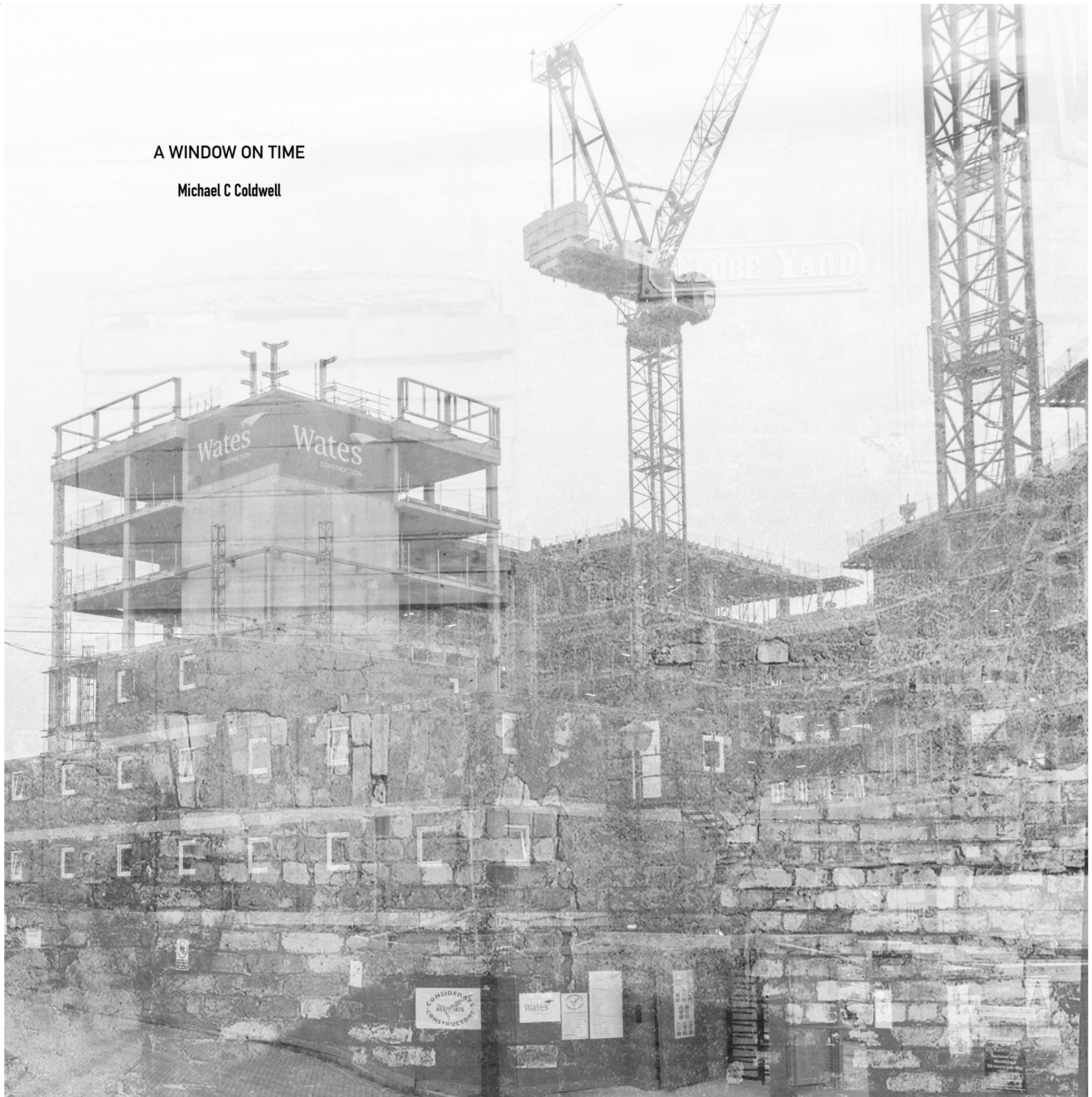


A WINDOW ON TIME

Michael C Coldwell



I like the word "medium" here.

It speaks to me of specters, of ghosts and phantoms, like these images themselves.

From the first "apparition", it's all about the return of the departed.

It is there in black and white, it can be verified after the fact.

The spectral is the essence of photography.

