



Heraldic Flags

Information Leaflet No. 3

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Scottish Heraldic Flags

All heraldic flags in Scotland come under the legal jurisdiction of the Lord Lyon King of Arms, in terms of the Act of Parliament 1672 cap. 47 and under 30 & 31 Vict. cap. 17. The Lord Lyon's regulations governing the display of heraldic flags in Scotland are broadly as follows. Doubts and questions of exact detail should be referred to the Court of the Lord Lyon, HM New Register House, Edinburgh, EH1 3YT, telephone 0131-556-7255.



GENERAL

1. SIZE

The size of a flag depends on the site where it is flown, from very small flags for table decorations to enormous flags for the top of a tower. Clear legibility determines the size suitable. Therefore, sizes are only given hereafter for special flags, where the sizes are fixed by regulation.

2. PROPORTIONS

The proportions of a flag, the relation of its width to its height, remain constant regardless of its size. Where relevant, these are given hereafter in the form "2:1", i.e. a flag whose width is twice its height.

3. HOIST

The "hoist" is the part of the flag nearest to the pole.

4. FLY

The "fly" is the part of the flag furthest from the pole. In long flags such as Standards, the devices are described in order reading from the hoist to the fly.

5. RESPECTING

All heraldic flags are designed with the convention that the pole is on the left of the flag, from the spectator's point of view. And it is on this convention that the flag and its contents are described. A lion rampant, for example, will face or "respect" the pole. Heraldic devices are sewn right through the flag's material, so on its reverse side all the devices will be reversed left to right, and the lion will still respect the pole. Lettering on flags such as Standards is the only exception to this rule, otherwise, the words would read backwards on the reverse side. Such exceptions have to be of double thickness.

6. MATERIALS

Any material suitable to the context and the owner's pocket maybe used for flags, from nylon or nylon-and-wool bunting for flags flown out of doors to silk, satin and rich brocades for flags used for internal display. Metallic nylon "Lurex" material gives good and economic results when used for gold and silver.

7. FRINGES

Except in a few cases such as Standards, fringes are regarded as mere decoration to be added or omitted at the owner's whim. Where used, they should be either plain and of the same metal (gold or silver) that is predominant in the flag, or they may be of alternate portions of the main colour and the main metal of the flag itself

8. COLOURS

There are no fixed "heraldic colours" for flags. Any red that is clearly "red" and not orange or purple is correct. In general, it is found that the brightest possible colours give the best effect. The rules of heraldic composition prevent garish results.

9. METALS

i.e. Gold and Silver. These occur in almost all heraldic flags, and can be shown either as yellow and white or as metallic gold and silver. Whichever is chosen, its use should be consistent within the flag. Not yellow AND gold.

NATIONAL FLAGS

10. THE UNION FLAG

Popularly called "The Union Jack", this is the correct flag for all citizens and corporate bodies of the United Kingdom to fly to demonstrate their loyalty and their nationality. It is often flown upside down, and the rule is that the broader white diagonals should be uppermost in the hoist, i.e. next to the pole. Its correct proportions are 2:1.

11. THE SALTIRE

The flag of St Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland. Blue with a white or silver diagonal cross reaching to its edges, this is the correct flag for all Scots or Scottish corporate bodies to fly to demonstrate their loyalty and their Scottish nationality. Its proportions are not fixed, but 5:4 is suitable. It is correct both to

fly it with or instead of the Union Flag.

12. THE "RAMPANT LION"

This is NOT a national flag and its use by citizens and corporate bodies is entirely wrong. Gold, with a red rampant lion and royal tressure. It is the Scottish Royal banner, and its correct use is restricted to only a few Great Officers who officially represent the Sovereign, including the Secretary of State for Scotland as Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland, Lord Lieutenants in their Lieutenancies, the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Lord Lyon King of Arms, and other lieutenants specially appointed. Its use by other, non-authorized persons is an offence under the Acts 1672 cap. 47 and 30 & 31 Vict. cap. 17.

BANNERS

13. THE PERSONAL BANNER

This is often wrongly called a "Standard" (see para. 17 below) and is the personal flag of the owner of a coat of arms (an "armiger"). It shows his personal coat of arms granted to him by the Lord Lyon or inherited in right of an ancestor, and protected to him by the Law of Scotland. The coat of arms fills the banner right to its edges, as though it were a rectangular shield. It is quite wrong to use a banner of a plain colour with the owner's arms on a shield in the middle. This would mean that the owner's arms were of that colour with a lithe inescutcheon in the centre. Nor should the external "additaments" be shown, i.e. helmet, mantling, crest, motto and supporters. Its purpose is the location and identification of its owner, and it is the visual equivalent of his name. No one else may use it. Flown over his house it denotes that he is there, and as a house flag its proportions are 5:4. The size of a house flag depends on the height of the building and the pole, and it should be large enough to be intelligible at the height at which it is flown.

For personal use, the size and shape varies according to rank, as follows, excluding any fringes: -

The Sovereign : 60 Inches square

Dukes : 48 Inches square

Earls : 42 inches square

Barons and Feudal Barons : 36 Inches square

Other Armigers : 28 inches wide x 35 inches high

14. CARRYING FLAGS

These are personal banners for carrying in processions, either by their owners or their appointed henchmen, for example at Highland Games. They are made of silk or satin or bunting at their owner's choice and may be fringed or not. When so used, there are regulation sizes according to rank, not including any fringes, as follows:-

Peers : Feudal Barons : Other Chiefs : Chieftains : 48 inches wide x 60 inches high

36 inches wide x 45 inches high

33 inches wide x 42 inches high

30 inches wide x 36 inches high

Other sizes may occasionally be laid down by the Lord Lyon for special occasions.

