



Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC242

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90126)

Taken into State care: 1963 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2003

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

EAST AQUHORTHIES STONE CIRCLE



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.



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EAST AQUHORTHIES STONE CIRCLE

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- Prehistoric recumbent stone circle with no known association with known individuals or events.
- First scheduled 1925; taken into Guardianship 1963.

Archaeological Overview

- An unexcavated recumbent stone circle (RSC) consists of 11 erect stones. At the SW of the circle is a massive flat block or recumbent bracketed by two tall stone uprights. A slight rise in the interior suggests the existence of a ring cairn. The wall and bank surrounding the monument is an early antiquarian measure to protect the monument.
- While not excavated, sound archaeological surveys and descriptions exist.
- Stone circles of this type (with the recumbent element) have a distribution restricted to the NE of Scotland.
- They are characteristic of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (around 2000-1500 BC), and East Aquhorthies is believed to be an early example.
- Recent excavations at other RSCs have suggested that these monuments are complex, multi-period sites often beginning as a series of cremation pyres, embellished over time to create a ring cairn, with the erection of the enclosing stone circle constituting the final phase of activity. Although this work is preliminary and not yet fully published, a similarly complex history of development is anticipated at East Aquhorthies.
- The monuments have been interpreted a ritual sites related to the disposal of the dead through cremation, with the erection of the stone circle closing the ritual site rather than an act bring it into being again. However, the significant lunar and geographical alignments of the stone circle would suggest ongoing ritual activity of some description.
- An alternative interpretation sees RSCs as communal ritual centres, where ceremonies relating to the changes seasons may have been undertaken. In this interpretation, the use of such sites for cremation is seen as a secondary development.

Artistic overview

- The stones making up the circle show notable geological variation and appear to have been purposefully chosen for their colour. The circle stones are rough pinkish porphyry, with the exception of that next to the east flanker which is a red jasper. The flankers are grey granite and the recumbent is red granite from near Bennachie.

Social overview

- No formal assessment exists

Spiritual overview

- The monument must have had great spiritual significance for those who erected and used the monument in its various phases of activity. However, we have only the very vaguest and conjectural concept of the form of that spirituality.
- No formal assessment exists. A wedding took place at the monument in the recent past, after which it was agreed that such activities were not appropriate at such monuments.

Aesthetic overview

- The stone circle is located near the crest of a long sloping shoulder with wide northerly and southerly views, a typical location for a recumbent stone circle.
- The flankers of RSCs frame the rising and setting summer moon.
- The flankers of many RSCs frame landscape features, demonstrating the importance of such considerations to those who constructed them

KEY POINTS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

- RSCs as a class are a monument type that is unique to the NE of Scotland and their relationship to other monument types is still open to debate.
- East Aquhorthies, as a well preserved and relatively undisturbed example of a RSC, is of high archaeological significance for its potential to provide information about late Neolithic and early Bronze Age social and ritual practices and their relationship to other spheres of contemporary life.
- Recent excavation and survey at other RSC (Tomnaverie, Aikey Brae and Cothiemuir) and the re-examination of older excavations (Old Keig, Loanhead of Daviot) has led to a re-interpretation of the development of RCS which has the potential to add to our understanding of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age social and ritual practices.

Associated properties:

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925

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Loanhead of Daviot RSC, Tomnaverie RSC. Taking NE Scotland as a whole there are related monuments with good surviving field characteristics which are accessible to the public because they are on Forestry Commission land such as at Tyrebagger, near Aberdeen. Several years ago Gordon District Council produced a stone circle trail and Aberdeenshire Council (its successor) has indicated that it wishes to update it. More widely, the Clava cairns of the Inverness area are regarded to be a closely related monument type.