

# Our Class of '62 – schooldays remembered

Eleven former pupils of **Gatehouse Secondary School (S1) in 1962** met for a reunion dinner at The Murray Arms on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Of those, 8 had started school together in 1953/54 in Mrs McGaw's infants' class, when there were 30 pupils in the class.

Many only came to Gatehouse school for a short time (often farm workers' children) and those who lived outside the town came to school by Campbell's bus.

Ian McClelland from Skyreburn Primary joined us in S1 while Munro McKie from Creetown and Willie McKay joined soon afterwards.

Sadly, 3 members of our original S1 class - Robert Welsh, James Carruthers and Josie Hope have died.



Several **important changes** took place during our stay at Gatehouse School.

Dr James Russell, left, (known as Doc Russell) was the headmaster of both the primary and secondary until 1963, after which Mr George Waddell (right) took over the role.

Who remembers Doc Russell taking our class to his house to watch Princess Margaret's wedding on his tiny TV in 1960 ?

Mr Waddell (right) was very keen on drama and encouraged us to take part in debating competitions.



For many years both primary and secondary classes were held in what is now the Community Centre with extra classes provided by pre-fab huts (near the current health centre) and the old Fleetside School (domestic science and woodwork). The refectory was also a separate building which also served as a gym (with a concrete floor!).



The Refectory



The new secondary school was opened in 1964 so we had the last year or so of our schooling in this new building, which now houses Gatehouse Primary School.

Our year were the first to sit the National 'O' grade exams in 1965 at Gatehouse School. To boost the class numbers, none of us were allowed to go to Kirkcudbright Academy after our 11+ exams in Primary 7, as was the previous practice.

The school leaving age was still 15, so those not sitting the exams left Gatehouse School in 1964. Three of us (Eileen McLellan, Margaret Hunter and William McKay) went to Kirkcudbright Academy to sit Highers. Others like Mary

Lockhart and Andy Carson went to Further Education Colleges, some joined the Forces (David Thomson & Munro McKie to the Royal Navy, Ian McClelland to the RAF) and others to jobs and apprenticeships.

## Teachers



Most of us fondly remember **Mrs McGaw**, our Infant mistress. Eileen remembered a large cracker on the classroom wall at Christmas



from which she got a fairy for her tree at home.

She also remembered Mrs McGaw giving us each a Smartie on Friday afternoon and telling us how well we had done that week.

Margaret remembered the class band in which, much to her disgust, she was given a triangle to play. The band played 'The Dambusters March' at a school concert.

Mrs Somerville, who taught P6/7, was renowned for her strictness, copious homework and endless class tests, but she also had her fun side. She wrote a very funny play for a school concert about Dads doing their children's' homework which mainly starred the boys from the class.

Andy Carson remembered pacing out and drawing a huge map of Gatehouse with Mrs Somerville. Margaret says it partly inspired her to later study geography.

Mr Parlane (primary & art) was also a favourite - for most of us, our first male teacher.



## Secondary



Most of us have unpleasant memories of learning maths and science with Mr 'Long John' Somerville. His skill at throwing the blackboard duster was legendary!

However Andy enjoyed being taught chemistry by him.

Corporal punishment, in the form of the belt or tawse, was commonplace throughout the school. When delivered by one of the female teachers it was tolerable, but when Long John dealt the blows it was feared even by the boys - and it happened frequently.



Miss Kelly (French, geography and music) and Miss ' Noddy' Clark(English & German) were also favoured by some.



Margaret remembers Miss Kelly introducing us to classical music - Dvorak's New World Symphony and Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture - and singing negro spirituals. Eileen enjoyed being introduced to Shakespeare's plays by Miss Clark.



However Mr Alistair Sinclair (woodwork and art), left, and Mr Archie Graham (art), were mentioned by all as great teachers.



Several girls enjoyed the cookery and sewing classes taken by Mrs Gibb (below). Knitting while sitting around the open fire and making Christmas cakes are favoured memories.



## Janitor

The school jannie (*caretaker*) was an important figure, keeping the school warm and well run, cleaning up after sick children (was the bucket of sand ever used to put out a fire ?) and just being a friend.

Davie Thomson, grandfather of David T. in our class, was our first Jannie. He was a lovely man looking after the welfare of the children and the building.

Margaret remembers that he carried her back home when she fell in the playground and cut her head open (she lived just opposite the school). David remembers his grandfather bringing children to his house, which was also close to the school, when they had soaked or ripped their clothes and his mum would clean them up and re clothe them.

Mr Thomson also helped us with our school gardens. We all had a tiny plot of ground near the refectory, to grow flowers or vegetables.

Later, Mr Thomson was replaced by Angus Stenhouse, another genial man.



## School Life



**Sport** was popular and Eileen and Yvonne remembered enjoying the sports day, particularly the obstacle races.

Mr Bill Aitken was the PT teacher- a hard task master - but he had several successful football teams involving the boys in our class. He was replaced by Mr Shankland, a gentler man.

Mr Aitken also taught us dancing every year before the Christmas parties. Not just the 'Gay Gordons' and 'Dashing White Sergeant' but also some ballroom dancing. Margaret remembers doing the cha cha with Mr Aitken. He was a very good dancer.

One big hate for the girls was having to wear navy blue knickers for PT!

## School Plays

Every year or so the school put on a concert in the Town Hall (in the days before the new school opened). Each class performed a play or a song etc. from Primary 1 to the secondary classes.

Burns Club Competitions were held every year in January with prizes of Burns poetry books for the winners.

## School trips

Primary trips often involved a trip to the beach . Pictured is the year above our class enjoying the sunshine at Sandgreen about 1956.



The Secondary trips were more adventurous. Trips to Edinburgh or Glasgow which involved theatre visits (e.g The White Heather Club), museum visits such as Kelvingrove Art Gallery and trips on Clyde steamers 'Doon the Watter'.

## Other Memories

Separate Boys and Girls Playgrounds - and different games played at different times of the year - skipping, marbles etc

The arrival of the large wooden library boxes, and the excitement of choosing a new book to read. In the new school we had a library room.

Using the large water pipes round the classroom to thaw out our free third-of-a-pint bottles of milk on frosty mornings. It then tasted disgusting!

David Steel (from the year above us) remembers drying out his 'snotty hankie' on the same pipes when he had a cold!

The school had no tuck shop so Dunnings the grocers in Fleet Street was a stopping off place for many on the way to school. Gordon remembers that Robert Welsh always had 10/- to spend while Gordon only had 6d.

The medical examinations and injections were carried out in Doc Russell's office.

The nit nurse and the awful school dentist!  
The horrible cold and smelly outside toilets!

Since we have left Gatehouse School we have spread far a wide. Only Josie Hope and Jock Clark continued to live and work in Gatehouse although several others remained in the Galloway area. Two have returned to live in Gatehouse on retirement with their other halves - **Andy** and Annette Carson and **Margaret** and Graham Wright.

We had one romance in the class. Munro McKie and Yvonne Crosbie married in 1970 and they now live near Falkirk.

We all had different memories but it is sad, and perhaps a reflection of the type of teaching at that time, that several ex pupils remember the best day at the school as the one they left for good.

However some had a better experience. Mary Lockhart commented  
'It was all great. Even the school dinners were good'

*Many of the above pictures are from standard school photos but a number were provided by Marion Russell, daughter of Doc. Russell and by David Thomson, grandson of our favourite Jannie.*



*Reunion dinner at the Murray Arms 27th July 2019*