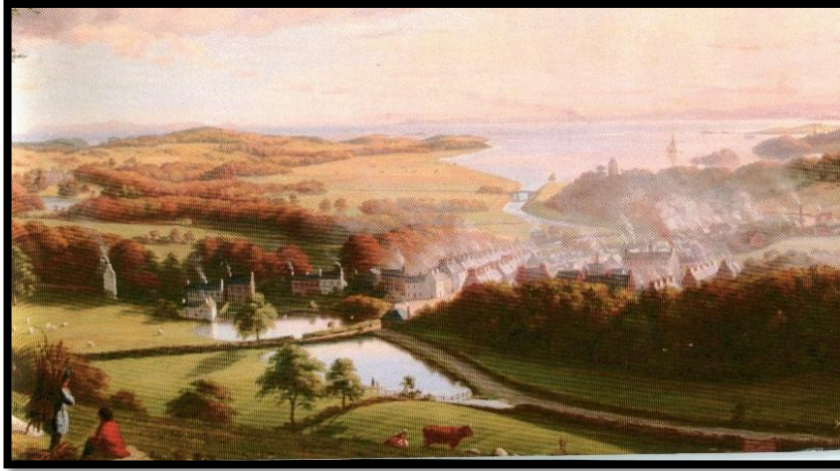


“2024 Gala Week” walk

about half a mile.

A walk around central Gatehouse highlighting its history.

The walk might take up to 2 hours, but it is arranged in sections so you can take a break, then continue where you left off.



1832 View of Gatehouse
Robert George Kelly

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

Introduction

Gatehouse is not an old town – it was planned as an estate village by James Murray of Cally & Broughton, the local laird (landowner), about 260 years ago (in the 1760s).

For comparison Kirkcudbright is over 700 years old & New Galloway 400 years old.

There were over 80 planned estate villages planned in Galloway between 1730 & 1850 - some never took off and others grew into larger towns. Gatehouse is unusual in that it grew quickly but the growth stopped suddenly with the demise of the cotton industry and it remained the same size until recently.

Pre-Gatehouse there was a small hamlet here (a farm and a few cottages) as a stopping point on the 'Great Road' from Gretna to Portpatrick where it crossed the River Fleet by a firstly, a ford, and by 1642 a bridge.

Bridges and Roads

Moving Government troops to Ireland along the Old Military Road provided a very important need for the first bridge which was wooden but which was washed away in a storm.

1662 - Richard Murray (James' grandfather) was commanded by an Act of Parliament to replace the bridge and build an inn and tollhouse. The inn is now the Murray Arms and the toll house (the 'Gaithouse') was next to it in Ann Street. 'Gait' is an old word for a road. So the name Gatehouse of Fleet means **a house on the road by the River Fleet**. The name predates the development of Gatehouse as an estate village.

1730 – The first stone bridge was built where today's bridge stands and it has been widened



several times since. It forms part of the boundary between the parishes of Girthon and Anwoth. The dates are on the pavement on the Anwoth side of the bridge, and under the arches you can see the progress of widening. *(Please do not attempt to go under the bridge – entry is through a private garden)*

In the past, roads took different routes into Gatehouse than they do today.

When the road crossed over the bridge the **Old Military Road** turned sharp right at The Ship Inn going to Anwoth Old Kirk and then over the hills to Creetown. The new 'Coast' road was built in the 1790s. Fleet Street developed as a result, later than the rest of the village. The Ship Inn was the first building in Fleet Street - built in 1794.

Like many streets in Gatehouse it was not just a residential street but had some shops and some pubs. For example the large house by the bridge was the Crown & Thistle Inn. There have been grocers, butchers and fancy goods shops at different times.

The last widening of the bridge was in 1965 when the pavements and parapets were added. This was before the Gatehouse bypass was built in 1986. An ever increasing amount of lorries from the Irish ferry, caravans and cars were coming through the town on the A75 and crossing the bridge. There was no pavement on the bridge so it was becoming dangerous for pedestrians.

