

Site Collections Development Statement

Name of Museum: English Heritage – Rievaulx Abbey

Name of Governing Body: English Heritage Trust

Date on which this statement was approved by the Acquisitions, Loans and Disposals Committee: 12 December 2023

Statement review procedure: The Site Collections Development Statement 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: 7 December 2028

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

1. Management Arrangements and scope

- 1.1. This statement 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 statement 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. Rievaulx Abbey was placed into guardianship on 20th July 1917, initially the area was a tight perimeter around the main conventual buildings but was later extended to include more of the conventual buildings, and part of the outer court leading to the roadside. The current owners are part Duncombe Estate; part Commission; part Secretary of State. English Heritage manage the site.
- 1.4. Rievaulx Abbey is situated in the village of Rievaulx in the Ryedale District of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. It is a listed building, list entry number: 1175724, National Grid reference SE 57632 84971. It sits within the wider scheduled landscape, list entry number 1012065 of 'Rievaulx Abbey Cistercian monastery: inner and outer precinct, water-management works, agricultural features, enclosures and ancillary buildings' which covers the majority of the village.
- 1.5. Development in the area is controlled by the North Yorkshire Moors Park Authority and is subject to scheduled monument consent.

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

- 2.1. The national Collections Development Policy approved by the Board of Trustees on 21 June 2022, (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.
- 2.2. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy and statement will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

3. History of the collections

- 3.1. Rievaulx Abbey is an internationally significant site; founded in 1132 as a Cistercian monastery and as the first to be established in Northern England it generally thrived with continual building programmes until its suppression in 1538. A museum was established on site in the early 1920s, firstly it was an adapted works shed set on unexcavated land East of the church then in the 1970s the schoolroom was adapted as a museum. In 1999 farm outbuildings east of the church were converted into a museum and they underwent further alterations in 2016-17 to form the current museum.
- 3.2. Almost all of the collections are archaeological and are from the guardianship area having been excavated during Antiquarian excavations of the church in the early 19th century and Ministry of Works clearances from 1919-1939, and further excavations since the 1950s. There have been over 70 recorded interventions ranging from excavation to watching briefs and surveys over the wider monastic precinct. The earliest recovered material is poorly contexted. There are also archaeological archives from the modern watching briefs within the guardianship area.
- 3.3. Gifts to the collection:
Early 20th century photographic print, donated 1997.
Weatherill Collection of notes, books, cameras, photographs, donated 2002. Melville collection of glass slides, donated 2017.
Marble keystone originally from the presbytery, donated 2019.
- 3.4. There are no current long-term loans.

4. An overview of the collections

- 4.1. There are 7961 current object records in the Rievaulx Abbey collections, representing a large but fairly typical monastic assemblage deriving from Ministry of Works site clearance. The collection consists of: architectural stonework (over a fifth of the collection), bulk floor tiles and bulk ceramics; small finds include coins, personal effects and thousands of sherds of window glass.
- 4.2. Of particular note are the internationally significant stone sculpture of Christ in Majesty and a plaited wire scourge.
- 4.3. The 12th-15th century floor tiles form a unique assemblage of national significance alongside those still in situ.
- 4.4. The architectural stonework is of national significance allowing detailed interpretation of the development of the monument which is well understood and has been published in a monograph and other academic journals.
- 4.5. There are nine works on paper, six 19th century prints and three 20th century paintings. There are also a number of photographs of the site from the 19th and 20th centuries including stereo views.
- 4.6. There is a large paper-based archive dating from c. 1907 to present which includes correspondence, archaeological archive, plans, visitor books, research papers and catalogues noting the medieval floor tiles and the extensive architectural stonework collections in particular.
- 4.7. Social and industrial history: The archives include architectural

conservation technique records including plans, blue-prints, photographs, notebooks and samples as well as accounts and employment records.

4.8. There are no items currently on loan in.

5. Themes and priorities for future collecting

5.1 Priority should also be given to the collecting of key diagnostic architectural stonework and sculpture including key diagnostic architectural stonework buried in the 1950s under the location of the present visitor carpark.

Collections reflecting aspects of monastic land management and industry should also be considered a priority, for example kiln evidence, iron production, agriculture and water management. These may be from outside the guardianship area.

Rievaulx was recorded by many artists from the 18th century on, and photographers from the 19th century on but this is poorly represented in the current collection. Consideration should be focused on collecting representative works of the site from the 18th to 20th centuries.

