



# Dancing Profile: The Gleaves

by  
GRAHAM PERKINS

"RICHARD AND JANET GLEAVE OLD-TIME Champions"—that headline could well have come true if the Gleaves had continued as they began, for the first lessons that either of them had were in Old Time dancing.

When he began to attend classes at a school in his native Slough, Richard was eight years old and it took him two years to master the Boston Two Step because he insisted on crossing his feet the wrong way. In spite of that, he went on to take part in competitions, winning the British Juvenile and Junior Old Time Championships.

Competing with a different partner, he also entered for Modern events. In 1959 he

won the Junior Star Championship, dancing with a girl called Diane Barron. Soon after the Star Richard became too old for the Juniors, so they competed together as adults, coming about sixtieth at Blackpool in the following year.

Diane then decided to turn professional. Richard made several attempts at forming new partnerships but none really worked out. Two years went by and he came very close to giving up dancing altogether. Then along came Janet Wade.

At the age of twelve she had first attended some Old Time classes which were held in





a church hall near her East Ham home. A shy girl, Janet rarely went out, but when her sister, Evelyn, took up junior competitions, Janet went along to watch. When she was fifteen she joined a local Modern Formation Team, and three years later, partnered by a boy from the team, entered individual competitions.

When that partnership ended, she joined up with Ray Rouse, then a member of the rival gang—Peggy Spencer's Formation Team; they reached the last twenty-four at Blackpool and the last twelve in the International.

Janet now wanted to concentrate solely on individual events but Ray wanted to continue with formation work as well. The split, which would eventually have occurred anyway, was precipitated when Sydney Francis announced at one of his Monday practice nights that a young man was seeking a partner.

Guessing that it was Richard, Janet rang him the next day and they arranged to have a trial session at Elsa Wells's Queensway Ballroom on the Wednesday before Christmas.

Richard later realised that he would be unable to make that date and, not having Janet's telephone number, wrote her a letter. Due to Christmas postal delays, the letter did not arrive in time so Janet spent half the evening vainly waiting for Richard to turn up and the rest of it blowing up balloons for Elsa's Christmas party.



*A kiss from Victor Silvester for Diane Barron after she and Richard Gleave had won the Junior Star; Above, a very junior but very assured old timer, Richard with one of his very first partners in his first competition. They came second.*

They eventually got together early in the New Year and in May 1963 danced in the British Amateur, coming twenty-sixth. In 1965 they made the final for the first time, being placed fourth. Then, after moving up to third in 1966 and second in 1967, they finally won the Championship for the first time in 1968.

By that time they had been married for eighteen months and were living in Slough with Richard's parents—they were spending too much money on dancing to be able to afford a home of their own.

Further victories in "the British" followed in 1969 and 1970, and they also won two European and two World's titles. The second World's was particularly memorable for Janet because her sister, Evelyn, danced in the Latin, taking second place.

In May 1970, having won Blackpool three times running, the Gleave's turned professional. Janet, who had spent the ten years before her marriage as a secretary in London and the four years after it in a similar position in Slough, was then able to give up her job.

Since their income was still not sufficient to enable them both to become full-time dancers, Richard stayed with his firm for another year. He displayed even greater job stability than Janet, keeping the same job—as an estimator in a company manufacturing motor-car gaskets—for thirteen years. He





*Above, cubby cheeked Richard (right) stands proudly at the head of the Unsworth team; below, the big thrill for all dancers—fourth in the British at their first Blackpool final in 1965.*

was able to obtain the time off that he needed for competitions and that, to a dancer, is the most vital consideration of all.

What finally made Richard give up work was the increasing frequency of trips overseas. One trip which he will never forget was a four-week tour of Japan.

Peter Eggleton had originally been booked for this trip but he fell ill and asked Richard to take his place. When the Gleaves discovered that the programme included seven four-hour lectures, they nearly turned it down. Richard had never lectured in his life before and recalls with horror how bored his Japanese audience must have been listening to a solid four-hour talk on "Department, Poise and Hold."

On the competition front, the Gleaves went straight into the first six, coming fourth behind Eggleton, Hurley and Westley in the 1970 International. When Peter retired they began to tussle for second place with Westley and then, after his retirement, they started to shadow Anthony and Fay.

When the 1973 British came round, they felt they might take the Foxtrot from Hurley but never seriously considered that they would win the Championship.

However, Blackpool has always been lucky for the Gleaves, and the crowd, ever eager to see a new champion, was behind them all the way, giving them a tremendous lift.

When Alex Warren announced the result, Janet looked round only to find that Richard had disappeared—he was already out in the middle of the floor.

The only regret they have about that night is that the Hurleys had to be beaten, for Anthony and Fay had always gone out of their way to help the Gleaves—especially in those difficult early years of their professional career.

To ensure that he stays at the top, Richard has a rigorous daily programme of physical exercises. He believes that strength is vital to a good dancer and as an amateur even used to do a three-mile run every day.

His main hobby is chess and he is also a keen language student. He has learned German and is now attempting Russian and Japanese. Janet enjoys reading and cooking—when she is not busy making dresses for dancing.

Eventually the Gleaves intend to have their own school but, for the moment competitions are the first priority as they go forward into 1974 to defend the British and World's titles which they won last year.

