



THE STORY OF
Scotland's
FLAG
AND THE LION AND THISTLE





PART ONE

THE SCOTTISH FLAG



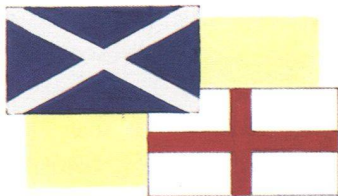
SAINT ANDREW AND THE SALTIRE CROSS

Every country has a flag. A flag is just a rectangle of coloured cloth that can be held up or fixed to a pole. But these pieces of cloth, and their colours, are very important to us. The pattern and the colours are special to each country. The flag is shared by everyone in the country: it is a sign of belonging. It shows that we are not simply a group of people living in a particular part of the world, but a nation. We have a shared past and look forward to a shared future, living together in the same land. The flag is the sign of the nation. To Americans, the flag is a reminder of their struggle for freedom in the War of American Independence against Britain. To the French, their red, white and blue flag is a reminder of their revolution, when they fought for the rights of ordinary people. In many countries, to insult or misuse the flag is a crime. And to burn the flag of another country is still seen as a terrible thing to do.

Some flags are very new. Russia changed her flag only a few years ago. But then, some countries are very new. Even countries like Belgium and Italy, partners in the European Union, are less than two hundred years old. Some flags are very old. The Scottish flag is one of these. Its story goes back a long way.

The flag of Scotland is a silver cross on a blue

background. The cross goes from corner to corner: this kind of cross is called a saltire. The flag of England is an upright cross, red on a white



background. This is the cross of Saint George, patron saint of England. The saltire is known as Saint Andrew's Cross. Saint Andrew was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, he was crucified. The Romans thought he was a dangerous man, spreading wrong ideas among the people, so they had him killed. Andrew asked to be crucified on a cross different from that of his leader, Jesus. He did not think he was good enough for the cross of Christ.

At the time Saint Andrew was killed, Scotland was a faraway country, hardly known at all to the outside world. The few travellers who had been there from Rome thought of it as a cold and misty land, lived in by wild people. They called it Caledonia. Although Roman armies came into Caledonia, its people were never defeated by the Romans.

How then did Saint Andrew become Scotland's saint?

The story is this. After Andrew's death, his body was taken away by his fellow Christians and buried. Because he had been an Apostle (one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ), his fame was very great, and people

wanted to visit the place where he was buried. They believed that Andrew was in heaven and that he might help in having their prayers answered by God.

Andrew's grave was in Greece, in a place called Patrae. Then, nearly four hundred years after his death, the Emperor Constantius decided that a little place like Patrae was not suitable for keeping the remains of such a great saint as Andrew. He ordered that the bones of the saint be brought to his capital, Constantinople, the greatest city in the world at that time.

The keeper of the saint's remains was a man called Regulus. Now Regulus had a strange dream in which he was visited by an angel. The angel told him that the bones of Saint Andrew should be taken, not to Constantinople, but to a faraway country at the edge of the world. Regulus should take them there and build a church. Regulus obeyed the angel rather than the Emperor. He travelled across Europe, with the remains of Saint Andrew kept in a chest. It was a long, difficult journey. At last he came to the east coast of Caledonia. There, at a place called Muckros, he and his companions landed and set up his church. Beneath the altar, it is said, he buried the chest containing the bones of the Apostle. As the years went by, the name of the place was changed. Regulus himself had been named as a saint, and Muckros became known as Kilrymont – the hill of the church of Regulus. Later still, the fame of



the greater saint overtook that of Regulus, and the place became known as Saint Andrews. Where his little church, made of wood, mud and turf, had been, a splendid stone cathedral was built. You can still see the ancient tower called Saint Rule's Tower (Rule is English for Regulus) beside the now ruined cathedral in Saint Andrews.