Jacques Derrida

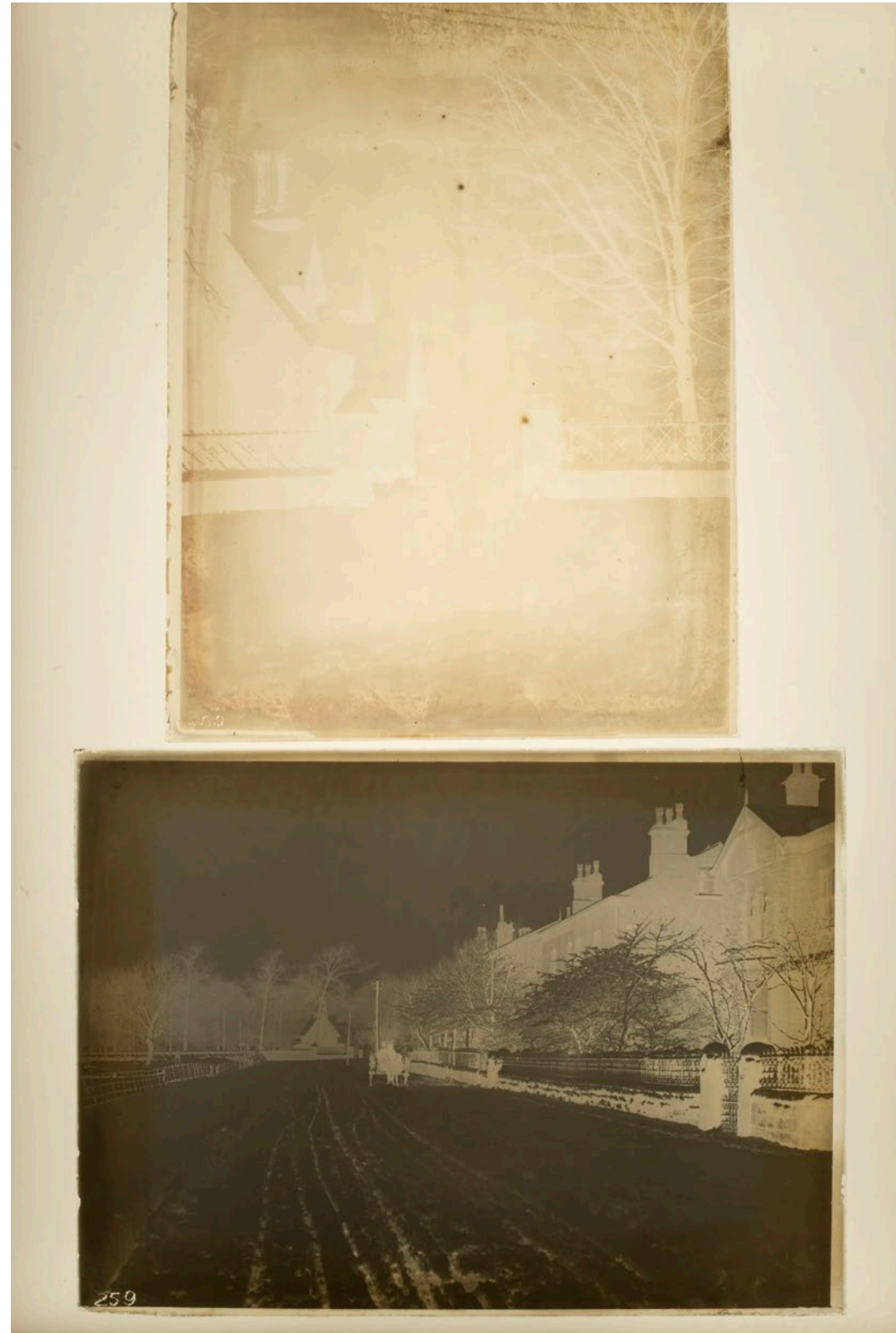


A WINDOW ON TIME

Michael C Coldwell







Through a Glass (Plate) Darkly...

This is a book about failed time travel.

It is also a collection of ghost stories without words.

Most importantly, however, this is a body of work about photography itself. Old images and new ones, time and its mediation, and the photograph's uncanny ability to bring back the dead - or with regard to landscape photography, to show us views of a world which has long disappeared.

Looking at vintage photographs of places we know well, can be a strange experience. It can be very disconcerting, even disorientating. It can be hard to reconcile images of the past with what we see today. The 'then-and-now' picture, sometimes called rephotography, attempts to address this problem by showing us a view of the past carefully alongside the same view in the present, so that we can compare them, make connections, and become aware of how a certain street or building has changed, through juxtaposition with what has stayed the same.

These types of images only really work when enough of the scene remains for us to recognise it as the same place. I became fascinated with the impossibility of rephotographing spaces which have changed fundamentally, where a lasting sense of place has been totally destroyed. I became equally captivated by the gradual decay of photographic artefacts themselves.

It seems we can lose the same scene twice.

There are many such lost places in my hometown, and these photographs present two of them - and two very different views of the same city.

One view is seen through the crumbling glass plates of Godfrey Bingley, a photographer and industrialist who lived in Leeds from 1842 until his death in 1927. He took many thousands of photographs and donated them all to the local University in 1913, when he went blind and could no longer work. Not a great deal is known about the man, but what we can see of the city in his images tells us something about him too. His view of Leeds centres on the natural and the bucolic, the woodlands and fields, the historic landmarks and the wealthy suburbs of a largely rural district just prior to its rapid urbanisation. Bingley doesn't show us the transformation which is happening all around him. There was a nostalgic quality to these selective views even in the time in which they were taken.

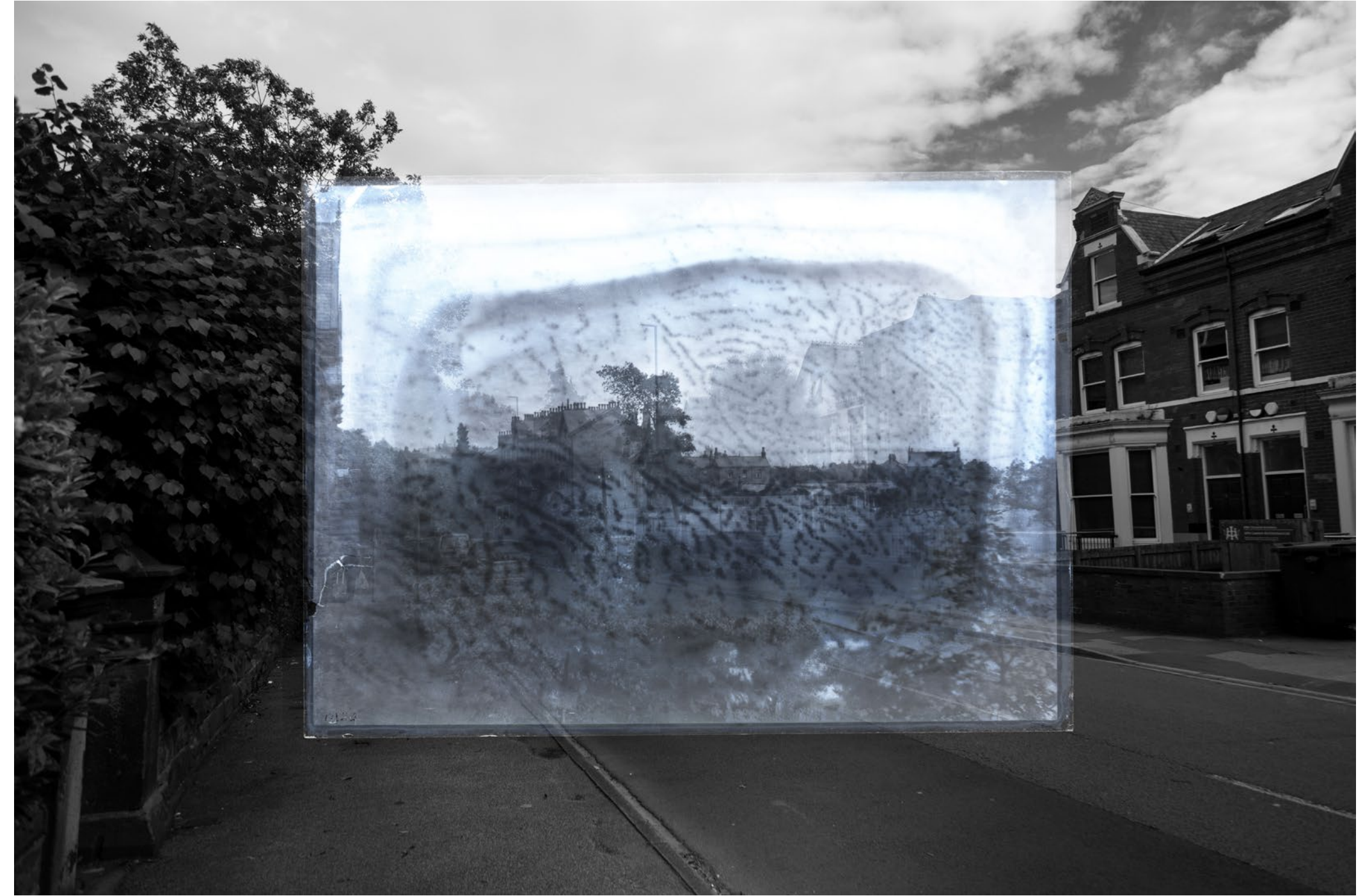
The other view re-presented in these works is of a slum called Quarry Hill. While taken at approximately the same time (c. 1900), and only a couple of miles away from Bingley's old haunts, the Leeds we see represented here is strikingly antithetic. In these murky views we see largely deserted streets, devoid of any vegetation or other signs of life. Occasionally we see a glimpse of a blurry face at a window, a haunting sign that people still lived in these condemned buildings. The original photographs were taken as evidence - commissioned to prove the area had become uninhabitable and needed to be cleared in its entirety.

