

Hunter Davies

*The  
Biscuit Girls*

Love, life and  
hardship in a  
northern factory



***Contents***

*Cover*

*About the Book*

*About the Author*

*Title Page*

*Introduction*

Chapter 1 *Ivy*

Chapter 2 *Ivy*

Chapter 3 *Ivy*

Chapter 4 *Dulcie*

Chapter 5 *Dulcie*

Chapter 6 *Dorothy*

Chapter 7 *Jean*

Chapter 8 *Ivy*

Chapter 9 *Jean*

Chapter 10 *Dulcie*

Chapter 11 *Dorothy*

Chapter 12 *Barbara*

Chapter 13 *Ann*

Chapter 14 *Barbara*

Chapter 15 *Ann*

Chapter 16 *Ivy*

Chapter 17 *Dulcie*

Chapter 18 *Dorothy*

Chapter 19 *Jean*

Chapter 20 *Barbara*

Chapter 21 *Ann*

Chapter 22 *Ivy*

*Afterword: Carr's Today*

*Acknowledgements*

*Appendix 1: Carr's Biscuits 1860s*

*Appendix 2: Carr's Biscuits 2014*

*Copyright*

## About the Book

*'I wore my overalls all evening, I wanted everyone in the street to see me, show them I was in work. I arrived early for my first day and stood looking through the windows at all the girls working away. It all seemed so big and daunting. I was very nervous, but I always loved working there, from day one.'* - **Ivy**

Ivy, Dulcie, Barbara, Ann, Dorothy and Jean all had different reasons for applying for work at Carr's of Carlisle, but once they had put on their overalls and walked through the factory gates they discovered a community where they worked hard, gossiped, got into scrapes and made lifelong friends.

Beginning in the 1940s, this is the true story of the 'Home of Biscuits', based on the vivid recollections of six of the women who helped send Carr's biscuits around the world.

## About the Author

Hunter Davies was brought up in Carlisle, educated at Durham University, and now lives half the year in London and half in the Lake District.

As a journalist he worked on the *Sunday Times*, where he was chief features writer, and later editor of the magazine. He wrote regular columns for *Punch* and currently writes for the *New Statesman*, *The Sunday Times*, the *Mail on Sunday* and *Cumbrian Life*. For three years he presented *Bookshelf* on BBC Radio 4.

He is the author of over forty books, including biographies, novels, children's novels (Flossie Teacake) and several books about the Lakes. He is the author of the only official biography of the Beatles.

*The*  
*Biscuit Girls*

Hunter Davies



EBURY  
PRESS

# *Introduction*

In the 1950s, when my twin sisters Marion and Annabelle were at the Margaret Sewell School in Carlisle and my wife Margaret was at the Carlisle and County High School for Girls, teachers would warn all the girls that if they didn't stick at their lessons they would end up as 'cracker packers'.

Everybody in Carlisle knew what that meant - and still do, for the phrase and the activity continues to this day. It referred to the women workers on the production line at Carr's biscuit factory, standing there all day, packing crackers. Who on earth would want to do that sort of menial, tedious, repetitive job? That was the fairly unsubtle message, not to say dreaded warning to get a grip, get your head down, pass those exams, get some proper qualifications and then you will be off, free and independent, not condemned to a life of factory work.

But of course for many unskilled, unschooled workers, Carr's was looked upon as a good job, attracting women from all over the surrounding area. Ethel Bragg, the mother of Melvyn Bragg (the writer and broadcaster, now Lord Bragg of Wigton), worked at Carr's from 1930 to 1931, coming in each day on the bus. She died in 2012, aged ninety-five.

'My mother was a cracker packer for about a year,' so Melvyn told me, 'until her name came up for a job in her home town at Redmaynes, the clothing factory, where she made buttonholes until she married in 1938 when, as was the custom, she was fired for the offence of matrimony. She was very happy working at Carr's. It was one of the very

few jobs available for girls who left school at fourteen and what used to be delightfully called “without any qualifications”. She used to get the bus from Wigton into Carlisle and get off at Trinity Church - now gone - which was the bus stop opposite the biscuits works. At home, we always bought Carr’s water biscuits.’

