

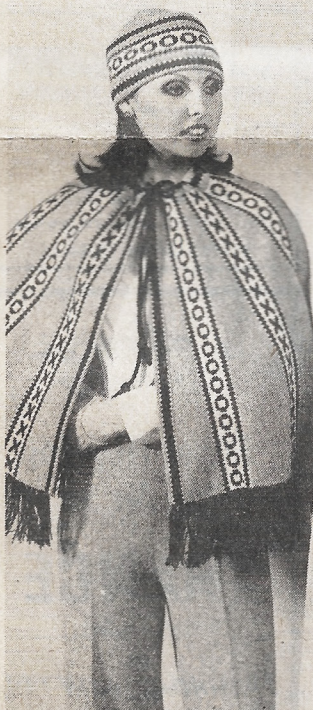
MAINLY FOR WOMEN

BY LYNDSY HEWISON

Women morris dancers — American



Painful road to prize



A distinctive trouser suit worn by this model has won Mrs. Pauline Bright a competition prize.

Over enthusiasm for sport gave Pauline Bright a painful elbow, but it also led her to a new career and now a competition prize.

For, finding the pain from tennis elbow too great to allow her to follow her interest of hand knitting, she bought a machine.

That was about 12 years ago — since then she has been a lecturer in fashion knitwear at a polytechnic and now works freelance from her home, Orchard House, North Road, Ormesby.

Her latest success will be marked today when she is presented with a prize for coming second in one section of a national fashion design competition organised by the WI and the British Wool Marketing Board.

The presentation will be at the Royal Show at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire where Pauline's entry — a trouser suit will be modelled.

The suit, in natural shades of Shetland wool ranging from cream to dark brown, took Pauline about two months to make. "I was very lucky with this. I had an idea at the back of my mind," she said.

Pauline, aged 50, hasn't yet decided whether to keep the suit. "If I think it looks really nice on the model I shall probably decide it probably won't suit me. It might be a little too young," she said.

Pauline, a member of the Ormesby branch of the WI for about four years, finds her knitting skills much in demand. She makes clothes — mostly suits — to measure and works from a caravan in the garden of her home.

But she is determined to keep it a part-time occupation. "The trouble is I have so many hobbies. As time goes by and you get older you think I must fit this in," said Pauline, whose interests include, tennis, badminton and sailing.

Bells are jingling, ribbons flying, feet leaping, sticks clashing or handkerchiefs waving... all to the sound of a fiddle or melodeon.

Then, there's momentary silence before the applause begins for the morris dancers.

The team is plainly enthusiastic and the dancing is clearly good — slick, with spot-on timing and plenty of spirit.

They were determined it would be that way. For here, dancing in an English hotel were American women morris dancers.

Either nationality or sex would have been enough for most people to contend with. For here, the home of morris dancing, there is bound to be much critical interest in the re-imported dancing.

And, to many traditionalists, women just don't take part in morris dancing.

HARDER

And Ring o' Bells, the 11-strong team from New York City were well aware of reactions they might get on their 2½-week tour of England.

When they stopped in Norwich, Linda Swenson, who did much of the tour organisation, told me: "We knew if we came here and were interlopers and women and weren't good we would be in trouble.

"So we worked awfully hard because we didn't want to be in that position. When we get in a difficult situation we just work harder."

It was the right approach. For a man in one of the teams they danced with told them that although he didn't think women should take part in morris he thought they were good.

Ring o' Bells was the first women's morris team to be formed in America — in 1974 — and although the oldest men's team has only been in existence for 11 years they found mixed reactions to their venture in their own country.

It was four years before the Morris Men in New York would dance with them — but they were also the last team to hold out.

Linda remarked: "It's not always the older teams. It's the younger ones who hear the way it is in England and wanted it to be like that."

The oldest team in America is the Pinewoods Morris Men who are members of the Morris Ring — a federation of clubs based in this country.

