



The Sugar Girls - Ethel's Story: Tales of Hardship, Love and Happiness in Tate & Lyle's East End

Duncan Barrett, Nuala Calvi

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During the Blitz, the Sugar Girls kept Britain sweet. The work was back-breakingly hard, but the Tate & Lyle factory was more than just a workplace - it was a community, a calling, a place of love and support and an uproarious, tribal part of East London. This is Ethel's story, one of four stories from The Sugar Girls.

‘On an autumn day in 1944, Ethel Alleyne walked the short distance from her house to Tate & Lyle’s refinery on the shining curve of the Thames. Looking up at the giant gates, Ethel felt like she had been preparing for this moment all her life. She smoothed down her frizzy hair, scraped a bit of dirt off the corner of her shoe and strode through.

She was quite unprepared for the sight that met her eyes ...’

In the years leading up to and after the Second World War thousands of women left school at fourteen to work in the bustling factories of London’s East End. Despite long hours, hard and often hazardous work, factory life afforded exciting opportunities for independence, friendship and romance. Of all the factories that lined the docks, it was at Tate and Lyle’s where you could earn the most generous wages and enjoy the best social life, and it was here where The Sugar Girls worked.

This is an evocative, moving story of hunger, hardship and happiness, providing a moving insight into a lost way of life, as well as a timeless testament to the experience of being young and female.

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