural West of Ireland. The region's troubled history lies dormant in the land, awaking her curiosity about the hidden side of conflict. She graduated from University College Dublin with a BA Hons degree in English. She moved to London in 1998 and is studying for a BA Hons degree in photography with the Open College of the Arts.

Commenting on her work, Sarah said: 'The landscape is the silent witness that fortifies histories, maintains boundaries and offers traces of evidence in its many layers. I live in the Lee Valley, on the site of the former Royal Small Arms Factory and home of the Lee Enfield Rifle. That's where my interest in conflict developed, particularly from the perspective of the Home Front. I hope the exhibition will encourage people of all ages to think in a different way about how they see conflict.'

OCA Principal Gareth Dent: 'I am delighted that Sarah has been able to show her work as it exemplifies the thoughtful considered photography that our degree course aims to develop.'

***Powder** is at The Royal Gunpowder Mills, Beaulieu Drive, Waltham Abbey, Essex, EN9 1JY and runs from 23 July to 31 August. The Royal Gunpowder Mills are open daily from 10.00 – 17.00 last admission 3pm. Admission to the whole site, including the exhibition: £9.75 adults, £7.75 children, concessions available.*

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