

Carol Gibbs' Experiences of Growing up and Working in Canterbury

(oral history recorded and summarised by Isabelle Keogh, April 2026)

Carol Gibbs was born in Canterbury in 1954. She lived in what is now known as London Road Estate, which when her parents moved in in 1952, were new council houses. For primary school, Carol went to St Peter's Methodist School, which is a small Victorian Primary school near the Westgate Towers.

School life

From 1965-1971, Carol went to Canterbury Technical School for Girls, which was a vocational grammar school. She found school enjoyable, as she felt that there was no pressure placed on the girls to achieve. *'I just went to school, had a nice time, came home, did the odd bit of homework. Nowhere near as much pressure then, as there is now on students.'*

In the fourth year, there was a choice between whether you would take the general course, the domestic course, or the commercial course. The general course was for girls who wanted to go into teaching, the domestic course was for girls who wanted to go into nursing and the commercial course was for girls who wanted to go into business. Carol chose the commercial course, in which she was taught shorthand, typing, principle of accounts and commerce. She found this highly enjoyable and did really well in this course.

Expectations of women

In relation to whether there were any expectations placed upon women at that time: *'I think because most of our teachers were female spinsters, I did get a feeling that there would be no barriers for us to achieve what we wanted to achieve. But I don't think we were given much idea about what you might do once you left school.'* However, because it was technical school and she was learning a skill, Carol states that she was *'quite confident'* that she would be able to get a job after leaving school. This mindset of hers came from her mother at home, who was *'quite clever but had never been given the opportunity to achieve, so I think she always encouraged me to do whatever I wanted to do.'*

Work life and University

After leaving school, Carol wanted to work in a secretarial role in London. It was only once she went back to work after having her children that she realised there was scope for women to do the same as men. When she was working in Barclays bank in Canterbury, the 1975 Equality Act came into place, which enabled women to get their own mortgage from the bank. When Carol had her children, she had a part time job in

the University of Kent, working in the library. She also had another job there, working in the alumni office.

Ms Gibbs left Canterbury in 1994.

After she had retired, Carol attended the Open University from home. Over three years, she studied Art History and graduated in 2015.

Fun and spare time in Canterbury

During her childhood, it was possible to drive through Canterbury High Street. In the 1960's, Carol had a number of Saturday jobs there. She worked in Woolworths, a ladies' fashion shop, and Ricemans, which is now Fenwick. As she worked in Woolworths, she enjoyed getting sweets and records from there. With the money that she earned from her Saturday job, which was just under £1, Carol would buy three singles at HMV; her favourite singles to get were songs by The Beatles. After she left Woolworths, she worked in a dress shop called Martins, which had a boutique on the top floor, which sold clothes for younger people. Here she also liked to shop, as she got a 15% staff discount!

In her spare time, Ms Gibbs would also spend a lot of time at the newly opened Canterbury swimming pool. Her father had taught her to swim in the sea at Whitstable, so this new pool nearby meant that *'it was exciting to be able to swim often and locally, a bus ride or walk away from home.'* During the summer holidays she would go to the outdoor pool at Faversham. Swimming was also something that she would do with her friends, who lived outside Canterbury, who were just a bus ride away in Whitstable.

However, other than swimming and Girl Guides, she doesn't recall there being much else to do for fun, as she felt that Canterbury focused more on the appeal of students and tourism, rather than the locals.

Memorable Moments of Canterbury

One part of living in Canterbury that was memorable, is that it was possible to walk from one side of Canterbury to the other, through the Cathedral grounds. It used to be completely open with unlimited access, and was a shortcut from North Lane to [Lady Wootton's Green](#).

Ms Gibbs' father also grew up in Canterbury, and was very proud of it. She recalls that as a result of this, during her childhood, her family would go on holidays to other cathedral cities *'to make sure that we realised that Canterbury was the best cathedral!'* It is from this that her love and interest of art and architecture stems.

Another memorable moment was in 1965, when a new university on the hill was going to be opened. It was the University of Kent.

Carol Gibbs went to the same school and is friends with Dr Sue Hornibrook, who is another one of our oral histories!