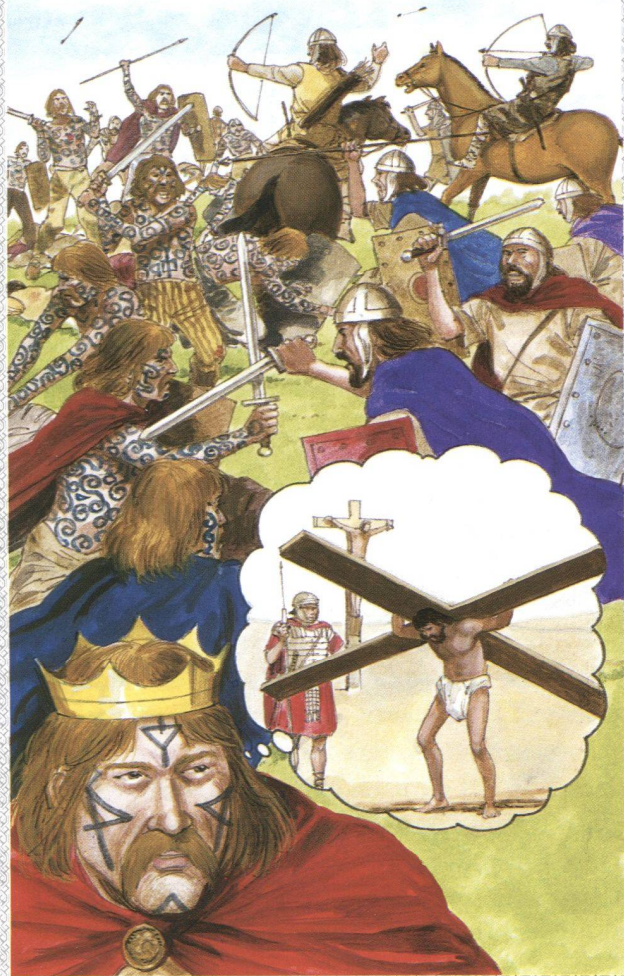
It was a proud and very unusual boast for a small country on the edge of Europe to claim that it was the last resting place of one of the Twelve Apostles. Perhaps it was not surprising that people in Scotland should feel that Saint Andrew was very close to them. In fact, at that time Scotland was not a single country but divided into four separate kingdoms. One of these kingdoms was Pictland, and in the year 761, the Picts were fighting the Anglo-Saxons, who lived in the north of England (England was also divided into several kingdoms at that time). The two armies were very near each other when King Angus of the Picts had a dream. He saw Saint Andrew appear to him, bearing his saltire cross. The battle took place on the following day, near the village in East Lothian called Athelstaneford, and the Picts won a great victory. From then on, the saltire was taken as the badge of the Picts, and they adopted

Andrew as their protecting saint. Even when the Pictish kingdom ended and Scotland became a single country, the fame of Saint Andrew was such that he became the patron saint of the whole country.

That is the story. Of course it was not written down until much later, and it is not the kind of story that can be proved. But there were other saints who might have become the patron saint of Scotland, like Saint Columba, who set up the famous abbey on the island of Iona and taught Christianity to the Picts. The story of Saint Regulus and Saint Andrew must have seemed very real to the Scottish people for them to choose Andrew rather than Columba as their protector.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE FLAG

Although the saltire was Scotland's special sign, there was still no flag. Flags had not yet been invented, but there was a need for something like a flag. Often there was fighting between Scotland and England. Men needed to be able to tell who was a friend and who was an enemy. If they were separated from their group, they needed to see where the others were. Each king or captain had his own badge, and his followers looked out for it and often wore it themselves. The same badge, embroidered on a pennant or banner, might be attached to a long spear and held up above the heads of the soldiers. Or it might be set in the ground in



order to provide a rallying point for soldiers who might otherwise spread out and lose themselves in a battle. From this eventually came the flagpole.

One of those many battles happened in 1138 and was called the Battle of the Standard (another word for flag). Some people think that the Scottish king, David the First, used a lion as his personal sign for the first time here. Later in the same century, the Scottish king was called William, and after his death he was called William the Lion. You will find out more about the Scottish lion later in this book. But we do not know what sign was on William's standard.

A more peaceful reason for needing a flag was that the kings of different countries sometimes met in friendship. Then, too, it was necessary to show who were the followers of which king. Each king or captain had his own personal badge, and his followers looked out for that and sometimes wore it. Also, ships were sailing from country to country, and it was useful to show a sign of which country the ship came from.

