

Elizabeth Murray Usher (née Baillie)

Elizabeth Evelyn Baillie was born on 5th February 1903, her birth being registered in St. George's, Hanover Square, London.

Her father was Lt. Col. Frederick David Baillie of Ilstone Grange, Leicestershire (1863 - 1924).

Her mother was Alexandra Helen Cavan-Irving. (1877 - 1946).



Betty Murray Baillie in 1917

Although Betty, as she was known, was born in London she spent much of her young life at the family home at Ilstone Grange, and she was educated at Lansdowne House, Edinburgh. She also spent time in Gatehouse as her grandfather James William Baillie had inherited the estate of Cally & Broughton from a cousin in 1904.

The family added Murray to their name as part of the inheritance arrangements for Cally. On the death of her grandfather in 1906, her father became the laird of Cally and inherited the estate but sold the Broughton part to help estate finances.

Cally House was let for most of the time between 1904 and 1932, so the Murray Baillie family used Cushat Wood as their home when in Gatehouse.



Cushat Wood

Her father died in 1924 and Elizabeth Murray Baillie inherited the Cally Estate, an estate of over 40,000 acres, spread over several parishes around Gatehouse.



Cally House (rear)

On 14th December 1929, Elizabeth Murray Baillie married Neil John William Heriot Usher at Girthon Church, Gatehouse, and their reception was held at Cally. The couple added Murray to their surname. From then on Betty was often referred to as EMU. The wedding was a cause of great celebration in Gatehouse. A picture card was sent to many people in the town, and the children were included in the celebrations:



"When Mrs. Murray Usher was married at Cally House in 1929 all the children from the school were invited to the house. The older ones were marched through the park to Cally while the youngest were ferried there in the estate shooting lorry with its rows of seats. On arrival they were all lined up and each presented with a commemorative medal and a silver threepenny bit - some of which are still in the possession of older residents"

*Written by Jackie Paterson in Gatehouse Memories.
Gatehouse of Fleet Bicentenary Committee 1995.*

The Murray Ushers arranged for a renovation of Carstramon House, the old factor's house further up the Fleet valley, to become their home. They lived at Cally House while this was happening. Elizabeth and Neil had one son, James Neil, born in 1931. Sadly the marriage was not a success and the couple parted company in 1937, but are believed to have remained friends until Neil died in 1989.

When EMU inherited the Cally Estate, it was in financial difficulties. This was a problem that had plagued the estate for generations as the main sources of income - the old industries in Gatehouse - had mostly closed. There were also issues caused by complicated inheritance agreements in the past. She made it her job to bring the estate into the 20th century. She sold Cally House and a large area of Cally Park to the Forestry Commission, hoping that it would also bring employment to the town. Later large areas of moorland were also sold to the Forestry Commission.



Carstramon House

She bought back the Murray Arms Hotel and along with the caravan park at Sandgreen and the chalets at Carrick encouraged the tourist trade whenever she could. She encouraged fishing and shooting, two activities that she herself enjoyed and took a keen interest in the many farms on the state. She started the first Tourist Information Centre opposite the Murray Arms and opened a gift shop (The Gift Tae Gae Us) and also a coffee shop in the old Gatehouse building.

She had many ideas for improving Gatehouse such as a footbridge over the Fleet and the renovation of the old mill. Both these ideas eventually came to pass but sadly not before her death in 1990.

EMU was known for her strict control over Gatehouse and was not unknown for her to 'order' a change of roofing material or paint if it did not fit in with her plans for the town.

The chalet residents at Carrick remember EMU's early morning 'inspections' and the rules about what paint they were allowed to use.

"Mrs Murray Usher ran the shore through the Cally Estate in those days and could be seen driving round in the early morning on an inspection. George Wishart remembers that she drove an Armstrong Sidley Sapphire. All huts had to be painted the regulation 'Usher Green', the shade of which seemed to change annually. George remembered the paint being sold at the Sandgreen shop in tins marked 'war department'."

Memories of Carrick Shore (Carrick Residents Association 2000)

Houses in Gatehouse had similar 'rules'. She was often quoted as saying that residents could paint the walls of their houses any colour they chose, so long when it dried, it was white!

