

# Remnants

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**STRUCTURES LOST TO TIME**

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**remnant**

noun, plural noun:  
remnants

a part or quantity  
that is left after the  
greater part has been  
used, removed, or  
destroyed.

Dedicated to my darling wife Jude, without  
whom.....

First published in 2020 by .....

**OPPOSITE:** *The warm light of sunrise illuminates the 7th century Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, in Chiapas State, Mexico. ABOVE:* *The Heel Stone, framed by the setting sun, Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England. INSET GRAPHIC RIGHT:* *Worn steps on Pont Valentre, Cahors, France. COVER:* *The ruined stern of the SS Wyola (see page?), CY O'Connor Beach, South Fremantle, Western Australia. I always liked this image, it feels to me as if the ship is heading back out to sea where it belongs.*





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# Foreword

## **I HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED ENOUGH TO WITNESS JON'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE IMAGINATIVE LANDSCAPE OF PHOTOGRAPHY FOR ALMOST FORTY YEARS.**

From those very early days Jon's natural talent for evocative composition and eye for the perfect image were clear to anyone who cared to look. However, talent alone doesn't predicate what Jon has achieved. Jon's dedication and passion for his craft and depths of commitment are forces of nature driving him over subsequent decades to build a justified reputation and create the most stunning and wide-ranging body of work. Though his combined output covers many genres, Jon's speciality is capturing aviation through air-to-air photography. If you've never had the opportunity to feel your jaw drop at the sight of an aircraft beautifully poised in mid-flight, then hop over to his website at [www.eyeinthesky.com.au](http://www.eyeinthesky.com.au) - it is truly 'awesome'!

Here in Jon's latest work, 'Remnants', we have something completely different. This is a book that reveals more of his underlying motivation and sense of time and place than ever before. It covers a very personal journey for Jon stretching way back into childhood. The book explores a theme of transience and lost human stories threading through a wide range of subject matter and captured in a collection of evocative imagery. That itself is worthy of exploration.

Why I love this book so much though and why it stands out is something even more telling. Not only is this a collection, now expected from Jon, of yet more exquisite photographs, it also shows Jon as a creative writer as well as image-maker. He is able to evoke through the written word the same sense of awe and wonder that he achieves in his visual work. He uses language judiciously and to great effect drawing on the same creative spirit he applies to composition and lighting. The essence of this book is the sense of transience in the artefacts of civilisation, looking at the many 'remnants' of human creation as they fall back into disuse and decay. The inspiration of the book is to capture these Remnants, then to imagine the richness of

the stories behind them. The sense of civilisation falling back into nature was deeply infused for Jon through his childhood experiences of growing up in post-war New Zealand. Through this book Jon draws from his early experience to explore the wider theme of what is left when the original function of the artefacts of civilisation is no longer there.

The science of physics explains the cycle of decay through the concept of 'Entropy'. Entropy is the opposite of 'order' or 'complexity', both of which result from the natural processes of life. The second law of thermodynamics or 'Law of Entropy' in physics states that all order in the Universe and everything in it reverts to a natural state of chaos. In effect, decay is an inevitable process perfectly described by the laws of physics. Everything eventually reduces to disorder. Ashes to ashes; Dust to dust.

In a more enlightened view, the Buddhist term 'Samsara' refers to the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It's the continuous cycle of change and dissolving of everything back to dust that is illustrated by so much in the following pages.

And that seems fitting. Jon is the funniest, most spiritually connected and truly open and generous person you could ever have the privilege to meet. It is no surprise he sees and evokes such a depth to the imagery he captures and creates. It invariably feels like a gift to walk through collections of his work and dwell on each image. Seeing his creative spirit here inspired by his own journey is a joy and is sure to captivate you with the same sense of wonder at lost things, the 'Remnants' of our time on this Earth.

