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Ditching the rules to dance free style

By Jane Lobb

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When Teresa Rushton dashes off to dance practice on a Monday evening, it is not strictly ballroom, the latest craze of Latin, or even tap dancing she is referring to – it is molly dancing, a variety of dance that dates back over 100 years. King's Cliffe resident Teresa has been a member of Pig Dyke Molly dancing group for three years. Apart from weekly practice sessions, the dancers display their art at various events and festivals, both within the UK and abroad. They recently performed at the Ashton World Conker Championships.

Teresa said: "I have always liked dancing and had witnessed Pig Dyke Molly performances at some of the local folk festivals.

"I loved their distinctive outfits and it always looked like great fun, so I got talking to them and they invited me along for a practice. "The group were wonderfully friendly and welcoming, and it proved to be a great source of exercise."

Molly dancing is a type of country dance that originated in the Cambridgeshire Fens back in the 19th century.

People would dress up, disguise themselves by wearing animal heads and painting their faces, and dance in the streets in mid-winter to provide entertainment in the hope of making some money.

The custom, along with the molly dancing, died out during the mid-1930s.

Pig Dyke Molly, named after a drainage ditch, was established as a dancing group around the beginning of the 1990s.

Previously a morris dance set, they were looking for alternative ways of making it more fun and attractive and sought to re-incarnate molly dancing and take it into the 21st century.

Tony Forster, leader and founder of Pig Dyke Molly said: "Many of the first dances derived from the original, simple country dances. However, over the years we have adapted them and even made up some of our own.

"Molly is less traditional than morris dancing and allows more room for creativity.

"We have our own musicians and our main aim is to make the dancing fun and interesting to people of all ages."

Teresa added: "The weekly practices and the performance events are great social occasions.

"When new dances are presented, we are all encouraged to have input so that everybody is happy with the finished effect and afterwards we go to the local pub for a drink.

"Molly is great because it attracts people of all ages from a wealth of different backgrounds, which makes for rich conversation."

The black and white clothing and make-up of Pig Dyke Molly has become their trademark, setting them apart from the crowd and providing a very individual image. Teresa said: "We buy materials from charity shops and like to make up our own costumes.

"It's great because we can use our imagination and be as creative as we wish, as long as the outfits are black and white.

"My long black hair means that I am the only member of the group who doesn't need to wear a wig!"

For more information about Pig Dyke Molly dancing go to www.pigdyke.co.uk



STRIKING – Pig Dyke Molly perform in their distinctive black and white outfits. Teresa Rushton is second right, bottom row, and inset

Top picture by Mandy Chasney

"My long black hair means that I am the only member of the group who doesn't need to wear a wig!"

Do you have an interesting hobby, collection or pastime? Write with a daytime phone number to Joni Ager, Features Desk, Evening Telegraph, Ise Park, Rothwell Road, Kettering, NN16 8GA or email joni.ager@northantsnews.co.uk.