Factory workers have always had a bad press. In all towns, in all industrial nations, at all times, since it all began, there has always been one factory, one sort of job which has become a term of contempt or of pity, about which local people either sneer or feel sorry. Charles Dickens scared the souls off all right-thinking Victorians by his memories of sticking labels on bottles of shoe polish in Warren’s boot blacking factory. Today we have dreadful tales of sweat shops in China and south-east Asian clothes factories.

When Margaret went on to Oxford on an Open Scholarship, and got her name on the Honours Board in the school hall, she used to come home to Carlisle and say she would have learned more about real life had she gone to work at the Carr’s factory.

Obviously, aged nineteen, she knew little about real life, at Carr’s or elsewhere, and it was a bit of bravado. And yet she knew there was something about these women whom she had met, had listened to when growing up on the Raffles council estate, whose lives and opinions and experiences were just as valid as anyone with a fancy education or more privileged background.

In the 1950s, women had already been packing crackers at Carr’s for well over a hundred years, in a factory producing biscuits that dates back to 1837, which boasted that it was the home of biscuits. Many of them had served there for the whole of their working lives, loyal and proud to have worked for Carr’s, a benevolent family firm, some of them receiving long-service awards after clocking up forty-five years. The workers must have known that they

were engaging in a meaningful if modest task, their minds probably miles away while they were silently, automatically packing crackers that would be dispatched around the world. For were not Carr's Table Water Biscuits known and enjoyed in all the corners of the globe? So they were being told in the company magazine, the *Topper Off*.

Many years later, in 1997, Margaret published a book about the history of Carr's, *Rich Desserts and Captain's Thin*.<sup>fn1</sup> The title is a bit of a mouthful - they were two of Carr's famous early biscuits.

In her book, she was dealing with the early years, from 1831 to 1931, and it was mainly about the Carr family, following them down the generations. It won a prize and sold well and naturally I am greatly indebted to it for background information. At the time, though, I remember her moaning about the lack of letters from the main participants, about the problem of finding any colour or personal details or about real life on the factory floor. But it was meant to be a serious, quasi-academic study, of a pre-war family business dynasty. It did not concern itself with the workers, or the post-war decades. Which is what I have now decided to attempt.

What was life really like for the ordinary women factory workers, the ones who packed the biscuits? How did they stand it? Were they just doing it for the money? How hard was it? Were they happy, accepting or merely resigned? Or was it their home and personal life, outside their factory life, that really mattered to them?

There is some decent oral history of what it was like be a Carr's factory worker, tape-recorded interviews that cover the period back to the First World War. They were made in the 1950s and again in the 1980s, part of that sudden interest in capturing working-class, local history, which sprang up after the last war and is today available in most local library and records offices.

It is noticeable, in the Carlisle archives, that members of the Carr family, so important in the city and the county for many decades, were not interviewed. It was the ordinary workers that archivists wanted to capture in those post-war years.

I have listened to and read many of these oral accounts, and found them all fascinating - but I have not used them here, except for a couple of examples. For, while they are rich on the inter-war or immediate post-war years, they are stories of women now dead, and the task I set myself was to capture the stories of women still alive today, who started in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and some of whom were still working at the factory up until the last couple of years. For life at Carr's, and at similar factories all over the country, all over the world, still goes on, though the number of factory workers in the UK is roughly half of what it was in the immediate post-war years.

One problem with oral history, fascinating though it can be, is that it is not proactive. The oral historian's tape recorder records, content to receive what it is being told. Oral historians are essentially archivists, not seeing it as their job to cross-examine, counter or comment.

The problem with the opposite, journalistic approach is that while the interviewer might properly engage, stir up and drag out, he or she often has an agenda, even if it just their own personal interests and concerns, which can slant or distort the end result, highlighting certain aspects, minimising others.

I like to think I have let the six women who tell their story here talk naturally, as they wanted to, allowing their own memories to flow freely, but also making them try hard to remember feelings and events, fashions and entertainments, local and national, that they all have lived through. I am roughly the same age as them, and my childhood home was Carlisle, so this helped me to focus them, and jog their memories of times and places, without,

I hope, trying to make them fit any of my preconceptions or prejudices.

