

## Site Collections Development Policy

Name of Museum: English Heritage – Denny Abbey

Name of Governing Body: English Heritage Trust

Date on which this policy was approved by the Acquisitions, Loans and Disposals Committee: **September 2023**

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: **September 2028**

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.
- 1.3 Denny Abbey became a guardianship monument in 1947 under the protection of the Commissioner of Works and Public Buildings, and since 1984 it has been in the care of English Heritage.
- 1.4 The Abbey buildings are owned by Pembroke College, Cambridge. The surrounding land and some of the farm buildings within the guardianship area are owned by John Martin and Sons (Littleport) Ltd.
- 1.5 Denny Abbey is on the edge of the Fenlands in Cambridgeshire, c. 1.8 miles north of Waterbeach. The Abbey is a scheduled monument, list entry number 1012770, National Grid reference: TL 49394 68429.
- 1.6 The guardianship area includes the Abbey and an area of land surrounding it, including the remains of an ancient causeway. The main Abbey building, with 12th- 14th century elements, is Grade 1 listed (list entry number 1127360). The Refectory building (14th century) is also Grade I listed (list entry number 1331328). A 17th century stone barn to the north of the Abbey is Grade II listed (list entry number 1179549) but is beyond EH's guardianship area. Walnut Tree Cottage, built in the 1860s in



the style of Prince Albert's model workers cottages, is unlisted but lies within the guardianship area (nearby to the Abbey) and is managed by EH.

- 1.7 In addition to the buildings listed above (in section 1.6) the scheduled monument area includes a series of earthworks including a causeway to the south-east, now truncated, but once connecting the religious settlement with the village of Waterbeach. There is a hollow way to the north of the precinct and banks representing field and stock enclosures to the south and west. In the field to the west of the current approach road are two rectangular fishponds. Today, part of the monument is used by a working farm. There are new buildings, barns and a swimming pool in the NW area, and a cottage close to the abbey which is currently occupied. A newly recut open drain is also located between the main priory complex and the fishponds. All above ground parts of buildings, walls and access roads are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them is included. The swimming pool and modern open drain are totally excluded from the scheduling.
- 1.8 The area to the south and south-east of the scheduled monument is currently being developed, with approximately 6,500 new homes on ex-MOD land covering Waterbeach barracks and airfield. A further 4,500 homes have more recently been approved on the land immediately east of the existing development. Building work is scheduled to last 20 years. The closest point of the development will be c. 150 metres from the scheduled monument area and will be highly visible from the Abbey. To mitigate this visual interference, a line of trees will be planted on the edge of the development. The land to the east of the guardianship area (within the development) is currently planned as green areas called 'Fenland Parks' (Joist Fen, Denny Fields, Cross Dove Gardens). Further details can be found in the Conservation Management Plan for the Abbey (Anna Jacka, 2019) or on South Cambridgeshire District Council's website<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.9 The Farmland Museum, founded in 1969, was opened on the site in 1997. They curate a collection of original farming implements and machinery. The Farmland Museum is an LMA partner who manages day-to-day operation of Denny Abbey. EH maintains the Abbey buildings and is responsible for interpretation of the Abbey, Refectory and Walnut Tree Cottage.
- 1.10 Denny Abbey sits between two council areas. Cambridgeshire County Council are responsible for education, social care and transport. South Cambridgeshire District Council is responsible for rubbish and recycling collection, council tax and housing.

## 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

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/planning/new-communities/waterbeach-new-town/about-waterbeach-new-town/>

- 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

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

### 3. History of the collections

- 3.1 EHT's collection from Denny Abbey are a result of excavations on site. The main excavations on site are listed below:
- 1954 – three small trial trenches were dug to establish the lines of foundations of the Templar/Benedictine and Franciscan church elements. These showed that the Templars had foreshortened the cruciform plan envisioned by the Benedictines, terminating the nave at the point which had been reached in the Benedictine building effort (the second bay of four) (Christie & Coad, 1980: 156).
  - 1968-1975 – Patricia M. Christie undertook annual excavations from 1968 to 1975 in the area to the north of the farmhouse, looking for the remains of an early cloister (Templar/Benedictine). Jonathan G. Coad excavated the interior of the old church in 1971, investigating the sequence of medieval buildings attached to the south of the nave. (Christie & Coad, 1980)
  - 1984-1985 – excavations in the refectory uncovered the internal arrangements of the nuns' dining hall. (Poster & Sherlock, 1988: 73-82)
- 3.2 A much smaller number of objects have come from other means e.g. historical clearance, removal, handed in by visitors on site, etc. This includes most of the monumental stonework (and architectural fragments) such as jambs, tracery, columns, etc.
- 3.3 More minimal excavations were undertaken in 2011 in advance of an extension to the children's play area. The second test pit uncovered the remains of a wall, which may represent part of the annex to the Refectory building. It is unknown to the author whether this excavation produced any archive – no deposition has been made with EHT.
- 3.4 Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology have three records on their collections database with Denny Abbey listed as the findspot. This includes a Neolithic axe (1977.888), a 15<sup>th</sup> century iron key (1883.629) and fragments of glazed floor tiles from the choir (1959.91), taken from the Abbey in the 1930s.
- 3.5 After the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539, the last abbess Dame Elizabeth Throckmorton took the dole gate from Denny back to her family home at Coughton Court, Warwickshire, where it remains today (NT 135289).

