

I wrote this article some years ago, and it is totally free of support for any candidate, it's just a history of the rectorship and the installation - for those who haven't been around long enough to have seen one before. I hope it sheds some light...

The History of the Rector

The post of Lord Rector of the University of St Andrews is the oldest of its kind, dating back to the university's foundation in the early fifteenth century (1410) when it was first filled by Abbot Lawrence of Lindores, who rejoiced in the title: Inquisitor of Heretical Pravity in Scotland. In the early days of the office, the Rector was chosen by the doctors, masters and students of the university to be the head of their society.

In modern times, however, and following many permutations, this right is reserved to students who hold a campus wide ballot triennially. A right for which the student body has fought long and bitterly, resulting at times in the expulsion of those who defied the Senate. It was not, in fact, until the University Act of 1858 that all students had a vote and the election was opened to candidates from outside the university. Sadly, this extended franchise led to forty years of political candidates and often absentee Rectors. One, John Stuart Mill, the philosopher, even referred to his post as an Honorary Presidency and matched his actions to his words by showing up only once, to be installed.

In 1892 a man of entirely different character was elected, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, the 3rd Marquess of Bute a man of enormous wealth and influence who was to realise the full potential of the chairmanship of Court to be a thorn in the side of the Principal, albeit an extraordinarily generous one. The first of the great working Rectors, it was the Marquess model which would shape the future of the Rectorship.

There were to follow the Marquess double term a succession of famous names which included Andrew Carnegie, Jan Smuts, Marconi, the Arctic explorers Nansen and Grenfell, Rudyard Kipling, and of course J M Barrie, now best remembered for his epic ninety minute Rectorial address entitled Courage. Some of these men were quite brilliant, others a total disaster and it is perhaps because of this that St Andrews began its tradition of electing what have become known as the media men. These included John Cleese, Frank Muir, Alan Coren, Tim Brooke-Taylor and Nicholas Parsons, there was then a slight return to the earlier part of the century when the students elected for two terms the flamboyant and often controversial, Donald Findlay QC. But with the victory of Andrew Neil in October of 1999, and Clement Freud three years later, the tradition reasserted itself. All of these men, (only one woman, Katharine Whitehorn, has ever held the office) and so many others have taken their place in the rich and varied history of Scotland's oldest university.

The Rectorial Installation & Drag

The traditions of the Rectorial Installation (or simply Rectorial) are as old as the office itself, and like the office, have undergone considerable change over the centuries. For example, there was a time when many of the stops were in Dundee, or when the Rector could expect to receive his honorary doctorate on being installed. Perhaps the most notable change, however, lies in the timing of the Drag which once preceded the installation ceremony leading, needless to say, to much high spirited goings on in the Younger Hall. Today, though, in recognition of the considerable imbibing associated with the Drag it has been moved to the following day allowing both greater freedom and a little more decorum at the formal proceedings. The old Rectorial handbooks are replete with stories of bawdy singing, bizarre stunts and toilet paper streamers festooning the hall, although they do stress that order

The Rectorship

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was restored before the Chancellor entered. Which is, perhaps, as well or the assembled multitude would have missed that most important aspect of all ♦ the Rectorial Address. </p><p align="justify">Every Rector who has been installed has enjoyed the right to speak on a subject of their choosing to the student body, and in the past such subjects as Tradition, Fortitude, Independence, Race, Equality, Change Courage (and John Cleese♦s infamous parody ♦ Cowardice) have been covered. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the whole, long process of installing a Rector is the traditional Drag. In days gone by this was a highly symbolic journey, with the Rector entering through the city gate, the West Port, where he would be formally greeted by the then President of the SRC before being dressed in a red undergraduate gown. After accepting this undoubted honour in a suitably gracious style, the drag began in earnest travelling around the town stopping to meet student groups, and consume alcohol, along the way. At the end of the drag, his introduction to the university completed, the Rector would remove the red gown and adopt the black robes of a graduand before being made an honorary doctor of the university. Sadly the symbolism of this process has now been largely lost, no longer does a Rector receive an honorary doctorate by right of office, and certainly if he did, he would not do so at the start of his term. However, never ones to discard a tradition, the students of St Andrews continue the drag much as it once was. </p><p align="justify">Nowadays, the Rector is conveyed in a variety of different ways; variously in a brewer♦s dray, a brougham, a car or even on foot. Sometimes drawn by horses, sometimes carried shoulder high by the SRC, most often pulled by the Blues of the Athletic Union. Now many of the stops are in local pubs as the majority of students live either in flats or in the custom built halls out of town but the route remains largely unchanged. Happening as this does only once every three years it is, understandably, a high point in the calendar of the university and although the turn out at the West Port at 10am may be thin, the Drag always gathers momentum during the day. At each stop a Hall Committee or student society traditionally presents the Rector with an appropriate, and perhaps amusing, gift. In the past these have included the keys to an all female hall, a live pig, a golden brick, Machiavelli♦s Prince and the more sedate but no less appreciated and surely to be expected golf clubs, university scarves and water-colours. In the cold of North East of Fife, however, it is probably the warming water of life that will be most gratefully received. When the Drag has finally run its course, the Rector normally retires to recuperate and allow the student body to continue the celebrations unsupervised, be that with a disco, a beach party (in later months!) or a nice tea dance ♦ as once was! </p>