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## JOHN BUTT

### *The Industrial Archaeology of Gatehouse-of-Fleet*

GATEHOUSE-OF-FLEET, situated about midway between Dumfries and Stranraer [NX598562] on the River Fleet not far from the Solway Firth, is a rare and beautiful example of an arrested industrial village founded by the local laird in the eighteenth century and still maintained. John Ruskin tells of Thomas Carlyle's interview with Queen Victoria during which he assured her that 'there is no finer place or more beautiful drive in your majesty's kingdom than the one round the shore of the Stewartry, by Gatehouse-of-Fleet to Creetown'. With characteristic humour, Carlyle added that the next best was the road from Creetown to Gatehouse. A notable tourist centre and yet a source of satisfaction for the industrial archaeologist—that is Gatehouse today.

In the mid-eighteenth century Gatehouse was nothing more than an inn with a house or two at the gate of the avenue leading up to the Cally mansion of James Murray of Broughton and Cally. This mansion [NX600542] was the growth-point of the area. Built massively in 1763 in the finest Palladian style, it required a local population with various skills to support its household service and to maintain its fabric. Another motive for attracting population to the area was James Murray's desire to recoup his considerable building expenditure by increasing the value of his estate rental. As one of several improving landowners in Galloway, James Murray recognized the social necessity of providing for a population displaced by enclosure and land improvement. He directed the building of the village, and those to whom he leased ground 'were required to build their houses in a certain order and of certain dimen-

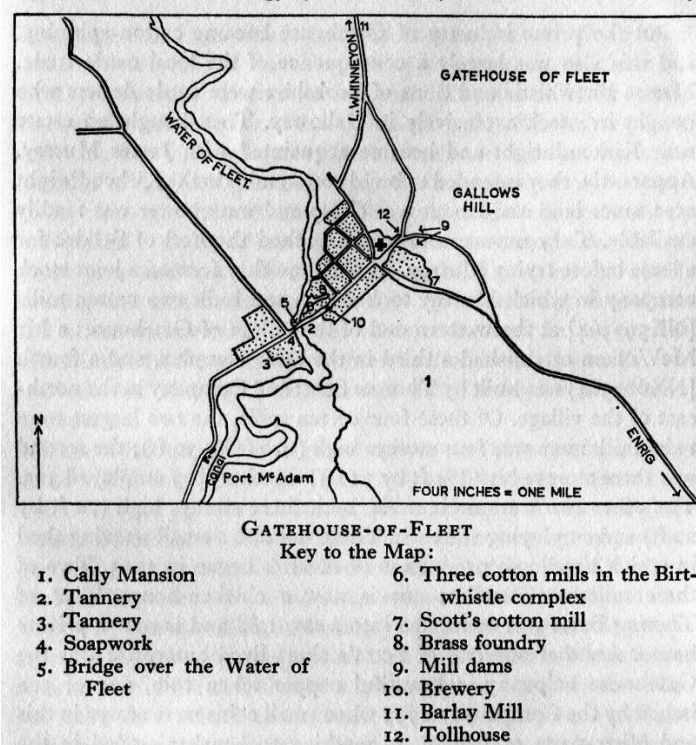
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sions'. The village of Gatehouse was erected on the flood-plain of the River Fleet within a mile of Cally House, near the existing inn and market on the main highway from Dumfries to Stranraer. At first two streets were built, divided from each other by gardens : Fore or front street lay along the highway and its houses were built two storeys high and slate-covered ; those in 'Back Street' were less imposing but just as orderly in their planning. By 1793 there were 160 houses in three streets 'which rise parallel from the river' and 1,150 inhabitants. By feuing land on very favourable terms to in-corners James Murray, according to Ralph Heron who visited Gatehouse in 1792, 'had soon the pleasure of seeing a fine village rise near his principal seat; more orderly in its arrangement, more uniformly handsome in its buildings, happier in its situation than perhaps any other village in Galloway'.

