

## “Places of Worship” walk

### Start at the town car park.

For a small town, Gatehouse has had a surprising number of buildings used for worship.

Gatehouse exists within two parishes - **Girthon** on the east of the River Fleet, **Anwoth** on the west.

Before Gatehouse evolved as a planned town, each parish had its own church.

**Girthon Kirk** is 2 miles outside the town on the road to Sandgreen

**Anwoth Kirk** is 1½ miles north west of Gatehouse.

These churches were originally **Roman Catholic** until the Reformation in the 16th century when they became Church of Scotland (**Presbyterian**).

The 17th century saw turbulent times when Royal interference tried to impose **Episcopalian** ideas on the Church of Scotland. **Covenanters** were people who refused to comply with Episcopalian beliefs. They were forced to hold services secretly outdoors and were treated very harshly. There are graves to Covenanters in both old kirkyards.

**Samuel Rutherford**, minister of Anwoth between 1627 and 1638, whose monument can be seen on a hill to the west, was very much against the Episcopalian ideas and was banished from Anwoth for adhering to his beliefs.

As well as providing pastoral care **Churches** were important in the past as they **organised local records** (births, marriages and deaths), **Poor Law** provisions and **education** within their parish.

The first houses in James Murray's planned estate village were built from 1763 onwards but there was **no church in the town until into the 1800s**.

### Walk to the car park entrance and look across the road

#### Rutherford Hall

The building across the road was built in 1844 as the **Anwoth & Girthon United Free Church of Scotland**. There had been disagreements within the Church of Scotland about how it should be run resulting in **The Great Disruption**.

The minister of Girthon, Rev. Robert Jeffrey, and others from both Girthon and Anwoth joined together as the **Free Church** and raised money to build a new church. Prior to completion of the building, the Free Church group held services in the **Masonic Hall** in Ann Street.

The new church building was unusual in that it has a north/south elevation. (Most churches face east/west towards the Holy Land). Much of the building is made of whinstone - from **Laurie's Isle** (Ardwall Island) at Carrick.

The tower was added later - with a bell from the Upper Birtwhistle Mill.

By 1929 the Free Church had reunited with the Church of Scotland and the building became the Church Hall for Girthon, known as the **Rutherford Hall**. It is named after Rev. Samuel Rutherford, although he had no direct connection with this building.

*Over the years it has served many purposes.*

**Church activities** - Sunday School, Bible classes, Women's Guild, nativity plays, Scouts, Guides, Brownies and Cubs.

During **World War 2**, the roll of Gatehouse School was significantly increased by evacuees and the Rutherford Hall provided extra classrooms.

A **gym** (run by policeman PC McClymont). **Dancing classes**, There was a **billiard room** in the basement.

**Sales of work**, jumble sales and art and craft exhibitions.

After the Town Hall was closed it hosted **dances** with visiting bands. The Bay City Rollers played here before they were famous.

After it was sold by Girthon Church it was converted into flats and retail units (e.g. books, antiques and crafts). For a period, it housed a history exhibition 'The Way We Were' run by Lynne & Roger Hampshire.

If it is open, why not pay a visit to **Ochre Studio** on the river side of the building. Inside you can see the church bell and some of the church plaques.

### Keep to the north side of **Fleet Bridge** and pause at the corner opposite the Ship Inn.

There are no churches in Fleet Street but there is a religious connection.

Number **17 Fleet Street** (on the same side as the Ship Inn) was owned by the **Watt family**, lint millers at Skyreburn. Charles Watt drowned in 1863 and the property passed to his nephew **George Darling Hall**. George was from Preston, Lancs. and was the **first person in the UK to be baptised into the Mormon faith**. He later emigrated to join other Mormons in Utah, USA in 1850, but the house was still owned by the family in Utah until 1897.

### Turn right up **Dromore Road** and stop at St Mary's Episcopal Church.

#### **United Secessional Church**

This church, known locally as '**The Wee Kirk**', was built by an earlier breakaway group from the Church of Scotland known as the Secessionists. It has windows commemorating John Knox and Martin Luther, both 16th century church reformers. The word Knox was later removed from the window when it became an Episcopalian Church.

A manse was planned to be built in the field next door (now the Ship Inn garden).

When this church reunited with the Church of Scotland the building was rented to the Episcopal Church. In 1909 the building was sold - both the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopalian Church were interested. The building was sold to the Episcopalians - as 'the lesser of two evils'. It then became **St. Mary's Episcopal Church**.



### Continue a few yards up **Dromore Road** to the corner of **Riverbank**.

Diagonally across the road is the Community Centre.

