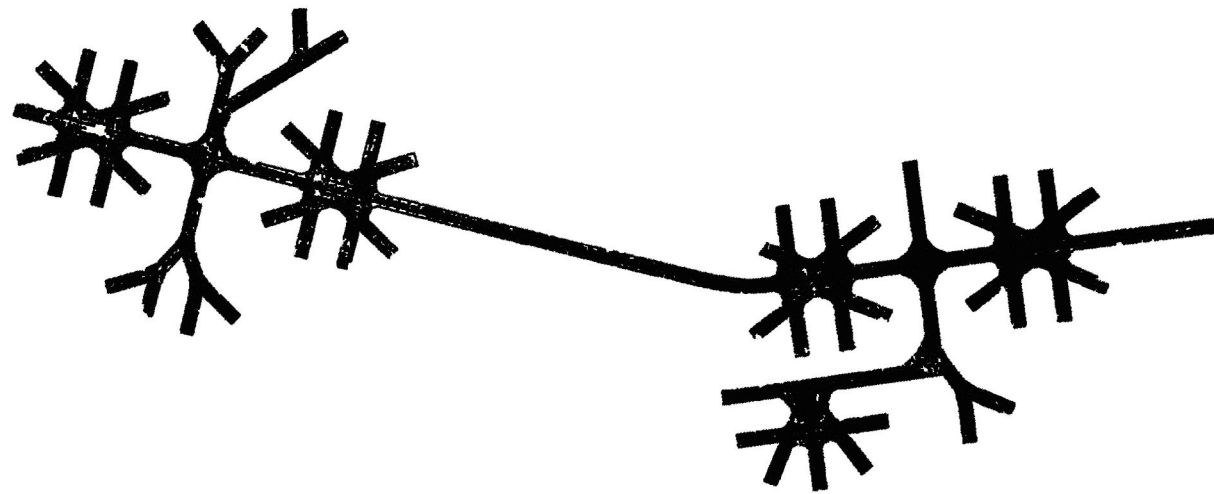


Critical Review of Practice

By Laura Wing



Project Overview

Our familiar landscapes are often forced to alter through World Wars and conflicts. It can result in leaving a unique imprint, which offers us a chance to reflect on the sacrifices and commitments that War commands. These imprints can also be described as traces and it important to understand potential differences for such tokens of the past. Lars Nowak describes in an article “It is useful to have an analytical framework for comparing traces of different kinds. Although many military interventions are destructive, we must also attend to constructive operations such as buildings of bunkers, railroads and airfields.” (Nowak, 2017)

We are all too familiar with the harrowing destructive traces from the Second World War to name but a few, Auschwitz camps, the front line battles but for some this may feel distant as we geographically view these from further afield. Perhaps some reflection could be drawn to these constructive traces that can be found much closer to home and investigate the structures that still stand in this ever-changing landscape.

With the outbreak of the Second World War our landscapes saw the dramatic increase of construction for aerodrome sites within United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. This gave an opportunity for political relations between Westminster and Stormont to grow, as historian Brain Barton says “It was, however above all facts of geography which made Ulster’s role in allied victory a much more vital one and which most earned Westminster’s gratitude”. (Barton, 1995)

After these newly formed relations between governments and with the victory of D-Day landings, many saw the rapid closure of the majority of these aerodromes. These military sites had physically altered the landscape greatly, often displacing communities and their livelihoods. This military infrastructure represents that fact and the essential cogs that were needed for the preparation for D-Day. I view these sites as a constructive trace as they intertwine with past and present and invite audiences to reflect as we fast approach 80th anniversary of The Second World War.

With this great significance, history turns into heritage and the discussion of preservation occurs, while some structures achieve the title as monuments and others diminish. We must try to preserve them in another ways, cataloguing them by tracking their GPS co-ordinates and then documenting them photographically, this will give them their best chance of surviving and keeping the legacy present for generations to see.

