

Report in the Sunday Times, circa 1990.

## The first “Miss SA” was a reluctant queen.

By Janice Hillier and Romy Meurer.

South Africa’s first beauty queen, Mavis Alexander, who died this week aged 84, remained as gracious over the years as the day she was crowned.

And the retired school teacher who stole the hearts of thousands, kept in shape swimming, bowling and playing golf until a couple of years ago when she became frail.

Mavis was crowned Gala Queen of 1925.

The competition, which attracted 783 entrants, invited readers of the Cape Argus to choose the queen.

### Dancer

More than 20 000 people visited an exhibition of photographs and then voted for their favourites. Among Mavis’s prizes were 25 guineas, the use of the Crossley car that transported the Prince of Wales during his official visit (just for the weekend) and a variety of personal gifts – including silk stockings, tea parties for her self and her friends. Six months “permanent wave dressing”, an easy chair, a gold watch and a course of tango lessons at a dance studio. The Kimberley-born schoolteacher snatched first place from a dancer, Miss Jean Stevens, and Miss Olivia Lategan, who were placed second and third.

This week, one of Mavis’s closest friends, Mrs. Alma Cuff, 84, recalled the day in 1925 when she accompanied Mavis to a photographic studio in the Strand for the photograph that was to make her famous.

“The photographer told Mavis about the competition and insisted that she enter”

Describing Mavis as “a very beautiful “ woman, she said her friend was not keen on the contest at all.

### Engaged

Said Mrs. Cuff “her parents voiced their strong disapproval over the affair, as it was not the done thing at that time.”

Mavis’s best friend, Mrs. Lily Joyce, also 84, said “I still remember Mavis and I walking past the newspaper offices and seeing the entrants displayed outside the building.

Mavis was entrant number 240. I turned to her and said “You stand a good chance – the people like you!”

“In those days it was the face that was important, not the figure.”

Mavis’s niece, Mrs. Joan Alexander, said her aunt had been engaged to Mr. Bernie Mitton for 35 years before she eventually married him at the age of 55.

Tragically Bertie died of throat cancer a few months later.

Mrs. Alexander said her aunt taught in Montague, Cape, until she retired.