However, the book is not just about the lives of six women. It is equally a slice of recent social history, about events and changes in Carlisle, most of which were going on in Britain and the Western world at large. As we progress through their lives, at work and at home, I have tried to put their personal experiences in a broader context, for those who might have forgotten or never knew when exactly it was that the Pill came in, beehives were fashionable, when the horrors of the Eleven Plus happened, or when sales of the first council houses became possible. Carlisle might be a fairly remote town, where things have usually arrived late, but since the war, all of us still alive and of a certain age have lived through and experienced much the same changes in conditions, fashions and attitudes. Even if we didn't realise it at the time.

Along with the general social history, as reflected in the lives of our six women, there is also a more specialist history - the history of biscuits, and of Carr's in particular. Biscuits have had a role, a bit part, in all our personal lives these last 150 years, in wars and in famines, peace times and at work. Few there are who have not longed, in good or bad times, for a Nice Cup of Tea and a Biscuit. Yet, strangely enough, there is no book about the history of biscuits. There are individual histories of the leading firms, such as Carr's or Huntley & Palmers, but I have failed so far to find a general history that covers the whole story of biscuits, right back to the beginning.

I found the six women whose stories are told here through a Carr's pensioners club for women who had retired from the factory. I talked to a group, explained the project, made it clear I wanted to know about their personal lives, not just their work at the factory, and asked for volunteers. I thought they shouldn't be all of exactly the

same age, but a broad range of ages so they would have a span of experience to share.

I had to resist the temptation to draw parallels or proclaim trends, but I think they are a fairly typical sample of post-war working women: ending up spinsters or married, some fit and healthy, others suffering failing health having faced the same sort of problems of most modern families, from divorce to drug-related deaths. As we shall see, some preferred to stick to working on the line, whereas others discovered they had different ambitions. The six in the book are aged between sixty and eighty. Four of the six were born pre-war, so have vivid wartime memories. Two were born post-war, growing up in the sixties, reacting to all the new social changes, reflecting the modern notions of female entitlement and ambition. I did have a seventh, but she dropped out, having originally agreed. During my first proper meeting with her at her own home, discussing again the point of the book and what I would be asking, she changed her mind. She had been involved in a messy divorce. The details were not secret, known to her family and friends, but it had all been so awful that she didn't want to relive the experience through talking about it.

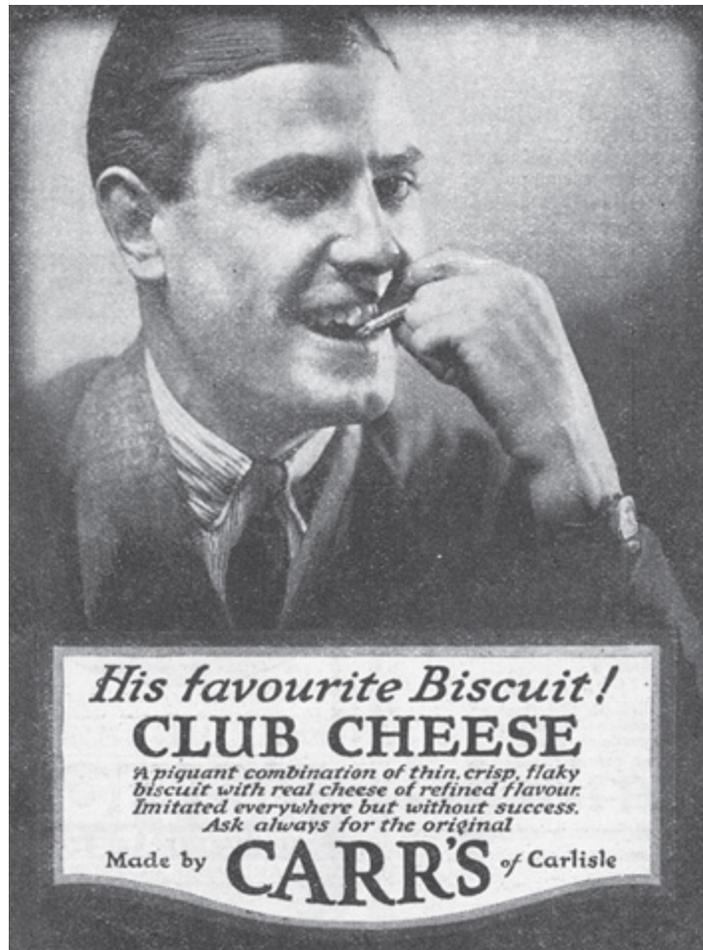
Factory work of the sort they experienced is changing, and will change as more automated machinery comes in, so in one sense they are period pieces, the end of the line. But there will always be some sort of industry somewhere in the world taking advantage of the sweat of women who see little alternative.

