



The Flag of Scotland



In the year 832AD, Angus mac Fergus, High King of Alba, clashed with a force of Angles and Saxons led by Athelstan. Encouraged by the appearance of a white cross of St Andrew in the blue sky, the Scots and Picts won the battle. Thereafter St Andrew became the patron of Scotland, and his cross, or saltire, the emblem of the Scottish people.

Such is the legendary origin of the Scottish flag. A memorial stands in the churchyard at Athelstaneford, East Lothian, and there the flag of St Andrew, "azure, a saltire argent", flies permanently, floodlit at night.

St Andrew was probably the patron of Scotland by the year 1000. In 1286, the Seal of the Guardians of Scotland already bears, on the obverse, a representation of St Andrew on his X-shaped cross, with the Latin inscription "ANDREA SCOTIS DUX ESTO COMPATRIOTIS" (St Andrew be leader of the compatriot Scots). In 1390, St Andrew was used as a national symbol on a coin of the realm, the five-shilling piece minted in the reign of Robert III.

In 1385, as the Scots made preparations to invade England, the Scots Parliament decreed that "every man shall have a sign before and behind, namely a white St Andrew's Cross, and if his coat is white he shall bear the same white cross on a piece of black cloth". Note that blue as a background had not yet been developed. The crosses of St Andrew and St George are so strikingly dissimilar as to be easily recognisable in the heat of battle, and their importance in medieval warfare is therefore understandable.



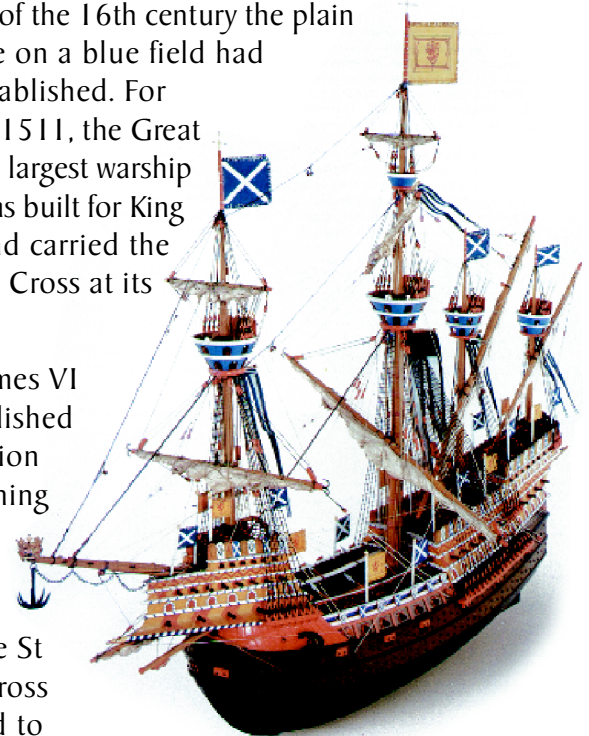
Armorial of Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount 1542. © The National Museums of Scotland.

There are other references in the 14th century to saltires with fields which were not blue. The Douglas Standard, said to have been carried at the Battle of Otterburn in 1388, included a saltire on a sage green background.

About 1460, a white saltire on a blue background appears as part of a more complex design on the "Blue Blanket" standard, said to have been given to the incorporated trades of Edinburgh by James III.

By the start of the 16th century the plain white saltire on a blue field had become established. For instance, in 1511, the Great Michael, the largest warship of its day, was built for King James IV and carried the St Andrew's Cross at its head.

In 1606 James VI and I established the first Union Flag combining the flags of St Andrew and St George. The St Andrew's Cross was allowed to continue as Scotland's national flag, and the Union Flag was restricted to royal ships by Charles I in 1634.

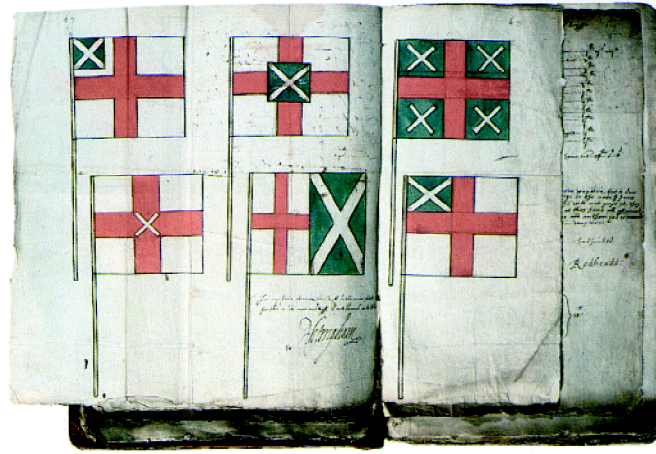


The Great Michael

Numerous 17th century examples are found of ships flying the saltire: it became a true national flag at sea. When in 1672 the Public Register of Arms was set up, the St Andrew's Cross was recorded as the badge of Scotland, and many seaport arms show ships flying it.

The St Andrew's Cross was also commonly the basis of the colours of Scottish Regiments in the Civil Wars, and later of those of the Covenanters.

In 1672, by Act of Parliament, the legal jurisdiction over the display of flags in Scotland came within the sole discretion of a Scottish authority - the Lord Lyon King of Arms. He remains to this day supreme in heraldic matters throughout Scotland.



Designs approved by the Earl of Nottingham circa 1604 for marrying the crosses of St Andrew and St George in one flag.

the white field of the St George's Cross was obscured by the St Andrew's blue. The Scots were angered that the St George's Cross was left entire, and not only obscured the cross of St Andrew but also cut it into pieces. Moreover, in the Royal Navy the flag of England remained predominant (the White Ensign consisting of a St George's Cross with a relatively insignificant Union Flag in the canton).

After the Act of Union, the use of the St Andrew's Cross declined. A yellow or gold saltire on a blue field was used, however, during the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745.



The "Scottish Red Ensign" shown here flying on the Jean de la Lune in Leith Docks, is making a comeback!

One of the consequences of 1707 was the introduction of the Union Flag as the flag of Great Britain. Queen Anne duly saw fit to make the Scottish flag the ground of the new one, placing thereon that of St George, and this continued to be the Union Flag until 1801 when the so-called cross of St Patrick (really the red saltire of the Fitzgerald arms) was added.



One of the definitive Scottish postage stamps issued in June 1999 to mark the reestablishment of Scotland's parliament.



The Saltire is the regimental flag of the Royal Scots, the oldest infantry regiment of the line whose origins go back to 1633.

The new flag was not generally welcomed - neither in England nor in Scotland. The English protested that



Young Scottish supporters painted up with the national flag before an international match.



Saltire seating at Hampden!

In the latter half of the 20th century, there was a major resurgence in the use of the St Andrew's Cross, and it has regained its status as the legally established national flag of Scotland. It is used by all Scottish teams in international competitions. It is now widely flown on

the flagstuffs of public buildings, sometimes alone and sometimes side by side with the Union Flag. The saltire is also used by many bodies, both private and public, as a logo, a purpose for which it is well suited.



Some examples of saltire logos.

For more information about the Trust, about the Athelstaneford T-shirts, or for an application form to become a 'Friend', write to The Scottish Flag Trust, P.O.Box 84, Edinburgh, Scotland.