

Venerable Fillan of Strathfillan

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St Fillans

village

St. Fillan (Foelan) lived in the eighth century. He was born in Ireland; his mother was St. Kentigerna and his uncle was St. Comgan. From time immemorial he has been much venerated in both Ireland and Scotland. He may have been educated at Taghmon Monastery in Wexford (Ireland) under St. Fintan Munnu. Later, probably in about 717, he moved together with his mother and other relatives to Scotland. There he became a monk and lived the monastic life until the end of his life. It is known that for some time Fillan preached the Good News together with Sts. Kentigerna and Comgan and then retired to live as a hermit in a cave on the site of the present-day village Pittenweem (“the cave’s place”) in the county of Fife. This village was to become one of the most important places for his veneration. With time Fillan was appointed abbot of a monastery in Fife but after several years he gave up his abbacy and retreated to Glendochart (in Perthshire) where he lived alone in prayer and contemplation and finally built a church. Today a number of places and churches in the vicinity of Glendochart bear the name of the saint.



The river

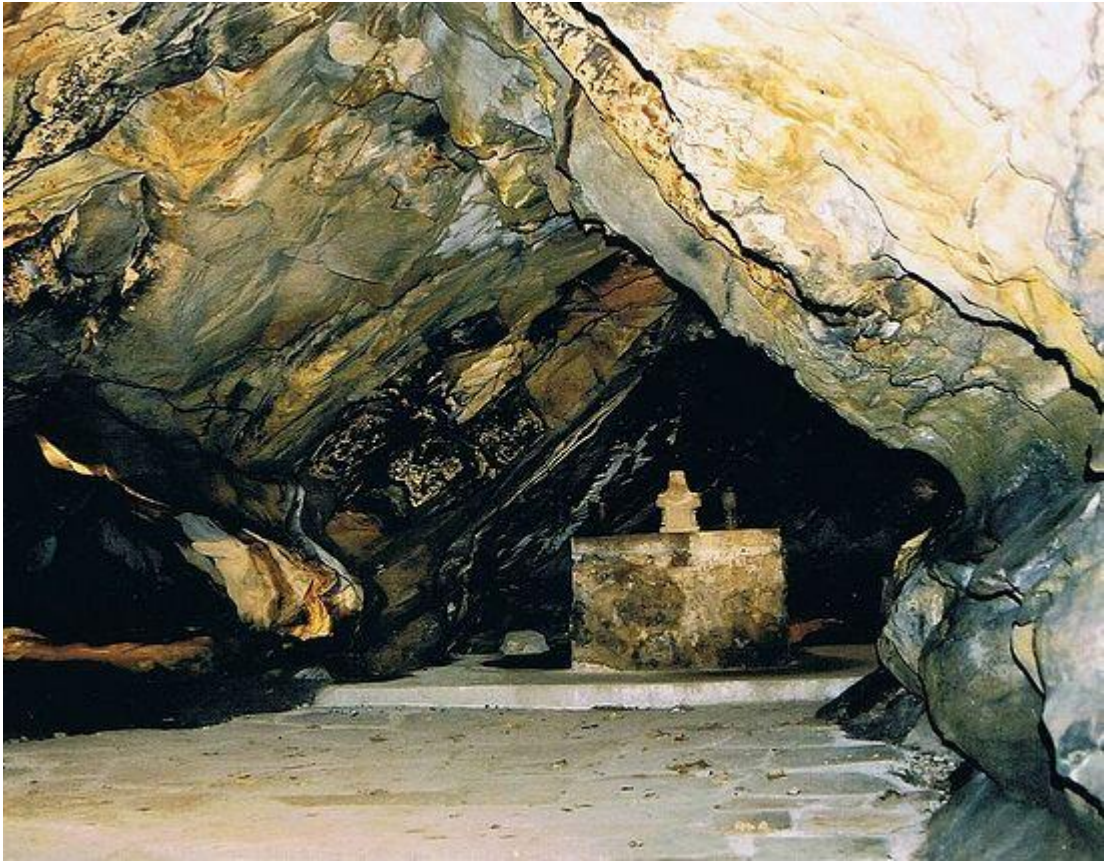
Fillan

During his life Fillan by his prayer healed from many diseases the sick who flocked to him. The hermit worked miracles. Once, when he was abbot, a wolf ate one of his oxen while the saint was working in the field. The abbot commanded the wolf as a penance to plough up that part of the field instead of the ox that it had eaten. The wild wolf obeyed the saint and immediately fulfilled the task. The veneration of St. Fillan in Scotland was so strong that in 1314 the Scottish king Robert Bruce took the reliquary with the saint's arm with him to the Battle of Bannockburn and attributed his victory over the English to the saint's intercession.



Pittenweem Parish Church

Fillan reposed and was buried in Strathfillan, the centre of his veneration. He probably built a church or a monastery on this site and preached to the local Pictish population. The cave of St. Fillan in Pittenweem survives to this day. After his death the cave became a destination for many pilgrims, and a holy well with healing power existed near it for many years. In late medieval times a small Augustinian priory, associated with the monastery on the Isle of May (in the outer Firth of Forth), was founded in Pittenweem and named after St. Fillan. Several centuries ago Fillan's cave was left derelict and forgotten for a certain time. In about 1900, a horse that pastured in a local priory garden suddenly fell into an overgrown hole. When the hole was cleared it turned out that it was the saint's cell, abandoned long before. Several stones which had healing properties owing to Fillan's prayers were discovered in the cave together with the partly surviving holy well. In 2000, both the cave and the well were consecrated and opened for visitors.



