

# EchoMemories

with Chris Lloyd



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## A lifetime of memories and fabulous fashions

To commemorate Middleton Hall's 125th anniversary, we spoke to some of the residents about their life stories, starting with Sixties fashion designer Mary Burgoyne, who is still super-chic into her nineties

**B**IG names and glamorous stories from a life in the fast lane of haute couture and high society in the swinging Sixties in fashionable London come tumbling from the elegant lips of Mary Burgoyne.

During an hour or so in her company in Middleton Hall, she transports listeners from her beginnings with a grease gun in an Aycliffe garage to the swimming pool at Cliveden House in Berkshire where John Profumo, the Secretary of State for War, is surrounded by call girls, one of whom will bring about his downfall.

The Rolling Stones are in the mix, as is royalty.

"One day," she begins, always punctuating her sentences with a gasping laugh, "I came back from my showroom in Sloane Street, and my friend, who I shared an apartment with, said: 'Hurry up, we are having tea. Tony and Margaret are here'.

"I said: 'Tony and Margaret?', and she said: 'You know, Princess Margaret and Tony Armstrong Jones. They've come for tea'."

She breaks into a laugh for dramatic effect, then adds: "'And Margot Fonteyn is with them'."

Her story begins 91 years ago when her father, Harold Taylor, ran the Gatehouse Garage at Aycliffe Village beside the Great North Road, where she fell in love with cars.

"I was always in the garage, filthy, pestering the mechanics. I loved being in there with the grease gun," she says. "I went with my father to a Darlington scrapyard down Valley Street, run by Gerry Baer, to get parts, sitting on his lap and steering the car."

She went to Aycliffe village school, then to The Mount, a private school in Bishop Auckland Market Place, before art college in Darlington and a fine art degree in Leeds. The Northern Echo last caught up with her in 1957 when she was just making her way in the art world in London.

"The 24-year-old daughter of an Aycliffe garage owner wants to cash in on the present craze for vintage cars by having her own



Mary aged about three with a car at her father's Gatehouse Garage in Aycliffe Village in about 1937



drawings reproduced on pottery, dinner mats and other household articles," says her tattered newspaper cutting.

And yes, she'd joined the prestigious Hurlingham Club in Fulham and was earning pin money sketching the wealthy members' vintage Bentleys and Jaguars, joining one of them in a 1902 Darracq on the London to Brighton run.

"A friend said 'the new E-Type Jag has just come in, I'm going to take it out for a spin. Do you want to come?'," she says. "It had the most beautiful shape. We flashed over Hammersmith flyover and suddenly two police motorbike riders came alongside us. He said: 'Ignore them, they just want to flag us down and have a look'."

She pauses, and with a laugh says: "And they did!"

But young Mary wanted more than just fast cars. "I wanted to get into haute couture and make some lovely things," she says.

She got a job with Jo Mattli, one of the top designers in London as

the fashion scene exploded after the strictures of the war, Mattli made his name making ball gowns for debutantes and little black dresses for society dos.

"Mattli had a little pug dog called Pushkin," she says. "He looked like the dog. And he walked like one, too, although his wife was more glamorous – she was French."

With Mattli, she dressed the Oscar-winning actress Ingrid Bergman, the scandalous socialite the Duchess of Argyll and even designed the first Gannex raincoat for Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

Then she branched out on her own, calling her business Mary Myne.

"I knew Courtney Jones," she explains, referring to the world ice dancing champion. "Whenever he saw me, he'd look at my outfit and say: 'Where did you get that one' and I'd reply: 'It's one of mine, it's one of mine' as I made them on a hand sewing machine in my flat in Eton Place. He said I should call my business Mary Myne."

"My showroom was in Sloane Street, opposite the Cadogan Hotel. Vidal Sassoon was next door and did all my models' hair, and mine. Elizabeth David was nearby, just starting out, and

