
Evacuees

When **war began in September 1939**, it was decided to evacuate vulnerable people from cities where there were **major industrial sites that could be targets for bombing raids**. Before the end of 1939 over 62 thousand had become evacuees in Scotland, most of which were schoolchildren. **Gatehouse was a prime location to care for evacuee children, predominantly from Glasgow.**

There was no time for organised medical checks before the children left their homes and host families were shocked by the **poor health** of the children. One evacuee later confessed that the only gift she gave her kind host family was scabies.

Equally the evacuees found the countryside to be an alien environment. There were few entertainments and new strange discoveries e.g. **milk came from cows not from a bottle!**

Children were usually transported to their evacuation locations by train, most of those destined for Gatehouse arrived at Dromore or Kirkcudbright, with onward journeys by bus into the town. They were taken to a **reception centre at the Rutherford Hall** where they were distributed at random to host families, with an attempt to keep brothers and sisters together. The WRVS and the churches played a big part in organising this process.

[Nessie Alexander](#) and her brothers Alex and James, arrived at Gatehouse on 4th September 1939. She recalled that she and her 2 brothers were the last to be chosen from the reception centre. Rev. Easton, Minister of Girthon Church, a single man, took pity on the family and they were billeted at Girthon Manse (then at Disdow road-end) for six weeks and looked after by Mr Easton's housekeeper.

Little attempt was made to billet children with families of the same religion although a Jewish boarding school was opened at Ernespie House in Castle Douglas.

Some larger houses were used for groups of children.

Cally House, 1 mile from the centre of Gatehouse, was rented by Glasgow Education Authority as a temporary boarding school for Glasgow evacuees, providing accommodation and teaching for about 100 pupils at a time. In all about 400 children attended Cally House during the war years. Pupils joined in activities with the local scouts and guides and some older boys and 2 teachers joined the local Home Guard.

Football matches took place and the Cally School held concerts for local war funds.

The teachers at Cally, and other evacuated schools, were expected to move with their pupils regardless of their other family commitments. Miss Marlin and Miss McHaffie came from Glasgow and taught at Gatehouse School.

Click to see more details of pupils, photos and other information about [Cally House School](#).

Rusko House, 2 miles outside Gatehouse was owned by the Cochrane family. About 16 children were billeted there and were looked after by Misses Molly and Evelyn Cochrane and staff. After Rev. Easton joined the forces as a chaplain in late 1939, the Alexander family joined the evacuees at Rusko House. [Cecilia Cochrane](#) has written a story about her experiences with the evacuees.



Rusko House



Commander Cochrane



Mrs Beryl Cochrane



Back: May Munro, Aunt Mary Munro, John Munro, Jessie the maid and James Lindsay
Front: James & Alex Alexander, Cathie and Annie Munro & Nessie Alexander

Host families were paid a standard allowance of 8/6 per week per child if they took 2 or more evacuees. A family providing 'lodgings only' for a mother and children were paid 5/- per week.

The threat to Glasgow docks did not materialise for some time and many mothers and children returned home in 1940. When Glasgow, and Clydebank in particular, was badly bombed in March and May 1941 a new, smaller scale evacuation took place.

Apart from **health problems**, many of the evacuees experienced problems of **separation** from their families. Some mothers chose to stay nearby but many returned to the city and only visited their children occasionally when a bus trip could be arranged.

There were also some complaints about the **poor behaviour** of evacuees. In some areas special provision was made for badly behaved children.

Some of the children like Nessie Alexander enjoyed their experiences in Gatehouse. She had arrived at Rusko as a seven year old and left 4 years later in January 1943. They loved the freedom of the countryside and the companionship of their fellow evacuees. Some like Marion Connell retained a lifelong friendship with their host families.

It is unclear how many evacuees came to Gatehouse but it had an impact on the number of pupils attending Gatehouse School and the Education Authority had to rent the **Rutherford Hall and Town Hall** to be used as extra **classrooms, dining room and gym hall**.

THEFT BY EVACUEE

Stewartry Sheriff's Warning

A warning to all Glasgow evacuee schoolboys presently billeted in the Stewartry to the effect that all petty thieving and other juvenile delinquency must cease was given by Sherrif Forbes in Kirkcudbright (Juvenile) Court on Thursday when yet another evacuee appeared before him in answer to a charge of theft.

The accused is a Glasgow evacuee boy who is presently billeted with Commander Cochrane at Rusko House, Gatehouse, and he pleaded guilty to having, on the 15th November from a chest of drawers in a bedroom at Rusko House stolen two postal orders for 20s each.

The evacuation scheme was suspended in September 1944 although it took some time for all the children to be returned to their homes. Here is a list of those [evacuees who are known to have stayed in Gatehouse](#) that we know about (excluding those at Rusko House and Cally House School).

Other Evacuees

Augustina and Antonio (Tony) Perez came to Gatehouse during the Spanish Civil War (1936 to 1939), probably after the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica in 1937. This war overlapped with World War II so the Perez children remained in Gatehouse until after 1945. Augustina then left Gatehouse but Tony remained until the 1950s.

