

Vivienne Westwood

An Unfashionable Life



Jane Mulvagh

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**Vivienne Westwood:
An Unfashionable Life**

«HarperCollins»

Mulvagh J.

Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life / J. Mulvagh —
«HarperCollins»,

The acclaimed biography of one of England's great eccentrics and leading fashion designers. • For three decades, Vivienne Westwood has been Britain's most consistently original, outrageous, eccentric and controversial designer. In that time she has evolved from an iconoclastic outsider to an internationally revered figure, with two British Designer of the Year awards, an OBE, her own successful fashion label and an unrivalled reputation for leading where other designers follow. • Her lifestyle could scarcely be in greater contrast to the opulence which surrounds other leading designers: until recently she lived in a modest council flat in South London, and she still travels around the capital by bicycle, dressed in her own flamboyant creations, with a plastic bag protecting her hair from the elements. How did an awkward girl from a conventional and provincial background become one of world fashion's most influential and respected designers? How has she managed to remain true to her own idiosyncratic vision, refusing to conform to the fashion industry's, and society's, expectations? • Speaking to Westwood herself, her friends, lovers, colleagues, rivals, admirers and detractors, Jane Mulvagh has created a portrait as rich, distinctive and constantly surprising as her subject's character and work.

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**VIVIENNE WESTWOOD
AN UNFASHIONABLE LIFE
JANE MULVAGH**



DEDICATION

To Anthony

EPIGRAPH

'The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. Nothing more resembles inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs form and colour ... but genius is nothing more or less than *childhood recovered* at will – a childhood now equipped with self-expression, with manhood's capabilities and powers of analysis which enable it to order the *mass* of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated.

Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*

On the Tree of Knowledge

I have carved 'amour'

The answer's not in looks, but books

If you want Glamour.

Vivienne Westwood, lyrics for 'Choice', 1987

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PREFACE TO THE 2004 EDITION

When I concluded the first edition of this book in March 1998 I felt that it was ‘too soon to establish Vivienne Westwood’s place in fashion history’. I am happy to see that the Victoria and Albert Museum in London now believes that her work deserves a major retrospective. The curators have supplemented their archives with the purchase of three hundred early Westwood items from Michael and the late Gerlinde Costiff’s collection. They were two of Vivienne’s most avid early customers, and wore the clothes everywhere: to work, to the carnival in Brazil every year; ‘Even in places like the Sudan or Mali or Burkino Faso, people would point and say, “World’s End!” People always recognised Vivienne’s things,’ Michael Costiff recalls.

The Costiff collection has been acquired by the V&A for £100,000, £42,500 of which was raised by a grant from the National Art Collections Fund. On 1 April 2004 (a date that will amuse Vivienne) it will open a major retrospective of Vivienne’s life’s work. It is pleasing to see her work properly curated and exhibited, especially by a museum whose knowledgeable and brave Director of Textiles and Costume in the seventies and eighties, Valerie Mendes, had the foresight to invest the department’s meagre funds in the ‘Pirates’ collection. Mendes’ early commitment to Westwood, and this biography, have contributed to the latter’s recognition as an important, original and above all worldwide influence on modern fashion.

Coincidentally, as the cycle of fashion turns Vivienne’s *oeuvre* sits happily with the times once again. In a reaction to the last five years of ubiquitous sportswear, relieved only by skimpy slip dresses, her fashion vocabulary has resonance now. Whether it’s the playful layers of the ‘Buffalo’ look from her early years or the cut, fit, and dress-up idiom of her later collections, her clothes have found a new generation of fans. The Vivienne Westwood revival went mainstream three years ago when Kate Moss turned up at a party wearing original ‘Pirate’ boots. Leading auction houses and specialist stores, such as Rellick in West London, have enjoyed a busy trade in her vintage clothes and accessories. Indeed, one whole sale at Sotheby’s was devoted to the Vivienne Westwood collection of Lady Romilly McAlpine. Vivienne Westwood Ltd has launched the Anglomania label to exploit her back catalogue. The company also keeps in its archives over ten thousand pieces of clothing stretching over twenty-five years so that clients can have pieces from the past copied and made to measure. It is a popular service.

Celebrities from a new generation have been drawn to Vivienne’s clothes, leading yet more fans in their footsteps. Heather Graham, Christina Applegate, Jerry Hall and Elizabeth Jagger, Cameron Diaz, Drea de Matteo, Sarah Jessica Parker, R’n’B star Lil’Kim Joy Bryant, Kate Winslet and Jennifer Connolly all favour her clothes, particularly for big events such as the Oscar ceremonies. The publicity-conscious Nigella Lawson wore a corseted black dress to show off her figure at the opening of the Saatchi Gallery in London in the spring of 2003 and while on a promotional tour of America, most notably on the *Jay Leno Tonight* talk show. Similarly Rosie Millard, the BBC’s Art Correspondent, dramatically boosted her profile when she wore a Vivienne dress with a plunging neckline for the Oscars three years ago. It’s a trick that worked, and she has repeated it since. Vivienne Westwood clothes produce results.

Vivienne’s influence continues to filter down from high fashion to the High Street too. Once again, and twenty years on, Top Shop are reinterpreting the frills and buckles of her ‘Buffalo’ look. And following in Brinton Carpets’ brave and groundbreaking wake, Swatch watches, Waterford/Wedgwood tableware and Wolford hosiery have recently marketed Vivienne Westwood designs exclusive to them. Each has been a lucrative and brand-promoting partnership.

Throughout the Far East and around the Pacific Rim Vivienne is picking up a new generation of clients. In April 2003 she was the only British designer to be invited to stage a major catwalk show

at the Shanghai Fashion Festival, in anticipation of the opening of her first store in that city. She already has a shop in Hong Kong and fifteen retail outlets in Japan.

Though much of the menswear is designed by her husband Andreas, who also has a hand in her women's wear, the idiosyncratic touch that indisputably reveals Vivienne's inimitable mind can always be seen. Who else could have come up with fabric printed with grass- or red wine-stains, or created a rugby shirt for the Golden Jubilee which featured so many iconic images of Merrie England, from the red rose of England to the orb of Elizabeth I?

What is perhaps most unusual and admirable about Vivienne Westwood is that, well into her seventh decade, she continues to question and to create. Neither age nor success has blunted her busy mind or her combative nature. She remains emotionally engaged with the young, and shares their passion for some of the major political debates of the day. While most of us grow out of 'It's not fair,' Vivienne continues to feel affronted by society's inequities and hypocrisies and lies wherever she thinks she sees them.