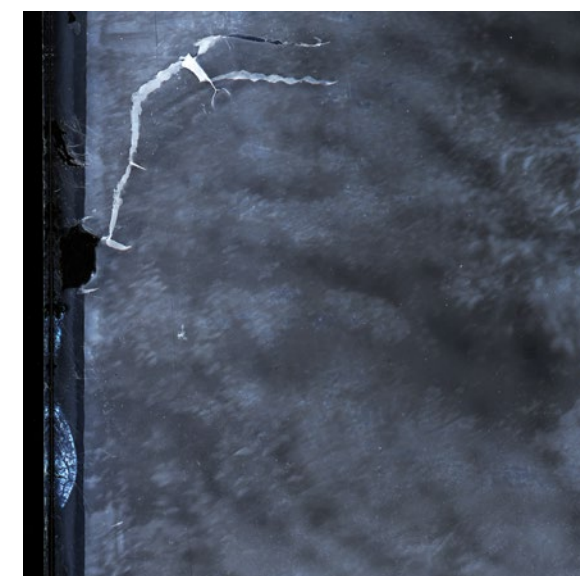
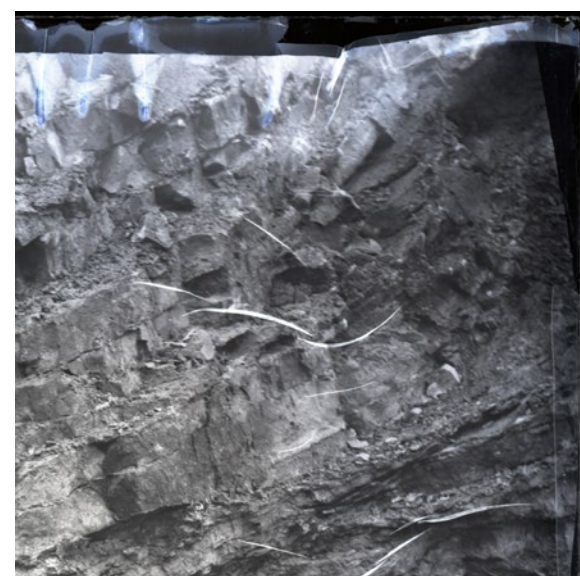
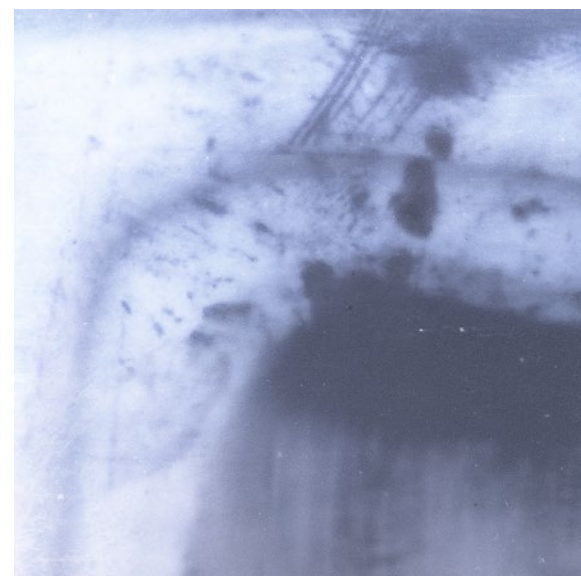
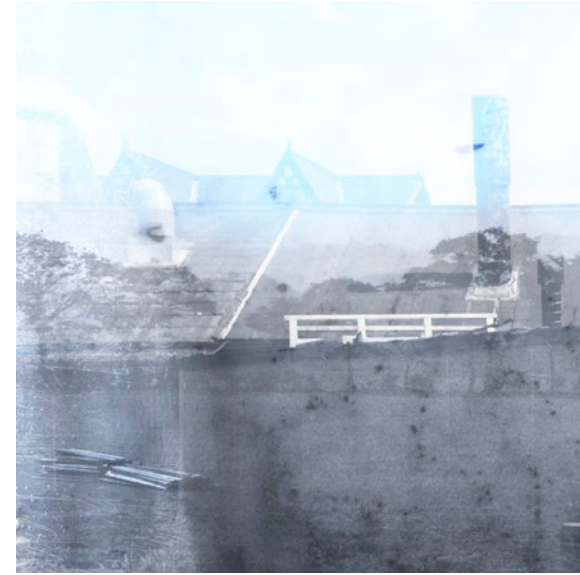
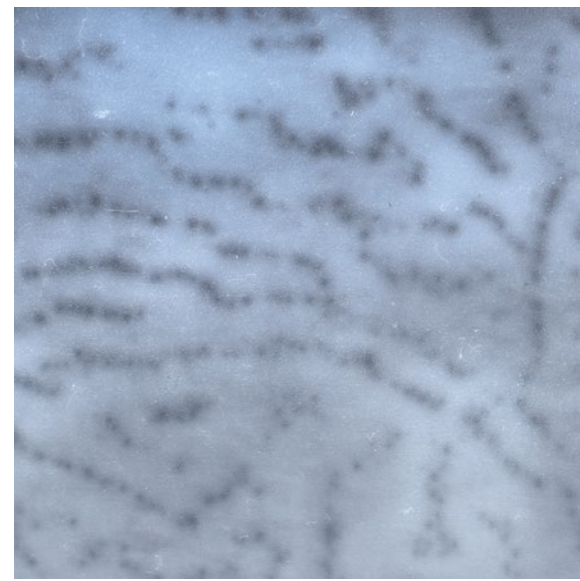
However, these two sets of images are also notably similar. They both present views of places on the cusp of disappearance. They both evoke the passage of time, as much through their own disintegration as objects, as through the historical scenes they depict. Their strangely fragmentary aspects of the past are at once eerie and beguiling - precisely because of their profound temporal limitation - their partiality as traces of a lost world we can never know.

