

# LEANNE MCCAFFERTY (RCAHMS) – RENFREWSHIRE

July 26, 2013 Historic Environment Scotland Day of Archaeology 2013, Historical Archaeology, Landscape Archaeology #myarchaeology, Canmore, Holy wells, Leanne McCafferty, RCAHMS, Religion in Scotland, Renfrewshire, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Scotland, Scottish Archaeology, Scottish architecture, St Fillan's Well, St Fillan's Seat and St Fillan's Church



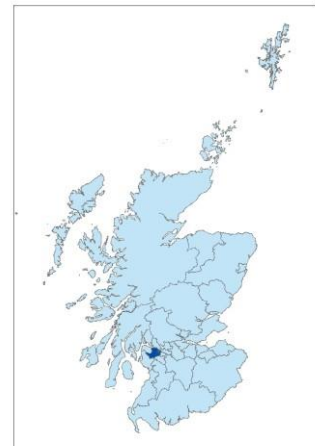
*Leanne McCafferty,  
RCAHMS*

After graduated with an archaeology degree in 2002, I began working at RCAHMS on a partnership project with our Welsh counterparts, [RCAHMW](#). This involved looking at how the two organisations recorded information about the built heritage including archaeology, architecture and marine sites. I am currently a project manager within the

Data and Recording section with a particular interest in the history of recording at RCAHMS and how this is reflected in the information we make available through our [Canmore database](#). In an attempt to illustrate this, I've chosen the site of St Fillan's Well.

The holy well of [St Fillan](#) lies to the east of Kilallan, a farm near Kilmacolm in Renfrewshire. It is one of 276 [holy wells](#) recorded in the Canmore database.

These wells were associated with early medieval saints (although their use could have been much more ancient than this) and were reputed to have healing waters. The holy wells recorded in the Canmore database claim to cure a variety of maladies from deafness to “nervous diseases”. In the case of St Fillan, reputedly an Irish monk, the waters of his well have folk traditions associating it



*Renfrewshire  
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with the curing of rickets in children. Nearby the well are two associated monuments, [St Fillan's Seat](#) and [St Fillan's Church](#), which is dedicated to the saint.

The information RCAHMS holds on the well is taken from the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division's record card. The cards were transferred to RCAHMS in 1983 and provided the foundation for what would become the database we use to record monuments today. This information is then available to the public through [Canmore](#). The record cards provided a brief description of the site along with references to relevant publications and a map. They were compiled by the Archaeology Division office-based recorders and then passed to the field staff, who in turn would investigate the monument. The office recorders would assemble the monument descriptions from existing publications such as the RCAHMS County Inventories and Statistical Accounts.



*An engraving of St Anthony's Well from William Ballingall's Edinburgh Past and Present. Copyright RCAHMS (SC431735)*

3	STRATHGOLYTH	NEWTON	HEMPFREN	TYPE
7	CE	HEMPFREN	HOUSTON	FORM
		STATES		LOCATION
		Dist		POOR
				Pa. No. No. St. St. No. Section 11
FILLAN'S WELL				ALL
Fillan's Well (NR)				7
near Killalton (St Fillan's) Church (SS spring, issuing from under a rock. It was healing properties, sick children being laid pieces of cloth being left, until about 17th century when the then minister had it sea. Mackinlay (5) states that water used in baptism is believed to have come from				1. OG 5 <sup>o</sup> 1968
used as a drinking place for cattle.				2. OSA 1 1791 316 3. OSB 10 1856 14 4. Bridge of Weir 191 (W W Lyle) 5. PGAS 29 1894-5 254 (Mackinlay)
				6. F1 JB 26 7 55 31 IF 17 12 75

*Ordnance Survey record card for St Fillan's Well. Copyright RCAHMS*

For St Fillan's Well, multiple sources have been consulted to construct a concise history and description of the site. The well was first recorded in the [Old Statistical Accounts](#) in 1791. The statistical accounts were first collected in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Church of Scotland ministers and described the geography, agriculture and culture of their respective parishes. The Reverend John Monteath was responsible for Houston parish in which St Fillan's Well is located and describes how the well was used for curing "rickety babies" until it was filled in by a local minister at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It also records the tradition of leaving cloth as a votive offering which means St Fillan's was also a [rag or 'clottie' well](#). One of the more famous clottie wells is located at [Hill](#)

[O'Hirdie](#) near Munloch in the Highlands.

The well was mapped by the Ordnance Survey in 1856 and recorded in the [Object Name Book](#). These books were used by the OS staff to record the place names that were used on maps.

Ordered by parish, a copy of the Name Books is available for public consultation on microfiche in the [RCAHMS Search Room](#).



*First Edition OS map (Renfrewshire 1863, sheet VII) depicting St Fillan's Well. 'Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2011'*

In 1895 a paper exploring the association of the cult of St Fillan with Kilallan was published by J M Mackinlay in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*. More recent publications on the well include *Scottish Healing Wells* (F and R Morris 1982) and W H Lyle's *The History of Bridge of Weir* (1975).

Renfrewshire was not included in the county inventory survey by RCAHMS, but when it was visited by the Ordnance Survey in 1955, it was reported the field investigator that the well was being used as a cattle trough.

To see the Canmore record for St Fillan's Well, see <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/42246/details/kilallan+st+fillan+s+well/>

This is what I've chosen for Day of Archaeology, but why not tell us your favourite archaeological sites in Scotland on Twitter using [#MyArchaeology](#).