

This is a transcript of a newspaper article that appeared in the Galloway News on 16th September 1921 :

Galloway One Hundred Years Ago

Burgh of Gatehouse I

Gatehouse is the Arcadia of Galloway. Here all the beauty, grandeur, and wide diversity of nature's charms seem packed into the smallest possible compass and beautifully blended into one harmonious whole. Here –

“Smiling Spring it's earliest visit pays,
And parting Summer's lingering bloom delays.”

No words can portray, and even the love, fervour, and masterly brush of an artist like the late John Faed, fails to convey a complete or true impression of this beautiful town and its sylvan setting. Away towards the north the hills rise tier upon tier till the highest tops are lost to view in the fleecy folds of the snow-white clouds. Away towards the south the old castle of Cardoness peers out from the surrounding trees, like a grim sentinel keeping watch and ward, and linking mind and memory with the past and present. Beyond the tiny wavelets are leaping and dancing like molten silver in a sea of dark emerald green. Behind and above towers ridge upon ridge of rocky upland clothed in all the glory of summer loveliness. Far down below lies the lovely vale of the Fleet, with its green fields, wavy woods, and flowery meads carpeted with an endless variety of countless flowers, and watered by the sparkling river as it meanders along its rocky bed. On its banks the lambkins are disporting themselves in the summer sun, whilst numerous flocks and herds are quietly browsing on the bountiful profusion of nature's food. All around the ear is captivated by the busy hum of countless insects and the tuneful note of the feathered choir, and the sense of smell is gratified with the fragrance that perfumes the air. It is a scene which enraptures the soul, elevates the mind and raises the thoughts far above the sordid life of the city, or the worldly cares of mankind.

According to the Royal Charter granted in 1795, the proper name should be “The Burgh of Barony of Fleet.” Notwithstanding this, however, it still retains the old place-name “Gatehouse”. This is not only gratifying, but it shows how tenaciously how our old Galloway place-names retain their origin down through the centuries. It is interesting to follow the many derivations of names as given by various writers. Such derivations range from “Goithouse”, meaning “the presence of goats”; to “Gate-House”, from the house at the entrance to Cally Avenue; or the old Toll-house at the northern entrance to the town. These, however, will not stand the test of history, for the place was called “Gatehouse” more than a century before the *raison d'etre* of these derivations was in existence. Prior to 1662, a bridge, presumably wooden, had been erected over the Fleet, and, in this year, an Act of the Scottish Parliament was passed to permit James Murray, of Broughton and Cally, to rebuild the bridge, with power to levy tolls on all cattle, horses, sheep etc. for its upkeep, and also to re-imburse him for his expenditure. A house for the toll-keeper had of course to be built, therefore we have the Norse “Gata”, or the Anglo-Saxon “geat”, or old Scottish “gait”, a way, which along with the suffix “house,” forms “Gaithouse”, now modernised into “Gatehouse”. It is an established fact that in addition to this house, which subsequently became an inn, the first house built in the village of Gatehouse was erected in 1760.

The past history of this town has been vitiated by the assertion that a town of Fleet existed on the site of Gatehouse, and this assertion is supposed to be confirmed by Symson in his “Large Description of Galloway,” where he says – “At a place called Gatehouse of Fleet there is a market for good fat kine

kept on the Friday after the first Thursday, which is after the first Monday of November, and so every Friday until Christmas.” There is no doubt, however, that neither a village nor town existed on the present site prior to 1760.

From the two houses which existed in 1760 the village of Gatehouse sprang up. At that period, James Murray, of Broughton, not only offered liberal terms to feuars, but spared neither time nor expense in promoting the prosperity of the village thus formed, but also in establishing industries. It was due to his energy that the Cotton Mills were erected in 1790, under the management of Messrs Birtwhistle & Sons from Yorkshire. This factory seems to have been a Company concern, with a share issue. Messrs Scott & Co. also erected cotton mills on the north-east extremity of the town. These mills unfortunately had to be closed down owing to the introduction of the power-loom, and other improved inventions which revolutionised the cotton industry at that period. In 1810, however, the industry was resuscitated. The Birtwhistle mills were transferred to Messrs Davidson & Co., who not only repaired them but installed more up-to-date machinery. Under the new management, the mills were more successful. Two water-wheels, equivalent to fifty-five horse-power, were kept busy. The number of persons employed was about 200, whilst the output of cotton cloth averaged about one and a half million square yards. The water-power had to be brought from Loch Whinyeon, and in order to do this a tunnel had to be cut through the dividing hill at a cost of nearly £1400. The upper mill was destroyed by fire in 1840, but it was again re-built, and refitted with new machinery. Many families were also employed weaving muslin, which found a ready market in Glasgow and Carlisle.