At the time of writing, the six women were all alive, each living in their own homes, enjoying their retirement after what has been by normal standards an exceedingly hard life. Their names are real, as real as the lives they have lived, and nothing has been changed. I can't thank each of them enough for their time and their memories, their thoughts and feelings.

Hunter Davies  
Loweswater, Cumbria, 2014

---

fn1 Margaret Foster, *Rich Desserts and Captain's Thin* (Chatto & Windus, London: 1997)



*Carr's advertisement from 1950s*

## Chapter 1

# *Ivy*



*Ivy aged fourteen in the school netball team*

'Ivy, go and see if anyone is in the lavatory, will you, pet?' said Ivy's grandmother.

So four-year-old Ivy toddled off down the little lane behind her grandmother's house in Brook Street, an old Victorian terrace which had communal wash houses behind and a single outside lavatory, shared by all. Ivy was a stumpy, broad-shouldered little girl, always cheerful, always smiling, always wanting to please.

The year was 1937. Ivy and her parents and her big brother Tommy had recently moved into a new council house not far away in Dalton Avenue. Her grandmother's house had one room downstairs, which was the living room, plus a pantry, and two bedrooms upstairs. They had gas mantles for lighting and open coal fire for heat, on which they made toast and boiled a kettle for tea.

Ivy loved going to visit her grandmother, helping in any way she could, even though the house was poky and cramped with very few amenities, compared with her family's new council house. The dustman could drive right into the backyard at her grandmother's, where the wash house and lavatory were, and if they were in a good mood, and not in a hurry, they would give little Ivy a lift round to the front of her grandmother's house. Brook Street has long since been knocked down, considered one of the city's poorer areas, not far from the old industrial slums of Caldewgate.

On this particular day, the lavatory was empty, so when Ivy rushed back with the good news, her grandmother grabbed the big iron key on a long piece of string and made a dash for it. And got there in time, before anyone else had spotted the vacancy.

Ivy was born in her grandmother's house, hence her affection for it, on 2 August 1933, and was named Ivy Emma. Emma was chosen by her grandmother. Growing up, Ivy always hated the name Emma and tried to keep it secret. Now, eighty years later, it has become fashionable again.

'My mother went home to her own house to have me, which was normal at the time. My brother Tommy, seven years older, was born there as well. Of course we had hospitals in Carlisle in the 1930s, but I suppose you felt safe in your own house, back with your mam.

'My grandmother's house might have been fairly primitive, but the wash house was excellent. They had this wood-fired boiler that heated the water so hot you couldn't touch it. In fact, my mam used to take all our washing there. She could never get the boiler hot enough in our own house.'

Her grandmother had been a factory worker in her youth, at Buck's, a clothing factory, known for its shirts. Her husband Isaac, twelve years older, was a labourer in the

Hudson Scott factory, famous for its tins, especially biscuit tins. Ivy's father was a labourer and worked at 14 MU, an RAF maintenance unit, across the other side of Carlisle.

Ivy's house was on the Raffles estate, and had an indoor lavatory and a bathroom. The Raffles estate had been created as a model council estate, with nothing too good for the workers. The movement for better housing had started after the First World War. 'The only adequate solution to the housing question,' said the King's Speech in 1919, 'is to build houses specifically for the poor.'