#### **Gatehouse Community Church**

Within the Community Centre is a room used by the Community Church which is described as a Pentecostal Church that started in 2000, originally called the Gatehouse Christian Fellowship. Meetings were at first held in supporters' homes and then at the Ship Inn, before being located in the Community Centre.

### Turn right into **Riverbank** and walk along the edge of **Burgher Park** before turning right towards the river.

To the left of the park are two new houses. These are built on the site of the **Church of the Resurrection Roman Catholic Chapel** which had been blessed in 1971, replacing the earlier Chapel at **10 Catherine Street**. The priest came from Kirkcudbright. The building had a unique design whereby the chapel could be extended into the church hall.

Regular services ended in 2015, and the final Mass was held in 2020.

There were many Roman Catholic residents in Gatehouse. Many had come from Ireland in the early 1800s to work in the mills and as navvies, draining land and digging the canal and The Cut. For many years a priest travelled from Dalbeattie to hold services in a rented hall once a month, usually the Masonic Hall. Birth and marriage records of Roman Catholic Gatehouse people were registered at Dalbeattie - in Latin.

**Continue to walk through the park, over the Bicenteny Bridge, left past the Mill on the Fleet and up the steps to Catherine Street. Walk up the street almost to the end, stopping at the junction with Ford Road.**

In 1850, **10 Catherine Street** was purchased by the Roman Catholic Church. It was served by a priest from Kirkcudbright who held services weekly. This building was formerly the Blue Bell Inn. The chapel closed in 1971 when the congregation moved to the new **Church of the Resurrection** at Riverbank.

**Continue up Catherine Street and turn right into Church Street.**

**Girthon Parish Church** opened in **1817**. By this time the population of Gatehouse was over 2700 and Girthon Kirk was too small and too far outside the town. The church was paid for by Alexander Murray of Cally. He was the sole heritor. In Scottish law a heritor was a landowner who was compelled to provide for the upkeep of the local church. In **1890** the tower was added as well as a staircase and the balcony. In 1975 Girthon and Anwoth churches combined and in 1990 the parish was enlarged to include Borgue. By 2005 it became **Gatehouse of Fleet Parish Church**.



When the church moved into the town, so did the **Girthon Parish School** and the **cemetery** - to a sites further along Castramont Road to the left. The stained glass windows came from Cally House Chapel.

**Continue to High Street**, stopping opposite the Clock Tower to look up Ann Street.

#### **Ann Street**

There are no churches in Ann Street now, but in the early 1800s, a **Parsonage** with an **Episcopal Chapel** and an **Academy** was built at what is now called **Cushat Wood**.

**Look up to the top end of Ann Street to the right**, beyond the high wall and modern bungalow, to see where The Parsonage was located, in the woods.

The Murrays at Cally were Episcopalians so James Murray built this chapel for his family but also for the large number of English workers who had moved to Gatehouse. The parson was also the school teacher.



#### **Cally House Chapel**

James' son Alexander had a chapel built onto Cally House in 1837 and the academy and the chapel at the Parsonage were demolished. In 1877 a new chapel was built at Cally House. *(Seen on far left of photo)*

Cally Estate workers were allowed use this for baptisms and weddings. The chapel was used until 1909 when the Episcopalian congregation moved to St Mary's Church in Dromore Road. During World War II, when Cally House was used by evacuee school children from Glasgow, the chapel was used by the school for assemblies. The building was demolished in 1990, however 3 of the stained glass windows were gifted to Girthon Parish Church in 1947.

### **Masonic Hall**

The hall above the Masonic Arms has been used by different religious groups at different times. e.g. by the Roman Catholics.

Between 1814 and 1840 a **Baptist Mission** regularly visited Gatehouse. Sometimes the meetings were held outdoors, or in friend's homes but often in the Masonic Hall. They may also have been held in the Murray Arms as the landlord, Mr McNish was a known supporter of this church and a friend of the minister David Gibson.

The Baptist Mission were keen supporters of the **Teetotal Society** which was started in 1837 and supported by several of the employers in the town e.g. Mr Newbiggin, manager of the cotton mill.

