

Site Collections Development Statement

Name of Museum: English Heritage – York Cold War Bunker

Name of Governing Body: English Heritage Trust

Date on which this policy was approved by the Acquisitions, Loans and Disposals Committee: 15 June 2022

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: June 2027

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 York Cold War Bunker (historically ROC 20 Group Headquarters) was acquired by the state in 1999, and scheduled in 2001. Conservation work was undertaken between 2001 and 2005, which also improved physical access to the site and installed basic administrative facilities within the monument. The site opened as a public heritage attraction in 2006. It is presented as at stand down in 1991.
- 1.4 York Cold War Bunker is located on the west side of the historic city center, in the Holgate ward of York City Council (grid reference: SE580515). The Bunker is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM no. 1019439) and is sited within a shared access space serving modern apartment blocks (see map in appendix 1).

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 statement 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 statement will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

3. History of the collections

- 3.1. York Cold War Bunker was constructed in 1961 as a semi-sunken group control within the UKWMO system. The site operated as part of a national network of bunkers whose role was to observe and locate nuclear explosions, report on power and altitude, and track ensuing radiation. That network was 'owned' by UKWMO – the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation (part of the Home Office) - but operated by the Royal Observer Corps, a largely voluntary organisation which at the peak of its nuclear reporting role counted over 25,000 members nationally.
- 3.2. A significant assemblage was inherited when the Control and related Administration buildings were transferred to EH. Currently around 70% of the collection derives from the Group Control and those personnel who served there.
- 3.3. Between 2000 and 2005 EH curators sourced equipment to fill gaps within the inherited bunker assemblage. This included: telecom systems and hardware; beds; bomb detection equipment; assorted material related to personal protection. An amount of those early acquisitions were subsequently disposed, being judged inappropriate or inaccurate in the context of the bunker and UKWMO network.
- 3.4. In 2005/6 EH acquired a significant assemblage of communications and detection equipment from the Home Office store at Marchington, Staffordshire. The material derived from the UKWMO/ROC network, but in the main could not be attributed to a specific facility.
- 3.5. In the period from 2005 to the present there has been a steady flow of donations from ex-ROC/UKWMO members and their families. In the main these have focused around training materials, uniform, certificates and memorabilia. On the whole donations have been restricted to members of the York group, with exceptions made where archives enrich the research resource or offer material to enhance the public displays.
- 3.6. An archive of 16 oral history recordings has been generated since 2006, including 11 interviews conducted by York St John University in 2021.
- 3.7. Since 2006 there has been little pro-active and targeted acquisition by EH (excepting the 2021 OH project). The existing collecting policy, using guidance from the national EHT policy, has endeavored to strike a balance between, on the one hand, forming an archive of material with a specific link to 20 Group Control set alongside material of a slightly broader but illustrative context, whilst on the other, not becoming a general repository for ROC or UKWMO heritage, or Cold War material.

4. An overview of existing collections

- 4.1 The English Heritage Trust collection for the York Cold War Bunker comprises 1509 catalogue entries in the permanent collection. These entries represent individual items, multiples of the same type (e.g. telephones), bulk entries of paperwork, or part numbers of multiple items within a single donation.
- 4.2 The ROC collection consists of 3D objects and 2D works on paper. It ranges across fixtures and fittings (in-situ and ex-situ), domestic and technical equipment, personal possessions such as uniform, badges, certificates, administrative record and training materials, publications, oral histories and film. The date range is mainly late 1950s – 1991, though there are earlier contextual ROC assemblages.
- 4.3 Collection provenance can be summarised as;
 - Material from the bunker and associated administration building (c. 700 entries);
 - Material from ROC/UKWMO personnel (both directly related to the Control, and nationally – c. 500);
 - Material from other institutions such as the MOD, Home Office and BT, the museum sector and private collections (c. 300 entries).
- 4.4 Broadly the collection can be seen to represent:
 - Assemblages that formed part of, or were used at, the Group Control.
 - Assemblages owned by the ROC staff based at the bunker or across 20 Group.
 - Material of a related type or form, but not from the ROC/UKWMO network.
 - Assemblages relating to ROC/UKWMO people nationally.
 - Assemblages relating broadly to the ROC and UKWMO organisations.
 - Material relating to a broader Cold War context.
5. Themes and priorities for future collecting
 - 5.1. In general terms the six categories set out in section 4.4 should act as a hierarchy in assessing potential acquisitions. Categories 1 and 2 are primary targets. Category 3 items may help to infill gaps in the public display, and form cohesive technical assemblages. Acquisition under categories 4 – 6 should be by exception.
 - 5.2 Acquisition of repetitive material (such as training manuals) will need to demonstrate exceptional worth in relation to the current base collection. Assessment may be based on condition, provenance or specific annotation/adaptation that, of itself, provides unique information.
 - 5.3 The ROC Collection Review (2022) sub-divides the collection into 6 themes (listed below). The review assesses significance in our holdings against these themes, and identifies gaps in both understanding and the physical collection. Potential acquisitions will also be assessed against thematic value.
 - 5.3.1 Structure, Form and Arrangement: assemblages relating to the applied fixtures and furnishing within the bunker such as frames, cabinets, railings; lighting, infrastructure (electrical/sanitary/life support); plant; fixed notice boards, signage; keys, latches and handles; carpets and tiles.
 - 5.3.2 EH will not seek to acquire material simply because it came from the site,

or material of type from similar facilities.

