

The Flags of Scotland

The Scottish flag is the cross of St. Andrew, also known as the Saltire. It is said to be one of the oldest national flags of any country, dating back at least to the 12th century



The Saltire

There is a second flag associated with Scotland, the “Rampant Lion”, or Royal Flag of Scotland. Although based on an older Scottish flag than the St. Andrew’s Cross, it should be used only by the Monarch in her capacity as Queen of Scotland.



The Rampant Lion

Origins of the Saltire

Tradition has it that in 832 AD, near the East Lothian village of Athelstaneford, a battle was fought which led to the adoption of the Saltire (sounds like “salt-er”) as Scotland’s national flag. A joint army of Picts and Scots under the High King of Alba, Angus Mac Fergus, was invading Lothian which at that time was still Northumbrian territory. Angus’s force was surrounded by a larger army of Angles and Saxons and, fearing defeat, the king led prayers for deliverance. Angus believed he had received a divine sign when, above him in a clear blue sky, he saw a great, white cross like that of Saint Andrew’s. The king vowed that if, with the saint’s help, he gained the victory, then Andrew would thereafter be the patron saint of Scotland and his cross the flag of Scotland. Angus did win and the Saltire duly became the national flag.

Records show the Saltire in regular use by the 14th century, although not always against a blue background. In fact, it wasn’t until the 16th century that the plain white saltire on a blue field became established. Throughout the 17th century, the Saltire continued to be used as a national symbol, particularly by the army and navy and even following its incorporation into the first Union flag in 1606 after the union of the crowns.

The Royal Flag of Scotland

The Scottish Royal Standard consists of the arms of the King of Scots; a red lion on a yellow field within a frame decorated with fleurs-de-lis. The lion dates from the reign of William the Lion (1165-1214) and the frame from at least 1222. The lion may represent the fierceness of the Scots in defending their lands and territories against invaders. The lion may also be a reference to the ‘Lion of the Tribe of Judah’, because so many Scottish kings claimed to be descended from the royal house of Israel. The fleurs-de-lis are said to commemorate the long standing alliance between Scotland and France. This flag can only be flown by Royalty or a few of their representatives, although the people are allowed to wave a hand-held version. The Lion Rampant is a favorite flag for Scots to wave at football matches and international competitions.