

Flags in Wales

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As you know this year's meeting of FIAV is here in the United Kingdom to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Union Flag of the United Kingdom.

You may also know that the design of the aforesaid Union Flag is made up from the flags of the constituent countries of this kingdom. How is it, I hear you ask, that Wales, the most important country within the kingdom, is absent from the Union Flag?

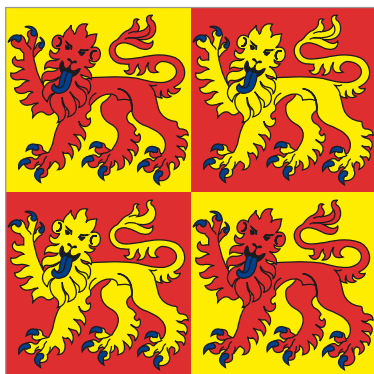
More than this, how is it that Wales is not represented on one of the quarters that make up the standard of our sovereign lady The Queen?

This talk is most definitely not a lesson in history but there does seem to me to be much in history that has caused what is at present a state of apathy amongst the Welsh people when it comes to the question of local flags at country and district level.

It is just worth mentioning how this flag situation between Wales and England came about. You will I am sure be aware that Wales has always been classed as a principality rather than as a kingdom. Llewellyn the last native Welsh Prince of Wales was defeated by Edward I, King of England, in 1282, some 700 years ago. Since that time Wales has as a fact of history been treated in principle and in law as part of an amalgamated kingdom.

Let me first briefly deal with the Royal flags as they relate to Wales. In the days when Edward and Llewellyn fought it was the right of the victor to purloin or commandeer the arms of the defeated and for the victor to use these arms as his own by right of conquest.

Having defeated Llewellyn, Edward proceeded, as was his right, to not only make his own son, later Edward II, Prince of Wales but also to pass the arms that once belonged to Llewellyn on to this son as the new Prince of Wales. This situation has descended down to the present Prince of Wales.



Llewellyn's Flag

It is interesting that now Wales once again has a degree of self government this flag is starting to take on a new significance. You will have seen the flag of the Prince of Wales in its present form. This is the self same flag that flew over the opening of the new Welsh Assembly when that assembly was first opened by Her Majesty the Queen and The Prince of Wales in 1999. Now that we are some two years later this new assembly has decided in its wisdom that it will fly the flag of Llewellyn - not quite the flag used by the present Prince of Wales which has a small shield of escutcheon in the centre but near enough I feel to cause confusion at some not too distant date.



Standard of the Prince of Wales in Wales

The other flag and badge used by the Prince of Wales is the three white feathers tied with the words *Ich Dien*. This again was purloined, this time by the Black Prince of Wales, the great grandson of Edward I in 1345 at the battle of Crecy when that prince slew the blind King of Bohemia whose flag this was. For some reason this particular flag is considered to be a flag of peace.



Badge of the Heir Apparent

Moving on a few years to 1485 we come to the real reason why Wales has been forgotten when it comes to

the flags of the UK. In that year the Welsh army of Henry Tudor invaded England and defeated King Richard III and claimed the throne of England. Henry had fought the war under his dragon banner; after the war he changed to using the standard of Richard III, this was only natural, in those times the standard of the monarch was the equivalent of today's national flag - continuity in an uncertain world was all-important. For a while much that was Welsh was to be found where it seemed to matter, the Royal Arms acquired a dragon supporter, the ensigns of the fleet became green and white. Now however very little of the Welshness found in the capital of the kingdom of those times is left. The reason for this is that with the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, James the 6th of Scotland became James the 1st of England - as the Scottish influence came in so the Welsh influence went out.

James I as you may know made room on the existing Royal Arms, which previously had been quartered France and England by adding the Royal Lion of Scotland. The chance had now somehow been missed of adding Wales to the arms of the sovereign. Was this because Wales was by then considered to be part of England or possibly because Wales was only a principality and not a kingdom? Somehow Wales, as far as the Royal Arms is concerned, was sacrificed to illusions of grandeur with its place being taken by an unrequited love of the Fleur de Lis over the Dragon of Wales. Until 1801 the Kings of England also claimed the throne of France, so France occupied the quarter that might have gone to Wales.

For the next 350 or so years both the Welsh language and to some extent Welsh culture had to survive as best they could. Survive they have, today the active encouragement of all things Welsh has meant that at the national level our tried and tested symbols have now come back into their own, the most important of these is of course the one symbol that never left us the *Draig Goch* or Red Dragon of Wales.



Y Draig Goch - The Red Dragon

The Red Dragon has always been considered to be the flag of the Celtic people of Britain, in the days after the Romans left, the Red Dragon was undoubtedly the dominant flag of both England and Wales, probably in

the form of a windsock. However with the arrival from the continent of the Saxons and other invaders the Celts and their Red Dragon were gradually pushed back to the present border of what you today know as Wales.

The Red Dragon has always been used to raise Welsh nationalism especially in times of war. The Dragon has somehow always been the flag of the people rather than the flag of a person. Perhaps the very survival of the Dragon flag has been because it served the historic needs of those who required the service of Welsh soldiers. Examples of this would be Edward III at Crecy, Henry V at Agincourt. The more recent attempt by the sovereign in 1953 to bring in a Welsh Dragon flag with a Royal theme was a complete failure, the Dragon is and it always has been pure and simply a mythical beast. The only thing I must say is that its tail must curl upwards.

