

Naval Flags Flown in Portsmouth Naval Base, and by HMS Victory and HMS Warrior

by Geoffrey Parsons

Abstract This paper will review the flags flown in Portsmouth Naval Base, including command flags, flags flown on designated days and during VIP visits, and by based-ported Royal Navy vessels and visiting foreign warships.

The flags flown by HMS Victory following the recent transfer of command to the First Sea Lord, and the problems encountered flying flags during her current refit period will also be discussed.

The paper will also review the flags flown during the opening ceremony of the Mary Rose museum, and by the iron-clad HMS Warrior.

It will describe the signal flags flown from Semaphore Tower for Royal Navy ships returning from overseas deployments, visiting foreign warships, and the courtesy flags flown by the tower during foreign warships visits.

Portsmouth Naval Base



Portsmouth Naval Base became a royal dockyard under king Henry VIII when he established the dockyard as the home of the Royal Navy. It has the oldest dry docks in the world that was built by Henry VII in 1495. The Mary Rose was built there in 1509. She sank in 1545 outside Portsmouth harbour, and was raised in 1982, and is now on display in No 3 Dock. Marc Isambard Brunel, the father of the famed Portsmouth engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, established in 1802 the world's first mass production line at the Portsmouth Block Mills, to mass-produce pulley blocks for rigging Royal Navy's ships. At its height, the Dockyard was the largest industrial site in the world.

Horatio Nelson, embarked on HMS Victory from Portsmouth for the last time before his death at the Battle of Trafalgar. His flagship is now permanently docked in No 2 Dock and is currently undergoing a full restoration. HMS Warrior, the first Royal Navy ironclad built in 1860 was permanently berthed there in 1987. The dockyard also built the first battleship HMS Dreadnought in 1906 which was completed in a record time of one year.

Following a reduction in the size of the Royal Navy, there was no longer a requirement for the dockyard to build ships and it became a Naval Base. The older part of the Naval Base containing HMS Victory, Mary Rose and HMS Warrior was transferred to a charitable trust and became the Heritage Area. The main part of the Naval Base

still remains an operational area which berths and supports operational ships, and provides dry dock facilities and undertakes major refits. Part of the Naval Base is leased to BAE Systems who built sections for the T45 destroyers, and is currently building sections for two new aircraft carriers.

The Naval Base is steeped in naval and architecture history and most of the buildings are listed which places significant constraints on their modification and use. Some important buildings include:



< The Old Naval Academy where naval officers were taught navigation, the ball on top of the building was used for sextant training during cloudy days.



< Admiralty House, the home of the Second Sea Lord, has a ballroom, and had the first flushing toilet in the country.



< St Anne's is the dockyard church where many Royal Navy Colours are laid up.

Naval Base Flags

Flags Flown by Royal Navy Ships Alongside

When alongside Royal Navy ships fly the Union Jack at the jack staff and the white ensign at the ensign staff. These flags are hoisted during the colours ceremony held at 0900 in winter and 0800 in summer, and then lowered at sunset.

The Union Flag or Union Jack

The Union Flag or Union Jack comprises three individual flag: St George, St Patrick and St Andrew. Both these names are equally valid.

When Elizabeth I of England died in 1603 without an heir, James VI of Scotland became James I of England. Although the two countries remained independent, James decided to call his new realm the Kingdom of Great Britain. Due to arguments between English and Scottish ships King James issued a proclamation on 12 April 1606 ordering ships to fly the St George's and St Andrew's crosses conjoined.

Under the reign of Queen Anne in 1707, England and Scotland became a single nation. The first article of the Treaty of Union stated that the flag would be the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew conjoined in such a manner as the Queen saw fit. Queen Anne decided to keep the existing design.

Ireland had been a separate kingdom until 1801. An Act of Union in 1800 was passed to create the new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, which came into effect on the 1 January 1801. The College of Arms designed a new flag with the cross of St. Patrick counter-changed with the cross of St. Andrew. The inclusion of St. Patrick's cross is of interest as St. Patrick was not martyred and therefore did not have a cross. The red saltire on white was the emblem of the powerful Irish Fitzgerald family and was a convenient symbol for Ireland.



< The Union Flag is flown as a jack at the jack staff by Royal Navy ships when alongside, at anchor, while underway when dressed with masthead ensigns, or if the Monarch or an Admiral of the Fleet is on board. The jack staff is surmounted by a naval crown. The Union Jack is normally lowered the moment the vessel slips the berth.