The Estate Village

1751 - James Murray inherited the estate of Cally & Broughton. (Broughton was the Murray estate in Wigtownshire)

It had become fashionable for landowners to build themselves large mansions with designed landscapes around them. The Murray's are believed to have had a town house in Gatehouse and also owned Broughton House in Kirkcudbright but by 1763 Cally House was built and became their main residence. (now the Cally Palace Hotel)

To build and maintain such a grand mansion cost a lot of money so James Murray needed to make his large estate profitable.

Agriculture

In the 1700s agriculture in Scotland was in a poor state. However during the lifetime of James' father (Alexander) many improvements were introduced. e.g. new crops such as potatoes and turnips, and new machinery. Perhaps the biggest change was to scrap the old run rigs (ridge & furrows) and common grazing ground. Fields were enclosed by stone walls (drystane dykes.) This was partly driven by the introduction of breeding cattle on a large scale. Along with many from Ireland, cattle were driven long distances to large cities in England.

The improvements resulted in fewer workers being required on farms. Many people lost their homes and livelihoods and there was great poverty. One solution was for landowners to create an estate village where they provided land for housing and introduced industries for employment.

In Gatehouse, the first houses were built in 1763 starting at the end of the town near the Murray Arms and continued down the High Street towards the bridge.

Turn round and look up the hill



1910 sketch of the old tannery
Angel Hotel is behind

First Industries

The first industry to be introduced was the **Tannery in 1768**. Local cow hides were used. The building is now used by Spar and Galloway Lodge was the first tannery. It closed 1840 and was then used as stables and garages. The tan pits, where the hides were soaked, were found under the carpark.

In 1769 a second tannery opened at Boatgreen, beside the old harbour, on the other side of the bridge. It closed in the 1860s and is now a house.

A soap works using by products from the tanneries opened beside the river.

The second industry was brewing beer. The **Brewery opened in 1769** using local barley. It was in the large building opposite Galloway Lodge. (behind the yellow house) It eventually closed c.1900 and was then used as stabling and a transport depot. Hayton [Coulthard](#), the Twynholm haulage firm, ran some of their business from here in the 1940s. It has now been converted into flats.

Rutherford Hall and Churches

The church building across the road is the Rutherford Hall - named after a famous minister at Anwoth Church (1600 - 1661), Samuel Rutherford. He is remembered by the tall monument on the hill to the south west of Gatehouse.

The River Fleet is the boundary between Anwoth and Girthon Parishes. The old kirks of Girthon and Anwoth are both about 2 miles outside of Gatehouse and built before Gatehouse developed although Girthon Church did eventually moved into the town.

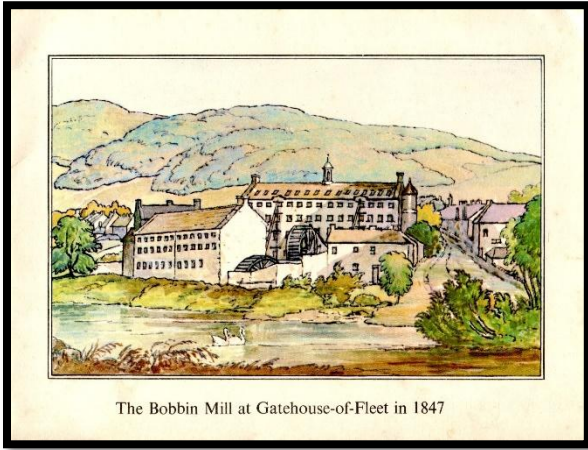
The church opposite was built as The Girthon and Anwoth Free Church of Scotland by a breakaway group after there was a disagreement within the Church of Scotland. It closed as a church in 1931 and became the Girthon Church Hall.

The building has been used by many groups - scouts, guides, country dancers and during World War 2, when many Glasgow children were evacuated to Gatehouse, it was an extension of the school.

Unusually the building has a north/south orientation (most churches are east/west). The church bell had previously been used at one of the nearby cotton mills. The whinstone for the walls came from Ardwall Island (Larry's Isle) at Carrick shore.

Walk into the grounds of the Mill on the Fleet as far as the big water wheel.

Cotton Mills



The Bobbin Mill at Gatehouse-of-Fleet in 1847

As Gatehouse developed it was obvious that more employment opportunities were needed.

