

## **George Collier Master Baker of Branscombe.**

**By Mervyn W Tims.**

George Collier was born 16th June 1864 at Beer, Devon. He was the fourth of eight children to George Sansom Collier and Elizabeth Ann, nee Bartlett of Beer. (My great great grandparents.)

His older siblings were Mary Collier (my great grandmother) born 1857, John William Bartlett Collier, born 1858. Hannah Searle Collier born 1860. George's younger siblings were Alfred born 1866, William Frederick in 1868, Elizabeth Ann in 1871, and Frank born 1873.

George was christened at the parish church on 24th July 1864.

His father worked at Beer as a farm labourer, and his mother worked at home as a lace maker for the Honiton lace trade.

Past generations of Colliers had lived in Dorset, and it was George's grandfather William, who as a young man left Hawkchurch and arrived in Beer around 1820, a couple of years before he married George's grandmother, Mary Stokes in 1822.

George's father George Sansom Collier got his middle name from previous generation of Colliers who very often added the alias Sansom to their name; becoming Collier alias Sansom, and at times Sansom alias Collier; and one member of the Collier family dropped the name of Collier altogether to become Sansom.

George was almost four years old in March 1868 when the London & South Western Railway arrived at nearby Seaton. This brought much excitement to the village, especially for the local fishermen who could get their fish to far off markets, especially the herring to Billingsgate in London. And for the villagers who could afford it there was the chance to travel easier and faster to Axminster on market days, or get to Exeter or Yeovil, and for the more adventurous who could afford it, a chance to see London.

Locals packed to the station on its opening day to watch the steam train "Chaplin" arrive with six carriages. Adults and especially the children marvelled at this new mode of transport. But the dignitaries of Seaton were nowhere to be seen and this was commented upon by the L&SWR officials who came on the train expecting to see some kind of welcome from Seaton's worthies. Such was the dismay of the rail officials that it merited a report in the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette a few days later. Despite a few flags at Seaton there was little else; no big welcome, no dinner. Not even a cup of tea. And dismay for the train passengers that day to find Seaton's shops were closed. The newspaper noted that in contrast to the lack of welcome, a ship at the harbour was more forthcoming in celebrating the new railway by hoisting up all its Union Jacks and signal colours.

Little did George know at the time that one day the railway would propel him not just to the major city of England, but would open him up to a way of life that few of his ancestors could have dreamed of, that of becoming a tradesman, and master of his craft, a Master Baker.

As a boy George attended the Beer infant school from the age of six under the tutelage of Miss Lydia Stokes, and at age of 9 years and 5 months went into the upper school to Grade 3, on 26th January 1874. This was the day the school got its new Head master, Edward W. Cocks, who had been assistant master under his father Hugh for the past few years. The two charity or Rolle endowed schools in Beer, one for infants and the other known as the Upper school, were at each end of the Alms Houses. The children wore their special clothes for school; according to the writer W H Hamilton Rogers on his " Wanderings in Devon," in 1868 he noted the boys wearing a suit of navy blue serge, a rounded cap, and upon the breast of the jacket was embroidered a red pater-noster cross. Free uniforms and education were available to 20 poor boys and 20 girls.

At the age of 11 George went into 4th Grade at school in 1875.

George's family lived at what the census enumerator called at the time, West Side of Street, Beer.

George was ten years old in 1874, and still going to school when his mother died. But first it was baby brother Frank who in June 1874 passed away at the age of 11 months. Soon after Frank died their mother went down with tuberculosis, and she followed her baby to the grave a few weeks later; dying on 27th August 1874 at the age of 38.

The death of George's mother was a terrible blow for the family. Here was his father now a widower, aged 39 with six remaining children to care for. Luckily for him his eldest daughter Mary, now aged 17 (my great grandmother) took up the reins of keeping house and looking after her younger siblings; John who was now aged 15 had been working on a local farm since he was 11. Hannah was aged 14 and busy earning two or three shillings as a lace maker.\*

George was going to school with his six year old brother Alfred.

\*Note; although Hannah made lace as many Beer women and girls did, their lace was not always paid for in cash. Although the practise of the "Tommy" system or "Trucking shop" had been illegal for a century, it was still practised in Beer and many villages; whereby the lace maker was paid wholly or partly in goods from the lace dealer who generally ran the village shop.