Collecting area 1: Material relating to the layout, fixtures and furnishings of the bunker may be acquired if these enhance public display of the site, or if the items retain specific operational evidence documenting differing configurations at differing periods.

- 5.3.3 Observation, Reporting and Warning: assemblages mapping the core functions of the bunker from initial observation to measurement and reporting, warning and monitoring. Sub-assemblages include: detection and measuring equipment; templates and forms for recording; training manuals for processes and use of kit; communications systems for transfer of knowledge; maps, screens, stickers, pencils; algorithmic charts, protractors and circular blast calculators.

Collecting area 2: We will seek to in-fill gaps in this record, working in conjunction with the Cold War assemblage held by the South territory. Specific focus should be given to documenting the role of UKWMO scientists in analysing data and communicating warning.

- 5.3.4 Communication and Information Technology: covering material relating to the transfer of information and associated officer roles: telephone exchange, telephones, headsets, cabling, sockets and routers; keyboards, screens, computers; telex machines, radio equipment and the Message Switch Exchange; telephone directories, forms, communications charts. These collections formed an interface with other nodes in the UKWMO and nuclear response networks. As such they illustrate not only how the Group Control in York functioned, but also how differing facilities were integrated, and how information was transmitted, to where and with what purpose.

Collecting area 3: A critical gap can be seen in the upgraded communications equipment from the late 1980s and withdrawn from the bunker by BT/Home Office in 1992. The assemblage comprised units making up the Message Switch Exchange (for communicating digital data) and Trend cypher system. These should be acquired for their inherent research value and significance, and as an important visual and cognitive aid in the public displays.

Collecting area 4: The collection contains little record of internal communication equipment, both from its early period, and later upgrades. Objects should be acquired to complement and complete the current late 1980's re-display policy.

- 5.3.5 Technology and systems: Assemblages describing technology which supported the bunker and its processes. This group is distinct from 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 in that the focus is less about what things look like or what they did but, rather, about how technology and processes worked. These assemblages illustrate technological change over

time and can be read within a broader context of technological development and the factors that influenced change (military, civilian, political and, (simply), the changing nature of the bomb).

Collecting area 5: There is a significant gap in our understanding of how much of the equipment in our collection actually worked – both in terms of the science behind functionality and technical engineering embedded within objects.

Acquisition should focus on operational and maintenance manuals, diagrams, historic spares (literally sub-parts such as capacitors, cabling, switches....), software and associated hardware interfacing.

Collecting area 6: Oral History research should include engineers, designers and operators to record the specifics of maintaining and operating the equipment.

- 5.3.6 Personnel and roles: The collection defines people and their purpose through assemblages of uniforms and training forms; badges, berets, ID cards and certificates; training manuals, magazines, note books and correspondence; crew lists, training records, social event ephemera and Royal approval; engineer and maintenance records. The developing OH archive offers an insight into the motivations, emotions, actions, experiences and reflection of serving personnel and support teams.

Collecting area 7: We will continue to collect personal items, photographs, and other records where these aid the formation of biographical assemblages linked to individual people of interest.

Collecting area 8: We will be more circumspect in the acquisition of general and repetitive material such as manuals, uniforms and badges, certificates and training records.

Collecting area 6: We will prioritise the collation of further Oral History records. Together with the physical archive, Oral History will help nuance our understanding of diversity within the ROC and UKWMO teams. There will be specific focus placed on acquiring UKWMO testimony, and that of engineers and support teams associated with the bunker.

- 5.3.7 Organisational: The collection gives insight into the long history of the ROC, pre- nuclear to nuclear reporting; the role of UKWMO and its relation to the Home Office (and of ROC to RAF); from Post office to BT; the Atomic Weapons Establishment; Civil defence.

There are no specified collecting gaps for this theme.

6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

- 6.1. A significant upgrade to the HOMS documentation is required to identify potential items for disposal. This will be planned in July 2022, and implemented across the following 6 months.
 - 6.2. The focus for rationalization and disposal will be:
 - 6.2.1 Duplicate collections such as telephones, uniforms, manuals and insignia.
 - 6.2.2 Material relating to national UKWMO/ROC heritage, or the cold war more broadly, and which offers no specific insight into operation, occupation and technology of the 20 group bunker.
 - 6.2.3 Material not directly relating to 20 Group where another institution may be a more appropriate repository.
 - 6.2.4 Collections containing hazardous materials, or which are considered beyond practical conservation will be considered for disposal.
7. Collecting policies of other museums, archives and individuals
- 7.1. English Heritage will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and archives, other organisations and individuals collecting in the same or related subject areas or fields. We 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, archives and other bodies:
 - 7.2.1 The Historic England Archives- with reference to archive material which includes plans and photographs of the site.
 - 7.2.2 York City Archives.
 - 7.2.3 Museums: IWM, Science Museum, ROC related and other cold war.
 - 7.2.4 Individual collectors and private museums

Appendix 1
Map showing location of York Cold War Bunker



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