Ken Royall, Windermere 2018

*Ken Royall has been involved in the language of design all his life. He was a pioneer at Oxford Polytechnic in the early 1980's where he was instrumental in developing the then, innovative use of computer graphics for graphic design, architecture and product design. Ken and his wife Wendy live in Windermere in the beautiful English Lake District.*

*Ken and Jon worked together at Oxford in 1981.*





# Introduction

**THIS BOOK REPRESENTS MY ON-GOING FASCINATION FOR PHOTOGRAPHING STRUCTURES AND OBJECTS THAT, FOR WHATEVER REASON, HAVE BEEN DISCARDED, BROKEN, FORGOTTEN, OR HAVE OUTLIVED THEIR USEFULNESS.**

Remnants are the visible structures that remain from our human endeavours. These can be abandoned, gradually returning to the earth from which they came, or they may still be in use, even hundreds or thousands of years later. I have speculated on the possible causes of abandonment, but where there is factual information, I have presented as picture captions. It was not my intention to catalogue every ruined city, or wrecked object in the world, nor to write an in-depth study. I have captured with my lens those that I have encountered, as a passionate photographer. Although I did not know it at the time, two things influenced me as a youth growing up in the small dairy-farming town of Rata in the North Island of New Zealand that would prove to be instrumental later in my work as a photographer, and ultimately lead to the creation of this book. Firstly, as a combatant nation during the Second World War, New Zealand took part in the reciprocal 'lend lease' program, where the United States supplied military hardware to its allies to help fight and defeat the axis powers.

Part of this agreement was that the lend-lease countries had to either purchase or destroy the equipment that remained at the end of hostilities. Because the equipment was 'war weary' and of little monetary value, the New Zealand government opted to sell the equipment to the scrap-yards, who in turn offered some items, such as aircraft and vehicles, to the public. This process took some time and as a result, it was a common sight right up to the 1970s, to see abandoned WWII aircraft and military vehicles in the New Zealand country-side. In one field alone at Rukuhia near Hamilton in the early 1960s, I saw close to a thousand abandoned combat aircraft.

There were gull-winged F4U Corsairs, P40 Kittyhawks, Ventura bombers and TBM Avenger torpedo bombers, all awaiting their inevitable fate with the smelting furnaces, so their precious aluminium could be turned into household products.

As a kid, I grew up playing on Second World War combat aircraft, amid pristine green fields and rolling hills, bathed in a crisp Pacific light, unique to New Zealand. What's more, it seemed normal at the time. Yet my heroes in the comics and books I was avidly reading as a ten year old, were flying in aerial chariots like Corsairs, Kittyhawk and Avenger aircraft in the skies above the Pacific only ten years earlier. The same aircraft that were sitting outside my back door, so to speak. I clearly did not understand the bigger picture at that tender age. Some aircraft escaped the furnaces and were given to local town councils and placed in children's playgrounds, or on beaches, usually with some sort of climbing structure attached. Others were hoisted on poles and displayed as 'gate-guards' outside military establishments. Still others found an agricultural



role in the fledgling aerial 'top dressing' industry, flown with passion and flair by ex-combat pilots reduced to delivering superphosphate. Some forward thinkers offered wartime airframes to museums. Larger aircraft like the DC3 Dakota formed the backbone of New Zealand's first major internal airline, the National Airways Corporation (NAC) in 1947.

My first flight was in one of these aircraft. So you see, my childhood was populated with historic aircraft that, to me, were in places they did not belong. I think the visual incongruity of this led to my interest in photography, as well as giving me something of an enquiring nature.

The second event that influenced me oldy enough, was the demise of New Zealand's cooperative dairy industry. Within half a century, hundreds of small towns that were dependent on dairying had disappeared, due to amalgamation, mechanised farming and a massive increase in retail supply and demand.

My hometown of Rata was one of the casualties. Today it is an isolated enclave of a handful of houses, nothing remains of the petrol station, the hardware store nor the dairy factory itself. Since Rata was on the central route through the North Island, I often drove past it in later years and I remember seeing our house slowly decomposing. Although, to a long haired adolescent of the 1960s it was more like watching a movie, feeling somewhat detached from it. Later however, I felt perplexed as to why all this had happened, how could the town I grew up in simply

1. My late father (a former submariner) in 1956, demonstrating the wonders of rubber band powered flight. Behind him, across the road from our house is the Rata Dairy Co hardware store and petrol station.  
2. The same building in the 1990s.  
3. The view in 2017, nothing is left. These three frames were all taken from roughly the same position.  
4. A field full of Second World War, RNZAF F4U Corsair fighters in Rukuhia, New Zealand, awaiting the inevitable smelters furnace. This same field had P40 Kittyhawk fighters, Lockheed Ventura bombers. Other fields had other aircraft like TBM Avengers and many more. Sadly, all had gone to the furnace by the late 1970s. Photo courtesy: Whites Aviation Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, New Zealand.



stop being a town? I couldn't figure it out, it felt so surreal to me, it was as if my roots, the things that anchored me, were no longer there. Maybe they never were and I was simply seeking them — a part of me wanted to belong, to have a direct link to the past.

