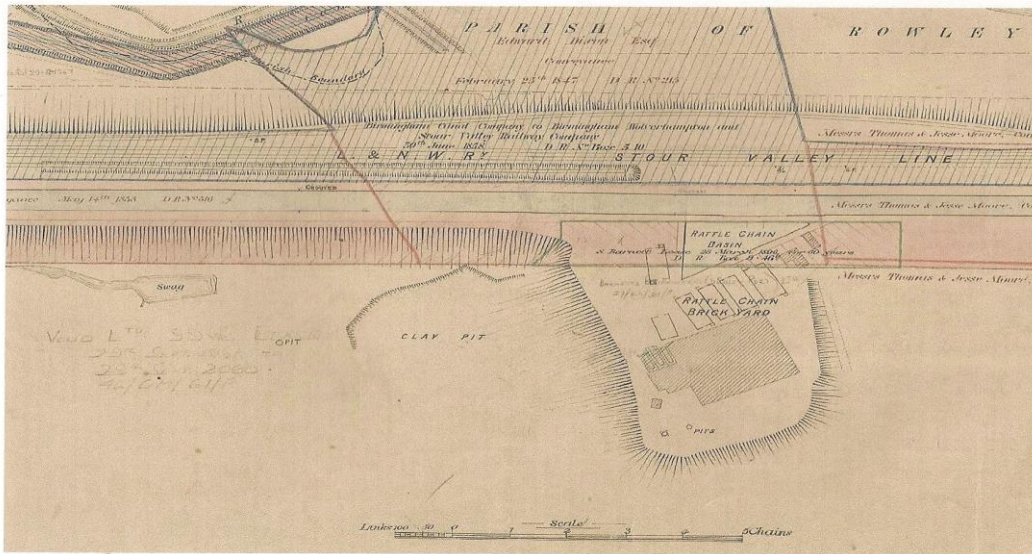


Rattlechain Lagoon Site History- A timeline of key events.

At the end of the **19th century**, Rattlechain lagoon was a clay pit created by Samuel Barnett as part of his Rattlechain & Stour Valley Brickworks. In **September 1899** the nearby Birmingham Canal burst its banks, flooding the clay pit to a depth of 300' (100m).



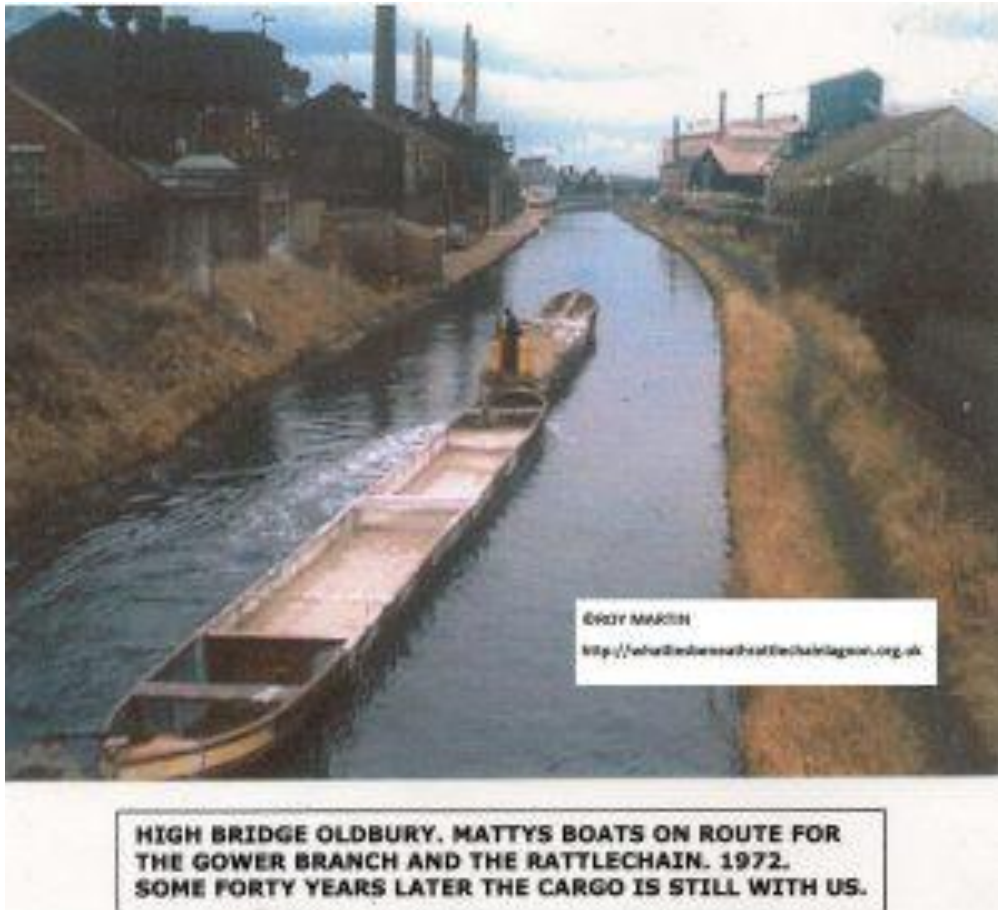
After this period there appears to have been some continued use of the pit for Etruria Marl extraction, in the manufacture of blue bricks, until a new claypit was dug to the East of the old one in **1946**. **The Rattlechain brickworks continued to operate seperately.**