#### 4. An overview of the collections

- 4.1 The collection consists almost exclusively of archaeological material supported by an excavation archive. There are 2,799 recorded objects in the collection, but the total number of individual objects is higher due to multiple objects from the same archaeological context often sharing the same ID number<sup>2</sup>.
- 4.2 Only two objects are currently on site, with the remainder in off-site storage. The stored collection is at Wrest Park collections store.
- 4.3 The most common elements of the collection are potsherds (30.5%), architectural and building fragments, including stonework, floor and roof tiles, window glass, etc. (21.1%) and animal and human remains (20%). Human and animal bone are stored separately with no chance of cross-contamination.
- 4.4 The bulk of the finds come from a medieval context, during the site's active life as a religious institution. A smaller number of finds come from earlier periods (prehistoric and Roman) and from the post-medieval period, when the Abbey building was used as a farmhouse.
- 4.5 EH has no loans or working objects on site. The Farmland Museum's collection, however, is made up of farming tools and machinery.
- 4.6 Highlights of the collection include:
  - 4.6.1 A decorated lead disc and metal chalice buried with one of the Templars.
  - 4.6.2 The collection of decorated window glass, particularly the bearded male head (Old Testament Prophet or Patriarch).
  - 4.6.3 The collection of medieval decorated floor tiles.

#### 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 on the map below) will be added to the English Heritage collection.
- 5.2 Excavation on site has so far been limited to the Abbey building, its immediate vicinity, and the Refectory. Excavation of areas within the church complex that have not been investigated are likely to return similar finds to those already in the EH collection. Finds from areas in the wider guardianship area (e.g. the causeway, fishponds) could be more varied and would need to be considered on an individual basis.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, types of finds (painted glass, tile, etc.) excavated together in a single archaeological context have often been accessioned together under a single ID number. The total number of objects (counted as individual fragments) is unknown but totals several thousand more than the 2,779 records on HOMS

- 5.3 We would also seek to collect, through negotiation, all known and future chance discoveries (single or small group) from the collecting area.
- 5.4 EH should not seek to collect objects from outside of the scheduled monument area unless there is a significant and demonstrable connection with the Abbey. This includes any finds or archive from the new Waterbeach development. Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology is listed as the collection museum for the Waterbeach parish and EH consider this a more appropriate place for deposition.
- 5.5 Visual representations of the abbey and its key occupants (e.g. 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.
- 5.6 Other objects and ephemera with site provenance, such as furnishings for the post-medieval farmhouse, may be acquired where they have research or display value.
- 5.7 Objects may be acquired for the presentation of the Abbey and Walnut Tree Cottage (particularly as set-dressing for the sites history as a farmhouse) but these should only be accessioned as props (if accessioned at all).
- 5.8 EH should not seek to collect objects connected to farming (e.g. tools, machinery) unless directly connected to the Abbey and Refectory during their working life as a farm. The Farmland Museum should be considered a more appropriate repository for any offers of this kind.