St.

Fillan's cave



St.

Fillan's Priory ruins in Strathfillan

The personal bell and staff of St. Fillan survive to this day: they are kept at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. In the past this bell was usually placed above those who suffered from severe headache—and the pain abated! In Strathfillan many lunatics were miraculously healed in ancient times. D.H. Farmer and other researchers write that mentally ill people used to be dipped into the Strathfillan well and then left for one night, tied up in a corner of St. Fillan's ruined chapel. If the following morning they were found loosed from their chains, they were considered to be completely cured. This practice existed until the first half of the nineteenth century. Today Strathfillan is a picturesque strath (a Scottish word meaning a broad, often mountainous, valley) in west Perthshire with the river Fillan flowing through it.

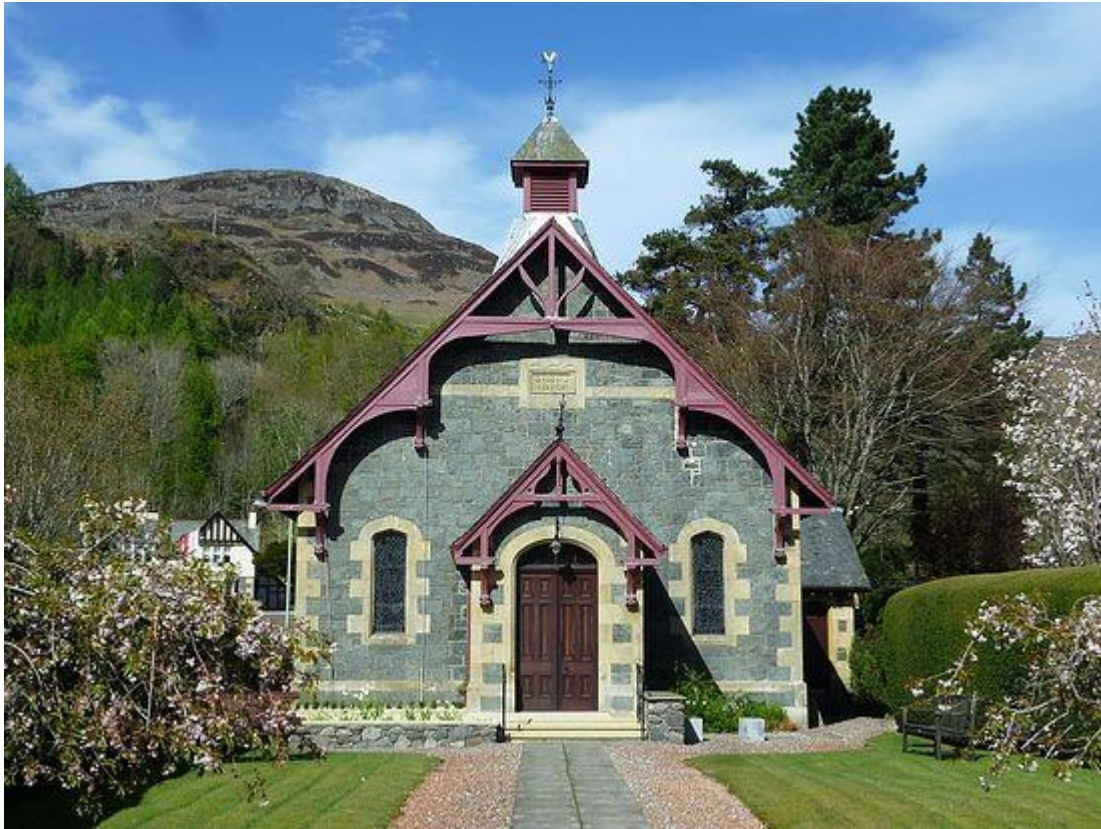


Healing stones of St. Fillan-1

In the picturesque village of Killin, situated near Stirling, there are so-called healing stones, associated with St. Fillan, and kept at a former mill.

According to tradition, due to the prayers of St. Fillan each of these stones heals a specific part of the body from various diseases. Interestingly, it was James Stuart, a minister from Killin, who in 1767 prepared the first New Testament in Scottish Gaelic, and his son, John, prepared the first edition of the Old Testament in this ancient language several decades later.

In the village of St Fillans in Perth and Kinross in central Scotland there is an ancient pre-Norman chapel dedicated to St. Fillan. According to local tradition, St. Fillan for some time lived on a hill nearby. An Episcopalian church in the village of Kilmacolm in Inverclyde is also dedicated to him. The nineteenth century Catholic church in the village of Houston in Renfrewshire in west central Scotland bears his name. There is also an ancient ruined church of St. Fillan not far from it, in the parish of Houston and Killellan. Close to the village there are two holy wells, dedicated to St. Fillan and St. Peter, which still have curative power. There are several other partly surviving early churches dedicated to this saint, scattered in different parts of Scotland, mostly on islands, which so much attracted Celtic saints by their severe beauty. Outside Scotland, St. Fillan is venerated in the Irish counties of Westmeath and Laois.



St Fillans village

Church in