### **This is the end of the walk around the places of worship in central Gatehouse**

**Postscript** Other churches outside the town that you might like to visit.

A **Congregational Church** is believed to have existed in the first part of 19th century but its whereabouts is unknown. There is a gravestone at Girthon Kirk to Rev. Archibald Miller, who died in 1836, **pastor of Gatehouse Congregational Church for 29 years.**

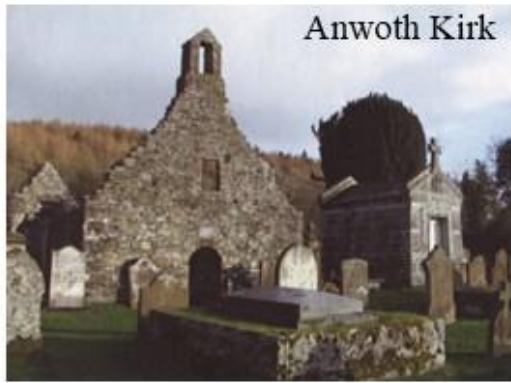
**Anwoth Kirk** and **Anwoth Parish Church** - a pleasant 1½ mile walk. The new church was built in 1827, along the road from the old kirk. The last service there was in 2002.

**The Railway Carriage** was at Gatehouse Station - six miles outside Gatehouse. A Royal Carriage was gifted to the people who lived at remote Dromore Station to used for services and other community events (e.g. carpet bowling). Served by the ministers from Anwoth and Kirkmabreck (Creetown). No longer exists but Creetown Heritage Centre has lots of photos of this old Royal Carriage.

**Cardoness Chapel** - by the sea on Cardoness Estate. Originally built as a prayer house in the early 1700s, it was replaced by the existing chapel in 1768. Later ladies on the estate made use of it as a changing place while bathing. Now restored used for weddings and sometimes Ecumenical services.

**Kirkandrews** - on the Borgue Road to Kirkcudbright. Occasionally still holds services. This church was built by James Brown of Knockbrex on the site of a much older church. Kirkandrews parish was amalgamated with Borgue Parish. It has a fireplace inside to keep people warm in winter.





Anwoth Kirk



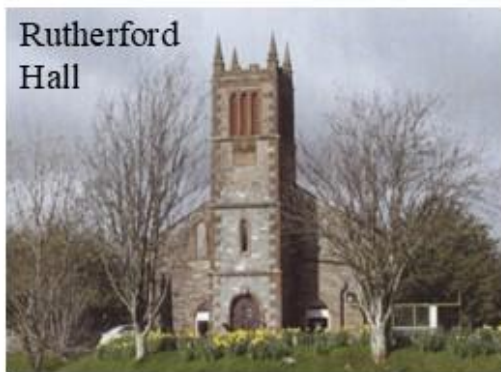
Girthon Kirk



Anwoth Church



Dromore Railway Carriage



Rutherford Hall



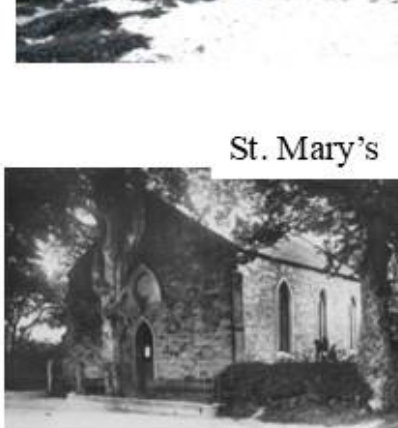
Church of the Resurrection



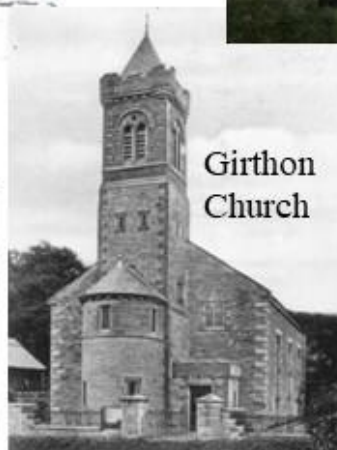
Cardoness Chapel



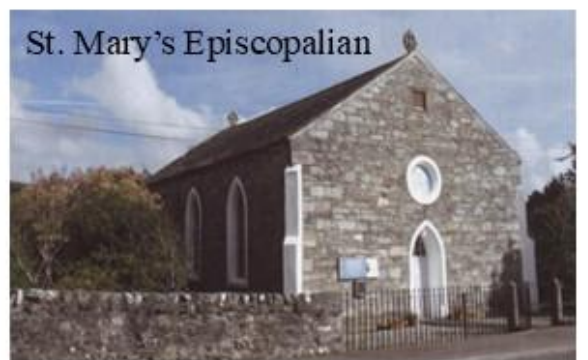
Cally Chapel - far left



St. Mary's



Girthon Church



St. Mary's Episcopalian