< The Union Flag is also flown ashore when a court martial is in progress as seen on the main mast of HMS Nelson the shore establishment adjacent to the Naval Base where Courts Marshal are held.

Civilian vessels are not permitted to fly the Union Jack. The use of the Union Flag as an ensign on a civilian craft is still illegal and may result in prosecution. Charles I ordered it be restricted to His Majesty's ships "upon pain of Our high displeasure" in the 17th century, mainly due to its unauthorised use by merchant vessels trying to avoid paying harbour duties by passing themselves off as Royal vessels.

Civilian vessels may fly the pilot ensign which comprises a union flag with a white border. This is very similar to the defaced Queen's Harbour Masters flag.

Ensigns

An ensign in British maritime law and custom is the identifying flag flown to designate a British ship, either military or civilian. Such flags display the Union Flag in the canton, the upper corner next to the staff, with either a red, white or blue field, dependent on whether the vessel is civilian, naval, or in a special category. These are known as the red, white, and blue ensigns respectively. These flags are flown at the ensign staff.

The traditional order of seniority was red, white and blue, with the red as the senior ensign.

White Ensign

< Since the reorganisation of the Royal Navy in 1864, use of the white ensign, which comprises a red St George's Cross on a white field with the Union Flag in the canton, has been restricted to ships, boats, submarines, and on-shore establishments of the Royal Navy.



The Royal Yacht Squadron also hoists the white ensign by special dispensation as can be seen on their vessels.



Blue Ensign

< The blue ensign, which comprises a dark blue field with the Union Flag in the canton, may be worn undefaced by masters of vessels in possession of a warrant and by the members of certain yacht clubs.

British government departments use a variety of blue ensigns defaced in the fly with the department badge. These include the MOD Police Flag and UK Border Agency. Newly constructed Royal Navy ships fly a defaced blue ensign during their delivery voyage, which is then replaced by a white ensign during the ship handover ceremony.



Red Ensign

< The red ensign, which comprises a red field with the Union Flag in the canton, is normally used by all other British merchant navy ships and private craft. Warships built by United Kingdom shipyards such as BAE Systems for foreign countries fly the red ensign during sea trials until the ship is commissioned by its nation and flies the ensign of that country.

Trinity House and various organisations and yacht clubs fly the Red Ensign, defaced by a badge.

Seniority and Command Flags

Royal Banner

< The Princess Royal, Princess Anne, is the honorary Commodore-in-Chief of Portsmouth Naval Base. Her standard may be seen flying over Admiralty House, or on board ship during her official visits. Her banner comprises the Royal Standard with a white label with three tabs indicating that she is the daughter of a monarch.



Lord High Admiral

< King Edward I of England appointed the first English admiral in 1297 when he named William de Leyburn 'Admiral of the Sea of the King of England'. The rank of admiral should not be confused with the office of Admiral of England or Lord High Admiral, which was an office held by the person with overall responsibility for the Navy.

The Queen who was until recently the Lord High Admiral bestowed the title on her husband the Duke of Edinburgh on his 90th birthday in 2011. Other honorary positions in the Royal Navy include the Vice-Admiral of the United Kingdom which is an honorary office generally held by a senior Royal Navy admiral. He is the official deputy to the Lord High Admiral. The Duke of Edinburgh held this post until he was appointed Lord High Admiral when it transferred to Rear Admiral Sir Donald Gosling in 2011, a generous patron of the Royal Navy.

Flag Officers

The Royal Navy has had Admirals, Vice and Rear admirals since at least the 16th cen-



ture. When in command of the fleet, the Admiral would be in either the lead, or the middle section, of the fleet. When the Admiral commanded from the middle section of the fleet his deputy, the Vice Admiral, would be in the leading section or van. The Admiral at the rear of the fleet was the Rear Admiral.

In Elizabethan times the fleet grew large enough to be organized into squadrons. The Admiral's squadron wore a red ensign, the Vice Admiral white, and the Rear Admiral blue. As the squadrons grew in size, an Admiral, Vice Admiral and Rear Admiral were eventually appointed to each squadron. The official ranks then became Admiral, Vice Admiral and Rear Admiral of the red, white and blue.

The squadrons ranked in order: red, white, and blue, with admirals ranked according to their squadron. Admiral Nelson was a Vice Admiral of the Red and therefore his ships would have flown the red ensign. However, at the battle of Trafalgar he ordered the British ships to fly the white ensign to avoid confusion with the enemy.

The organisation of the fleet into coloured squadrons was changed in 1864. The Red Ensign was allocated to the Merchant Marine, the White Ensign became the flag of the Royal Navy, and the Blue Ensign was allocated to the naval reserve and naval auxiliary vessels. It is interesting to note that the senior colour went to the merchant fleet.