Vivienne espouses issues and uses her celebrity to preach about them. Intellectually, she is a serial polygamist, flitting from one all-consuming passion to another. The seventies saw her committed to anarchy, the eighties to the politically and economically dispossessed and the voluptuous female form, and in the nineties we left her mourning the death of culture, and defending, for example, free entry to museums. The Labour government has reversed the Conservatives' policy, and once again museums are free. While the chattering classes may chuckle, few would argue that Vivienne's stands are not heartfelt and in some small way effective in raising awareness.

Recently, one of my Central St Martin's students, Derren Gilhouley, interviewed Vivienne for *Harpers & Queen*. He was struck by her assertion that 'If I could have my time again I would be an eco warrior.' Today we find Vivienne supporting the ideas and objectives of Noreena Hertz, the anti-globalisation campaigner and author of *Silent Takeover*. Perhaps grandmotherhood has inspired a greater determination in her to leave a truly worthwhile legacy for her only grandchild, Cora, of whom she is tenderly caring.

Jane Mulvagh

London, July 2003

PREFACE TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

I first met Vivienne Westwood in the autumn of 1983, while researching my book *The Vogue History of Twentieth-Century Fashion*. In the two preceding years I had become accustomed to interviewing successful designers in handsome premises in the capitals of fashion. Each encounter was fairly similar. It would be formal and conducted in impressively sumptuous surroundings, with careful attention paid to the professional etiquette of sound public relations. The ritual of passing through a series of receptionists and assistants was typically followed by a one-to-two-hour conversation with the designer in his well-appointed office. Across an impressive arrangement of flowers, and against a backdrop of photographs boasting his acquaintance with the famous and the beautiful, we would discuss the motivations and influences that had formed his work.

None of this prepared me for meeting Vivienne.

Her two-room second-floor studio was squalid and cluttered. The railings up the communal outside staircase were hung with sodden, hand-dyed clothes. The entrance was blocked by half-packed boxes of late deliveries or returned orders, and the temperature inside seemed lower than the bracing October evening outside. Stepping over a collapsed ironing board and past a rickety trestle table strewn with unwashed mugs and overflowing ashtrays, I made my way to a corner where, surrounded by half a dozen ragamuffins, the designer, dressed in thick, padded, ankle-length layers of greige felted wool, nodded an informal acknowledgement.

To the hesitant tap-tap of a vintage typewriter operated by a flustered youth, we attempted to begin our interview. Pulling anxiously on a Gitane, Vivienne periodically turned to the typist and snapped, 'Can't you stop that noise? It's really distracting me. I can't think.' The typing continued. After half an hour, during which she repeatedly lost her train of thought, she finally said, 'Sorry, I get really bored talking about my past.' We appeared to have reached an impasse, and I was preparing to leave when she unexpectedly turned the conversation to incest. In her latest collection she had used hieroglyphs inspired by incest and primitivism and drawn by the New York graffiti artist Keith Haring. She began to ask me questions. Were there any good books on incest? She was fascinated by it. Did I know that it was commonplace in primitive societies? She liked celebrating taboos; the unorthodox was what interested her, 'to shock, to seduce the public into revolt'.

How had she come across Haring's work, I asked. 'That was my boyfriend, Malcolm,' she beamed. Like a love-struck teenager she repeatedly mentioned Malcolm McLaren as she discussed her work, savouring the enunciation of his name. Finally, as if in confession, she bowed her head, wrung the hem of her heavy skirt between her fingers and confided, 'I don't live with Malcolm any more, you know. I don't see that much of him any more, but he's still my friend ... and there we are.' She sighed, and added in a voice choked with emotion, 'Maybe we'll work a little more closely in the future.' She was clearly not seeking pity, which made her suffering all the more pitiful. I felt as if I had intruded upon a deep private grief. I was touched by her desperate anguish and her frankness to a total stranger, and could not fail to be curious about such a woman.

Over the next few years I was drawn to Vivienne's extraordinary work, which was like no other designer's. While others conformed to the direction that fashion was taking and tried to please the buyers, Vivienne prided herself on her almost militant resistance to orthodoxy, and had little notion of a customer. In the 1980s fashion celebrated clothes that looked rich and fast. Skirts were short, shoulders were wide, heels were high. Women strove to look hard, thin, toned, masculine, powerful and financially independent. Meanwhile, Vivienne's idiom was the poor, the dispossessed, the anarchic. She promoted a rounded, even chubby, female shape, and dressed it in layered, baggy rags and flat shoes, such as trainers or rubber flip-flops that were fastened round the ankles with bandages. Then in an apparent *volte-face*, she began to produce the 'posh' clothes of an élite, parodying the British establishment and its uniforms of class and tradition. Through-out her

creative life she irreverently snatched pieces of fashion history, inspected them, dismantled them and reconstructed them, making something modern and disturbing. As a fashion historian, it amazed me how she could extract modernity and, more surprisingly, sexiness, from a Victorian crinoline or the dowdy garb of the British royal family.

My employer at the time, British *Vogue*, did not like Vivienne's earliest and most creative work. Though occasionally mentioned, she was never lauded. She was a maverick: inconsistent, uncommercial, often unwearable but, most of all, anti-establishment, and that was dangerous. Before the nineties, only her 'Pirates' (autumn/winter 1981–82) and 'Harris Tweed' (autumn/winter 1987–88) collections were extensively featured by *Vogue* or any other mainstream British glossy magazine; both were seen as suitably romantic, British and free of polemic. Italian *Vogue*, by contrast, has been consistently fascinated by her work.

Throughout the first half of the eighties, *Vogue's* fashion editors were cultivating a delicate relationship with Buckingham Palace, dressing, it was assumed, the future Queen of England. Diana and Vivienne, who in her punk days had been associated with a disrespectful, not to say treasonous, attitude to the monarchy, were two images that did not sit happily together, and the magazine understandably chose to maintain its establishment connections.

But, like Diana, Vivienne is quintessentially English. She could only have emerged from a society that is, on the one hand, steeped in tradition and class deference, and on the other prides itself on being the cradle of liberalism and the tolerance – if not unduly threatened – of eccentric non-conformity and satire. Vivienne needed the taboos and rituals of this relatively small and homogeneous post-colonial society, clinging to its class system and sentimental respect for the monarchy, as a backdrop against which she could create and display her parodic pantomime of dress. Her references and the messages sewn into her clothes were full of meaning both to those who revelled in being irreverent and to those susceptible to being offended by them. The vitriol scrawled across her 'Seditionaries' T-shirts, the gentle irony of her Scottish tartans, royal tweeds, Henley stripes, school uniforms and hunting pinks made no sense without this social context.

