
Home Defence – Voluntary Service

A number of organisations were set up or re-mobilised to help defend the nation. Three which existed in the Gatehouse area were :-

Royal Observer Corps

This group was set up to assist the RAF with sighting of aircraft over Britain.
The local team were located at Castle Douglas but several men from Gatehouse were part of this team.

In 1943 The Royal Observer Corps - Gatehouse branch included

Chief Observer **Tom McGaw**

Observers **John Rae** and **Allan McClelland**

Leading Observer **Bert McMurray**

Civil Defence

The **ARP** (Air Raid Precautions) had been established in 1935, before the war.
In 1941 the ARP was re-designated as **Civil Defence** (CD) and this also included the **Fire Service**, **Fire Guards** (fire watchers), rescue and **First Aid**.

Gatehouse had a voluntary **Civil Defence Corps**.

Their role was to help with the management of air raid shelters and organise the fire service. A survey was carried out for suitable shelters in Gatehouse. Rosebank in Ann Street seems to have been the only suitable site but it was never used.

Commander Cochrane of Rusko was one of the instructors in the CDC

Anne Murchie from the Murray Arms (who married soldier Robert Nicol in 1942) drove an ambulance for the corps.

Home Guard

In May 1940 Anthony Eden, the Prime Minister broadcast on the radio an appeal for 'men between the ages of 17 and 65 to enter into the **Local Defence Volunteers**'

By July 1940 1.5 million men had enrolled nationwide and the name changed to **The Home Guard**. The Home Guard were armed and ready to provide protection against enemy invasion..

The men registered to the Home Guard continued with their normal day-jobs and were unpaid for their defence work. At first they had no uniform and sometimes were equipped with their own guns but by the end of the war they were in uniform and were a well trained unit. Some of the older men like **Duncan MacInnes** and **Tom Nicol** had served as soldiers in the First World War.



The Gatehouse Home Guard set up defence posts to look out for an enemy invasion. The Local outlook post was on Galla Hill. Another was on the cliffs near Auchenlarie which **Bob McClymont** and **Willie Worrall** helped to man for the coastguards.

Milestones were removed, many being thrown into ditches. Most were recovered after the war, but some like the one outside Mile End Cottage on Woodside Terrace has never been found.

These were all tactics designed to thwart the enemy if they invaded.

The Home Guard were never expected to be able to defeat a well trained German Army - rather to slow down the enemy if they invaded. They were even taught simple German phrases in case they might be needed.

To the left is the Cardoness Castle milestone. 1 mile to Gatehouse, 17 to Newton Stewart, 50 to Portpatrick and 364 to London.

The Home Guard also dug trenches along the side of The Cut, beyond the Double Lodges, and also in the garden at Portville in Fleet Street to guard the River Fleet. A local girl fell into the trench at Portville and broke her arm !

A barricade was built at the Fleet Bridge - 2 structures about 6' high and 10' long topped with barbed wire. One on either side of the road at the Anwoth side of the bridge with a chicane between them.

The Home Guard also took on roles such as bomb disposal, watching for parachute drops and training in the use of anti-aircraft guns.

The Gatehouse Home Guard were based at the Drill Hall in Castramont Raod. (the old Girthon school building). There is also believed to have been an ammunition store in a Nissan Hut, behind the Episcopal Church in Dromore Road.



There were similar Home Guard units in Twynholm, Creetown and Kircudbright, and they would often hold practices together.

Older scouts known as Kings Scouts or Rover Scouts acted as messengers between the different Home Guard units. Leo McClymont was a Rover Scout towards the end of the war.

In April 1940 a large exercise was held involving many of the volunteer groups such as the ARP and Home Guard as well as ambulance and medical teams. Three 'bombs' had dropped in Gatehouse High Street including one damaging the Fleet Bridge and an 'incendiary bomb' at the Bobbin Mill, causing numerous casualties and much damage. It was reported in the Galloway News that the exercise was a great success. With so much ammunition and equipment around Gatehouse it was almost inevitable that there were some accidents. In 1942 Joseph Mellon received a hand injury when he picked up an unexploded grenade.
