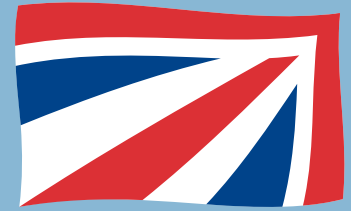




Flags &
Heraldry
Committee

An All Party Group of the UK Parliament



FLAG INSTITUTE

UNION FLAG OR UNION JACK?

An Official Flag Institute Guide



INDEX

Foreword by the Chairman of the Flags & Heraldry Committee 1

Introduction 2

David Lister 2

The Many Names of the Flag 3

Derivation of the Word “Jack” 3

Origins of Flags in the Fore of Ships 3

The Name of the Flag in Royal Proclamations 4

The Name of the Flag in Official Statements 6

Writers About Flags 6

The Jack and the Jack-Staff 8

Conclusion: Union Flag or Union Jack? 8

Select List of Books Consulted 9

Union Flag or Union Jack?

First published in the United Kingdom in 2014 by the Flag Institute in association with the Flags and Heraldry Committee of the UK Parliament.

Copyright © The Flag Institute 2014

David Lister has asserted his rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988 and the Berne Convention on Copyright to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be used for commercial purposes without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. The copyright holder permits the free and unrestricted distribution of the complete document for any non-commercial purpose. No single part of the document may be distributed without proper identification of both the Author and the Flag Institute.

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this booklet, neither the publishers nor the author assume any responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.



FOREWORD

By the Chairman of the Flags & Heraldry Committee

The importance of the Union Flag, or Union Jack, to the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland cannot be overstated.

As a longstanding champion of the flag and its correct flying, both on state occasions and throughout the year, it is with great joy that I welcome the publication of the Flag Institute's work on the question of its name.

In my position as Chairman of the Flags & Heraldry Committee, an All Party Parliamentary Group of the British Parliament, I have a compelling interest in seeing this emblem of our great nation properly flown. Our recent success in securing the flying of the national flag permanently above the Houses of Parliament, has been an important step on the road to promoting a proper understanding of flags and their flying: a success we have repeated with the flying of the flags of all British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in Parliament Square on the occasion of Trooping The Colour and for other State occasions.

We have made it clear that the informed flying of flags is essential to the deep feelings of national pride that run deep throughout our nation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the flying of our national flag. As there has never been a statute recognised all over the world, it is the spirit of the emblem which counts and the public understanding of what that spirit represents. The Flag Institute, with typical clarity of vision, has chosen to investigate the question of the flag's name both with scholarly accuracy and emotional sensibility.

The cross-party nature of Flags & Heraldry Committee is perfectly reflected in the debate surrounding the name of the design. The British flag is representative of our nation as a whole. It recalls the heroism of the brave men and women who have given their lives for the democratic ideal in the recent, turbulent history of the world; and it stands as a reminder of everything that we have sacrificed to retain the values of this country.

Such symbolism knows no party allegiance and is subject to no ownership. It is a flag owned by the events with which it is associated and an indispensable reminder of the pride felt by every subject who flies it.

I am delighted to contribute this foreword to the Flag Institute's paper examining the question of the proper naming of our flag, which has had great implications for the work done by the Flags & Heraldry Committee and for the way in which every patriotic person sees the famous standard.

As Chief Executive of the Flag Institute, Charles Ashburner has done excellent work guiding this publication to completion. I would like to commend Charles and his dedicated team for presenting a thorough and reasoned examination of the question, "Union Jack or Union Flag?" and for the common sense attitude they have taken to the problem. It is right that the Flag Institute promote the same values of pride and understanding in flags that the Flags & Heraldry Committee is also dedicated to.

I have no doubt that the Flag Institute's work on our flag will become the point of reference in years to come.



Andrew Rosindell MP in Parliament Square with the flags of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

Andrew Rosindell MP
Chairman of the Flags & Heraldry Committee



INTRODUCTION

Controversy persists about whether the British national flag should be called “the Union Flag” or “the Union Jack”.

