

Future Promotion of Vexillology

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In the late 19th century, two pastimes changed their names. Stampcollecting became philately, due to the increasing interest, which it aroused around the world. Antiquarianism became archaeology due to the work of Champollion, Flinders Petrie and others. There was an important difference between these two. Philately remained a hobby, though some people made a living by dealing in stamps and publishing stamp-magazines and catalogues. Archaeology became a recognised science and career, involving university courses; both are pre- and post-graduate levels.

Today vexillology has reached the point at which philately stopped. It is essentially a hobby, but a few people make their livings by making flags and publishing vexillological books and magazines.

If vexillology is to develop beyond being simply a hobby, action is needed, and it is needed quickly. Furthermore this action cannot be haphazard, left to the temporary fancy of individual vexillologists, or it will surely be ineffective. In the thirty years since the foundation of the Flag Research Center, much has been achieved, largely by the enthusiasm and commitment of individuals. There has been no foundation funding research, these have been no grants from governments, there has been no generous millionaire willing to patronise vexillology. Yet much has been achieved thanks to the work of individuals whose love of

flags led them to give unsparingly of their time, and what they could afford financially, to the development of vexillology. We must also remember that in almost every case, this has been part-time work, as most vexillologists have full-time jobs, which severely limit the time they have available for flags. So we can be proud of what has been achieved. We must also recognise that what was done in the past is not sufficient for the future, if vexillology is to develop beyond being a hobby.

Flag-awareness is a field in which all vexillologists would like to see development. The need is more obvious in some countries than others. In the United States and some other countries, flag-awareness is high. In Britain it is very low. Note how often the British Union Flag is seen flying upside-down, even over public buildings. One way of increasing flag-awareness is for vexillologists to fly flags. Apart from giving pleasure, it arouses interest in those who see the flags.

Co-ordinated campaigns can help to promote flag-flying where there is little flag-awareness. But please avoid what happened in York. The city council flew the European Community flags and made two mistakes. The flags were made locally, so the flag of Portugal was not flown, being too difficult to manufacture. Worse

was the flag of Belgium, with vertical stripes of black, red and yellow, in that order. If we are to promote flag-usage, it must be good usage of good flags. Such campaigns can increase flag-usage and flag-awareness among the general public, but dedication and organisation are necessary. A single letter to a public body is unlikely to have success. A carefully planned campaign from a recognised, organised group will produce far better results.

Encouragement can also be given to advertising and company flags. Care is needed here, as some such flags are vexillological nightmares. If we suggest a flag, it should be backed by well-drawn designs, to stop the managing director placing his pale green logo on a pale blue flag. If we promote flag-usage, but it must be good usage of good flags.

Education is a field in which vexillology can be promoted. There are obvious areas, which involve flags, but the flag-enthusiast should not be limited by the obvious. Gary Grahi began by decorating his classroom with flags of the United Nations. While teaching history in Africa, I drew wall-maps to illustrate some tropics and periods. To decorate the maps, I often added the flags of the countries shown. The pupils loved them. So the technique worked both in America and in Africa.

Even quite small children can be

encouraged to interest themselves in flags. Most children love colouring pictures. There are some flag colouring-books, but they often have captions too advanced for small children. Some very good colouring-books on historic flags of the United States exist, but their captions are generally too difficult. It should be both easy and inexpressive to produce such books. It does not matter if a child colours the German flag blue, white and green or gives the flag of Argentina a red sun. While doing so, the child is getting to the concept of "flag", and at this early stage that is what matters.

Later in the primary school, helped by decoration of the classroom in the Grahl style, children can be encouraged to complete the flags in correct colours. At this stage they can be shown the patterns which are seen in, for example, the flags of Scandinavia and Central America, (if they do not recognise them without assistance, which many will do).

In language-teaching, the classroom should always have a flag of the country whose language is being taught. The flag is an important part of the culture of the country, and this cultural aspect is now stressed increasingly in language-teaching. I agree, that in Spanish lessons in the United States, it might be difficult to decide which flag to show, but this opens possibilities of discussions on flags, with development of

vocabulary in terms of colours and designs.

