A walk through the "Industrial Heart of Gatehouse

about ¾m.

This walk is around the middle of Gatehouse and concentrates on the towns' industrial heritage. It is shorter than the Gala Walk.

Start at the entrance to the town car park, opposite the Rutherford Hall

Gatehouse of Fleet is a **planned estate village** , the idea of James Murray, the landowner at Cally, in the late 18th century.

This was a time of change in agriculture and industry. Many people had been put off the land and needed accommodation and work. An estate village was a way of answering this problem.

Gatehouse was not alone, there were many planned villages, but it is unusual in that it expanded very rapidly from a few folk to over 2000 by 1800, then when the industries failed, it remained much the same size (in area) until the mid 20th century, but the population dropped to about 1000.

The Earliest houses were built in 1763. The first industry to be introduced was the **tannery** in 1768.

Look across the car park towards the Spar/ Galloway Lodge. This building was the tannery, using local cow hides to make leather. The old tan pits where the hides were soaked, are under the car park.

There was another tannery at Boatgreen (the old harbour) on the other side of the river.

A by-product from these tanneries was used in a **soap works** - just the other side of the Fleet Bridge.

There were concerns at the time about the pollution that these industries were causing to the river.

Look across the road, behind the yellow house. The large building was a brewery which was opened in 1769 using local barley. It served the many pubs in Gatehouse - and it was often safer to drink beer than the local water.

Cross the road and walk to the Mill on the Fleet, stopping near the big wheel.

More industry was needed to provide more employment. In 1785, James Murray went into partnership with a family named **Birtwhistle**. They were looking for an investment in the 'new' water-powered factories. The Birtwhistles were from Yorkshire and were involved in cattle droving - walking large numbers of cattle from Galloway (and Ireland) to towns in England. The Birtwhistles built 2 mills on this site. The one by the river (now The Mill on the Fleet) and a 4 storey high mill at the back (now The Wheels of Fleet).

The mills were powered by water - not from the River Fleet, but by as system of man-made channels (called lades) and natural streams from Loch Whinyeon, 3 miles away in the hills. James Murray invested a lot of money in this part of the project. **This was only the 5th mill complex to be built in Scotland**.

At the height of the cotton boom there was another mill on this site owned by Mr McWilliam, another in Ann Street (Scott's Mill) and for a short time there was one in Fleet Street.

The mills produced cotton thread on large machines. This was a fairly new idea - previously linen was used before cotton was introduced - and it was a home-based industry.

The raw cotton came from America and there were often problems with supply due to wars, the transport distances, and the emancipation of slaves.

Some of the thread was used locally - some in the mills in Gatehouse and some woven at home. Some was sent away to be spun but this was difficult because of the poor transport links.

For a period the mills employed over **500 people**. Many were women and young children. Men tended to do the mechanical work and weaving. Women and children were more skilled at tying broken threads and crawling under the spinning machines.
The main boom in the cotton industry only lasted about 30 years, although one of the mills continued until the 1850s.

Gatehouse had become priced out of the market by steam-driven mills which were fuelled by coal from Yorkshire and Lancashire. Also the markets for cotton were too far away and relied on transport by sea.
The only mill to remain open in Gatehouse was the back mill where they started to made wooden bobbins for use in the textile industry elsewhere. This was fairly successful until a fire destroyed most of the building in 1919 (fire being a major hazard in mill buildings). The building was lowered in height and it continued to operate as a sawmill until 1938.

Continue through the mill grounds and climb the steps and turn right to walk along Victoria Street.

(If steps are a problem, retrace your steps to the High Street, turn left up the hill and the first road on the left is Victoria Street, walk to the end)

Central Gatehouse is designed on a grid system. High Street had the shops and larger houses. The back streets (Catherine Street and Birtwhistle Street) were the workers' houses and the side streets housed the workshops and services.

Victoria Street had (and still has) various workshops.
The house on the left (on corner of Catherine Street), was owned by **McGaw, the builders**. The garden behind was their stone yard - stretching back to a workshop by the lade. The first house on the left was the cart shed and stable for the builder.
The first large house on the right (Bobbin Cottage) is a bit of a mystery. It seems to have been named as Coven(t) garden in some early census. It certainly housed a lot of people.
The next house on the left was the police station. Between it and Bobbin Cottage, the little building (a garage) was the mortuary.
Before the police station was built here, there had been 'lock ups' at Cox's Lodge (at top of Anne Street) and Woodside Tollhouse (opposite the war memorial). As a Burgh of Barony (created in 1795) Gatehouse had its own Town Council to run affairs and could deal with minor misdemeanours. More serious crimes were dealt with by the Sheriff Court in Kirkcudbright.
Until the ??, the policeman's only transport was his bicycle. For many years the police station had one of the few telephones in Gatehouse.
The next building on the right was used by the local Fire Brigade for about 50 years until a new Fire Station was built at Dromore Road. More recently, or a period it was the jam factory for Galloway Lodge Preserves.
Look to the left. This is the lade running down to the big wheel at the Mill on the Fleet. It goes under several roads and buildings on its way through the town and was used by various workshops.
The building to the right of the lade is believed to have housed an early smithy and is sometimes known as the Brass Works. Brass was used on the spinning machines. The family who ran it (Campbells) built a new smiddy on the land opposite when they bought the house on the corner of the High Street (5?) and Victoria Street. They built the smiddy at the foot of their garden by the lade.
The building with the rope hoist seems to have been a salt house, grain store and store for the blacksmith at various times.
The last house on the left was, for many years, the Victoria Inn and was connected internally to 5? High Street. For many years the landlady was Marianne Thompson. In certain light conditions you can still make out parts of the name Thompson above the door.