Among those who are informed about the matter, it is generally accepted that either name may be used. However, some people are convinced that “Union Flag” is the only correct term and that “Union Jack” should be used only when the flag is flown from the jack-staff in the bows of a Royal Naval vessel or, at least when it refers to the use of the flag by the Royal Navy.

The general public almost universally uses the term “Union Jack”. Today some people claim to perceive that this usage is being eroded by persons who deliberately adopt an unjustified pedantry. It must be acknowledged, however, that the origins and relationships of the names “Union Flag” and “Union Jack” are historically far from clear.

Discussion on the matter is almost as old as the flag itself. Each individual person tends to prefer and use the version of the name he or she has always used. And while, since the mid-19th Century, most writers of books about flags have deemed the correct name to be “Union Flag”, they have, nevertheless, often conceded that “Union Jack” is widely accepted

No definitive pronouncement or definition of a correct name of the national flag of the Union pattern has ever been made. Mentions of names in royal proclamations or in statements made in Parliament do not have any statutory effect unless they are in the form of specific determination of the proper name in a proclamation, or an order in council or in an Act of Parliament or statutory Instrument.

It should be made clear that in the absence of any specific designation of a name, it is possible for the flag to have more than one name. Such names may be equal in status, or one name may have more official status and the other more popular status, but either may be validly used.

For convenience, in these notes, in order to keep a neutral approach to the name when I am referring to it myself, I propose, instead of “the Union Flag” or “the Union Jack”, to use the term “Union pattern”. This will enable the documents and the writers I quote to speak for themselves, without introducing any personal bias.

DAVID LISTER. 1930-2013

A long time member of the Heraldry Society, David became one of the founding members of the Flag Institute in 1971. He was one of our most enthusiastic and influential members, rarely missing a meeting. He became Chairman in the 1980's and held the office for several years.

At the fifth International Congress of Vexillology (London, 13-18 September 1973), he delivered a well-received paper on British flags. He later also contributed to vexillological journals and flag magazines around the world.

In addition to an abiding interest in vexillology, David was a world authority on origami. He found time to write a well-researched history of the cartoon character, Rupert Bear, and was an accomplished and well-respected lawyer.

After he stood down as Chairman of the Flag Institute, he became our first Honorary Vice-President. He acted as legal adviser to the Flag Institute for more than three decades, although this was not recognised by a title.

In recent years, David was less able to travel to meetings, and was greatly missed. He did however remain in contact with the Flag Institute by e-mail until shortly before his death.

I commissioned David to research what he refers to here as the ‘Union Pattern’ at the end of August 2012, and received his final copy on 15 October 2012. I have edited it with a light touch and this document is presented very much in his own words.

David Lister passed away on 15 February 2013.



David Lister

Charles Ashburner

Chief Executive & Trustee of the Flag Institute

THE MANY NAMES OF THE FLAG

Since its creation, the Union pattern has had many names, formal and informal, in official and semi-official documents. These include:

1. The Britain; The British Flag;
2. The Banner of the Union; the Union; the Great Union; the Flag of the Union; the Union Flag.
3. His Majesty's Jack; The King's Jack, Our Jack; the Jack; the Jack Flag; the Union Jack.

DERIVATION OF THE WORD "JACK".

Various suggestions have been made for the derivation of the word "jack".

Any investigation into the matter (and all other matters relating to the early history of the Flag) is handicapped because many of the early records relating to the creation of the Flag have been lost. W.G. Perrin, who made the most intensive search into these records, was compelled to write in his book *British Flags*:

"Unfortunately the naval records of the early years of the 17th century have almost entirely disappeared from the State archives; the State Papers themselves are but fragmentary remains; and the English Privy Council Registers from 1202 to 1613 were destroyed in the fire at Whitehall in 1618." (p.55)

One theory is that the word "jack" derives from the name of James I, who first ordered the Flag. It is suggested that "jack" comes from "Jacques", which is the French (at the time, the courtly language) for James – and that James I used to sign his name "Jacques". But the English way of pronouncing "Jacques" was probably "jaikes" and not "jack".