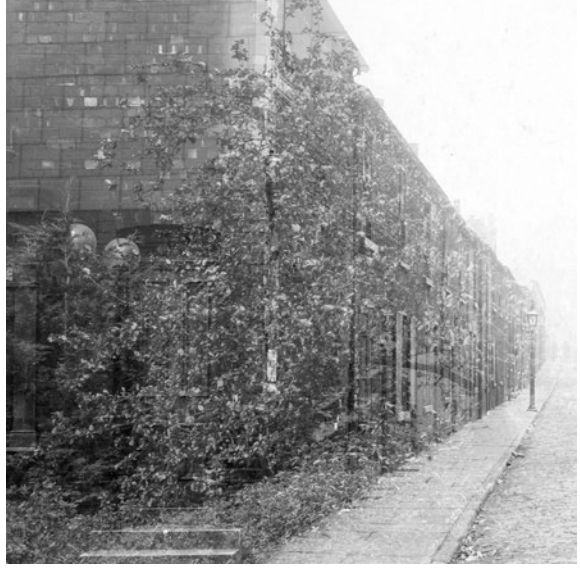
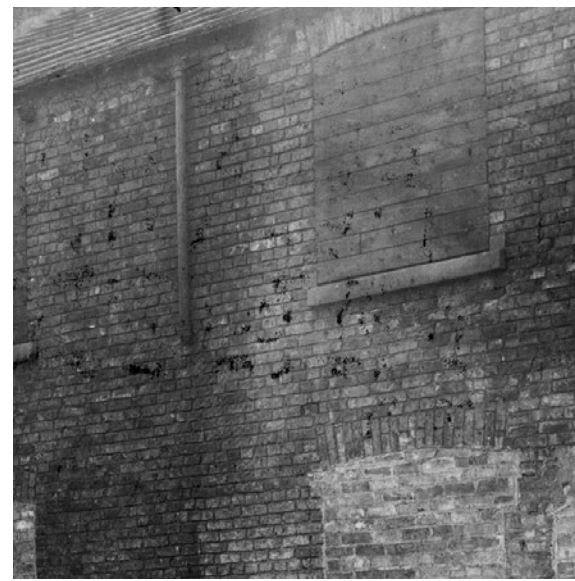
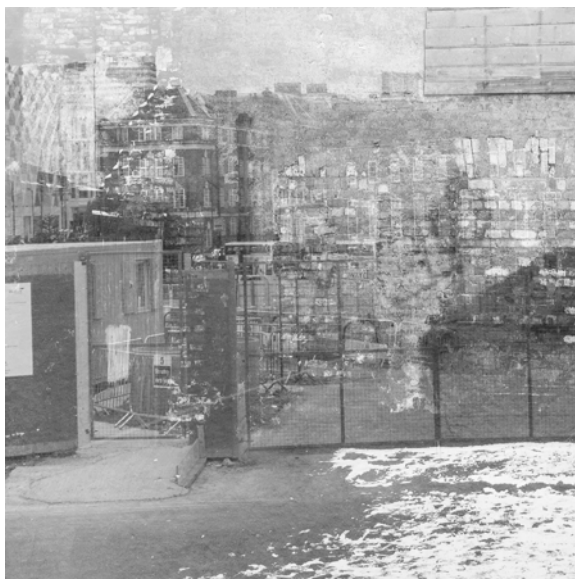
Some of the artefacts are so faint or damaged it has become impossible to peer through them to the scene they once represented. The photograph's disappearance then mirrors that of the landscape it once revealed.

In this book I attempt to take these scattered traces back to where they came from, and 'project' each image back into the same landscape as it exists today - regardless of whether we can tell it is the same place, or even *see* much of the original image. In these photographic works we see one time *through* the other, or they obscure each other completely. The intention here is not to provide an effective view of the past, a working then-and-now picture for us to play 'spot the difference', but to haunt the present with the forgotten changes which have taken place, the huge upheavals the city has undergone, and to place a hazy window on time itself - its relentless passage and the inevitable passing of all things.

Even landscapes and photographs.









In the two figures opposite we see examples of the original archival images used to create these new photographic works of Leeds.

The top photograph was taken by Godfrey Bingley in 1888, and depicts the rolling fields of what is now bustling suburban Headingley. The second image was taken by an unknown photographer in 1908. It represents the condemned buildings of the slum on Quarry Hill.

This is not the first work to directly contrast these two locations. In an essay by John Tagg on the photographic misrepresentation we see of Quarry Hill in these images, he compares the two districts in his discussion of the slum's demonisation.

“From the heights of Headingley, Quarry Hill seemed a nether world lost in satanic fumes, the breeding place of infernal beings” (Tagg, 1988)

Page 2 - Monument Hill I (Projection) 1888-2017

*Headingley rephotography

Page 4 - York Road no longer exists (Disorientation) 1909-2017

Page 5 - Searching for York Road (Trace), 2017

*Quarry Hill rephotography

Page 6 - Section I (Projection), 1891-2017

Page 7 - Ganister Quarry I (Projection II), 1905-2017

Page 8 - Godfrey Bingley glass plates on a light box

Page 10 - Old Tree Beck (Projection II), 1889-2017

Page 11 - To Fields I (Projection I), 1889-2017

Pages 12-13 - Auras of Headingley

Pages 14-15 - Auras of Quarry Hill

Page 16a - Headingley, from North Lane to

Cardigan Lane, 31 August 1888

by Godfrey Bingley.

(this slide was mislabelled, the location is actually

Meanwood Valley as seen from Wood Lane, Headingley)

Page 16b - Cornhill, Quarry Hill, 6 April 1908

photographer unknown.