In 1795, James Murray, had the village erected into a burgh of barony, governed by a provost, two bailies, and four councillors. A weekly market was instituted on the Saturday, and four yearly fairs. These fairs were fixed as follows :- (First) on the ninth of February, if Saturday, if not the Saturday after; (second) the 27th of June, if a Monday, if not the Monday after; (third) the 8th of October, if a Saturday, if not the Saturday after; and (fourth) on the 18th of November, if a Saturday, if not the Saturday after, each of these fairs to run six successive days. The fairs were not all held as fixed, but the market was duly held on the Saturday of each week, and a yearly fair on the first Monday after 17th June (O.S.). The fair ranged from the head of Front, or High Street, down to what was called the “Brewery Brae”. In the early part of the 19th century the market was a good one, as nearly all cattle, horses etc., were imported from Belfast to Portpatrick, and had to pass through Gatehouse *en route* for England. In 1812, over 20,000 horses and cattle were thus brought over, but the trade fell gradually off when the animals came to be shipped from Ireland direct to the English ports. The streets at this period were Front Street, Back Street, Fleet Street, Cross Street and Ann Street.

Mr Murray was also the medium by which a tannery was established, with Mr Davitts as manager, who subsequently became the proprietor, and realised a fortune. Davitts was succeeded by Samuel Blyth, Fleetvale Cottage. Another tannery was established by Samuel Menzies. Mr Murray was also instrumental in establishing a joint-stock Wine Company and Brewery, in which he, along with a number of gentlemen in the county, and a number from England, held shares, particularly Messrs Atkinson of Temple Sowerby, and Messrs Freeland, merchants in Liverpool. These companies were managed by persons from England. They did not turn out profitable speculations. A saw-mill was also established at Cally under Messrs Halliday & Spiers. Mr Hornsby, and subsequently Mrs Hornsby, had a good-going brick factory about a quarter of a mile to the north of the town, where the average out-put of bricks amounted to 60,000 per annum. Mr Credie had also an extensive nursery, with a good business connection. Copper being discovered near Rusco, and lead and zinc on the farm of Kirkbride, mines were sunk and worked under the agency of Richard Williams, Front Street.

Mr Murray now directed his insatiable business-like energy to the road and shipping facilities. The new road from Dumfries to Portpatrick was opened for traffic in 1807, and tolls established throughout for its maintenance. In order to remove this road a little further from the mansion house of Cally, he, at his own expense, made the cutting through Gallow Hill. It cost £3,000. The river was then navigable by a tortuous route from Fleet Bay to the harbour. In order to further facilitate the shipping industry, he constructed a canal in 1824, which not only shortened the route, but also reclaimed a large portion of good land and allowed vessels of 160 tons burden to come up. This canal was commenced on the 17th June 1824, and opened for traffic on the 3rd October following at a cost of £2200. The amount of land reclaimed extended to nearly 170 acres. In 1837, the number of vessels arriving at the port was 75 with a tonnage of 2163, and the outward bound 31 with a tonnage of 1186. The only ship-owners in Gatehouse at this period were James Kirkpatrick, Front Street, and Robert McMaster, Fleet Street. David McAdam was the shipping agent for cargoes etc.. The imports and exports consisted chiefly of grain, lime, coals, minerals and manufactures.

The result of all these beneficial activities was, that a large influx of Englishmen and their families settled in Gatehouse, and in order to provide them with religious worship and church ordinances according to the ritual of their own church, Mr Murray founded an Episcopal church and Academy for the education of their children at a cost of about £3000. The Reverend Matthew Vicars was both clergyman and rector.

The burgh was now a busy hive of industry, and from a population of under 1000 in 1790, it rose to nearly 1832 in 1841. Most of the houses were two stories in height, and the inhabitants, though wages were low, seemed very comfortable and contented. The police court records show a remarkable absence of cases. Poaching was practically unknown, and smuggling had completely ceased. At this period Gatehouse was amply supplied with churches. Prior to 1818 there was the old parish church of Girthon. In 1817-1818 a new and substantial church was built for Girthon in Gatehouse, capable of accommodating 800 sitters. The ministers were Robert Gordon in 1801-1817, and Robert Jeffrey 1818-1843. The old church of Anwoth, made famous throughout the world by the saintly Rutherford, was still standing, along with his house at Bushy-bield. The old church was erected in 1627 and measures a little over sixty-four by eighteen feet, whilst the walls were only ten feet high. It had a barn-like appearance, and the seats and pulpit were of oak. The pulpit was much perforated, cut, and defaced, and many of the seats were carved with initials. One of the most prominent was J.B., thought to be John Bell of Hinton, and another J.W., supposed to be James, or John Walker whose names appear among the signatures to the petition from Anwoth in 1639. The old bell was said to have been presented by Lady Kenmure, and formerly used as the dinner bell at Rusco. The ministers of Anwoth one hundred years ago were the Rev. Thomas Turnbull 1809-1839, when he was succeeded by the Rev. Thomas Johnstone. It was here, in this quiet secluded little church that Rutherford made his voice and power felt in the kingdom

