

The new Flag for Guernsey

Bruce Nicolls

On 1st. May, 1985 the States of Guernsey, the parliament of this Channel Island, received the news that the Queen of England had approved a new flag for the Island. Guernsey, originally part of the Duchy of Normandy, is not part of the United Kingdom, but has belonged to the English Crown since Duke William of Normandy conquered England in 1066.

The new flag consists of the previously used red cross of St. George on a white field, as for England, with a gold cross 'patte' superimposed - on the red cross. This cross is taken from the gonfanon carried by William, with the blessing of Pope Alexander, for the invasion of England, and thus symbolises Guernsey's first link with that country.

The need for a new, distinctive flag had been felt increasingly in the Island because of misleading impressions created by the use of the flag of England, and in September, 1983, the States of Guernsey appointed a Flag Investigation Committee 'to examine the possibility of establishing a distinctive Guernsey flag'.

In January, 1984 Commander Nicolls made proposals for a new flag to the Flag Investigation Committee, incorporating the charges from Duke William's gonfanon, and a summary of the account of his design project is as follows.

"The red cross flag of St. George has been flown proudly by the people - of Guernsey for many hundreds of years, possibly from the 13th century, probably from the 14th, and certainly from the 16th century. It symbolised much of the long history of the Island and its strong links with England. It is a simple and striking flag of bright and bold design, which should not lightly be discarded. It must also be remembered that the -- cross of St. George forms the basis of the flags of the other main Is-- land of the Bailiwick, Alderney and Sark, and it is important that the flag of Guernsey should continue to symbolise this family connection.

The requirement is to design a new flag for Guernsey which retains the historical and Island family symbolism; which remains simple and striking, bold and bright; but which incorporates an original and distinctive device of an appropriate kind to make the flag uniquely that of Guernsey.

One approach which has some attractions is that of using one or two of the common charges from the arms of prominent families, notably those of the Bailiffs. However, using heraldic charges in this way would be regarded as creating new arms, and such a flag would not meet all the requirements stated above. It would also be likely to upset families - whose arms were not represented.

The simplest approach would be to add the Arms of Guernsey to the flag of St. George, as has been done in Jersey, but such a flag would lack unique distinctiveness. With the arms in the centre the flag would resemble that of Alderney, with them in the canton it would be similar to that of the Seigneur of Sark.

The Guernsey lily, although an attractive emblem, does not readily lend itself for use on a flag. Modern logo style devices are generally transient and meretricious symbols, inappropriate for use in this case.

William of Normandy's banner was the symbol which first linked Guernsey with England, and paved the way for the adoption of the St. George's - cross in later years. This distinctive and holy device also proudly states the link with Normandy, still commemorated in the loyal toast of 'The Queen, our Duke'. Furthermore, the papal cross underlines the influence - of the church throughout the history of the Island, so clearly indicated to this day in the names and symbols of Parishes.

The papal banner of Duke William is thus seen to be an ideal device to include, together with that of St. George, in a new flag for Guernsey. It fulfils all the requirements: retaining the historical and island - family symbolism, remaining simple and striking, bold and bright, and incorporating an original and distinctive device of an appropriate kind.

It could be argued that William's banner is equally valid for Jersey, and so it is, but the same can be said for the Arms of the Islands, differentiated only by the small, albeit most important, Guernsey sprig. Jersey has chosen the Arms, leaving Guernsey free to use the Duke of Normandy's banner.

Two versions of the papal banner appear in the Bayeux Tapestry, a simplified one with a plain cross and blue border only, illustrated by S. Carey Curtis in a paper on 'The Guernsey Flag' in 1935, and more detailed one, heraldically charged with a cross patté or between four roundels azure. It is held aloft by Eustace of Boulogne as he points William out to his soldiers at the crucial moment in the battle when it was rumoured that he had been killed.

