



A BRIEF GUIDE TO FLAGS, MILITARY COLOURS AND HISTORIC BANNERS

Introduction

This advice is intended to help dioceses and parishes by explaining the options available to them for flying flags and for laid-up military standards, guidons and colours and Royal British Legion standards.

The conservation guidance is relevant to the care of historic banners, including those designed to be carried in procession.

By a warrant dated 9th February 1938 the Earl Marshal laid down that the flag to be flown upon any church within the Provinces of Canterbury and York was "The Cross of St George and in the first quarter the escutcheon of the Arms of the See in which the church is ecclesiastically situated". In simple words, the flag of St George with the diocesan arms in the top corner nearest to the mast.

The Garter Principal King of Arms gave the following directions:

1. The Arms of the diocese are to be placed in the first quarter only (as in the preceding paragraph).
2. The shield of the Arms should fill the space and should not be ensigned with a mitre.
3. New flags should be made to an approximate ratio of 5 x 3 which is larger than, or more square than, ordinary flags to enable the Arms to be included. Shields may be added to existing flags of St George without altering their shape.
4. The shield of Arms should be of the same material as the flag and inserted. The larger charges on the shield are also to be inserted but smaller charges and shading can be applied in oil paint. All heraldry is read from the flagstaff and charges on the shield must face the same way in relation to the staff on both sides of the flag.
5. The Earl Marshal's Warrant had the approval of the Archbishops of the day but it does not make it compulsory for the flag to be flown.

If the PCC owns any buildings apart from the church, the government's guidance on [flying flags](#) will be relevant.

Military standards, guidons and colours

This guidance is drawn from Chapter 8 of the Queen's regulations for the Armed Forces 1975. These regulations can be found via an online search, or using this [link](#).

Military colours, once laid up, are expected to remain where laid up in perpetuity. No maintenance or other charges against public funds are permissible when colours are laid up.

When a standard, guidon or colour is deemed completely disintegrated (it no longer supports its own weight on the pike or, if netted, the netting and only a few un-recognisable scraps of silk remain), the priest in charge of the church or chapel concerned should gather the remains and store them in a secure location. The pike, tassels and crown mount can remain in place until they are passed to the owning Regiment. Care must be taken to prevent the unauthorised removal of the remains. The priest should establish the identity of the standard, guidon or colour and then contact the HQ of its Regiment or, in the case of a unit that has disbanded, the HQ of the successor Regiment. Advice should be sought from MOD(Chaps) and MOD HC PS12 SO2 Ceremonial & Plans (address below).

The consecrated cloth, as it is, together with the pike, can be buried in an unmarked location in consecrated ground. Alternatively the cloth (and pike if the Regiment wishes) can be burnt and the ashes scattered in a suitable location. This could be Church Grounds or a graveyard, or a location that has special significance to the Regiment, subject to any necessary consents. The burning of the cloth removes the necessity for the scattering of the ashes on consecrated ground.

The crown mount and tassels (if still present) should be given to the Regimental HQ for retention together with the pike (if still present). The crown mount is not to be burned or buried with the consecrated cloth.

The priest, in consultation with the Regimental Secretary / Regimental Adjutant, should arrange for a short service to be conducted for the burial of the consecrated cloth, or the scattering of the ashes.

The Regiment concerned is to ensure that MOD HC PS12 is informed of the disposal of the standard, guidon or colour. Advice may be sought at any time from the Ministry of Defence, Ceremonial and Plans PS12, Main Building 6-C- 14, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB.

Royal British Legion Standards

The Rules for laying up Royal British Standards have some significant differences from those for military standards. They agree that a standard, once laid up, may not be removed.

The costs of laying up a standard should be borne by the Legion unit involved. Rules can be found [online](#).

Conservation recommendations for flags and historic banners

The flags should remain in the 'hanging' position providing the weight-bearing edge from which they are suspended is strong and there are no discernible weak areas or visible damage. Flags should not be hung above radiators or heating vents nor in direct draughts.

Where possible they should be straightened on their poles (creases catch more dust).

The stability of the hanging system (poles, finials, etc) and flag material should be checked on a regular basis as a routine part of annual maintenance and inspection. When accessible the flags, poles and finials should be carefully checked for loose bits of paint and fabric. The cords and tassels should also be checked for stability.

For very fragile areas of textile, consideration may need to be given to enclosing the fragile area in a 'net sandwich' in order to give support. This work should only be undertaken by, or under the supervision of a trained conservator.

A trained conservator can make recommendations on the frequency of surface cleaning and dust removal. If the flag is robust enough, surface dust on the fabric may be able to be removed using a low suction conservation vacuum cleaner. The nozzle must be covered with a square of butter muslin or gauze and be held just above the surface of the flag. The nozzle must not come into direct contact with the surface or scuff damage may be caused to fragile flag fabric surface. Brushes should never be used because of the risk of scuff damage to a fragile surface. In preparation for surface cleaning, ideally the flag should be taken down and laid flat on a padded surface or padded board. Depending on the size of the flag at least two people (preferably four) will be required to handle the flag safely and turn it over when this is required. The cleaning action should be in line with the grain of the fabric.

Where appropriate (on poles and crowns) a very soft brush might be used to gently lift off dust and dirt accumulation on these areas. Under no circumstances should water, alcohol, or any other solvent be used on any part of the flag including fabric, poles, finials or tassels unless this work is undertaken by a trained conservator.

The cleaning should be fully documented (in the church Log Book) with before and after photographs of the flags taken from both sides. Detailed photography of sensitive or damaged areas should be undertaken as a matter of record. Similarly, close up photographs of the finials, and other decorative elements should be made.

The build-up of dust should be monitored and consideration given to the frequency of repeating the cleaning process. The frequency will very much depend on individual circumstances and may not be required annually.

Faculty considerations

The repair, maintenance, removal, disposal or replacement of a flagpole are on List A of the Faculty Rules and can be undertaken without a faculty, and without consultation with the Archdeacon or DAC, provided that only non-corroding fixings are used when a flagpole is repaired or replaced.

A faculty is not needed to introduce, remove or dispose of a Union flag or St George's flag (with or without the diocesan arms in the first quarter) for flying from the church. Similarly, flags and banners for temporary displays do not require faculty for their introduction or removal.

The laying up of flags and the removal of flags that have been laid up does require faculty, as does removal or disposal of flags or banners of historic or artistic interest.

