

# Municipal flags in Zimbabwe

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**ABSTRACT:** In common with the approach followed in many other countries, the major urban centres in Zimbabwe have flags which are derived from their municipal arms. This paper traces the development of municipal vexillology in Zimbabwe, including recent post-independence changes.

*The illustrations for this paper appear on Plates 1-2.*

## 1 Introduction

While a rich tradition of local and civic heraldry exists in Zimbabwe, the same cannot be said for local vexillology. Most municipal bodies in the country have arms dating from the colonial period when the country was first colonized by European settlers. In those cases where a flag followed, the flag was derived from the arms following in the British tradition. In fact, many of the earlier local arms were registered by the College of Arms in London. Following independence, some of these colonial arms and flags have been amended or changed to include more African-orientated designs.

This paper deals with the municipal flags of the major centres in Zimbabwe, but as a strong link exists between heraldry and vexillology, considerable mention has to be made of the heraldic roots of many of the local flags. As the heraldic tradition is much older and stronger, information on the municipal arms is more readily available and considerable research in this field has been done by members of, firstly the Rhodesian, and now Zimbabwean, Heraldry and Genealogy Society [1]. No such similar work on local and civic vexillology exists and this paper is an attempt to overcome this shortcoming.

## 2 Municipal flags in Zimbabwe

### 2.1 Salisbury/Harare

Following the decision of Cecil John Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC) to colonize the area now known as Zimbabwe, the first group of White settlers arrived at Mount Hampden, about 12 miles from where Fort Salisbury was eventually sited, with the Pioneer Column on 12 September 1890. A Board of Management for the town was established in 1891 and a municipality was established in 1897. Salisbury became capital of Southern Rhodesia in 1923 and was made a city in 1935. [2]

The decision to design a coat of arms for Salisbury dates from the mid-1890s, only a few years after the arrival of the Pioneer Column and the founding of the town. After some debate the Salisbury Council adopted an emblem (**Fig. 1**) in June 1888, which was used officially for the first time in August 1889. This in spite of the fact that the design had been rejected by the College of Arms as being too crowded and possessing "too many discrepancies from the rule of English heraldry". [3]

A flag was only chosen for the city after 1939 when the City Council, by then aware that the arms were not in accordance with heraldic custom, again approached the College of Arms and quickly reached agreement on a new design (**Fig. 2**). The approach followed, as in many British and American (and indeed South African) examples of municipal vexillology, was simply to place the shield from the new municipal arms in the centre of a plain white field, being classified as an armigerous flag with shield only (**Fig. 3**).<sup>1</sup> The new arms retained part of the arms of the Cape Colony of which Rhodes had been Premier (three roundels with *fleurs-de-lis*) and included a simple charge to represent agriculture. The supporters were two Sable antelopes - as in the Southern Rhodesia arms - while the lion in the crest was adopted from the arms of Cecil Rhodes. Unlike the arms, which were formally registered, once the design of the flag was decided upon, it was simply taken into use and flown from the Town House and other municipal buildings.

On the second anniversary of Zimbabwe's independence in April 1982, Salisbury was renamed Harare and later adopted new municipal arms and a flag. As in the case of its predecessor, the design of the flag once again followed the adoption of the new municipal arms. The new arms (**Fig. 4**) have a more indigenous flavour, having dispensed with the European shield in favour of an African one, as well as including traditional hunting and war spears. The new municipal flag is an extension of the new shield in the proportion 1:2 (**Fig. 5**). Some license has been used as there are seven golden sun rays on the shield of the arms but only six on the flag. On the flag these are off-set, as the Zimbabwe Bird and tobacco leaves are placed on the centre line. This armorial flag or

<sup>1</sup>Here we use the typology for heraldic flags (armorial; armigerous flag with shield only; armigerous with full achievement; and badge flag) introduced by Croft. [4]

heraldic banner, argues Michael Faul, provides a good example of the pathological condition known as 'dysproportionality' which William Crampton referred to in his lecture at the XVI International Congress of Vexillology in Warsaw. [5]

The flag flies alongside the national flag at the Town House and at satellite municipal offices around the city.