Gradually, through the mid-eighties, I struck up an acquaintance with Vivienne. She came to the odd party I gave, accompanied by her teenage son Joseph, and they would always be the first to step out onto the dance floor, while other guests were still arriving. She seemed unself-conscious, even shameless, childlike yet intensely serious. Her dancing was manic; an explosion of energy in which she lost herself in a trance: a rock 'n' roll Shaker, a punk Whirling Dervish.

Sometimes I would receive a call from her assistant, who would tell me that Vivienne wanted to talk about 'serious things – literature, art, that sort of stuff'. Would I meet her for dinner at the Indian restaurant on Westbourne Grove? She usually arrived very late, having cycled several miles from her studio, then in North London. Dinner over a couple of bottles of red wine – I did not drink – would last until the waiters turned out the lights. It was never a conversation, rather a monologue. She would tell me what she had been reading, then deliver a passionate attack on how the modern world was unfair, stupid, orthodox and evil. Listening to her woolly and selective idealisation of the past, it became clear that, for all her barricade agitprop and her position at the cutting edge of fashion, Vivienne was at heart a bitter romantic. Convinced of her talent and aware of her precarious financial existence, I decided to try and help her.

During the spring 1991 collections, Paris fashion circles were buzzing with the rumour that Gianfranco Ferre's five-year contract as design chief at Christian Dior would not be renewed. Knowing that Vivienne harboured an ambition to work in couture, I suggested that I introduce her to the house in the hope that they would either consider her as Ferre's successor (a long shot), or agree to finance and develop her own label.

Armed with her portfolio and as much *chutzpah* as we could both muster, we must have been a strange sight as we set off from Heathrow at the crack of dawn. Vivienne negotiated the newly-mopped floor in her platforms, one hand swinging a carpet bag, the other hitching up the skirt of

her cling-film-tight, gold-printed velvet dress to the hem of her tweed jacket. Atop six-inch-heeled court shoes, I was dressed in a black velvet 'Rob Roy' jacket with matching mini and a cavalier's blouse. Vivienne was in full flow, lecturing on the ancients, the failings of democracy, the legitimacy of élitism and wise rule under a philosopher-king. The monologue was not only targeted at me, but at any official – passport controller, bag inspector – she encountered. Questions like 'Did you pack your own bag?' were answered with a snippet of classical political thought. Having been mobbed in the lounge by a crowd of sari-ed Indians who astonishingly recognised her, we finally boarded. Exhausted by Vivienne's antics – the mundanities of reaching the plane were of no urgency to her – I steered my unsteady ward from check-in to touchdown.

Our appointment the next morning was with Christian Dior's Directeur Général, Daniel Piette. Dior, one of the world's truly grand couture houses, occupied a whole block of the wide, tree-lined Avenue Montaigne. The dove-grey façade was punctuated every few metres by a grandiose plaque which tilted down imposingly over one's head and bore the house's initials in classic gold script. The ground-floor boutique was fitted with delicate turned-wood display cases that few contemporary cabinetmakers could equal, set with glistening vitrines – no fingerprints here. In one, a virgin-white organza evening blouse for £800, grander in its simplicity than any embroidered rival; in another, a slim, aubergine silk petersham evening pump for £220. And the *vendeuses*, far too professional to affect Sloane Street stropiness, snappily dressed in grey or black, were the personification of that Gallic adage, passed from mother to daughter, 'I cannot afford to buy cheaply.'

Vivienne and I ascended the staircase to the couture salons, where the proportions widened, ceilings heightened and clues to trade were hidden. We were led along a silent corridor, past doors marked '*Chef de Cabine*', '*Atelier Flou*' and '*Atelier Tailleur*', to Daniel Piette's office. Once the introductions had been made, the floor was handed to Vivienne. I had been confident that this plucky, loquacious Northerner would present her case convincingly, but she remained tongue-tied, nervously tugging her hem, coiling her ringlets and rubbing the corner of her mouth with her index finger.

Unexpectedly forced to become her advocate, I took over, while a sceptical Piette looked on. After fifteen minutes it was clear that words would not suffice, and the portfolio was enlisted. Did Piette recall Lacroix's great success with the mini-crinoline? He nodded. Well, Vivienne had pre-empted Lacroix by three seasons. And Lagerfeld's corsets for Chanel? Vivienne had led the way three years earlier. A list of examples was cited where Vivienne had led and others followed. Piette's head was now bent attentively over the groundbreaking portfolio. Finally I suggested that perhaps he might like to inspect some key pieces from Vivienne's archives. He agreed, and in doing so left the door ajar for further discussions. Vivienne only found her voice again once she was well out of earshot. The clothes were never sent to Piette, due to the bad communications and sheer disorganisation of her office. Ferre's contract was renewed for a further five years.

This book is not about the business of fashion. Though Vivienne has consistently been the first to introduce new looks, she has equally consistently failed to capitalise on her fashion lead. She has absolutely no business acumen. Fashion is not an art, it is a trade, and to survive a designer has to sell. Vivienne has scant regard or aptitude for commercialism. Her survival has come despite this failing.

When John Fairchild, proprietor and publisher of *Women's Wear Daily*, the trade's most powerful publication, cited her as one of the six most important designers of the day – along with Saint Laurent, Emanuel Ungaro, Giorgio Armani, Karl Lagerfeld and Christian Lacroix – she was virtually bankrupt. While her peers collected villas, yachts and art, she did not even own her modest flat. As late as 1993, when she had twice been named British Designer of the Year, and been awarded the OBE by the Queen, she still lived a hand-to-mouth existence in a council flat in South London. The entire annual turnover of her business was a mere £600,000. In contrast to the five other designers Fairchild saluted, Vivienne is neither a man nor born into an affluent, or at least educated, background (Ungaro, though from a modest family, was exposed to the refinements of his craft by his father, who was a tailor). Also unlike her peers, she entered fashion in early middle age, not youth.

Compromise for commercial advantage is not in Vivienne's nature. In her somewhat solipsistic universe, other people (in so far as solipsism may be allowed to admit other people) are mad not to see things her way. She has not succeeded – it's doubtful if she every really tried – in charming or endearing herself to colleagues, peers, the press or those with, as she crudely calls it, 'clout'. André Leon Talley of *Vanity Fair* says, 'Most female editors are just plain scared of her. They'd rather not deal with her.'

For someone notoriously uncouth and undiplomatic, Vivienne has one extraordinary social skill. She can elicit help and sympathy where she wishes, and on her own terms. And yet, no matter what an individual does to help her, she has no sense of indebtedness or loyalty. She can be belligerent, rough, rude and selfish. Yet she commands remarkable loyalty from employees and associates. Time after time, they told me she was mean, cruel, heartless and even vicious towards them. Nevertheless, with few exceptions they are happy to have worked alongside a truly original talent who could habitually astonish them with her powers of creativity. Her creativity cannot be copied, anticipated, second-guessed. It is inimitable.

