

Kathy Patterson (née Cairns)

This story was first published as part of a report written in 2008 by Glasgow University under the auspices of CADISPA. Kathy has since died.

Kathy Patterson is not a native of Gatehouse but has lived in Gatehouse most of her life. In fact she was born in Buffalo, New York. After the first World War her newly married parents emigrated from Glasgow to the USA where her father found work as a coachbuilder. They went on to have nine children. When the depression hit America the whole family came back to Glasgow. Later three of the sons were called up for military service in the US and then settled there for the rest of their lives.

When war came the rest of the children were evacuated to Galloway. Kathy aged 9 and her twin sisters aged 6 were placed with an unmarried lady called Polly Anderson who lived in a cottage in a hamlet called Abbey Burnfoot near the village of Dundrennan. Their brothers went to work on the nearby farm of Balig.

Life with Miss Anderson was hard. Kathy remembers that she and her sisters took it in turns every morning before school to go to Port Mary farm 2 miles away to collect the milk, one quart of full cream milk and one quart of skimmed milk for baking. Then they would walk 2 miles to school in Dundrennan.

In 1942, a large area of farmland between Kirkcudbright and Dundrennan was requisitioned by the government as an Army firing range and this included Abbey Burnfoot which was completely demolished. Portville, a house in Fleet Street Gatehouse was requisitioned for Miss Anderson and the evacuees. The girls moved to Gatehouse school. When Kathy left school aged 15 she started work in the Bank of Scotland in Gatehouse, one of the female staff taken on to replace men who had been called up for war service. At the end of the war Kathy's sisters were reunited with their parents in Glasgow but Kathy decided to stay in Gatehouse.

When the male bank staff arrived home Kathy lost her job. She then attended Commercial School in Castle Douglas and having finished her training worked for Hewats, Solicitors for £1 a week. Rather than travel from Gatehouse every day Kathy stayed in digs in Castle Douglas from Monday to Friday which cost 10 shillings (50p) a week all found. Kathy remembers that her return fare from Gatehouse to Castle Douglas was 1/6d (7 1/2p). Later Kathy got a secretarial job in Gatehouse working for Mr Lillie the Town Clerk.

By this time Miss Anderson and Kathy had moved from Portville to Mile End, a house at the top of the town as Miss Anderson became the housekeeper for an elderly couple Mr and Mrs Murray. When they died they left the house to Miss Anderson.

In 1951 Kathy married Jack Patterson. Jack's family had a farm and dairy business in Gatehouse, but Jack did not go into the family business. Instead, after seeing active service in the army he worked for Crosbie's Garage where he remained for the whole of his working life. Their first house was a brand new bungalow at Riverbank. When Miss Anderson died she left Mile End to Kathy. There was a great deal of work to be done to make it more comfortable. There was electric lighting but the cooking had been done on a paraffin stove. Although there was a bathroom, the only water supply was a tap in a shed at the back of the house.

Jack and Kathy are very proud of their two children, who have both left Gatehouse. Their daughter is a headmistress of a school in Perth and their son is Operations Director of a large American firm in Cheltenham. Kathy is very sociable and enjoys meeting friends regularly for coffee, friends that go back to her school days and early working life. She remembers the days when the men used to meet at the Bank of Scotland corner to discuss local matters, but that no longer happens. Jack remembers that before that there was a men's regular meeting place over 3 miles from Gatehouse at a big oak tree by Castramont Wood. This was locally known as the 'Parliament'. Kathy feels that Gatehouse has changed a great deal in the last few years. She remembers the time when Mrs Murray Usher, the 'Superior', was very strict about the appearance of the town. Nothing could be altered without her say-so and she laid the law down about the painting of houses.