



Charities Day in Stirling. 1969 & 1970, with Cate Houston as Charities Queen.

## CHARITIES FLING

Charities' big night, whatever other mud has been slung at then, was an undoubted masterpiece of showmanship. There was the pleasurable build-up of tension in the sumptuous atmosphere of Allan Water Hotel, where one felt civilised and (dare I say) almost cultured in high, graceful rooms amongst ladies and gentlemen who looked stunningly unfamiliar and imposing in long, glittering (and sometimes daring) dresses and quiet dark suits respectively. (Some males decided to be different, some strikingly successfully in Highland Evening dress and others strikingly unsuccessfully in flowery ties) — but no matter. One sipped sherry or brandy and talked for a while in the cocktail bar before being summoned by a formally-dressed waiter to dine, and after a perfunctory grace engaged a large and sumptuous meal. (Albeit some were surprised to find that "Creme Malakoff" meant tomato soup and Consomme Mikado clear chicken). Everyone felt the tension, though: even before the meal one of the contestants could not bear to take a practice walk round the hall without moral support from her escort, and by the time they were summoned out before the final parade before the announcement and the crowning they were visibly shaking, and so were we all, for anxiety is powerfully infectious. But they made a queenly job of it, and strain never threatened dignity.

Ex-provost Macfarlane Gray then stood to announce the result and, as provosts will, chose the wrong moment to tell a funny story (which I have forgotten). When he announced the result, though, there was a pandemonium of clapping as Kate Houston, duly elected Charities Queen, took the rostrum. Were I a fashion correspondent (which, you may be surprised to hear, I am not) I might go into raptures over her pale yellow sheath dress (a colour beloved of that other Queen, one notices):

were I a member of Chem. Soc. (vide-noticeboards) I might go into ecstasy of another sort; were I a beat group I might rupture guitar upon guitar to describe her. But . . . one can only say she was splendid as she was crowned by the ex-provost and then congratulated by Sue Holland, the retiring Queen — who got a heartwarming reception and was, as always, charming and unaffected. The company then adjourned to the bars and the ballroom, and the first dance was taken by Queen Kate and Mr Macfarlane Gray; and Kate endeared herself to all present by kicking off her shoes and getting down to some serious dancing (she can dance, too). After that the ex-provost withdrew to his wife, muttering that perhaps he should "leave the young folks to get on with it," but before leaving went on record as saying the contestants — all of them — were "the best in Scotland — anywhere."

The ball, once it warmed up, went with some panache, and what skill lacked enthusiasm improvised. Certain rugby players got down to it in typical fashion to provide light (?) entertainment on the side, and the raffle must have been hilarious, since everybody laughed. The most unexpected people raved up (and down) the twist, which was called for four encores and was only stopped by time running out. Indeed, especially from Auld Lang Syne and the friendliness of all and sundry thereafter one might suggest that most people were intoxicated with more than the atmosphere — but dashing gentlemen and fine ladies do not do such things, so perhaps not. Suffice it to say that Queen Kate's coronation was joyfully and thoroughly celebrated in her little realm as any Stuart's or Tudor's ever was, and with good cause. Long live the Queen!

Roddy Cowie.

(Christ, didn't you guess).



**Cate Houston in the pony and trap used in Dr Finlay's Casebook.**



**Charity Queen Contestants, 1969- 1970.**