As a result - and years later as a professional travel photographer - these two events became a crucible for my interest in the subject of this book. I found that while on location, I was drawn to the ruins of old houses, castles, and even farm machinery. After a while I began to see them everywhere, and wondered what life may have been like for the people who were associated with them. As a result, I continued to photograph them, although I was never any the wiser as to their origins. The more I reviewed my images of these places and structures, I found many

looked almost organic during their slow slide into decay. I found it hard to imagine these dilapidated structures ever having been something else. To me, they looked less and less like man-made structures. So my thoughts about these subjects changed. Rather than seeking out the more obvious ruins, I was drawn to irregular shapes in the landscape, ones that did not look natural, such as odd clumps of rocks, or lone cosses of trees in ploughed fields. As I went closer to investigate, there under the foliage or hidden from view by the trees, I found man-made ruined structures. It seemed to me that if the farmer who owned the land found the remains too difficult to move, he simply ploughed as close as he could and left them. Ultimately, these remnants would return to the earth and there would be nothing left, save for odd patterns in the landscape that







can only be appreciated when viewed from the air. I couldn't resist, I had to photograph these ruins in a more ordered way. This book is the result.

The accompanying text represents my musings on the possible conditions that may have led to the abandonment of some of these structures.

Although I have visited many countries photographing 'Remnants', I found that New Zealand, France, the UK and Australia — probably because I have lived in these countries and know them intimately — for me, encapsulate the true focus of this book, hence the predominance of images from these countries.

It's interesting when you see your work in one body, meaning it wasn't until I saw them here for the first time as a continuous thread, that I realised that within these pages there is evidence that for over 2000 years we have abandoned almost everything we have created. Judging by the weight of this evidence, it appears that it is in our nature to do this. Yet I find it odd that we all expend energy protecting our possessions while they are of use to us, but as soon as they no longer function as they should, then out the door they go.

And it's not just material things. We discard, partners, children, parents, pets, everything. So I wonder, without using an obvious metaphor, if it is an external manifestation of how we consume and process our fuel.

**OPPOSITE:** *Snow covers an abandoned structure near Cordes-sur-Ciel, Occitanie, France.* **LEFT:** *The 12th century Castle Doria sits above a series of natural sea caves facing the Ligurian sea at Porto Venere, Italy.*

Meaning, we take in what the earth offers us, digest what we need in order to grow and flush away what is not needed. But there seems to be a dichotomy at work here, why then this fascination for things we now consider as waste? Worldwide, people travel great distances, like me, to stare and wonder at the structures we have discarded - trying to make some sort of connection with the past. It's almost as if we are wishing these structures and objects have something they will never have - a soul.

I was pondering this conundrum while photographing the ruined piano sanctuary in Western Australia (opposite), a private farm where countless old pianos have been left with the intention that they deteriorate visibly. I was resting in the shade on a 40 degree day and I heard music playing. On a nearby piano, a large black crow was running up and down jumping on the keys, fascinated by the sound. A cat was curled up on another keyboard, idly watching the impromptu performance. Oddly, it felt like a sort of closure. I figured that now that I have recorded all these remnants with my camera, that maybe now I should just leave it.

On a personal note, it's rather ironic that during the time it has taken me to compile the photographs for 'Remnants' I have become aware of my part in the ageing process, even some of the cameras I used to capture those images, are now remnants themselves. A technological paradigm shift rendered a one-hundred-and twenty-year-old process obsolete in just twenty years. Fortunately the photographic craft itself adapted to this shift and to my mind is better served because of it.

During the time it has taken to capture all these images, some of the structures depicted may well have been bought and restored, or disappeared totally. My role it seems has been to document the state of these structures as I came across them at the time.

Jon Davison  
Cordes-sur-Ciel, France 2020





*Outside wash room and tap,  
Greenhills, Western Australia.  
Built in the late 1800s, Greenhills  
became a thriving town in the  
late 1800's and relied on the  
railroad for the export of its grain  
production. The only substantial  
building left standing is the local  
pub.*