THE SPECTRAL FOREST

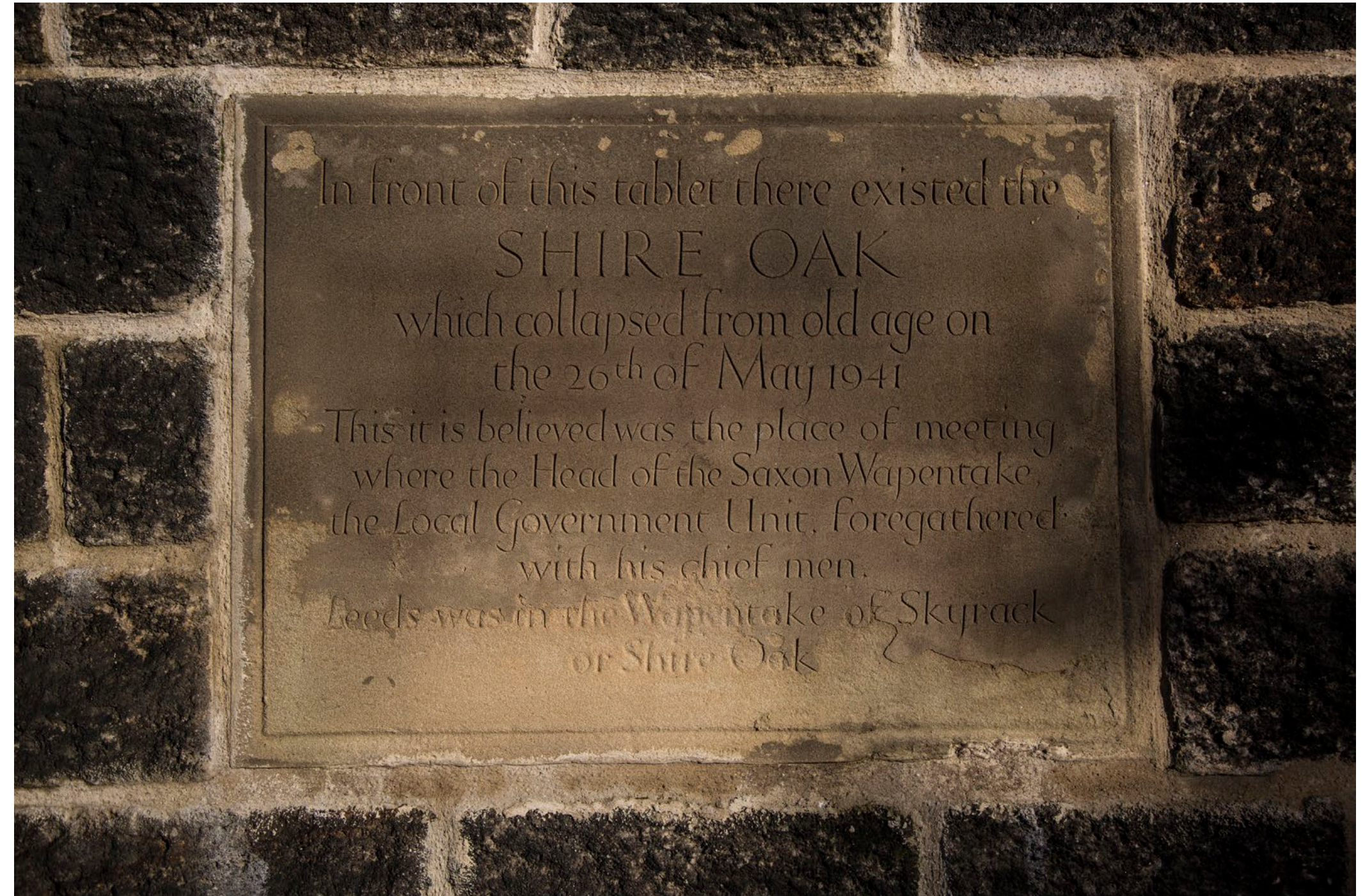
This city was once an ancient forest called Elmet.

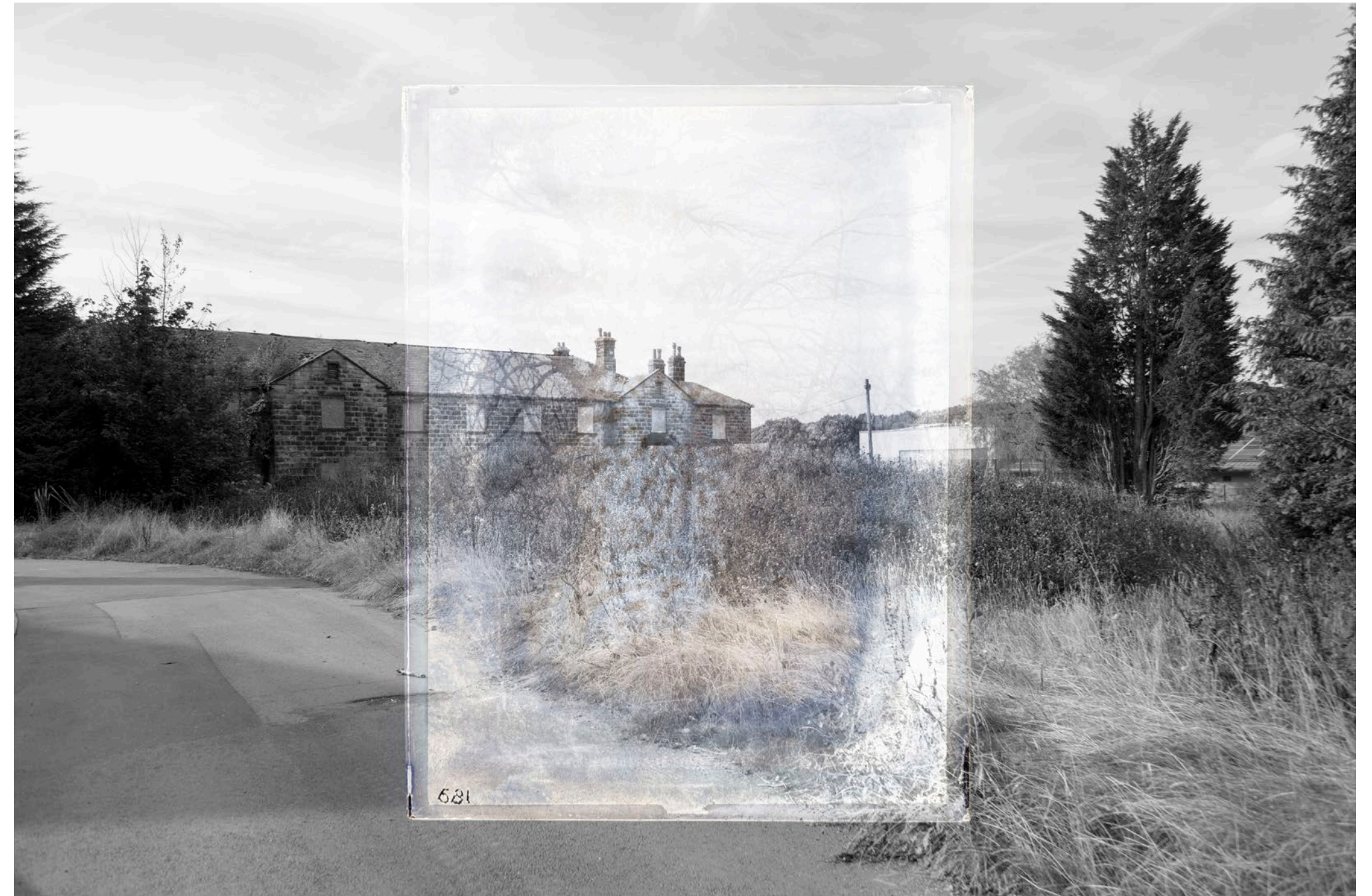
With these images we return to Godfrey Bingley's bucolic Leeds