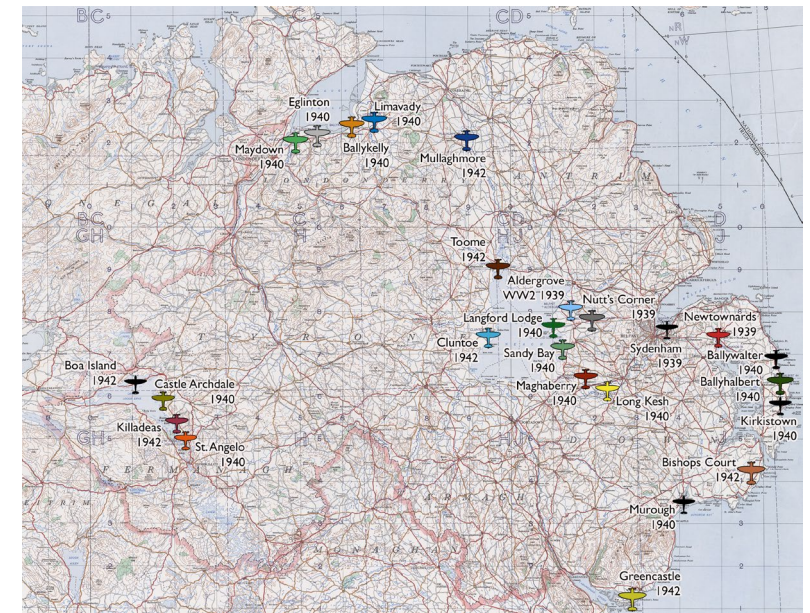


Fig. I. Northern Ireland Map

Project

With reflection in mind, that started my journey into investigating all military aerodromes within Northern Ireland, viewing the landscape from different viewpoints, informing my knowledge of the extent and range of different areas. I wanted to document the current state of all structures and also the landscape surrounding these sites. Concentrating on about 2/3 sites at a time to see what I could pull from the environment and discover these constructive traces.

John Kippin's work *Cold War Pastoral* sees him extensively document one military airfield Clapham Common, which it is known for its complex history, mainly from the nuclear Cold War era. (see fig 2.) Kippin's work is descriptive as he documents the remnants of the former airfields, buildings and the changing landscape. Mark Durden describes the work 'There is a certain forensic quality to these pictures, a sense of simply gathering evidence, of preserving visual traces before they disappear'. (Durden, 2001)

This is an area, which is complex, with its rich social, and political context and I think it's important that the imagery is simple. Letting the beauty of the constructed landscape engage with the audience for itself. By documenting this site in way you are preserving these areas with the indexical power of the camera. Whilst there is always enthusiasm for preserving buildings or listing buildings into schedule monuments it is often a slow process, it will inevitably boil down to finance and funding.

My work developed very much with the idea in mind to preserve with the camera. With a vast area to explore I felt much like John Kippin did with his own body of work. "Wandering amongst the gorse, heather and birch, discovering peculiar structures half hidden by vegetation, I felt like some eighteenth century explorer stumbling across the remnants of ancient civilisation". (Kippin, 2001) Along with my ideas about preservation this project started to grow into a more personal one, as I was rediscovering these sites like collecting stamps for newly found hobby.

From about mid way into the project I realised the importance of being systematic within my approach and this would be critical for producing a cohesive series. Remaining consistent with the time of day, a choosing the best weather to emphasise the subject and my process of exploring. Capturing each site during sunset on an overcast evening to accentuate the stillness of the landscape surrounding area. A warmer tone is present that contrasts with the military subject and its often-grey exterior. The buildings have become one as its decay mixes, to make a new landscape.