In 1785 James Murray signed a contract with a family named Birtwhistle. The Birtwhistles were involved in cattle droving and were looking for an investment. They had seen how water power could be used for mills near their home in Yorkshire. The Birtwhistles built 2 mills on this site - the back mill being 4 stories high. This was only the 5th mill complex to be built in Scotland.

The Murray part of the contract was to provide water power. The River Fleet, with an erratic flow and tides, was

unsuitable. Water was diverted from Loch Whinyeon, 3 miles away in the hills, via a tunnel and using streams and artificial channels, known as lades, to bring the water to a large mill pond at the eastern end of Gatehouse, and then down to the mills.

The mills were spinning cotton into thread and by 1794 the Birtwhistle Mills employed over 500 people, many of them children. Women and children were often employed in mills. One reason being that the threads would often break if the air was dry. Women had nimble fingers to knot the threads together and children were small enough to crawl under the machines and do the same.

They must have been noisy, dusty places to work - Robert Burns described the mills as 'Roaring Birtwhistles' when he visited Gatehouse.

These were not the only mills. There was another mill on this site, one in Ann Street and possibly another in Fleet Street.

The boom in cotton spinning was fairly short lived. By 1810 the Birtwhistles had closed their mills, as had the other mill owners. The top mill reopened in 1832, with about 200 employees, but closed again in the 1850s.



Why was the industry so short lived?

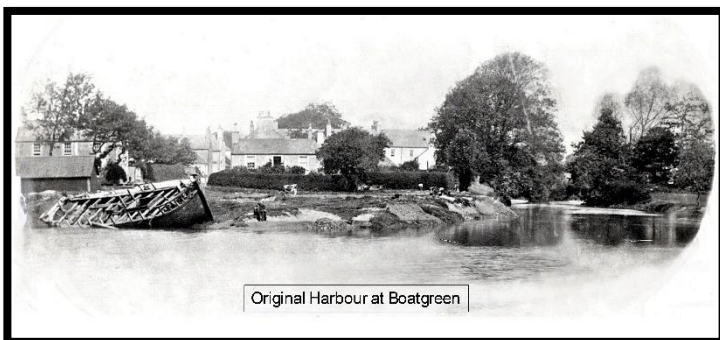
The supply of raw cotton from America was often erratic due to the American Civil War and also to the abolition of slavery.

The cotton came by ship to larger UK ports and was transferred to smaller vessels. Although these sailing vessels could reach the Fleet Estuary it was very difficult to navigate the river meanders to reach the small port at Boatgreen. *(Boatgreen is at the far end of Hannay Street - which is opposite the Ship Inn).*

A short stretch of the river was straightened in 1813 but the canal (1828) and deeper harbour of Port McAdam (1836) came too late to help the cotton industry.

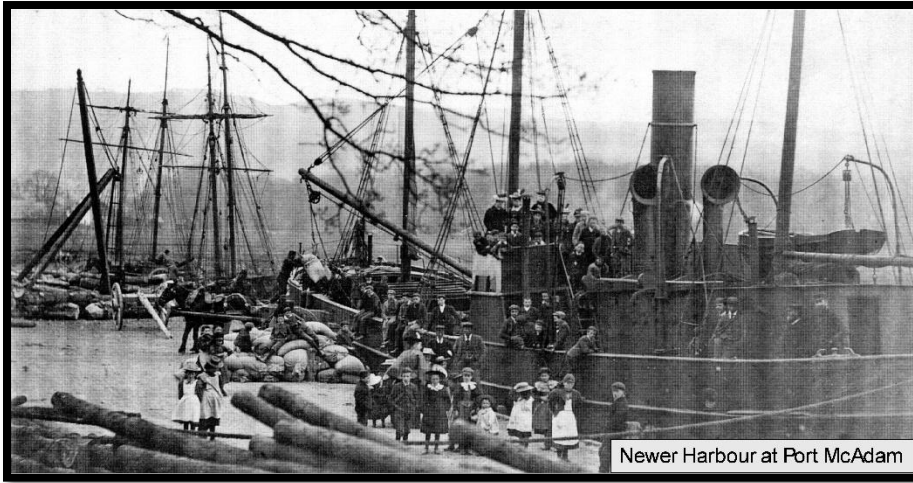
(There is a mile long walk out to Cardoness Castle then back via the canal side path to Port McAdam).

