

OUR NATIONAL FLAG Roger Hateley

The most noticeable visual symbol of any nation is or should be its national flag it is a powerful and significant show of identity and belonging to the country it represents. One of the most recognisable of the worlds flags is the red, white and blue Union Flag of Britain.

Our Union Flag is unique in as much that it has been and still is a feature of many other nation's flags, this indicates the legacy left by the pride in and importance of the old British Empire. Canada, Hong Kong and South Africa are some of the nations that have dispensed with the emblem of their former colonial rulers it is however displayed on some of Canada's state flags. The likes of Australia and New Zealand have chosen, though sometimes controversially, to retain the symbol of their association with our country within their flag. Our flag is still found within that of Fiji, despite its independence. Strangely there is a state flag within the U.S.A. that displays the Union Flag in its design, that being the state of Hawaii. The city flag of Baton Rouge, Louisiana also has the Union Flag incorporated in it along with symbols of other old colonial powers, France and Spain. Taunton, Massachusetts also has it in its city flag,.....I could go on,..... but I will not. Suffice to say that many countries, states and cities throughout the world are proud to fly the flag of Britain in conjunction with their own flag.

How did our flag come about ? Briefly it happened like this, in 1606 James VI of Scotland ascended to the throne of England bringing together the two countries in a new realm he styled "*the Kingdom of Great Britain*". This flag incorporated the red cross of St. George and the White cross of St. Andrew. Wales was not represented on the flag and still isn't, as it was annexed by King Edward I in 1282 and was included into England. Likewise, Ireland had existed as a personal union with England since 1542, Henry VIII was created King of Ireland, and was not represented on the original flag. Following the Act of Union in 1801, which merged the Kingdom of Ireland with the Kingdom of Great Britain, to make "*the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*" the red cross of St. Patrick was added to the flag. These saint's crosses are separated with a white surround of varying thickness this signifies the order of the unions and as you will read later are very important.

That then is a very brief history of the Union Flag, or is it a Union Jack? It can be either, Yes it can. Most people will insist it is Flag, I indeed used to, some say a Jack is a small Union Flag attached to a jack staff on board a ship and not the same as a Flag being hoisted by rope up a pole. Some Buckingham Palace historians will tell you that it is a Jack, in reference to James VI who in 1606 established the flag by Royal decree. The Flag Institute, probably the highest authority to be found in the flag world has a chief vexillologist, (vexillology – the scientific study of the history, symbolism and usage of flags), who states that we can call our national flag the Union Flag or the Union Jack. In 2008 Andrew Rosindell MP sponsored a 10-minute rule bill in parliament, the Union Flag Bill, this was to affirm the make-up, the use and the name of our national flag, this bill endorses the use of the two names, flag or jack, choose either.

That then is our national flag, loved and displayed proudly by many throughout the world. Held high by winning athletes, draped over railings by adoring crowds, flown from buildings and in gardens at national events, worn on clothing, stuck on our cars, carried on marches and seen adorning house and shop windows. It is great to see this show of patriotism, or is it? Probably more than 50% of the general public don't have a clue which way up the national flag should be, most of them achieve it purely by chance, this is a national disgrace.

Remember the white surrounds of the three crosses having various thickness, this is all you need to know, my apologies to those readers that do know and, also that this may not be in colour. When the flag is flown horizontally from a flagpole it should



have the broad diagonal white stripe upper most and nearest to the pole. When the flag is displayed without a pole it should have the broad white diagonal stripe upper most on the left-hand side, the same as on a pole. If the flag is to be displayed vertically, with or without a pole, it is simply turned clockwise through 90 degrees, the broad white stripe will then be upper most and on the left diagonal. Obviously if it's on a pole or hung and seen from the other side it is reversed.



These two depictions of the flag are correct. Deliberately flying the flag upside down is considered "*lese Majeste*," (i.e. insult the monarchy) and in theory only it is considered a crime in the UK and the Commonwealth by some people. However, like many others I do find it very annoying.

The two depictions below are displayed upside down. The difference in the thickness of the white stripe and its correct position can be clearly seen. It



has been flown and displayed upside down by many, the B.N.P. of all people, The BBC, some national newspapers and in front of Nigel Farage on his desk in the EU parliament. I did email Farage's public relations department on this one and in their reply they apologised and fobbed the error off onto some obscure foreign EU minion, a pathetic excuse.

Flying the flag upside down is also considered to be a sign of distress for the persons in its immediate vicinity or in a building or vessel displaying it so. If you should see it flown upside down please do not go all guns blazing to perform a gallant rescue, you will only see the misinformed enjoying themselves in complete ignorance of the fact that they are insulting their country.

We are going to see many displays of patriotism this year with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games. It will be a happy and welcoming sight to see our National Flag proudly displayed all around the country, but if you, or your family and friends are flying flags please make sure that they are doing in correctly.

So now you know and I truly hope that if you see your national flag the Union Jack/Flag flown upside down that you politely point out the error to those responsible. To those of you who know how to display our flag correctly I apologise. I have found everyone I've pointed out this error to, to be extremely thankful and apologetic.

One other thing why is the colour of our flag changed, we see it in an all-over blue hue, pink and I've seen it as an all-green flag. It is red, white, and blue, leave it alone. As for writing on it.....don't get me started on that one !