In 1993, Vivienne asked me to write her autobiography. I refused. I did not want to be put into the uncomfortable position of being a ghostwriter, particularly to a woman with such a strong personality and an uncompromising point of view. I spent the next year persuading her to cooperate with a biography which I would write. My conditions were that it would be authorised by her, and I would have access to her, but under no circumstances would she be allowed to read the manuscript. In August 1994, she agreed.

Within four months, Vivienne told me she had had second thoughts. When I asked her why, she would not, or could not, offer an explanation. In the meantime, she had approached family members, friends and colleagues, past and present, and requested that they did not speak to me. Apart from the conversations with her family that I had had over the eleven years I had known her, I have had no additional access to them. As a result, comparatively little information has been forthcoming about Vivienne's father and her first husband, Derek Westwood. Fortunately, I had already managed to reach some of her school and childhood friends. Equally fortunately, most of her associates and friends disregarded her injunction, and agreed to talk to me (of necessity, the identities of some of them have been disguised). Then, curiously, in 1996 various friends and colleagues still close to Vivienne, such as Gene Krell and John Walford, received her permission to cooperate with me. In addition, others who had originally abided by her request changed their minds and spoke to me candidly. To all of them I am indebted.

Why did Vivienne, for no stated reason, decide not to cooperate with the author she had originally asked to write her own autobiography? While I have been researching this book, some possible explanations have suggested themselves. Firstly, and understandably, she is probably apprehensive. To her mind, she has consistently been misrepresented by the media. And even apart from the risk of misrepresentation, nobody likes to have their character and weaknesses laid bare. What will I find out, and what will I write about her? Secondly, I discovered that many years before I set about my task, another publisher commissioned an autobiography from her. To date, they have seen no manuscript. Thirdly, Vivienne's professional survival is founded on her working relationship with her manager Carlo D'Amario. In return for her complete creative freedom, he runs the business. D'Amario might not wish her to cooperate with a project which did not bring profit to the company nor guarantee favourable coverage. No matter what relationship Vivienne strikes up with an associate, it will ultimately be subjected to the sanction of D'Amario's approval or disapproval. She remains indebted to him and him alone, as attested by the long line of friends and loyal colleagues who have been discarded or summarily dismissed over the years.

Vivienne is a difficult, exceptionally talented and fascinating woman. Her relentless creativity is irrepressible, and its mainspring is her busy curiosity. Her visual inquisitiveness is unusual in its intensity and its scepticism. She dissents in order to reinvent. Although ours is dubbed a 'visual age',

with images being instantaneously transmitted around the globe, few today take the time to look and to really see; we consume instead not only soundbites, but vision-bites. What distinguishes Vivienne is that she inspects, questions, dismantles and reassembles – as a teacher she would march her young pupils down to the local fishmonger to study the fish before they drew them. My aim in this biography has been to shine some light on her character, and on the way in which her relentless creativity works.

Jane Mulvagh

London, March 1998

Part One THE AMATEUR DRESSMAKER

1 THE GIRL FROM THE SNAKE PASS

1941–1965

‘As a child, I was in waiting.’

Vivienne Westwood, 1995

‘She puts her mother on a pedestal.’

Bella Freud, 1997

Just before Christmas 1938, twenty-three-year-old Dora Ball, a flush-cheeked flirt with a determined gait and a passion for ballroom dancing, journeyed from her home village of Tintwistle, on the border between Cheshire and Derbyshire, to the nearby market town of Glossop, to buy material for a new dance dress. Missing the last bus home, she started to walk to another stop on the outskirts of town, passing St Mary’s Dance Hall. There, lolling in the doorway, stood the smooth-faced, dapper Gordon Swire, four years her senior. Dora, wary of his reputation, refused his offer to escort her to the bus stop. He insisted, and they struck up a conversation.

On 19 August 1939, two weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War, they married in Tintwistle’s Christ Church, in the county of Cheshire. Gordon was described on the marriage certificate as a fruiterer, living at 96 Market Street, Hollingworth, the son of the late Ernest Swire, a boot and shoe repairer. Dora’s address was 25 West Street, Tintwistle, and she was the daughter of Edward Ball, a labourer. The young couple honeymooned in Scarborough, Yorkshire. Their first marital home was number 6 Millbrook, a two-up-two-down labourer’s stone cottage in a terrace of twelve, between Tintwistle and Hollingworth on the A57, the major road that leads from Sheffield through the Pennine pass to Manchester. Like most humble British homes of the time, the house had an outdoor lavatory in the back yard. The couple washed in a tin bath filled with water warmed on an open fire.

The Swires’ first child, Vivienne Isabel, was born on Tuesday, 8 April 1941. She was a first-born war baby, brought up in the English cotton country; circumstances that were to mark both her character and her interests.

The arrival of a sister, Olga, on 14 January 1944 so infuriated Vivienne that she vowed to ‘dead her and put her in the dustbin’. Vivienne recalled over fifty years later that when Olga arrived home from the hospital, ‘I was outraged. I didn’t know I was going to get her. I was three and from then on I decided I wanted to be grown up as soon as possible.’ Vivienne’s resentment of the interloper went far beyond the sibling jealousy common in young children; indeed, it was so strong that it may have contributed to the competitive suspicion of other women she was to show in later life. As a child she would rarely mention her sister, and few of her friends even realised that Olga existed. Two years later, in 1946, a brother, Gordon, arrived, further thwarting Vivienne’s desire to be the centre of attention.

On the night of Vivienne’s birth London suffered the heaviest air raid of the war to date. The Blitz had escalated, and the German bombers were targeting Britain’s industrial cities as well as its capital. The Swire family would have watched the night skyline during the blackout for the explosions that pockmarked Manchester, ten miles to the west. During the war Vivienne’s father served as a storekeeper in the aircraft manufacturers A.V. Roe at Trafford Park, twelve miles from Manchester. This was an extremely important factory during the war – Lancaster bombers were made there – and the Luftwaffe made several attempts to bomb it. The Dam-Busters’ famous bouncing bomb was tested at the Derwent Dam at the far end of the Snake Pass, where Vivienne would wander as a child. Dora, meanwhile, took employment as a weaver in a local cotton factory of the sort typically requisitioned by the government to supply materials for the war effort: for uniforms, tents, camouflage, webbing, parachutes and balloons.