The government made grants and Carlisle City Council was proud that it was one of the first local authorities to snap up the subsidies. Their first council houses opened in 1922. The earliest of many new council estates on the edge of the city was at Longsowerby and the council lashed out on good building materials and provided a variety of styles, some with bay windows and parlours, proper bathrooms and indoor lavatories. They were so desirable that it was found that many white-collar workers, who in theory could have managed a mortgage to buy their own house, were rushing to get on the council-renting list. In 1926 the council purchased ninety-eight acres at Raffles, a mile to the west of the city centre, and the city architect Percy Dalton was told to fit in as many houses as he could, and also provide a new park, shops, a church and other amenities. The Raffles estate did not have the variety enjoyed at Longsowerby, and most of the houses were more basic, without bay windows and front parlours, but they were still well built and modern and nearer the middle of the town, handy for workers in Caldewgate, where the Carr's factory was situated. This time the council managed to restrict the tenants to industrial, blue-collar workers, many of them rehoused from the slums in Caldewgate. When they were nearing completion, young families would walk round Raffles on Sunday afternoon to admire the new houses and all the greenery and new shops. The average

weekly rent in 1930 was six shillings, out of an average industrial wage of two pounds, three shillings and tuppence.

When completed, the Raffles estate contained 2,352 houses. New council estates were still being built in Carlisle after the war and by the 1950s, over 60 per cent of Carlisle's population lived in council houses, a high proportion but in line with most other towns in the UK. Ivy's council house in Raffles, where she grew up, was in Dalton Avenue, named after Raffles's architect.

At the age of five, Ivy started at the local primary school, Ashley Street. For some reason, her mother had not signed all the appropriate forms, so on the first day, when she took little Ivy along, she was immediately called into the office, leaving Ivy all alone, telling her to sit still and not cause any trouble.

'I did want to cry, with my mother rushing off so quickly and leaving me, but I managed to hold it back. I was sitting in exactly the same spot when she came back. But that was me. Never any trouble. I went through my whole school career causing no trouble, doing exactly what the teachers said, hardly saying much. Made up for later, like. Now I never stop talking.

'I tried my best, but I wasn't clever, never have been. I don't know anything, really. When the teacher asked a question and we all put our hands, I would dread her asking me. So if she walked down the aisles and looked as if she was going to ask me, I would slowly put my hand down again, pretending it was a mistake.'

Ivy loved reading the *Dandy* and *Beano*. Her father got the *News of the World* and the *Empire News*, but Ivy didn't read them. Just the *Sunday Post* for 'Our Wullie' and the cartoons. The *Sunday Post* was and is a Scottish paper. Ivy did not come from a Scottish family, but Carlisle has strong Scottish connections, being only ten miles from the border, hence its title the 'Border City'. Many Carlisle families at

the time got the *Sunday Post*, a homely, old-fashioned family newspaper.

'I remember one day collecting for the May Queen. It was just really a party held in our street, in our close, where one girl dresses up as the May Queen in old curtains and all the boys are dressed as chimney sweeps. I was going round the local streets collecting, asking for contributions. You usually got halfpennies or pennies, if you were lucky. But this time I stopped a man and he gave me half a crown! He was American. Don't know where he had come from. Perhaps he was a soldier, as the war was on. We had a really good children's party that year. Albert, who lived opposite, his sister worked at Carr's and she got us a big tin of biscuits with the money we had collected.'

At eleven, Ivy sat the Eleven Plus, known in Carlisle as the 'Merit'. This was the exam that tested all the country's children, dividing and sorting them, not just educationally but socially and economically for the rest of their lives.

The chosen few, and in every part of the country it was only a minority, went on to a grammar school, a path that could lead the chosen ones on to university, the professions, a proper white-collar job with a career structure. The majority went on to a secondary modern or, in many cases, just stayed where they were, in the same school they had started at five. The Eleven Plus exam came in under the Butler Education Act of 1944, which also raised the school leaving age from fourteen to fifteen, though this did not come into operation till 1947.

In Carlisle, there was a three-tier system, which was what the government had planned, but most local councils ignored it, creating only two tiers, the grammar and the secondary modern. In Carlisle, the top 12.5 per cent went on to either the Carlisle Grammar School for Boys or the Carlisle and County High School for Girls. The next 12.5 per cent went to two secondary technical schools, the Creighton for Boys and the Margaret Sewell for Girls,

where some of the top class could stay on till sixteen and take O levels, but neither had a sixth form. This left the 75 per cent who had failed the Eleven Plus at the bottom rung of the educational pecking order, such as Ivy's school, Ashley Street.

