NEW T.S OF THE WORLD

Look what happened to Sweeney tough guy!

By ROGER INSALL

TV TOUGH guy Mike Kent, a former cop in The Sweeney and muscleman extra in films with superstars John Wayne, Robert Mitchum and Sean Connery, has begun a new life — as a woman!

The beefy six-footer, once an Army boxing champion, now calls himself Michelle following a sex-change operation earlier this year.

Mike is now officially registered with Equity, the actors' union, as a female, has a 45-inch bust and keeps trim as a goal-shooter for a women's netball team.

Yet he still lives with his ex-wife Jennifer and their two children in Catford, South London, and has confided the secret of his changeover to only a few close friends in show business.

"I suppose a lot of people will be shocked," said Mike. "But throughout my life I have lived with the conflict of not knowing what to do for the best.

"The feminine side of my personality was much stronger and now I feel much more comfortable as a woman."

During his army days, Mike built a powerful physique as a weight-lifter and was light-heavyweight boxing champion of his regiment. He took up acting when he was demobbed.

He never really made the big time, but because of his broken nose and tough appearance he found plenty of work as an extra.

Mike explained: "I suppose throughout my acting career I have always landed very masculine roles.

Afraid

"That has aggravated my problem and made it difficult to come to terms with the fact that deep down I wanted to be a woman.

"Before I had the operation I used to go for auditions as a man although I had been taking female hormone pills and was beginning to develop breasts.

"I nexer told anyone because technically I was still a man and was afraid of being laughed at and rejected.

"But I was cheating them and cheating myself."

Mike, who has a 13-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter, said the children were aware of the sex change.

He said: "They were a bit upset for a while, but they soon took it in their stride and now they are not worried at all.

"My little girl, who is very bright, takes no notice of my change in appearance. In fact, she sometimes helps me to choose my clothes!"

Mike now advertises in the show business newspaper The Stage as a female impersonator and cabaret artiste.

He is proud of his new career as a drag artiste at pubs and clubs throughout the country.

He said: "I am not impersonating a woman because I AM a woman. But it is still difficult getting people to accept me in that way, particularly among those who knew me as a man."

THE PEOPLE

VICTIM OF SEX-CHANGE IS SPARED

Former television actor and Army boxing champion, Michelle Kent, who smashed a 30 hospital window in frustration at having a woman's body and a man's face following a sex change operation, was placed on probation for two years when he appeared on remand at West London Court yesterday.

Kent, 48, unemployed, of Glenwood Road, Catford, had undressed and smashed the window after unsuccessfully seeking help from a psychiatrist to obtain plastic surgery.

"I think this is one of the saddest cases imaginable," said Mr Eric Crowther, the magistrate. "I think you've shown great persistence and courage."

Kent, who admitted criminal damage, had since repaid for the window.

DAILY EXPRESS by Alexander Chancellor 9/3/82

DAILY TELEGRAPH 6/3/82

WHEN a West London magistrate commented last week "I think you've shown great persistence and courage," he might have been congratulating a policeman who had just brought a particularly dangerous criminal to justice.

But, in fact, he was congratulating a convicted man in what he described as "one of the saddest cases imaginable."

The accused was a former TV actor and Army boxing champion called Kent who had decided, in one of those mysterious aberrations to which a surprising number of men are susceptible, that he would be better off as a woman than as a man.

So, on St Valentine's Day last year, he underwent the operation and changed his name to Michelle. He did it at his own expense, having obtained a divorce from his wife and having sold his home and business (he manufactured pub mirrors with transfers of old-fashioned advertisements on them).

Unfortunately, although he had had plastic surgery to feminise his nose, he did not make a convincing woman. He had a large, sticking-out jaw and looked to all the world like a man in disguise.

Refused

So one day he was beaten up by skinheads and his new nose was ruined. He wanted it repaired, but was told that this could not be done immediately, and he would have to wait.

Desperate he went to visit his psychiatrist in a London hospital and, on being refused instant admission, stripped himself naked and smashed a window. He was taken away and charged with criminal damage.

It was indeed a sad case. The sympathetic magistrate put him on probation for two years.

By coincidence, this wretched episode occurred on the 30th anniversary of the first sex change operation in Britain to be reported in the newspapers—the transformation of Robert Cowell, a former fighter pilot and son of a major-general, into Roberta Cowell.

I remember it well, for it caused enormous excitement at school. Since 1954, such operations have been available on the National Health, and more and more people have been undergoing them. According to Department of Health statistics, roughly 20 to 30 men are turned into women every year in National Health hospitals.

I should correct that: they are not *turned* into women, which would be a medical impossibility, but into *imitation* women. At the Charing Cross Hospital, in London, the country's principal sex change centre, 400 men and 250 women have been through the mill since 1954.

The operation is only carried out on the National Health if it is regarded as "clinically necessary." This means, in practice, if it is required to restore a person's peace of mind.

For there are no physical disadvantages in belonging to the "wrong" sex.

On the whole, the operation appears to achieve its desired results. Those who undergo it feel happier afterwards. Certainly the celebrated writer and journalist James (now Jan) Morris, who had the operation carried out more exotically in Casablanca seems a very contented woman.

But the frustration which which drove Michelle Kent to smash a hospital window shows that things do not always turn out so well. How does the NHS decide when the operation is "clinically necessary?" It is not enough that the patient should be miserable and obsessed.

If the doctors decide that a man, even after surgery, will not emerge as a plausible woman, they will refuse to operate.

If he is married, they will make him get divorced (even though he will not, in fact, become a woman).

If he has attempted suicide, they will turn him away. He has, in other words, to be both "pretty" and single, and psychologically stable.

This seems rather bad luck on those would be womenwho are hideous and hysterical and want to stay married.

But it is tempting to blame the growth of sex-change surgery in part, at least, on the doctors. To turn a man into a woman must be a thrilling technical achievement: It is almost like playing God.

No wonder there are some surgeons who are eager to perform such operations.

The most famous of all British trans-sexuals is April Ashley, a sailor's son from Liverpool who, as a "woman," married and subsequently divorced a Scottish peer.

Her biography, *April Ashley's Odyssey*, is to be published this spring when we will be able to judge how happy she has been.

In the meantime the author, Duncan Fallowell, has told *Tatler* magazine: "I wouldn't belittle April's sufferings, but I think she's learned to live with her sadness and keep it in its place."

This does not seem to me to be a terrific adver-