Until recently you could always tell an imported Dragon flag, the tail always curled downwards as though it was about to go up its back passage. A few years ago the Western Mail, the daily paper of Wales, listed all the shops in the city of Cardiff who were flying the flag with the wrong tail - now we seldom see one of these non-Welsh Dragons, at least in Wales.

Thus now we have working centre stage our national flag the Dragon, we have on the wings the flag of Llewellyn, what else do we have? We have the flag of St David, which is a yellow cross on a black background. If you leave this flag flying long enough the yellow fades and everyone thinks you have a St Piran from Cornwall. This is again a problem caused by cheap imports.



St David's Cross

We have one other peculiarly Welsh flag, that is the flag of the Church in Wales. The Church in Wales is a church on its own to be differentiated from the Church of England. On this basis the churches in Wales fly either the flag of the Church in Wales or the flag of the local diocese.



The Church in Wales Flag

It is at this point that the trouble starts and where we in Wales seem to lose our way. You have seen from Philippe Rault the magnificent mouth watering collection of provincial flags used by our Celtic cousins just across the water. Many of you will have read Philippe's fantastic book on the subject, if you have not read this wonderful book then I suggest it gets to the top of your must-read list immediately. This book has done more for Breton flags than years of preaching could achieve. Philippe is of course wrong on one point - the *Croix Noir* is not the oldest flag - this medal must go to the *Draig Goch* of Wales.

I wish it were possible to do an equivalent book for Wales but somehow those who have to join in the process of getting flags organised simply do not know what flags are about. I refer here to those involved in local government.

It is certainly true that most of the county councils and many of the towns do have perfectly effective coats of arms, many of which could form the basis either in total or in part an attractive and recognisable local flag, but this simply has not happened. Much of the reason why this has not happened is because those to whom the decision falls have little experience on the subject. What is happening is that we have now developed a series of flags on a theme that goes right across the principality - a theme best described as commercial or advertising.

These corporate commercially designed flags only serve as a kind of industrial promotion, nothing to do with the long term bonding of the local community. What these communities need is a flag that will be here today and here tomorrow and to which everyone can identify. The present generation of industrial flags will probably change with the next council or the next generation of designers wanting to earn a fast buck.

The following slides show for the most part three images. The first is the official arms as and when these exist. The second shows how these arms would from into a flag. The third shows what if any flag now actually flies.

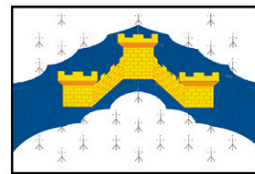
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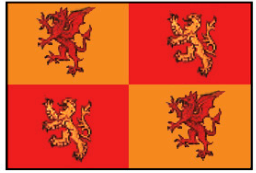
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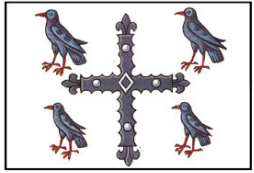
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CARMARTHEN



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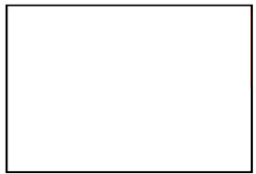
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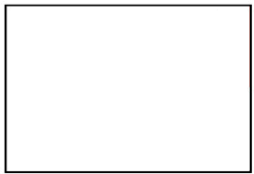
GWENT



CONWY



GWYNEDD



Swyddfa: Cyngor, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 1JH
Ffôn/Fax: 01286 479666
Ffôn/Fax: 01286 473993



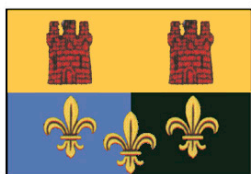
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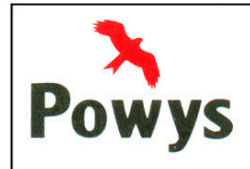
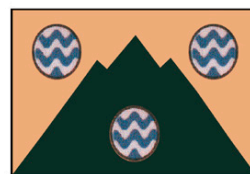
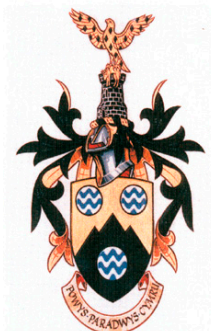
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MONMOUTH



POWYS



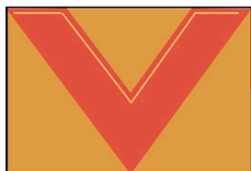
NEATH & PORT TALBOT



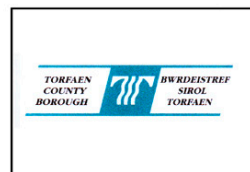
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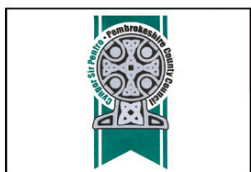
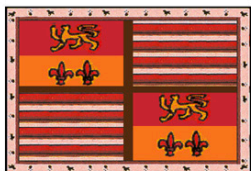
NEWPORT



TORFAEN



PEMBROKE



VALE OF GLAMORGAN



WREXHAM