“No Sabbath-drawler of old saws

Distilled from some worm-cankered homily”,

but a powerful exponent of the Divine Love, and the pure and holy principles of Christianity. A monument was erected to his memory on Boreland hill in 1842. Bushy-bield was demolished in 1628. What a pity these old landmarks have fallen under the neglect, or vandalism, of man, for, are they not history defaced, leaving only the remnants which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time. The old church continued to be used as a place of worship till the new one was built in 1828. There was also a dissenting chapel in Fleet Street, and the Episcopal Church, formerly referred to.

The educational facilities in Gatehouse were exceptionally good. William Armstrong had a school in the Old Lodge. He was a famous teacher. George Dunn was master of the Parochial School in Front Street, and also a teacher of great repute, so much so, that many English pupils came to him as boarders. Alexander McAdam, Cross Street, had also a small adventure school., and Eliza. Wilson another in Front Street. Dr. Thomas Murray, of literary fame, had also a small adventure school near the Lake of Cally in 1807.

Among the gentry and clergy of that period, resident in Gatehouse and neighbourhood, may be mentioned

John Brown, agent to William Murray of Broughton
William Campbell, Roseville;
Major George Colomb, Knockbren;
Mrs Mary Gordon, Gatehouse;
Miss Hannay of Kirkdale;
Robert Hannay of Rusco;
Rev. Robert Jeffrey, Girthon Manse;
Mrs Jean McCartney, Gatehouse;
Alexander McCulloch, of Kirkcraigh;
James Murray McCulloch, of Ardwall;
Sir David Maxwell, of Cardonness;
Alexander Murray, of Broughton and Cally;
The Misses Jean and Janet Smith, Front Street;
Alexander Stewart J.P., Barharrow;
Mrs Dorothea Thomson, Front Street;
Rev. Thos. Turnbull, Anwoth Manse;
Mrs Yorstoun, Castramont.

A branch of the Union Bank of Paisley was introduced, and carried on a good business for several years. About 1829, a branch of the Commercial Bank also was established (drawing on Jones Lloyd & Co., London) with Richard Mundell, agent. On its discontinuance, a branch of the Western Bank of Scotland was established in 1839.

The postal facilities were fairly good. Letters arrived every day from Dumfries at half-past one, and despatches were sent out every morning at one. Letters from Portpatrick arrived every morning at one and despatches were sent out every afternoon at half-past one. Janet McKeand was postmistress.

As usual the innkeepers and vintners were well represented :-

“The Anchor”, Anthony Hewetson, Fleet Street,
“The Angel”, Peter Wilson, Front Street,
“Bay Horse”, John Biers, Ann Street,
“Black Swan”, James Roy, Front Street,
“Blue Bell”, William Munro, Back Street,
“Commercial”, David Sproat, Front Street,
“The Crown”, Thomas Fowler, Front Street,
“Crown & Thistle”, James Murray, Fleet Street,
“Earl Grey”, David Kelvie, Cross Street,
“Masons’ Arms”, John Finlay, Ann Street,
“Murray Arms”, John Nish,
“Robert Burns”, James Robison, Cross Street (now Digby Street),

The “Robert Burns” is now, or was lately known as “Burnside”, and was presumably the poet’s favourite howff when he visited Gatehouse, and so named after him. McKune was the landlord of the inn which he visited in 1794, and if any old residenter could trace McKune they would identify the inn.

“The Royal Oak”, Alexander Purdie, Cross Street,

“The Ship”, James Cowan, Fleet Street,

“Shoulder of Mutton”, David Wilson,

“Thistle”, John Dennistoun, Front Street.

The doctors were represented by James Bennett, Charles Kennedy, and James Watson, all in Front Street.

The legal fraternity were conspicuous by their absence and represented by James McNish, town clerk.

