

Site Collections Development Statement

Name of Museum: English Heritage – Eltham Palace

Name of Governing Body: The English Heritage Trust

Date on which this Policy was approved by governing body: December 2022

Recitals and Policy review procedure:

Under the terms of the Property Licence and Operating Agreement between Historic England (Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England: “the Commission”) and English Heritage (PLOA: section 14), English Heritage:

- May acquire by any means any historic chattel that relates to the history of any of the Historic Properties (as defined in the PLOA) or otherwise might contribute to the knowledge and enjoyment of them, provided it offers the same to Historic England free of charge. If Historic England refuses the transfer, English Heritage is under no further obligation to Historic England in relation to that chattel; and
- May request that Historic England disposes of a historic chattel if it does not relate to the history of any of the Historic Properties or otherwise contribute to the knowledge and enjoyment of them. Consent to any such disposal is in the absolute discretion of the Commission.

English Heritage has implemented this Policy in order, in part, to set out the processes by which the above PLOA provisions are effected. The General Counsel and Corporate Secretary of the Commission has been consulted on those parts of this Policy which concern engagement with the Commission (sections 10.1 to 10.4, 17 and 18).

The Collections Development Policy is owned by the Head Collections Curator. It will be published and reviewed at least once every five years as part of a cyclical process managed by the English Heritage Senior Registrar.

Date at which this policy is due for review: November 2027

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

1. Management Arrangements

- 1.1. The permanent collections are owned by, or in the guardianship of, the Commission, either directly or on behalf of the Secretary of State. The English Heritage Trust (henceforth English Heritage) manages the collections on behalf of Commission.
- 1.2. The Management arrangements are set out in the PLOA for the National Heritage Collection, in particular sections 11, 14 and 15 and schedules 4B and 9.

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

- 2.1. English Heritage’s statement of purpose is: To conserve the National Heritage Collection of over 400 unique sites, monuments and artefacts, in keeping with their status as part of England’s national heritage. To bring history to life in the places where

it happened by opening up the sites and monuments to public access, through exhibitions, events and educational programmes, supported by our online content.¹

- 2.2. English Heritage will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.
- 2.3. By definition, English Heritage has a long term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection or the disposal of any items in English Heritage's collection.
- 2.4. Acquisitions outside this policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.5. English Heritage recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements, and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museums Association Standard. This includes using SPECTRUM primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collections arrangements.
- 2.6. English Heritage will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that English Heritage can acquire a valid title to the item in question.
- 2.7. English Heritage will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

3. History of the Collections

The majority of the collection at Eltham Palace was acquired in the late 1990s, shortly after English Heritage took on responsibility for the site. The decision to restore the interiors to their appearance during the time of Stephen and Virginia Courtaulds' residency from 1936-1944 necessitated the commission of high-quality replica furnishings and paintings to take the place of objects indigenous to the house that were not then available. At the same time, English Heritage accessioned some of the surviving original 1930s fixtures and fittings together with the only furnishings that had been left by the Courtaulds – a collection of 17th century furniture from the Great Hall.

In more recent years, the collection has been supplemented with 18th century furnishings from Ranger's House (that were removed to make room for the Wernher Collection), purchases of Art Deco furniture and room dressings, and the gift, purchase and long-term loan of the Courtaulds' personal belongings, books and furnishings indigenous to the house. English Heritage have also collected books, manuscripts, photographs, architectural plans and drawings that illustrate the history of the site from the medieval era to the end of the 20th century. In addition, there is a small collection of architectural objects salvaged from the house and an extensive archaeology collection, the majority currently in store at Wrest Park. The basement at Eltham reflects the period of the site's history when it was occupied by Army (later Royal Army) Education Corps, from 1944 onwards when the Courtaulds left Eltham. There are currently very few collections (and props) associated with this part of Eltham's history.

4. An overview of the collections

- 4.1. The collection is made up of approximately 7,400 objects: archaeological (55%); art (5%); furniture and decorative arts (10%); social history (2.9%); library collections (25%); architectural and fittings (2%); oral history (0.1%). 212 objects are on long-term loan from private individuals. Approximately 25% of the collection is currently on display.

¹ *Strategic Plan 2022–2025: Sharing our past, shaping our future*, page 8.

- 4.2. The replica furniture and paintings commissioned in the 1990s form the core of the collection on display at Eltham. As the majority of the Courtaulds' original furnishings were unavailable when English Heritage acquired the site, the then curators commissioned high quality replica furniture, rugs and paintings using surviving designs, an inventory and photographs of the interiors as a guiding source. Although replicas, these furnishings were of such high quality that they were accessioned, and have historically been treated, as collection objects rather than props.

