

The Story of Scotland's Flags

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The story of Scotland's flag has to start with the story of our modern patron Saint, Andrew (before the 9th Century St. Colum Cheile (or Columba) was the patron saint, having brought Christianity to Scotland):

Despite Andrew being one of the original apostles (along with his brother Simon-Peter) little is known about his life. He was a fisherman from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee in what is now Israel. After the crucifixion of Jesus he took the message to the people of the Scythian Steppes and Asia Minor. He was crucified by the Romans at Patrae (now called Patras) in Achaia, near the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth. He asked to be crucified in a different manner from Jesus, as he didn't feel worthy of emulating the messiah. So he was crucified on two diagonal pieces of wood. This is the origin of his symbol, the saltire.

His body was entombed, and about 300 years later, in 340AD, Constantine II decided to move the relics of Andrew to Constantinople (now Istanbul in Turkey). According to legend a Greek monk called St. Rule (or St. Regulus in Latin) was warned by an angel in a dream that Constantine intended to move the relics and was told to

take them to "the ends of the earth" to keep them safe. The monk managed to remove a tooth, an arm bone, a kneecap and some fingers from St. Andrew's tomb and took them as far away as he could. Scotland was pretty much the end of the known world in those days and it was here that St. Rule came, only to be shipwrecked off the Fife coast. The Pictish settlement that he came ashore at is now called St. Andrew's.

A complication in this tale is that one of Colum Cheile's followers in Ireland was St. Reaghail or Regulus. He dwelt at 'Mucinis', an small island in a loch. 'Mucinis' means 'Isle of the Pigs' and an old name for St. Andrew's is 'Muckcross' - 'Headland of the Pigs'. The Irish St. Regulus has his Saints Day on 16 October while the St. Andrew's St. Regulus has his on 17 October. They may well be the same person.

Another, and possibly more likely, tale is that a Bishop of

Hexham, called Acca, who was a renowned relic collector, brought the relics of St. Andrew to the settlement in 733AD, after being banished from his See. There certainly seems to have been a religious centre at St. Andrews at that time, either founded by St. Rule or by a Pictish King, Angus, who reigned from 731 - 761AD and the Abbey in Hexham was dedicated to St. Andrew.

Whichever tale is true, and there are others, the relics were placed in a specially constructed chapel. In 1160AD the chapel was replaced by St. Andrew's Cathedral, and the town became the ecclesiastical capital of Scotland and draw for Mediaeval pilgrims who came to see the relics.

The relics have now disappeared, probably destroyed during the Scottish Reformation, when the strictures of Calvinism tended to wish to remove traces of Catholic 'idolatry'. The site of the relics is now marked by a plaque in the ruins of the Cathedral, which was also destroyed by the Calvinists.

Most of St. Andrew's remains were stolen from Constantinople in 1210AD and are now to be found in Amalfi in Southern Italy. In 1879 the Archbishop of Amalfi sent a piece of the Saint's shoulder blade to the re-established Roman Catholic church in Scotland.

In 1969, Pope Paul VI visited Scotland and gave the people some more relics of St. Andrew with the words "Saint Peter gives you his brother". These are now displayed in a reliquary in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh.

So that is how St. Andrew became associated with Scotland.

The National Flag

The origins of the national flag are also shrouded in mystery and legend. The story, as generally agreed, originates in a 9th century battle near Athelstaneford in Lothian. The earliest know account is in the 1165AD Register of St. Andrews. In 832AD a Pictish army under Angus Mac Fergus, High King of Alba, along with a Scots detachment led by Eochaidh Mac Etsin, King of Dalriada (the grandfather of Kenneth Mac Alpin, the first High King of Scotland), was surrounded by a much larger force of Angles under Athelstane. Some historians claim the encounter followed a cattle raid by the Picts.