George left school in 1876 at the age of 12. He would not follow his father onto the land to work for a pittance of seven shillings a week; his father would make sure of that. It was just two generations ago when times were so hard and food so scarce that driven by poverty George's great uncle James and two of his boys, aged 13 and 11 were convicted of taking some potatoes from a field at Hawkchurch. They were sentenced to Dorchester prison; James for 3 months with hard labour and the boys for one week and whipped. This was during the decade that became known as "The Hungry 40s." Twenty years later when the same family were residing at Axminster, father and one son were convicted of "stealing two or three sticks" from the master's field. They were sent to Exeter prison for three months with hard labour, and the same day the mother was sentenced to six weeks imprisonment with hard labour for stealing a quart of barley from the master's barn. A great uncle George of the same family escaped poverty at home in 1839 when he took his family, with the aid of free

passage to New Zealand and became one of the early settlers at Wellington, and there planted the Collier name in that part of the world.

George's father would have been aware of what happened to his uncle James, his aunt and cousins, their circumstances of hunger and crime; and thus determined the same must not befall his own family.

It was soon after George left school that his father made a decision to change his own occupation. It was poor pay working as a farm labourer. The extra cider that came in lieu of wages was no compensation towards a comfortable wage. There were men in the village who were mariners who had tales of earning a better wage if you could ride out the sea-sickness and stomach the weeks away at sea. His own experiences of labouring in all weathers, of struggling on a low income had sharpened his instincts to not only change his occupation, but to make sure that his sons would do better. John who was working as a farm labourer was now taken off the land and made ready to leave home; but not alone. He and young George were been packed off to London, but not to be amongst strangers. George was going to be under the watchful eye of a Beer man, William Cawley who had recently gone to London with his new bride Eva Newton to take over a bakers shop. Both William Cawley and Eva Newton were from Beer, but Eva although born in Beer had spent part of her childhood at a Girls orphanage in London after her father died. Now in their new life together running their bakers shop, Mr and Mrs Cawley had their new assistant, George Collier.

George's brother John would go with William Cawley's brother, Henry who was also going to work in London as a baker.

The young lads probably left home with mixed emotions, saying Goodbye to family and friends they had known and grown up with, but tinged with the thrill of moving to the big city where more money was to be had there than could be earned at home. To add to their adventure was the steam train journey from Seaton up to London. But once there, found a place so alien to them, of crowded streets bustling with people, of dashing carriages, rumbling carts, the crying out of hawkers on street corners, and the air, unlike the salty brine or fresh cut hay of home, was heavy with smog and smoke. But the boys knew they had to knuckle down, and they did.

In London George lived with William Cawley and his wife at 105 Crawford Street in Marylebone, and began his trade there as assistant baker. He was still with the Cawley's a few years later in 1881.

His brother John was with William Cawley's brother Henry in Islington. These two lads lived-in with their new employers, two spinster sisters, Ann and Isabella Hayes who ran a bakers shop at 205 Copenhagen Street. John Collier started in the bakery as a general servant, while Henry Cawley was the baker.

The Cawley brothers had not come from a background of bakers, on the contrary, their father and their paternal and maternal grandfathers were all mariners, and their great grandfather Henry Cawley, although a labourer he also turned his hand to smuggling. He was killed one night in 1801 while carrying a smuggled keg of spirits across the fields at Branscombe. He got as far as Margells Hill when in the dark he fell, and the weight of the keg either knocked his head or broke his neck. He was found dead the following morning with the keg close by.

Soon after George and brother John were sent to London, their elder sister Mary who had acted as housekeeper since their mother died, got married. She married Robert Driver (my great grandfather) at Beer in 1877. And it was then the turn of their 17 year sister Hannah to take the role of housekeeper. Their father by this time had given up farm work to become a seaman. He signed on as Fireman/Stoker as crewman of the steamship Prudent, for James Westoll of Sunderland. Prudent was a new iron built cargo vessel, and her crew of 23 besides mister Collier included a number of men from Beer; James Bartlett, James Potter, Jacob Westlake, Tom Saunders and Robert Abbott. The ships of the James Westoll Line specialised in freighting coal along the east coast of the UK and for some time during the 19th century was active in the Black Sea grain trade.