Combining the whole of the papal banner, including the blue and yellow border, with the cross of St. George results in a design which is too complicated and overpowering. Simplification leads to use of the cross and roundels only, a much more attractive design. Alternatively the papal cross could be enlarged so that St. George's cross may be placed - upon it, but this would involve adding a dark border to make the yellow papal cross sufficiently distinctive against the white field. The papal and roundels could also be placed in the canton of the St. George's cross but the designer's preference is for the flag with the papal cross superimposed on the St. George's cross, between the roundels.

The recommended proportions for whatever flag is chosen are 3:5, advocated by a previous Garter King of Arms, and closely approximating to the Golden Rectangle, discovered by the Ancient Greeks to be the most pleasing rectangular shape.

The Guernsey Flag Investigation Committee received a total of seventy proposals for the new flag, and in February, 1985 published their report to the States, including their recommended design. This consisted of the papal cross superimposed on the St. George's cross, but without the blue roundels. The Committee were of the view that the embroiderers of the Bayeux Tapestry had exercised a generous artistic licence, and accepted representation made to them that the Dukes flag was a gold cross on a red field.

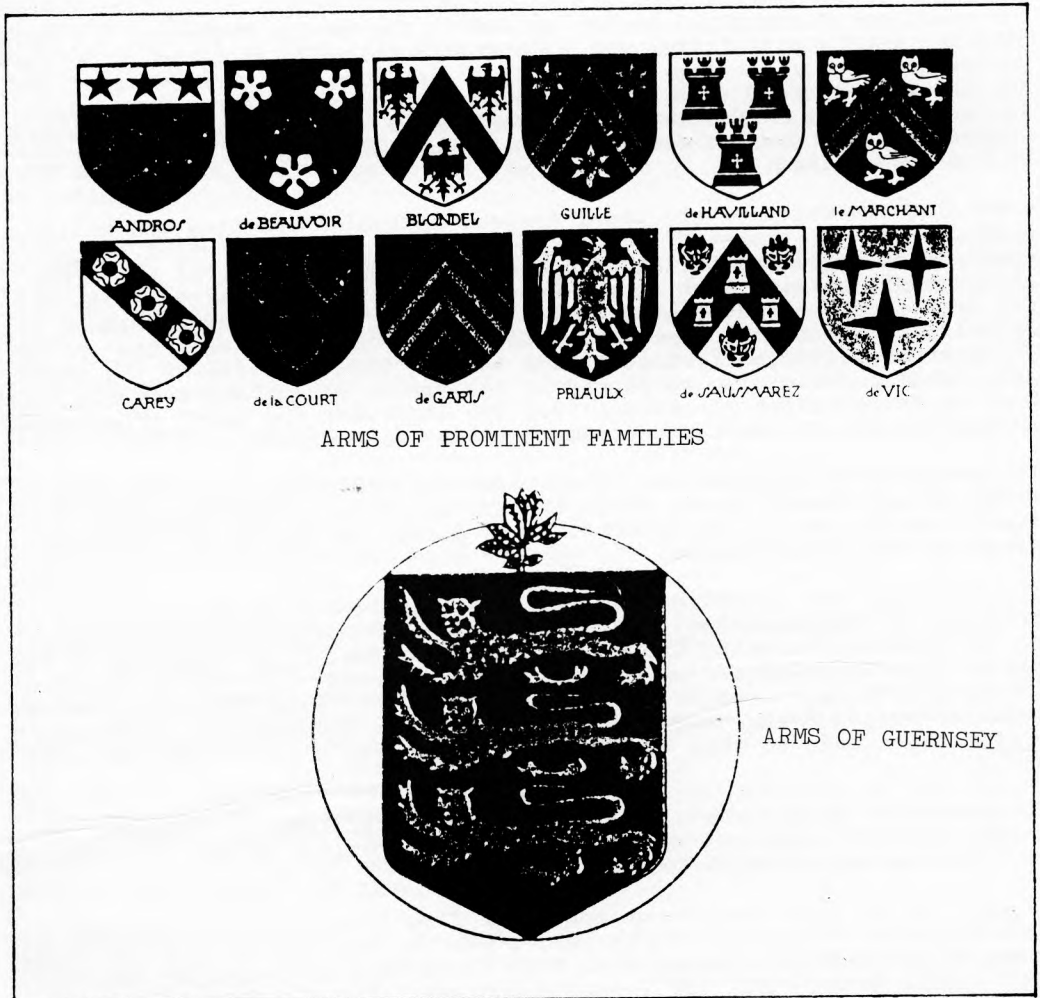
The Committee generously acknowledged their gratitude to Commander Nicolls for 'his inspired suggestion', and his donation of his services as a professional flag designer.