## 6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

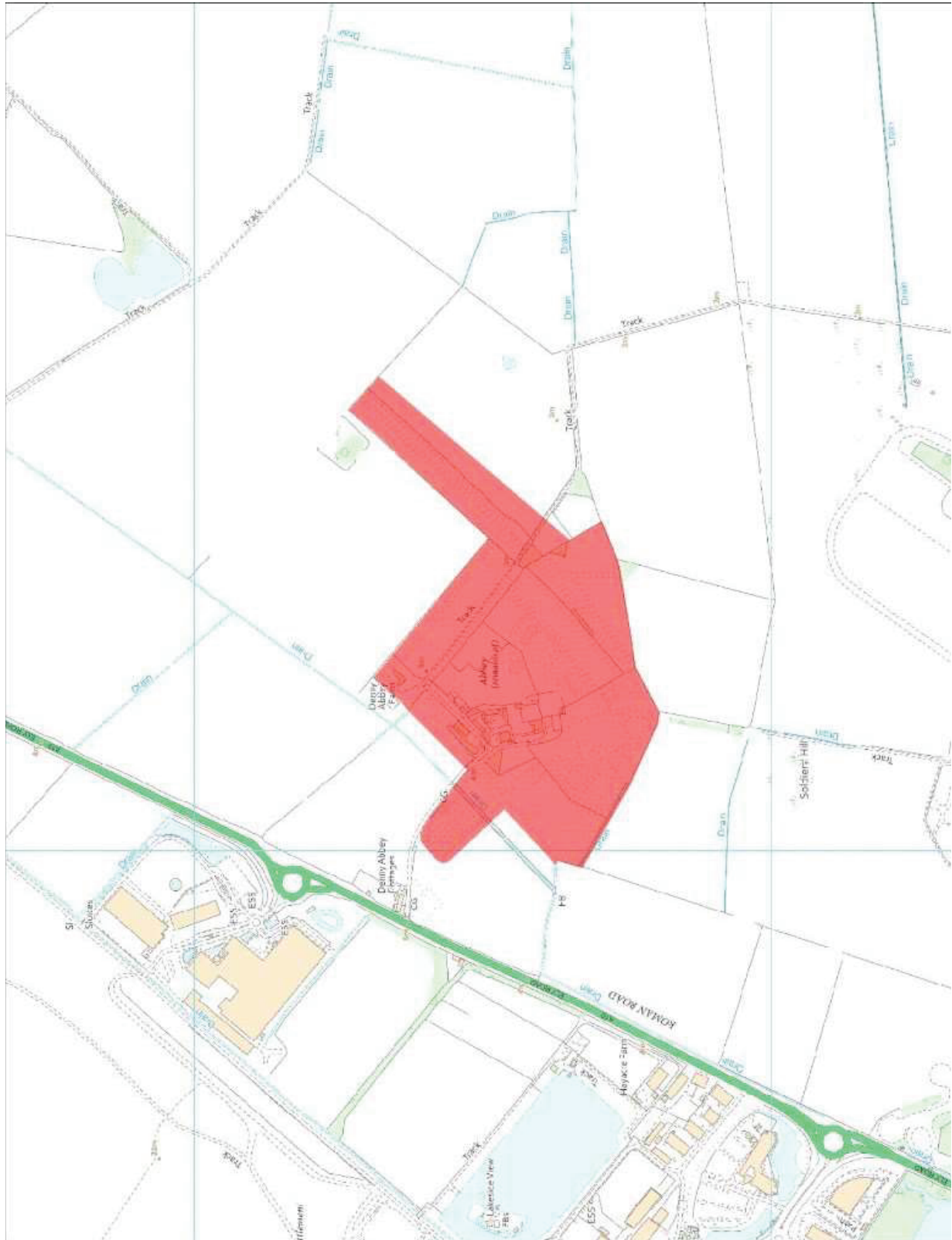
- 6.1 There is limited scope for rationalisation within the collection. It is possible that some of the architectural stonework could be rationalised after consultation with a specialist. However, this makes up only a small percentage of the collection and a similarly small amount of space within the collection store. Records listed as 'samples', 'strips', 'unidentified objects' and 'sheets (flat objects)' on HOMS (making up 15.3% of the collection) could similarly be rationalised, but this is not a priority given the small numbers of boxes it takes up within the store.

## 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 Pembroke College, Cambridge (landowners)
- 7.2.2 John Martin and Sons (Littleport) Ltd (landowners)
- 7.2.3 The Farmland Museum
- 7.2.4 Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

## 8. Plan of the Scheduled Area



# DENNY ABBEY

## Collections Review

[ADLC approved – Sept '23]



Dickon Whitewood  
Curator of Collections and Interiors (East)



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## 1. Statement of Purpose

This document is a preliminary review of the collections from Denny Abbey. It has been produced in accordance with the Collections Team Plan 2023-5.

In order to facilitate informed discussions about the nature and uses of the collection, this document aims to:

- Provide a clear description of the history, formation and current status of the collections
- Assess the current level of knowledge and documentation in order to inform future research and collections work.
- Identify some next steps and key questions for the immediate future.

Note that this document should be read alongside the Collections Development Policy for the site (available on the EH collections sharepoint) and Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for Denny Abbey, written by Anna Jacka and published in March 2019.

## 2. History of the Site

Denny Abbey was established in 1159 as an offshoot, or dependent ‘cell’, of Ely Cathedral Priory. Over the following 400 years – and uniquely among religious houses in England – the abbey was occupied successively by Benedictine monks, the lay order known as Knights Templar, and an order of Franciscan nuns, the Poor Clares. Each community left its distinctive mark, and adapted the buildings to its particular needs. When the Countess of

Pembroke brought the Poor Clares to Denny in the 14th century, she converted part of the existing church into a house for herself, unwittingly securing the building's long-term survival.