Fig.2. John Kippin Cold War Pastoral



Fig.3. Newtownards Laura Wing



Marc Wilson *The Last Stand* documents the presence of The Second World War decaying defensive structures, which would have been used if enemy forces penetrated Europe. Roy Exley says about the imagery “In his (Wilson) images, they merge with, rather than punctuate, their landscapes. Somehow they have become topographical component of, rather than an imposition upon, those landscapes.” (Exley, 2014)

These still, ghostly structures shot on an eerie dawn, are representational for the title and the subject. (see fig 4) These images for me represent what you would typically expect to see from the aftermath of The Second World War but for this work it has been brought together geographically. Seeing works that have span Europe, gives greater context to how many different countries that were affected by The Second World War. Like my own work it gives thought to what these constructive traces really represent for potential heritage and legacies for this time period. As the project progressed I struggled with the large amount of content that could be recorded and seem to stray from my original intent. I realised that I needed to revisit the structures, the military buildings that drew me into this subject, the found artefact, and these ideas of an airfield monuments.

By streamlining my approach I started to notice the typical types of buildings found on an airfield. The standardised structure for me came more apparent and so I started creating categories of these types. This would include hangars, control towers, defensive structure and of course they main imprint onto the landscape the runway. For capturing my work I started experimenting with a large format camera, I enjoyed this analogue process and liked the end product that was produced. For me it slowed the whole process down, framing the shots precisely. However I had processing issues and could not keep up with the amount of content that needed to be captured, it was holding back proceeding with the next shoot as I had limited film holders. Despite changing back to my original apparatus of the digital camera I still enjoyed this experiment and learnt a lot in the whole process in which it has been beneficial to my work.

Throughout the project the intent has always been focused on the ideologies around The Second World War. Knowing the audience was critical to this work as every aerodrome site was in a different area of Northern Ireland. Some sites were not only used in the 1940s but were kept open and used for other military involvements such as The Northern Ireland troubles (conflict between 1968-1998) and because of this fact it's hard for communities to see certain sites within a Second World War perspective. A couple of sites include Long Kesh and its infamous H block within HMP Maze and Aldergrove being a main hub for flight activity during the troubles.

Fig.4. *The Last Stand* Marc Wilson



Fig.5. *Greencastle* Laura Wing



With this in mind it is important to visually to keep these time periods separate if possible, for example when capturing the hangars at Long Kesh. I could easily include the tower that was used at the prison, architecturally I quite like it but it was important to reduce my frame and remove it from my shot. (see fig 6)

When audiences view my work I am asking them to look beyond any representations that they hold from media from the Second World War or the Northern Ireland troubles. Presenting my work with as much context becomes an integral part to punching through media representation, Val Williams says “When we see a photo-story about war, we subliminally anticipate a number of visual elements- a dead body, an anguished family, a destroyed building, a distraught child. Without these indicators of what a photograph is, and what it means, we might be disappointed, unable to feel guilt or compassions, deprived of catharsis. (Williams, 1995)

Within my work I think it helps that I am looking at all these sites collectively, it doesn't give the viewer time to digress deeply into one particular area, although many peoples memories will come through and that's unavoidable. Other audiences that might care about the area itself is perhaps family members trying to retrace the footsteps, looking for commemoration, a piece of personal history, the closest thing they can witness that their relatives endured from the war.

Whilst building the structure categorises, I experimented with rephotography, I did an extensive search for archival imagery of the buildings, which one would probably do at the start of a project but this was an element I wanted to look at. After researching from different resources such as the RAF Museum it came apparent that very few buildings were documented during these times. The types of archival imagery I came in contact and relied on heavily, were the aerial images for establishing the buildings, which were found in a MOD film library. With this aerial imagery from the 50s-70s, I was astounded with the size of the runways and imprint they left even after subsequent years after the war ending. (see fig 7)

Through this MOD film library I had access to a few aerials of the aerodromes I was investigating, I would often layer up a recent aerial to see differences between the landscape and layout. Visually I liked the way they came together, the merging of monochrome and colour, ghosting of outlines to produce this layeredness of time but within a context that would be beneficial for audiences to see. To visually have a greater perspective of the size, imprint of the runways itself. (see fig 8)