In Middle English, the word "jack" was applied to a short close-fitting jacket or a protective coat, leather or quilted and in later times often plated with iron. Occasionally it referred to a coat of mail. Some such coats bore heraldic symbols and it has been suggested that the name was transferred to the flag. However, there is no evidence whatsoever that the Union pattern was ever worn on personal clothing.

A more probable derivation is that the word was commonly used for something that is small. For example, a "jack yard" was a small spar used in attaching a gaff topsail. Hence, a "jack flag" was a small flag (smaller than the ensign), and this came to be contracted to "jack".

ORIGINS OF FLAGS IN THE FORE OF SHIPS.

The origins of the flag in the fore of a ship or on a staff mounted at the end of the bowsprit are obscure. Perrin (p.60) cites an engraving in the Society of Antiquaries, which represents a view of the English and French fleets before battle between them began on 19th July 1545. The Lord Admiral's ship, the "Henri Grace a Dieu" is shown flying a royal standard on the bowsprit.

In his revision, dated 1915, of F.E. Hulme's *Flags of the World*, W.J. Gordon writes:

"Enquiry showed that Howard's ships in the Armada battles [1588] are described as carrying a 'jack' on the jack-staff, their jack being but a small edition of the red cross of St. George." (p.57)

However, this would be an exceptionally early use of the term "jack" and the words "jack" and "jack-staff" in this context are probably Gordon's own. Unfortunately Gordon does not give any authority for his assertion: we must be very cautious in accepting that the terms "jack" and "jack-staff" were in common usage as early as this.

In his last voyage and conflict with the Spanish (1596-1597), Drake is said to have flown a striped flag on the bowsprit of his ship. Nevertheless, when, soon afterwards, Captain Young compiled his *Notes for Sea Service*, he wrote:

"that the cullers maye bee the better knowne from those of the enemies and yf they chance to have the like, it shall be then convenient that upon our misson [mizzen] flagge-staves or the ende of our



bowsprits and that there bee but a smawle litle flagge with a red Crosse yt being a little bigger than a vaine of a great Catche."

Perrin (p.60) believes this indicates that flags on bowsprits were unusual at this time. He goes on to point out that this "jack" is not shown in illustrations of the flagships of an expedition of 1596. Perrin also states that there is no mention of, or provision for, "jacks" in the inventories accompanying the report of the Committee inquiring into the state of the Navy in 1618.

It appears that the earliest unambiguous use of the word "jack" to denote a flag occurs in orders issued by Sir John Pennington to one of his captains on 3rd July 1633, during an expedition against pirates, which employed some small ships known as "whelps". He gave orders to the 10th Whelp to conceal their colours in these terms:

"You are to looke out carefully for these pirates night and day; that if it be possible wee maie intrapp them. You are alsoe for this present service to keep in [not to fly] yor Jack at yor Bowsprit end and yor Pendant and yor Ordinance"

Perrin interprets the fact that it is necessary to define the position of the "Jack" as tending to show that the term had not yet come into common use.

In circa 1634 Sir Nathaniel Boteler, in his Six Dialogues about Sea Service (Perrin pp. 61 and 62), wrote that no English ships should be allowed to carry the King's flag (called the "British Flagge or Colours"), save His Majesty's own, and every such King's vessel was permitted to wear one of these "in a smale volume on her Bowsprit's Topp. And the flaggs thus worn are tearmed Jacks."

From this, Perrin deduces that the "jack" on the bowsprit came to be introduced generally a year or two before 1634.

A copy of this page is included in Sloane MS.2449 at the British Library and is headed "of the Flagge called the Jacke". Perrin expresses the view that it is to Sir Nathaniel Boteler that we owe the general institution of the "Jack" on the bowsprit.

