



Case information

Case ID	300046545
File Reference	N/A
Name of Site	Eilean a' Chùirn lighthouse, Eilean a' Chùirn, Islay, Argyll and Bute
Postcode (if any)	PA42 7EF

Local Authority	Argyll and Bute
National Grid Reference	NR 47312 48999
Designation Type	Listed Building
Designation No. and category of listing (if any)	
Case Type	Designation

Received/Start Date	2020 [Lighthouses Review Project]
Decision Date	15/12/2020

1. Decision

Previous Statutory Listing Address	N/A	Previous category of listing	N/A
New Statutory Listing Address	Eilean a' Chùirn lighthouse excluding solar panels, Eilean a' Chùirn, Islay	New category of listing	C

An assessment using the selection guidance shows that the building meets the criteria of special architectural or historic interest. The decision is to add the building to the list at category C.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

This building has not previously been designated.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

Eilean a' Chùirn lighthouse was considered for designation as part of the 2020 Lighthouse Review Project. Eilean a' Chùirn lighthouse has not been visited. The present assessment is desk-based, using available information and has included reference to recent photographs.

3.2 Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

The building was found to meet the criteria for listing.

An assessment using the selection guidance to decide whether a site or place is of special architectural or historic interest was carried out. See **Annex A**. The listing criteria and selection guidance for listed buildings are published in Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019), Annex 2, pp. 11-13, <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy>.

4. Consultation

4.1 Consultation information

Consultation period: 26/10/2020 to 16/11/2020. We have consulted with the owner and the planning authority. The consultation report of handling is published on our portal for comment from interested parties.

4.2 Consultation summary

Both the local authority and the National Lighthouse Board responded to the consultation. The NLB highlighted an error in the proposed listing which has been corrected. The responses to consultation did not raise any issues that put into question the special architectural or historic interest of the building under review.

Elizabeth McCrone

Head of Designations
Heritage Directorate
Historic Environment Scotland

Contact

Kevin Munro, Senior Designations Officer
Kevin.Munro@hes.scot, 0131 668 8825

ANNEX A

Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

1. Statutory address

Eilean a' Chùirn lighthouse excluding solar panels, Eilean a' Chùirn, Islay

2. Description and historical development

2.1 Description

Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse was built in 1907 by the Northern Lighthouse Board to plans by David Alan Stevenson and Charles Stevenson. Standing on a raised concrete base, Eilean a' Chùirn is an octagonal concrete tower 11 metres high with a metal gallery. The tower is topped by a cast iron conical-roofed lantern with triangular-shaped storm panes and astragal bars. The whole structure is painted white, and the LED light displays three white flashes every 18 seconds and has a range of 5 nautical miles.

Access to the interior is provided with a wooden door while the exterior balcony level is accessed via an external metal ladder. Two solar panels are mounted on one of the concrete faces.

The interior is divided into two spaces. The lower section houses the banks of batteries. It has a small square window. An internal metal ladder leads directly to the upper section of the lantern housing the LED light.

2.2 Legal exclusions

In accordance with Section 1 (4A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 the following are excluded from the listing: the solar panels on the lighthouse tower.

2.3 Historical development

Northern Lighthouse Board announced in 1906, the contracting of Messrs D&J Macdougall, Oban to lay foundations for a minor light at Eilean a' Chùirn (Scotsman 7 July 1906). The lighthouse became operational in 1907 marking the southeastern corner of Islay and the southern approaches to the Sound of Islay.

Before its conversion in 2002 to solar power, Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse was originally powered by acetylene gas. Cylinders of acetylene gas were supplied to lighthouses to power the lights, creating a significant maintenance programme made difficult by the remote location of many of Scotland's lighthouses.

3. Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

To be listed a building must be of ‘special architectural or historic interest’ as set out in the [Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#). To decide if a building is of special interest for listing we assess its cultural significance using selection guidance which has two main headings – architectural interest and historic interest (see Designation Policy and Selection Guidance, 2019, Annex 2, pp. 11-13).

The selection guidance provides a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions. The special architectural or historic interest of a building can be demonstrated in one or more of the following ways.

3.1 Architectural interest

The architectural interest of a building may include its design, designer, interior, plan form, materials, regional traditions, and setting and the extent to which these characteristics survive. These factors are grouped under two headings:

3.1.1 Design

The lighthouse at Eilean a’ Chùirn is of interest as an example of an early 20th-century minor light designed by the engineers David Alan Stevenson and Charles Stevenson. Eilean a’ Chùirn has a simple, well-proportioned design that is typical for a Stevenson lighthouse, while exhibiting characteristic features of the work of David A Stevenson such as the triangular glazing and diagonal astragals.

