

## Site Collections Development Policy

Name of Museum: English Heritage – Furness Abbey

Name of Governing Body: English Heritage Trust

Date on which this policy was approved by the Acquisitions, Loans and Disposals Committee: March 2024

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: **28 March 2029**

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. Furness Abbey was established in 1123 as a Savigniac monastery, later absorbed into the Cistercian order. It was dissolved in 1537 and fell into ruin. Furness Abbey was placed in guardianship on 19/12/1923, with a further area purchased by the Ministry of Works on 27/7/1960. The current owner of the guardianship area is Richard Hugh Cavendish, Baron Cavendish of Furness. English Heritage manage the site.
- 1.4. Furness Abbey is situated in Cumbria in the Barrow-in-Furness (District Authority) district. It is a listed building entry number 1197906, national grid ref SD2181871777. It sits within the wider scheduled landscape, list entry number 1010014.

### 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. The majority of the collections are archaeological and from the guardianship area. They were mainly collected in three broad phases; from 19<sup>th</sup> century excavations, Ministry of Works clearances 1924-33 and from the more recent presbytery stabilisation works 2009-15. There have been multiple smaller interventions ranging from excavation, watching briefs and surveys from both within the guardianship area and over the wider scheduled area of the monastic precinct. The earliest recovered material is poorly contextualised. The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century retrieval and collecting policies have led to a skewed representation of finds. Few small finds, or organic materials were retrieved or retained. This contrasts with the assemblage from the full depth excavation of a Savigniac-Cistercian church recovered under modern archaeological conditions.
- 3.2 A museum was established on the site in the Infirmary Chapel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and housed stone effigies and architectural stonework. Clearance work of the 1920s-1930s added further stonework. The current museum was purpose built and opened in 1982.
- 3.3 Gifts/transfers to the collection:  
Following the 1920s-1930s site clearance works a number of small finds were held by the Dock Museum, Barrow. Alabaster sculptures and panels and a stone over mantle were also held by the Dock Museum following the bombing of the former Abbey Hotel and its subsequent partial demolition in 1951-4 where they had formed decorative elements. Along with a number of photographs, small finds, including medieval keys and a cast of a seal from the dissolution document these collections were transferred back into the English Heritage collections in the 1990s  
19<sup>th</sup> century photographic prints by private donation in 1990s  
Hand coloured photographic print of the site by private donation in 2021  
Two 18<sup>th</sup> century topographic prints of Furness Abbey by private donation in 2022
- 3.4 Purchases:  
Watercolour painting, Buckler 1814, at auction 2019  
Watercolour painting, Sandby Munn, 1809, at auction 2019  
Antiquarian book 1774 (West) at auction in 2022  
Antiquarian book 1844 (Beck) at auction in 2022

### 4. An overview of the collections

- 4.1. There are 2330 records registered on the EH collections database for Furness Abbey, these include individual objects and bulk finds.
- 4.2. The majority of the catalogued material is archaeological. Collections from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century interventions include c. 350 individual medieval architectural and sculptural stone and inscribed grave covers, floor tiles, window glass and coins. The Presbytery excavation material archive catalogue includes almost 2000 items ranging from medieval architectural stone, grave covers,

human remains, animal remains, samples, funerary material as well as post medieval material. These are currently undergoing post-excavation analysis by Oxford Archaeology North and are held temporarily off-site by OAN.

- 4.3. The archaeological collection includes architectural and sculptured masonry of local and national significance. The recovered ex situ Savigniac period architectural stones contribute to international study of 12<sup>th</sup> century Savigniac architecture. This includes Savigniac voussoirs and a scallop decorated capital, reused as a piscina. There is a particularly fine collection of 7 funerary effigies representing the largest number from any Cistercian monastery in the North of England, 6 of patrons, including a female effigy, 1 of clergy. Of note, and of national significance, are two complete knight effigies depicted wearing full helms, c. 1250-75 of Urswick limestone.

There are 26 monumental grave slabs – of which 8 are inscribed. The collection is typical of assemblages associated with monastic sites in having inscriptions, but the Furness slabs have a far higher proportion of inscribed stones than is usual. They are of regional significance.