THE NAME OF THE FLAG IN ROYAL PROCLAMATIONS

In the absence of a definitive name for the Flag of the Union pattern, Royal Proclamations and other orders and statements (see following section, "The Name of the Flag in Official Statements") may be examined to find out what name or names have been accepted by the Government, the armed services and other official bodies.

The first Proclamation of the Flag by James I in 1606 (see e.g. Perrin p.55) reads:

"From henceforth all our subjects of this Isle and Kingdom of Great Britain and the Members thereof shall bear in their maintop the Red Cross, commonly called St. George's Cross and the White Cross, commonly called St. Andrew's Cross, joined together according to a form made by our Heralds and sent by Us to our Admiral to be published to our said Subjects".

This proclamation says little about the new flag. All it tells us is that it is to be flown in the maintop by all subjects, including merchant ships. It is clear, nevertheless, that no name of any kind is given to the new flag at this point. Even the word "Union" is not mentioned in the proclamation.

Perrin writes that the Flag was first called the "Britain" or "British Fflag" since these names appeared in a summary of the rigging of His Majesty's ships of this date. He is unable to find the name "Union" earlier than 1623, when it appears in the list of flags and banners used at the funeral of King James I.

The next proclamation relating to the flag of the Union pattern is that of Charles I, dated 5th May, 1634. (see Perrin p. 59.) At this time, there was a perceived need for ships of the Royal Navy to be distinguished from merchant ships by depriving the merchant ships of their right to fly the Union pattern from their main top (as they had originally been allowed to do by James I), and restricting it to use by the Royal Navy alone.

The proclamation of 1634 unambiguously uses the term “Union Flag”. It reads:

“None of Our Subjects, of any of Our Nations and Kingdoms, shall from henceforth presume to carry the Union Flagge in their Maine toppes or other part of any of their Ships.....but that the Union Flagge bee still reserved as an ornament proper for Our owne Ships and Ships in Our immediate Service and pay and none other.”

The Union pattern is at this point specifically referred to as the “Union Flag”, and not the “Union Jack”, despite presumably flying from “the Maine toppes or other part” of a Naval vessel.

With the inception of the Commonwealth and the subsequent execution of Charles I (30th January 1649), the dynastic Union of England and Scotland was severed and the Union pattern became inappropriate. Various patterns, mainly incorporating the Cross of St. George, the Cross of St. Andrew and the Irish Harp were experimented with, but the design was not stabilised until the restoration of Charles II (May 1660). At this point, the flags used during the reign of Charles I were revived: including the flag of the Union pattern.

Despite previous prohibitions, merchant ships continued to fly flags of the Union pattern. On 9th March 1661 James, Duke of York, the Lord High Admiral, issued an instruction that:

“I desire you will give notice unto all Commanders and Masters of Shipping belonging to the Subjects of the King.....that from henceforward they forbear to wear the Flag of Union.”

On 11th May 1666 the Lord High Admiral issued a further Warrant for Taking into Custody such Masters of Merchant Ships as shall Presume to Wear the King’s Jack. It read:

“Whereas I am informed that the Masters of severall Merchant Shippeshave presumed to Wear the Kings Jack without having leave ... I require you to examine and enquire what merchant Ships either do or have lately Wore the King’s jack, not being hired or carrying goods for His Majesty’s Service.”

In another attempt to restrain the flags flown by merchant ships, Charles II made a proclamation on 18th September 1674 containing several references to flags and jacks, including the following:

“Whereas by ancient usage no merchant’s ship ought to bear the Jack, which is for distinction appointed for his Majesty’s ships: nevertheless his Majesty is informed that divers of his Majesty’s subjects have of late presumed to wear his Majesty’s Jack. His Majesty hath thought fit.....strictly to charge and command all his subjects whatsoever, that from henceforth they do not presume to wear his Majesty’s Jack, (commonly called The Union Jack) in any of their ships or vessels.”