Before the battle, King Angus prayed to God for a victory, despite his smaller army. During the battle clouds appeared, forming a white diagonal cross against the blue sky - the very cross on which St. Andrew was

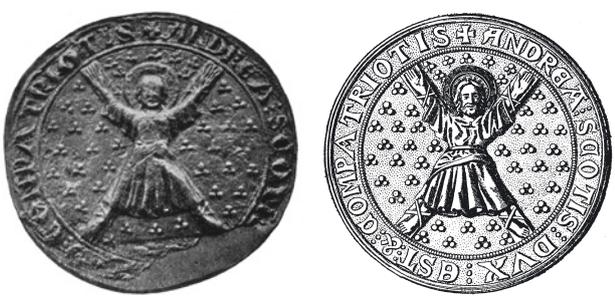


martyred. Angus promised that if St. Andrew helped his forces to victory, then he would make St. Andrew his kingdom's patron saint. The Picts and the Scots defeated the Angles and St. Andrew became Alba's patron saint. When Kenneth Mac Alpin, who may have been at the battle with his grandfather, united the Scots and Picts and named the new kingdom Scotland, Andrew became the patron saint of the whole realm.

According to legend this is also how Scotland acquired its national flag, but unfortunately there is no documentation to corroborate this. Sixteenth century historians appear to believe the legend, but they may have had access to documents or sources that are now lost. The 18th Century writer, Nisbet, says "After the victory, the two confederate Kings, out of a sense of singular mercy, went in procession to the Church of St. Andrews (where his arm was said to be a relic) to thank God and his apostle, for the victory; purposing that they and their successors, should in all time coming use, on the ensigns the Cross of St. Andrew. How well the Picts performed I know not, being overcome and expelled afterwards by the Scots; but it has been the constant practice of our Kings to carry a white saltire cross, on a blue banner."

The first known use of St. Andrew's cross in Scotland was as a religious, not national, emblem in the seal of the Chapter of St. Andrew's Cathedral in about 1180AD. St. Andrew also appears on the seal of Bishop Gamelin, Chaplain to Alexander II and Chancellor of Scotland in 1254AD.

In 1286AD we have the first known appearance of the figure of St. Andrew as a national emblem. The seal of the Guardians of Scotland, appointed on the death of Alexander III, shows St. Andrew on his cross, surrounded by the words "ANDREA SCOTIS DUX ESTO COMPATRIOTIS" ("Andrew, be the leader of the Scots your compatriots")¹ or possibly "ANDREA DUX EST ET COMPATRIOTIS"² (unfortunately part of the edge is damaged)



The Obverse of the Seal of the Guardians of Scotland 1286AD

The first evidence of the use of the cross, without the saint, as a national emblem is on soldier's uniforms, rather than as a flag. The Scottish Parliament decreed in 1385AD that 'Item every man French and Scots shall have

a sign before and behind, namely a white St. Andrew's Cross, and if his jack is white or his coat white he shall bear the said white cross in a piece of black cloth round or square'. The French probably wore white which accounts for the last part of the ordinance.

We can see here that blue was not the automatic background colour, indeed black is specified. Over the years blue became the predominant colour. It may well be that the white saltire on blue were the arms assigned to St. Andrew in the early part of the last millennium, much as the red cross on white had been assigned to St. George. Technically it was the saltire, not the background that was the badge of the Scots. There are several explanations as to the blue background: it may come from the legend of the cross of clouds in the sky, from the arms assigned to St. Andrew, or possibly due to the alliance with France, whose flag at the time was a white cross on blue³.

The standard of the Earl of Douglas was supposedly carried by his younger son Archibald at the Battle of Otterburn in 1388AD. It is sage green with a white saltire at the hoist with two small red hearts. The lion, the Tau Cross and the motto "Jamais Areyre" are in white.



Standard of the Earl of Douglas reputedly 1388AD

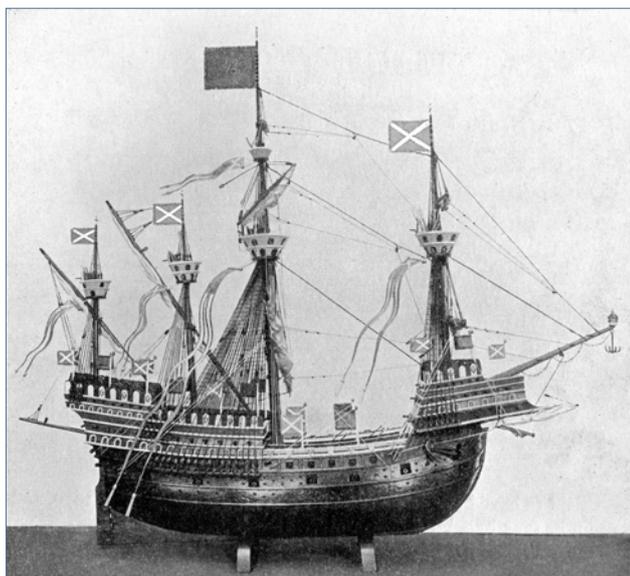
In the late 15th Century there are several references to flags with a St. Andrew's Cross, but it unclear as to whether it was the only emblem on the flags.