While George was in London, tragedy struck back home in Beer. First it was brother John. He had left London and returned to Beer, perhaps because he was ill, and while at home he died in 1887 at the age of 29.

The following year it was sister Hannah. She had been holding the fort while her father was at sea, and she died in 1888. She was 28 years old.

It was time for their father to come home.

George's father gave up the sea and returned home to Beer. He took up farm work again but this time working for his widowed sister Mary Jane Thomas, who farmed at Paizen Farm in Beer. He remarried the following year to widow Mary Barrett (nee Mutter) in 1889. They settled into married life at a cottage near the school, and had a son John William Collier in 1890.

George spent his initial training as a baker with William Cawley, and by the time he was in his mid 20s had moved on to a higher position as Baker & Confectioner at 24 St Peter's Street in Islington. He was a boarder above the shop which in 1891 was run by the manageress Eleanor Bentley; with Edith Clark as shop assistant.

George was nearly 30, and still in Islington around 1894 when he met a young lady named Annie Philo. Annie was five years his junior and lived at Islington. She was the eldest of seven; the daughter of Wace Philo a wheelwright, and Eliza Annie nee Brown, who although both from Norfolk had arrived in Islington before Annie was born there in 1869. Annie had lived mainly in Islington, except for a time when she worked in Kensington as a housemaid. It seems likely that she met George Collier through frequenting the bakers shop where he worked, while shopping.

George and Annie had been seeing each other for a while when in 1895 he returned to Devon; but no doubt with the understanding between them that once George was established at his own bakery he would return to London, marry Annie and bring her to Devon where they would settle into married life together, running his own business.

Meanwhile at Branscombe, just over the hill from George's native village of Beer, things were afoot that would stand him in good stead for the rest of his life. The local Branscombe bakery at Bridge had been run for some years by George Joseph Butter and his wife, who also ran a Post Office service from their cottage. But in August 1895 George Butter at the age of 49, died. His widow gave up the bakery to concentrate on the village Post Office. The vacancy at the bakery was now filled

temporarily by George Collier's younger brother, William Frederick Collier. William had also spent time in London where like George, he too had learnt the craft of baking, and becoming a master baker he returned to Beer in 1891, married the same year and opened his own bakers shop in Fore Street. But with the vacancy for a baker at Branscombe he would take it until George could settle there.

The opportunity for George to have his own bakery was in the making. He left London in 1895 and joined his brother William at Branscombe.

William was still the Baker at Bridge, Branscombe on 21st December 1895 when Mr Thomas Latham, Inspector of Weights and Measures paid him a visit. The inspector found that William had unjust scales, and was using an unstamped weighing machine. A red faced William Collier was summoned to the Honiton County Petty Sessions in February 1896, and pleaded Not Guilty to the charges. However, the court decided the case against him was proved on the evidence of the Inspector and fined him 10/- with 8/- cost for using a faulty scale. And for using an unstamped weighing machine was fined with cost, 13/- . But William was not the only Branscombe baker to be fined that day; Thomas Northcott was also found guilty of using unjust scales, and fined.

It was soon after this that William went back to Beer to carry on at his own bakers shop, and left George in control of the bakery at Bridge. Thus established at his own business, George promptly went back to London to marry his sweetheart, Annie.

On 20th May 1896 George and Annie Philo were married at the parish church of St Mary, Stoke Newington in London. Annie was aged 26. George gave his age as 30, although he was almost 32. He showed his place of residence as Branscombe, Devon; and declared his father as George Collier, a builder. Perhaps George preferred not to mention his father was a Farm labourer. After all it was a time when keeping up with the Jones's and ladder climbing were all important if you wanted to get on. But despite his ideas or thoughts of a lowly farm worker, George had much to thank his father for; his determination that his family would not end up in the workhouse or fall into the spiral of poverty and crime, but to give his family the chances his forebears never had.

Following their marriage George returned to Branscombe with his bride and set up home at Bridge. Sarah Butter whose late husband had been the baker at Bridge remained in her cottage opposite the Forge for a while before moving up the hill a short distance to the Post Office that she ran assisted by her step daughter, Ethel.