Note that the “ancient usage” referred to dates only from 1634, merely forty years previously! The proclamation continues:

“And his Majesty doth hereby further command all his loving subjects, that without warrant as aforesaid, they presume not to wear onboard their ships or vessels any Jacks made in imitation of his Majesty’s, or any other flags, Jacks, or Ensigns whatsoever, than those usually heretofore worn on merchants’ ships, viz. the Flag and Jack White with a Red Cross (commonly called Saint George’s Cross) passing right through the same; and the Ensign Red, with a like Cross in a Canton White, at the upper corner thereof next the staff.”

There is no indication whether the frequent use of “His Majesty’s Jack” in this proclamation was because the Jack was by now a smaller flag flown from the fore of the vessel, or if the Union pattern was generally known as the “jack” wherever it was flown on a ship.

In the reign of Queen Anne, following the union of England and Scotland to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain (1707), it was provided by an Order in Council dated 17th April 1707 “that the Union flag continue as at present.” This Order in Council was followed by a further Proclamation on 28th July 1707 defining, once again, the flags to be flown by merchant ships:

“We do thereforestrictly Charge and Command all Our Subjects, That they do not Presume to Wear in any of their Ships or Vessels Our Jack, commonly called The Union Jack, nor any Pendants, nor such



Colours as are usually Born by Our Ships, without particular Warrant for their doing from us, or Our High Admiral."

In further provisions, relating to flags to be flown by merchant ships having Commissions of Letters of Marque or Reprisals against the enemy (otherwise known as privateers), it is provided that they should wear "a Red Jack with the Union Jack described in the Canton at the Upper corner thereof next to the Staff." The term "Jack" here clearly refers to the Union pattern and not to the position in the ship where the flag is flown.

It is sometimes said that Queen Anne's proclamation was the first time that the words "Union Jack" appear in a royal proclamation, but this is not so. As recorded above, the words "Union Jack" had already appeared in the Proclamation of Charles II dated 18th September 1674.

On 1st January 1800, the Union of Great Britain and Ireland came into being. The first of the Articles of Union provided that the "Ensigns, Armorial flags and Banners" were to be those the King, by Royal Proclamation under the Great Seal of the United Kingdom, should appoint. The Proclamation was issued on 1st January 1801 and it provided:

"That the Union Flag shall be Azure, the Crosses Saltires of St. Andrew and St. Patrick Quarterly per Saltire, counterchanged Argent and Gules; the latter fimbriated of the Second surmounted by the Cross of St. George of the Third, fimbriated as the Saltire."

In this proclamation, the name used for the flag, which is the one still in use today, was unambiguously "The Union Flag".

THE NAME OF THE FLAG IN OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

Quite apart from Royal proclamations, there have been several statements made in Parliament and by Government departments about the Flag.

It appears that for many years the Admiralty referred to the Flag as the Union Jack, whatever its use. In 1902 an Admiralty Circular was issued which announced that it had been decided that either name [Union Flag or Union Jack] could be used.

On 14th July 1908, a statement was made in the House of Lords by the Earl of Crewe (on behalf of the Government) in reply to a question asking whether the full Union Jack might be flown on land by every citizen in the Empire. His answer was that the Union Jack should be regarded as the National flag, and it undoubtedly might be flown on land by all of His Majesty's subjects.

In June 1933 the Home Secretary, Sir John Gilmour, again stated (this time in the House of Commons) that the Union Jack was the national flag and might be flown by any British subject on land.

As noted in the introduction to this paper, no definitive pronouncement or definition of a correct name of the national flag of the Union pattern has ever been made.

WRITERS ABOUT FLAGS

Writers about British flags generally take the view that the correct name for the flag is "Union Flag": but they also tend to agree that "Union Jack" is an acceptable alternative.

A. MacGeorge, in *Flags, some Account of their History and Uses* (1881) writes:

"The Union Jack is a diminutive of the Union. it ought never to be called the Union Jack except when it is flown on the jack-staff. It is extraordinary how little this distinction is understood."

He then goes on refer to the Queen's Regulations for the Army, which provide that "the National Flag, the Union Jack, is authorised to be hoisted."

