

INTRODUCTION

SCOPE

The Royal Ordnance Depot, Weedon Bec, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 625 595 centred) was constructed between 1804 and 1816 and was the first major Board of Ordnance Establishment to be built far inland in a central location well connected by canal and road, where it could efficiently receive, store in a secure environment and dispatch promptly muskets, field ordnance and gunpowder to wherever they were needed in an emergency – principally an invasion by Napoleon but also potentially civil unrest. It remained in military use as a storage depot for small arms until 1965, after which many of its component parts were demolished and their sites redeveloped (Civil Officers' Houses, Horse Artillery Barracks and Hospital, and Residences for Workmen). Two of its original component parts survive, however – the Storehouse Enclosure (containing eight storehouses) and Magazine Enclosure (containing four magazines and traverses) and a stretch of the Ordnance Canal which runs through them – and are listed Grade II*. The area covered by this Conservation Plan (henceforth referred to as the Conservation Plan Area) is the Storehouse Enclosure and the land and buildings on it immediately to its west (extending as far as but not including the Magazine Enclosure), which are currently owned by Gladedale Homes Ltd which commissioned the Conservation Plan at the suggestion of English Heritage (East Midlands Region).

AIMS OF THE CONSERVATION PLAN

A Conservation Plan is a document which seeks to understand how a site has developed through time, assesses the cultural significance of that site and its component parts (buildings and areas) and their constituent elements, and then identifies ways in which those significances are vulnerable to harm and recommends conservation policies to retain and recover cultural significance and character.

Although the majority of buildings and areas in the Conservation Plan Area at the Royal Ordnance Depot are currently in use (mostly for light storage or as offices), these uses are generally not regarded as economically viable and some are resulting in harm to significant fabric (e.g. from the articulated lorries serving the site). Viable uses need to be found for all the buildings and areas in the Conservation Plan Area which retain significances, character, vistas and views. A few of the buildings are in poor condition and are on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register, pointing to the need for appropriate maintenance and repair regimes to be implemented throughout the Conservation Plan Area. The policies in the Conservation Plan are intended to inform such processes.

APPROACH

The approach adopted in this Conservation Plan is based on that advocated in J.S. Kerr's *Conservation Plan. A Guide to the Preparation of Conservation Plans for Places of European Cultural Significance* (2000, 5th edn) and demonstrated in his numerous Conservation Plans. The principal difference between this Conservation Plan and Jim Kerr's is that whereas they were single-volume and included brief lists of elements and their level of significance either within the section entitled 'Assessment of significance' (e.g. Sydney Opera House, 1993) or within the 'Conservation policies' section (e.g. Parramatta Correctional Centre, 1995), this Conservation Plan has a separately bound gazetteer which contains summary information about the site's component parts and their elements which is designed to make the document as useful and user-friendly as possible for those managing the site. Like Kerr's Conservation Plans but in contrast to some British examples which treat issues and policies in separate sections and do not

necessarily relate to each other, in this Conservation Plan ways in which significances may be vulnerable to harm and recommended conservation policies to retain such significances are discussed within a single section. The approach adopted to the Conservation Plan is consistent with the guidance in the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Conservation Management Plans* (2004) and English Heritage's *Conservation Plans in Action* (1999) and *Informed Conservation* (2001a).

METHODS

Terminology

Over time, the names given to various component parts (buildings and areas) of the site have changed, reflecting individual changes in use and more general episodes of reorganisation and development which the Depot underwent. In order to avoid confusion and to provide consistency, the numbers assigned to buildings in the last phase of military use (and which still survive painted on many of them and were used by the RCHME in its report) have been used here (e.g. B1, B15). The original use of a building is also stated for further clarification where appropriate (e.g. Storehouse B3, Wagon Shed B15). Some elements of the site and its areas were not assigned numbers by the military and so are referred to here by the names used for them on historic plans and accounts (e.g. Ordnance Canal, Scherzer Rolling Lift Bridge) or where necessary by new names (e.g. concrete bridge, lower land).

Sources

The main sources used to compile the Conservation Plan have been the recently published extremely useful book on the construction of the Depot,¹ the RCHME report for the site,² an account of the history of the Depot by a former employee,³ recent transcriptions by Nick Bridges of Ettwein Bridges Architects of unpublished primary sources and earlier drafts of a Conservation Plan for the site also by Nick Bridges. A full list of the published sources used to inform the Conservation Plan is set out in the section entitled Sources.

An extensive range of historic plans and maps survives for the Depot (held at a number of repositories) covering the period from the years immediately before its construction to the mid-twentieth century. Photocopies of these have been bound as a volume by Ettwein Bridges Architects, a copy of which accompanies this Conservation Plan as Appendix III. A few drawings (and engravings) showing views of the Depot were produced in the mid-nineteenth century. The archive of historic photographs for the Depot is limited and largely confined to a narrow range of views because access to the site by outsiders was very limited whilst it remained in military use and as far as can be ascertained, the military themselves did not photograph it. Photographs were taken by the RCHME of the various component parts of the Depot (except the Horse Artillery Barracks and Hospital) shortly after it closed in 1965, but for all except the Civil Officers' Houses these were confined to exterior shots.

Site visits

Intermittent site visits by the Conservation Plan's author were carried out in May 2004, during which all buildings and areas of the site were visually inspected and a general record made using colour prints. A further visit was made in July 2004.

¹ Williams 2003.

² Menuge and Williams 1999.

³ King 1965, republished with notes by Rumbold 1997.