George and Annie settled into married life at Bridge to run the bakery together. However, their marriage was sadly cut short when a year later Annie died in June 1897. She was aged 27. She was buried at Branscombe on 2nd July.

For sixteen months George remained a widower, during which time he had taken an interest in a young lady who lived in the village; Sarah Jane Otton, who kept a shop with her father in the Square.

-----  
SARAH JANE OTTON was born 10th February 1868 at Branscombe, daughter of William Courtney Otton and Sarah Jane, nee Selley, both of Branscombe. She was

christened at St Winifred's church, Branscombe the same day as her twin brother William, on 22nd March 1868. But William died at the age of nine months. Another brother also named William arrived a year later. In 1880 a brother Rutland Charles arrived.

When Sarah Jane was growing up her father was in the Royal Navy. Her mother, besides running the family's grocers shop in the Square was also a lace dealer.

According to the Branscombe school admissions register Sarah Jane started school on the day of its opening, 13th March 1878; one of 52 pupils who started that day. She was ten years old. She left school aged 15 in April 1883. In 1880 her father, then a Quarter Master in the navy, left the RN and returned home with a navy pension.

On leaving school Sarah Jane worked in the family shop. Her mother suffered with an illness, the consequences of which she was admitted as a patient into the County Asylum at Exminster. Sadly she spent the last years of her life there, dying in May 1912. Sarah Jane continued working at the shop for many years. The shop, formerly called Otton's was soon to be renamed Collier's when she and George Collier married.

-----

George and Sarah Jane were married on 30th November 1898 at St Winifreds church Branscombe. George was aged 33 and Sarah Jane was 29. She showed her occupation as Lacemaker.

This time George was not so coy about his father's occupation, showing him to be a Labourer.

George and Sarah Jane set up home together at Bridge, at what would become a successful bakery for Branscombe and its surrounding area.

At Bridge they had five children.

On 23rd May 1899 they had a daughter May, who was christened at Branscombe on 27th August.

The following year they had a son Gerald, born 11th October 1900 and christened on 25th November.

In 1903 they had twins, Ivor and Ivy who arrived on 23rd June, and were christened at Branscombe on 30th August.

Their son Stuart was born 27th July 1911, and christened on Whitsun Day 26th May 1912.

By 1901 George had taken on a young apprentice bread maker, 17 year old Reginald Parrett, the son of a local shoemaker. Although a local lad he lived-in at the bakery at the time, but for how long is uncertain, because in 1911 Reggie was still working as a baker but living at home with his parents at Bank in Branscombe. During WW1 Reggie served in the merchant navy as a cook, and in 1918 transferred to the RAF.

In 1902 George Collier placed an advertisement in the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - dated Friday 7 November 1902; "BAKERS, Lad (respectable) about 14 to 15. Wanted to learn the trade; indoors. Collier, Baker. Branscombe, Beer."

Perhaps the long hours and early mornings were too much for some lads because on 12th February 1904 George posted another advert in the Western Times, "BAKERS Lad Wanted (indoors) to assist in bakehouse and deliver with horse and cart; must be clean and obliging. --- Collier, Branscombe."

The 1911 census shows the Collier family at Bridge, with George as Master Baker. Their children, May aged 11 was going to school; as was Gerald aged 10, and 7 year old twins Ivor and Ivy. Boarding with the family is 19 year old William Harold Pierce who works there as a baker journeyman. William Pierce had been brought up by his widowed father in Branscombe until he went to work as a baker.

At the time the neighbours of the Colliers at Bridge were Fred Layzell the Blacksmith and his wife Florence and family. Susan Gill and her daughter Abigail who both worked as lace makers were next door to the Layzells; and adjoining their abode was Maud Gill who was also a lace maker.

Across the field below the bakery was the Mill, occupied by William Pike a farmer.

Although George Collier was running the bakery from 1896 he first appears in KELLY'S Trades Directory as a Baker at Branscombe in 1902.

In June 1908 George was one of those in attendance representing the tradesmen of Branscombe, at the funeral of the late Mr Henry Ford, JP and lord of the manor. In September the following year he was present at the funeral of the late vicar of Branscombe, Rev Robert Swansborough.