Many of the minor lights of the late 19th and early 20th century appear to originally to have been cast iron towers (Strachan 2016; 47), such as Glencallum Bay, Ruvha’an Eun Minor Light (LB44998). The concrete tower of Eilean a’ Chùirn therefore appears to be more unusual. Unlike Eilean a’ Chùirn which remains substantially unaltered, many minor lights have been replaced from the 1980s with later Glass-Reinforced Plastic (GRP) versions or Solar Powered Lattice Aluminium Tower (SPLAT) lights.

3.1.2 Setting

The location for any lighthouse is critical to its function. Eilean a’ Chùirn Lighthouse occupies a remote, low-lying coastal location on the uninhabited island of Eilean a’ Chùirn at around 15 metres above sea level, just off the south-eastern corner of Islay. The lighthouse serves to safeguard navigation by marking the southern entrance to the Sound of Islay. It also overlooks the channel between Islay and Gigha, itself linking the Sound of Jura to the north, the North Channel between Scotland and Ireland to the south and the Atlantic Ocean to the west.

The setting is largely unchanged since the lighthouse was first constructed.

3.2 Historic interest

Historic interest is in such things as a building's age, rarity, social historical interest and associations with people or events that have had a significant impact on Scotland's cultural heritage. Historic interest is assessed under three headings:

3.2.1 Age and rarity

Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse is of interest as it belongs to the early period of the transition between the last manned lighthouses and the earliest examples of automated lights. It is one of 75 un-manned minor lights built around Scotland by David A and Charles Stevenson after the first introduction of automated lights with temporary beacon lights in the Sound of Mull and at Stroma in the Pentland Firth in 1890 (Munro 1979: 200) and the conversion of the Oxcars Lighthouse from oil to gas-powered light in 1894 (Strachan 2016).

There are over 200 operational Northern Lighthouse Board lighthouses within Scotland, with many other examples either decommissioned or operated by other organisations and groups. They range from elegant stone pinnacles on remote reefs far out to sea, to small navigational beacons and modern modular lights. Of these, around 150 lighthouses of various shapes, sizes and types are currently designated as either listed buildings or scheduled monuments, representing a wide range of specific navigational dangers that required marking at night.

3.2.2 Social historical interest

Social historical interest is the way a building contributes to our understanding of how people lived in the past, and how our social and economic history is shown in a building and/or in its setting.

Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse is of social historical interest as it belongs to the earliest phase of building of automated lights in Scotland, when the Northern Lighthouse Board took steps to introduce additional lights at previously unlit sections of coastline.

The significance of Scotland's lighthouse network to the country's history is high. As an island nation with over 18,000 kilometres of coastline and over 900 islands, maritime industries such as fishing, coastal trade and transportation have long been significant social and economic factors. Scotland's coasts are also located on international sea-routes linking northern Europe with the rest of the world. The use of lighthouses was therefore vital to the safety of shipping in Scottish waters. Prior to the construction of Scotland's lighthouses, most navigation markers were landmarks visible only during daylight, and so nautical navigation at night or in poor conditions was a highly dangerous but sometimes unavoidable undertaking. This is reflected in the large numbers of records of ships and sailors lost in wrecking incidents around the coasts of Scotland during the 19th and 19th centuries.

The first lighthouse in Scotland was established on the Isle of May (SM887) in 1636. This light aided navigation into the many harbours around the Firth of Forth and took the form of a stone tower mounting a coal fired brazier. Although the Isle of May beacon was far from as bright as later examples, in good weather it could be seen from as far as the entrance to the Tay, and it would remain operational for 180 years. The Isle of May was followed by several other lighthouses and beacons being built from the late 17th century, improving navigation for the Tay, the Solway and the Clyde.

A common factor in all the lights established in the first 150 years was that they were conceived, built and operated by private interests and organisations, such as local magistrates, councils and individuals, supported by the king and parliament when necessary. By the early 1780s, however, there was a growing recognition that many shipping and navigational dangers existed far beyond the profitable harbours and estuaries that had driven the development of the early lights. To address this, in 1786 parliament passed "*An Act for erecting certain Light-houses in the Northern Parts of Great Britain*" and established a board of Commissioners (subsequently to become the Commissioners of the Northern Lighthouses and then the Northern Lighthouse Board), initially to undertake the work of building and maintaining lights at four locations, including Kinnaird Head (LB31888), Eilean Glas (LB13487), Mull of Kintyre (LB19874) and North Ronaldsay (SM6596). These lights were the work of the Board's first engineer, Thomas Smith, and his assistant Robert Stevenson, and used improved lighting technology in the form of whale oil burners and mirrored reflectors to enhance the brightness.

