

Site Collections Development Policy

Name of Museum: English Heritage – Battle Abbey

Name of Governing Body: English Heritage Trust

Date on which this policy was approved by the Acquisitions, Loans and Disposals Committee: **June 2020**

Policy review procedure:

The Site Collections Development Policy is owned by the Senior Curator for the geographical area. It will be reviewed at least once every five years as part of a cyclical process managed through Registry.

Date at which this policy is due for review: June 2025

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Site Collections Development Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of the collections.

1. Management Arrangements and scope

- 1.1 This policy covers all the museum artefacts managed by English Heritage from, or associated with the site whether they are held on site, at another English Heritage site or store, or on loan to a third party. This policy does not cover artefacts associated with other English Heritage sites which are stored or displayed at this site.
- 1.2 The site and its collections form part of the National Collection of English Heritage.

2. Relationships to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation

- 2.1 The national *Collections Development Policy* approved by the Board of Trustees on 9 November 2016, (together with any amendments to, or replacements for, the policy approved by Trustees), apply to the site. In the event of any disagreement between this site policy and the national policy the national policy will apply.
- 2.2 Without limitation to the above all the procedures, all ethical and legal considerations set out in the national policy apply to acquisitions, disposals and loans from or to the sites collection.

- 2.3 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

3. History of the collections

- 3.1 Approximately 95% of the collection associated with Battle Abbey comes from a single period of excavation between 1978 and 1980 led by J.N. Hare, which focused on the Reredorter and Chapter House of the monastery.¹
- 3.2 The collection also contains some stonework from an earlier excavation in the 1930s under Harold Brakspear. A small amount of additional archaeological material has been added as a result of minor interventions in the Dormitory, Dairy and Gatehouse, as well as several watching briefs, and staff or visitor finds from around the site.
- 3.3 Some material from the 2013 Time Team exploration of the battlefield is expected to form part of the English Heritage collection but has not yet been deposited. It is currently with Dr Glenn Foard at the University of Huddersfield.
- 3.4 A significant addition to the collection was made in 1999 when 25 Webster family portraits were acquired by purchase, the Webster family having owned the house from 1719 to 1858 and again from 1901 to 1976. Two further paintings, *The Battle of Hastings* by Frank Wilkin and *William the Conqueror*, as well as a statue of Queen Matilda, were separate acquisitions to the art collection.
- 3.5 Further material relating to Battle Abbey exists in the collections of a number of other organisations. Most importantly: the medieval Abbey's archive in the Huntington Library in California, the Brakspear Archive covering 1930s excavations and the School with the East Sussex Record Office (2512/160/11 and 2512/310/99), and the 15th century Battle Abbey Sword (A.1905.633) in National Museums Scotland.

4. An overview of the collections

- 4.1 The collection consists almost exclusively of archaeological material supported by an excavation archive, a small art collection and some ephemera. There are approximately 4,500 recorded objects in the collection but the total is higher as much of the stonework has yet to be catalogued.
- 4.2 Around 10% of the collection is on display, with the remainder in offsite storage. The majority of the stored collection is at Dover Castle with some

¹ See Hare, Battle Abbey: The Eastern Range and Excavations of 1978-1980 (London, 1985)

architectural stonework at Fort Brockhurst.

- 4.3 The most common elements of the collection are metal small finds (32%), architectural fragments including stonework, floor and roof tiles (26%), and ceramics, window glass and animal bone (around 10% each).
- 4.4 There is a very strong weighting towards material relating to the Abbey's dissolution. Around 25% of the collection comes from a single dissolution context.
- 4.3 The site has no loans or working objects.
- 4.5 Highlights of the collection include:
 - 4.5.1 The ivory Tau-cross fragment.
 - 4.5.2 An inscribed music slate with an accounts list on the reverse.
 - 4.5.3 The portrait of the 4th Baronet by Louis Gauffier (1762-1801) which was acquired jointly for this site and Kenwood House in 1999.

5. Themes and priorities for future collecting

- 5.1 The main priority for ongoing collecting is that archaeological material found within the scheduled area (pink and red on the map below) will be added to the English Heritage Collection.
- 5.2 It is desirable that archaeological material discovered within the area of the Registered Battlefield but outside the EH managed scheduled area (brown on the map) would also be added to the collection, especially if it dates to the medieval period. Currently Hastings Museum is listed as the collection museum for Battle parish so a formal agreement will be needed with them to implement this aspect of the policy.
- 5.3 Visual representations of the abbey and its key occupants (eg paintings, prints, photographs) may be acquired in the following circumstances: if they are of exceptional quality; if they can be shown to have been painted or hung at the site; if they document the appearance of the Abbey; or if they are of immediate use for display.
- 5.3 Other objects and ephemera with site provenance, such as furnishings for the post-medieval country house, may be acquired where they have research or display value.
- 5.4 In particular we are likely to be interested in:
 - 5.4.1 Archaeological material which may relate to the Battle of Hastings.
 - 5.4.2 Material relating to the reception history of the Battle at the site, for example commemoration activities such as the 1932 Battle Abbey Pageant.

6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

- 6.1 The collection of architectural stonework contains a significant quantity of duplication and, following advice from a specialist, would benefit from a program of rationalization.

7. Collecting policies of other museums

- 7.1 English Heritage will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related subject areas or fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.
- 7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museums and organisations:
- 7.2.1 Battle Museum
 - 7.2.2 Hastings Museum – regarding the non-scheduled area of the registered battlefield.
 - 7.2.3 The East Sussex Record Office – for archival material.

8. Plan of the Scheduled Area and Registered Battlefield