Fig.6. Long Kesh Laura Wing



Fig.7. 1968 Long Kesh MOD Archive

Leading rephotography collaborators Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe have produced many projects utilising this technique, after an expedition for the work Yosemite in Time he wrote an email to Rebecca Solnit (collaborator for project) “We’re seeing a window in time that rarely occurs, the moment in which ideas and convictions converge in the same frame and, becoming clear before being scattered once again. We’re between landscapes, and we’re seeing the overlay clearly in way that’s normally impossible” (Solnit, 2005)

What these images hold are the landscape’s truth through space and time, although of course put together with an artist eye, you can’t escape this. I like the way the panoramic has been assembled, like a montage, a collection of artist’s ideas to form one wider perspective of the landscape. (see fig 9) For me this is why I wanted to include these aerial images, they may look different to the rest of the work but what they offer in terms of combining history. The ultimate view to these constructive traces, that brings the project together. By labelling up the buildings I wanted to provoke a sense of repetition in the types of buildings found, although this is a photographic body of work and I wanted it to take another form, as a type of guide to Northern Ireland’s aerodromes, although I expressed in the introduction to my work that this is not an exclusive catalogue, in the hope to provoke audiences to do their own research, to discover there own heritage.

Fig.8. Castle Archdale Laura Wing



Fig.9. Yosemite inTime Mark Klett & Byron Wolfe



Outcome

The exhibition was the first instance that I really pushed for definitive categories in order to display my work. The festival that I displayed at featured all different projects concerning digital outcomes for The First World War. Although my project featured The Second World War it was connected with the beginning of the aviation for the Royal Air force in The First World War. Exhibiting my images to the public was well accepted and the fact that I wasn't displaying First World War aerodrome sites did not faze the audience, as I would imagine most World War enthusiasts would be largely the same.

The categories worked well for the space that I was given, as I was able to engineer an installation that featured the images onto boxes, which in turn resembled a structure of its own. The boxes were arranged to feature the category in a row but were able to rotate as so the viewer could arrange them in any order they wished. The categories remained separate from each other's geographical areas, as it was not possible to group them together like this. Some sites would feature 1-3 images where other sites none, this was because sites did work photographically or I had problems gaining access. But audiences seem to align them up for themselves, which made them engage with the display.

The physical size of the images 8 in x 10 in which I believe didn't hold a substantial impact for the aerial shots as they were not big enough to inspect the layers of the original source images and the 2018 aerals. But actual size was constrained by space and budget. The general public received it well and were surprised just how many sites were constructed. They were aware of the sites that were in their area but not for the whole of Northern Ireland.

After feedback from the general public and portfolio reviews from the Belfast Photo Festival I started to work on the design of my book. I knew it had to start with the right context and map of locations of these aerodromes. With the layout of the images I did not put them in obvious categories of the types of structures this time. However the same order was used from the exhibition, with the category order of control tower, bird's eye view, hangar, defensive structure and the final type.

The order did change a little, if visually a pairing didn't work on the double spread or I preferred the stronger image to feature on the right hand side. The captions (like the exhibition) were kept to the type of building and then its location. I did incorporate colour-coded aircraft markers that linked with the map, image and then the extended caption at the back. This was to keep in the notion of a guide within this photographic body of work.

Fig. 10. Installation shot Laura Wing



Fig. 11. Book page Laura Wing



For this project I worked with (mainly) historian Ernie Cromie throughout, building context to my work with his extensive archive and resources of aerodrome sites. My approach for the captions was to reveal the final edit to Ernie and work through them one by one for any historic significance that came to mind, in which I noted down the information. This process was slightly lengthy and we often went off on a tangent. However I liked the idea that somebody who was well seeded within this field relayed his knowledge and stories onto somebody who is relatively new to this subject. Almost keeping the stories and history alive, through shared interest.