When King Robert the First defeated the English army at Bannockburn in 1314, there was still no saltire flag, but undoubtedly many Saint Andrew's Crosses were embroidered on the tunics of his men, not only to proclaim their loyalty but also in the hope that the saint would ensure their safety in the fight. In the fourteenth century, Scottish soldiers had a white saltire on the front and back of their tunics. There is a very old

flag in the National Museum of Scotland, called the Douglas Standard. It was said to have been used at the Battle of Otterburn in 1388. It was the personal flag of the Scottish Earl of Douglas, and it was green, with a saltire as well as a red heart (the special symbol of the Douglasses). This is the oldest flag we have that shows the saltire cross. Otterburn was a famous battle between the Douglasses and the English Percy family, from Northumberland. It was won by the Scots, though Douglas himself died in the fight.

It was probably sailors, with their skill in sewing and working with canvas, who first made the kind of flag that can be hoisted on a rope and pulled down again. By this time, the cross of Saint Andrew was already used in many different ways to represent the kingdom of Scotland. It was used on coins (King David the First in the thirteenth century introduced the first Scottish coins). The saltire was already the symbol of the Scottish nation, and when national flags became used, during the fifteenth century, the saltire was the obvious and natural thing to show on it.

The colours, silver on blue, take us back to the story of King Angus's dream, when he saw Saint Andrew bearing a silver cross against the blue of the sky.

THE SCOTTISH FLAG IN PEACE AND WAR

The Scots took great pride in their flag. Other countries, like Denmark and Sweden as well as England, had crosses on their flags, but the Scots knew that theirs was not only one of the oldest but also the most powerful. They believed that their flag put them under the special care of Saint Andrew. And it was theirs, the flag of the Scottish people. It flew from the masts of their ships, like Sir Andrew Barton's *The Lion*. Flying above the castles of Edinburgh and Stirling, the flag told the visitor, "You are in Scotland".

When the young Mary Queen of Scots returned from France to rule as queen of Scotland in 1561, it was the saltire flag that greeted her on a misty morning at Leith harbour. At that time, the Scots were changing in the way they thought about God and the church. They set up their own church, which disapproved of prayers to saints, and they broke up the holy pictures and statues in churches. The great cathedral built in honour of Saint Andrew was attacked and ruined. But the saltire cross still flew. Even though it was the sign of a saint, it had also become the sign of the nation, and no one tried to stop it being used.

In 1603, the King James the Sixth of Scotland also became the King James the First of England and went to live in London. Although Scotland and England remained separate, he was keen to turn them into a



single country, and he asked for a flag to be designed that combined the crosses of Saint Andrew and Saint George. The Scots were not at all pleased about this. They did not want to lose their own flag, and the fact that the red cross of Saint George was laid on top of the silver cross of Saint Andrew made them angry. The Scottish parliament complained to the king, and the Saint Andrew's Cross continued to fly in Scotland.

In the seventeenth century, the Scots joined with the English parliament to fight against King Charles the First. They were called the Covenanters, and they did not believe in saints. They would have been shocked at the thought that they needed the protection of a saint, but they carried the flag of Saint Andrew far into England. It stood above their camps and it led them into battle. To many people it became known as the Covenanters' flag. About a hundred years later, when the flag of the United States was designed, its blue background was taken from the Scottish flag – “taken from the Covenanters' banner in Scotland” wrote an American writer.

In the year 1707, Scotland and England finally joined together to become the United Kingdom. A new Union flag was designed, the first form of the “Union Flag” which is still the British flag. This flag has three crosses – the blue and white saltire of Saint Andrew, the red and white cross of Saint George, and the red and white saltire of Saint Patrick. It was ordered that the Union

flag “be used in all flags, banners, standards and ensigns both at sea and land”. Official buildings, like Edinburgh Castle, now hoisted the Union flag in place of the Scottish saltire.

But the saltire was not forgotten. There were people in Scotland who did not want to be united with England. There were others who did not like the fact that the London parliament had brought in the German Prince George of Hanover to be the king. They wanted the king to come from the Stuart family, who had been kings of Scotland and of England until King James the Second had been forced to give up the throne in 1688. They still saw Saint Andrew’s Cross as the true flag of Scotland.