With the closure of the abbey by order of Henry VIII in 1539, Denny became a farm. The former monastic buildings were adapted once again to provide a farmhouse and barns, which they remained until the 1960s. The Farmland Museum, adjacent to the abbey remains, was set up in 1997. Its displays represent aspects of Cambridgeshire farming and rural life, complementing the earlier monastic history and bringing the story of Denny up to date.

[Text above taken from Richard Wood, *Denny Abbey and the Farmland Museum*, English Heritage Guidebook (2016 reprint)]

## 3. The Collection

### 3.1 Formation of the collection

The overwhelming majority of the collection from Denny derive from excavations conducted in the 20th century, summarised as follows:

- **1954** – three small trial trenches were dug to establish the lines of foundations of the Templar/Benedictine and Franciscan church elements. These showed that the Templars had foreshortened the cruciform plan envisioned by the Benedictines, terminating the nave at the point which had been reached in the Benedictine building effort (the second bay of four) (Christie & Coad, 1980: 156).
- **1968-1975** – Patricia M. Christie undertook annual excavations from 1968 to 1975 in the area to the north of the farmhouse, looking for the remains of an early cloister (Templar/Benedictine). Jonathan G. Coad excavated the interior of the old church in 1971, investigating the sequence of medieval buildings attached to the south of the nave. (Christie & Coad, 1980)
- **1984-1985** – excavations in the refectory uncovered the internal arrangements of the nuns' dining hall. (Poster & Sherlock, 1988: 73-82)

A much smaller number of objects have come from other means e.g. clearance, handed in by visitors on site, etc. This includes most of the monumental stonework (and architectural fragments) such as jambs, tracery, columns, etc.

More minimal excavations were undertaken in 2011 in advance of an extension to the children's play area. The second test pit uncovered the remains of a wall, which may represent part of the annex to the Refectory building. It is unknown to the author whether this excavation produced any archive – no deposition has been made with EHT.

## 3.2 Collections overview

The English Heritage Trust collection for Denny Abbey comprises 2,799 catalogue entries in the permanent collection. These entries represent both individual items and multiples of the same type (e.g. window glass) listed under a single entry. The total number of objects is therefore significantly higher.

A breakdown of objects by type is given below:

<b>Type of collection</b>	<b>Number of records</b>	<b>Approx. of total</b>
Architectural fragments (e.g. jambs, columns, tracery, etc)	43	1.5 %
Animal remains	321	11.4 %
Clay pipe	76	2.7 %
Coins	13	0.5 %
Floor tile	178	6.3 %
Human remains	43	1.5 %
Mollusca remains	200	7.1 %
Nails	68	2.4 %
Oyster shells	62	2.2 %
Pins	27	0.9 %
Potsherds	856	30.5 %
Roof tile	55	1.9 %
Sample <sup>1</sup>	116	4.1 %
Sheet (flat object) <sup>2</sup>	26	0.9 %
Strip <sup>3</sup>	15	0.5 %
Tile	33	1.2 %
Unidentified object <sup>4</sup>	277	9.8 %
Vessel	84	3 %
Voussoir	15	0.5 %
Wall plaster	11	0.4 %
Window glass	221	7.9 %
Other (including small finds)	59	2.1 %

<sup>1</sup> Misc. archaeological samples of soil, plaster, charcoal, building material, strata, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Misc. lead and copper alloy objects.

<sup>3</sup> Misc. lead and copper alloy objects.

<sup>4</sup> Misc. glass, iron, lead and copper alloy objects. Note that some of these have been allocated small find numbers.

At least 2,094 of the 2,799 objects (74 % of the total) derive from the 1968-1975 excavations. 28 (1 %) of the records come from the 1984-1985 excavations and 10 (< 1 %) come from the 1954 excavation. The excavation date of the remaining 667 objects is not listed on HOMS, although a significant number of these records have known contexts, suggesting they also come from the 1968-1975 excavations.

The high percentage of animal remains (11.4 %), potsherds (30.5 %) and other accumulated building material (e.g. window glass, 7.9 %) is consistent with the monastic nature of the site and the specific location of the excavations within the complex (see section 3.1 above).

The main excavations at Denny between 1968 were subject to a detailed excavation report (Patricia M. Christie & J. G. Coad (1980) 'Excavations at Denny Abbey', *Archaeological Journal*, 137:1, 138-279). The report features individual reports on:

- Appendix 1: Stained glass
- Appendix 2: Vessel glass
- Appendix 3: Medieval floor tiles
- Appendix 4: Stonework
- Appendix 5: Medieval and post-medieval pottery
- Appendix 5a: The Romano-British pottery
- Appendix 6: Metalwork and bone objects
- Appendix 7: Numismatica
- Appendix 8: Clay pipes
- Appendix 9: Seeds
- Appendix 10: Insect remains
- Appendix 11: Human remains
- Appendix 12: Animal bones

These detailed discussions on the objects which now form the bulk of EHT's assemblage from Denny mean that we have an unusually good understanding of the collection, its context and significance.

