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## Welcome Home

As with any war, it takes many months for the armed forces to be demobilised, prisoners of war to be released, and displaced people to find their way back to their homes.

Although the war ended in August 1945, it was not until September 1946 that a Welcome Home event was held.

As early as February 1945, a Welcome Home Committee was formed in Gatehouse, with the aim of 'how best the community could be of service to the ex-service personnel after demobilisation.'

The committee consisted of the Provost (Mr A A Stewart) and Mrs Elizabeth Murray Usher, representing the Town Council with representatives from British Legion, the churches, WRI, WVS, St Stephen's Lodge (Masons) and clubs such as the golf and bowling clubs.

### The committee laid out various aims:

- to fund a premise where ex servicemen could meet
- a memorial to the fallen - probably a memorial garden (*this never happened*)
- make it possible for relatives of ex servicemen to apply, on their behalf, for one of the new council houses being built in the town (*68 new homes were built in Gatehouse at this time*)
- a civil reception
- a commemorative fund - for British Legion to administer
- a welcome home fund for returning servicemen. Each ex serviceman was to receive a gift or memento.
- support for the Thistle Foundation. *This organisation was set up in 1944 to provide homes for disabled ex servicemen*

A target of **£2000** was suggested with a further target of £400 for the Thistle Foundation.

The British Legion decided to continue fund raising themselves as they had been collecting donations for some time and their main aim was to have a clubroom. They later gave each member a cheque for £5 but sadly no club room ever materialised.

Dances, collections, concerts and other events were held to raise money and £800 had already been raised by October 1945.

The largest fund raiser was the **Great Free Gift Sale** that was held on 20th October 1945 in Campbell's Garage, Fleet Street (*now Fleet Valley Nursing Home*), which was organised by Mrs Murray Usher. The gifts included all kinds of livestock, furniture and antiques, toys, jewellery, paintings, potatoes, plants and even 10cwt turnip manure! Teas served in the old Womens Land Army Hut, were provided by the Womens Voluntary Service and various local WRIs. The event was opened by the Earl of Galloway who had been the 1st Commanding Officer of the 7th KOSB, with whom many local men had served.

The catalogue lists a great many donors who lived in Gatehouse. Click on the catalogue.