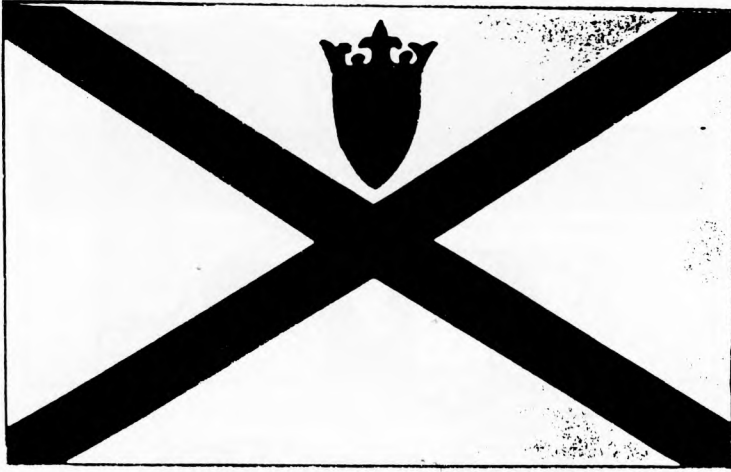
As well as the flag for use on land, the Flag Investigation Committee - also proposed a flag for use at sea, a Special Red Ensign with the papal cross of Duke William in the fly. Both flags were displayed by the harbour in St. Peter Port, the Island's capital, from the date of publication of the report to the date of the debate on the new flag.

The States of Guernsey debated the Flag Investigation Committee's proposals on 13th March, 1985 and approved them unanimously. A humble petition was then submitted by the Bailiff to Her Majesty the Queen, seeking approval for the new flags. This having been received on 1st May, the new flags were officially brought into use on 9th May, the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of the Island from German occupation during World War II.

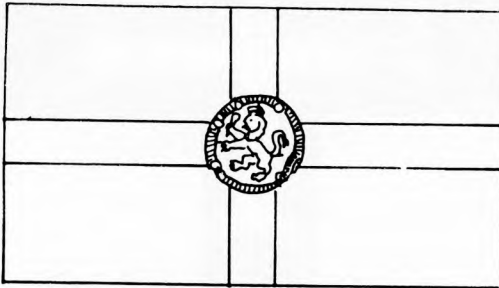
Garret King of Arms, the principal Officer of Arms in England, has announced that the new cross, St. George with the papal cross superimposed, -- shall be known as 'The Guernsey Cross'.