In the "Branscombe Shops, Trades & Getting By," (Edited by Barbara Farquharson & Joan Doern; Branscombe Project) explains the old bakery used to sell "tommy loaves", miniature cottage loaves with currants, especially for children's lunches. Perhaps because not all children could afford them there was the occasional petty thieving, some of which were reported to the head teacher and entered into the school Log Book.

It was during the early 1900s that George Collier was kept very busy around apple harvest time, with the baking of large apple pies for Branscombe Apple Pie Fare. The vicar, the Reverend R. Swansborough had revived the old custom a few years previously and with his enthusiasm managed to get others in the village involved. Mr L. Perry was in charge of collecting donated apples from local orchards, and funds for the making and distribution of the apple pies. George Collier was on board to do the baking.

In 1903 the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette reported that the Branscombe Fare had stalls of sweet-stuffs and a couple of shooting galleries, where it was thought that some of the younger generation partaking of shooting might one day lead to Bisley. The Apple Pies, three in number each measured about three feet square, went in procession from the bakery at 6pm to the Square led by the flag bearer, then the bell-man, with the pies carried on a stretcher (or pig ladder) by bearers dressed in box hats, black coats, red waistcoats and large buttonholes. As it was raining the pies were shielded by a large carriage umbrella. But en-route one of the pies slipped from its lofty perch to the road, leaving just two pies to distribute amongst the crowd.

This paper report ended with a regret “that many such harmless enjoyments of our villages are being swept into oblivion.”

In 1910 the fare was held on Friday 23rd and Saturday 24th September with the pies dished out on the Monday 26th. Many from Beer were amongst the crowds, and the Beer brass band gave hearty music to the occasion, ending with Auld Langs Syne when the pie tasting was over. The night ended with a dance in the Club room.

Apple Pie Fare was held in September and in those early days it was a three day fare, the first day starting at 6 '0 clock in the morning when the procession left the bakery led by a standard bearer with the Union Jack aloft, and the pole capped with a large bunch of flowers. The bearer was followed by the Beer brass band, village dignitaries and the bakers, with the three large apple pies carried in a donkey cart. In previous years the pies had been carried to the Square on a pigs ladder, wheelbarrow or a donkey cart. Arriving at the Square where there were produce stalls, fun stalls and coconut shys and ice cream. Later the apple pie was shared amongst the gathered crowd.

In 1912 Branscombe's three day fare ended with the customary Apple Pie Fare day, and it's distributing of the pies. Crowds came from neighbouring parishes and followed the procession of the pies carried in a decorated cart from the bakehouse to the Square. The procession included the standard bearer, the banners, and the brass band. After the distribution of the pies George Collier stood and made a speech thanking the band and all those others who gave their services to make it a successful occasion. He remarked that seeing so many people gathered he was worried there was not enough pie to go round, but was pleased there was a little left. He added that next year he will make a bigger one. The evening ended in dancing.

The Branscombe Apple Pie Fare seems to have declined during the Great War. In December 1914 tons of cabbages, turnips and apples were contributed to the Grand Fleet. In 1915 at Exeter the Mayor and Mayoress of that city were appealing for spare apples to be donated for the soldiers travelling to the Front. Following the war, in September 1920 the Western Times reporting on the markets said that fruit especially apples “were very dear.” And commenting on Chard pannier market it said, “Apples are so scarce that many farmers will not be making cider this year.”

Perhaps the recovering from war, the flu epidemic directly after it, and the shortages of food during it, brought a halt to the Branscombe Apple Pie Fare, at least into the 1920s.

In 1927 George was again busy with baking for Apple Pie fare. He demonstrated his move into the modern age by neglecting the pigs ladder, the wheelbarrow and donkey cart, and had the three large pies conveyed to the village Square by pony and trap, accompanied by the usual flag bearer, the Beer brass band, and followed by the crowds of people carrying their spoons and plates. The pies were laid out on a large flower-decked table, and after the customary speech given by the village dignitary Mr Clem Ford, the first piece of pie was cut and taken to the oldest inhabitant of the village. The next piece went to the youngest. With the band playing, the rest of the pies were cut and handed out, first to the elderly, then to children, with the others having theirs before ending the night in dancing.