The actual printing of the book was slightly disappointing, the budget unfortunately did not stretch to a higher quality production. I went for quantity rather than quality in the hope to distribute books to museums around Northern Ireland. In reflection I think it would have been beneficial to produce one book at the highest quality to showcase my work and take to other organisations for funding, this is something I will pursue after the MA.

When viewing body of works I personally prefer viewing a photo book, however the website is important as it is more accessible to the general public. The website is of a simple design and is easily navigated, featuring the project solely. Every image used in book is available to be viewed there too, displaying caption with type of structure and location. On the website it is not so obvious of the guide format that was established in the book, but the landing page goes straight to the introduction that includes the map, offering important context to the project. The extended captions do not feature within the website, this was to encourage audiences to download the book onto their own devices to experience the guide format. Within that menu of downloading the PDF this was where the printed book would have been available to order if I were happy with the quality.

The importance of making these images available online is that they are digital, available to everyone, I am documenting these sites in 2018 creating a digital record, preserving the structure, evidence of the constructive traces that are the only remnants of contributions from The Second World War. If these sites are unsuccessful with achieving their title of scheduled monument at least we have the apparatus of a camera to help preserve. "Each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again". (Sontag, 1978)

Fig. I2. Book page Laura Wing

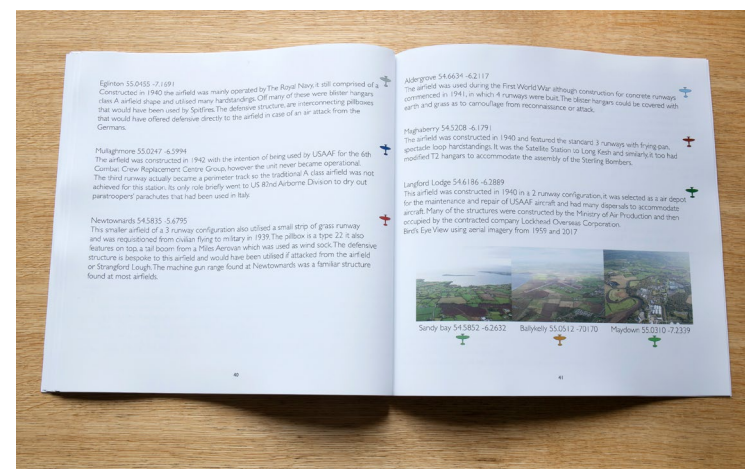


Fig. I3. Website page www.lauraframe.com



Fig. I4. Book Laura Wing



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Figures

Figure 1. Northern Ireland Map c. 1963, aeroplanes added by Laura Wing 2018

Figure 2. Cold War Pastoral John Kippin 2001 <https://johnkippin.com/images-2/>

Figure 3. Rediscovering the Aerodrome Laura Wing 2018

Figure 4. The Last Stand Marc Wilson 2014 <https://marcwilson.co.uk/albums/9U8LSb/the-last-stand-1>

Figure 5. Using a large format camera, Greencastle Control Tower Laura Wing 2018

Figure 6. Long Kesh with HMP Maze Watch Tower Laura Wing 2018

Figure 7. Aerial image of Long Kesh MOD Archive 1968

Figure 8. Rediscovering the Aerodrome Castle Archdale imagery from 1959 and 2017 Laura Wing 2018

Figure 9. Glacier Point Mashup, Mark Klett Byron Wolfe, 2003. Ansel Adams (left) C.193, Carleton E. Watkins (right) 1861. Yosemite In Time. <https://byronwolfe.typepad.com/klett Wolfe/yosemite/>

Figure 10. Exhibition view from Digital Centenaries Laura Wing 2018

Figure 11. Book page from Rediscovering the Aerodrome Laura Wing 2018

Figure 12. Book page from Rediscovering the Aerodrome Laura Wing 2018

Figure 13. Website view from Rediscovering the Aerodrome Laura Wing 2018 www.lauraframe.com

Figure 14. Book cover from Rediscovering the Aerodrome Laura Wing 2018