With both parents in employment and the wartime rations supplemented by Vivienne’s paternal grandmother’s grocery store, the Swires were well fed. Later, Dora and Gordon were to run the store

for a time. Gordon could drive the family car – a considerable luxury at the time – to Manchester to stock up on supplies, and would bring home news of the city. Thrift was a pervading feature of Vivienne's formative years, which were circumscribed not only by the modesty of her working-class background, but by the austerity of wartime and immediate post-war Britain. Rationing was to be in force until October 1951, and the Attlee government demanded self-sacrifice to rebuild the nation, deploying slogans like 'make-do-and-mend' as an exhortation to frugality.

Meanwhile, Britain's wartime allies enjoyed a post-war consumer boom, epitomised in France by the fabric-consuming lavishness of Christian Dior's New Look, which most British women could only admire, not wear. Thriftiness, inculcated early on as a necessity, would remain intrinsic to Vivienne's character, serving her well during periods of considerable financial hardship, and even when she found relative affluence in her fifties, she never indulged in conspicuous consumption.

Vivienne has always been reluctant to talk about her childhood. In 1994 she told the local newspaper *Derbyshire Now!* that this was because she 'feared people would find it boring'. Until she was sixteen, the Swires lived in or near Tintwistle, in Glossopdale, which is cut off from Lancashire and Cheshire by steep hills and a river gorge, and lies in the western lee of the Pennines, the spine of hills which divides the North of England in two. To the west of the Pennines, in Lancashire, the nation's cotton industry flourished. To the east, in Yorkshire, the woollen industry was established. Exploiting the fast-running water that flowed down the peaks, textile mills and factories were built in the area from the mid-eighteenth century. Immediately after the First World War, the cotton industry had employed nearly 80 per cent of Glossop's working population. Following severe unemployment during the Depression, when the Hadfield Tintwistle labour exchange recorded a devastating 67 per cent rate of unemployment, the local economy revived once again. The mills which surrounded Tintwistle provided a livelihood for many of Vivienne's relations, and she was to retain a sentimental but informed appreciation of the qualities of traditional English textiles: starched cottons, worsted pinstripes, fine-gauge knits, satin-smooth gabardines and hairy tweeds. They were to inspire the nostalgic strand of fashion that would become one of her signatures.

At the end of the war, Gordon Swire senior took work at the local Wall's ice-cream factory. He supplemented the household income with odd jobs, such as collecting holly from the hedgerows to twist into Christmas wreaths which he sold to the neighbours. The whole family enjoyed the make-do-and-mend habit, turning their hands to simple crafts such as dressmaking or utilising domestic ephemera for decoration. Their Christmas tree, for example, was adorned with the perforated silver tops from salt and pepper pots.

Dora, who now worked in the grocery shop, not only made her own ballroom dresses but clothes for all the family, perhaps using remnants bought from the mill where she had worked. Times were good. In the second half of the 1940s the textile trade continued to thrive as the government fostered an export drive to finance war debts. Production was focused on long runs of cheap cotton prints for the African and Far Eastern markets. Workers were secure in their employment, and took patriotic pride in the posters displayed throughout their communities which assured them that 'Britain's bread hangs on Lancashire's thread'.

Vivienne's parents provided for their family and were loving and kind, but they were not remotely scholarly: Dora took the view that reading was a waste of time. They encouraged physical pastimes instead, such as dancing and rambling. The children kept hamsters and guinea-pigs in the back yard and crafted toys and games out of discarded objects. Describing her childhood, Vivienne was to say: 'what we didn't have at home was any literature. I remember my mother once buying some encyclopaedias but they weren't the right sort where you could look things up.'

What her mother, in particular, did give Vivienne was a forthright bearing, a confidence that invited comment and a sense of style. She chose unusual Christian names for her children, and made a point of dressing them well, buying good-quality clothes at C&A in Manchester or making them herself. Childhood friends recall Dora as 'houseproud', something Vivienne would never be, and

caring about her appearance, a trait she retained into her seventies and which Vivienne did inherit. A school classmate, Bob Noton, remembered Vivienne as ‘meticulous about her clothes and well-turned-out as a schoolgirl. That’s what a lot of people found attractive about her.’

By the standards of the time, the Swires were relatively liberal parents. The three children were often left unsupervised, since both Dora and Gordon worked by day, and in the evening they were frequently left with a babysitter while their parents went ballroom dancing (a hobby they pursued into old age) at the Tintwistle and Hollingworth school halls, Glossop’s Victoria Hall and in Ashton-under-Lyne, six miles away. They relied on their eldest daughter to take responsibility for her siblings from an early age. Vivienne has described her parents as being ‘in love all their life and devoted to each other’. Perhaps she felt that this love excluded her. A former employee of Vivienne’s says: ‘Her mother and father were so close. He was star-struck by her right to the end of his life. Dora always came first. *She* was the star of the family.’

Vivienne was required to walk her brother and sister to the Hollingworth village school each morning and to St Mary’s Anglican church on Sundays. Although her parents were not zealous members of the local church – they would assure her that they would attend the evening service, but rarely did – Vivienne was captivated by religion. On learning, aged four, about the crucifixion, she remembers being so horrified that she vowed to challenge oppression: ‘I felt I had to become a freedom fighter to stop this sort of thing going on. I really did want to do something to change this horrible world.’

Making defiant stands became an early characteristic of this confident and independent girl. On her first day at nursery school in Hollingworth, she saw a queue outside the girls’ lavatory. Reasoning that there was no point in waiting, she used the boys’ instead. She claims that this was her ‘first confrontation with tyranny’, and it earned her a slap from the teacher. By the time she was five she was questioning the teacher’s example, preferring ‘to do my “r”s round and round like a snail because it looked prettier’, rather than copying exactly from the blackboard. Even though she was slapped again, she refused to conform. She had already developed an independent view of mores and manners: ‘I have an inbuilt perversity, a kind of inbuilt clock which always reacts against anything orthodox,’ she said thirty years later.

At the age of eight Vivienne progressed to the Tintwistle church school, where her mother had been educated, and joined a class of variously-aged pupils of both sexes. Her parents took only a distant interest in their children’s academic development, neither harbouring grand ambitions for them nor, according to Gordon junior, discussing what they wanted to do when they grew up. ‘We never showed our parents our school reports,’ Gordon remembers, though Vivienne’s consistently acknowledged her ‘creativity’: ‘It wasn’t that they didn’t care, they just assumed we were bright and let us get on with it.’

Despite her comparatively uncultured background, Vivienne remembers finding stimulating companionship in books, which nourished her imagination and led her beyond the restricted world of her family. One can imagine her escaping the confines of the small bedroom she shared with Olga and Gordon, spending winter evenings huddled in front of the hearth, or sneaking into her parents’ room and, propped up against the door under the scratchy tulle layers of her mother’s dance dresses, losing herself in the pages of Enid Blyton’s Famous Five stories, the brothers Grimm’s fairy tales and Walter Scott’s ‘Lochinvar’. These first writers were soon followed, according to Vivienne, by Dickens, Buchan, Chaucer and Keats. On summer mornings she scrambled over the wall behind the cottage, passed through a disused quarry and climbed up to the high meadow to read: ‘I remember sitting in this meadow in the sun with the dew still on the grass, and I could smell May blossom, and even at that early age I remember saying to myself how lucky I was.’