It was also difficult to sell the finished thread because road transport was difficult and



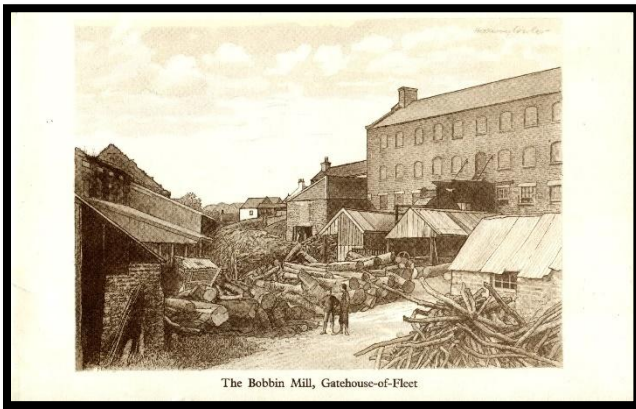
Original Harbour at Boatgreen

Gatehouse was a long way from the markets. However quite a lot of the thread was woven locally, some on looms in the mills but also on looms in houses.



The invention of the steam engine and its introduction into the cotton industry put an end to factories using water power. Gatehouse is too far from a coal field (although some coal was imported from Cumbria) to make steam driven mills viable. Gatehouse mills could not compete with larger steam driven mills in Lanarkshire and Lancashire.

The lower mill became a bark mill (used in the tanning industry) and then used for storage before it became an ivy covered ruin. In the 1990s it was renovated as The Mill on the Fleet visitor centre. The upper mill was converted to make bobbins and operated until a fire gutted the building in 1919. The building was then lowered and continued working until 1938. It became a ruin. It is now the base for the cycling charity Wheels of Fleet.



How did this affect the population of Gatehouse?

From a handful of people in 1760 the population rose rapidly to about 2000 by about 1800. After the mills closed the population gradually shrank back to about 1000 by about 1900.

Today the population is still about 1000 but there are many more houses for these people to live in.

The Bicentennial Bridge - footbridge

Opened in 1995 to celebrate Gatehouse being made a Burgh of Barony in 1795. James Murray applied to the King for this privilege as he had great hopes that his village would grow to become 'the Glasgow of the South'. The boundaries for the town extended out to Cardoness Castle, a distance up the valley and the area around the golf course.

The expansion did not continue but for many years, Gatehouse had its own Town Council headed by a Provost to look after the affairs of the town. It also was given rights to hold certain markets and fairs.

The Mill on the Fleet has an exhibition about Gatehouse history including a model of the 'Wee Toon'.

Continue through the mill grounds and climb the steps.

If you have problems with the steps you can go back out of the Mill grounds, turn left up the hill and take the first street on the left (Victoria Street) and walk along to the top of the steps.

Town Plan

Gatehouse is a Georgian town and is built on a grid system. The High Street (originally called Front Street) had larger houses and shops, the parallel back streets had workers homes, and the Cross Streets various workshops and stores.

Victoria Street, one of the cross streets. It had a blacksmiths and possibly a brass foundry (brass was used on the spinning machines). Still today there are joiners and builders workshops.

The Police Station (stone building on right side) was built in the 1860s. There was not a lot of major crime but there was drunken behaviour as there were many pubs in Gatehouse - including one in Victoria Street

on the corner of High Street. (Victoria Inn). The Police Station also had one of the few phones in Gatehouse in the 1920s - but no police car - the policeman used a bicycle.

The white building beyond the Police Station was the Fire Station.



Catherine Street runs parallel with the High Street. Houses were built from the 1770s from top end down to Victoria Street. Many of the houses were originally single storey but have had a second storey added later. In the early years few of the owners lived in the houses but rented them out to workers from the mills, shops and other jobs.

The quality of housing not always good and many were overcrowded. Often there were two, three or four families living in one building each family having one or two rooms and sharing an

outside toilet.

Walk up Catherine Street to the next junction with Digby Street

Look along Digby Street towards the High Street.

The houses at the corner of Catherine Street and Digby became dilapidated and were demolished to build a row of council houses in about 1930? – these were some of the first local authority housing in Gatehouse.

