

Dr Alastair Christie

Doctor in Gatehouse 1951 - 1965

Our thanks to James Christie, son of Alastair, for providing the notes below.

Alastair Malcolm Christie was born in London in October 1914 into a medical family, both his father and grandfather having been doctors. His grandfather, **Dugald Christie**, spent 40 years in China as a Medical Missionary, founding a hospital and medical school in Mukden – now Shenyang. Alastair's parents were **James Malcolm Christie** and **Annie Douglas**. Annie, daughter of a Church of Scotland Minister (Rev. George Douglas), came from Moffat.

Although living in London the family remained much attached to its origins in Glen Orchy and any free time was spent in the Highlands

After school at University College School, London, Alastair graduated MB ChB in 1940 from the University of Edinburgh, like his father and grandfather before him. Wartime meant that on graduation he served as a Surgeon Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. He saw service at the evacuation of Dunkirk and equally the Normandy landings as well as serving on destroyers escorting East Coast coal convoys from Leith to London. The end of the war found him in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).



Like many of his generation, it was a time of which he rarely spoke..

After demobilisation he worked in several positions in hospitals in England and also Dublin. It was as a Resident Physician at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford that he met his wife **Hilary Allen**, a young anaesthetist. They were married in August 1947, settling in South Oxfordshire. In 1951, he was appointed by the recently established National Health Service to succeed Dr Craig in Gatehouse. With two small children (James & Judy), the family moved from Oxford to Gatehouse. Two more children (Neil & Claire), were born in Gatehouse.

In the early days, Consulting Rooms were rented from Misses Rubina and Alice Muir, at Laurelbank while the family lived at 3 Riverbank. In 1953 they had a house, complete with Surgery and Waiting Room, built at Planetree Park (now the Manse).

These were early days for the National Health Service and the medical world was “feeling its way”. Working conditions were not easy, the contract with the NHS to supply a 24 hour service, 7 days a week throughout the year was a tough one for a single handed doctor covering a very large area - any time off meant that a replacement had to be found, paid and lodged at his expense.

He was much supported by his wife Hilary, her own medical qualifications and experience proving invaluable, not to mention the obligatory telephonist/secretarial work which she carried out unpaid!. Hilary practised anaesthetics at dental surgeries in Kirkcudbright and Castle Douglas, as well as at Dumfries Royal Infirmary.

Although time for leisure pursuits was in short supply in Gatehouse, Alastair Christie managed to participate in trout fishing expeditions, often with Jack Henderson, Alan Campbell, Jimmy Straiton, Alan McLellan and Billy Cowie. The stuffed prize trout from Loch Grannoch that once resided in the bar of the Murray Arms was caught by Alan Campbell on one of these expeditions. On arrival at the loch Alastair discovered that he had forgotten his reel and Alan Campbell said he would wait, fishing from the shore whilst Alastair went back to collect his reel (a long hike over the moors in those days). Mr Campbell caught the fish when Alastair was away and it was rumoured by the wags that the Doctor had driven down to Gatehouse and acquired the trout from Willie Wilson, the fishmonger. On another occasion, a fisherman arrived at the surgery with a trout fly firmly embedded behind his ear. Normally this would be removed by pushing the hook right through to the barb and then clipping it off. But on this occasion this was out of the question as the said hook was the only one catching any trout that day and the patient had been ordered to return with the fly intact. He thus returned to his companions with a few stitches, the fly in one piece and ready for further action.

Towards the middle of the sixties it was becoming apparent to Alastair and Hilary that his health was beginning to suffer as a result of the conflict between the NHS 24/7 contract and the quality of service he wished to offer to his patients. In 1965, he regrettably resigned from the National Health Service. His beloved patients, in recognition of his dedication, presented him with a very fine gold watch as a departing gift. Initially he went to work as a Civilian Medical Officer attached to the RAF at Leconfield in East Yorkshire. In 1967 he joined a five doctor practice in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, where he remained until retirement in 1979. The following year Alastair and Hilary Christie retired to Warborough in Oxfordshire, the village where they had started married life. He died in 2009 aged 95 followed by Hilary in 2017 aged 94.