

May Gillone

school teacher

Many of the older Gatehouse locals remember May Gillone as a popular music teacher and choir-mistress between the 1920s and 1940s.

Marion Kennedy Gillone was born in Edinburgh in 1895, although all her life she was known as May. Her parents were James McKie Gillone, who ran a draper's shop, and Jane Kennedy. Jane was from Carmichael, Lanarkshire but James was born in Twynholm. They married in Edinburgh in 1895. Their only other child was Alexander, born in Edinburgh in 1897.

May's father James was from well known family of millers and biscuit makers in Kirkcudbrightshire who had worked at the mill at Tongland and at Kempleton Mill, Twynholm. By 1861 the Gillone family lived and worked at Barlay Mill, Gatehouse.



In the 1911 Edinburgh census the Gillone family lived at Briarbank Terrace. May was a student teacher and Alexander was a scholar. Alex joined the army (1st KOSB) in 1916 to serve in WW1. He was killed in April 1918 and is remembered on various Gatehouse war memorials. He is also remembered on the Boroughmuir High School memorial. It is very probable that May also attended this school in Edinburgh and very likely that she trained at Moray House College of Education in the city.

By the early 1920's, the Gillone family had moved into Gatehouse and were living at 19 Fleet Street (per the 1920/21 Valuation Roll). James and Jane lived there until their deaths in 1928 and 1934 respectively. They are commemorated on a gravestone at Anwoth along with their son Alex.

May became a schoolteacher at Gatehouse School and continued to live at 19 Fleet Street until the 1940's. She was a popular teacher, although she stood no nonsense and some of the less hard working pupils found her to be very strict.

Willie McMurray was one of her former pupils and remembered " English and art (were taught by) Miss Gillone, 'Auntie May' as we called her, was mostly good fun; she could teach, and keep control without the aid of the belt." (*ex Gatehouse Memories, published by the Gatehouse Bicentenary Committee, 1995*)

Leo McClymont remembers May as being quite fussy. He had an after school job as an errand boy for Macadam the grocer. He would cycle round taking orders, collect the goods, and then return them to each house. One day May asked for supper biscuits - but she noticed that Leo wrote super biscuits on the order. Next day he was reprimanded in class for his misspelling. However Leo, who is very musical, enjoyed her lessons where she introduced

him to music by Dvorak, Smetana and Tchaikovsky. He remembered that she had been referred to as 'May K'.

May took part in many activities in the town but is most remembered for teaching music and her prize-winning choirs. Leo says that May often sang at concerts and when she reached for a high note she shut her eyes and fluttered her eyelids.

There are photos of her choirs on this website in the section "Old Photos – Other".

May lived in Gatehouse until she married Thomas Cairns in Dumfries in 1946. Thereafter she lived in Edinburgh until she died in 1979. Until her death, she was always interested in young people and their activities and was always very keen to hear about Gatehouse folk, especially her former pupils.



The extended Gillone family on a day trip to Ross Lighthouse, Kirkcudbright c.1912.

The lady in black, 4th from the right is Agnes Gillone who was for some time housekeeper at Ross Lighthouse. Agnes was sister of James Gillone, May Gillone's father, so Agnes was May's aunt.

To the right of Agnes is her son Alexander Gillone with son Frank on his knees.

To the left of Agnes is Florence Gillone with son James Gillone on her knee

Alexander and Florence were married. Their son James was father of Katy Chapman who sent the above picture and provided names.