5.2 EHT will collect artefactual and paper-based archive from within the guardianship boundary and, through consultation and assessment, material from the wider associated landscape, including the original monastic precinct and grange sites. Material outside of Rievaulx's monastic dates will be considered case by case.

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

We would also seek to collect 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 (and 2023 amendment). These will generally be limited to monastic related finds with clear provenance.

- 5.3 Detached architectural material will be collected in line with our deposition guidelines.
Loose tiles should be collected, even if repetitive, as they form part of an internationally significant assemblage.
- 5.4 Dispersed collections:
- 5.4.1 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:
- 5.4.2 Architectural stonework and sculpture removed from the site in the 19th century now held by private owners in the parish of Rievaulx. 5.4.3 Any metal detecting finds recovered by recent and future illegal metal activity with the scheduled area adjacent to the guardianship site, including known discoveries of:
- Virgin and Child silver pendant
 - Gold necklace
 - Iron shoe patten
- 5.4.4 Lost finds should be brought back into the collection when located including:
- Raqqa ware sherd, first noted by John Hurst in 1950s
 - Lead reliquary containers excavated in 1920s
 - Ceramic jug lent to Yorkshire Abbeys exhibition 1988
 - Ceramic fragments held by the North Ireland Historic Environment Service
- 5.4.5 A number of other institutions hold single or very small quantities of Antiquarian finds from Rievaulx (see list in 6.3 below). English Heritage would accept these collections if their future was otherwise in jeopardy.
- 5.4.6 English Heritage would seek to collect 19th and 20th century archaeological and monument conservation paper-based archive and other relevant photographs and records relating to historic archaeology at Rievaulx Abbey
- 5.5 Prints, drawings, paintings and maps:
We would seek to acquire prints, paintings and maps that show key views of Rievaulx Abbey, in particular those with a detailed level of recording which aid our understanding of the history of the abbey and discoveries.
- 5.6 Photographs and postcards:
We would seek to acquire photographs and postcards that show key views of Rievaulx Abbey; in particular those which show detailed views of excavated features, site layout, the historic museum, the lost farmhouse and collections as well as events held at Rievaulx Abbey.

6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

No further reviews of the permanent collection are currently planned as a large proportion of the collection has received recent detailed research and all are either of display quality, further research potential or add to the overall understanding of the site.

An assemblage of c.600 architectural stones held in an on-site clamp may be de-accessioned in line with recent ADLC approvals. A further assemblage of material already identified as being suitable for the clamp may be de-accessioned.

There are thousands of plain square mosaic floor tiles from the late 12th-

early 13th century. They are repetitive and many are worn. There may be scope for deaccessioning some for specific use such as repairs to in-situ pavements or site- based installations.

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:
- The Historic England Archives- with reference to archive material which includes plans and photographs of the site.
 - The British Library holds medieval manuscripts from Rievaulx Abbey. It does not have an active CDP for Rievaulx Abbey but does have a national remit for nationally and internationally significant manuscripts.
 - The British Museum holds medieval floor tiles from Rievaulx Abbey acquired from the Duke of Rutland. The British Museum does not have an active CDP for Rievaulx Abbey but has a national remit of last resort for significant archaeological finds and treasure.
 - The National Archives holds dissolution papers, seals, Works 14 and Works 31 files.
 - The Borthwick Institute, York holds rentals and Weatherill papers.
 - York Minster Library holds charters.
 - The North Yorkshire County Record Office holds parish archive papers, charters, deeds and maps and has an active collecting policy for North Yorkshire records.
 - York Museums Trust (YMT) has a county remit for the collecting of archaeological archive, but only if another institution is unable to accept the archive. Additionally YMT seek 'to strengthen the research potential and significance of the nationally designated archaeology collection through prioritised...acquisition within...peculiar, particular and significant objects that are outstanding on a national level' (YMT Collections Development Policy, April 2013). YMT holds c.26 drawings, prints and photographs of Rievaulx Abbey dating from the 18th to early 20th centuries.
 - Leake Church has a church bell dedicated to Aelred, removed from Rievaulx Abbey at the dissolution.
 - The Helmsley Archive has an extensive collection of original and copies of 19th and 20th century photographs of Rievaulx Abbey and village.

8. Maps



Scheduled area



Detail showing guardianship area (red) within scheduled area.