

## OUR NATIONAL FLAG

What with a large daily newspaper giving away a million miniatures of it on Empire Day, the Americans displaying it everywhere during the recent visit to their country of our Queen, an airline removing it from its brochures and Civic authorities of a certain country allegedly refusing to attend a meeting because it was flying alongside their own flag at their meeting place, our National Flag has been making news recently.

Originally meant to symbolise the Union of England and Scotland, and later of England, Scotland and Ireland, it has become the emblem of British peoples everywhere and as such is the pride of millions. The present design was established in 1801 but prior to this it had an extremely varied career.

Long before the initial Union between England and Scotland each of these countries had made its choice of a National Flag.

As its national emblem England had chosen the Cross of St. George. The exact date is uncertain but there is no doubt that it was in use as such in 1277. Oddly enough, this is almost a century before St. George, a foreign Saint, gained supremacy from other Saints of a far more national character as the Patron Saint of England (generally taken to be 1350 when the Chapel of St. George at Windsor was founded in thanks for his supposed help at the Battle of Crecy). St. George was essentially a soldier's Saint, and proved most popular especially in the East where his original flag was a representation of himself on horseback slaying the dragon with a spear, this eventually being changed to the present Cross of St. George by the Republic of Genoa. The Crusaders believed his intervention gave them victory on many occasions and it is probably due to his immense popularity with them that he eventually gained supremacy in England. The St. George's Cross was first flown at sea by English ships at the latter end of the 13th century, and by the end of the 16th century had taken the lead as their distinguishing characteristic.

Scotland had chosen the Cross-Saltire of St. Andrew. It is not known just when, but was probably at a very early date. Unfortunately the earliest Scottish records were lost at sea in the ship which was returning them after they had been carried off, together with the Stone of Destiny, by Edward I. However, it was certainly in use as such in the 14th century, for when planning a raid into England orders were given that every man in the Scots Army was to wear a white St. Andrew's Cross before and behind, and there is also a recorded payment for a ship to be supplied with a banner with a white St. Andrew's Cross in the middle. No set ground colour seems to have been essential though, and in the 1540's this was yellow and red (Stuart colours) though after this date the prevailing colour seems to have been blue. The Scots made up their minds at a

very early date as to who was to be their Patron Saint. There were several rivals for this position, but in the first half of the 8th century the King of Scotland founded a Church at St. Andrews with new clergy who brought the relics of St. Andrew with them, and this Saint soon became the more popular and has remained unchallenged ever since.

Ireland never developed a National Flag common to all people as did England and Scotland. When the Order of St. Patrick was instituted, the red saltire, which was originally the arms of the Earl of Kildare, was taken as the badge of this Order. The Irish showed little enthusiasm for this, however, and never took kindly to it. Since the red saltire was of such a convenient form it was chosen for introduction into the Union Flag of Great Britain when forming the combined flag of England, Scotland and Ireland. St. Patrick was a native of Scotland but spent almost all his life in Ireland and is in the truest sense a national Patron Saint. He never had a serious rival. There is no ancient flag, and no symbol, except the shamrock, associated with his name. He is not entitled to a Cross as he was not a martyr. With the little information available on flags flown by Irish ships, it appears there was no recognized Irish flag until the 18th century when a green ensign with a harp and crown in the centre made its appearance.

On the accession of James I, in 1603, which brought about the Union of the English and Scottish crowns, bitter disputes arose between English and Scottish seamen, previously "foreigners" to each other, as to the precedence of each other's National Flag. In an effort to settle this James issued a proclamation in 1606 to the effect that henceforth all ships of the Kingdom of Great Britain should fly in their maintop the Cross of St. George and the Cross of St. Andrew joined together according to a form made by the heralds. At this time it was called the British flag and was intended to be flown only at sea by both warships and merchantmen. This was the first Union Flag.

More disputes arose, as it was impossible to combine the two flags without giving precedence to one of them. On one occasion a quartered flag consisting of the St. George's Cross and the St. Andrew's Cross was used but even this caused argument as to which flag should occupy the upper canton near the mast—the place of honour. Eventually it was settled that the red cross, the white border and the white cross-saltire should be of the same width. All the same the Scots never really took to the new flag and rarely used it.

In the late 1630's a proclamation was issued that the Union flag, as it was now being called, was to be flown by ships of the Royal Navy only. This was considered necessary due to foreigners failing to pay proper marks of respect to ships of the Royal Navy and who used the excuse that until they were shot at they had no idea that they had encountered the

King's ships. This proclamation did not state where the Union Flag was to be flown. This was probably the outcome of the general practice which had come in about this time of flying it at the bowsprit and when so flown it was termed the "Jack".

On the execution of Charles I in 1649 the Union between England and Scotland was dissolved and ships of both countries went back to their old National Flags.

Very shortly after this the Council of State decided on a new "Jack" for normal use, symbolising the Union of England and Ireland, consisting of the St. George's Cross on a white field nearest the mast and a harp of a blue field for the fly. It was known as the "Commonwealth Cross and Harp Jack".

A few years later, in 1658, Scotland was once again united with England and the Cross-Saltire of St. Andrew ordered to be joined with the Cross of St. George. The Union Flag now consisted of St. George's Cross and St. Andrew's Cross superimposed with a harp in the centre. This lasted only a few months however and yet again the Cross of St. Andrew vanished and orders were given for the Commonwealth Cross and Harp jack to be flown.

On the return of Charles II in 1660 the Union Flag once again reverted to its original form—the St. George's Cross and the St. Andrew's Cross joined together—the harp being taken out of all flags "it being very offensive to the King." The Union Flag still remained the prerogative of the Royal Navy,

though the merchantmen tried hard to gain possession of this right due to the privileges, such as freedom of pilotage, which the flag would have given them.

In 1707 the Union of England and Scotland was made complete, the first article in the Treaty of the Union providing for the Crosses of St. George and St. Andrew to be joined together as thought fit by the Queen, it being finally decided by Order in Council of the same year that "the Union Flag continue as at present".

The beginning of the 19th century saw the final change in the design of the Union Flag. With the Union of Great Britain and Ireland a proclamation was issued that the Union Flag consist of the Cross of St. George conjoined with the Cross of St. Andrew and saltire of St. Patrick. From this date the Union Flag seems to have ceased being the prerogative of the Royal Navy and has been flown by all including private individuals. In 1908 the Government announced that it was to be regarded as our National flag.

The present Union Flag is never made in strict accordance with its original design, but then it seems fated to misrepresentation even to its name. Strictly speaking a "Union Jack" is a Union Flag flown at the jackstaff of one of H.M. Ships, yet this technical distinction is seldom applied, for practically all our newspapers and even the B.B.C. and Government officials often refer to "our National Flag, the Union Jack".