History and geography lend themselves well to the promotion of flag-knowledge in secondary school. Geography today also involves cultural aspects of the countries or areas studied, and these can be illustrated easily by use of flags, notably in the case of Africa and the Islamic countries. So many flags have colours denoting geographic factors, that they would provide enough material for an entire project by a class. Apart from a project on colours, we can consider actual geographic features shown on flags, the map of Cyprus, the mountain of St Lucia, the agricultural produce of Fiji and Grenada, the trees of Lebanon and Equatorial Guinea. The enthusiastic and innovative teacher could find years of useful, interesting and enjoyable work in vexillology, to broaden and brighten the course, while also enlightening the students.

History in the classroom provides a wonderful opportunity to use flag-related material, as my own experience showed. Apart from the maps, I used historical displays, including one on history of flags. That was always the most popular, if only because of its colour. Flags have been called the "the shorthand of history". This is not always true, of course, but the flags of the United Kingdom, United States, Portugal, South Africa, and Sri Lanka, to mention only a few, embody the

history of those countries exceptionally well. Could a better illustration than flags be found to show the closeness of links and inspiration between African independence movements of the 1950's to 1970's?

This again links with the colouring-book approach. As mentioned before, many of the books available do not have suitable captioning for young children. These books could be used in secondary school, once students realise that they are not "kid-stuff". There are excellent colouring-books on historic United States flags. True, the United States has a richer flag-history than many countries, and is enviably flag-conscious, but there are other countries with rich flag-histories too, like France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, South Africa, to mention only a few. How much flag-history has India?

A prime requisite for the use of flags and the promotion of vexillology in schools is interest and cooperation from teachers. Teachers must be convinced of the educational value of flags before they will use them. Not only teachers need to be convinced, but the schools themselves, and even educational authorities. Some may try to censor the approach, by agreeing in principle, but forbidding certain flags or types of flags. Pressure of this type should be resisted. It can be resisted without argument and hostility, by showing the flags form part of a general course, and are illustrations,

teaching aids not focuses for ideology. In my own classroom I had a map of German expansion prior to World War II, topped by a drawing of a Nazi flag. I also had maps of the Middle East 1948-1973, with the flags of Israel and the Arab states. If it is clear that the flags are illustrative and explanatory, and do not mean the teaching of ideology, I see no reason to outlaw any flag.

In university and higher education there are more possibilities. While training as a teacher, I had to submit a major dissertation in history I chose the history of the flag of the United States. This caused a stir, as the college at which I studied was in central Africa. It cost me a good deal in postage, but it gained me a distinction in 1964.

Research into flags can be used in further education, notably in post-graduate study. How many vexillological topics have been researched in depth at that level? I suggest that few have been submitted for higher degrees. Even if the research is confined to the design and political significance of flags, the information now available in vexillological association archives shows that the scope for such research is vast. Vexillology touches many topics within history, geography and cultural studies, yet so often researchers ignore vexillological aspects.

We know that vexillology touches many different disciplines. How much research has been

done into flag-materials? This links the university discipline of history, the technical subject of textiles, and marine science. Flag-manufacture is a wide field and should be broken down into components. It includes natural and artificial textiles, plastics, weaving, sewing, printing, dyeing and painting. Each could be a topic of research in itself, purely in relation to flags. Each could also fit into a recognised university department, within which most universities want post-graduate research to be done.

It does not matter if the research is regarded as applied art, textile science, cultural history or whatever. For years archaeological topics were accepted only in established university departments of history, classics and even geology. In time archaeology was recognised as a science in its own right, and developed its own principles, practices, training, standards and assessment methods. These derived from earlier disciplines, but modified into a truly new science. So for the moment we cannot hope to see a department of vexillology at any institution of higher learning. We can dream of such a department in the future, but only if we now encourage the study of vexillological topics within other departments, and show those flags are worthy of study in many different aspects. Only if we do this successfully, will a true department of vexillology arise, dealing not only

with designs, textiles and manufacture, but also with the philosophy, symbolism and usage of flags.