The supporters of the Stuarts were called the Jacobites (meaning “the people of James”), and they carried the saltire of Scotland but with a cross of gold, not white, as blue and gold were the Stuart colours. In this way, at battles like Culloden, the last battle fought on British soil (1746), the cross of Saint Andrew was carried by both sides. Scots fought alongside English and German troops for King George against other Scots who fought with Bonnie Prince Charlie for the Stuarts.

Scotland’s cross can also be found in the flags of two Canadian provinces, both of which have many people of Scottish descent – Nova Scotia (the name means New Scotland) and Newfoundland. In their case, the



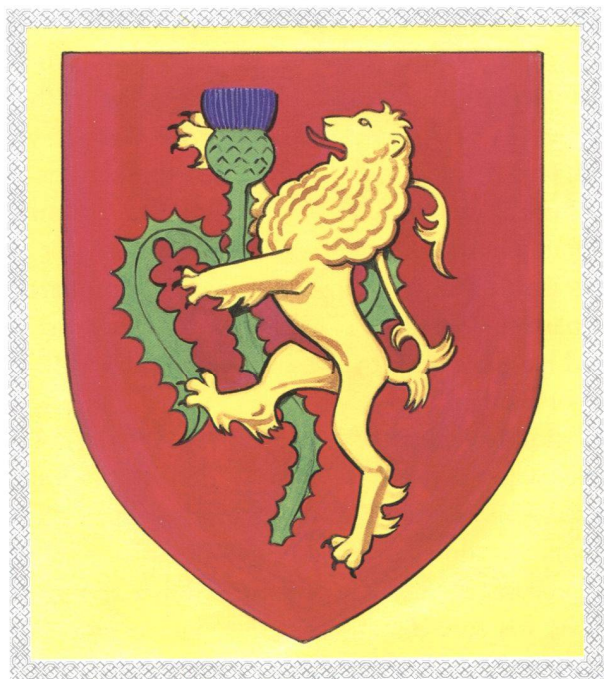
colours are reversed, with a blue cross on a white background.

Today the Scottish flag is on show more than ever before. It can be seen in hundreds of places throughout the country, from ancient buildings like Blair Castle to modern schools and offices, and soon it will fly above the building of the new Scottish parliament. But nowhere does it fly more proudly than in the village of Athelstaneford, where it is still hoisted daily to remind us of King Angus and his dream, and his battle, all those centuries ago.



PART TWO

THE LION OF SCOTLAND AND THE THISTLE



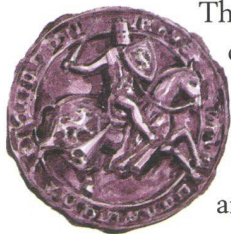
THE LION RAMPANT

There is another Scottish flag that we often see. This one has a gold background and on it is a red lion standing up on his hind legs, brandishing his claws and with his mouth open to roar. Around the edge is a decorative red double border. The proper name of this flag is the royal standard of Scotland.

Once upon a time, anyone who used this flag without permission would have been severely punished, perhaps even put to death. It was the flag of the king or queen of Scotland. Only he or she was allowed to use it, and it was hoisted only when the king or queen was there in person. It did not belong to the monarch personally. It was used by whoever was king or queen as the sign for all to see that here was the monarch, not any particular man or woman. The king or queen would have his or her own family badge as well, which was personal.

The lion is called the lion rampant. We do not know exactly when it was first used to identify the king. It is likely that early Scottish kings used a dragon as their symbol. The lion may have begun with William the Lion in the twelfth century, and it was certainly used by his son, King Alexander the Second. We also know that it was used on the Great Seal of Scotland.