MacGeorge further cites a provision which states that when the General Assembly is sitting in Edinburgh "the Union Jack" will be displayed from the Castle and at the Palace of Holyrood. He concludes:

"The proper name of the national flag is "the Union" [not "Union Jack"]. It is the shore flag, and, except personal flags, is the only one which is displayed from fortresses and other stations."

In *Flags of the World* (circa 1890), F. Edward Hulme states:

"Technically our national banner should be called the Union Flag, though in ordinary parlance it is always called the Union Jack. The latter flag is a diminutive of the former, and the term ought, in strictness, to be confined to the small Union Flag flown from the jack-staff on the bow-sprit of a ship. The Union Flag is, besides this, only used as the special distinguishing flag of an Admiral of the Fleet."
(p.47)

In *History of the Union Jack* (1900), Barlow Cumberland fully accepts and uses "Union Jack". Note that he was writing in Canada from the point of view of a loyal citizen of one of the dominions.

In *The Flags of Britain* (1934), Cumberland Clark writes that "Union Flag is more correct", but then goes on to say: *"It has become so natural now to refer to the Union Jack that few would use Union Flag, even if they knew it to be more correct."*

The last edition of *Flags of the World* that I have seen is a revision by Capt. E.M.C. Barraclough and W.G. Crampton dated 1981. Their view on the naming of the Union design is given on page 24. These are the views of two of the most prominent British students of flags of their day, who were members of the Flag Institute, and it is helpful to quote their comments in full:

"The original Union Flag was introduced in 1606 as a maritime flag, and in 1634 a Royal proclamation laid down that the Union Flag was reserved for His Majesty's Ships of War and forbade merchant ships to wear it. It has been explained (p.17) how this flag came to be called a "jack", and how the term Union Jack came into being. It is quite clear that the name Union Jack was the name given to the distinguishing flag of His Majesty's ships, and that it is proper to call this flag a Union Jack when flying in a ship: but this flag, which was formerly purely maritime, is now used as the national Flag of Britain, and some consider that it is incorrect to call it a Union Jack when it is not flying in a ship and that when flying ashore it should be called the Union Flag. Strictly this view may be correct and there would be no doubt as to its correctness if the flag were the 1900 War Office pattern, but this is not so, and the flag that is seen in Britain flying from the Houses of Parliament and other public buildings is the pattern adopted by the Royal Navy. Furthermore it has been called the Union Jack in modern times in Parliament and so by common usage it is considered that it is correct to call this flag, which is to all intents the National Flag of the United Kingdom, the Union Jack."

In 1922, writing on p.73 of his book *British Flags*, the authoritative W.G. Perrin has no doubts about the correct name. He laments:

"This flag seems doomed to misrepresentation, which extends even to its name. A 'Union Jack' is, correctly speaking, a small Union Flag intended to be flown in one particular place, the bows of one of H.M. ships."

An outsider's point of view from the United States is given in 1975 by Whitney Smith, the distinguished American authority on flags, on p.186 of his *Flags Through the Ages and Across the World*:

"We do not know the true source of the word [jack]. While jack today continues to refer to a small flag flown from the prow of a ship, only a pedant insists that the familiar Union Jack, if appearing other than on the jack staff, be referred to as the Union Flag."

Another recent writer who has accepted the legitimacy of "Union Jack" is Cdr. Bruce Nicolls, a retired officer of the Royal Navy and a member of the Flag Institute. His short article "The Union Jack or the Union Flag" appears on the Flag Institute website: he is also the author of several magazine articles. In an article in *Evergreen*, he writes:

"The Union Jack.....is a flag of which every Briton may be proud. It is a bright flag, a strong flag with great character and an interesting history."



THE JACK AND THE JACK-STAFF

There has been considerable debate, exemplified in many of the views previously referred to in this paper, about the relationship between the Union Jack and the jack-staff, and whether the flag derives its name from the jack-staff or vice versa. This must be further considered.