The Admiral of the Red was also the Admiral of the Fleet. However, in 1996, this rank was put in abeyance in peacetime, except for members of the Royal family. Admirals of the Fleet continue to hold their rank on the active list for life.

Although Admirals are deemed to be of flag rank they may not necessarily be flag officers that are appointed to an operational command such as the Fleet Commander.

A full admiral hoists the cross of St George with no balls, a vice admiral has one ball and a Rear Admiral has two balls.

< A Commodore hoists a broad pennant comprising the cross of St George with a single ball.

The Royal Dockyard was originally commanded by the Port Admiral in the rank of a Rear Admiral.

However, with the reduction in size and status of the dockyard a Naval Base Commander (NBC) now commands the Naval Base in the rank of Commodore. He hoists his flag at several locations in the Naval Base including: the entrance at Unicorn Gate, the Royal Naval shore establishment HMS Nelson, and in front of his administrative office block Victory Building. When the First Sea Lord or other VIPs visit the Naval Base their flag replaces the Commodore's flag at Unicorn Gate.

< When a previous commodore departed on reappointment a record number of nine commodore pennants were hoisted in front of Victory Building.



Commissioning Pennant

A commissioning pennant is flown continuously in all Royal Navy vessels and establishments in commission. The commissioning pennant comprises a white field with a red cross. It is typically 1 m in length and 10 cm at the hoist, tapering to a squared-off point.



Paying off Pennant

< Ships, which are being payed-off from operational service, fly a paying off pennant ship whose length is determined by length of service which normally exceeds the length of the ship. HMS Edinburgh, the last of the type 42 destroyers was flying her paying off pennant when she arrived at Portsmouth her home port on 31 May 13 for decommissioning.

Senior Officer Afloat

When a group of Royal Naval ships are berthed alongside, the senior ship hoists the Senior Officer Afloat pennant, which is the NATO signal flag for STARBOARD. It is green on the hoist and fly with a white field in between.



Out of Routine

< When ships have reduced crew on board, normally during maintenance or leave periods, the ship hoists the PORT flag, which has red and white vertical strips indicating that it is out of routine. This means normal marks of respect to passing ships and senior staff will not be shown. HMS Illustrious was both the senior officer afloat and out of routine when she hoisted the starboard flag on the starboard yardarm and the port flag on the port yardarm.

Squadron Leader

Traditionally, black rings were painted on the ship's funnel to indicate the squadron leader's ship, which must have caused problems every time the leader changed ship in the squadron. Today a squadron leader's broad pennant is flown from the yardarm.

Efficiency

The Royal navy has introduced a new flag that is awarded annually to the most efficient ship in a particular ship class.

Dressed Overall

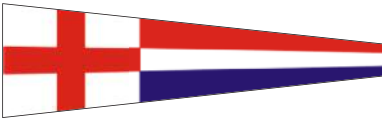
< On designated flag flying days such as the Queen's birthday or during VIP visits, ships are ordered to dress overall. A prescribed sequence of flags is hoisted from the bow to the masts and down to the stern. Additional white ensigns are also flown from the masts unless displaced by another flag such as that of a flag officer.



The T45 destroyer is the latest class of warship to enter service with the Royal Navy. Although it is one of the most advanced warships in the world, the design does not lend itself to displaying flags, which are often hidden in superstructure and shielded from the wind.

Courtesy Flags

Visiting vessel often fly a courtesy flag or ensign in foreign waters as a token of respect. Normally a small national maritime flag of the host country, they are usually



worn at the foremast yardarm.

< The correct flag to hoist is the ensign of the visiting vessel's respective service, for example a red ensign for a visiting foreign merchant vessel. Warships do not normally hoist courtesy flags unless failure to do so will cause offence. Visiting warships tend to fly the Union Flag instead of the white ensign.

< Semaphore Tower also routinely hoists the national flag of visiting foreign warships and recently hoisted the French flag.

Signal Flags

Ships at sea and alongside fly a combination of flags based on the International Code of Signals (ICOS), National and NATO Flag Regulations.

Preparative

< Five minutes before colours, or sunset, Royal Navy vessels hoist the preparative pennant which is dipped at one minute to go and then struck at the designated time.

Church

< A church pennant is a broad pennant flown on ships and at establishments during religious services and is used by the Royal Navy, European Navies and Commonwealth Navies. It is based on the George Cross and Dutch flag and was chosen during the English Dutch Wars when both sides stopped for Church on a Sunday.

