



Yvonne Ross, wearing the Provost's chain of office, with First Minister Alex Salmond.

# A tale of skulduggery with the Provost's chain!

THE ROYAL Burgh of Dornoch's civic regalia saw the light of day for the first time in decades, thanks to the First Minister's visit to the town.

Provost Yvonne Ross, who bears the title by dint of her position as community council chairwoman, donned the very valuable solid gold chain to welcome the cabinet.

She looked suitably official but the appearance of the almost forgotten chain led surprised onlookers to query where on earth it had been for the last 30 or so years.

And therein lies an astonishing tale of suspicion, cunning and skulduggery.

Apparently it all dates back to around 1975 when town councils morphed into district and regional councils and the office of provost disappeared.

Outgoing provost Harry Clunie was bound and determined that the chain, along with the ancient Royal Burgh charter, would not be whisked away to a central location, but would stay in the town.

So he secreted both in a very safe place, well away from the powers-that-be in Glenurquhart Road, Inverness. And there they have lain until this week and the historic summer visit of the Cabinet.

One man who knows all about it is Duncan Allan, who served for 18 years in successive authorities as a town, district and Highland councillor. During his term in office, the provostship was restored and he took the title.

He says: "When the old town council became defunct, Provost Clunie was fearful that, like so many other things including the town council records, the chain and charter would be taken to Inverness and put in a

museum there. So it has been held privately in a safe in Dornoch. It was a little bit of deceit and secrecy in order that Dornoch could keep its treasures.

"When I retired, I let this be known to Highland Council for the first time, but the people who have chaired the community council have always known about it."

Mr Allan would not be drawn on exactly where they have been stored and would only say: "They are in safe-keeping in the home of a professional person whose antecedents had close connections with the town council."

He added: "The only time to display the regalia would be during a civic occasion. This is the first civic occasion that has happened in Dornoch since the provostship was returned to Dornoch.

"Quite rightly, Yvonne put on the regalia because a ministerial visit to Dornoch is a big event."

Mr Allan said the ancient charter, which was granted by Charles I, could not be put on display because it had been written on vellum, which deteriorates if repeatedly exposed to light.

"It has been kept in a pouch but fairly recently, thanks to a public spirited donor, it was sent to St Andrew's University where it was restored and put in a book with covers so it is not exposed to the light but can be easily opened up and read."

Mr Allan added: "They are in very safe hands. It was just a bit of deceit. We kept our own treasures to ourselves until it was safe to bring them out."