Following the 1786 Act, the number of lighthouses around the coasts of Scotland began to rapidly grow, along with the technology and engineering skills employed. By the early 19th century oil lamps were replacing the earlier coal burners, and Robert Stevenson had been able to design and build a lighthouse on the Bell Rock (LB45197). Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, Robert Stevenson and his descendants continued to push the boundaries of technology and engineering to expand the network, including lights on Skerryvore (LB17489), Muckle Flugga (LB17479), Dhu Heartach (LB12320), and the Flannan Isles (LB48143).

In addition to the major lights, a system of network of minor lights was introduced from the 1890s. Munro (1979: 199-200) considered that the establishment of minor lights on the Scottish coast arose from a policy of encouraging fishing to develop in the Highlands and Islands, following the Napier Commission's inquiry of 1883-4. A report in 1890 stressed the need for additional lighthouses and beacons to help the fishing fleet and sea communications in areas that were largely unlit at that time. During the 1890s, Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB) employed more than 600 lighthouse keepers around Scotland. These numbers reduced in response to advances in lighting technology and communications that allowed lighthouse operation to become increasingly automated.

3.2.3 Association with people or events of national importance

The buildings have a close historical association of national importance.

Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse is one of many Northern Lighthouse Board lighthouses to be designed by one of the Stevenson family, a connection stretching back three generations and spanning over 150 years. David Alan Stevenson was born in 1854, and his brother Charles Alexander was born in 1855. They were the sons of David Stevenson, grandsons of Robert Stevenson and nephews of Thomas Stevenson, all also distinguished lighthouse engineers for the Northern Lighthouse Board. Their cousin was the author Robert Louis Stevenson. The efforts of the Stevenson family in designing and constructing the network of lighthouses around Scotland's coasts, often against seemingly overwhelming odds, has led to their collectively being known as the "Lighthouse Stevensons", and as some of Scotland's greatest engineering minds.

4. Summary of assessment

The Eilean a' Chùirn lighthouse meets the criteria of special architectural or historic interest for the following reasons:

- Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse is a relatively unaltered example of an early 20th century design by David Alan Stevenson and Charles Stevenson and retains much of its early 20th-century form.
- The remote setting of Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse is largely unchanged since the lighthouse was built.
- It is of interest as it belongs to the early period of the transition between the last manned lighthouses and the earliest examples of automated lights.
- It has a close historical association of national importance with the Stevenson family, renowned nationally and internationally for their contribution to lighthouse design and engineering.
- Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse is of social historical interest in helping us to understand how the operation of lighthouses changed during the late 19th and 20th centuries.

In accordance with Section 1 (4A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 the following are excluded from the listing: the solar panels on the lighthouse tower.

5. Category of listing

Once a building is found to be of special architectural or historic interest, it is then classified under one of three categories (A, B or C) according to its relative importance. While the listing itself has legal weight and gives statutory protection, the

categories have no legal status and are advisory. They affect how a building is managed in the planning system.

Category definitions are found at Annex 2 of Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019) <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy>.

5.1 Level of importance

The level of importance of Eilean a' Chùirn Lighthouse is category C.

Buildings listed at category C are defined as 'buildings of special architectural or historic interest which are representative examples of a period, style or type.'

Eilean a' Chùirn is a representative example of an early 20th century minor light by the renowned engineers David A Stevenson and Charles Stevenson.

Category C is considered to be the most appropriate level of listing.

6. Other Information

N/A

7. References

Canmore: <http://canmore.org.uk> CANMORE ID 302819

Printed Sources

Munro, R. (1979). *Scottish Lighthouses*. Stornoway, Lewis [Scotland]: Thule Press.

Bathurst, B. (1999). *The Lighthouse Stevensons*. London: Harper Collins.

Krauskopf, S. (2001). *Scottish Lighthouses*. Belfast: The Appletree Press Ltd.

Strachan, M. (2016) *Scottish Lighthouses, an illustrated history*. Stroud: Amberley.

Online Sources

Marine Scotland. (2019). *Facts and figures about Scotland's sea area*. [online] Available at: <http://marine.gov.scot/data/facts-and-figures-about-scotlands-sea-area-coastline-length-sea-area-sq-kms> [Accessed 23 Jan. 2020].

The Scotsman 7 July 1906

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000540/19060707/433/0009>