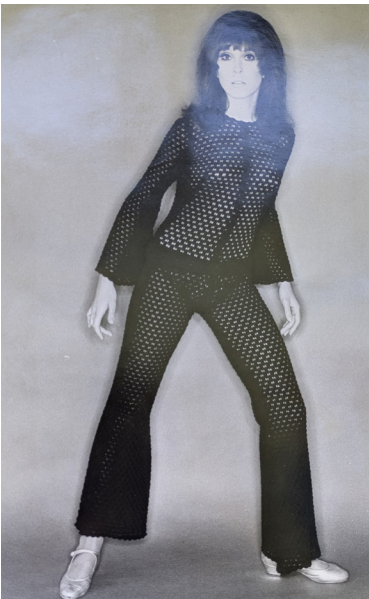


Mary wearing one of her designs in her studio at 42 Sloane Street in 1965

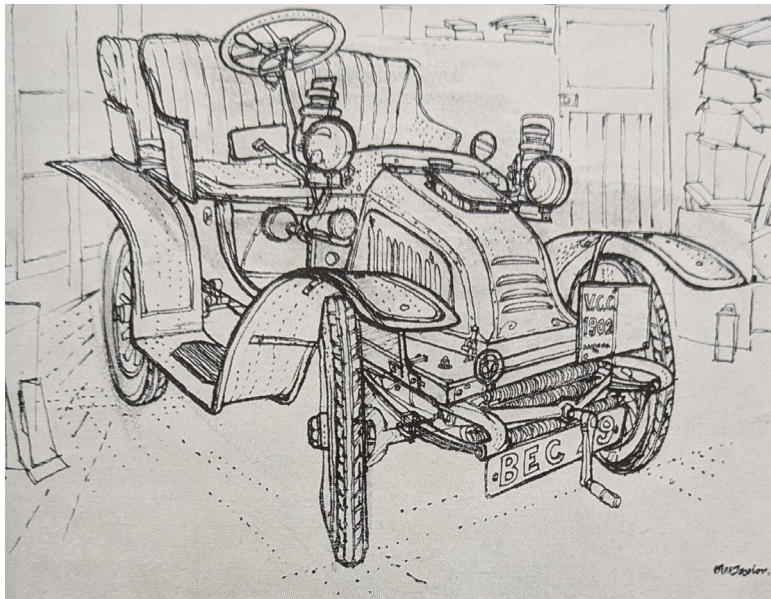


Middleton Hall resident Mary Burgoyne Picture: SARAH CALDECOTT

Mary with designer Xavier Marchemont, in Spain in 1962, modelling her matching creations



ABOVE LEFT: A catsuit designed by Mary for Anita Harris when she appeared in Way Out in Piccadilly in London's West End in 1966. ABOVE RIGHT: Mary's sketch of a 1902 Darracq from autumn 1961



LEFT: A page of Mary's stylish designs for Jo Mattli, as featured in Queen magazine in 1958



RIGHT: Mary wearing one of her designs in her Sloane Street workroom in 1965

Mary Quant's Bazaar was down the King's Road, but she only had a small showroom and when she couldn't cope, my showroom helped her out."

Bazaar, in particular, was iconic, changing the face of British fashion, capturing the zeitgeist of the decade.

"When I started in the 1950s women wore gloves and handbags to match, but in the 1960s it wasn't like that," says Mary. "The 1960s were freedom and flower power, and anything went. It is hard to explain, you had to be there, and fashions just went shorter and shorter and shorter until there was nowhere to go. I wore mini dresses, all knitted by a lady I knew in Richmond."

Mary dressed Anita Harris, who was appearing in the West End, and she hung out in the Fulham Road.

"The Rolling Stones started to play at the Café des Artistes – stamp your hand, strobe lighting, can't hear yourself speak for the noise," she says. "My first date with the man I married, David –

he was a policeman – was there."

She and David were in the capital until the late 1980s when they retired to Middleton One Row to be near Mary's parents. When they died, both into their nineties, David, a keen fisherman, somehow persuaded Mary to move to an island off the west coast of Scotland.

"For the love of the man, I did," she says, with a laugh. "It's only a house. We moved to the Isle of Bute, it was all glass, had a balcony overlooking the sunset, and we were there for 13 years... had a lovely time."

During David's police career he had had several motorbike accidents and as his mobility diminished, they decided that living a helicopter-evacuation away from hospital was no longer a good idea. They heard that new, independent bungalows were being built at Middleton Hall which offered a secure future and moved there in 2015.

David died in 2018 following a knee operation.

"It was the year before our 50th anniversary," she says,

momentarily losing her irrepressibility. "It was so sad."

But then she's back with a laugh: "He was my toyboy – I lied about my age. I went to his 21st birthday party when I was 32!"

They chose their Middleton bungalow as it fitted their lifestyle: room for two cars, two dogs and a lifetime of clothes.

"They are such lovely cloth I don't want to get rid of them," she says. "I have 20 rails of summer trousers, 20 of winter trousers, 20 of evening trousers, 60 pair of shoes, and all my knitted things lie flat. I have seven wardrobes, and there's another one for handbags."

With another great laugh, she adds: "I've told them that when I go, they should open a shop."

Having dashed through nine decades of big names and glamorous stories from her life in the fast lane, she dashes off, her purple cords matching her rollneck purple jumper but contrasting with her gilet of dark blue, to walk her dog in the parkland.