All over the nation, for the rest of their lives, the millions of children who sat the compulsory Eleven Plus during the thirty or so post-war years when it was in operation remember the exam hanging over them, followed by the elation of passing, or, more commonly, the disappointment of failing, feeling they were doomed, having fallen at life's first hurdle.

However, in Ivy's case, the effect was minimal. In fact she can't really remember sitting it.

'It was about six weeks afterwards, when someone in the house happened to be talking to me mam about the Eleven Plus. I piped up and said, "Oh, I sat that."

'My mother said I hadn't told her, which was probably true. It was nothing really. All I can really remember is just one question: "How many sides has a pyramid?" I looked over to see what the girl next to me had written. She had put six. So I wrote six as well. Turns out it's, eh, actually I'm still not sure, three I think.

'The Merit didn't mean a thing to me. I didn't want to go anywhere else anyway. I loved Ashley Street so much and never wanted to leave. I knew my parents could not have afforded the uniform for the high school, so that was in my mind. But really, I had no ambition in life. Never said I wanted to do this or that. Just accepted.

'I know some teachers said to some of the girls that if you don't stick in you'll end up as a cracker packer at Carr's. That didn't seem too bad to me. In our playground at Ashley Street, we could smell the sweet smell of the biscuits and chocolate and see the streams of Carr's workers going down the hill to the factory each day. We used to climb on the railings and shout at them. Oh just

silly things, make remarks about their hair, or shout, “Got any broken biscuits, missus?” I thought they looked good in their overalls, very smart.’

Ivy can only remember one girl in her class who passed the Eleven Plus and went to high school, a girl who lived near her on the Raffles estate.

‘Didn’t do her much good. She was hardly there, always playing truant. The school inspector was forever at her house. I don’t know what happened to her in the end.’

So Ivy stayed on at Ashley Street until 1948, when she was fifteen. This meant that the bulk of her school days were spent during the war years. But for a schoolgirl in Carlisle this meant little, as the city was a relatively safe place to be. Carlisle wasn’t a major target for the Luftwaffe, if they knew of its existence at all. Being a remote, isolated town in the middle of a rural area in the far north-west of England with a population of 65,000 in 1948 and far away from the industrial heartlands of Lancashire, Carlisle can hardly have registered on the German radar, either metaphorically or geographically.<sup>fn1</sup>

Now and again the odd bomb did fall on Carlisle, or was rumoured to have fallen, and sometimes a plane did crash, but it was usually a German plane that had got lost on its way to or from Liverpool or Glasgow, industrial centres, which really got a pasting.

But of course the war did have a huge effect on life generally in Carlisle, as it did everywhere in the UK, with rationing, blackouts and air-raid shelters.

‘We all had a gas mask which came in a cardboard box. My mam made me a sort of black bag for it, so I could carry it over my shoulder.

‘At Ashley Street, we had regular air-raid drills. We all put on our gas masks and were marched through the streets to the air-raid shelters. I hated them, they were smelly and

dark and filthy. We all had to crouch down inside, then we all marched back to school again. That was it.'

Ivy didn't have a shelter at home, but now and again her father made her crouch down under the kitchen table, if there was a bomb scare, such as German bombers being spotted high up in the sky, heading for the munitions' factories at Gretna.

'My mother filled the bath with water one night and got the stirrup pump ready. The idea was that she would use it to put out any fires in the house. My dad was away that night. Anyway, having filled the bath, me mam got nervous, so she grabbed my hand and we ran to Mrs Wallace's, but she wasn't in. So we ran down the street to another neighbour's and stayed there all evening with her family. My mother felt much safer with other people.'

