



### **Flying the flag**

#### **Guidance on flying the national flag of England**

#### **(the Cross of St George)**

#### **About the flag**

- ❖ The St George's Cross flag is recognised as the national flag of England by the Flag Institute.
- ❖ Its official date is 1348 and the first recorded use was in 1300 at Caerlaverock (though not at that point as the national flag, hence the slightly later official date).
- ❖ The flag's authenticity is verified by the Chief Vexillologist of the Flag Institute
- ❖ Its pantone colours are white and red 186.

### **When can the flag be flown?**

Flags may be flown on every day of the year. Government and local authority buildings in England, Scotland and Wales are encouraged to fly national flags every day of the year (there are certain additional regulations in Northern Ireland).

Flags are normally flown from sunrise to sunset but they may also be flown at night, when they should be illuminated.

No permission is needed to fly the national flags and they are excluded from most planning and advertising regulations (but flagpoles may not be).

### **How should the flag be flown?**

The national flags of the United Kingdom (ie the Union Flag and the flags of England, Scotland and Wales) should be displayed only in a dignified manner befitting the national emblems. They should not be displayed in a position inferior to any other flag or ensign.

National flags should never be flown in a worn or damaged condition, or when soiled. To do so is to show disrespect for the nations they represent.

When British national flags are flown with the flags of other nations, each flag should be the same size (or have the same width - the measurement from top to bottom) and should fly from a separate flagpole of the same height.

### **Raising and lowering flags**

The senior British national flag being flown (eg the Union Flag or the flag of England, Scotland or Wales) should be raised first and lowered last, unless all the flags can be raised and lowered simultaneously.

Flags should be raised and lowered in a dignified manner.

An alternative British tradition for flag raising is to hoist the flag while rolled up and secured with a thin piece of cotton or a slip knot. A sharp tug of the halyard will break the cotton and release the flag to fly free. This is known as 'breaking' the flag, and is sometimes used to signal the beginning of an event, or the arrival of a VIP.

### **Learning more about flags**

Vexillology is the scientific study of flags and related emblems (from the Latin “vexillum” for the Roman fabric banner hung on a cross pole and carried on a vertical pole – the nearest equivalent for the Romans to what we now use as a flag).

There is no “Flag Act” or similar legislation in the UK, as there is in some countries. Instead, the national registry of UK flags is maintained by the Flag Institute. The Institute has probably the largest archive and library of flag related material in Europe (located in Hull). It also publishes a number of interesting and useful guides, in particular:

“Flying Flags in the United Kingdom”

This tells you everything you might need to know from protocol and order of priority through to the correct mechanics of flag flying and the use of flags as palls on coffins

(Available free on the Institute’s website, published in association with the Flags & Heraldry Committee of the UK Parliament)

“British Flags and Emblems”

This is the most comprehensive reference work on the subject

(This book can be ordered online from the Institute’s website).

Cecile Gillard, Royal Society of St George UK Operations Representative, November 2012

With thanks to the Flag Institute

[www.flaginstitute.org.uk](http://www.flaginstitute.org.uk)