An intact abbatial burial discovered in the Presbytery included a gilded copper alloy and silver crozier with decorative St. Michael panels, evidence of the sudarium, wooden painted shaft and iron base ferrule. An unusual abbatial crystal and gilded silver finger ring was also recovered from the grave. The crozier contributes to international studies of the artefact type; this combined with the ring, context and skeletal remains ranks the abbatial assemblage as of high significance.

One fragment of painted window glass, depicting an angel, the work of John Petty a York-based glazier from 1475-1500 is of regional importance.

There are 518 records of human remains, the majority came from the presbytery excavations.

- 4.4 The fine art collection consists of post medieval religious carvings, including a c. 1600 stone over mantle depicting the creation of the world, 17<sup>th</sup> century alabaster figures of St John and St John the Baptist, their inscribed panels, and two alabaster carved relief panels, all from the post medieval manor house (formerly Abbey House Hotel, now the reduced building known as The Abbey Tavern).
- 4.5 Works on paper include watercolours by renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century artists Buckler and Sandby Munn, and 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century topographical prints.
- 4.6 Social History items include photographic prints of the site, two antiquarian books and un-accessioned archive include a late 20<sup>th</sup> century Mystery play programme and associated audiotapes, and 1920s/30s site admission permits.

## 5. Themes and priorities for future collecting

### 5.1 General:

EHT seeks to set a geographical archaeological collecting area respecting the original monastic precinct scheduled area. Area map appended.

Acquisitions will be made where there is a demonstrable monastic link, or where they are informative about the pre- or post-monastic use of the site.

A pre-deposition disposal policy will be applied for repetitive and non-diagnostic material.

Multi-period archaeological archives will only be collected as part of a wider relevant archive.

Archaeological archive resulting from large scale excavations within the collecting area but outside the guardianship area would only be accepted following negotiations with the excavator/developer, including the issues of capacity and costs.

We would seek to collect, through negotiation, all known and future chance discoveries (single or small group) from the collecting area (which should be reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme), including items which fall under the Treasure Act 1996. These will be limited to monastic related finds with clear provenance.

5.2 Detached architectural material:

Detached architectural material, which cannot be reattached, which is diagnostic and non-repetitive will be collected if it adds to our understanding of the site and if it cannot be adequately recorded for archiving or it is of display quality.

5.3 Dispersed collections: We seek to unify split assemblages whether through acquisition or disposal. English Heritage would collect known archaeological material currently held by organisations or private individuals originating from the collecting area if it was to be offered to English Heritage and fulfilled all other criteria for collecting, this includes:

5.3.1 Architectural stonework, sculpture, fixtures and fittings removed from the site in the 16<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> century now held by private owners.

5.4.3 Lost finds should be brought back into the collection when located including the small finds noted on the 1920s finds ledger.

5.4.4 A number of other institutions hold single or very small quantities of antiquarian finds from Furness (see list in 7.2 below). English Heritage would accept these collections if their future was otherwise in jeopardy and/or would seek to unite split archives by deposition with English Heritage, particularly noting the precedent of the transfer of collections from the Dock Museum to English Heritage in the 1990s

5.4.5 English Heritage would seek to collect 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century excavation and conservation paper-based archive and other relevant photographs and records relating to historic archaeology at Furness Abbey.

5.4 Collections relating to former owners or occupiers:

Will be collected where relevant to the understanding and interpretation of Furness Abbey and the later occupation of the site including the Preston family and Catholic recusancy.

5.5 Books, manuscripts and archive:

We would seek to collect original site guidebooks and antiquarian studies of Furness Abbey. Very few manuscripts survive from the abbey's original collection and these are dispersed between public institutions such as the British Library and private owners. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the library books were dispersed, it is possible that more will be