Turn left up the High Street

Notice the large house on the left - The Bank of Fleet. At one time this was the home of the Birtwhistle family, the mill owners.

Later it became one of 2 banks in Gatehouse dealing with financial transactions.

Turn left into **Digby Street**.

The house on the corner as you turn (?? High Street) was at one time Slimmon's pub and grocers. About 1914 it was purchased by the Frullani family. The Frullanis were miners from central Italy who came to Gatehouse in the 18?? to work in the local copper mines (and coal mines in Ayrshire). The family bought the shop and started making ice cream and selling fish and chips. They also had a colourful cart to sell ice cream from around the houses and beaches. Their property extended round the corner where they had a billiard hall.

As in Victoria Street, some buildings were stores - 'The Meal Hoose' was used to store grain.

Across the road, just before the lade was another **blacksmiths**, run for many years by the McDonald family. (now a holiday house)

The tall building on the right on the other side of the lade was also a store for many years before it was converted into flats. During World War II scrap metal and papers were collected and stored here.

Across the road are a row of council houses - some of the first to be built in Gatehouse (193?), replacing some old derelict houses.

There is still an active joinery business on the right. During the 1930s part of the building housed an electric generator run by the Dalbeattie Electric Company which provided street lighting (replacing the old gas lamps) and lighting for the Town Hall.

There have been several pubs in Digby Street though their exact positions are unknown. e.g. The Robert Burns & Purdies.

Cross over Catherine Street and continue straight on

Opposite the houses on the right - the field over the stone dyke was used as a **bleachfield**. Home woven cloth was often dirty looking so it was washed and laid out in the sun to dry and whiten.

As part of the mill contract with James Murray, the Birtwhistles were granted land to build workers cottages. These terraced houses in Rosebery Terrace, Swan Street and Birtwhistle Street are unusual in Scotland, being made of bricks. They look more like Yorkshire workers homes. The bricks were made locally.

Stop at the corner of Ford Road and look along Birtwhistle Street.

There is a tale that the terrace of houses on the north side of the street had a spindle running through the attics to provide power for the weaving looms in the houses. It seems that it may have been petrol driven. Certainly many of the occupants were power loom weavers but there is no definite proof that this happened.

Turn right into Ford Road.

This was the road which led to the ford across the River Fleet. For many years this part of the town was home to various carters and coal merchants.

At Catherine Street, turn left and walk up to the T junction with Church Street.

At the top of the street on the left, there are no houses. However until the 1930s there were several large buildings, one of which was a boarding house. It housed many of the Irish workers who came to Gatehouse to find employment in the mills and often as drainers and navvies eg working on the canal.

Turn right along Church Street

Immediately on your left (now Stellage Court) was a farm until the 1970s. It probably existed before Gatehouse developed.

The wide gate opposite the church led into a joiners yard.

Stop opposite the Clock Tower and look up Ann Street.

Scott's Mill (now converted into flats) is at the far end of the street on the left. It was converted into the Cally estate sawmill after the cotton mill closed in 1810. Unusually for Scotland, the mill workers here were paid by a trade token which they could exchange at the shops for goods. - known as the Gatehouse halfpenny.

At one time this street was the main entrance into Gatehouse from the east and had 3 pubs. One of them - the Bay Horse - was converted into a joinery workshop.

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Some of the thread was used locally - some in the mills in Gatehouse and some woven at home. Some was sent away to be spun but this was difficult because of the poor transport links.
For a period the mills employed over **500 people**. Many were women and young children. Men tended to do the mechanical work and weaving. Women and children were more skilled at tying broken threads and crawling under the spinning machines.
The main boom in the cotton industry lasted about 30 years, although one of the mills continued until the 1850s. Apart from the supply and transport link problems, the introduction of steam powered machinery into the cotton industry elsewhere made Gatehouse uneconomically viable. Gatehouse was too far away from any coalfields to compete with steam driven mills.
The only mill to remain open was the back mill as they started to made wooden bobbins for use in the textile industry elsewhere. This was fairly successful until a fire destroyed most of the building in 1919. (Fire is a common hazard in mill buildings). The building was lowered in height and it continued to operate as a sawmill until 1938.
Continue through the mill grounds and climb the steps and turn right and walk along Victoria Street.
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