The first certain use of a plain St. Andrew's Cross flag - but the field was red, not blue - occurs in 1503AD in the *Vienna Book of Hours*.

In 1512AD the Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland include an entry for payment for a roll of blue woollen bunting for the banner of a ship 'with St. Andrew's Cross in the middle'.

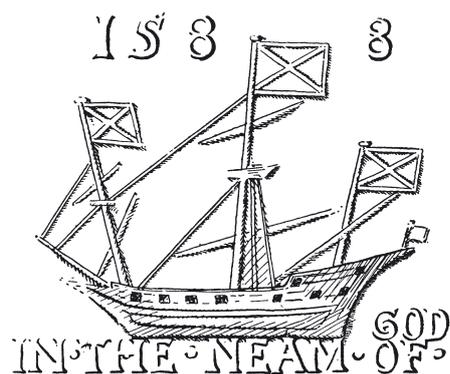
During the reign of James IV Scotland's navy was at its height, with the flagship "Great Michael" (built in 1511AD) being the greatest ship of its time. In 1513AD a staggering £72 7s 6d was spent on a "main standard" for the ship. The flag appears to have had a St. Andrew's cross on a blue background at the hoist and a fly of red and yellow with the royal badges of the red lion and white unicorn.

The Accounts give us another entry in 1540AD for red and yellow taffeta to make three ensigns, with white taffeta of Genoa to make the crosses.



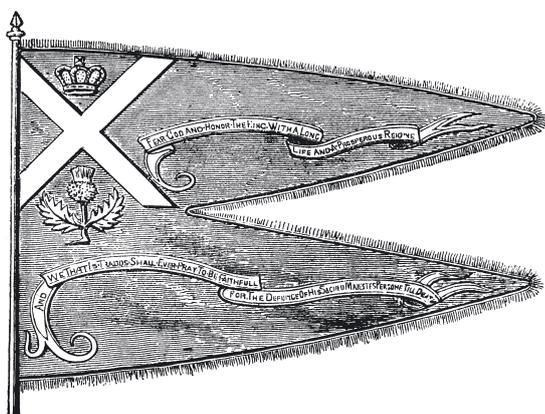
A Model of the Great Michael

The first certain illustration of the St. Andrew's Cross on a blue field as we have it today is in the armorial of Sir David Lindsay in 1542AD. A carved stone panel in Newhaven, dated 1588AD, shows a Scottish ship flying three saltires.



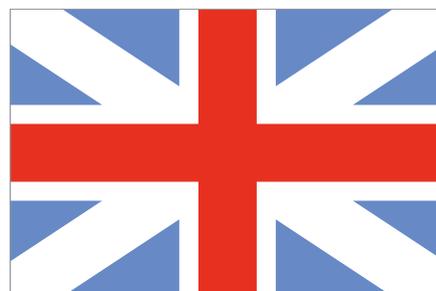
Carved Stone Panel from Newhaven

Another ancient flag is the "Blue Blanket" of the Trades of Edinburgh. This is reputed to have been made by Queen Margaret, wife of James III (1451-1488AD). It is of blue cloth with a white saltire in the canton.



