
Flags

Introduction

There is no Flag Act in this country and so there is no legal restriction on the flags that may be flown from a church tower. However, there are customs which should generally be followed and there is legal guidance.

St George's Cross with the diocesan arms

The main legal direction on the subject of flags is the Earl Marshall's Warrant made on 9 February 1938, which laid down that the flag to be flown upon any church within the Provinces of Canterbury and York was "a St George's Cross with the arms of the see (which should not be surmounted by a mitre except when used by the bishop personally) in the first quarter", that is, the arms of the diocese in the top quarter nearest the mast. The Warrant was endorsed by the two Archbishops at the time and continues to be quoted in legal guidance on the subject, but it is not compulsory.

More detailed directions provided by the Garter Principal of Arms are:

- The arms of the diocese are to be placed in the first quarter only
- The shield of the arms should fill the space and should not be ensigned with a mitre
- New flags should be made to an approximate ratio of 5x3 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.
- 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.

The Government guidance is at [Flying flags: a plain English guide - GOV.UK](#)

Other flags

There is an ancient tradition of churches flying a plain St George Cross. There is also precedence for flying regional, civic or organisational flags from a church to mark particular occasions.

There is no "diocesan flag", although within the city and district of St Albans the familiar blue flag with a gold cross, as represented within the diocesan shield, is often to be seen on churches as well as in civic contexts.

There are restrictions on the flying of the Royal Standard or the White Ensign which mean they are generally not to be flown from parish churches.

Permission should be sought from the organisation concerned before the flag of a particular organisation is flown.

At times when no flag is being flown, it may be appropriate to fly a pennant (as is done at St Albans Cathedral, for example).

When to fly flags

There are no legal timings for the raising or lowering of flags, although they are traditionally raised at sunrise and lowered at sunset. It may be more practicable to keep a flag raised overnight if it is to stay there for a longer period.

As a matter of protocol, the Union Flag should only be flown at half-mast following a royal command as a sign of national mourning. It will therefore be more appropriate to fly the Cross of St George or a relevant civic or organisational flag at half-mast to mark a more local event or a funeral taking place in the church.

Flagpoles

The erection of a new flagpole requires a faculty. It is also worth checking with the Local Authority in case special provisions apply.

Care of old flags

Advice on the conservation and storage of old flags is available from the Flag Institute (details below). Where flags are to be laid up within the church building, authorisation is needed under the faculty jurisdiction.

Contacts

Fuller information on the flying of flags from churches can be obtained from either the Council for the Care of Churches via its Churchcare website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/flags-and-military-colours> or from the Flag Institute at www.flaginstitute.org.

Manufacturers of flags include:

Flying Colours: <https://www.flyingcolours.org/>

Hampshire Flag Company Ltd: <https://www.hampshireflag.co.uk/>

House of Flags: www.flags.co.uk

Mr Flag: <https://www.mrflag.com/>

Additional information and advice are available from the DAC team.

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