The collection also comprises a group of mostly 17th century English oak furniture that was purchased by Stephen Courtauld for use in the Great Hall. This furniture was left behind in the care of the Ministry of Works when the Courtaulds moved out of Eltham and it has remained in situ ever since. Other objects belonging to the Courtaulds that have been repatriated include the original dining table and chairs from the art deco dining room, rugs from Stephen's library and Virginia's boudoir, a pair of chairs with seats embroidered by Virginia Courtauld, a portrait bust of Virginia by Filippo Lovatelli and a large proportion of the Courtaulds' library. English Heritage has also collected historic photographs, architectural plans and drawings to illustrate the story of Eltham's design, building and occupation by the Courtaulds.

Since 2009, Stephen and Virginia's descendants, the Peirano family, have loaned a number of significant indigenous objects from the house, including paintings, Jan Wyck's *Frost Fair on the Thames* (1684), Leonard Campbell Taylor's double portrait of the Courtaulds (1934), several pieces of marquetry furniture, books and personal and household objects such as cutlery, dressing brushes and photograph albums. The family have also donated or sold a number of objects to English Heritage for display at Eltham. Wherever possible, these objects are displayed in their original locations as recorded in photographs and an inventory compiled in 1939.

When English Heritage took over the management of Eltham, they acquired a large number of archaeological finds unearthed during 19th and 20th century investigations of the medieval and Tudor royal palace, which had been placed in the care of the Ministry of Works. The collection also comprises a small group of architectural objects salvaged from the 1930s house over the course of the twentieth century.

5. Themes and priorities for future collecting

5.1. The Courtaulds' occupation of Eltham:

- Collect objects that were designed and made, or acquired, for Eltham Palace by Stephen and Virginia Courtauld, with the aim of furnishing the house with original objects rather than replicas and improving its presentation.
- Collect objects that formed part of Stephen Courtauld's outstanding collection of paintings, ceramics and silver.
- Seek to borrow on long-term loan significant works from Stephen Courtauld's collection now in public collections, both in the UK and Zimbabwe.
- Collect objects that belonged to Stephen and Virginia Courtauld that illustrate their life at Eltham Palace.
- Collect objects that relate to the servants, gardeners and other staff who worked at Eltham Palace during the Courtaulds' occupation.
- Collect objects in keeping with the Courtaulds' furnishing and occupation of Eltham Palace that would make a significant contribution to the presentation of the house and aid in the understanding and interpretation of the collection and property.

- Collect objects relating to the external and internal architecture of Eltham, such as significant detached fragments, architectural plans and documents, photographs, important topographical views.
- Commission high quality replicas of paintings and furniture originally from the house where the originals cannot be acquired.

5.2. Other periods of Eltham's history:

- Collect objects that illustrate the RAEC's occupation of Eltham that would enhance the presentation of the basement display area.
- Collect highly significant archival and archaeological objects that illustrate Eltham's history as a medieval and Tudor royal palace that are suitable for display at site.

6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal (see Section 17 for process)

6.1. In cases where the acquisition of an original object displaces a replica or non-indigenous object, the latter will be reviewed for disposal if it cannot be deployed elsewhere in the house.

6.2. In cases where the long-term loan of an original objects displaces a replica or non-indigenous object, the latter will be placed in long-term storage.

6.3. A disposal review of the non-indigenous room dressings purchased in the late 1990s and not currently on display will be undertaken in 2022-23.

6.4 Where the object has become useless by reason of damage, physical deterioration, or infestation by destructive organisms (in which case the means of disposal can include destruction) objects may be reviewed for disposal. This notwithstanding, there is a strong presumption against disposal and English Heritage will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

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. The National Gallery of Zimbabwe that holds a significant number of paintings from Stephen Courtauld's collection.

7.2.2. The National Archives: holds the national collection of archival material relating to the royal palaces.

7.2.3 The Courtauld Gallery which holds Stephen Courtauld's collection of Turner watercolours and some Courtauld silver.

7.2.4. The British Museum which holds Stephen Courtauld's collection of prints by Robert Sargent Austin.

7.2.5. Royal Institute of British Architects: holds the archives of Eltham's architects, Seely and Paget.

7.2.6. The Museum of London, in respect of the archaeology, social history and history of London.

7.2.7. The Historic England Archives- with reference to archive material relating to English Heritage sites.

7.2.8. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew who hold a collection of letters about the gardens at Eltham.