Digby Street

Like Victoria Street, Digby Street had a number of tradesmen. There was a blacksmiths half way along on the left side (now a holiday home) and there is still a joiner's workshop. There was a grain store, a salt house (important for preserving meat before refrigerators). and a council store - used during WW2 to collect

paper and iron salvage. At this end on the left in the 1930s there was an electric generator supplying street lights and lights for the Town Hall. Before this lighting came from the gas works at the other end of the town - where the nursing home now stands.

And of course there were at least 2 pubs - Purdies and the Robert Burns.

Before we continue along Digby Street - compare this photo with the large house on the opposite left corner. One of several shops in Catherine Street in days gone by.



Turn round and continue along Digby Street - away from the High Street

Walk past the terrace of brick houses (Roseberry Terrace) into Swan Street.

Two hundred or so years ago building with bricks was very unusual in this area. Houses were usually built with local stone e.g. whinstone & granite.

As part of the mill contract The Birtwhistles were allocated land to build workers' homes. They chose to build brick terrace houses similar to those in mill towns in England. The bricks were made locally. There was a brickworks at the bottom end of the town.

Once round the bend, in Swan Street, look over the stone dyke, opposite Swan Cottage.

This field is known as the Bleachfield. Some of the cotton spun in the mills was woven into cloth by workers (usually men) on looms in their own homes. Once woven it needed to be soaked and laid out in the sun to improve its appearance. In larger places, chemicals (lye - sodium chloride) was used but it isn't known if this was the case here or the sun naturally bleached the cloth lying on the south west slope. The wooden building was built as a Youth Hostel in 1950. Now a private house. Out of sight, behind the house, was the Town Ford The road continued over the field to the Anwoth junction near Blackloch Farm and on to Anwoth clachan. The ford continued to be used after the bridge were built as it was quite expensive to pay the bridge toll. e.g. In 1662 it cost 'Twelve pennies Scots money for each heid of bestiall and twelve pennies for each ten sheip'

Walk on but stop at the lane on the right. (Old Ford Road)

The continuation of the street is called **Birtwhistle Street** - after the mill owners. The census shows that many of the occupants were cotton weavers. There is a story that there was a spindle running through the attics of the terrace on the right with bands going through the floor to work the looms in each house. It was probable powered by a steam engine at the south end of the terrace. There is no written evidence of this - only hearsay.

Walk along Old Ford Road

As the name implies this was the road leading to the ford. The land alongside was used as a carting yard and later a small coal depot.

Cross Catherine Street and stop at the corner.

You are now at the top end of Catherine Street. The first house built in the street was the orange house on your right. Some houses in the street have been demolished.



One of the tall houses demolished was a lodging house. It was home to many single Irish labourers. Many Irish people came to work in Gatehouse. Some came during times of famine in Ireland using the Portpatrick to Donaghadee sea crossing. The Murray family also owned lands at Killibegs. Co. Donegal. They are said to have encouraged tenants in financial difficulties to come to Gatehouse for work.

The Irish workers were often employed as labourers draining the land and also digging the Fleet Canal in 1828.

Garden Street - parallel with Fleet Street, was known as 'Wee Ireland' because of the number of Irish inhabitants.

Most of the Irish followed the Roman Catholic faith but there was no Catholic Church in Gatehouse. A priest visited about once a month from Dalbeattie and rented a hall for services.

The tall house at this corner (10 Catherine Street) was for many years a pub - **Blue Bell Inn** - on Ford Road. When the landlord, William Munro died, the RC Church bought the property and converted the upstairs into a chapel served by a priest from Kirkcudbright. It was the RC Church from 1866 until 1971.



Walk along Old Ford Road to the gate - half way along.

Notice the length of the gardens. James Murray was keen that the people in Gatehouse had space to grow vegetables or keep some small livestock. The deeds of each house often stipulated if you could keep, for example, a sheep. He did not want Gatehouse to have crowded back to back housing like many mill towns.

Looking over the wall by the gate you can see the lade - which eventually reaches the big wheel at the Mill on the Fleet. The small brick building by the lade is one of the old shared outside toilets.

