



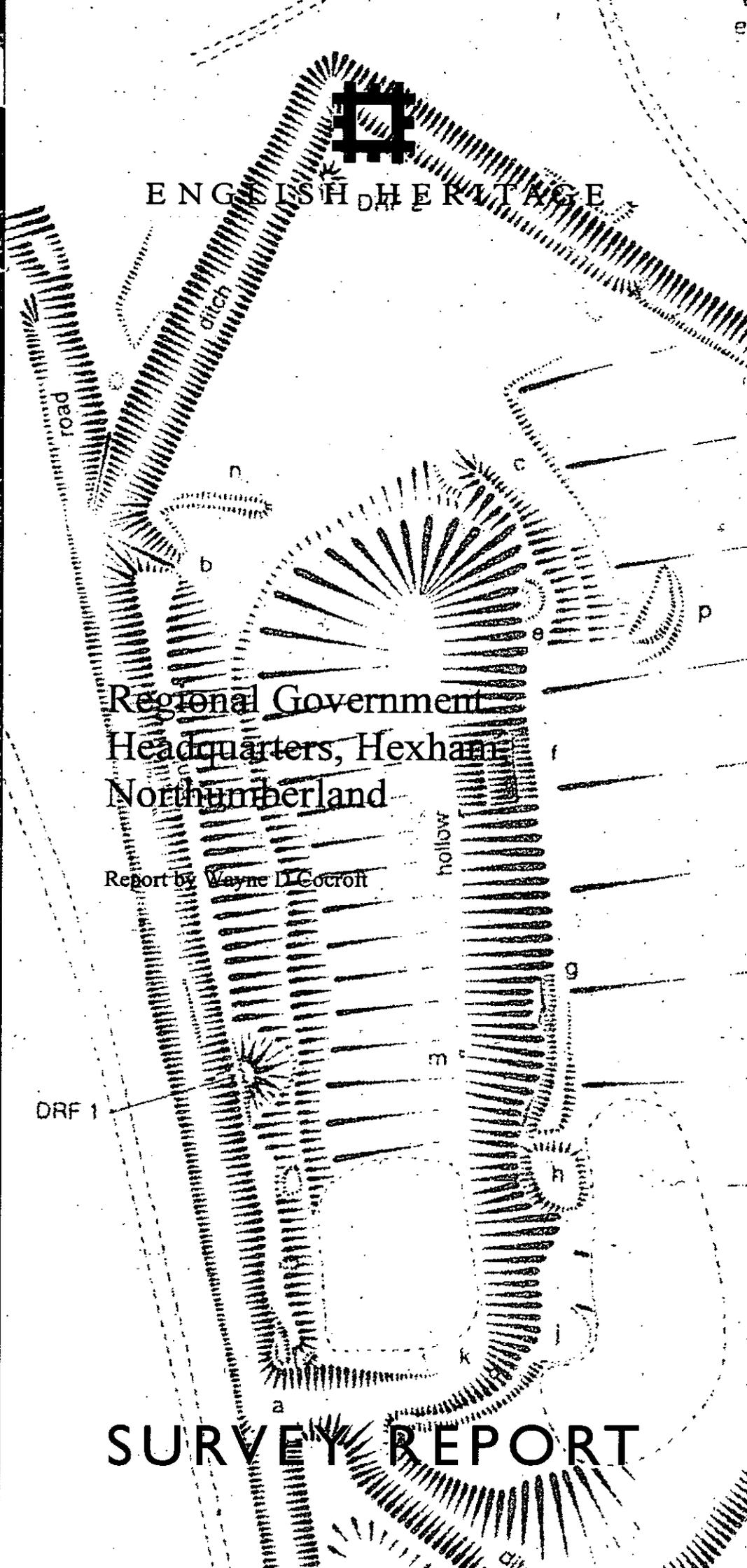
ENGLISH HERITAGE

Regional Government
Headquarters, Hexham
Northumberland

Report by Wayne D. Croft

DRF 1

SURVEY REPORT



COLD WAR PROJECT
SURVEY REPORT
REGIONAL GOVERNMENT HEADQUARTERS

Hexham
Tynedale
Northumberland

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SUMMARY

The Regional Government Headquarters (RGHQ) at Hexham is situated in a converted Second World War Cold Storage Depot; it was envisaged that in the event of nuclear war central government administration of the region would be conducted from the RGHQ. At the time of investigation, in March 1998, the building was being demolished.

DESCRIPTION

The RGHQ at Hexham is located to the north-east of the town centre adjacent to the Newcastle to Carlisle railway line. It is sited in a fenced enclosure, of 2.1 hectares, which is approached from a track off the north side of Alemouth Road at its junction with Station Road.