If “jack” was originally a diminutive term (see above, section “Derivation of the Word ‘Jack’”), it is improbable that the jack flag took its name or existence from the jack-staff. On the contrary, the jack-staff originated later than the jack and appears to have been devised at a later date for the specific purpose of flying the flag at the end of the bowsprit.

It has been shown, however, that in the proclamation of Queen Anne, the term “Union Jack” was used as a general name of the Union pattern.

A different distinction some have made is that the Union pattern should be called a Jack when it is flown from the jack-staff, but when flown elsewhere in a ship it should be called the Union Flag. This would include its position as the distinguishing flag of an Admiral of the Fleet, when it is flown from the peak of the mainmast; or on the occasion (now rare on board a ship) when it is flown from the yardarm to indicate that a Court Martial is in progress.

In practice in the Royal Navy, the flag is usually known as the Union Jack no matter where it is sited on the ship. This may be because the flag of the Union pattern is now rarely flown anywhere other than the jack-staff and for this reason, use of the name “Union Jack” to the exclusion of “Union Flag” has become a mere matter of habit.

CONCLUSION: UNION FLAG OR UNION JACK?

As has been pointed out, there has never been any specific definition of an official name for the flag of the Union pattern. No name is specified in Acts of Parliament, in Royal Proclamations or in Orders in Council. This does not mean that various names have not been used in such instruments, but the mere mention of a name is different from a definitive pronouncement that it is the proper and only correct one.

In official documents since 1674 the name “Union Flag” has been the most commonly used name, but this has not been exclusively so. Despite this, the name “Union Jack” has been preferred by the Royal Navy and almost exclusively by the general British public. Pronouncements by the Admiralty and in both Houses of Parliament have used the term “Union Jack”.

While the word “jack” may have originated as a technical term for a specific kind of small flag, it has, in the popular and official use of the term “Union Jack”, become a proper name – just as the name “Old Glory” is given to the Stars and Stripes of the United States. Employing a jack (any small flag) in the bows of a ship is not the same thing as flying the Union Jack. A ship may fly a small Union Jack in its bows, but it does, as noted above, also fly a flag of the Union pattern in other locations, where it is also referred to as the Union Jack.

The name “Union Jack” is a lively one, which may account for its widespread popularity. It must also be noted that the name “Union Flag”, as well as being somewhat dull by comparison, is not an exclusively British usage. Both Norway and Sweden used a “Union Flag” during the period 1814-1905, when they shared a common monarch, yet remained separate countries. A person may therefore theoretically use the term Union Flag to refer not only to the British standard, but to other standards – while the given name Jack, like Old Glory, incontrovertibly identifies the colourful design we know and love.

It may, perhaps, be useful to ask whether the current infighting over the “proper” name of the flag bearing the Union pattern is necessary at all. Regardless of the origin of the term “Union Jack” – which, as is noted above, is open to discussion – it has been adopted almost universally by the public whom the flag is intended to represent. If it is generally accepted and widely understood, both with reference to seagoing and landlocked uses of the standard, then to argue the semantics of it may be beside the point.

There is apparently a movement in some quarters, including, it has been suggested, in some Govern-

ment departments and the media, including the BBC, to seek to exclude the name “Union Jack” on the grounds of incorrectness. We might also ask, then, what happens to the colour and personality of the flag when a politician or a newswriter wishes to appeal to the history and power of the standard, in a speech or an article or a piece of editorial reflection. Or what happens when the public audience for that speech or article fail to understand, or just don’t like, the reference to the Union Flag rather than the populist Jack.

This is not to say that it’s inappropriate to talk about the Union Flag – that the British standard should only ever be called the Jack. Different audiences require different tones of voice. Different social situations call for different forms of address. Ultimately, all that matters is that we understand what we’re talking about when we refer to the flag.

It is as appropriate to talk of the Union Flag as it is to speak about the Union Jack. What is not appropriate is to cut one out of the conversation entirely, on the basis of historical claims that have been shown to be unfounded. It isn’t clear exactly when and how the term Union Jack came into being; and the official uses of “Union Flag” have been freely mixed with the colourful Jack for more than 100 years. Generations of vexed writers have wrestled with the subject, to no consensus view. If there is no definitive answer, perhaps there is no argument.