The **CODE flag**, which is a pennant with red and white vertical stripes, normally precedes the signal flags. It may also be used as the ANSWER pennant.

< A code flag regularly used in the Naval Base is the DESIGNATION flag, blue and white vertical stripes, flown by ships entering harbour to indicate which berth they have been assigned. The first letters of the berth name and the berth position is hoisted, for example South Railway Jetty North.

Single signal flags may be used to indicate that there is a pilot on-board (Flag H), a ship is engaged in fuelling operations (Flag B), or has divers in the water (Flag A).

< Two letter groups are used to convey more specific information. The code Romeo Yankee (RY) is hoisted to advise passing traffic to keep a safe distance and moderate their speed.

Three letter groups are able to convey very specific information. Semaphore Tower which houses the Harbour Control Centre which controls the traffic in Portsmouth Harbour, and the Solent sea area approaches, regularly hoists flags on special occasions to signal ship which are either deploying overseas or returning from deployment, and to welcome foreign visiting warships.



< Regular flag hoists include:

UW, 'I wish you a pleasant voyage';

UW2, 'Welcome' and

UW3, 'Welcome Home'

HMS Victory



< Until 2012, HMS Victory was the flagship of the Second Sea Lord and Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command. It flew originally the flag of a 4 star full Admiral at the main mast but this post was reduced to a 3 star Vice Admiral's appointment. The Second Sea Lord official residence is Admiralty House where he hosts important visitors to the Naval Base such as the Princess Royal and Head of the Russian Navy.

Following a major revision to the Royal Navy Command structure in 2012, the 4 star Commander-in-Chief Fleet post was redesigned as a 3 star Fleet Commander's post and the Second Sea Lord post ceased to exist. The First Sea Lord has taken formal command of HMS Victory as his flag ship.

< When the Admiral of the Fleet rank was put into abeyance in 1996, the First Sea Lord adopted the Union Flag as his flag. However, now that the First Sea Lord is the only remaining serving 4 star flag officer in service he has reverted back this year to flying a St Georges cross as a full Admiral.



Trafalgar Signal

< Every year on the 21 October, Nelson's signal at the Battle of Trafalgar is flown from HMS Victory which provides a colourful display.

< The ship is currently undergoing a multimillion-pound renovation and the upper sections of the mast have been removed, which has caused some difficulty finding suitable locations from which to fly these flags.



Mary Rose

< The new Mary Rose museum was formally opened on 31 May 2013. As part of the opening ceremony the ship's bell was escorted by personnel from HMS Duncan to the wreck site where it was sounded eight times and a wreath laid on the water. HMS Duncan flew the Henry VIII standard throughout the day whilst alongside.

The entrance to the museum was covered in a giant standard of Henry VIII, which was lowered to the ground at the opening ceremony. This standard was widely displayed around the Heritage Area during the event.



HMS Warrior



< Although HMS Warrior was fitted with a revolutionary steam propulsion system, the seaman officers at that time were wary of modern technology and insisted on a full set of masts and sails. When in operational service, the ship formed part of the red squadron, and hence flew the red ensign, which it still flies today. When dressed over-all, Warrior hoists very large red ensigns from its three masts.



< HMS Warrior's staffs continue to maintain an interest in flag flying and fly several flag groups in support of their corporate activities. The ship regularly hoists the flag group WARRIOR 1860 on the starboard yardarm, and the flag group DISCOVER on the port yardarm.



< The ship often hoists HAPPY CHRISTMAS and GOOD LUCK when hosting private celebrations on board.

Conclusion

Flag flying continues to play an important part in the life of Portsmouth Naval Base and the ships which are based there and visit. They are used to indicate the command structure, to celebrate important occasions, to signify visits by important dignities, and they remain an important means to communicate instructions and information.

Portsmouth Naval Base is a wonderful place to explore naval history and see flags in daily use.



Geoffrey Parsons biography



Geoff specialised in communication, command and control systems during a 30 year career in the Royal Navy. Although he worked at the forefront of communication technology, he developed a keen interest in the history of communication, and in particular, the development of communication at sea using visual means.

On retirement from the Royal Navy, he now works in Portsmouth Naval Base where his office overlooks HMS Victory, and where he enjoys views of ships entering and leaving Portsmouth Harbour. He is able to see flags in continued and regular use today in a busy nautical environment.

He is currently the Chairman of the UK Flag Institute, and is keen to promote public awareness of the importance of flags and symbology, and their relevance in society today.