## 2.2 Bulawayo

Bulawayo is Zimbabwe's second largest city and stands on the site of the kraal of the Ndebele king Lobengula. Forces of the BSAC invaded Matabeleland in 1893 causing Lobengula and his people to flee from their kraal after razing it to the ground. White settlers moved into the area and Bulawayo was declared a town on 1 June 1894, and eventually a municipality in 1897. City status was granted in 1943. [6]

On attaining municipal status in 1897 Bulawayo also adopted arms which were heraldically incorrect and were based on designs sent in by members of the public. Nevertheless it was not until more than 40 years later that, following Salisbury's example, enquiries were made to the College of Arms in 1939 with a view to having a new, heraldically correct, design prepared. In 1943 a design by V.W. Hiller, the first Rhodesian Government Archivist, was accepted by the Town Council and sent off for approval to the College of Arms. On the eve of the City's 50th anniversary, the Town Clerk read out the Letters Patent of the Grant of Arms at a special meeting of the City Council on 4 November 1943. [7]

The charges on the shield are mainly African in origin, the rock rabbits being the totem animal of the royal family of the Matabele. The cross symbolises the influence of the early missionaries on the Matabele and the elephant crest comes from the seal used by Lobengula, last Paramount Chief of the Matabele. The Sindebele motto, *Si Ye Pambili*, means "Let us go Forward" (**Fig. 6**). [8]

Bulawayo has an armigerous flag with full achievement which was adopted following the granting of the municipal arms and comprises a royal blue field in the centre of which is a full-colour representation of the arms and motto of the City (**Fig. 7**).

Unlike some of the other towns and cities in Zimbabwe, Bulawayo did not change its name following independence and its original "colonial" arms and flag have also been retained. The flag, in pennant form, is also used on the Mayoral car. [9]

## 2.3 Gwelo/Gweru

Gweru (formerly Gwelo) is the third largest city in Zimbabwe and lies in the centre of the country. The town was established as a coaching station on the Bulawayo—Salisbury route in the late 1890s and became a municipality in 1917. City status was granted in 1971. [10]

Unlike the other major centres in the country the early development of Gwelo's municipal arms is not recorded. A seal for the municipality was only sent to the then Rhodesia Heraldry and Genealogy Society in 1973 (**Fig. 8**). [11] The seal is divided into three, the top left section depicts a stamp mill in gold on blue and the top right section a two-share plough in gold on red. The lower section shows a brown ox with a "European" lady with fair hair in a white dress holding a white ribbon. The background is blue for the sky with a green base representing grass. Surrounding the seal is a scroll with black lettering bearing the words "City of Gwelo" on the sides and the motto "Forward" at the base.

In keeping with the tradition followed by the other major centres in the country, the city flew a flag which incorporated the full municipal arms which were registered in 1976 (**Fig. 9**). The Gwelo municipal flag comprised three vertical stripes of red, white and red with the full achievement of the city arms in the centre of the white stripe (**Fig. 10**). This design (armigerous with full achievement) followed the pattern of the Rhodesian national flag which was green, white and green with the national arms in the centre.

Gwelo was renamed Gweru in 1982 and in 1986 amended its municipal arms (**Fig. 11**). The electric train was added to the shield to signify the historic launching of the first electric railway track in Zimbabwe between Gweru and Harare in October 1983 while the book represents the various educational institutions in the city. The helmet and mantling of the arms have been removed and the motto changed to "Progress". [12]

The municipal flag retains its basic design with the new arms being depicted in the centre (**Fig. 12**).

## 2.4 Umtali/Mutare

The country's fourth-largest city, originally called Umtali, is located in the east of the country on the border with Mozambique. The city was established as a fort in 1890 but was abandoned a year later when the settlement moved 14 km to its present site. A municipality was proclaimed in 1914 and in 1971 it (along with Gwelo) was granted city status. [13]

Immediately after becoming a municipality the town council initiated a competition for the design of a coat of arms and seal. There were only two entries with the winning entry by a Mr. Fox being used by the council for the next 41 years. The shield was quartered containing firstly a fruit tree, secondly a stamp mill, thirdly three stalks of maize and fourthly a bull's head (**Fig. 13**). These changes represented the main activities of the area, namely citrus farming, mining, agriculture and cattle ranching. Overall in the centre was an inescutcheon charged with an open gate alluding to the town's position as the eastern gateway to the country. The crest was identical to that of the BSAC - a lion supporting an elephant's tusk with the dexter (right) forepaw.