The houses at this end of Catherine Street (on the left) were some of the last to be built because this large **triangular piece of land was planned to be the market place. As a Burgh of Barony, Gatehouse had a right** to hold certain fairs and markets each year.

It was probably also used by the cattle drovers to rest overnight - flat land, fresh water for the animals and pubs nearby for the drovers.

The church beyond the gardens was built in 1817 - as a new Girthon Parish Church. It was originally a much plainer building - the tower and front porch were added in the 1890s. This church now serves Girthon and Anwoth and is also combined with the churches of Tarff, Twynholm and Borgue.

Walk to the end of Ford Road and stop at the corner opposite the clock. (Horatio Square)

As with the bottom end of the town, the roads entered Gatehouse from a different direction. Look up Ann Street opposite, there is a large white house straight ahead. Until 1821 the main road (Old Military Road) came straight down the street. The Ann Street house was built on the vacant old road site in 1828.

Alexander Murray, James' son, made many changes to the roads around his Cally estate, as some came close to his private residence at Cally. He paid for a new road into Gatehouse from the east, known as The Cut - the road we use today.

Look left up the road towards the War Memorial

The original mill pond was about twice the present size and the new road cut the pond in two. The pond on the left still exists beside the war memorial but the one on the right was drained for a garage and is now

awaiting redevelopment. A new toll house was built which served both the road into Gatehouse and the 'new' road to Laurieston.

Cross the road into Ann Street and stop near the Murray Arms.

The Murray Arms is believed to be the inn built by Richard Murray in 1661. In earlier times it was known as the King's Head and it has been extended a number of times since.

The small building between the Murray Arms and the Masonic Arms is known as the **Gaithouse**. This is believed to be the original tollhouse which gives Gatehouse its name. At the start of World War 2, a group of commandos were billeted around Gatehouse while they trained. This building was their headquarters.

The Murray Arms was not the only pub on the original road into Gatehouse.

The Bay Horse (low building on opposite side of road) was an inn from 1787 until 1896 and then for many years a joiner's workshop.

The Masonic Arms was built in 1812. The hall upstairs was used for Masonic meetings but also used by Girthon school for examinations, and for social functions and weddings.

Walk to near the top of Ann Street.

Look to your left and you can see another large mill building.

This was **Scott's Mill** - another water powered cotton spinning mill which operated between 1790 - 1812, using a different lade system. Although it had a short life as a cotton mill it has left an intriguing legacy. At the start of the Industrial Revolution factory owners everywhere were faced with a problem of having to pay many workers small amounts of money. There was a shortage of basic coinage throughout the country. One solution was to pay them with a trade token which could be exchanged at local shops for goods.



The **Gatehouse Halfpenny** is one such token - the only one in SW Scotland.

The Birtwhistles got round the problem differently. They bought goods for Mrs Sloan the landlady at the King's Head and she paid them in small change from her takings.

Scott's Mill became the Cally estate sawmill (still water powered) but has now been converted into flats.

Colonial connections

As you might expect from a town with cotton mills, there is a strong connection with the slave trade.

The McNish family were farmers in this area. They emigrated and had a rice plantation in Georgia, USA - named the Gatehouse Plantation and a sugar plantation in Jamaica (Cairnsmuir Planation). They sent money back to Gatehouse and built the large white house for their sister, at the head of the street, once the old road had been closed. They also owned Horatio Square (the large house you can see across the High Street from the clock).

The pretty stone terrace of houses (Neilson Square) was built by William Neilson in 1812. The Neilsons were a local family who made money in a printing business in Canada. There was also a larger tenement behind (now demolished). In 1841 6 families (11 people) lived in the front buildings, while 13 families

(60 people) lived in Back Neilson. A half brother, Nathaniel, also had business interests in Jamaica, and owned the Ship Inn at one time.

The handsome stone house (Roseville) next to Neilson Square was bought by the Campbell family in 1830 using the money they had been paid by the Government as compensation when the slaves they owned in were emancipated. (freed). It was later owned by the Rattray family who had strong connections with India.

Schools

Girthon and Anwoth each ran public schools. Anwoth School was out by the old Anwoth Kirk until it moved into Gatehouse in 1872 near the present day school on Dromore Road. Girthon Parish School was further along the road from Girthon Church. The two schools merged in 1927.