Vivienne’s childhood was secure and happy. She enjoyed exploring the lyrically beautiful nearby peaks and dales. Finding hideaways in the wooded terrain of the Snake Pass and Devil’s Elbow towards Cut-Throat Bridge, she would read adventure stories or tuck into a picnic of treats from her

aunt's greengrocers, washed down with home-made dandelion and burdock lemonade. It was during these solitary, free-roaming days in this gauzy, rain-softened terrain that she developed what she has called her 'country heart'; her subsequent nostalgia for the English rural idyll and her knowledge of its flora and fauna. Two decades later, money being short, she used her knowledge of edible plants to feed her family; as a designer she would refer back to country pastimes – fell-walking, riding, fishing, shooting – to create clothes that, even though they were worn by the hurried city-dweller, conjured up the unhurried, idealised Arcadia of her childhood.

From 1951, a recession developed in the British cotton industry as competitively priced imports from Hong Kong, India and Pakistan began to flood the home market. Large numbers of jobs were lost in Glossopdale's mills, and while some of Vivienne's neighbours found employment in the new chemical and plastics firms that moved into the area, many joined the ranks of the unemployed or the economic migrants. The hardships Vivienne witnessed left their mark on her: it would be many years before she placed what she saw as the indulgence of higher education above her anxiety to earn her keep.

Almost effortlessly, Vivienne won a place at Glossop Grammar School in 1952. According to her maternal aunt Ethel Mitchell, who owned a sweet shop in Tintwistle: 'Before her eleven-plus I remember Dora suggesting that Vivienne should be swotting. Vivienne simply said, "Why?" She knew it all, and passed with good grades.'

Glossop Grammar School was three miles from the Swires' home, and was reached by a bus that travelled across Woolley Bridge, which separated Cheshire from Derbyshire, past several cloth mills, under a viaduct and into the market town of Glossop. The handsome stone building, erected in 1899 by Francis Fitzalan, the second Lord Howard, as an art and technical school for mill apprentices, stood on the corner of Talbot Street and Fitzalan Street. In 1903 it became a grammar school, with the brightest local children competing for places. Reginald Barnsley, who was at the school at the same time as Vivienne, recalled that 'science, maths, English were important. Music, PE and woodwork didn't count for much ... it was a learning school with seven lessons a day.'

Formality and propriety characterised this proud grammar school, which is now an adult education centre. Only teachers and sixth-formers could pass through the main entrance, under a stone-carved plaque bearing the school's motto: *Virtus, Veritas, Libertas* (Honour, Truth, Liberty). Juniors had to use the back door, where they changed from outdoor shoes into indoor pumps. The boys, dressed in grey trousers and maroon-and-navy striped blazers, crossed the black-and-white-tiled hall and climbed the left-hand arc of the rosewood staircase to assembly, while the girls, in grey skirts or gymslips, blazers, white blouses and grey stockings, filed up the right. The staff room and offices had long casement windows which overlooked The Nab, a substantial hill at the back of the building, but the classrooms had high windows to prevent pupils from being distracted by daydreams.

A memorable event of Vivienne's youth was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953. It rained that day, and the Swires attended a celebration tea party at Tintwistle Sunday School, which was hung with patriotic bunting and banners. Waving their Union Jacks, the party then proceeded to a neighbouring cottage where they crowded into the front room to watch the event on television. The image of the royal family and all its tradition and pageantry must have had an impact on the visually alert twelve-year-old Vivienne, for she was to exploit them, both positively and negatively, in her creative life many years later.

A few months after the coronation, the Swires rented a new council house for a year in nearby Hollingworth, and then, in 1954, Dora was given the opportunity to become the Tintwistle village postmistress. The family moved into the building which housed the post office in its flagstoned basement at 36 Manchester Road, at the end of a terrace of five. Dora, exhibiting the distinctive independence of the women of her family, boasted proudly that the post office was 'in her name'. All three children inherited this 'supreme self-confidence' which their maternal aunt, Ethel Mitchell,

observed and shared. Vivienne's early role models were matriarchal. Power resided with the women in the family, and Vivienne soon displayed their strident determination.

As well as distributing the post, Dora also ran a little general store in which she sold a few of the cheaper magazines, such as *Woman's Own* and *Women's Weekly*, that disseminated the fashions of the time in a watered-down form, and provided dressmaking and knitting patterns. She also stocked a small selection of clothing, such as underwear from John Smedley, the Derbyshire specialists in fine-gauge knitwear, and traditional gymslips (both of which were to feature in Vivienne's collections in the 1980s – when Vivienne's school uniform changed to skirt and blouse, she insisted on keeping her gymslip).

Young Vivienne was determined to make her mark at her new school, to be 'more extreme' than the crowd. In her attention-seeking manner, she was always first to raise her hand in answer to a teacher's question, to the annoyance of her classmates. One contemporary, Eileen Mellish, remembers Vivienne as argumentative, getting 'a bit humpy' when the biology teacher chastised her, and climbing out of the window when she had been locked into a classroom for detention. With her unusual cast of mind, Vivienne would find tangential solutions to set questions: when the class was given the title 'Bats in the Belfry' for a painting, Eileen Mellish recalls, 'We all imagined a church, but she went psychological and did bats in the head. She was smart.'

Her maths teacher, Jack Holden, however, finds it hard to recall Vivienne: she was 'an unremarkable girl, you didn't notice her'. Vivienne was certainly not a distinguished scholar, though she did reasonably well at English, sports and art, for which she took lessons after school with the art teacher, Gordon Bell. She did come third in the high jump at the school sports day, and when she entered the annual poster competition at the age of fifteen, she was highly commended, 'which, as you know,' says Holden, 'means she didn't quite make it. Looking at Vivienne Swire and looking at Vivienne Westwood, I would just sit there in total amazement. How on earth the one became the other is quite beyond me. But you see, we are nice people. You didn't do outrageous things.'

It was exactly this sense of propriety that Vivienne wished to challenge, with bold actions such as 'always {being} the one who kissed the teacher under the mistletoe at Christmas'. Bob Noton, a primary-school sweetheart, was enamoured of her 'striking' looks, composed carriage and long dark hair neatly tied back in a ponytail. He found her direct and flirtatious. But when the pair went on to Glossop Grammar School, he was summarily dumped: there was 'too much competition by the other boys for Vivienne – she was a hot date and knew she was a good-looking, bonnie girl'. Vivienne is also remembered for making a point of championing an unpopular and lonely boy, a moralising and self-publicising stance.

