

# Jack Nelson



Jack Nelson c.1937



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Jack Nelson was born in 1931, the youngest of three **children of John Nelson and Annie Davidson**. He had 2 older sisters, Margaret and Jean.

Jack's father, known as **Jock**, trained as a **plumber**. He fought on the Western Front during WW1 with the Royal Field Artillery and after he returned to Gatehouse, he worked for Jardine's the plumbers. In the 1930's he changed jobs and worked at Cally Palace Hotel as a **maintenance man**. The job at Cally Hotel came with accommodation at the Cally Stables, also known as Cally Square.

Cally was an upmarket hotel with just 23 bedrooms, all with private bathrooms. It was owned by the Stewart family from Fort William and was only open in the summer months. Many of the visitors had expensive cars which were kept garaged in lockups opposite the Cally Stables Gates.

Following outbreak of war in 1939, Cally Hotel closed and was taken over by Glasgow Corporation to be used as a school for 200 evacuees from Hillhead High School. During this period the building was referred to as Cally House School.

Jock Nelson continued to be in charge of maintenance.

The main accommodation, dormitories, dining room, chapel etc. were in the main building, along with some classrooms.

There were also 4 wooden huts on the lawn in front of the Cally which were built as classrooms.

The garages at Cally Square were used for woodwork classes and some science lessons. (the wooden panelling at lower levels of the walls in some of the school photos confirm that these pictures were taken inside the garages).

Cally Mains Farm provided a field where a rugby pitch was laid out.

The huts were each heated by a coke boiler at the end of each building and there was also a boiler in each wing of the main house. Mains electricity came to Cally in 1940.

Jack remembers the excitement of one of the huts catching fire. The Gatehouse Fire Brigade had been summoned and boys from the school tried to save the other buildings with buckets of water.

The wagon and pump arrived but the firemen could not get the pump started. An alarm was then sent to Castle Douglas but by the time they arrived, the hut had burned to the ground. Fortunately the other huts were saved.

Cally School was very self sufficient :-

1. Boys cut trees in the woods for the open fires.
2. Mr Cowie at Cally Gardens (Donald Cowie's grandfather) was assisted by pupils from the school to grow vegetables.
3. A large field between the Stables and Cally House was used for growing potatoes (now part of Cally Golf Course).
4. Milk was obtained from Cally Mains Farm in 10 gallon cans (cooled but not pasteurised). Jack's family also got their milk from Cally Mains.
5. Pigs were kept to the back left at Cally Stables - just through the archway behind the stables. It was another of Jock Nelson's jobs to feed the pigs and look after them especially when piglets were being born. Jack remembers his Dad bringing small lifeless piglets to the house. His mother wrapped them up and put them in front of the oven to revive them. When it was time to slaughter them, Bert McMurray (car mechanic and sometime butcher from Gatehouse) would do the needful in the area at the Square where the cars were washed so all the evidence could be flushed away. Jack's family always got some pork when a pig was slaughtered.
6. On Saturday nights, some of the pupils would come to visit the Nelson family and have their tea. Jack especially remembers Glen Lowther, Blake Thomson, Billy Fergusson and Pauline Pyrah. He also knew Roy Smith who later married fellow pupil Christine Smith. The couple came back to Kirkcudbrightshire after they married and lived at Hartburn Farm, Whinnieliggate.
7. The pupils had their own Home Guard unit and did exercises with other local groups such as Gatehouse and Borgue. They were not above playing pranks on each other during these exercises.

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