

# The Original Gate House



## Summary

In 1642 the government opened the first military road through Galloway to assist the passage of troops to Ireland. The first bridge over the Fleet (a wooden one) was built that same year.

In 1661, Richard Murray of Cally was authorised by parliament to widen the bridge and also to erect an inn which was to serve as a toll house, the innkeeper being responsible for the maintenance of a 12 mile stretch of the road. This is believed to have been the original house on the "gait" or road, which later came to be known as the "gait house of Fleet".

The inn eventually became the Murray Arms and the toll house is the building between the Murray Arms courtyard and the Masonic Arms.

The cut was opened in 1823 and the toll-house moved to Woodside. Since then the Gate House has been an annexe to the Murray Arms until it was sold privately in 2022.

## Building Development

The building has clearly undergone a number of developments during the past 360 years, and a quick perusal leaves a number of questions :-

1. Was the building once single storeyed ?
2. Given the wide front doorway, what might the building have been used for ?
3. Why is access to the upper floor via an external steel staircase
4. Why are the upper windows so shallow ?
5. A lower ground level can be accessed via a trap-door under the ground floor. The cellar space is about 7 feet deep. What might this have been used for ?

**Q1** : The gable end wall which overlooks Ann Street shows what must be the line of the original roof. This roof line barely covers the side window which is probably at the same height as the window overlooking the courtyard. The corners of the upper level of the building has genuine quoins. The window in the gable end wall was probably added in the 1930s.



**Q2** : It is entirely possible that the ground floor once had two symmetrical windows and a single, central door. The expansion of the doorway could have been to facilitate animal access to the ground floor. Just as likely is that it allowed access for storage of one or more carts, bearing in mind that such use would have been after the building's use as a toll house. If the wide doorway was not original, then widening would have taken place before 1913 when the Ayrshire Yeomanry mustered on Ann Street for a missing person search.



**Q3** : After the roof had been raised it is possible that the upper floor was used for human accommodation. There would have been no space for an internal stair and maybe the ground floor was used for animals. During WW2 the commandos, who were training in the area, used the building as their headquarters.

**Q4** : It is difficult to understand the shallowness of the upper windows. It seems reasonable that when the roof was raised the upper windows had dormer windows. That would have made the front of the building appear similar in style to Maryville (on the opposite side of Ann Street). If dormer windows had been present it is difficult to understand why the roofline would have been levelled again.

**Q5** : There are stories about the lower end of Ann Street being raised with excavation spoil when the Cut was opened.

## Who Lived Here

Whilst the Toll House remained in Ann Street (up to 1823) it is likely that the toll-keeper would have lived in the building.

From 1823 onwards the building was an annexe to the Hotel. We don't know if anyone lived in the building. Census returns refer to the whole hotel with no separate entry for the Gait House.

For many years the ground floor was used as a coffee shop / café.

It is possible that the Murray Papers (which are kept in Edinburgh) may have more detail.