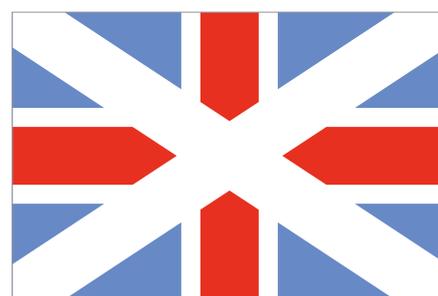
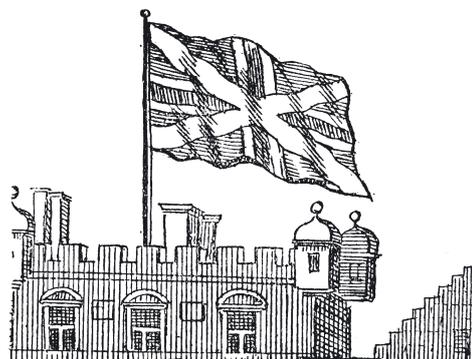
The "Blue Blanket" of the Trades of Edinburgh

In 1606AD James VI & I combined the white saltire on blue with the red cross on white of St. George to create the "British Flag" the original "Union Flag". In 1707AD when the Act of Union between England and Scotland required a new national flag Queen Anne decided to continue with James's design. At this point the old Scottish ensign ceased to be used. It was also the start of a quieter period in the flag's life that was to last well into the 20th Century.



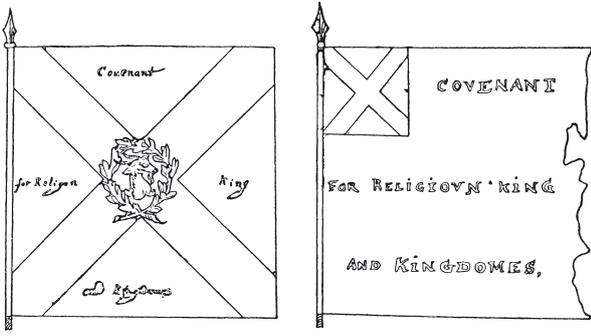
The 1606 British or Union Flag

Many Scots were not happy with the new flag which they believed gave precedence to England and came up with their own variant, shown here flying over Edinburgh Castle in about 1693AD in an engraving by John Slezer, Captain of Artillery and Surveyor-General of Stores and Magazines in Scotland.

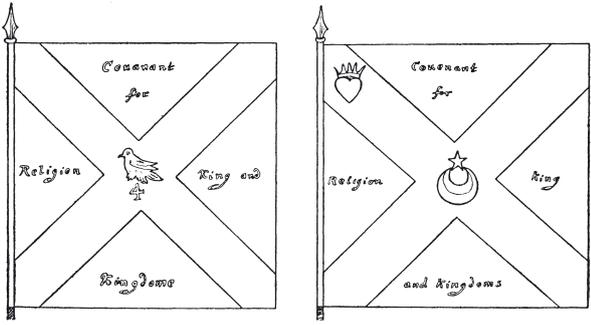


Unofficial Scots Variant of Union Flag

The white saltire on blue appears in military flags such as those used by Scottish forces used at the Battle of Preston in 1648AD and Dunbar in 1650AD. Some of these were captured by Cromwellian forces and drawings of them survive.

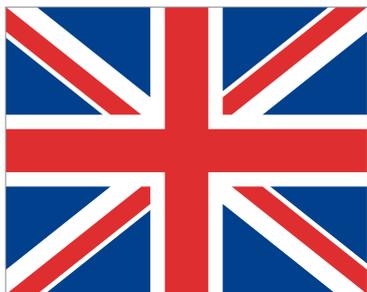


Scottish Colours captured by Cromwell at Preston 1648AD



Scottish Colours captured by Cromwell at Dunbar 1650AD

In 1801AD Ireland joined the Union to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Geraldine "Cross of St Patrick" was added to create the modern Union Flag.



The 1801 Pattern Union Flag

The rise of the Scottish Nationalist movement in the 1970's brought the Saltire back to the fore, with SNP councils using it instead of the Union Flag.

July 1st 1999 saw the Reconvening of Scottish Parliament. For the opening the Parliament flew a Union Flag and a Saltire, but normally it only flies the Saltire. The Queen's title as Queen of Scots was confirmed by no less than the Presiding officer (Speaker), Lord Steel, during his welcoming speech. It was very much a day for Saltires. The badge of the Scottish Parliament shows a banner of the Saltire surmounted by a Scottish style crown.