In the **1940's** Albright and Wilson, phosphorus and chemical manufacturers of Langley, Oldbury, were producing experimental white phosphorus weapons and Molotov cocktail style grenades in the millions at their Oldbury factory for WW2, as they had in WW1 as a Ministry Of Supply agency factory. The Home Guard nationally were issued with these "AW BOMBS", (over 7 million), but unfortunately, no records exist of what happened to these highly toxic and inflammable weapons, or their eventual destination.

Around 1942 Albright and Wilson use and subsequently acquire the former Rattlechain clay pit for disposal of effluent waste. No licence, regulation, waste limit, health and safety or other conditions were attached to this disposal. Security at the site was non-existent – there was not even a perimeter fence.

Most importantly no records exist of what they dumped for the next 32 years.

Waste was carried by canal barge contractors Alfred Matty of Coseley, and tipped into the pool manually. Some waste was delivered in barrels. Some was moved in wheelbarrows across planks. It is also apparent that lorries delivered barrelled waste to the site.



In the **1950's and 60's** children were reported playing in this unfenced dangerous site, lighting sticks dipped in phosphorus which caught fire when oxidising. Many eye witnesses recall skimming stones across "the blue lagoon" to produce sparks across the water. **This was white phosphorus (P₄) reacting to air exposure.**

In **1957**, press reports confirm that the then Rowley Regis council had concerns about this "peril to children and had questioned Albright and Wilson's dumping at the site.

In **1958** Rattlechain was again in the news concerning white phosphorus material catching fire and falling from lorries, as well as the tipping making people sick. A gravity-fed pipe, and then an electric pipe were added to the pool for more convenient dumping. One eye witness recalls seeing dozens of dead birds on the nearby Birmingham canal embankment. The British Waterways Board also used the site as a dredging tip for canal areas polluted by Albright and Wilson operations. See this picture from 1955 ©English Heritage reproduced by permission.

In **1961–1963** site boundary changes created a subsidiary lagoon to operate a canal discharge, within the original western edge of the contaminated lagoon claypit area.

In **1970** waste disposal reportedly switches to road tanker, though canal barge tipping anecdotally and evidentially (see also picture above) continued and large discharge pipes were added to the south of the site.

1974 is the first year that Albright and Wilson record what they are dumping in the lagoon. [Site boundary changes](#) add concrete panel fencing, and changes made to the existing subsidiary lagoon and pumping equipment.

