



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID:
Designations:
Taken into State care:
Last Reviewed:

PIC200
Scheduled Monument (SM90199)
1887 (Guardianship)
2005 (2025 update to include Empire
connections)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

LAGGANGAIRN STANDING STONES



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Cover image: General view of two carved stones at Laggangairn. The stones are incised with early Christian crosses. © Crown Copyright HES.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

LAGGANGAIRN STANDING STONES

Contents

BRIEF DESCRIPTION	2
CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT	2
Historical overview	2
Archaeological overview	3
Artistic/Architectural overview	3
Social overview	3
Spiritual overview	4
Aesthetic overview	4
What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?	4
ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	4
Key points	4
ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES	5
KEYWORDS	5
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	5

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Two early prehistoric standing stones on a low mound, 80m south of the Tarf Water, Galloway, in deserted moorland and forestry. Access is difficult but signposted through Forestry Commission lands.

It is on the medieval pilgrimage route to Whithorn, running south across the moors from Ayrshire. At this time the stones were carved with Christian crosses.

Now on the east-west Southern Upland Way, 5 miles (8km) north-east of New Luce.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical overview

The placename has been translated as meaning “hollow of the cairns”, possibly indicating that there were prehistoric burial mounds nearby. The placename at the nearby farm of Kilgallioch has been translated as “church of the standing stones”. This is attested as an early church site. A writer in 1907 refers to a group of three remarkable beehive holy wells here, which together with the placename is suggestive of wider pilgrimage infrastructure in the area.

The monument was first scheduled by General Pitt-Rivers and given into State care in 1882, following advice from Sir Herbert Maxwell of Monreith. The stones were sketched by the General on 28th Oct 1886.

Recent research into the relationships between the Properties in Care of Scottish Ministers and the British Empire¹ has highlighted that Laggangairn Standing Stones have a ‘cultural’ empire connection.² Sir Herbert E. Maxwell Bart (1845–1937) was a major landowner in late Victorian Scotland. His commitment to and pursuit of antiquarianism led to the preservation of this and other sites across the region. The family had major imperial connections, and through Herbert E. Maxwell’s maternal line, the Shaw-Stewart family, connections to Caribbean slavery. It is not clear how much of that family’s fortunes made it into the Maxwell family, but there was

¹ Full report can be downloaded from HES website: [Surveying and Analysing Connections between Properties in Care and the British Empire, c. 1600-1997 \(historicenvironment.scot\)](#)

² ‘Cultural’ connection describes a connection that denotes the ways in which an empire influence, often in the form of wealth and associated prestige, enabled owners or those acting on their behalf, either through action or inaction, to shape the condition, fabric or representation of a PiC. See Mullen *et al* 2024, 30-31 for a full definition of typology.

undoubtedly some transfer of wealth, which may have played a role in the preservation of sites on Maxwell's lands.³

General Pitt-Rivers had also major connections to the British Empire and his status ensured the stones were among the first sites in Scotland brought under the protection of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act 1882.⁴

By 1911 the smaller stone had fallen and was re-erected by Ministry of Works.

Archaeological overview

Two cross-marked standing stones, of grey Silurian sandstone, traditionally said to be the survivors of a group of fourteen, seven of which remained *in situ* in 1873.

The standing stones are situated on the western extremity of a low knoll, possibly erected in c2000 BC as part of a stone circle, although this has never been convincingly demonstrated.

They stand close together, facing west, the north stone being 2m high, and the other about 1.6m high. Each bears on its west face the incised outline of an expanded-arm Latin cross 0.4-0.5m high with incised crosslets in the angles.

This monument, and other archaeological features in the landscape nearby, is a clear indication of the existence of late Neolithic or Bronze Ages communities in the area.

Artistic/Architectural overview

Both are irregular oblong standing stones, each carved on one face with an incised outline cross with four incised crosslets in the angles. There is possibly a second outline cross on the reverse face of one of the stones. The incised lines are now shallow and weathered.

The larger crosses are of a style ascribed to the 7th - 9th centuries AD.

Social overview

The stones are an important landmark, their profile now being seen once more, by being beside the Southern Upland Way.

³ Mullen *et al* 2024, 60-61.

⁴ Mullen *et al* 2024, 63.

Spiritual overview

Not formally assessed.

Aesthetic overview

The stones stand as lonely sentinels within this wild, featureless, and windswept setting, providing a stark and evocative reminder of a fugitive and 'mysterious' past.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- What was the nature of the contemporary prehistoric landuse?
- Were the stones part of a larger stone circle?
- What was the date of their original erection?
- What kind of ceremonies and rituals were practiced here in prehistory?
- Did this become a focus for burials?
- Was the inscribing of the crosses necessary to disassociate the stones from their pagan origins?
- What kind of pilgrimage volume of traffic passed by here, and how did this vary through time?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- This is a highly visible legacy of belief and ritual to survive within the landscape. The stones chart the significance of this place to two separate groups of people, divided by almost 3000 years of time.
- The stones have the potential to inform an understanding of the ceremonial life, world-view and belief-system of the people who built and used this place, and who farmed in the immediate vicinity.
- The stones provide a tangible link with the generations of medieval pilgrims who passed this familiar landmark, coming to and from St Ninian's shrine at Whithorn, between the 6th and 16th centuries.

- The involvement of General Pitt Rivers in the late 19th century as the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments, makes this an important monument in terms of the history of conservation.

ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

Whithorn; Kirkmadrine; Torhouse; Drumtroddan and Big Balcraig cup markings; Cairnholy.

KEYWORDS

Standing stones; prehistoric ceremonies; ritual landscapes; Christianisation; pilgrimage.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mullen, S., Mackillop, A., and Driscoll, S. 2024 Surveying and Analysing Connections between Properties in Care and the British Empire, c. 1600-1997. (Edinburgh, Historic Environment Scotland). Available online: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=e192ea9f-0d7e-4745-b499-b0fb010a167a> (accessed: 17 December 2024).