

Rotherwas Ordnance, Hereford

At the turn of the 20th century, the Rotherwas estate comprised 2,500 acres of land on the south side of the River Wye. After the death of Count Louis Bodenham-Lubienski in 1912, it was broken up into lots and sold. At the auction just prior to the war, Herefordshire Council bought an area of 185 acres overlooked by Dinedor Hill and bordered by the Wye meadows. In 1916, the land was acquired by the Ministry of Munitions as a site for a factory for filling shells with lyddite, as an insurance against mishap elsewhere. At the height of the factory's activity in October 1918, there were 5,943 employees, 3,977 of which were women. The factory closed in 1920, but reopened in 1940 as the Royal Ordnance factory. After the war, the factory was demolished and the site became Rotherwas industrial estate. The magazines used to store the finished shells, however, remained at the south of the site. These buildings are now due to be demolished and we were called upon to carry out a photographic survey before all but one of them was pulled down. The seven brick built structures were each surrounded by an earth bund to protect the rest of the factory (and Hereford) from an explosion. Finished shells were transported to the magazines using a narrow gauge factory railway. The loading platforms at the side of the magazines are clearly visible (see above). Shells were stored upright on the concrete floors. Circular marks are still visible on the floors where the shells stood. By measuring the diameter of the marks we can tell that only 12" shells were stored here. Perhaps the most striking find from the survey was the wartime graffiti covering the walls. An uncomplimentary depiction of a British officer had been modified to make it look like Hitler, with an iron cross and characteristic moustache.