There were also a number of private schools. The Cally sponsored a school for children of estate workers. The boys' school was behind the long building next to the Bay Horse (opposite the Masonic Arms) - it still has a bell on the roof.

The girls' school was near Cally Lake - now a roofless ruin. The schools merged when the teachers from the two schools married and the girls' school moved to the left hand end of the Ann Street building. The school house was in the centre of the building. The school closes in 1914.

Later this building became the Cally Estate Office and found fame as the exterior of the pub, 'The Green Man' in the cult horror film 'The Wicker Man' (1973). The building is now 3 homes - one named Willow after the barmaid from the film.

The Murray family followed the Episcopalian faith. They built a house (The Parsonage), a chapel and a school (The Academy) on the hill through the gap in the wall at the top of the street. The school was not a success and a new chapel was built onto Cally House. The present day house 'Cushatwood' now sits on this site.

During World War 2 Glasgow Corporation Education Department rented Cally House as a boarding school for evacuee children. *(There is a film of this school in the Mill on the Fleet and on the www.gatehouse-folk.org.uk website)*

The chapel was used by the school but after the building became a hotel, the chapel was demolished and the Episcopal Church moved to Dromore Road, opposite the Ship Inn in 1909.



The house by the opening in the wall is known as Cox's Lodge. Some people think it may have been the site of a tollhouse. This actual building was a porter's lodge built 1828 at the entrance to the road down to Cally House. It included a small 'lockup' - in the days before there was a police station. It is named after Bert Cox who was a well known gardener at Cushat Wood and one of the founders (with Mrs Elizabeth Murray Usher) of the Gatehouse Cricket Club.

Walk back down to the High Street and walk down the left hand pavement.

The first houses in the estate village were built at this end of the High Street from 1763 onwards and the street was finished by 1788, although there was a break of 10 years from 1772 when the Bank of Ayr collapsed and house owners were in financial difficulty.

Many people left Gatehouse at that time for other parts of the UK and also abroad - e.g. America

There were rules set down in the feu agreements.

All houses had to be 2 storeys - built of stone (they could use whinstone from a quarry near the war memorial) and have slate roofs. Many of the houses used slate which came to Gatehouse by boat from Wales.

There were to be no outside stairs to the upper level and no dung heaps.

The buildings were built individually so all look a bit different but often built as a pair - one part a house, the other part a shop. (Old shop windows were often a bit lower than the house windows).

Look across the street at 11/13 and 15/17 Art & Books with the yellow doors. Both these buildings have lower shop windows. The Post Office has been sited in both these shops at different times.

Even in the 1960 there were a great variety of shops in the High Street. Several grocers, two butchers, two drapers, fishmonger, shoe shop etc. In earlier times we know of at least eight pubs and spirit dealers.

Stop outside 8/10 High Street (Alexandria).

For many years (1830s until 2001) this was an ironmongers.

From 1912 to 1958 it was run by the McMurray family. It served many purposes apart from ironmongery.

You could get your watches & clocks mended, buy jewellery, get photos developed and buy Gatehouse postcards, have your bicycle serviced and get your eyes tested.

They also had a petrol pump outside (one of 4 in the town before the garages opened at either end in town in the 1930s).

The photo shows the McMurray brothers outside the shop before the large plate glass windows were installed.

Walk on the chemists shop. (Gatehouse Pharmacy) and continue down the street

This has been a chemists since the 1870s. From an old shop fitters advert we know that the large windows were fitted in 1909. Perhaps the windows across the road at Fergusson, drapers were fitted about the same time.

Look across the street to 27/29 High Street - the building needing repair. This was another drapers run by Robert Jardine. The family owned the house, the shop and also the building next door (31) with the large windows. The latter building was the workshop where the tailors made the suits and other clothes.



More recently number 31 was a fishmongers. At the large window was a sloping shelf with cold water running down it to keep the fish on display cool.

In the 1940s this was one of the few places in Gatehouse where there was a refrigerator. Dr Craig, the local GP, had an arrangement with Willie Wilson, the fishmonger. The new medicines such as penicillin that

needed to be kept cool were kept in the fish shop fridge and the doctor had a key to access them day or night.