So populous and important did the village become that in 1794/5 James Murray successfully petitioned George III for a charter ; this was granted on 21 February 1795. 'The Burgh of Barony of Fleet' was to be governed by a provost, two bailies and four councillors. The right to a Saturday market and four fairs during the year was recognized. The fair was held along the highway from High Street down to 'Brewery Brae'. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the markets and fairs did well, since, apart from livestock and farm produce of the Scottish hinterland, cattle, horses, sheep and pigs were imported from Ulster to Portpatrick and had to pass through Gatehouse *en route* for other places. In 1812, for example, over 20,000 horses and cattle were brought over from Northern Ireland to the Solway ports, but this trade gradually declined in eighteen-twenties and eighteen-thirties, as Liverpool and Glasgow became more significant termini and markets for the Irish cattle-boat traffic.

The well-established cattle market of Gatehouse perhaps provided the necessary infrastructure for the development of industry. Before 1792 Murray had started a tannery [NX599563] with a Mr

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Davitts as manager ; Davitts ultimately became its proprietor and realized a fortune before he retired. His tannery building survives as does the smaller one [I\TX597562] of Samuel Menzies. A small soapwork [NX598562] erected in 1793 near the bridge over the Fleet was probably supplied with animal fats. Its effluents were a cause of local concern, since with lime-imports, which occasionally contaminated the Fleet, it was thought to have adversely affected the salmon fishing.

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But the prime industry of Gatehouse became cotton spinning, and this also was largely a consequence of the local cattle trade. Messrs Birtwhistle and Sons of Yorkshire were cattle dealers who bought livestock extensively in Galloway. They bought an estate near Kirkcudbright and became acquainted with James Murray. Apparently, they intended to build cotton mills in the Kirkcudbright area, since land and labour was cheap and waterpower was readily available. They unsuccessfully approached the Earl of Selkirk for a lease before trying Murray. About 1790 they formed a joint stock company in which Murray took shares and built two cotton mills [NX599564] at the western end of the village of Gatehouse ; a Mr McWilliam established a third in the same complex, and a fourth [NX603564] was built by Thomas Scott and Company in the northeast of the village. Of these four cotton mills, the two largest were twist mills : one was four storeys high (120 ft by 30 ft); the second was three storeys high (84 ft by 32 ft) ; together they employed 300. The other two were mule mills, both three storeys high (70 ft by 20 ft) and employing 'co each. There was also a small weaving shed in which handloom production of muslins began in 1793. Two of these mills are derelict ; one is now a chicken-house. That of Thomas Scott was converted into a saw-mill and is now a private house. Another survival of Scott's short-lived enterprise was the Gatehouse ha'penny, a beautiful copper token coin, one of 500 issued by the Company in 1793 when small coins were scarce in this and other parts of Britain. A machine tool-maker settled in the village specially to make and to repair cotton spinning and weaving machinery; a brass foundry [NX600564] was also established to supply the metal parts of what were still mainly wooden machines.

The power for the mills—and water for other industries—was made possible by an extensive lake and dam system from Loch Whineyon which was made to drain into a canalized burn by cutting a tunnel through a hill at a cost of about £1,400. Another lade, formed by altering the course of a burn, helped to sustain a

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joint large dam from which again the lades separated. One passed down the west side of the village along an aqueduct which served the brass foundry, a small brewery and two waterwheels of the Birtwhistle mill complex which produced 55 hp. The other passed down the east side and served Scott's mill and the two tanneries. Remains of this lade system are very extensive, covering over 5,000 yards, although the mill dam [NX603566] has been ineffectively and partially drained, leaving a clearly demarcated area full of marsh grass and reeds. Of the wheels, nothing remains but wheel-housing and axle mountings, although a print of 1847 shows that one wheel was overshot and the other undershot. In the derelict mill nearest the Fleet there is a mason-built mill-wheel stone, round and hollowed, through which the axle of the undershot wheel must have passed.

Little is known of the output or subsequent history of the Gatehouse mills. In 1792 when Heron visited Gatehouse, 200 of the labour force of 300 were children; the total wage bill was over £100 per fortnight. About 1810 the Birtwhistle mills went out of production until they were leased to Messrs James Davidson and Company in 1832. The fabric of the buildings was overhauled and up-to-date machinery was installed, including 74 power looms. In 1844 these mills employed 200 and produced 1 million yards of cloth per annum. One of the mills had been gutted by fire on 14 October 1840 but was quickly rebuilt and refitted. When on 14 September 1847 a testimonial presentation of a silver snuff-box was made to Henry Heywood, the manager, 84 employees contributed of whom 48 were women. This was the occasion for a painting of the cotton mills to be made. By the nineteen-twenties only 20 people were employed in one of the mills and they were making bobbins for other textile factories not spinning cotton. Despite the formation of a local Bobbin Mill syndicate to keep this going, the mill closed in the nineteen-thirties, and the building fell derelict. All three of the Birtwhistle complex are now in ruins and only stand because of the