- found to have survived. EHT would seek to help locate the most appropriate public repository for any manuscripts if they become available. General archive of the collated histories, bills, wills, plans and maps should continue to be collected by Barrow Archive Centre.
- 5.6 Prints, paintings and maps:  
We would seek to acquire prints, paintings and maps that show key views of Furness Abbey, in particular those with a detailed level of recording which aid our understanding of the monastic architecture and layout, and also the decline of the monument after 1539, and also of Abbey House Hotel and Furness Abbey Railway Station.
- 5.7 Social History:  
We would seek relevant ephemera, fittings and furniture from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century relating to tourism and the Romantic movement at Furness Abbey and Furness Abbey Railway Station and Abbey House Hotel for display purposes.
- 5.8 Oral History:  
Testimonies relating to the history of the site will be collected in line with our oral history collecting policy.
- 5.9 Photographs and postcards:  
We would seek to acquire photographs and postcards that show key views of Furness Abbey; in particular those which show detailed views of the architecture, excavations and monument repair, site layout, the historic museum and collections as well as events such as the 1927 procession and 1961 and 1988 Mystery Plays, held at Furness Abbey which relate to the history of the site, particularly if they can be used for site interpretation. Also the original images of 1920-3s consolidation work held by Joe Taylor of Market Street, Dalton as reproduced online at [www.furnessabbey.org.uk](http://www.furnessabbey.org.uk) (Gallery 10).

## 6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

- 6.1. The following reviews could be considered:  
Once the publication of the OAN/Headland excavations is completed, a review could be made of the fragmentary eroded grave covers which were stored (accessioned) to dry out and record.  
There was a comprehensive pre-deposition rationalization applied to the presbytery architectural stone 2009-2015, but many physical sections of profile examples were retained and accessioned; with developments in recording techniques it may be possible to further sift this collection in future.  
There are 518 records of human remains, the majority from the presbytery excavations with the legal status of permanent collection – this was mostly applied in 2016 - but the intention (and under the Home Office licence) was that these remains should be reburied on site on completion of post excavation analysis.  
There are also 136 sample records, with permanent collection status, undergoing post excavation assessment. These could be reviewed and rationalized by applying a discard policy.  
There are two accessioned stones which have now been securely provenanced as originating from Conishead Priory, they are 88213032 and

88213036. 88213033 to 88213035 may be part of that group. Efforts should be made to dispose of these and transfer them into a local museum.

## 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 to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.
- 7.2. Specific reference is made to the following museums and organisations:
  - 7.2.1 The Historic England archive – holds paper-based archive material associated with the site
  - 7.2.2 Barrow Archive Centre and local studies library holds paper-based archives from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which includes archaeological archive, photographs and books relating to Furness Abbey, including the Alice Leach (local historian) collection.
  - 7.2.3 The National Archives hold the Deed of Surrender 1537, and the Cartulary of Furness Abbey (Coucher Book) Part I, 1412.
  - 7.2.4 The British Library holds a volume of Thomas West, new edition 1805 with additional paintings on the binding by William Close and the Cartulary of Furness Abbey (Coucher Book) Part II, 1412.
  - 7.2.5 Barrow Dock Museum are the local collecting museum for the area. The Dock Museum transferred the majority of their collections originating from Furness Abbey (including Abbey House) to English Heritage in the early 1990s but still retain a stone corbel, a stone cresset lamp, a copper alloy Roman statuette of Hercules, and 4 roman coins found in the amphitheatre. They hold a small number of photographs, postcards and some modern paintings of the abbey and some mid-20<sup>th</sup> century paper itineraries of a visit to Furness Abbey. They also hold some collections relating to the Furness railway, but not Furness Abbey station. Since the 1990s the Dock Museum have deferred to English Heritage as the collecting body for archaeological material from the scheduled area and collections associated with the abbey. They have limited capacity for new acquisitions.
  - 7.2.6 British Museum holds an early medieval copper alloy mount in form of a monk's head. A 17<sup>th</sup> century drawing by Arnald, an 18<sup>th</sup> century drawing by Ferneley and a number of 19<sup>th</sup> century topographic prints of the site.
  - 7.2.7 Dalton parish church: the 19<sup>th</sup> century church has incorporated 14<sup>th</sup> century glass from Furness Abbey in its windows including figures of saints and angels. The large stone basin now reused as a font is also reputed to be from Furness Abbey.
  - 7.2.8 In private hands:  
From the collection of Roger Warner (deceased) two choir stall

pinnacles, and a wooden sculpture of King Stephen reputedly from Furness Abbey, (but very unlikely). Current whereabouts unknown, but likely to appear still on the open market.

Douai Abbey, Woolhampton, two complete medieval decorated glass quarries, (also lost iron key)

Jason Wood, extensive 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century photographic print and postcard collection

Joe Taylor of Dalton, 1927-1930 consolidation works photographs.

## 8. Map



Furness Abbey: Guardianship area in red, Scheduled Monument area in brown