With the onset of puberty Vivienne, who claimed to have had a boyfriend from the age of ten, began to show an interest in sex which her mother would have dubbed 'fast'. She went with her schoolfriend Anne Shaw to Sunday school dances, and looked forward to rainy days when games were replaced by ballroom dancing in the school gym. She boasted that she had a different boyfriend every week: 'I was straight until I was fourteen. Then I went funny ... boredom, bad boredom.' Though she says she did not indulge in full sexual intercourse (something her parents had brought her up to believe was only to be enjoyed within marriage) until her late teens, her physical relationships were 'quite heavy, lots of kissing and all that'. A former classmate remembers the fifteen-year-old Vivienne flaunting a ring and proudly announcing that she was engaged.

Thanks to protruding teeth (later straightened) and a flat chest, Vivienne did not judge herself to be pretty, though she anticipated that 'I was going to be.' Perhaps her lack of self-confidence was a result of having a pretty and vain mother. Seeing that Dora was always well turned-out, and the impact that had on her father, gave Vivienne an early belief in the power of beauty and clothes. She determined to make something of herself through her clothing. She would come home from school with a piece of material, cut out a dress, sew it up and wear it that night. At school she wore one coloured stocking and one plain one with her uniform, which she had customised by tightening the

skirt round her haunches and cutting a provocative slit up the back. She started padding her bras, longing for the sexuality of a curvaceous female form – ‘big tits are what boys are interested in’. Her idols were the hourglass-shaped Sophia Loren, Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield. The clothes she later designed would challenge sports-honed skinniness with a voluptuousness enhanced by corsets and high heels. She also took to curling her hair, leaving the curls so stiff that it looked as if the rollers had not been removed.

In 1957 Vivienne and a schoolfriend, Maureen Purcell, went for a holiday at Butlin’s camp in Skegness, a popular working-class resort. The camp had a libertine atmosphere, and many young boys would work there as ‘Redcoats’ for ridiculously low wages, in the virtual certainty of sexual encounters with female campers. The holiday opened Vivienne’s eyes to the sexiness of shoes: ‘There were these Essex girls who were really stylish and wore stilettos. In Manchester I saw these amazing high-heeled stilettos in a shop window and I bought a pair ... I wore them to school with a tight-fitting pencil skirt,’ much to her headmistress, Dolly Greenwood’s, dismay. Maureen Purcell recalled that when Vivienne stayed overnight on the family sofa ‘she’d bring a collection of her winklepickers and line them up near the skirting board’. ‘Clothes make you the centre of attention,’ Vivienne said in 1995. ‘It’s like when I was a girl, I thought the difference between jive and rock ‘n’ roll was that you stuck your bottom out, so I would stick it *right* out and the boys would really laugh at me. But I didn’t mind because I thought, OK, I know what I’m doing.’

Vivienne reached adolescence in the mid-1950s, right at the beginning of a dramatic social change – the emergence of the teenager. The urban, middle-class teenage girl disdained adult fashion, preferring casual dress that reflected her own age and musical interests, such as separates inspired by Italian fashion, and full cotton skirts and bobby socks from America. Vivienne, though, was born into the conservative provincial working class, which valued the smartness, ‘good taste’ and *hauteur* of its social superiors. Retaining the romanticism of the New Look and its glamorous Hollywood exaggerations, a fashion-conscious adolescent from this background would have aspired to the image of an elegant and well-married thirty-year-old woman in neat dress or suit and matching accessories. (One contemporary marvelled at how Vivienne was ‘so smartly turned out ... it was always the complete outfit, the shoes, the bag always matched’.) She would have been unlikely to risk looking casual, which might give the impression of poverty.

Her sartorial icons were the aristocratic mannequins who graced the pages of the upmarket glossy magazines like *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vanity Fair*, such as Barbara Goalen, Fiona Campbell Walter (later Baroness von Thyssen) and Bronwen Pugh (later Lady Astor), and Hollywood stars like Lana Turner, Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell, Elizabeth Taylor, Grace Kelly and Audrey Hepburn. The big American film studios spared no expense in the grooming and marketing of these female icons, employing the considerable creative skills of costumiers such as Edith Head, William Travilla and Orry-Kelly, and French couturiers such as Christian Dior, Pierre Balmain and the Paris-based Elsa Schiaparelli. The celluloid goddesses reached Vivienne and her friends through the cinema in Glossop, which they typically visited once a week.

Wherever she went, even to school, Vivienne aimed to dress like a woman, not a girl; she ‘could not think of anything more exciting’, and was convinced she looked better than anyone else – ‘a sensation’. The first items of clothing she chose for herself were a fashionably tight pencil skirt, which she later described as ‘so sexual’, and a pair of high-heeled shoes. She experimented with her image, dying her hair red one week and bleaching a badger streak in it the next. Her mother recalled that ‘even at sixteen she would wear unusual clothes’. In an effort to attract attention, when the fashion for delicate daisy earrings hit Glossop, Vivienne made a pair out of huge marguerites. She was thrilled when, as she entered the dance hall, the trombonist took his instrument from his lips, pointed at her and hissed, ‘Look at that girl!’ On another occasion, when the other girls were wearing net petticoats, stiffened with sugar, under full skirts, ‘she came in a slinky black Suzy Wong dress that she had made – but then, she could carry it off.’

Keenly aware of the limitations of her background, Vivienne determined to elevate herself above it. Quite unfairly, she later boasted: 'I am very happy that I didn't need my family. They were not sceptical or questioning enough for me – too conforming.' Despite her apparent self-confidence, she felt she was 'stupid ... I thought that nobody around me had enough information to give me.' This conviction never left her, and to it one can perhaps trace her intellectual insecurity and her drive to seek out – usually male – mentors.

Always alert to an opportunity, at grammar school Vivienne selected as her best friend Maureen Purcell, who came from a slightly higher social level – her family owned the Glossop general store just off the main square. During lunch break the two teenagers would look for sheet music in the town, going back to the Purcells' to sing along to the hits they played on Mrs Purcell's record-player. After school, if she did not take the bus straight home to the dull village of Tintwistle, Vivienne could loiter at the Purcells' or join friends, such as Anne Shaw, and the boys in the café in Glossop. Her mother did not like her to be out late, so she began to stay over at the Purcells', which she still describes as being 'like a second home to me'.