Many of the more significant individual finds were illustrated for the publication. For this reason, the excavation report acts as a useful guide as to which objects are suitable for display – see section 3.4 and 4 below.

A digital copy of the excavation report is saved in the collections curator folder [here](#).

### 3.3 Human remains

The collection includes a small but significant assemblage of human remains requiring specific mention in this review. During the 1968-1975 excavations the remains of at least 14 individuals were found, mostly located in the church and the area immediately outside the west door.<sup>1</sup> Although the condition of some of the bones made classification difficult, the report lists 10 males and 4 women, consistent with the Abbey's time as a Benedictine, Templar and Poor Clare institution. Many of the remains displayed signs of periostitis (inflammation of the membrane enveloping a bone), which the report suggests could be a sign of restricted diet, hard work (etc) and osteoarthritis (degenerative joint disease), which is less surprising as all but two of the individuals were middle aged or older.

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<sup>1</sup> A plan of the burials is provided in Christie & Coad, 1980: 146 (Fig. 4)

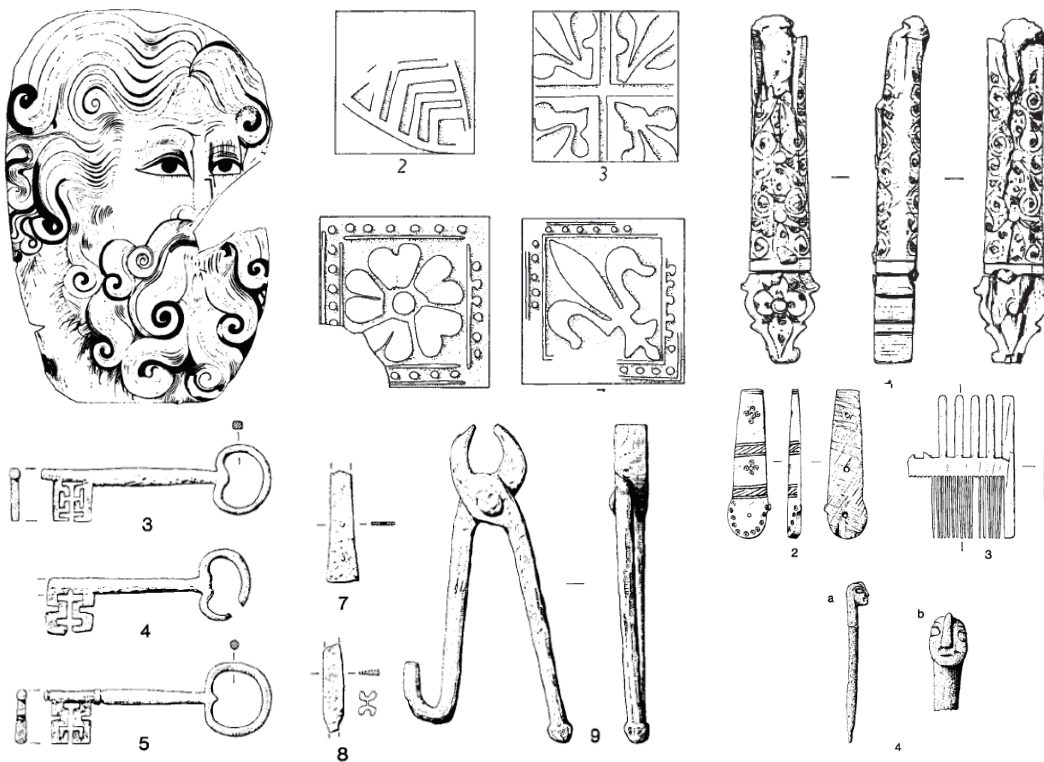
Of the burials, one (Christie & Coad, 1980: Burial I, Appendix II, no. 1) is noteworthy for being found in a grave lined with dressed clunch blocks dressed in mortar. The remains had been placed in a coffin and a pewter chalice and decorated lead disc were found with the body. This group (including the remains) were previously on display in the Farland Museum's Education Centre – see section 4 below.

In addition to the excavation report, a further detailed report including dental formulae and tables of measurements was submitted to the AML (report number 1631).<sup>2</sup>

### 3.4 Other finds

Although the bulk of finds from the site are made up of bulk archaeology and building material (e.g. potsherds, tile, animal remains, etc) unsuitable for display, there are a significant number of finds from the site which are more noteworthy and/or could form part of a future object focused exhibition.