The Cold Storage Depot

The Cold Storage Depot is of a standard type constructed during the Second World War or early post-war period. Construction of Cold Storage Depots of this design was funded by the government, and they are found widely distributed across England. They were, however, generally operated private contractors; their role was to maintain a strategic stockpile of food, and they were often referred to as Buffer Depots.

As described above the Cold Storage Depot is a standard structural type; design drawings of a similar structure are deposited in the National Monuments Record (ALD1279 to 1283). These drawings were issued by the Ministry of Works and Buildings, Westminster, in November 1940.

The original ground plan of the Cold Storage Depot measured 51m by 26m, and externally the side elevations are divided into three equal bays, each 17m in length. The central bays project forward from the main elevations 3.5m, giving a total width in the centre of the building of 33m. The projections contained stairs and lift wells. Along each side of the building were concrete platforms, originally covered by canopies and served by rail. The Cold Storage Depot is three storeys tall and has an internal steel frame, 12 bays in length by six bays wide. The external walls are of yellow brick, and are two bricks thick, while behind this was 0.3m cavity filled with slag wool and a single brick thick internal wall. The elevations were plain except for the projecting central bays which contained escape doors and small glazed windows at the top of the lift wells. The roof is a flat concrete slab, about 0.30m thick; the internal floors are also of concrete. The roof is drained by cast-iron down pipes. At either end of the building were single-storey plant rooms and offices, which were probably demolished when the building was converted into an RGHQ.

The Cold Storage Depot was originally served by railway sidings, and in addition to the main Cold Storage Depot there were four, probably single-storey, sheds, to its north-west. These have been demolished, and are marked as concrete floor slabs on the contractor's survey (Ryder 1997).

Another Buffer Depot (NY 96 SW 82), probably for storing dry goods, is sited 300m to the east, adjacent to Hexham railway station.

Regional Government Headquarters

It is not precisely known when the Cold Storage Depot was converted into an RGHQ. One source notes that the store was being converted into a Sub-Regional Headquarters (SRHQ) in 1983 (Campbell 1983, 221); this was a term in use from 1973 until the 1980s to describe central government nuclear citadels. It is, however unclear whether the Cold Storage Depot was being modified for the first time or if it was being modernised to bring it up to the standards needed for an Regional Government Headquarters (RGHQ), a term current during the 1980s. In only one other instance, at Loughborough, Leicestershire, was a Cold Storage Depot converted into a RGHQ (Campbell 1983, 220).

The RGHQ lies within a fenced compound of 2.1 hectares, enclosed by a wire mesh fence held by concrete posts with out-turned tops supporting three strands of barbed wire. To its south-east is an electricity transformer house. This is a single-storey brick building with a flat roof, which is rectangular in plan measuring 8.5m by 4m. To its west is a more modern transformer. Around the building the railway goods yard has been cleared, grass laid and small clumps of trees, primarily horsechestnuts, planted.

To convert the Cold Storage Depot into a RGHQ, the building was extended 15m to the north, and a small projection added to its north-east corner. This extension had been demolished at the time of investigation. A crumpled Braithwaite tank in the area may indicate that part of it contained the building's water supply. Internally, the lower two floors were strengthened by the addition of a reinforced concrete wall, perhaps poured into the wall cavity originally occupied by the slag wool insulation. Traces of a fibrous insulation material could be seen between the concrete and the external wall. The steel columns on these floors were also faced in concrete. It appears that the upper floor had been thickened, but the remainder of the upper storey was unmodified. Externally, windows on top of the central projections and any other openings in the walls were blocked. Single steel blast doors replaced wartime door openings in the centre of the south-eastern elevation and in the centre of the two side projections. The wall at ground-floor level also appeared to have been thickened by the addition of an extra layer of reddish brick, contrasting with the yellow brick of the Cold Storage Depot.

Access onto the roof is by a vertical steel ladder steel at the eastern end of the south-east elevation. On the roof at its south-west corner is a steel framed radio mast which is about 24m tall.

At the time of investigation the building was being demolished, a notice on the building stated that it had been acquired for the developer Matthew Charlton.

The above description was produced by observations taken from public roads.

SOURCES

Primary Sources

National Monuments Record

ALD/1279 95/10021 Cold Storage Depot Sections through Blocks A and B

ALD/1280 95/10022 Cold Storage Depot Second floor plan

ALD/1281 95/10023 Cold Storage Depot First floor plan

ALD/1282 95/10024 Cold Storage Depot Ground floor plan

ALD/1283 95/10025 Cold Storage Depot Elevations

Other

Ryder, 1997. Ryder Company Building Design & Management, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Site survey 100:01 scale 1.50

Secondary Sources

Campbell, D. 1983. *War Plan UK*, Paladin, London


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RECORD

*The National Monuments Record
is the public archive of English Heritage.
It contains all the information in this report - and more:
original photographs, plans old and new,
the results of all field surveys, indexes
of archaeological sites and historical buildings,
and complete coverage of England in
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