At the outbreak of WW2 in 1939, George Collier aged 64, his wife Sarah and their sons Gerald and Stuart all lived at Bridge and all working as bakers.

With the late Otton's Stores now named Collier's this gave them the opportunity to deliver groceries as well as bread and cakes to their customers. For many years the shop would be run by their daughter Ivy.

George Collier had the bakery until his death aged 84, in November 1948. He was buried at Branscombe on 8th November.

George's sons Gerald and Stuart continued running the bakery into the 1980s; with early morning starts to get the oven heated ready for the baking, and late evenings at the bakehouse allowed little time for pleasure. Gerald continued to live at the bakery long after his father George passed away, and Stuart lived at Melbourne House in Branscombe.

The fuel for the oven at the bakery was faggots, usually brought in by local farmers. The large garden behind their bakery was always stacked high with faggots. A faggot was usually the thin wood cut from a hedge that's been laid, or thinnings from a copse, and tied into a bundle as large as a man could carry under one arm. At busy times three to four might be consumed by the oven in a day.

During the 1950s Gerald and Stuart revived once again the old custom of Apple Pie Fair. Having been dormant for about thirty years since George Collier's time it was now the turn of his sons to bake the large pies and have them conveyed to the Square to the delight of another generation. Armed with their spoons and plates the crowds tucked into some of Collier's finest fare. (I have fond memories of it; walking over from Beer with spoon and plate; enjoying the apple pie and afterwards trudging up over Vicarage Hill in the darkness with my parents, and home to Beer.)

By the 1950s the Branscombe bakery was believed to be the last remaining wood-fired commercially used oven in the country. And so it remained into the 1980s run by George's sons Gerald and Stuart. The bakery with its long tradition of supplying its customers for so many years, and by the same family for 92 years finally closed in 1987, the year that Gerald passed away. His brother Stuart passed away in 1994.

-----  
George Collier's parents. His mother died at Beer in 1874 of TB. His father died at Beer in 1907.

His siblings;

Eldest sister Mary, as a girl worked as a lace maker, and following the death of their mother became housekeeper for the family. She married Robert Driver and had 11 children, although not all survived. Their eldest (my grandmother) Amelia Annie Driver was born 1877. Mary and her husband lived at Drivers Court in Beer for many years before moving into 2 Dolphin Road. Mary died there in 1935. Her husband Robert Driver, followed her to the grave two years later, and aged 84 he was noted to be "The Oldest Fisherman in Beer."

Brother - John William, after working in London for a while, returned home to Beer where he died aged 29.

Sister Hannah, from a young age worked as a lace maker and from the age of 17 kept house for their father when he was away at sea. She died aged 28.

Brother Alfred worked for a time for his widowed aunt Mary Jane Thomas who farmed at Paizen farm in Beer. He lived there for a while. He later married a Somerset girl, Eliza Ann Blackmore; they lived at Beer and had 10 children. At a local ploughing match in 1906 Alfred was commended for having at the time, seven children under the age of 13, without once seeking parish relief (medical excepted.) Alfred and his family lived at Beer in Church Court, where now stands the Mariners Hall, before moving into 1 Dolphin Road in Beer. He later worked as a mail cart driver. He died in 1948.

Brother William Frederick worked on a farm as a boy, (very likely at Paizen Farm for his aunt Mary Jane Thomas; she later named him as her executor). As a young man he was sent to London where he apprenticed as a baker. He returned to Beer as a Master Baker, married Mary Mutter and ran their bakers shop in Beer. It was William who took the Bridge Bakery in Branscombe for a few months until George took over. During the early 1900s William was a patron and member of the Seaton and Beer Regatta Committee. He was also a prominent member of the National Deposit Friendly Society and attended their Club Days and dinners held at the Dolphin Assembly Room in Beer. William and Mary had five children. They retired to live at number 14 The Meadows in Beer. Mary died aged 52. William continued living at The Meadows. It was still his home when he went on holiday in January 1953 to stay at The Bittern Hotel at Thornhill, near Southampton. His holiday came to a sad end; he died at the hotel on 11th January; aged 84.

