

Bishop Rock, Isles of Scilly

Bishop Rock



Location	Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, United Kingdom
Coordinates	
Year first constructed	1851
Year first lit	1858
Automated	1992
Height	49m (167 ft)
Current lens	Hyper Radial 1330 mm Rotating
Intensity	600,000 Candela
Range	24 miles
Characteristic	2 White Group Flashes Every 15 Seconds
ARLHS number	ENG 010

The **Bishop Rock** ([Cornish](#): *Men Epskop*) is a small rock in the [Atlantic Ocean](#) known for its [lighthouse](#). It is in the westernmost part of the [Isles of Scilly](#), an [archipelago](#) 45 km (28 mi) off the southwestern tip of the [Cornish peninsula](#) of [Great Britain](#).

The [Guinness Book of Records](#) lists it as the world's smallest [island](#) with a building on it.

The original iron lighthouse was begun in 1847 but was washed away before it could be completed.

The present building was completed in 1858 and was first lit on 1 September, in the same year.

Prior to the installation of the helipad, visitors to the lighthouse would rappel from the top (with winches installed at the lamp level and at the base below) to boats waiting away from the lighthouse.

Bishop Rock is also at the eastern end of the [North Atlantic](#) shipping route used by ocean liners in the first half of the 20th century; the western end being the entrance to [Lower New York Bay](#).

This was the route that ocean liners took when competing for the Transatlantic speed record, known as the [Blue Riband](#).

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History

In the late 13th century, when the Isles of Scilly was under the jurisdiction of John de Allet and his wife Isabella, anyone convicted of felony "*ought to be taken to a certain rock in the sea, with two barley loaves and a pitcher of water and left until the sea swallowed him up*".

The rock was recorded as *Maen Escop* in 1284 and *Maenenescop* in 1302.

In Welsh (similar to Cornish) Maen Escob means Bishop Rock. The outer rocks to the west of [St Agnes](#), used to be known as the Bishop and Clerk, and exactly how they acquired their names is not known for certain.

One explanation is that when a fleet of [merchantmen](#) out of Spain were wrecked 200 years ago, only Miles Bishop and John and Henry Clerk survived. Another possible explanation is the shape of the rock is similar to a bishop's [mitre](#).

East of Bishop Rock are the [Western Rocks](#) and the Gilstone Reef, where [Admiral Shovell](#)'s flagship [HMS Association](#) was wrecked in the [great naval disaster of 1707](#).

Shovell's remains were repatriated to England by order of Queen Anne shortly after their initial burial in the Isles of Scilly.

The earliest recorded wreck on the rock itself was in 1839 when the brig *Theodorick* struck in rough misty weather on 4 September.

She was out of [Mogodore](#) for London carrying a general cargo. In the early hours of 12 October, 1842, the 600-tonne [paddle steamer](#) *Brigand*, a [packet boat](#),

which was en route from [Liverpool](#) to [St Petersburg](#), struck the rock with such force that it stove in two large bow plates.

The rocks then acted as a pivot, and she swung round and heeled into the rock portside, crushing the paddle-wheel and box to such an extent that it penetrated the engine room.

She drifted over seven miles in two hours, before sinking in 90m. All the crew were saved. In

1901 a [barque](#) named *Falkland* struck the rock, her main yard hitting the lighthouse itself.

Lighthouse

An 1818 Report by the Surveyor-General of the [Duchy of Cornwall](#) on the dangers to shipping in Cornwall proposed to build a lighthouse, similar to the one on the [Eddystone](#), upon Bishop Rock, given its location as the westernmost rock of the Isles of Scilly.

The plan was considered by the Government and building was expected soon as [Mr Rennie](#), the engineer made an offer to build it.

The Government did not take up the offer and [Trinity House](#) surveyed Bishop Rock, in 1843, with a view to building a lighthouse, and work began in 1847.

The engineer in chief, [James Walker](#), decided on a 120-foot-tall (37 m) design consisting of accommodation, and a light on top of iron legs.

The light was never lit, since on 5 February 1850 a storm washed the tower away.

In the second attempt, James Walker began building a stone structure in 1851. The site presented a number of difficulties; the paucity of available land area, and the slope of the rock meant that the lowest stone had to be laid below the water level of the lowest spring tides.

Despite multiple problems, the tower was completed without loss of life, and the lighthouse shone its first light on 1 September 1858. The total cost for the lighthouse was £34,559.

In 1881, Sir [James Nicholas Douglass](#) inspected the tower, and designed renovation to reinforce t

he structure.

The work was begun in 1882 and completed in 1887, under the supervision of Douglass's eldest surviving son, [William Tregarthen Douglass](#).

Bishop Lighthouse is often referred to as "**King of the lighthouses**" and it is indeed a very impressive structure.

It is the second tallest in Britain, second only to the [Eddystone Lighthouse](#) and altogether the money spent on reaching this lighthouse we have today has been:

- The first iron lighthouse: £12,500
- The second granite lighthouse: £34,559 (£3,106,241 in 2016)
- The third improved lighthouse: £64,889 (£6,444,440 in 2016)
- **Total cost:** £111,948

The interior for the light house consists of: Below and inside the lighthouse are 10 floors with spiral staircase to the 2nd floor with a door (made from gun metal (likely bronze) and installed in 1887) that leads down an external metal (likely bronze) ladder to climb down to the large exterior base.

From the base another metal ladder provides access to stone staircase to the water line.

- 1st floor – water tank (providing fresh water for lighthouse keeper)
- 2nd floor – entrance room with metal door leading to exterior ladder to base below
- 3rd floor – store room with window
- 4th floor – 1st oil room with oil tanks formerly used to light the lamp
- 5th floor – 2nd oil room with window
- 6th floor – Living room for lighthouse keeper with window
- 7th floor – Bedroom for lighthouse keeper with window
- 8th floor – Store room
- 9th floor – Service room
- 10th floor – lamp

Difficulty reaching the lighthouse by boat led Trinity House to build a helipad atop the lighthouse in 1976. The tower has been fully automated since 15 December 1992.

Culture

The rock is the subject of a short orchestral descriptive work by the late [Doreen Carwithen](#) (Mary Alwyn

Settlements

- [Great Ganilly](#)
 - [Gweal](#)
 - [Norrard Rocks](#)
 - [Rosevear](#)
 - [Round Island](#)
 - [Samson](#)
 - [St Helen's](#)
 - [Teän](#)
 - [Western Rocks](#)
 - [White Island](#)
 - [Zantman's Rock](#)
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- St Mary's: [Hugh Town](#), [Holy Vale](#), [Longstone](#), [Maypole](#), [Normandy](#), [Old Town](#), [Pelistry](#), [Porthloo](#),
 - St Martin's: [Higher Town](#), [Middle Town](#) and [Lower Town](#)
 - Tresco: [New Grimsby](#) and [Old Grimsby](#)