

English standards and banners

Introduction

Throughout history, military units have used field signs of various kinds as a rallying point on the battlefield. Over time, the field signs have developed, often into elegantly ornamented works of art.

As the focal point of the unit, the field sign is also the symbol of the unit's *soul*, and woe to the unit that lost its field sign.



*The Sovereign's Standard of The Life Guards, consecrated 19 May 1983.
(From *The Guards*, Pitkin Pictorials, London 1990, ISBN 0-85372-476-8.)*

About English standards and banners

The following is to be regarded as a general guideline, valid from around 1914.

Principle

- An English cavalry regiment (a battalion-sized unit) carries one standard, called the *Standard* (in *The Household Cavalry* and *Dragoon Guards* regiments) and *the Guidon*, in *Dragoon* regiments).
- An infantry battalion carries two banners – the Regent's Banner and the Regimental Banner – called *the Queen's* or *King's Color* as well as *the Regimental Colour*. The regent's flag is the Union Jack, while the regiment's flag has the regimental color (sleeves) as the base colour.
- On e-standards and pennants are sewn-on pennants, called *Battle Honours*, showing selected battles in which the unit has particularly distinguished itself.

Some variants

When the principle has thus been determined, it must immediately be added that there are several variations on this theme, for example:

- In *The Household Cavalry*, each regiment carries a standard - *The Sovereign's Standard* - and each squadron has its own standard - *Squadron (or Union) Standard*.
- In the five English regiments of guards (foot), the regent's banner is crimson, while the regimental banner is the Union Jack. (See also the postscript.)
- Hussar regiments and lancer regiments, as light regiments, do not carry e-standards, but use the flags on the regiments' timpani as field insignia.
- Hunter regiments such as *the King's Royal Rifle Corps* and *the Rifle Brigade* do not carry ensigns, as they were originally intended to fight in scattered order, and therefore did not need an ensign as a rallying point.
- The artillery does not carry banners, as the individual pamphlet is in principle to be regarded as a banner.

Special commissions have assessed the individual units' participation in the war and, after recommendation, decided on the units' wishes as to which banner ribbons should be displayed on the banners. For each of the two world wars, units could choose to wear 10 ribbons on the Regent's banner, in addition to the ribbons already worn for honors in previous wars.

And so on.... It would go too far - to the extent that it is at all possible - to have to cover all the variants on these topics, but the principles are followed to this day.

Om Player's cigaretkort *Regimental Standards and Cap Badges*

It is often only by looking at the current tab that you can get a final proof of the appearance. As one of the sources for this purpose I would recommend a series of cigarette cards issued by Player's in 1930. The cards that have formed the basis of the scan were reprinted in 1993 by *The Card Collectors Society* in England.

The current series of cigarette cards originate from Stephen Luscombe's *British Empire Web Site* - www.britishempire.co.uk - which in itself is worth a visit, and Stephen Luscombe has kindly allowed us to display the images on Chakoten's website.

The cards show 2 standards and 48 plumes. The banners are mainly from the regular infantry regiments of the British Army, but also banners from the Territorial Army (the volunteer reserve units) are reproduced. On the back of the cards there is a small story about the individual flag, the regiment and/or some of the flag bands.

As the name of the series indicates, the badges of the individual regiments are also reproduced on the cards.

The tabs on Card 01 are not named, but a comparison with the other cards in the series shows that it is *primarily* 1

Bn. The Durham Light Infantry, whose regimental flag is also reproduced on Map 43.

Possible sources for further studies

The sources mentioned here can today only be borrowed from libraries or bought antiquarian:

1. *British Cavalry Standards* af Dino Lemonofides, Almark Publications, London 1971, ISBN 0-85524-051-2.
2. *British Infantry Colours* af Dino Lemonofides, Almark Publications, London 1971, ISBN 0-85524-021-0.
3. *Standards, Guidons and Colours of the Commonwealth Forces* af T.J. Edwards, Gale & Polden, Aldershot 1953.
4. *The Standards, Guidons and Colours of The Household Division 1660-1973* af Nicolas Payan Dawnay, Midas Books, London 1975, ISBN 0-85936-031-8.