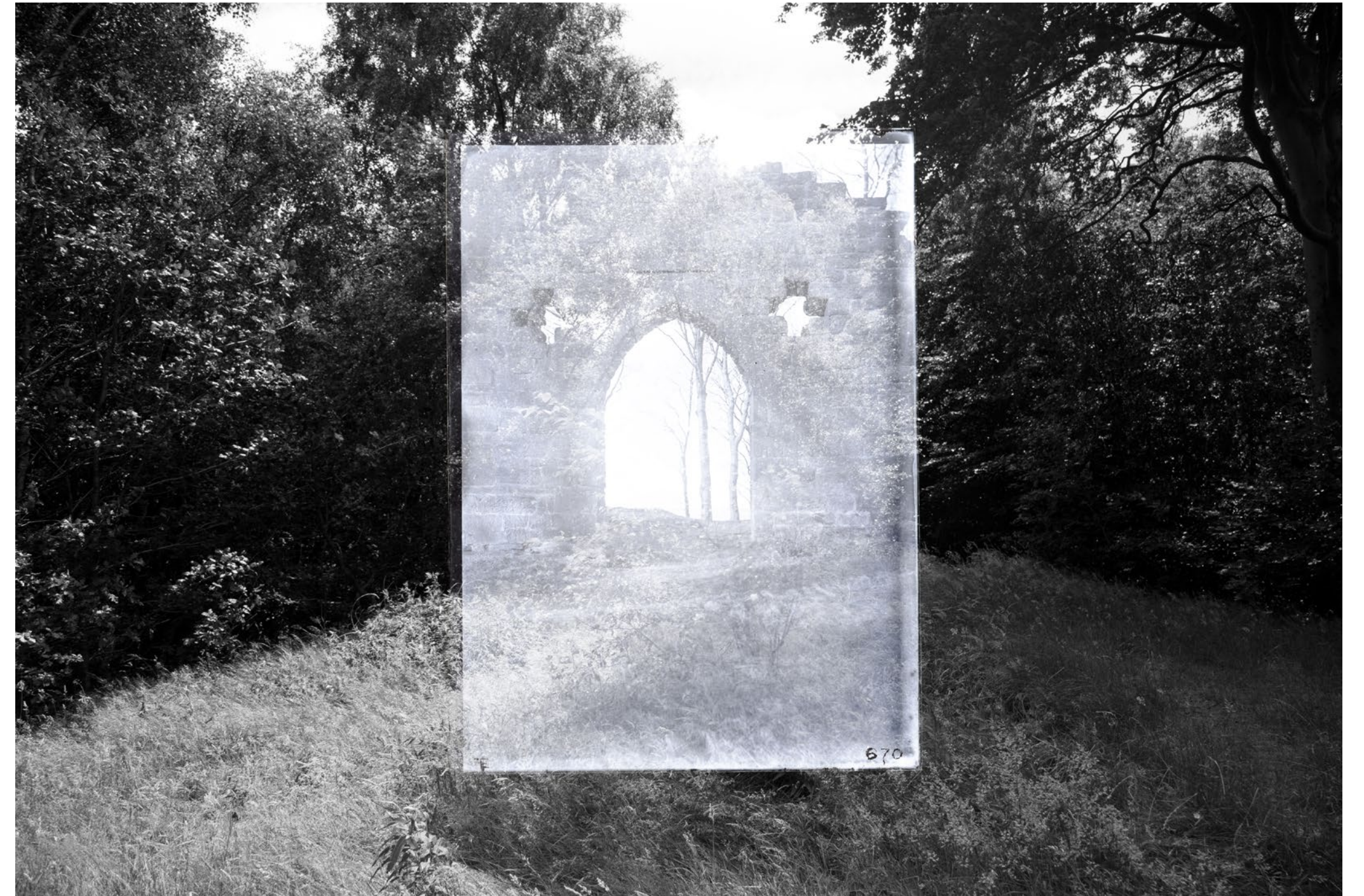
looking for spectral traces of this lost verdant landscape.