15. CORPORATION BANNERS

These are the equivalent of personal banners for companies or other corporate bodies, such as Regional or District Councils, which have been granted arms by the Lord Lyon. The flag shows the coat of arms filling its whole rectangular shape, as for personal banners (para. 13). The extent of its usage depends upon the corporate body, whether it is only flown over the headquarters building or at all the company's or corporation's sites. Its use as a car bonnet flag is restricted to the head of the corporate body and when he is acting as such. Its proportions are 5:4.

16. PIPE BANNERS

These are banners of personal arms as in para. 13, but cut slanted at the top to fit against the big drone and hang down the piper's back. They are used by most Chiefs and Lairds who have personal pipers, and by the Highland regiments whose company commanders' pipe banners are displayed on the regiment's pipes. The correct usage is for the arms to fill the entire banner to its edges, but some regiments have different customs, such as showing the whole achievement including supporters, or the crest alone. Such traditions are now hallowed by the centuries and are permitted. The pipe-majors of local government or works pipe-bands may display their appropriate pipe-banner of the corporation or company's arms.

SPECIAL HERALDIC FLAGS

17. THE STANDARD

This is a long, narrow tapering flag, granted by the Lord Lyon only to those who have a "following", such as Clan Chiefs, because it is a "Headquarters" flag. It is used to mark the assembly point or Headquarters of the Clan or following, and does not necessarily denote the presence of the Standard's owner as his personal banner does. Ancient standards usually showed the national Saltire in the hoist, next to the pole, but nowadays usually show the owner's personal arms. The remainder of the flag is horizontally divided into two tracts of his "livery colours" for Chiefs of Clans or families, three tracts for very major branch-Chieftains, and four for others. Those of peers and barons have the end split into two and

rounded. Upon this background are usually displayed the owner's crest and heraldic badges, separated by transverse bands bearing the owner's motto or slogan. The standard is fringed with the alternating livery colours. The height of the standard is not fixed, but it is usually about 4 feet at the pole tapering to about 24 inches at the end. The length of the standard varies according to the rank of its owner, as follows:

The Sovereign : 8 yards

Dukes : 7 yards

Marquises : 6 1/2 yards

Earls : 6 yards

Viscounts : 5 1/2 yards

Lords : 5 yards

Baronets : 4 1/2 yards

Knights and Barons : 4 yards

The standards of non-baronial chiefs, or others who for special reasons get standards, have round unsplit ends.

The height of the flagpole should take account of the length of the standard when hanging slack.

On rare occasions a uniform length of standard for a decorative display may be laid down by the Lord Lyon. Where it is desired to display other matter along with the National Flag the

Standard is the appropriate form of flag. It should show the Saltire Flag or the Union Jack in the hoist, and the remainder of the flag may contain lettering appropriate to the user's purpose, for example the name of an exhibition or site of a gathering.

18. THE GUIDON

This is a similar shape to the Standard, and is one-third shorter than the Standards assigned to Feudal Barons. It is 8 feet long, and is assigned by the Lord Lyon to Lairds who have a following, as for Standards, but are of non-baronial tenure. The Guidon tapers to a round, unsplit end at the fly, has a fringe of the livery colours, and has a background of the livery colours of its owner's arms. The owner's Crest or Badge (formerly his arms without supporters) are shown in the hoist, with his motto or slogan in the fly.

19. THE PENNON

This is similar to the Guidon but half its length, i.e. 4 feet. It is assigned to armigers in very rare cases and circumstances nowadays.

20. THE PINSEL

This is the flag denoting a person to whom a Clan Chief has delegated his authority for a particular occasion, such as a Clan Gathering when the Chief himself is absent. In a word, the flag of the Chiefs representative. It is triangular in shape, 2 feet high at the hoist and tapering to 4 feet 6 inches in width, with a background of the main livery colour of the Chiefs arms. On it is shown the Chiefs crest, within a strap of the second livery colour and buckle (gold for full Chiefs), bearing the motto, and outside the strap and buckle a gold cirlet (outlined in green if the background is not a contrasting colour to gold) inscribed with the Chief's or Baron's title. On top of this cirlet is set the owner's coronet of rank or his baronial cap. In the fly is shown the owner's plant badge and a scroll inscribed with his slogan or motto. This flag is allotted only to Chiefs or very special Chieftain-barons for practical use, and only upon the specific authority of the Lord Lyon King of Arms.

THE LAW

21. NATIONAL FLAGS

The Union Flag and/or the Scottish Saltire Flag may be freely flown by any Scot or Scottish Corporate body anywhere in Scotland, to demonstrate their nationality and allegiance. No special permission is required, and either or both may correctly be flown.

22. THE 'LION RAMPANT'

The personal banner of the King of Scots may NOT be flown by anyone other than those specifically authorised as variously representing the Sovereign, as set out in para. 12 above. Its use by other non-authorised persons is an offence under the Acts 1672 cap. 47 and 30 & 31 Vict. cap. 17. The freedom of use accorded to the Saltire Flag is NOT extended to the Scottish Royal Banner.

23. PERSONAL AND CORPORATE HERALDIC FLAGS

All of these are rigorously protected to their owners by the Laws of Arms in Scotland, and they may be flown by no one else. Transgression of the law is an offence, and the Court of the Lord Lyon includes a Procurator Fiscal whose duty it is to prosecute the offenders.