Some vexillologists choose, and have the time and inclination, to study at higher levels. There is also the mass of part-timers who do not wish, or cannot afford to do so, but who want to research within self-set limitations. Such people can contribute greatly to vexillology. Indeed, most of what has been achieved so far is due to the efforts of these enthusiasts.

How many vexillologists know the resources available in their own local libraries and museums? I confess I do not. How many people can afford to spend time, even only a little, in research of favoured topics in vexillology, but are frustrated because museums, libraries and such collections are not readily available? Such institutions often do not willingly open their doors to those they regard as casual enquirers. We accept that the staffs of such institutions have their own priorities, and dislike interruption in their routine. Yet those same staffs will accept an approach from a serious researcher. If that researcher can prove that he or she is really serious.

Then another problem arises. Once the researcher proves that this is no casual enquiry, what information is available? Probably every library in the world has at least one flag-book, but many have little more than obscure topics. It may

be a collection of papers of a long-dead seaman, which has been gathering dust for fifty years. It may be the manuscript of an even longer-dead enthusiast, who painstakingly compiled a complete record of every military flag used by his country during his life. It too has been gathering dust. If the institution is a museum, it may have a collection of flags; a collection never put on display, because insufficient interest has been shown.

These thoughts to three conclusions in this respect. First, there should be some form of identification for researchers, to show the staff of the institution that this is not idle curiosity, but genuine research, which merits attention. At a recent meeting of the Flag Institute, this matter was raised, and is now under consideration. Such identification must be issued by an organisation, and backed by signatures of officers of the organisation. If such a document were issued by N.A.V.A., the Flag Institute, or a similar body, even though the staff may not have heard of the organisation, it must strengthen the approach being made.

The second conclusion is that members of vexillological associations should be encouraged to undertake surveys of all local institutions, to establish what vexillological resources they possess. Such a survey is impossible without proper identification. Once the survey is completed, the

member submits the result to the relevant association, for inclusion in the archives, where it can be a reference-point for other members.

The third is considerably more difficult. As I mentioned before, it is likely that the vexillological material has gathered dust for years, unseen, unrequested (because its existence was not known) and unwanted by the institution. It is wasted. The association should apply to the institution, requesting that the material be given to the association or sold to it. This is difficult, because such institutions cling to their possessions, whether they are ever consulted or not. An individual's approach would be hopeless, but an application from an organised body, which would put the material to use, might be accepted.

The next point leads naturally from the last, as it too deals with the loss to vexillology of potentially valuable material. At the Congress in San Francisco, Whitney Smith spoke of how so many vexillological collections are lost on the death of the collector, stored uselessly, given to a museum or library to gather dust, dispersed, even burned, with the total loss of the perhaps unique research done by that person. An important part of the promotion of vexillology must surely be to prevent such a situation again causing irreparable loss.

How many vexillologists make their wills before dying, and mention their collections in those

wills? How many realise the true value of their collections? Most, I am sure, believe that their collection is fine for themselves, but contains nothing of value to anyone else. After all, it has only the usual books and charts, which all enthusiasts have, a few national flags, pictures and papers. I thought that about my collection until the Flag Institute asked to borrow and copy some information and documentation I had, which did not exist in the Institute's archives.

Any collection, however small, can contain useful, even valuable items. It may be an actual flag, a copy of a long-out-of-print book, a single document, and a picture, which proves something about just one flag. There will be much repetitive material, but there can always be the single gem of information, which will be found nowhere else. No one likes to think of his or her own death, but in this case it is necessary. Let me appeal to all of you to ensure that your personal collections are not lost on your deaths; to ensure that the collection is left to a fellow vexillologist or to an association. Even the repetitive material can be used in an association library, given or sold to others, and the gems will not be lost. I also ask those who publish vexillological serials, to publish this appeal to subscribers, so that other collections are preserved. In my own case, I have willed my collection to another vexillologist who I know will

appreciate it.