The building on the left side of Digby Street was at one time been a grocers/spirit dealer called Slimmons. In 1919 it was sold to Guilio Frullani. The Frullani brothers had come from central Italy to work in the copper mines up the Fleet valley, Johnny, as he was known, made ice cream and ran a cafe. He also sold fish and chips and had a billiard hall and indoor bowling area behind the shop.

Gatehouse also had an Italian barber - Alfonso Marcellino - known as Wee Alf who had a shop at 28 High Street with a red and white striped pole above the door.

The archway behind you led to a town well on the edge of the park. Later there were water pumps at several places along the street to supply water. The water quality was not very good - maybe one of the reasons for so many pubs - the beer was safer to drink than the water.

Continue down the street passed the Bakehouse (42/44 High Street). This was a bakery from 1792 until 1976. Notice the 'Sun' signs on the wall. This showed that the property had taken out insurance against fire, a common problem in bakeries, and could pay the fire brigade to put out any fires.

Across the road

The Bank of Fleet is the grandest house on the street. In 1786 this became the home of the Birtwhistles, the mill owners. By the 1830s the building had become a bank - hence the name of the current hotel.

The building next to the Bank of Fleet, now the charity shop, was for many years the Black Swan pub and then a grocers run by the Macadam family. A member of this family was responsible for building the new harbour by the canal in 1836. The harbour or quay is often referred to as Port Macadam.

The Gatehouse Store site was first feued in 1783 by the Kirkpatrick family. They ran a drapers/booksellers business until 1945. The longest single ownership on the High Street. The Kirkpatricks have another claim to fame in the town.

When James Kirkpatrick died in 1920. He left money in his will to set up a Trust Fund to start a town brass band which was to be called **The I'll Mak Siccar Band**. The name is said to be in memory of one of his ancestors, Roger de Kirkpatrick. He was with Robert the Bruce when Bruce killed the Red Comyn, a rival for the Scottish throne, in Greyfriars Church, Dumfries on 10th February 1306. Bruce was unsure that the Red Comyn was dead and de Kirkpatrick stabbed him again to make sure (I'll mak siccar).

The **Town Hall** was built in 1889 on the site of the Commercial Inn. Although Gatehouse had become a town in 1795, there was no town hall, and meetings were often held in the Murray Arms dining room. A group of local men, which included the Victorian artist John Faed, organised collections and fund raisers to build the hall. When it opened it had the largest single span roof in Kirkcudbrightshire. Sadly it always suffered from structural problems and was eventually demolished in 1978. The gardens opened in 1994. John Faed contributed by painting a backdrop for the stage, the view from his house on The Cut. This large picture is now in the Mill on the Fleet.

It was a well used hall for dances, concerts, visiting cinema, flower shows, prize givings and badminton. It was used by the local home guard - at one such meeting someone accidentally shot John Faed's picture.

The Town Clock which was built in 1871 was also funded by public subscription. The provost at the time is said to have travelled to Glasgow and Edinburgh and Liverpool and Manchester to visit folk who had moved there from Gatehouse to collect donations. It was designed by Pilkington of Edinburgh and built of Dalbeattie granite. It had a horse trough, a drinking fountain and dog bowls for the thirsty (now all filled in).

Horatio Murray Stewart of Cally gifted the clock.

The building with the steps and the rounded top window is the library. It was owned by Birtwhistles and is believed to have been the 'office' for the mills. It is called The Counting House in one census. Apparently there was a path up from the mills to the end of the 'library' garden where there was a pay office for the workers to collect their wages. They then could enter the High Street by the passageway. (Known locally as a pend). Conveniently Petrie's Pub was next door (in part of Apothocally). Later the property was owned by Horatio Murray Stewart of Cally who converted it into a library and reading room in 1857 for the people of Gatehouse. The property at the opposite corner was once the Angel Inn or Hotel. This is another McNish property with slave connections - Joseph McNish was from Savannah Georgia, USA.

We have come full circle and to the right and left are the tannery and brewery buildings. Hopefully you have enjoyed this walk through the history of 'Oor wee toon'

This completes our 2024 Gala History walk – we hope you found it interesting.

Margaret Wright

April 2025

More information can be found at www.gatehouse-folk.org.uk