Bruce Middle

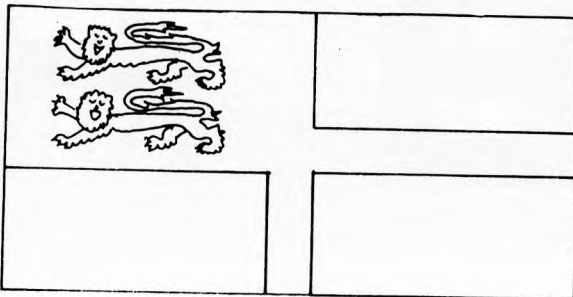




FLAG OF JERSEY



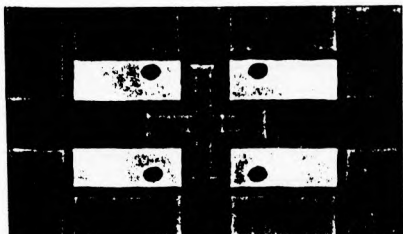
FLAG OF ALDERNEY



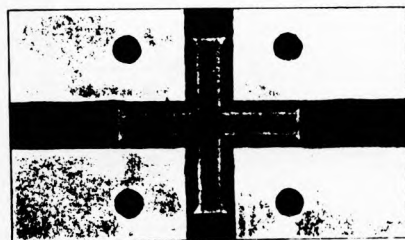
FLAG OF SEIGNEUR OF SARK



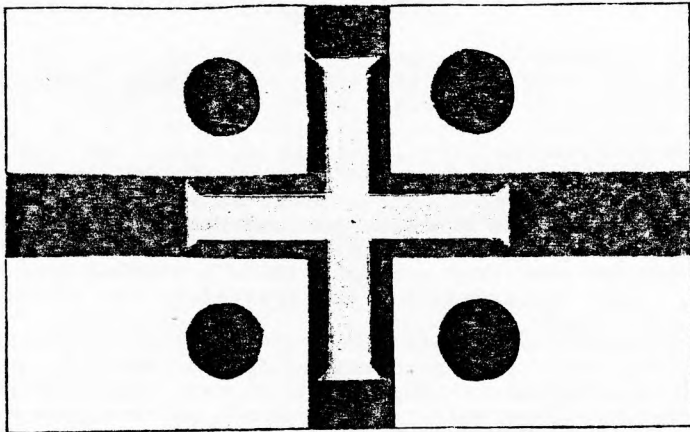
DUKE WILLIAM 'S GONFANON



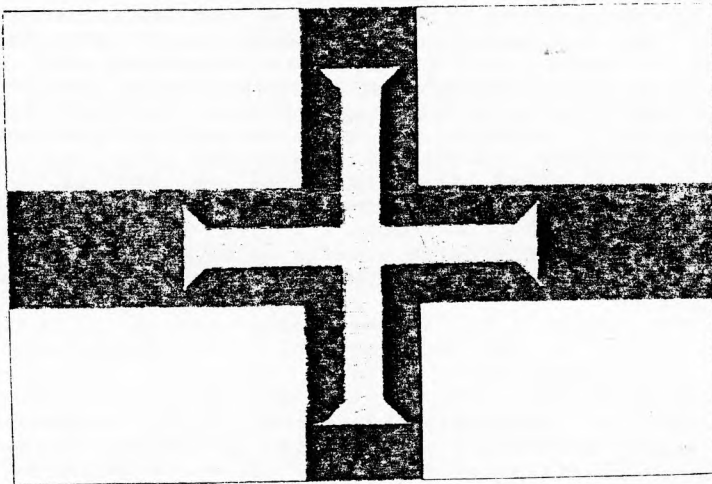
COMPLETE GONFANON COMBINED
WITH ST GEORGE



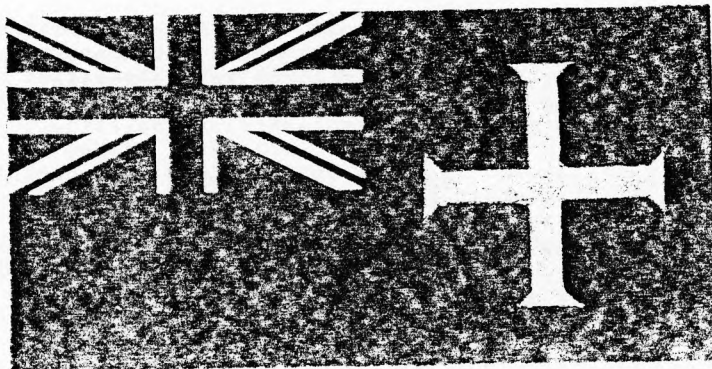
CROSS AND ROUNDELS COMBINED
WITH ST GEORGE



DESIGN PROPOSED



DESIGN ADOPTED



FLAG FOR USE AT SEA