These objects broadly represent the history of the site from the Roman period through to its time as a religious institution and on to its conversion into a farmhouse in the 16th century. These objects can be broadly split into the categories listed in the appendices of the excavation report (see section 3.2). The number of objects would allow a chronological or a thematic approach to be adopted, adding to the overall visitor offer within the Abbey. Many of these objects have previously been on display and there is a desire from the Farland Museum for these objects to return to site.



<sup>2</sup> An online copy can be found here: <https://historicensland.org.uk/research/results/reports/1631?searchType=research+report&search=denny+abbey>. The full report is kept at Wrest Park in Box XDE1225 (see section 3.7)

**Previous page:** A selection of finds from Denny Abbey taken from the illustrations in the 1968-1975 excavation report. Clockwise from top left: c.1350-80 window glass showing a bearded man; medieval floor tiles from Bawsey kiln; bone objects – knife handles, comb and pin; iron objects – pliers and keys. Not to scale.

### 3.5 Current documentation

The general state of the documentation for the collection is poor. HOMS records generally lack photographs, dimensions and good descriptions. Very few, if any, of the records have been associated with their small find numbers or with their catalogue entries in the published excavation report.

In addition, there are several known documentation backlogs. There are 4 green boxes of collection that cannot be married up to records on HOMS. There are also 49 objects still listed on HOMS as being at Denny Abbey, last seen in 2004. These objects need to be located and their records updated.

### 3.6 Storage and conservation

The collection is currently stored at Wrest Park. Most of the collection (2,718 of 2,799 records) has been audited and its location updated within the last 5 years (or even more recently). 49 records are listed as being on site at Denny but in all but two cases this is a documentation error. As of 04/05/2023 the only two accessioned objects on site are:

- 81110016 – sculpture, Feline head. Eyes pierced, lentoids.
- 81110020 – sculpture, male head

### 3.7 Archive

EHT curates a small dedicated site archive containing primary archive for all the excavations on site. In addition to original plans, drawings, photographs and correspondence, EHT also holds detailed reports/catalogues of the medieval tiles, pottery, and animal and human bone. These reports provide a level of detail on the collection only briefly summarised in the published excavation report. The archive is therefore vital to the full understanding of the collection.

The following table provides a breakdown of the archive by box number:

Box number	Description
XDEI403	Site Plans 88107066- 88107069
XDEI402	Film, Ink and Pencil(1967-1975) 88107064 & 88107065
XDEI487	Site Plans 88114784
XDEI492	Film and Ink Drawings 88107070- 88107076
XDEI227	Site Photographs Part 1/4- 2/4

XDEI228	Site Photographs Parts 3/4 & 4/4
XDEI229	Medieval Tile Project Archive Reports 88114782 & 88114783. Tiles Conservation Report
XDEI230	Site Photographs 88107093, 88107095-88107103. Selection of Photographs Selected for Publication
XDEI224	Pottery Catalogue 88108610.1 & 88108610.3. Object List 88114758. Publications 88234151
XDEI225	Animal and Human Bone Catalogue 88108610.4 & 88108610.7
XDEI226	Tile and Stone Catalogue 88108610.3 & 88108610.9
XDEI202	Find and Context lists for finds (metal, glass, stone and mortar 88108610-5) (shell, clay pipe 88108610-6) 1950s, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985 & general 1980s excavations. Object list
XDEI203	Photographic film B/W Negatives (1971-1974) 88107104
XDEI204	Photocopies of maps 88107082. Annotated Plan 88107083. Site Books (1968-1974) 88107084/1 1-3. Site Books (1973-1974) 88107084/2 1-2. Daily Site Books (1968-1974) 88107084/3 1-4. Drawings and Photographs Register (1954-1974) 88107084/4 1-2. Photographs 88107094- 88107096 & 88107103. Correspondence re: Photographs 88107105. Distribution & Maplets Forms (1968-1974)
XDEI205	AML Reports (1968-1975) 88107085. Various Reports & Correspondence: 88107086/ 1-17. Report (1980) 88107087. Record Card 88107088. History 88107089. Photocopies of elevations 88106090. Illustrations (1974) 88107091
XDEI959	Inventory List 2004

Further work is required to fully index the material within the boxes. As of the date of this review, there is an archive volunteer working at Wrest Park to fully index the contents of the archive, although it is unknown when the archive for Denny will be completed.