Among the various trades, industries and shopkeepers may be mentioned :-

Farmers -	William Black, Goatend; John Gardiner, Murraytown; William Ramage, Boreland.	William Brown, Enrick; James & John Rain, Cally Mains;
Bakers :-	Margaret Hunter, Front Street; Jean McRobert, Back Street; Jean Parker, Front Street;	Marg’t McMinn, Front Street; John Miller, Front Street; Janet Porter, Front Street.
Boot & Shoemakers :-	John Dryburgh, Front Street; Murdoch, Front Street; Samuel Telford, Back Street.	Mary Blyth, Front Street; James McTaggart, Front Street; Rob’t William McLean, Cross Street;
Fleshers :-	James Forsyth, Cross Street; James Wilson, Front Street;	John Muir, Front Street; Peter Wilson, Front Street;
Cartwrights :-	Samuel Henry, Fleet Street;	Alexander McMinn, Back Street.
Grocers, Shopkeepers, and Dealers in sundries :-	James Campbell, Front Street; Robert Coltart (and tallow chandler), Front Street; Agnes Dalziell, Front Street; John Donaldson, Front Street; Margaret McMinn, Front St.;	James Bain (and ironmonger), Front Street. Thomas Campbell, Front Street; John Denniston, Front Street; Thomas Fowler, Front Street; Hugh Milligan, Front Street;
	Jean Parker, Front Street; Alexander Haining, Cross St.;	James Forsyth, Cross Street; David Kelvie, Cross Street;
	John McMillan, Back Street; Robert Murdoch, Fleet Street; James Porter, Fleet Street;	James Miller, Ann Street; Martha Pollock, Fleet Street; Peter Shannon, Fleet Street.
Blacksmiths :-	James Rain, Front Street; Archibald Halliday (and nail maker), Back Street; Alexander McDonald, Cross Street.	James Turner, Front Street;
Linen & Woollen Drapers :-	James Kirkpatrick (and merchant), Front Street; William Menzies, Front Street.	James Campbell, Front Street;
Painters & Glaziers :-	Andrew Payne, Front Street;	Joseph Tait, Front Street.
Stonemasons :-	William Hume & Sons, Front Street; Charles McGae & Bros, Front Street; James Thomson, Front Street;	John McClive, Fleet Street;

	William McKie, Fleet Street;	John Stewart & Son, Fleet Street.
Tailors :-	John Clinton, Front Street;	William Garraway, Front Street;
	John Kennedy, Front Street;	James Walker, Front Street;
	William Graham, Cross Street;	David Walker, Fleet Street.
Milliners & Dressmakers :-		Jean Bell, Front Street;
	Elizabeth Carmont, Front Street;	Janet Carson, Front Street;
	Jackson & Duncan, front Street;	Catherine McGeoch & Sisters, Front St.;
Among the miscellaneous may be mentioned :-		John Hannah, saddler, Front Street;
	James Bell, hoopmaker, Front Street;	
	Andrew Findlay, watchmaker, Front Street;	
	William Gordon, auctioneer, Front Street;	
	Hugh Hopkins, musician, Front Street;	
	Mary Hyslop, straw hat maker, Front Street;	
	James McAdam, wool-carder, Front Street;	
	James Morrison, maltster, Front Street;	
	Peter Murray, skinner, Front Street;	
	Hugh Pollock, tin-plate worker, Front Street;	
	Margaret Rae, druggist, Front Street;	
	John Johnstone, linen weaver, Back Street;	
	James Kirkpatrick, stamp-distributor and collector of taxes, Front Street;	
	Wm. D McMillan, bookseller, Fleet Street.	

The travelling facilities were not very good. The Royal Mail passed through the town to Dumfries from Portpatrick, calling at the Murray Arms every morning at one, and to Portpatrick from Dumfries every afternoon at half-past one. The carriers were as follow :-

To Castle Douglas,	James Robison, from his house in Cross Street;
and	Mr Reside (from Wigtown) every Tuesday
To Creetown,	Peter Walker, every Tuesday & Thursday;
	Alexander McQuaker & Mr Reside every Thursday;
To Dumfries	James Robison & Mr Reside, every Tuesday;
To Edinburgh	Samuel Mouncey, every Saturday;
and	Mr Penicuik, once a fortnight;
To Glasgow	Thomas Walleit & David McClure, Thursday, alternately;
To Kirkcudbright	James Lees, every alternate Friday;
To Newton Stewart & Wigtown	Mr Reside, every Thursday.

From the foregoing *resumé* of the birth, trade, industry, and natural beauty of Gatehouse, it will be at once recognised that no other town in the Stewartry had such a splendid start in life, or was blessed with such a public-spirited and open-handed superior, as the late James Murray of Broughton and Cally. He grudged neither time, energy, nor expenditure to make it the most prosperous industrial town in the South of Scotland, but, alas! Like many another dashing upstart in trade and industry, Gatehouse failed to redeem the many bills of promise it had made. Since 1841 it has gone down in the industrial world. Its rich natural facilities lay neglected, the thousands of pounds spent on its factories, waterways etc. have been lost, and the energy of its inhabitants has lapsed into lifelessness. Is there no one among the sons of Gatehouse public-spirited enough to take up the question of a light railway in order make some use of the great natural beauty, minerals, or water-way facilities with which the district abounds?

James Affleck