Sister Elizabeth Ann worked as Housemaid at a girl's school in Axminster. While in Axminster she met and married Walter Enticott, a carpenter. They moved to Stoneham in Hampshire and had 4 children. While living in Hampshire Elizabeth's husband worked as Rail Coach Finisher for the L&SW Railway. Elizabeth died at Eastleigh, Hants in 1946; nine years after her husband. She had done well, with her estate valued at £1155-15s-2d.

Youngest brother Frank died at 11 months, shortly before their mother.

-----

George and Sarah Jane Collier's children;  
Gerald did well at Branscombe School, starting there in October 1903; he left in December 1914 with school log noting "A bright scholar."

May went to Branscombe School, starting in May 1902 aged 3. She left aged 14 in May 1913, with the teacher noting, "A very good girl."  
May later married Fred Hoskins and ran the Central Bakery in Beer. (My grandfather William Tims worked for Fred's father as a baker and confectioner when the Hoskins' moved from Seaton to Beer in 1902, and had the Marine Bakery in Fore Street)

May was a tiny woman but full of energy, bustling around in her apron, always busy. She was a true Devonshire girl with a broad accent that coupled with her high pitched voice sounded at times, excitable.

My own memory recalls a Good Friday when she delivered a tray of hot-cross buns to Joyce Paddy's tea hut on the beach, exclaiming in her very high pitched voice,

"Now mind -um me bay, they be erd ot you. They be erd ot." Queen's English didn't have a patch on the Devonshire dialect, especially amongst some of the old Beer folk. When requesting Ron Jones their delivery man to fetch a packet of Brook Bond tea from their delivery van, with its registration BTT 41, May would call out in her high pitched voice "Yer Ron, urn out to Bay-Tay-Tay Vower Won and vetch us in a packet o Brookie Bond Tay, will e."

On Sundays when the Hoskins' bread ovens were not needed for baking bread they were used for baking Sunday dinners. My grandmother (Chick), like a number of villagers, for years took her Sunday dinner and a fruit cake to be cooked there for 3 pence, then carry it home on a tray. I often accompanied her to carry the cake.

May was known in Beer as not the most confident of drivers. She often drove their van to Branscombe to visit the Colliers. But she had to choose her timing so as not to meet an oncoming bus in the narrow lanes because she couldn't reverse, and what's more she could only drive the van in bottom gear. She would wait until the Branscombe / Sidmouth bus had left Beer, and by following it she was sure of any oncoming traffic having to give way to the bus, and clear the way for her. But before starting off, someone had to put the van in bottom gear for her and off she'd go. The same performance would have to be repeated before she left Branscombe. May died in 1987, two years after Fred.

Ivor went to Branscombe School from age of three and left aged 13. He later married Ava May Wood. Around the time of WW2 they lived at Budleigh Salterton, where Ivor worked as a man-servant to a retired army major, and Ada was the cook. Ivor died in 1981. His widow Ada died in 1995, aged 93.

Ivy was three when she started school in Branscombe. She left school just before she was 14 after obtaining a certificate and was noted as "A Good scholar." She ran the Collier General Stores in the Square, Branscombe for several years. Ivy remained a spinster. She passed away at Check House in Seaton, in 1989.

-----  
Research;  
Birth/Marriage/Death indexes  
Census returns; England & Wales.  
1939 Register  
Baptism/marriage/burials; parish church [records@DRO](#) Exeter.  
Certificates/births/marriages/deaths @GRO UK.  
Ancestry / Find My Past  
Branscombe Shops, Trades & Getting By. Edited by Barbara Farquharson & Joan Doern -The Branscombe Project 2000.  
Beer school registers @ DRO Exeter.  
Branscombe School register @ FMPast  
Beer school note 1868 @Wanderings In Devon by W H Hamilton Rogers; No 111.  
1868 pub 1869, (also Newspaper archives- Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, March 1868. by R.)  
Probate registers.  
Newspaper archives.  
Prison records Dorchester; admissions/releases @ Dorchester Archives.

Prison records Devon. Ditto @DRO Exeter.  
The History of the Honiton Lace Industry by H.J. Yallop; University of Exeter Press.  
School uniforms - Lydia Stokes to Royal Commissioner John Edward White M.A.  
interviews at Beer into the girls working in the lace industry, in 1862.