



**Property in Care (PIC)ID:** PIC221

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90316)

**Taken into State care:** 1890 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2012

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# WREN'S EGG



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.



© Historic Environment Scotland 2019

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Historic Environment Scotland

Longmore House

Salisbury Place

Edinburgh

EH9 1SH

+44 (0) 131 668 8600

[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

You can download this publication from our website at

[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

# WREN'S EGG

---

## SYNOPSIS

The Wren's Egg is located near the farmhouse of Blairbuie, ½ mile north of Monreith. It comprises a single large glacial boulder, over 2m high, in the centre of a field, with a pair of much smaller standing stones situated respectively 17m and 19m to its east. It was among the first 'ancient monuments' taken into state care following the passing of the first Ancient Monuments Act in 1882. Then it was thought to represent the remains of a large, double concentric stone circle. Archaeological excavations in 1975 suggested otherwise – that the original monument had comprised nothing more than the three surviving stones, and that the Wren's Egg itself had been moved from its original spot in more recent times.

---

## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview:

- **Late Neolithic / Bronze Age** – The Wren's Egg and its adjacent two standing stones are erected.
- **1882** – the first Ancient Monuments Act passes into law. Shortly after, Lieutenant-General Pitt Rivers, a leading figure in the movement to protect Britain's archaeological heritage, is appointed the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments.
- **1887** – Pitt Rivers visits the site whilst staying with Sir Herbert Maxwell of Monreith, MP. He sketches the monument, and subsequently adds it to his 'schedule' of Ancient Monuments.
- **1890** – The Wren's Egg stones are taken into state care.
- **1908** – J Fitzgerald, Inspector with the Office of Works, visits and records the removal of 'many stones' from around 'this huge monolith', suggesting that the site was formerly a stone circle. The RCAHMS reiterate this view in its *Inventory*, published in 1912.
- **1975** – Lionel Masters, of Glasgow University, carries out an archaeological investigation for the Ministry of Public Building and Works in an attempt to cast more light on the enigmatic monument.

### Archaeological Overview:

The Wren's Egg stones were once thought to be the vestigial remains of a large, double concentric stone circle of late Neolithic or Bronze Age date (RCAHMS 1912), with the Wren's Egg itself forming the centre stone, not unlike the situation at **Torhouse Stone Circle**, near Wigtown. To test this hypothesis, Lionel Masters, of Glasgow University, was invited to investigate the monument in 1975. He excavated the Wren's Egg itself and an area around the pair of standing stones.

The Wren's Egg itself was found not to be in its original position. A large pit was found partly underlying the boulder, containing animal bones and a shirt button of modern date. Furthermore, iron chains found around the base of the boulder probably represent a farmer's failed attempt to move it to the edge of the field.

Regarding the two smaller standing stones, the west stone appeared to be in a slight hollow with packing stones under and around its curved base. The east stone was set in a more well-defined hole, packed with boulders and a small slab. Nothing else of archaeological interest was found to suggest that there had ever been a stone circle at the site. The few artefacts recovered included a flint knife, scrapers, flakes and an unworked pebble flint, mostly found in the plough soil. No finds were recovered from the stone holes.

An almost identical pair of granite stones, standing 1m high and set 2m apart, exists 400m SSE of the Wren's Egg, on the north slope of Milton Hill, but what their relationship, if any, is to the Wren's Egg is not known.

#### Architectural/Artistic Overview:

The Wren's Egg itself is an impressive glacial boulder. Nothing more need to be added.

#### Social Overview:

Other than being a minor visitor attraction, the Wren's Egg currently plays no social role.

#### Spiritual Overview:

Whilst it is conceivable that the Wren's Egg served some form of spiritual/ritual role in late Neolithic / Bronze Age times, today the monument currently plays no such role.

It is thought that the name 'Wren's Egg' may derive from the ancient Gallovidian ritual whereby young men hunted a wren around the midwinter solstice, creating much havoc in the process. The ritual, recorded as still being practiced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is no more.

#### Aesthetic Overview:

The property as a whole exudes little in the way of aesthetic qualities, although the eponymous Wren's Egg itself has a certain quirky charm, as evidenced by its name.

#### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- If the monument was indeed erected in the late Neolithic / Bronze Age, what form did it take, and what purpose did it serve? Further archaeological excavation may shed further light, but the results of the 1975 excavations suggest otherwise.
- Why was Lt Gen Pitt Rivers so convinced of the Wren's Egg's antiquity that he added it to his 'schedule' of monuments of national importance? That he chose the Wren's Egg and not **Torhouse Stone Circle**, one of the best preserved stone circles in the British Isles, is puzzling.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key Points

- If the Wren's Egg stones are of prehistoric origin, they may have further potential to inform an understanding of ritual and belief in the late Neolithic / Bronze Age eras.
- The Wren's Egg stones occupy an important place in the history of 'ancient monumentry', courtesy of their association with Lt Gen Pitt Rivers, a key figure in the post-Darwinian interest in the origins of human development.

### Associated Properties:

(*other locally related places*) – **Drumtroddan Standing Stones**; Milton Hill stones;  
**Torhouse Stone Circle**

### Keywords:

standing stones; Pitt Rivers

---

### Selected Bibliography:

MacIvor, I & Fawcett, R., 'Planks from the shipwreck of time: an account of Ancient Monumentry, then and now', in Magnusson, M (ed)., *Echoes in Stone* (Edinburgh, 1983)

Masters, L., 'Excavations at the Wren's Egg, Port William, Wigtown District', *Trans Dumfriesshire & Galloway Nat Hist & Antiq Soc*, vol. 52 (1976-7)

Ritchie, A., *Scotland BC* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1988)

RCAHMS *Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in Galloway, vol. 1: County of Wigtown* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1912)

Thompson, M W., *General Pitt Rivers* (Bradford, 1977)

---