In **1976**, [a lorry on route to rattlechain to deposit waste caught fire, as a direct cause of white phosphorus within the waste catching fire.](#)

In **1978** Waste management [sl31-licence](#) is granted by West Midlands County Council. This licence allow Albright & Wilson to dump –

- Effluent treatment sludge : 140 tonnes per day
- Waste contaminated with **white phosphorus** : 500 tonnes per year
- Water contaminated with **white phosphorus**, sulphur and phosphoric acid : 1000 gallons per year
- “solid wastes” : 10 tonnes per week

This licence was later to be renumbered **WML 40803**.



Molotov cocktails awaiting disposal in Rattlechain lagoon

1983 sees the documented dumping into lagoon of “Molotov Cocktails” (AW bombs) unearthed at Dudley cricket ground. Albright and Wilson claim to have disposed of these weapons from time to time after the war, ***but do not know how many or when.***

In October **1989** [a large phosphorus fire happens on site after a consignment of barrels containing P4 is emptied by contractor onto the South side of the lagoon.](#)

In **1990-91** the Cremer and Warner report was carried out on behalf of regional development agency The Black Country Development Corporation (BCDC). Tests carried out on the pool are only carried out by information given by Albright and Wilson. White phosphorus is confirmed in the pool and is identified as **“toxic”** in the report.

1999 saw the first properly documented reported [deaths of wildfowl on site](#), swans dying from violent convulsions, with other wildfowl found frequently dead.

2000-1 Albright and Wilson taken over by [Rhodia](#). [Meetings are held](#) to discuss Rattlechain bird deaths. Rhodia’s Health and safety manager does not reveal what toxic chemicals are contained in the pool or their toxic effects. Claims that the site offers [“a safe haven”](#) for wildfowl are made by works manager! Barrels attached to ropes are put on pool to deter birds landing. This does not work. Waste continues to be dumped into the lagoon, as bird deaths depressingly continue.



Carry on dumping

2003 Planning permission is granted on appeal for Houses on former sewage works site adjacent to the South of the lagoon. Rhodia objected on grounds it could undermine their operations, and limit remediation options, but withdraw their objection at the last minute, destroying Sandwell Council's case.



2008 After dozens of bird deaths and inconclusive post mortems, research by Swanwatch uncovers link with white phosphorus and wildfowl deaths from papers published at Eagle River flats in Alaska- a US Army firing range. Clinical signs of dying swans are exactly the same as at Rattlechain. Experts here confirm similarities in symptoms after viewing our footage. Rhodia undertake a report into “bird deterrence”, but do not say why they want to deter birds from landing on the pool.

2009 Rhodia remove barrels from pool but do not give reason why. These then catch fire after drying out. White phosphorus (P4) confirmed in gizzard tissue of [a dead swan](#) and [Canada goose](#), which **“CONFIRM THAT WHITE PHOSPHORUS RELEASE IS OCCURING AT THE LAGOON SITE.”**

2010 White phosphorus (P4) confirmed in tissues of [a dead mallard and coot](#).

2011 White phosphorus (P4) confirmed in [two dead mallards](#) and [Canada goose](#). In the case of the goose “systemic poisoning” was noted. **“The autopsy failed to identify any other likely cause of death. The quantity of white phosphorus detected in the gizzard and the presence of white phosphorus residue in fat tissue is consistent with white phosphorus poisoning as the cause of death of this goose.”**

2012 White phosphorus (P4) confirmed in [two more mallards](#), [a swan](#), [Canada goose](#) and [tufted duck](#).

A Human health risk assessment report is produced by The Health Protection Agency. This followed a publicly [published Freedom of Information request](#) by swanwatch where it was confirmed **“the investigation confirms current environmental contamination with P4 and suggests the levels of contamination in or around the lagoon could poison wildlife or humans.”**

2013 Rhodia, now “a member of the Solvay group” begin a process of works incorporating their proposed “closure plan” for the site, under the guise of “protecting wildfowl” from ingesting the waste that they previously claimed to be “harmless” and on a site they had claimed was [“a safe haven”](#) for wildfowl.

This website is set up to tell the real truth behind the continuing story of how hazardous waste can be buried and forgotten, continuing the legacy of the victims of industrial pollution.