

## OBSERVATIONS ON A GRAFFITI SITE

On the fringes of a Northern city this derelict former brick factory is hidden away in several acres of wooded valley and crumbling from neglect and vandalism. Dank, overgrown and eerily littered with the detritus of drugs and sex. Many of the still standing walls are covered in graffiti, freshly painted and exuberant, shining out against its miserable backdrop.

Fascinated by this bit of industrial history I have been there several times.

The last time I was there was with my two adult sons and a nephew from Australia, at first the place seemed deserted, even with the four of us it felt edgy, a bit scary. All was quiet for a while then came the sound of a motorbike close by. We were on a narrow path down the side of one of buildings, the bike came straight towards us ridden by a tatty individual about twenty years old. We had to jump aside to let him through. He looked straight at us but said nothing. This happened a couple more times as we carried on round. It was as if he were trying to scare us off but all he did was make us curious as to what he might be up to.

Later we saw a group of lads standing outside one of the buildings, behind them was a gap in the wall from which they had just emerged. They looked sheepish, guilty, aggressive, scared and wary all at the same time. Had I been on my own I would have given them a wide berth but having the safety of numbers it was 'ayup awreet lads).' Meanwhile our lad from Oz had nipped in through the gap to see what was happening inside, 'Come and get a look at this. Brilliant !!' inside they had taken a sheltered part of the derelict shed and done a basic renovation creating a large, smooth painted area. The floor was littered with paint spray cans, they had begun to draw and practice their graffiti - they had created an equivalent to an artists studio amongst this useless deteriorating site. They had been secretive because of what they perceived the reactions of the authorities would be. They were right to be worried, the mean spirit of the council and its rules would have been down on them - trespass, health and safety, making use of a property no one wants, being creative without permission, and worst of all enjoying themselves without paying for the privilege. I have no doubt the site will eventually be 'developed' and become another drab housing estate or business park. Meanwhile we admire the creative energy and enterprise we saw that day.

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