Sources 1 and 2 are good general works which also have figurative angles on the subject; they are often seen for sale at English antique dealers. **Source 3** is definitely the handbook on the subject, which is covered well and with many good illustrations; the book is not so common with the English antiquarians. **Source 4** is *the nestor* among books on English tabs. It is a distinguished special study on the standards and banners of the Guard regiments, many of which are reproduced. The book was not published in a particularly large edition, and is therefore rare.

Additional sources



An edited extract of the dust jacket from *Lions of England - A pictorial history of the King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster)*

1680-1980 By Stuart

Eastwood, Silver Link Publishing Ltd., Kettering/
Northants 1991.

Actual regimental histories and catalogs from regimental museums often contain reproductions of the unit's flags, accompanied by a description of their appearance, including flag bands.

Remarkably, the subject does not seem to be particularly widespread as a motif for postcards; one would think that would be a grateful subject. But in addition to *the Player's* series, there are other series of cigarette cards that show tabs.

Most general works on the English army also contain mention of - and often show examples of - standards and pennants.

A final - and very important - source is the programs that are published in connection with the celebration of a flag presentation. Over the past 100 years or so, publishing such programs has been common; in this you will find a mention of the ceremony taking place as well as drawings or pictures of the flags.

In the mid-1930s, every soldier who had served in one of the regular battalions of *The King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster)* was given a certificate on discharge as proof and thanks for his service. This fine document shows the regimental banners as they went out after the First World War (the drawing shows *the King's Color* on the left and *the Regimental Color* on the right) and is thus an example of another possible source.

Closing

As a curiosity, it can be added that the individual regiments - often very fiercely, and using all imaginable forms of political pressure - have sought to promote their views on the good reasons why their banners should deviate from the regulations. A case that does not exactly make it easier to determine how a given tab has looked.

And this is precisely where the need for illustrations comes into play...



Estandart (*Guidon*) fra *The Cheshire (Earl of Chester's) Yeomanry*.

From *The Cheshire (Earl of Chester's) Yeomanry* by Richard Verdin, Privately Published, 1971.

Postscript

The starting point for my particular interest in English flags has been pewter soldiers from the English company Britains, who over the years produced several sets of flags from different regiments.



The ultimate rarest set - if not among all the figures produced by Britains, then certainly among figures in khaki uniforms and figures with tabs - is the *Scots Guards, Color Party* (= tab command), shown here.

The figures were produced around 1940 and only in very few copies, and without a catalog number.

On June 11, 1988, the figures were sold at an auction at Philips, in New York. The hammer blow was then USD 12,100!

Happy buyer William J. Miele had an article about his collection in *Toy Soldier Review magazine*, from the spring of 1989, and the picture shown here graced the cover.

As a collector of Britain's figurines, it is exciting to see these figurines, which are only available in very limited numbers. And they certainly haven't gotten cheaper over the years!

As someone interested in English flags, it pained me that the person who posed the figures for photography was not sufficiently at home in his material. It is the case that the arrangement is correct if the figures were to represent any infantry regiment, but not a guard regiment! In *the Grenadier Guards, Coldstream Guards, Scots Guards, Irish Guards* and *Welsh Guards*, the regent's banner is crimson, while the regimental banner is the Union Jack. Since the regent's banner is the most distinguished, it must of course be carried in the most distinguished place, i.e. the right wing. In other words, the two tabs (which are basically loose) should have been swapped.

Similar flags were used by Britains before and immediately after the Second World War. Regardless of regiment, the banners were the same. After examining all available sources, my conclusion is that the tabs do not represent specific tabs, but are simply meant to illusion English tabs. And they do it quite well!

Per Finsted