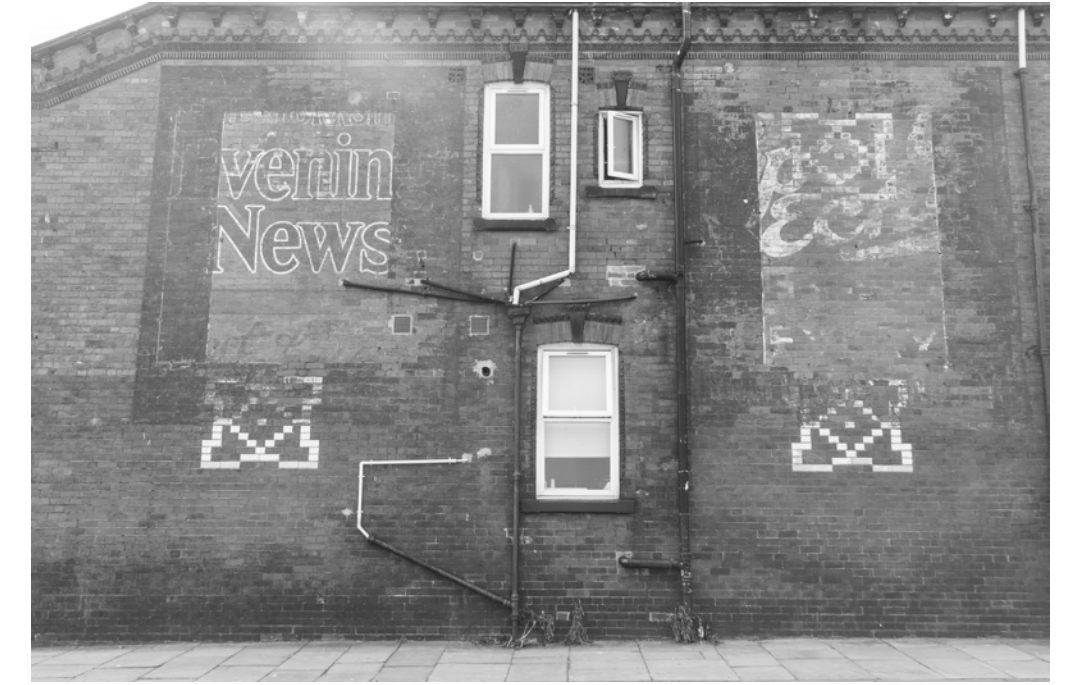




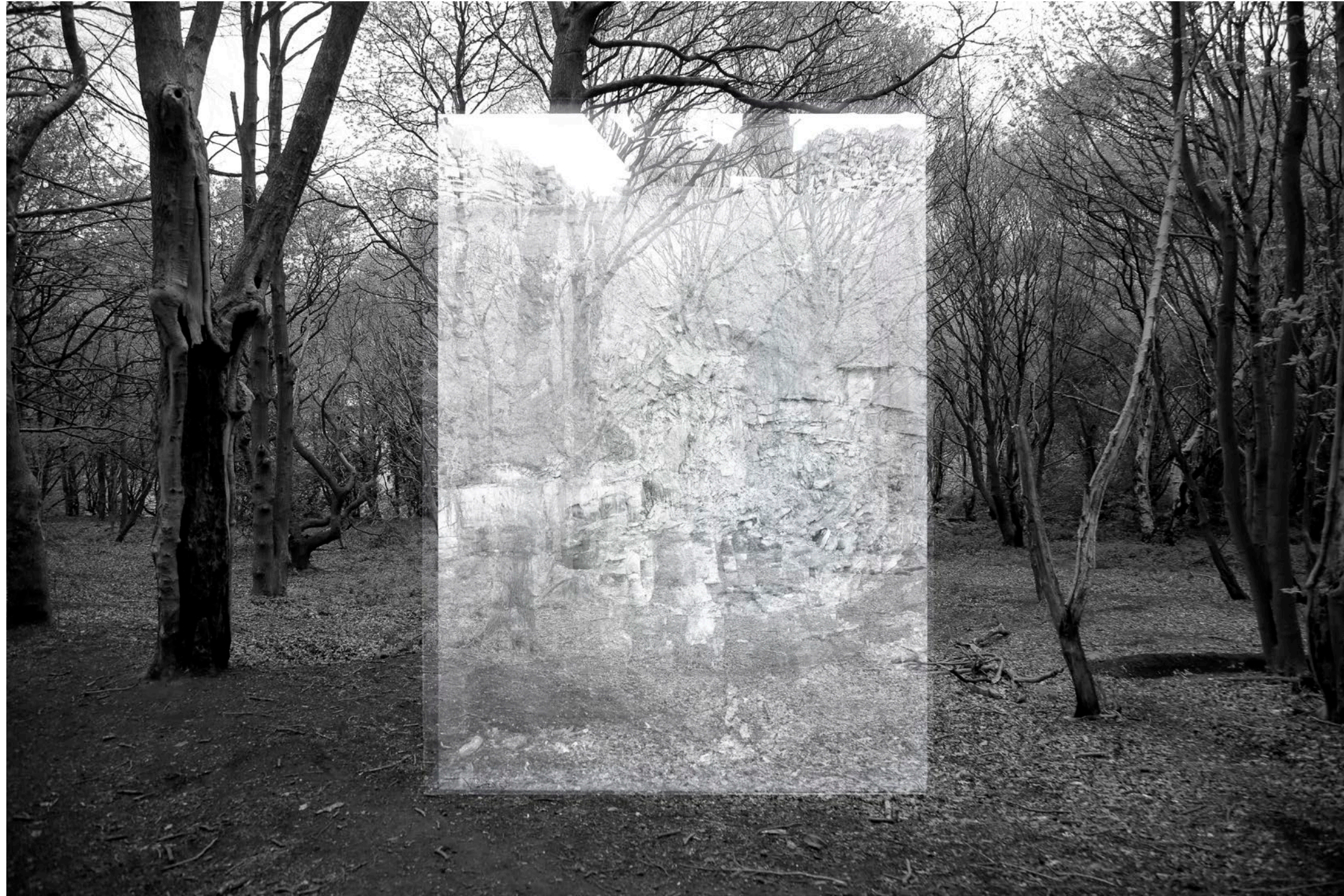




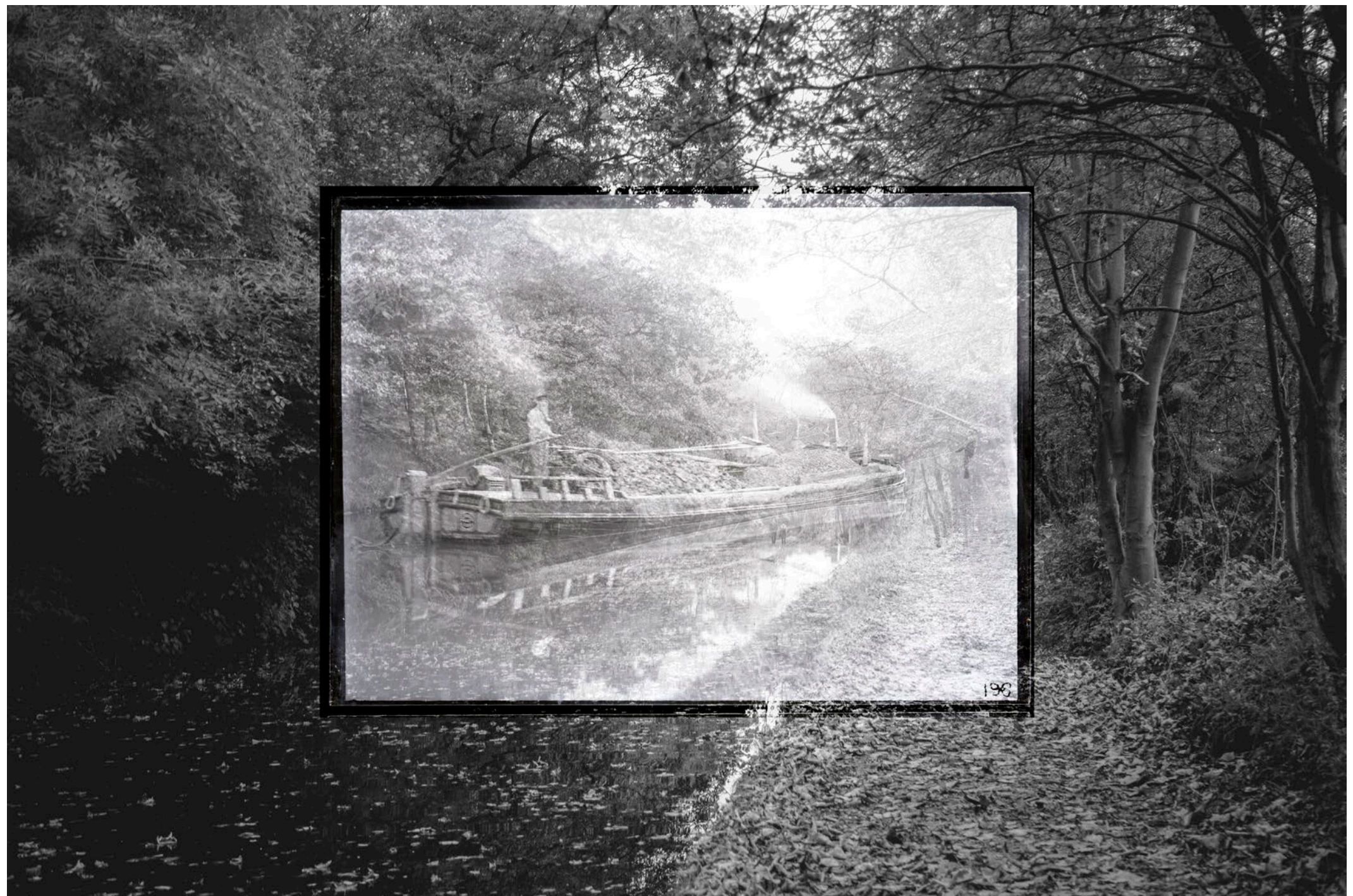














One of the interesting things revealed by these 'failed' rephotographs, is that there is actually more urban woodland and wild areas in the city today, than there was in Bingley's time. The legendary forest of Elmet was long gone by the 19th century, most of the wooded areas had been cleared for farmland and industry. It is in these post-industrial quarters that it can feel like this ancient forest might now be returning, the landscape shapeshifting once again.