It is certainly the considered view of the Flag Institute that both terms are correct; and that either may be used. It is the Union Jack, and the Union Flag. Officially and unofficially, we all know what the terms mean. It is the image, and the associations of character and history, that make the British flag what it is.

SELECT LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED

It must be clearly stated that by far the best book about British Flags is that of W.G. Perrin and I have referred to his book more than to any other source. Nevertheless, his book is not a complete account and the contributions of other writers are valuable, both for additional facts given and for their different interpretations of the evidence.

A. MacGeorge, *British Flags*, unknown 1882

E.F. Hulme, *Flags of the World*, Frederick Warne 1897

Barlow Cumberland, *History of the Union Jack* (second edition), Ward Lock & Co. 1900

W.J. Gordon, *Flags of the World*, Frederick Warne 1915

William Gordon Perrin, *British Flags*, Cambridge University Press 1922

Cumberland Clark, *The Flags of Britain*, Wilding & Son 1934

A.W.B. Messenger, “*The Union Flag*”, Reprinted from *The Flag Bulletin* July 1952

The Flag Bulletin, Issue devoted to British Flags, Article by John Joy, Summer 1973

Whitney Smith, *Flags Through the Ages and Across the World*, McGraw-Hill 1975

E.M.C. Barraclough and W.G. Crampton, *Flags of the World*, Frederick Warne 1981

Timothy Wilson, *Flags at Sea*, National Maritime Museum 1986

Malcolm Farrow, *The Colours of the Fleet* (second edition) and supplement, Flag Institute 1996

Nick Groom, *The Union Jack*, Atlantic Books 2006

Wikipedia, Article on the Union Jack, accessed Sept 2012

A.C. Fox-Davies, In *The Art of Heraldry*, Various editions, Bloomsbury Books

Bruce Nicolls, “*The Union Jack or the Union Flag*”, Flag Institute website accessed Sept 2012

David Lister

15th October, 2012



The Flag Institute

The Flag Institute is the British centre of excellence for everything connected with flags, past, present and future. It advises government departments, public bodies, commercial companies and individuals alike on all issues concerning flags, including ceremonial, constitutional as well as design, use and practical matters of flying flags. It is responsible for maintaining the Register of County Flags.

There are flag organisations in many countries and the Flag Institute is an active member of the *Fédération Internationale des Associations Vexillologiques*, the international flag organisation.

The Institute publishes a twice-yearly illustrated journal, *Flagmaster*, which includes articles on wide and varied flag related subjects and in which details and pictures of new national and inter-national flags are presented.

Membership of the Flag Institute is open to everyone interested in flags, whether individuals, organisations or companies. The Institute's William Crampton Library is open to members and is situated in Kingston-upon-Hull.

To find out more, or to request further copies of this booklet, please visit the Institute's website at:

www.flaginstitute.org



The Flags & Heraldry Committee

The Flags & Heraldry Committee is an All-Party Parliamentary Group of the United Kingdom parliament. It was formally established on 5th February 2008 as the All-Party Parliamentary Flag Group. It is comprised of MPs and Peers from across the political spectrum who wish to promote the flying of the national flag and all flags associated with the United Kingdom, the British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

The Committee is based within the Palace of Westminster and has become a vibrant and active body which has successfully lobbied the House authorities to fly the national flag on all the flag poles on the Parliamentary Estate at all times throughout the year. As a result of this long running campaign, led by Andrew Rosindell MP, the Committee's Chairman, and with the unwavering support of the Flag Institute, the national flag is now flown from the Victoria Tower of Parliament and all other flag poles, three hundred and sixty five days a year. A Private Members Bill was also tabled on the floor of the House of Commons defining the current design as the official flag of the United Kingdom.



The Flag Institute
161 High Street
Kingston-upon-Hull
East Yorkshire HU1 1NQ
www.flaginstitute.org