Ivy was very excited when her grandmother started taking in evacuees, many of them around her own age, so she had new children to play with. Evacuation began right at the beginning of the Second World War. On 1 September 1939 Operation Pied Piper sprang into action and in three days 800,000 school-age children from across England were on the move. Their schools had sent parents a letter telling them to pack clean clothes for their children, plus washing material, strong walking shoes and their favourite book. At the railway stations, they were given a gas mask and food and had a label stuck on with their name, school, home address and destination. And off they went. Some were back in a few weeks. Others remained evacuated - usually somewhere in the countryside - for the duration of the war. There were other waves of evacuees during 1940, when it was thought England was going to be invaded on the south coast and during the London Blitz. In all, well over three million children were evacuated.

As a relatively safe place, Carlisle and the surrounding area was ideal for evacuees and many households took them in, if they had the space. Most of the evacuees came

over from the industrial north-east but some arrived from much further away. During the war, Roedean girls' school moved up from the south and took up residence in Keswick, using the railway station and the station hotel for lessons.

Ivy is proud of how her grandmother did her bit, taking in evacuees despite having such a small house. On her bedroom wall today, Ivy has a framed certificate given to her grandmother, signed by the King, thanking her for her war effort in taking in evacuees. She is convinced it is his real signature, signed personally for her grandmother.

Carlisle had ration books, like everybody else, so new clothes were in short supply, with little choice, but like most little northern girls of the time, Ivy usually got 'dressed for Easter', meaning that was the time of the year when her mother somehow managed to buy or acquire some new clothes.

'Once I got a coat at Studholme's for Easter, which was thought a very smart shop, but that was unusual. A lot of my clothes were homemade. My grandmother made me a tartan kilt and waistcoat one Easter which I loved.'

Food rationing meant that people had to get used to making do with dried milk and dried eggs instead of the real thing. Children believed that bananas were a mythical fruit, which they were unlikely to see or taste in their lifetime.

'In a cookery lesson at school one day, I saw this tin of dried milk. I dipped my finger in it and licked it. I felt ever so guilty afterwards.

'But there was one really serious incident. Some girl had stolen a bar of soap from the cookery room. Soap was, of course, rationed during the war. The head had us all lined up in the hall and lectured us about this terrible thing some girl had done. It was a criminal offence, and she should really report it to the police, but it would bring such shame on the school that she had decided not to do that. So would the girl own up? There was silence.

'The head then had all the suspects come to her room, one by one. Eventually one split on the other one. We all knew her name. No, I'm not mentioning it. She's dead now, but I often see her sister up the street. And of course I never mention it.'

'Mother always cooked proper teas at 5.30 each evening when my father came home from work. And she always used fresh meat and fresh vegetables and we always had a pudding. Mostly it was tapioca. On Sunday we would have a roast and then leftovers on Monday. She would also make stews and broths. Each week, she would have the same sort of meal on the same day, so you would know what was coming.

'When I came home from school each day she would always give me homemade currant squares or ginger squares, just to keep me going.

'My mother shopped in the Red Stamp shop in St Nicholas and her groceries were delivered to the door. We never had drink in the house. My father would not allow it, so we had none at all, even at Christmas.

'My father had an allotment at the bottom of the garden. We always ate all our own vegetables. He also grew raspberries and strawberries and rhubarb, but mainly his allotment was full of potatoes, carrots, onions and cabbage. I disliked onions as a child, hated them - but I liked everything else.'

Being on the whole a very good girl, and well-behaved pupil, by the time Ivy was in the top form she was chosen for the school's netball team and had been given various positions of responsibility, such as milk monitor, handing out the little bottles of milk which all children got during the war. Often the contents had turned sour by the time it was drunk, especially in winter if the bottles had arrived frozen and been put on the radiators to thaw.

Ivy's most important job was going to the post office with the savings money. Children at all schools were encouraged

to save money during the war with the National Savings certificates system, all to help the war effort. Mothers would give money to their child to take to school, usually half a crown, which would buy a savings stamp and in due course a savings certificate.

‘I had to take all the money to the post office each week. I never knew how much. It was in a bag. But must have been a queer lot. Good job I didn’t know. I might have been scared I’d be robbed.’

In 1948, coming up for fifteen, it was time for Ivy to leave school. She had no idea what she wanted to do, and still no ambitions of any sort.

