

Coats Pension Plan About the Harlequin



At least twice a year, the Coats Pensions Office distributes a colourful and informative newsletter to all our members which covers a variety of subjects ranging from technical updates detailing legislation changes to day-to-day stories from the office. In Pensions News 14 (issued May 2005), we included an article about the Coats Pensions mascot. We thought you might like to know a bit more about the harlequin, affectionately known as Harley.

We were moved to write about the harlequin after we received a lovely letter from one of our members, asking us why we decided on our harlequin as our mascot for the Pension Plan. Mrs Parkin is 91 years old and was Manageress of Van Allens in Cheltenham before retiring in 1973. She has been cutting out the image from the Pensions Newsletters for the last 3 years and sticking it to crackers to give to her family (who love him dearly). When we received this letter we were touched by how something so simple could give someone such pleasure.

The harlequin was inspired by the chance coincidence of Kevin Shilling, our designer, thinking hard about what would be a suitable character or symbol, and a meeting with a friend whom he accompanied to buy some clothes. While in the men's outfitters, waiting for his friend to try on various items, he could see a tailor in the back room cutting up cloth and letting the discarded pieces fall to the floor. It made him think of patchwork ideas, and as he moved on and browsed through some ties on a rack, he came across a harlequin styled tie made up of neat diamond shapes in different colours.

Returning to his desk, he found that the idea of the harlequin had taken shape in his head, and he was immediately able to draw the character. The rationale for the design is that the harlequin is made from colourful fabric threaded together, in much the same way as the Pension Plan is made up of different elements which are all linked together.

It is easier for people to relate to a character and the relevance to our business of fabric and thread made it particularly appropriate.

We had in our administration team a lady who was skilful at making clothes, so we acquired the fabric and she created the harlequin suit, which was then worn by Karen, a member of our team in the first pictures we used. The Harlequin lady who is seen today in much of our communication is employed by our communications specialists, but we still think of Karen as Harley. This doesn't, however, mean that she acts the clown!

It is interesting to note that, in spite of both "models" being female, we always think of Harlequin as a 'he'. The character was nicknamed Harley after it was suggested he was the brother of the Group Pensions Manager - whose surname is Quinn - but there is no truth in this suggestion!

When we told of this enquiry, Kevin promptly sent a picture in a frame of an original of Harley. We sent this picture on to Mrs Parkin, and it arrived on Christmas Eve. We received an emotional telephone call from Mrs Parkin, who was clearly overwhelmed by the letter and her wonderful Christmas gift!!