Willie McMurray who was a joiner on the Cally Estate said " She was always on the top of everything and she had an eye like a hawk. Once I was erecting a wicket gate up at Woodfoot, and she came whizzing past in the car. I thought she hadn't seen me, but later, when I went back down to the office, the factor told me that I had one post higher than the other. I cycled all the way back up (the valley) and sure enough, one post was half an inch higher than the other!"

Most people in Gatehouse respected her and realised that she had the best interests of the town at heart although 'Madam' as she was often called, usually got what 'Madam' wanted.

Jack Henderson in a poem to EMU on her birthday in 1983, put it rather well.

verse 1

A wee lass came tae Gatehouse Toon,
Wi' buttoned bits an' weel starched goon,
She said, when she had dandered roon,
This hame wull date for me.

verse 2

Later on, she had a dream,
O' hooses white wi' background green,
She worked hard tae create this scene,
Produced a valley trim an' clean.



verse 6

We criticise her frae time tae time,
An' claim that as oor right,
But let outsiders criticise,
An' they are asking for a fight.

verse 7

Some tourists say she owns us a'
We laugh; but make nae fuss,
For they have got the facts mixed up
Because SHE belongs tae us.

She had an interesting relationship with some of her estate workers. Gamekeeper, Jack Henderson communicated with her by poem, especially if he disagreed with her on some point. She would often reply in verse.

Bert Cox, her gardener, had known EMU since she was a little girl at Ilstone Grange. Bert came to Gatehouse when the family moved to Cushat Wood. He always called her 'Elizabeth' - probably one of very few people in the town who was allowed to do so.

Willie McMurray, the estate joiner remembered being made to swear on the Bible, when given the job of destroying some important estate papers, including some Penny Black stamps, but he also remembered that EMU never forgot his birthday or Christmas.



Bert Cox

Christmas was a time when many people in Gatehouse and friends much further afield received a special Christmas card.

See separate section on these cards :-

<http://www.gatehouse-folk.org.uk/detailpage.asp?d=78&ID=8>

This was also the time of the legendary parties at Carstramon. Willie McMurray remembered

" Christmas was hectic as we had all the staircase to hang with boxwood and laurel garlands, and we had them all to make. All the doors were removed from the drawing room, the dining room and the study, and most of the furniture from the drawing room was taken to the attic - two floors up."

EMU took a keen interest in all aspects of the town, serving on the Town Council and many other organisations. She was awarded the Freedom of the Burgh of Gatehouse of Fleet in April 1973, the first Hon. Burgess of the Town. Her many interests are listed on the programme for this event – see below.



Mrs Murray-Usher of CALLY, J.P.

Superior of the
Burgh of Gatehouse-of-Fleet

MURRAY-USHER of CALLY. Mrs Elizabeth Evelyn. Born London, 1903. Only child of Lt.-Col. Frederick David Murray-Baillie of Broughton and Cally and of Mrs Alexandra Helen Murray-Baillie, née Cavan-
Irving. Educated at Lansdowne House, Edinburgh. Married 1929—Neil Usher (marr. diss.). One son. Superior of the Burgh of Gatehouse-of-Fleet since 1924. Was a Member of Gatehouse-of-Fleet Town Council 1941-46. Sometime President of Gatehouse District Agricultural Society (originally Cally Agricultural Society—Founded 1864) and of Gatehouse Sheep Dog Trials and founded Gatehouse Cricket Club in 1928. Was Burgh Representative to the Stewartry County Council 1945-46. Served on the Education Committee as a co-opted member 1945-47, and again from 1961-64 (Further Education, Bursaries, Boarding and Transport, Joint Consultative Sub-Committees, Chairman of the Western Area Sub-Committee 1961-64). Has represented Anwoth and Girthon on the Stewartry County Council since 1959, serving on the following Sub-Committees: Health 1945-47, and from 1959—Roads and Roads Safety from 1964; Children's 1959-1969 and Social Work from 1969—; Probation 1961-69; Carlingwark House Sub-Committee 1961-69 and Planning 1945-47; and from 1964—; Vice-Chairman of Planning Committee since 1964. Is a Member of Sub-Committee on Areas of Great Landscape Value and Tourist Development and since 1971 a Member of the South-West of Scotland Development Authority. Was a Member of the South-West Consultative Group from 1967 till its termination. A Member of the Western District Council since 1959 and was chairman 1961-64. Was a Council Member of the Galloway Cattle Society 1948-1950 and 1959-1961 and has been Convener of the Stewartry Drystone Dyking Committee since 1961. Became a Member of the Scottish Tourist Board and of the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland in 1969 and was a Council Member of the National Trust for Scotland 1967-1970 and has been Scottish Tourist Board Representative on National Trust Council since 1970, and has been a member of the Scottish Economic Council since 1971.

