

ART APPRECIATION

Subject: Edinburgh - Biba exhibition

During March, a group of us boarded the 8.23 am Oxenholme train to Edinburgh and after a quick pit stop for coffee and pastries, we made our way to the Dovecot Studio ready for the lunchtime tour and talk on the history of 'Biba'

Just to give readers a quick insight of the collection, Barbara Hulanicki, alongside her husband Stephen Fitz-Simon, started a small mail-order company selling inexpensive clothing for women and children in 1963 – Biba's Postal Boutique. An advertisement in the Daily Mirror resulted in 17,000 orders for a Brigitte Bardot inspired pink gingham dress. This success prompted Barbara to give up her day job as a fashion illustrator and concentrate solely on Biba. (Photo of gingham dress below).

The clothes were designed for very skinny young women – Twiggy was an early customer, and the perfect size and shape for Biba designs. Only 500 of each garment would be made, so a design sold out quickly and the shop's stock would be constantly changing. The colour palette of the clothes was also unusual – in addition to black and brown, mauve, rust, plum and purple were much in evidence. Feather boas and wide-brimmed felt hats became archetypal Biba add-ons, and were much in evidence in Swinging London in the late 60s.

The garments on display have mainly come from private collections. Many are from the collection of Sarah Plunkett, the first manager of the first London Biba; others from Lilli Anderson, the last person to stop working at Biba when it closed in 1975; yet more are from individuals who responded to a recent appeal for Biba clothes and memorabilia. It was touching to see the small holes and imperfections in garments which have virtually been worn to death, they were loved so much.

This is a delightful and fascinating exhibition - a window into a now bygone era, when life seemed simpler and all you had to do was work out for how long you'd have to save to be able to afford the next Biba garment or item!

Lisa Sharp