

YOUR PROJECTS

UNLOCKING GATEHOUSE

Rosemary Collins talks to a couple who run a website that celebrates the heritage of Gatehouse of Fleet in Scotland

Margaret Wright (née Hunter) grew up in Gatehouse of Fleet in Girthon, Kirkcudbrightshire, Dumfries and Galloway. She moved back to Gatehouse with her husband Graham after they retired in 2006, where they have dedicated much of their free time to family history. Their research into their roots has led to the creation of the website Gatehouse Folk (gatehouse-folk.org.uk).

“For many years Graham and I have been interested in our own family histories,” Margaret explains. “We have often found it helpful to have a local contact in the areas where our ancestors had lived, and we decided that when we retired we would try to help other researchers in this way.”

Gatehouse covers two parishes, Girthon and Anwoth, each of which has two graveyards. For their first project, the Wrights photographed and transcribed all of the headstones in both parishes. They shared

the records with Jim Bell, of the website Stewartry Monumental Inscriptions (kirkyards.co.uk). He in turn helped the couple to set up their own site.

Gatehouse Folk is now a thriving repository, sharing information about the town’s history and the family history resources available; photos and old postcards; and trees for Gatehouse families.

With permission from ScotlandsPeople (scotlandspeople.gov.uk), which holds the census returns for the country, Graham and Margaret transcribed the 1841–1911 census records to correct errors by transcribers less familiar with local people and place names. Copies of their transcriptions are available at Gatehouse Library, Gatehouse Tourist Information Centre, Stewartry Museum, and Dumfries and Galloway Family History Research Centre. The Wrights also transcribed the Girthon and Anwoth valuation rolls, which record the proprietor, tenant and rateable value of each property for 1859–1975.

In addition, the website holds PDF summaries of the Girthon kirk sessions, held to establish who was responsible for illegitimate children, from 1821 to 1863. There is also a list of the male heads of families in 1834, and an A-to-Z of names in the 1864–1895 Girthon Poor Law register.



Left to right: Bob McDonald, John McDonald, James Hunter (Margaret's grandfather), Alex McDonald and John McMurray in a blacksmith's in Digby Street

As more First World War records became available online, Graham and Margaret began researching the lives of all of the local men who were killed and are commemorated on the Anwoth and Girthon War Memorial. Their stories are now listed on the website, along with details of many who survived.

One story Graham and Margaret uncovered was that of the Davidson brothers. James, Peter, Robert and Nelson Davidson were all killed in 1917 in separate incidents. A fifth brother, Wilfred, survived the war and remained in Gatehouse for the rest of

his life. He became a successful businessman, and was made the provost of the burgh.

The Wrights

also marked the 75th anniversary of VE Day on 8 May 2020 by carrying out similar research into the Gatehouse men who died in the Second World War, and publishing their details on their website. Their plans for the future include updating the site’s ‘Who Lived Where’ section, which aims to identify who has lived in each house in the town, and working on a new section about Gatehouse artists.

“We are proud of what we have achieved so far and all of the feedback has been positive, which makes it all worthwhile,” Margaret says. 🌟

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TELL YOUR STORY

Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email rosemary.collins@immediate.co.uk

GET INVOLVED

GATEHOUSE FOLK
w gatehouse-folk.org.uk

The Wrights are appealing for help identifying local residents in photographs taken by postman William McMurray in the early 20th century. Please also get in touch if you can share photos, stories or family histories by emailing info@gatehouse-folk.org.uk.