permanent greenery, especially ivy, which supports them. The original owners have their permanent memorial in Birtwhistle Street [NX601567], a fine example of eighteenth-century industrial housing. The large-roomed top storey of these houses was reputedly so designed to accommodate spinning jennies put out to domestic workers. Some families were employed as outworkers weaving muslins on handlooms ; a ready market for these products existed in Glasgow and Carlisle.

When Scott's mill failed after James Murray's death, Messrs Halliday and Speirs, with Alexander Murray's support, established a sawmill there—an indication of the growing significance of forestry in the area. This sawmill is now magnificently preserved as a private house. Early in the nineteenth century a brickworks, first owned by a Mr Hornsby and later by his widow, was active. This, situated about a quarter of a mile to the north of Gatehouse, had an annual average output of 60,000 bricks. Nothing remains of this brickworks. Apart from the brewery near [NX599563] the Birtwhistle mills, there was a much smaller brewery [NX602565], employing only three men; this is now a private garage situated in Ann Street. Probably connected with these breweries, was the water-driven grain mill known as Barlay Mill [NX602573] just north of Gatehouse on the main lade system. Barlay Mill should be recorded because it was the birthplace of John, James, and Thomas Faed, a celebrated Scottish artist family of the nineteenth century, who did many paintings of Galloway well before Kirkcudbright became an artists' colony. It is well-known that such grainmills are readily converted; Barlay Mill is now the garage for the miller's house. The wheel has long since gone but the axle remains.

The district around Gatehouse shows many indications of past mining ventures. Copper was discovered near Rusco [NX590586], lead and zinc on the farm of Kirkbride [NX564559]. Mines were sunk and worked in 1844 by Richard Williams of Front Street, Gatehouse, who had come from South Wales, and Alexander

Murray and several of his descendants ineffectually ploughed their capital into such ventures. The richest copper mines were opened at Enrig [NX615547] in 1819: they were operational in the eighteen-fifties, and after closure in the late nineteenth century, were unsuccessfully reopened twice in the twentieth century. Enrig hamlet still has descendants of the Welsh and English copper miners living in the houses built for their forefathers. Nearby, just off the road to Newton Stewart there were lead mines and also at Blackcraig where there are remains of smelters built in the eighteenth century at the instance of John, Earl of Galloway and his brother, Admiral Sir Keith Stewart. Quarrying for good quality building stone was necessary first for the building of Cally House and then for the village houses, church and public buildings of Gatehouse.

Both James Murray and his son realized the special significance of developing docks and communication, although they had many precursors. The main post road had passed through Gatehouse since 642—before the village existed—because of the bridge [NX598562] over the Fleet. At first a timber structure, in 1729 it was replaced by a stone bridge. This has been successively widened on three occasions and remains after the widening of 1964 an excellent example of industrial archaeology, although no rival for the elegant Telford bridge at Tongland (1805) or for the graceful Rennie bridges at Creetown (1813) and Ken (1814). Highland regiments spent much of 1763 building a military road to Portpatrick, most of which still survives. The area is traversed by old drove and smugglers' roads and by more recent turnpikes. Alexander Murray was one of the Road Trustees responsible for the building of the Dumfries-Portpatrick road opened in 1807. Tolls were established to pay for its upkeep, and Gatehouse has a beautifully decorated and carefully preserved toll house [NX603565] at the bottom of Gallows Hill. Murray went to great trouble to divert the road round the estate of Cally, and at a personal expense of £3,000 had the cutting made for the present road through Gallows Hill in 1820.

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Undoubtedly, Murray's outstanding achievement in developing communications was the creation of the harbour of Gatehouse-of-Fleet. The Water of Fleet flows about three miles through the estuary to Wigtown Bay from the bridge which carries the main road. At the west side of the river is the parish of Anwoth; on the east, the parish of Girthon. Both parishes, but especially Girthon where Gatehouse's cotton mills and Enrig's mineral wealth existed, always depended upon the sea for transport of heavy goods, since the railway from Dumfries to Portpatrick, begun in 1858, bypassed Gatehouse by more than five miles, at the instance of later Murrays. A landing place existed in the parish of Girthon from much earlier times, as it indicated by the name Cally, probably derived from the Gaelic *Caladh*, meaning a port or landing place.