The Badge of the Scottish Parliament

That same year saw the Saltire, along with the national flags of the other constituent countries of the United Kingdom added to the official publication "Flags of all Nations". In order to add the flag we needed to know what colour to make it. Some modern Saltires are on light blue backgrounds, and some on dark blue. To choose a shade we used a Pantone chart and a day when the sky was a beautiful azure. Comparing the sky to the chart we selected Pantone 279 as the most suitable colour. To double check we asked the Lord Lyon's office what colour their artists use when painting the Saltire. They use an ultramarine blue with added white. This ruled out dark blue as a colour, and confirmed Pantone 279, which is made of blue ink with added white. Coincidentally Pantone 279 is UN blue. [Since this paper was originally given in York the Scottish Parliament has selected Pantone 300 as the colour of the flag.]



The Modern Saltire

The Royal Flag

The story of Scotland's other flag, the Lion Rampant is slightly simpler.

William the Lion (1143-1214) is usually credited with adopting the Lion Rampant as the Royal emblem, but we have no real evidence of this. Certainly his seals show no such arms. According to Fordun and Boece, William got his name as "The Lion of Justice". Other historians suggest he was called the Lion for his bravery.

The first known example of the arms is on the seal of his son Alexander II in 1222. These appear to show the Lion Rampant and the Tressure, but the arms can be seen clearly on the seal of his son, Alexander III (1249-1285).



Seal of Alexander II

The reverse of the seal of the Guardians of Scotland (the obverse was shown above) clearly shows the Lion Rampant and Tressure. It can be seen that this seal is very important in the history of Scotland's national symbols.



The Reverse of the Seal of the Guardians of Scotland 1286AD

Why such a complex coat was chosen is not certain. It may well be that it is related to Scotland's old alliance with France. Indeed Nisbet claims that King Achaius was in alliance with Charlemagne, and that for the services of the Scots the French king "added to the Scottish lion the double tressure fleur-de-lisee to show that the former had defended the French lilies, and that therefore the latter would surround the lion and be a defence to him." Interestingly the Fleur-de-lys did not appear on French arms until Louis VIII (reigned 1223-1226AD) and therefore they appeared on Scotland's arms first! Despite this the lily was certainly a French symbol from much earlier times, a 870AD sceptre ends in fleur-de-lys.



The Lion Rampant

Nisbet reports that the lion may have been the symbols of the Scots kings since Fergus I in 300BC! Chalmers says in *Caledonia* that "the lion may possibly have been derived from the arms of the old Earls of Northumberland and Huntingdon,

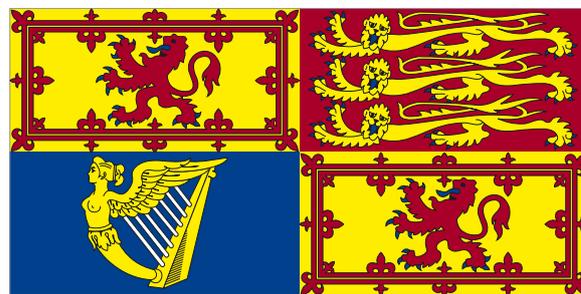
from whom some of the Scottish kings were descended". We have no evidence of either of these origins. At the Battle of the Standard in 1138AD the Scottish Royal Standard was a dragon, at least according to the contemporary report of St. Alred, Abbot of Rielvaulx Abbey in Yorkshire.

The arms remained unchanged until Mary Queen of Scots married the Dauphin of France, when they were impaled with France. When the Dauphin died the arms reverted. When James VI became King of England he quartered the arms with the already quartered arms of England, and those of Ireland. The Royal Arms went through several changes in the following centuries that are beyond the scope of this paper.

During all this time the unquartered arms remained in use as the flag of a representative of the monarch. They are still used for this purpose today, in the person of the First Minister (as Keeper of the Great Seal), Lord Lyon, the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the Lord Lieutenants of the Counties.

On 3 September 1934, George V issued a Royal Warrant permitting Loyal Scots to use the flag as an indication of their loyalty. Today this is interpreted as allowing the use of flags in the hand, but not on a flagpole.

As a footnote to the story in 1998 the Queen started to use a different Royal Standard in Scotland, with the ancient Scottish arms in the 1st and 4th quarters. This now matches the Scottish version of the Royal Arms.



The Royal Standard for use in Scotland



The Royal Arms for use by the Government in Scotland

1. Birch, *Scottish Seals. i. pp. 32-33 and plate 14*
2. Anderson, *Diplomata 1739*
3. Gordon, *Flags of the World, p.223*