## 4. Significance and potential of the collection

### 4.1 Overview

The 2019 CMP summarised the archaeological significance of the site as follows:

*Archaeological significance has been shown by past excavations to be exceptional, deepening our understanding of the occupation of the site through the centuries. Group value is conferred by the earthworks around the Abbey and their connection with the buried remains within the raised platform. There is the potential for future excavations in several different areas which would add to our understanding of the site and its inhabitants...*

Additionally, the historic significance of the site is summarised in the CMP as follows:

*Denny Abbey is exceptional in having been owned by four successive religious orders: the Benedictines, the Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitaller (who seem not to have used the site) and the Franciscan 'Poor Clares'. Denny is the only known example of an existing monastic site*

*being adapted for Franciscan use (Christie & Coad, 1980: 141). It is the only known English property transferred directly from the Benedictines to the Templars.*

The collection from Denny is intrinsically connected to the archaeology and history of the site and therefore largely shares its value and significance. However, in many ways the bulk of the collection also typifies the type of archaeological and building material that could be expected of any monastic or archaeological site (see the breakdown of the collection in section 3.2). For this reason, a discussion of the significance of the collection by type follows in section 4.2.

## 4.2 Significance by collection type

This section replicates and summarises the discussions to be found in the appendices of the excavation report (Christie & Coad, 1980). No additional research or attempt to re-classify significance has been made.

### 4.2.1 Window glass

The glass is all fourteenth century in date. There is very little glass extant from Franciscan (Poor Clare) houses elsewhere in England. The most important and extensive collection is the fourteenth-century glass excavated at Sidney Sussex College Cambridge, on the site of the Franciscan Priory. Both sites yielded little coloured glass, suggesting that the Franciscans, like other denominations, may have preferred white and yellow stained glass for reasons of aesthetics, practicality and cost.

### 4.2.2 Vessel glass

The material comprises the fragmentary remains of lamps, urinals, bottles, beakers and wine glasses and dates from the medieval period through the 17th century. The glass is of two kinds: green (mainly presumably English made) and colourless (mainly imported but also in the 17th century possibly English).

### 4.2.3 Medieval floor tiles

The excavations both inside the church and to the north of it produced a substantial quantity of floor-tile. Four distinct types could be identified: line-impressed mosaic tiles; relief tiles; plain tiles, probably imported; and one piece of two-colour tile. These finds are of considerable importance as they add significantly to the information already available for the study of medieval tiles in East Anglia.

### 4.2.4 Stonework

Stone uncovered during the excavations was limited to two samples, one of Carrara marble imported from Italy and the second of alabaster, probably from Nottingham.



Of greater significance are the examples of monumental stonework, architectural fragments, and few examples of sculpture in the collection. Alongside the standing fabric, these provide highly significant evidence of the pre-dissolution architecture and decoration of the religious buildings.

#### **4.2.5 Medieval and post-medieval pottery**

The considerable quantities of pottery recovered relate to all phases of the site's development, from the foundation of the abbey in 1159 to the present day. Most was securely stratified and can be securely dated.

#### **4.2.6 Romano-British pottery**

The collection from Denny Abbey was recovered during the excavation of the church and adjacent medieval land-surface to the north, and must be considered unstratified having been thrown up during the digging of foundations and pits. No trace of any Romano-British structure was uncovered but the distribution of sherds suggests that the settlement probably lies in the unexcavated area to the south or west.

#### **4.2.7 Metalwork and bone objects**

The iron, copper alloy and lead objects recovered from the excavations form a useful, if typical, group which reflect to a certain extent the various types of occupation of the site. Some are what are to be expected from a farm context, while the numerous knives and keys are concomitant with domestic occupation, whether monastic or agricultural. The various fragments associated with books may indicate that they came originally from a monastic library, while the circular lead plate taken from burial 1 (see section 3.3) is very rare.

#### **4.2.8 Numismatica**

This collection includes two Roman coins, a medieval coin, medieval jettons, post-medieval coins and tokens, post-medieval jettons, and a coin weight. A full catalogue is available in the excavation report.

#### **4.2.9 Clay pipes**

Pipe bowls, complete and fragmentary, were recovered from the excavations north of the church together with numerous stem fragments. No distinct local type was noted and all could easily be identified with the typology evolved for London pipes. A more varied collection, consisting of 19 bowls or parts of bowls and one marked stem fragment, was recovered from the excavations within the former church. They cover a time span of 1680-1800 and include some by local makers:

#### **4.2.10 Seeds**

At the base of what was a garderobe tower there was found a number of grape, fig, elderberry, blackberry seeds, suggesting that the occupants of the first floor suite of rooms (probably the Countess and later abbesses and their

guests) were accustomed to a degree of luxury in their diet, unlike the nuns themselves.

**4.2.11 Insect remains**  
N/A

**4.2.12 Human bones**  
[see section 3.3]

**4.2.13 Animal bones**  
Evidence of butchery was observed on sheep, cattle and deer. Bones of other species were also found, including frog, field vole, black bird, water vole, water shrew, common shrew, hare, and wood mouse. Further information can be found in Ancient Monuments Laboratory Reports, nos. 1876, 1878 and 1901.

