

The Imperial Gazetteer of Scotland. ed. Rev. John Marius Wilson,

2 vols., no date given but data given up to c.1865, compiled between 1852 and 1865.

p.720-721. Gatehouse-of-Fleet, a post-town and small sea-port, and seat of manufacture, chiefly in the parish of Girthon, and partly in the parish of Anwoth, Kirkcudbrightshire. It stands on the river Fleet, 1½ mile above the head of Fleet-bay, 8 miles from Kirkcudbright, 50 from Port-Patrick, 33 from Dumfries, and 105 from Edinburgh.

The scenery around it is magnificent. Spread out from the river is a beautiful, luxuriant, romantic vale; rising up on three sides, are congeries of hills, variously clad with heath and verdure, or cinctured and crowned with plantation, and climbing away in the distance till they raise bald summits to the sky, and look down upon the lowlands with the savage aspect of defiance to cultivation; and, on the south-west through a broad cleft in the mountain-screen, the pellucid bosom of Fleet-bay glitters in the reflected rays of the sun, or exults beneath a gorgeous drapery of clouds. Nor does the situation contribute less to health, and to the purposes of traffic and manufacture, than to the soothing of the imagination and the tutoring of taste.

Yet, though lying on a navigable river near its influx to the sea, - though traversed by everything passing along the great thoroughfare between Dumfries and Port-Patrick, - and though exerting a command as to facilities of intercommunication over an extensive range of country, it possessed, about a century ago, only a single house, or, as a town, was still to be called into existence.

Gatehouse was then nothing more than 'a house' at 'the gate' of the avenue leading up to the mansion of Mr.Murray of Broughton, the proprietor of the soil. But when, in consequence of that gentleman offering very advantageous terms of feu, and exhibiting well-digested plans for drawing an influx of prosperity, the town was fairly commenced, it made, for a series of years, very rapid progress towards importance, and even gave promise of becoming an influential seat of manufacture,

So early as about the beginning of the present century, it had four cotton factories, a fair proportion of hand-looms for cotton weaving, a brass-foundry, a wine company, a brewery, a tannery, and workshops for nearly every class of artisans; and, though possessing a population of only about 1,200, it had so diffused the spirit of manufacture and enterprise among the rural inhabitants of an extensive circumjacent region, as to hold many of them in a state of subserviency to its aims of social achievement. Improvements were made to facilitate the navigation of the Fleet to the sea; a canal or aqueduct was cut from a lake several miles distant to bring down a sufficient waterpower for the driving of the factories; a public library, a mason lodge, an academy, an Episcopalian chapel, and various other institutions indicated transition to something resembling burghal life; and appearances, in general, seemed to menace the Glasgow of the west with the energetic rivalry of a Glasgow of the south.

But Gatehouse – like many a dashing upstart in trade – was unable, at the day of reckoning, to withdraw all the bills of promise it had endorsed; it lost, somewhat suddenly /

/ suddenly, several of its appliances of prosperity; and though still a place of importance, and likely to continue so, it has egregiously failed to fulfil the expectation which had been formed of it, and can scarcely be said to have made material progress during the last forty years.

Gatehouse as to the aspect of its streets, the neatness of its buildings, and the entire grouping of its burghal landscape, is decidedly the most handsome town in Galloway, and is equalled by very few in Scotland. The larger part of it on the left bank of the Fleet, has, as to its main body, the form of a regular parallelogram, a sort of miniature imitation of the original New town of Edinburgh. The street which stands on the highway between Dumfries and Port-Patrick, and forms the principal thoroughfare, is particularly neat and uniform, Most of the houses of the town are two stories high, and covered with slates. A Handsome stone-bridge spans the Fleet, and connects the Girthon district with its Anwoth suburb. A neat parish church, built in 1817, and containing 714 sittings, adorns the parallelogram. There are also in the town a Free church and an United Presbyterian church; and only about a mile from it is the Anwoth parish church; but the Episcopalian chapel, though under a deed of endowment which renders it capable of being revived, has been taken down. Two cotton factories, employing upwards of 200 persons, are still in operation; and one of these is a re-edification, with improvements, of a factory which was destroyed by fire in 1840. There are likewise in the town or its near vicinity a brewery, a brick manufactory, and an extensive nursery. A

canal, cut in a straight line along the river, at an expenditure of £3,000, by Mr Murray, supersedes some defects in the natural navigable capacities of the Fleet But the river itself is stemmed by the tide up to the town, and brings up on its bosom vessels of 60 tons burden. The exports are principally grain, and the imports coals and lime. The aggregate yearly tonnage probably does not exceed 1,200 outwards, and 2,200 inwards. The town has offices of the Union Bank, of the Bank of Scotland, a savings' bank, a news room, several friendly societies, a variety of schools, and a telegraphic station. A weekly town market is held on Saturday; a weekly cattle market, in November and December, on Friday; and a fair on the first Monday of June, old style.

Gatehouse was erected into a burgh-of-barony by a royal charter, dated 30th June 1795. Its magistracy and council consist of a provost, two bailies, and four councillors, annually elected by the resident feuars or proprietors of houses within the burgh. There is also a town-clerk, who is annually elected in like manner. There are no other office-bearers. The jurisdiction exercised by the magistrates is chiefly confined to civil causes; and the average number of cases does not exceed 20 per annum. The magistrates also take cognizance of the smaller police offences and punish offenders by fines, which are wholly appropriated towards remunerating the officer for his trouble. The burgh has no property, debts, or revenue, and, of course, no accounts, annual or otherwise. The police act was adopted in 1852, with good effects /

/ effects; and the assessment under it is the only local tax. A justice of peace small debt court is held on the first Saturday of every month.

Population in 1841, 1,832;
 in 1851, 1,750;
 in 1861, 1,635.

Population of the Girthon section
 in 1841, 1,413;
 in 1851, 1,323;
 in 1861, 1,245.