

Guidance Note Flags, Military Colours and historic banners



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 porcession.

Rules governing the flying of church flags

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. Questions have been asked about certain details and 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.

The DCMS has guidance on its website on flying flags and this can be found at



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flying-flags-a-plain-english-guide>

Military standards, guidons and colours

This guidance is drawn from Chapter 8 of the Queens Regulations for the Army. The Regulations are online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433769/QR_Army.pdf

Old standards, guidons or colours which are provided from public funds remain the property of the State. After replacement it will be normal practice for them to be laid up in a church or other building which is open to the public. There will be no disposal of colours without Ministry of Defence sanction.

Colours once laid up are intended to remain where deposited in perpetuity. No maintenance or other charges against public funds are permissible when colours are laid up. When Colours are deemed completely disintegrated the remains are to be buried with the staff and lion and crown colour pole mount in consecrated ground without any marking.

It is expressly forbidden to undertake any work of

either replacement or conservation of standards, guidons and colours that have been laid up.

Standards, guidons and colours should be left to decay naturally once laid up. No funds exist for any repairs to old standards, guidons and colours and to seek funds from elsewhere would be to the detriment of more deserving causes.

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 strictures against spending on conservation of military standards do not apply to Royal British Legion Standards.

The costs of laying up a standard should be borne by the Legion unit involved.

Rules are online at: http://support.britishlegion.org.uk/app/answers/detail/a_id/131

Conservation recommendations for flags and historic banners

1. 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.
2. Where possible they should be straightened on their poles (creases catch more dust).
3. 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.
4. 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.

5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 2015 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.