Maureen Purcell was Jewish, which distinguished her from most of her classmates, and she possessed 'a much stronger personality than Vivienne'. Looking at photographs of the two friends in their mid-teens, it is striking how knowing and slickly-turned-out they are compared to their contemporaries; any vestige of innocence is artfully disguised. According to Eileen Mellish, 'the boys thought a lot of Vivienne – she was great fun to be with.' Their confidence probably stemmed from their relative worldliness. The Swires and the Purcells allowed their daughters to go to Manchester on Saturdays to shop or visit the dance halls, something which, Eileen Mellish remembers emphatically, 'my parents wouldn't let me do, full stop!' The two girls were even permitted to go for a holiday at Butlin's; Vivienne claimed that she 'got off with over a hundred blokes'.

In the pre-Profumo era, when moral standards were strict and social ordering was precise, the two girls' antics might have been expected to invite comment. However, it was often the case that the working classes were less hidebound by propriety than the 'respectable' and aspiring middle classes. Furthermore, there was in some urban Jewish circles a progressive, tolerant and playful spirit. Frequenting such circles in Manchester, where some of Maureen's relatives were in the tailoring business – and where both of her parents had worked as machinists in a clothes factory in the thirties – would have given Vivienne a glimpse of glamour. As a contemporary saying (at least among Mancunians) asserted, 'What Manchester thinks today, London thinks tomorrow,' and the city's King Street was proudly claimed to be 'the Bond street of the North'. Vivienne and Maureen also socialised with the Purcells' cousins, the McCofskis, who were Jewish tailors in Leeds.

Vivienne did not excel as a scholar in the competitive environment of the grammar school; she was socially rather than academically precocious. By the time she left the school in the summer of 1957, aged sixteen, she had only once visited an art gallery – in Manchester – dismissed the theatre as belonging to the past, and had read only storybooks and the set texts of her curriculum rather than ranging wider or deeper. Though she claimed to have been 'intellectually curious', she admitted to being unaware that what she called 'the vast lake of knowledge' existed, and never entertained the idea of going to university, which she associated with 'the snobby lot ... the boys all carried umbrellas, which we considered effeminate'. Her horizons were limited: 'I just wanted to leave and earn my living. If someone had told me I could train to be a librarian, I would have thought, "Great!" But I didn't know. How could I have been that stupid?' Eileen Mellish remembered Vivienne observing that nursing or hairdressing were her only options – both Maureen Purcell and Anne Shaw pursued the latter career: 'I think she wanted to do something different, but I don't think she had any idea.'

In July 1957 Vivienne took a six-week holiday job at Pickering's cannery with Maureen and Eileen. The factory's female employees – dubbed the 'pea pixies' because of their green overalls and caps – worked from 7.30 in the morning until 5.30 in the evening. 'It was horrendous because your hands got really sore with the juices,' Vivienne remembered. 'It was just money.' At first the three girls

were employed on the fruit-salad conveyor belt, but they soon irritated the regular staff by working faster than them and creating logjams. They were moved to the pea section, and Vivienne's mother would get angry when her daughter came home with her clothes stained bright green.

Later that year Vivienne's life changed dramatically. Her father was unemployed, and the family, at Dora's instigation, moved to the more affluent South, her parents taking over another post office in Station Road, Harrow, in North-West London. 'We had to move,' says Dora. 'there was no work.' It was a great culture shock for Vivienne. In Cheshire, as Malcolm McLaren says, 'she dominated her brother and sister, left and right, and was very much in control of her life. When she came to London she lost control. She thought they were not kind, easily accessible people and would cry, "I want to go back up North, I can't stand it here." It was tough on her.' Her horizons were broadening, but she was finding it hard to cope.

The social status of Harrow's residents was clearly defined by the position of their homes on the gradient that led up from Wealdstone, past Harrow town centre and on to the leafy heights of Harrow-on-the-Hill, where the well-heeled lived above the persistent urban smogs of 1950s London. Gordon and Dora's sub-post office and small general store at 31 Station Road was virtually at the bottom of the hill.

Station Road was a main thoroughfare, flanked with terraces of three-bedroom Edwardian houses. Some of the ground floors had been converted into shops, including tobacconists, funeral parlours and bakeries. Number 31 was a modest but adequate home. The Swires lived above the shop in three bedrooms, a sitting room/diner, a kitchen and a small bathroom. After a year Gordon took over another post office and grocery business in nearby Stanmore, while Dora continued to run Station Road.

Vivienne, the bombastic sixteen-year-old schoolgirl from Glossop, was temporarily cowed by her new surroundings, and she felt insecure. She enrolled at the local grammar school but found it difficult to integrate, a fact that she put down to her broad Northern accent. After leaving school she attended a silversmithing and jewellery-making course at Harrow Art School, but she left abruptly after one term, took a secretarial course at Pitman's and began to earn her own living as a typist for a local firm, having seen an advertisement on a tube train. Her favourite pastime was still dancing, and she attended many local dances. At one of them in late 1961 she met a young man called Derek John Westwood, two years her senior. Vivienne was instantly smitten by the handsome Westwood, who was confident, ardent and shared her love of rock 'n' roll: 'When I met Derek he was very lively and ever such a good dancer,' she said later. His family lived on Belvedere Way in Kenton, the next suburb, and his father was a checker in a factory. Derek was working as a toolshop apprentice in the local Hoover factory, supplementing his wages with casual work as a manager at bingo halls and hotels. He longed, however, to be an airline pilot, and not long after meeting Vivienne he secured a job as a steward for British European Airways. His prospects looking up, Derek proposed marriage. Vivienne, who had left her typing job and was now working as a primary school teacher in Willesden, North London, accepted, although she later said: 'I didn't want to marry him actually, but he was such a sweet guy and I couldn't give it up.'

Though the young couple planned to marry in a register office, Dora forcefully insisted that they have a white wedding, in a church. Vivienne made her own dress, which was not unusual in those days, and the wedding took place on 21 July 1962 at St John the Baptist, Greenhill, a large Edwardian stone church half a mile up the hill from the Swires' home. The couple were married by Reverend J.R. Maxwell Johnstone, and honeymooned in North Devon. Vivienne and Derek moved into 86 Station Road, three hundred yards from the Swires' sub-post office. On 3 September 1963 a son, Benjamin Arthur Westwood, was born at Edgware General Hospital in Hendon.

To contribute to the household expenses, Vivienne took a menial job chopping up rolls of print with a guillotine at the nearby Kodak factory ('I was the fastest chopper in the factory,' she later boasted). Despite Derek's kindness and great love for his new wife, she was bored. She felt that her life

was frustratingly circumscribed, and she watched with envy as her younger brother Gordon moved into a new and exciting circle at Harrow Art School. It was through him that she was to meet the man who would entice her away from working-class family conformity for ever.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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