

Aerial photo collection saved

15 June 2007

A fragile and important collection of 800,000 aerial photos of Britain has been acquired for the nation by English Heritage and partners in Wales and Scotland, paving the way for it to be used and enjoyed by the public.

Image



Aerial photo of St Paul's Cathedral area

English Heritage, in partnership with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), has agreed to purchase the Aerofilms Historic Collection from Blom Aerofilms. The purchase is made possible by financial support from English Heritage's donors and supporters, the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), and the Friends of National Libraries.

The Aerofilms Historic Collection is the best and most significant collection of oblique aerial photography of the United Kingdom remaining in private hands. Its chronological and geographical coverage is superb and documents the face of Britain dating from 1919 to recent years, providing unique evidence of a period of intense and unparalleled change.

The collection covers the countryside, industrial and urban landscapes, archaeological sites and historic buildings and charts the growth of new towns and the spread of motorways across the landscape. Almost every community is represented, many with a series of views taken over the decades showing how cities, towns and villages have changed and grown.

Greg Simmons, Managing Director of Blom Aerofilms, said: 'We are delighted that this part of our company's heritage will be preserved for future generations, while we build on our history with a major new Europe-wide photography initiative.'

Mike Evans, Head of Archives at English Heritage's National Monuments Record, said: "The collection will be of immense value to a wide range of people including researchers, teachers, local and family history historians, geographers, archaeologists, architects, planners, landscape historians and all those interested in how the face of Britain has changed over the last century."

Carole Souter, Director of NHMF, said: "Some of our nation's most memorable 20th-century events are documented in this unusual collection and this National Heritage Memorial Fund grant has helped save it for future generations."

The fragile prints, negatives and documentation which comprise the collection will now be transferred to the specialist archival storage provided by English Heritage and its partners. This will ensure not only that the collection can be used and enjoyed by the public, but also that it is preserved for future generations of researchers.

English Heritage and its partners have begun planning for the comprehensive cataloguing, conservation and digitisation of the collection. The transfer and initial sorting of the archive will take some months, and as soon as access to the photographs can be provided details will be placed on the EH website.

Note to editors

Aerofilms was formed in 1919 and was the world's first commercial aerial photographic business. The founders of the company were F L Wills and Claude Grahame White. Wills had flown during the First World War with the Royal Naval Air Service, and was the driving force behind the expansion of the company from an office and a bathroom (for developing films) in Hendon to a business with major contracts in Africa and Asia as well as in the UK. In 1942 the company became part of the Hunting Group, and subsequently passed in 1997 to Simmons Aerofilms, who developed the use of modern technology within the company. In

2005 Simmons Aerofilms in turn became a subsidiary of the current owners, Blom ASA. The archive was expanded by the purchase of the holdings of two smaller collections of aerial photography – Aero Pictorial in the early 1960s and Airviews in 1979.

Further information

Renee Fok, English Heritage Corporate Communications

Phone: 020 7973 3297 Email: renee.fok@english-heritage.org.uk.