Until 1824 Gatehouse harbour consisted only of the lower reaches of the river, when a pier was formed by building a stone frontage on the Anwoth side of the river about a quarter of a mile below Gatehouse bridge and straightening the river by constructing a small canal, 1,400 yards long, to allow ships of up to 160 tons burden to reach the new pier. Thus Port McAdam [NX595527], the port of Gatehouse, came into being. The canal, begun on 17 June and opened on 3 October 1824 was estimated to cost £5,000 but, in fact, cost £2,204 3s 5d. This reduction was achieved by Mr Craig, Alexander Murray's factor, who instructed the 'navvies' to dig a trench along the line of the proposed canal and to deflect the river water to run along it to wash away the soil, until a canal of the desired width and depth was obtained. The front of the pier was protected by driving vertical posts into the water, some of them projecting above pier-level to form bollards. A line of equally spaced mooring posts was also fitted, a few feet from the water's edge. At a point opposite Cardoness Castle, some distance below the pier, a swing bridge was built, the piers on either side of the canal being built of local stone. This made access to the new coast road possible from the Cally estate. Murray's interest in this project was not

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entirely industrial; as a result of the canal over 170 acres of fertile land was reclaimed to form one of his best farms. The canal, although blocked by silt, still exists; so do the piers and bollards and the stone pillars upon which the swing-bridge rested. The sheds erected on the pier have been demolished. A stone retaining wall, at the back of the pier, served to support the bank adjoining the main road. A sloping ramp about eight feet wide, allowing direct access to the river, also still exists.

It seems that the small ships using the canal and Port McAdam's facilities relied upon the extreme range of tides in the Solway Firth for movement. In 1811 about twelve vessels were registered at the port, and the shipping agency for cargoes was in the hands of the McAdam family. Some idea of the use made of the harbour can be obtained from the following figures:

Year	Inward			Outward		
	Vessel	Tons	Men	Vessels	Tons	Men
1837	75	2,16	192	31	1,186	99
1838	83	1,876	197	3 <sup>1</sup>	99 <sup>1</sup>	92
1839	67	1,594	160	28	913	79
First half 1840	42	931	102	16	395	38

By 1840 the only shipowners in Gatehouse were James Kirkpatrick of Front Street and Robert McMaster of Fleet Street. Some local labour at Boat Green was employed making boats, using the local timber from the sawmill. The main imports were coals from Whitehaven, lime, raw cotton, herring and manufactures; the main exports were grain, cattle, hides, cloth yarn, soap and minerals ; copper ore was sent to Llanelly for the Welsh coppersmiths in empty herring barrels.

Gatehouse remained relatively prosperous until the eighteen-forties. Because of the amenities of Galloway great numbers of gentry were resident in the district; they must have imported their luxuries via the Solway ports. Hence, the existence of a wine com-

pany in Gatehouse at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Skilled workers were imported from England ; this not only increased the labour force but also the purchasing power available in the district. The cattle fairs and markets acted as magnets for other commerce. The number of coaching inns, the innumerable public houses, provide a crude index of general prosperity. So do the churches and schools. An episcopalian church and an academy for English children (both marked on an estate map of 1801) cost Murray a further £3,000 and indicates the significance he attached to attracting skilled workers. In 1817/18 the new church of Girthon was built in Gatehouse with pew-room for Boo. The slates for its roof were obtained from the quarry of Culreoch farm which was opened in 1817—and is now disused. The smaller church of Anwoth was replaced in 1828, and there was also a dissenting chapel in Fleet Street. In 1861 a local joint stock company, with a capital of £520 made up of 104 shares of each, promoted the building of St Stephen's Hall. The Clock Tower, dominating the northern approaches to the village, was built of Graignair granite in 1871 ; the Town Hall in 1885. A settled population, with comparatively civilized standards of behaviour had replaced the smugglers, the gypsies and the wreckers of the Solway, made famous by the novels of Walter Scott and S. R. Crockett. It was this change that produced the industrial archaeology of Gatehouse-of-Fleet.

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*Plates, pages 102-104.*

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