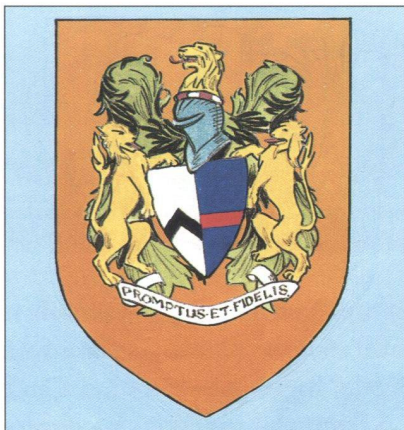




This was the stamp placed on all official documents to show that they were not forgeries. Why a lion? Then, as now, the lion was known as the king of the beasts, a fierce and noble animal, dangerous to meddle with. It seemed a very suitable symbol for a king. And partly because their country was a small one, and a rather poor one, compared to England or France, the Scottish kings wanted to make a brave show. It did not always work out that way. It was under the banner of the lion that King James the Fourth, one of Scotland's most able kings, died fighting the English at the disastrous Battle of Flodden in 1513.

In all the countries of Europe there was a system to record the special badges and symbols of everyone who had such things. These were the lords and their families, as most of the rest of the population had none. This system was called heraldry. The heralds had several jobs to do. They carried the king's messages. They proclaimed the king's greatness. They also kept a record of each family badge. They worked out a way of exactly describing each badge so that it could be drawn and painted by someone who had never seen it. Scotland had its heralds from an early stage and still does. The chief herald is called Lyon King of Arms (the lion again), and he still has powers of his own to

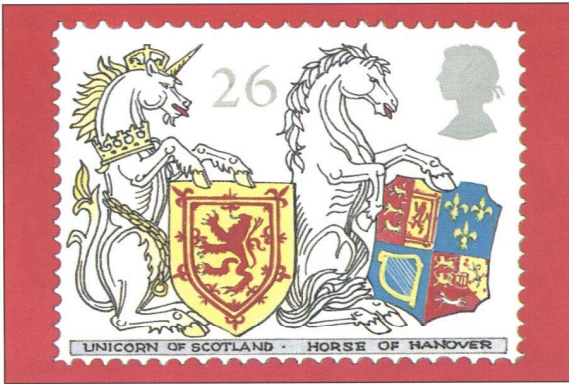
prevent people misusing the badges (or coats of arms) that belong to others, and to approve applications for new designs.



Scotland's heralds devised a fine motto to go with the rampant lion. In Latin it reads *Nemo me impune lacessit*, which means in English "No one attacks me and gets away with it". You can see it in many places, including the edges of some one-pound coins.



When King James the Sixth of Scotland also became James the First of England in 1603, a new royal standard was designed that included the symbols of England, France and Ireland as well as the lion



rampant. But the lion standard was still used by the king's chief officer in Scotland. As time went by, it was used less and less. But it was too bright and bold to be forgotten, and from the nineteenth century on, it was manufactured in large quantities as a "Scotch standard", with the suggestion that anyone could use it when they wanted to. Today it is used so widely that we have almost forgotten that it began as a banner that could be used only by the king. Some people even think it is the flag of Scotland.

THE THISTLE OF SCOTLAND

In the special language of heraldry, Scotland's national badge is "the thistle, slipped and leaved proper". This means that the thistle is face-on, with spines and leaves.

Why a thistle? It is said that early in the eleventh century a raiding party of Danes attacked a Scottish castle. They came by night and took off their shoes to be as quiet as possible. Reaching the castle moat, they jumped in to swim across. To their surprise, the moat held not water but thistles. Their shouts of pain awoke the defenders of the castle, who rushed out, and the Danes fled. Despite this ancient tale, the thistle is not as old a sign as the saltire and the lion. The first time a thistle was used as a special emblem of Scotland was in the time of King James the Third, in the fifteenth century. The saltire had already been in use for more than five hundred years.

Now, the thistle is not a useful plant. Only donkeys eat it. But it is a tough, prickly plant, which you cannot simply grasp hold of and pull out of the ground like a common weed. It was this prickliness that the Scottish heralds liked. In this way it was like the lion with its claws out, and it fitted Scotland's proud motto, *Nemo me impune lacessit*. Perhaps they also had an eye on England. The English flower was the rose (also a



prickly plant). When an English princess, Margaret Tudor, married James's son, it was called the marriage of the thistle and the rose.

The thistle became a popular badge in Scotland. While the lion was grand and the saltire hallowed by long tradition, the homely thistle was something everyone could identify with. To the Scots it was a reminder that their country might not be the most rich or fertile but, equally, it was not to be grasped lightly.