Sue Salmons, Ring o' Bells most experienced dancer, remarked: "Their attitude was mixed. They formed bylaws for men only because that's the way they could get into the Ring, the whole thing was part and parcel of their formation.

"It wasn't for many years that the question of women came up. When it did I would say the old guard didn't care. They were for changing the bylaws. The newer, younger members were against and they never did change the bylaws.

"They would have had to withdraw from the Ring. That was a very big issue."

Although morris teams of either sex are comparatively new in America, morris dancing is not — even for women.

They have been doing it with the Country Dance and Song Society since 1917; demonstrations had been staged and women dancers appeared on

television... but not as a team. Ring o' Bells grew out of the society and began with seven members. It now has 25.

In Norwich the team danced with Biffin Morris, a three-year-old side who claim to be the only wholly independent women's club in Norfolk.

They enjoy a good relationship with the Norwich men's group, Kemp's Men. Biffin are able to practice with the men once a week and have tips passed on to them.

But, some of the women have experienced hostility from men dancers. Squire, Jenny Howard, remarked: "Personally I have had a lot of bother from men. Individual male dancers have said some pretty nasty things to me."

It's an attitude which has forced some women's team to adopt subterfuges. At the same function Jenny has seen notices for "men's morris dancing workshop" and "women's ritual dancing."

Biffin is affiliated to the Women's Morris Federation which has been searching for evidence that women have taken part in the dancing for hundreds of years.

There are, says Jenny, records showing that women danced with William Kempe for

Handkerchiefs waving the Ring o' Bells team dance in the Maid's Hotel in Norwich as seen top left. Top right, members of the Ring o' Bells team from America seem to be applauding the performance but it's the home side, the Norfolk Biffin Morris that is winning their approval. Biffin Morris, who claim to be Norfolk's only wholly independent women's team, are seen going through their paces lower left. And in the bottom right picture Jill Bennett, who plays the fiddle for Biffin Morris and Lee Ellen Friedland, the Ring o' Bells melodeon player chat during a break between dances.

parts of his marathon from London to Norwich in 1599. Kempe, whose name has been taken by Kemp's Men, was one of Shakespeare's fellow actors.

Biffin is a type of Norfolk apple believed to be a rarity these days. The team has an apple design on the backs of their waistcoats.

SUPERSLIM RECORD PAIR



Super-slimmers Melody Sylvester, left, who lost 6 stone and Diana Swatman who lost over 4 stone.

Together, there was enough of Diana Swatman and Melody Sylvester to make three people.

Not any more. Between them the two Norwich women have slimmed off 10 st. 4 lb., gained the figures they always wanted... and won places in the finals of a "Slimmer of the Year" contest.

That makes them record-setters. For it is the first time two women from the same place have got into the finals of the Slimming World Club competition.

Over 600 people entered and only 20 have reached the finals to be held on Saturday.

SIX MONTHS

Diana and Melody — who go to different classes in the city — both took about six months to shed their extra stones and reach their targets.

Diana, aged 29, of 16, Old Farm Lane, Norwich, lost 4 st. 4 lb., said: "I am the owner of a very proud husband. We have been married 12 years and he

has never seen me like this." She now weighs 9 st. 10 lb.; was 12 st. 8 lb. when she married, aged 17; and at her heaviest was 15 stone.

Diana said: "It got to the point when I thought I was going to kill myself because I couldn't breathe. I was getting spots before the eyes. I thought, 'it's not good' so I went to the doctor and he sent me to the slimming club."

Melody, aged 24, of 81, Muriel Road, Norwich, shed 6 st. to reach her present weight of 10 st. 4 lb. "I was fed up with trying to get modern clothes in size 24. It was absolutely impossible, it really was.

"It was just a snap decision to lose some weight and get down to a size 14. I did it. I was so determined nothing was going to stop me."

"I'm a completely different person. I have self confidence. I used to stay at home every night. I would hardly go out because I was too self-conscious."