## 5. Collections Display

### 5.1 Current and previous collection displays

There are only two accessioned objects currently on site (see section 3.6). These comprise two large medieval sculptures located on the first floor ('Countess of Pembroke's room') of the Abbey.

Prior to 2020, a much larger collection display was present on site. The collections on display were held in two polstore units located in the Abbey and the Farmland Museum's education room. The displays and objects were arranged chronologically (tracing the development of the Abbey) in some drawers and thematically (by object type) in others. Pictures of the displays and label text are available in the shared files – see link above.

In 2020 English Heritage decided to remove these displays due to concerns about the poor quality of the interpretation and potential damage to the objects and EHT's reputation. The polstore drawers had no internal conditioning or environmental control. The drawers also lacked a soft-close/open mechanism, meaning that objects could be violently rocked when



opening and closing the drawers. In some cases, objects had become completely free from their plastazote cut-outs and were rolling loosely around the metal drawers.

## 5.2 Future potential

Although there are very collection items currently on display, there is considerable potential to return objects to site in a new collections-based display. As outlined in sections 3.4 and 4.2, there are a significant number of finds with considerable archaeological and historical importance, many of which have previously been on display. These objects would add value to the interpretation of the site and provide visitors with a more in-depth understanding of the site's development.

The wish to return these objects and rebuild the collections display has also been voiced by the trustees and members of staff of the Farmland Museum, EHT's LMA partner.

The current barriers to returning the objects are as follows:

- **Environmental conditions** – the conditions within the Abbey are generally unsuitable for a collections display. The windows and roof are in poor condition and there are no other environmental controls within the building. The doors to the Abbey are generally kept fully open during the day. The Abbey is generally dusty and has to be regularly cleaned. Part of the ground floor has a wooden ramp/gangway, but some rooms retain a natural, uneven dirt floor. This makes the internal conditions unsuitable for the display of most objects (except for stonework) outside of a showcase. In the recent past there have also been issues with bird ingress and nesting, causing considerable issues of guano.
- **Cost** – The conditions in the Abbey mean that most objects require a showcase to be displayed. There are already two glass showcases owned by EHT on site, moved to the Abbey in 2021, but these lack any form of conditioning. It is currently unknown whether these cases are suitable to house the collections on a permanent basis given the general environment of the Abbey. Testing of individual objects by the Conservation Science team is likely to be required to ascertain their suitability for display. If new conditioned cases are required, it is likely to be extremely costly, depending on the specifications and number required.
- **Access** – Access to the Abbey is difficult. The ground floor has a modern raised, narrow walkway in one section but otherwise consists of a natural ground (dirt) surface. Both surfaces are unsuitable for display cases. The second floor is accessible via a wooden staircase without a lift for wheelchair or disabled access. The second floor is more suitable for a collection display as the floor is more even and the rooms are wider. Placing a display here, however, would limit the numbers of people who could physically access it.

It is possible there are other areas of the site (i.e. the Farmland Museum) that could be suitable for showcases and the display of objects. However, this avenue has not so far been explored. It is important that these barriers are considered during planning stages of the upcoming SEP project.

## 6. Conclusion

This review can be summarised as follows:

- EHT possesses a sizeable collection from Denny Abbey, comprising material from excavations in the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s.
- The collections are of high significance, with considerable archaeological and historical value, adding to our knowledge and understanding of the site and its development.
- Elements of the collection have considerable display potential. Very little of the collection is currently on site, but there is a significant opportunity for objects to form part of a new collections-based exhibition.
- There are considerable barriers to returning the collections to site. These need to be considered in the planning stages of the upcoming SEP project.

## 7. Key Questions

EHT's collection from Denny Abbey is well understood and has been the subject of a full peer-reviewed excavation report. For this reason, very few questions remain about the collection and there is limited scope for additional research.

An exception to this is the human remains. The remains were identified and described in the excavation report, and a further report with dental formulae and tables of measurements was submitted to the AML (Powers & Keepax, 1974, now kept at Wrest Park in Box XDE 1225). However, it does not appear that any further scientific testing was conducted. It is likely that further analysis using modern scientific techniques could provide much more detail about the remains. This should be considered when any decision is made on the future storage and/or reburial of the remains.

## 8. Next Steps

This report has highlighted the poor documentation of the collection as the main area in which the state of the collection could be improved. Individual HOMS records need to be improved so that each record has a photograph, description, measurements and a reference to its catalogue entry in the excavation report.

The possibility of returning the collection to site in any new interpretation scheme (i.e. the SEP project scheduled for 2023/4) should be discussed by the project team.