Occupation, interests and recreation: Landowner, Farmer, Hotelier. Long-term Planning and Conservation, Music, Sketching, Fishing.

On the 31st December 1982 she was awarded an O.B.E. for public services in South West Scotland.

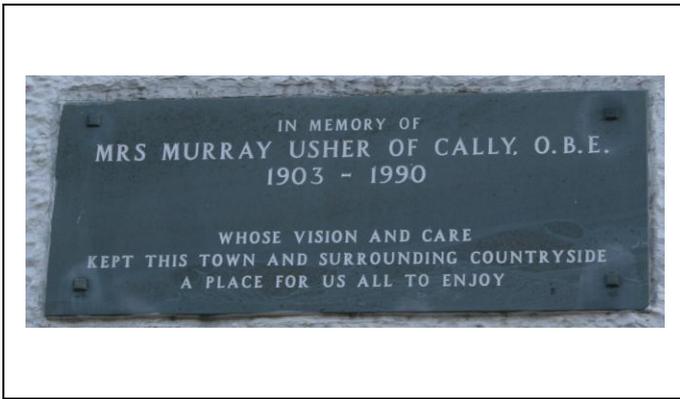
She also liked to encouraged young people.

In 1964, for the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth, she arranged for a competition at Gatehouse School. The winners, Eileen McLellan and Margaret Hunter, were taken to Stratford upon Avon by Mr Waddell, the headmaster and his wife, where they saw 2 plays and visited various other attractions, all paid for by EMU.

She also enjoyed sport and was keen to encourage a cricket club in town. When she was approached about the formation of a club in 1928, Alastair Dott, the local doctor's son remembered that she said she would allow a cricket ground to be created in the Cally Park, on one condition - that she could also play! She had a enjoyed cricket when she lived at Ilstone Grange as a youngster. Gatehouse Cricket Club still use an Emu bird as their symbol.

She also encouraged the creation of a golf course and her name appears on many of the sports trophies in the town.

Elizabeth Murray Usher died in 1990. She is commemorated on a plaque outside the old Cally Estate Office in Ann Street, and at the entrance to the new Burgher Park which leads to the footbridge over the River Fleet which she had long suggested.



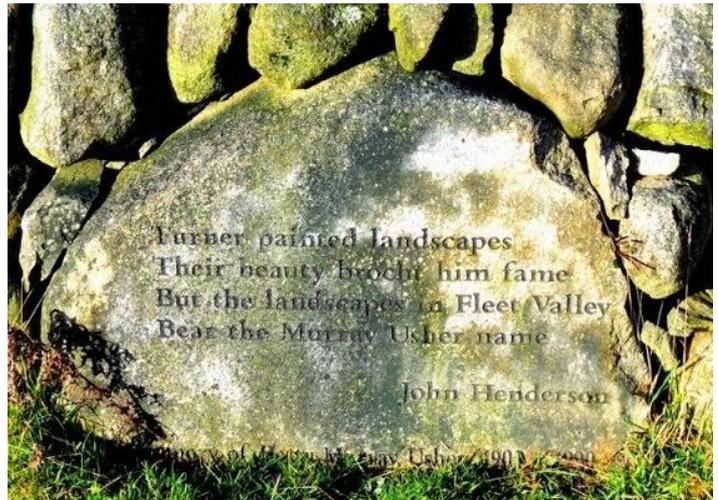
In the small car park at "Knocktinkle" on the Laurieston Road, which looks up the Fleet Valley, much of part of the original Cally Estate, a large Boulder is inscribed with the words:

Turner painted landscapes,
 Their beauty brought him fame,
 But the landscapes in Fleet Valley,
 Bear the Murray Usher name.

This is the second verse of a poem written by Jack Henderson to EMU, probably to celebrate her award of OBE.

The first verse of the same poem is also a good epitaph:

Yer hans hae carefully moulded,
 The Gatehouse o' this day,
 Yer stamp upon the local scene,
 Wull never fade away.



1986 Mrs Murray Usher with grandson Peter and son James