‘I was still eezy ozzy, not bothered really. I would never have dreamed of asking for anything. Girls these days are asking all the time, mainly for themselves, of course, wanting this and wanting that. We would never have dreamed of asking for anything. You waited to be asked.

‘There was one job I vaguely fancied at one time – and that was working in a shoe shop. That quite appealed to me. But my dad said, “You wouldn’t like it if I came in to try on a pair of shoes with my sweaty feet.” So I went off that.’

Carlisle is an ancient city, not perhaps as famous as some other northern cities such as York, but it has an ancient cathedral, founded in 1122, and a castle even older, begun in 1093. Mary Queen of Scots was imprisoned in Carlisle Castle in 1568, and from its battlements she is reported to have watched the locals playing football, or a form of football, one of the earliest known sightings of the glorious game.

In 1745, Bonny Prince Charlie marched on Carlisle, on his way south from Scotland to claim the English throne, taking over the city. He only got as far as Derby, on his march to London, returning through Carlisle on his ignominious retreat home.

Apart from these two famous historic incidents, Carlisle over the centuries has not featured largely in English history or in English mythology, the sort which gets passed on through the generations. In more recent decades, there are just two things most ordinary Brits tend to know about Carlisle, if, of course, they know the name, know roughly where it is, and that it is not in Wales or Scotland.

Firstly, that their little football team, Carlisle United, got into the top division of the English football league, and for a brief moment in time - 24 August 1974, to be precise - they were top of the league, having won their first three games. Then they got demoted.

The other thing they might know about it is biscuits. Not just in the UK but around the globe, many people today still know that Carr's of Carlisle produces table water biscuits. All thanks to a man called Jonathan Dodgson Carr.

In 1948 Carlisle, despite its modest size and rural isolation, was a hive of industry, as it had been throughout most of the nineteenth century, with many factories located around the middle of the town or in Caldewgate.

There was Hudson Scott, which had started out as a printing firm in 1799 but at the end of the war was a factory that produced tins. Cowans Sheldon had made cranes since 1846. Dixons, Bucks, Morton Sundour and Fergusons, equally long established, were textile factories which employed a lot of women and girls, as did Teasdales making sweets and Carr's making biscuits.

In the centre of the town, then and now, was the ancient pink-bricked sweet little eighteenth-century town hall, but in the immediate post-war years, it always seemed clouded in a haze of industrial smoke and soot from all the chimneys. One of them, Dixon's chimney, 320 feet high, was said to be the tallest in the land when Peter Dixon opened his textile factory in 1836.

Surrounded by the noise and bustle of a busy industrial town, it was easy to forget, or at least not be aware, how

ancient and historic Carlisle was, with its medieval castle and cathedral and other ancient buildings, all clustered round the heart of what was once a walled city.

Opposite the pretty town hall the council had plonked down some public lavatories, so all day people were coming in and out, while around the ancient Market Cross, beside the old town hall, where once there had been market stalls and fairs, the old cobbled square had become the town's bus terminus, with buses arriving and departing and crowds queuing up. Most people caught their bus home from work outside the old town hall. So when the main shifts ended, at two in the afternoon, six in the evening or ten at night, the workers flooded straight from the factory gates, desperate to catch their own bus home, creating huge queues that wound their way across the cobbles. Nearby were some ancient, narrow medieval lanes, known as The Lanes, which were being allowed to fall into disrepair, supposedly to be knocked down one day to make way for a new shopping precinct - which did eventually happen. It was as if the town was in disguise, clothed in shabby, dirty, workaday grime and grit, waiting for someone to rip away the façade and say, goodness, underneath you really are pretty and attractive. But this was not to happen for another few decades.

Opposite the town hall and the Market Cross was the Crown and Mitre Hotel, still Carlisle's grandest and poshest hotel, in a prime position, passed most days by most of the working or shopping population. For centuries it had been Carlisle's main coaching inn, with travellers from elsewhere in England resting before the last stage of their stage coach journey to Scotland, up to Glasgow or Edinburgh, some hundred miles or so further on.

In 1745 Bonnie Prince Charlie and his main supporters had stayed there, the landlord of the time being a Jacobite sympathiser. Sir Walter Scott spent the night at the Crown