The quarries we see in Bingley's photographs have been filled-in, the grass fields built on, and the country estates have since become modern suburbia. But this area is still haunted by its past as an affluent village, a refuge from the smog and the chaos of the city below. Even as that city has enveloped it, pockets of a rural world have survived, even flourished. And in many ways, despite the urbanisation that has taken place, the 'village' is still much more prosperous than the deprived inner city neighbourhoods that we find in the east.

Page 19 - Fossil Tree (Projection) 1895-2017

Page 20 - Shire Oak (Projection) 1888-2017

Pages 21-23 - Searching for Shire Oak (Traces I-III) 2017

Page 24 - Wood and Park (Projection) 1887-2017

Page 25 - Beck Near Lane (Projection I), 1889-2017

(in the background you can see Eastmoor, a derelict site in Adel woods, which used to be a Borstal)

Page 26 - Wood Road (Projection) 1887-2017

Page 27 - Monument Hill II (Projection) 1888-2017

Page 28 - Beck Near Lane (Projection II) 1889-2017

(Eastmoor again)

Page 29 - Searching for Beck Near Mills (Trace I), 2017

Page 30 - Beck Near Lane (Projection III) 1889-2017

Page 31 - Searching for Beck Near Mills (Trace II), 2017

Page 32 - Searching for Ganister (Trace IV), 2017

(industrial ruins in the woods)

Page 33 - Ganister Quarry II (Projection), 1902-2017

Page 34 - Ganister Quarry I (Projection I), 1905-2017

(this was the wrong quarry)

Page 35 - Searching for Ganister (Trace VI), 2017

Page 36 - From North To Valley (Projection), 1888-2017

Page 37 - Fossil Root (Projection), 1894-2017

Page 38 - Looking North, Snow (Projection), 1888-2017

Page 39 - Various: Searching for 'Headingley, house' 1888-2017

Page 40 - Various: Searching for Ash Lca, 2017

Searching for Beck Near Mills, 2017

Page 41 - To Fields II (Projection II), 1889-2017

Page 42 - Quarry Valley I (Projection II), 1905-2017

(the forest returns)

Page 43 - Old House From Road (Projection), 1889-2017

Page 44 - House, Drive, Donkey and Sleigh (Projection I), 1888-2017

Page 45 - Quarry Valley I (Projection I), 1905-2017

Page 46 - Over Fields I (Projection I), 1889-2017

Page 47 - Canal Barge (Projection), 1887-2017

Page 48 - Searching for Canal Barge (Trace), 2017

THE NETHERWORLD

Returning to Leeds' East End,

how much of its history as a notorious slum has survived the clearing?

Can the photograph haunt this recently regenerated area with troubling spectres from its past?

























Despite the recent moves to regenerate and rebrand Quarry Hill, the area still feels haunted by its troubled past, even without these photographic interventions. This process is still ongoing, the area is still contested, and the urban landscape depicted here was changing week-by-week, even as I tried to document it as it stands today. By the end I was rephotographing my own rephotographs, as you can see on pages 54-55. No fixed moment can really characterise or definitely capture such ongoing change. As soon as you have one representation, it is out of date.

A simple narrative of urban squalor is not only reductive but wholly inaccurate. This negative characterisation is what John Tagg warned us about. We see pockets of nature emerge out of the rubble of land left fallow - a small section of woodland has appeared here in the city centre, since the final 'slums' were demolished in 1978. These new trees provide refuge from the pollution and noise, for birds and other creatures, and privacy for daytime drinkers and heroin users.

Things are certainly changing, though. Who can say what will really happen next on this hill, or whether this 'today' will be forgotten, like so many others.

Page 51 - Unhealthy Areas, Quarry Hill (Projection I), 1905-2017
 Page 52 - Cross Templar Street no longer exists (Projection I), 1901-2018
 Page 53 - Searching for Globe Yard, 2018
 Page 54 - Cornhill no longer exists (Projection II), 1908-2017
 Page 55 - Cornhill no longer exists (Projection II), 1908-2018
 Page 56 - Searching for Allison's Buildings (Trace I), 2017
 Page 57 - Boynton Street no longer exists (Projection I), 1906-2017
 Page 58 - Searching for Allison's Buildings (Trace II), 2017
 Page 60 - Unhealthy Areas, Quarry Hill (Projection II), 1905-2018

Page 61 - Cornhill no longer exists (Projection I), 1908-2017
 Page 62 - Boynton Street no longer exists (Projection I), 1906-2018
 Page 63 - Allison's Buildings no longer exist (Projection I), 1909-2018
 Pages 64-65 - Various: Searching for Quarry Hill, 2017-2018
 Page 66 - The Ghost of Allison (Projection), 1909-2017
 Page 67 - Searching for Allison (Trace), 2017
 Page 68 - Cross Templar Street no longer exists (Projection II), 1901-2018

Page 69 - Cornhill East End no longer exists (Projection), 1901-2017
 Page 70 - Boynton Street no longer exists (Projection II), 1906-2018
 Page 71 - Vienna Street no longer exists (Projection III), 1908-2017
 Page 72 - Allison's Buildings (Projection II), 1909-2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without Dr. Jim Brogden and Simon Popple.

All at the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds.

Special Collections at the University of Leeds and Leeds Library and Information Services.

Laura Wilson, Joanne Fitton, Ross Horsley, Ken Kajoranta, Stephen Hay and Dr. Kate Nash.

Godfrey Bingley, John Tagg and Peter Mitchell for inspiring me.

Mary, Elodie and Zoe, Jim and Marie for your constant support, patience and love.

A Window on Time

This is a book about failed time travel.

It is also a collection of ghost stories without words.

Most importantly, however, this is a body of work about photography itself.

A Window on Time presents the final outcomes of a three year photographic research project published as a thesis under the title *Aura and Trace: The Hauntology of the Rephotographic Image*. The work deconstructs the practice, revealing its spectral and temporal anomalies, through the rephotography of lost landscapes.

These images were also exhibited as *The Remote Viewer*, a site-specific video installation at the Treasures of the Brotherton gallery, as part of Light Night 2018.

Copyright 2018 Michael C Coldwell

www.michaelcoldwell.co.uk