How many times have we invented the wheel? I invented it in 1963-64 when I researched the history of the Flag of the United States. I cannot believe that any of the information I discovered had not been found previously by Whitney Smith, Quaif or McCandless. Yet I patiently researched it all over again. How many of us do the same? How many researchers are now working on the same topic or closely related topics, completely unaware of each other's work? How much time and effort is wasted because one person has a piece of information, which he or she is not using, but which would be of inestimable value to another? That other is writing letters, paying postage, wasting time, when, if only it were known, the information is readily available.

Vexillology has been a great example of cooperation, at local, national and international level. There have been disagreements, friction and difficulties, but these are inseparable from human relationships. Can this cooperation not be extended, in the interests of both the single vexillologist and the science as a whole? However generously this is done, some will still re-invented the wheel, but the waste of time and effort can be reduced.

Each association should maintain a record, updated when necessary, of research being done by its members. The details need not be recorded,

only the general topics. From time to time the updated list should be published in the association's serial. This will provide three immediate benefits.

The members will know what is being researched. Thus if a member is researching a specific area, others working in similar areas will know it. There can be an exchange of ideas and information. Such an exchange must benefit all concerned. Yes, it may be disappointing to learn that someone else is working on a topic regarded as one's own, and there may be resentment, but that person may have the one or two pieces of information which the researcher needs. The exchange of information will be at the discretion of the people concerned. If one wishes to charge a fee for the fruits of research, and the other is willing to pay, there can be a deal. No-one would sensibly demand that the fruit of years of work and study must in all cases be freely given to the first person that requests it.

Members would also know whom to approach about more casual interests. If a member is middle interested, for example, in signal flags, and sees that another member is researching that topic, it would be reasonable to ask the researcher to give information as to readily available sources. It also has the advantage of increasing contact between members.

The third advantage would be that

members might offer information to a person known to be researching a topic. If the research is unknown, the offer could not be made. Again it need not be a free offer. The terms would depend on the persons concerned.

As there is a fairly general exchange of vexillological serials between associations, the research being done worldwide would be known. A member in Germany waiting information on American military flags could check the current research list in NAVA News, to find the name of a possible American contact.

Some may doubt that such cooperation would occur. In my own case, while researching an international dictionary of vexillology, I have had wonderful, immediate, unbelievably generous cooperation from people in Spain, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Italy. In every case the assistance was given enthusiastically and freely. It was a marvellous example of the international cooperation of vexillologists to the benefit of vexillology as a whole. Cooperation will occur if research topics are known. In this connection, I make a small offer. Some years ago I researched the history of flags in the Zimbabwe National Archives. I had little time, and the research was limited to the period before 1937. I have supplied the results of this research, such as they are, to the Flag Institute, the Southern

African Vexillological Association and the Flag Research Center. I shall supply them free to the archives of any other association, which request them.

We should also open contact and mutual exchanges of information with other groups, not directly connected with vexillology, but which have information of use to us, and whom we can help with our specialist knowledge. Such groups include those interested in heraldry, philately, sphragistics, semiotics and phaleristics. In the latter case alone, there are many orders and decorations, which show flags or flag colours in the medals or in their ribbons, such as the independence medals of Nigeria and Zimbabwe. On the other hand, we see the ribbon of the Iron Cross as the cross on the Imperial German Ensign and the George Cross on the flag of Malta. These are just four instances from a single example.

How far do we advertise ourselves? In April I bought some postcards of flags, and opened contact with the publisher. He had been interested in flags for many years, yet knew nothing of the Flag Institute. How many more people are there, longing for contact with our associations, able and willing to provide useful information, who do not even know that we exist? The more members we have, the more widely we are known to exist, the more we will taken seriously by official bodies,

other interest groups, film and television producers, universities and other further-educational institutions, museums and libraries.

Finally it rests with us. Stagnation so often leads to decay. Only progress and advancement secure permanence. Vexillology must not stagnate. It must progress. It must develop. For this development to happen, action is needed now. The vexillology of tomorrow lies in our hands today.