In 1954, while holidaying in Rhodesia, Mr James Frere, then Bluemantle Pursuivant in the College of Arms, pointed out to the Umtali Council the errors

in the municipal arms and the fact that they had never been legally granted. On further advice from Mr. Frere the Council submitted an amended design to the College of Arms in London where it was dealt with by the Chester Herald and was subsequently granted in 1955 (**Fig. 14**). [14]

There seems to be some controversy whether in fact Umtali followed its heraldic development with a vexillological one. Current civic officials deny the existence of a municipal flag for the city - both past and present - but Jim Croft has in his possession a picture taken in the mid-1970s of an armorial flag of the municipal shield. While its current status is unclear, it is clear that a municipal flag did exist at some time in the past.

Umtali was renamed Mutare in April 1982. Subsequently, in 1985, the municipal arms were amended slightly. The shield and supporters from the earlier arms were retained but the crest was changed to a mountain range on which is perched a cockerel (**Fig. 15**). [15] Mutare has no officially recognized civic flag at present but it is understood that one is under consideration. [16]

## 2.5 Fort Victoria/Masvingo

The town was founded in 1890 by the Pioneer Column as the first permanent settlement for Whites. A fort was built about 5 km from the site of the present town and named in honour of Queen Victoria. A Town Management Board was established in 1926 and municipal status was conferred in 1956. [17]

The arms of Fort Victoria (**Fig. 16**), which were granted in 1954, had as the crest a representation of the old bell tower which was part of the original fort. The shield displays the Zimbabwe Bird in the first quarter, a maize plant in the second, a pick and shovel in the third, and the conical tower of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins in the fourth. According to Richard Allport, [18] who has a photograph in his possession, the flag of the town was divided horizontally red over white with the full achievement of the arms in the centre (**Fig. 17**).

Fort Victoria was renamed Nyanda in April 1982 and a few months later this was changed to Masvingo. As with other towns in the country, Masvingo has also made some alterations to its municipal arms (**Fig. 18**). The Bell Tower crest, considered to be a relic from the colonial past, was replaced with the conical tower from Great Zimbabwe. In the fourth quarter was placed a pictorial view of Lake Mutirikwi (formerly Lake Kyle), which is the largest internal dam in the country (Kariba being shared with Zambia) and is situated 40 km east of the town. These arms were registered on 17 October 1989.

While retaining its armigerous basis, the flag has been altered to include the new arms which appear in the centre of two horizontal stripes of blue over red (**Fig. 19**). The reason for the change in the colour of the stripes is unclear.

## 2.6 Chitungwiza

Chitungwiza, the youngest local authority in Zimbabwe, is located 9 km south of Greater Harare. It was formed in 1978 by the amalgamation of three African townships to form a residential dormitory for the capital. Chitungwiza received full municipal status in 1981 and it is now the third largest and fastest growing urban centre in the country. [19]

As the youngest municipality in the country, Chitungwiza has not had the colonial influence which has been prevalent in the arms and flags of the other municipal centres in Zimbabwe. A more distinctively African-orientated municipal coat of arms has been chosen and this forms the basis of a municipal flag which was adopted on 30 September 1986 (**Fig. 20**). The flag comprises three horizontal stripes of orange, white and orange, each of the orange stripes being one quarter the width of the flag with the middle white stripe being one half the width of the flag. The municipal arms are in the centre of the flag on the white stripe (**Fig. 21**). This is another example of an armigerous flag with full achievement. Orange is the corporate colour of the municipality while white is said to stand for peace and development. The Shona motto, *Pamberi Nekushandira Pamwe*, means "(Marching) Forward in Co-operation." [20]

## 3 Conclusion

Civic vexillology in Zimbabwe has its roots in heraldry with the municipal flags of the major centres being derived from the development and evolution of municipal arms. This trend is not unique to Zimbabwe and is followed in many other countries around the world. [21] In Zimbabwe the process of establishing arms is formal, with municipalities registering their arms under the Armorial Bearings, Names, Uniforms and Badges Act of 1971 (Act No. 12 of 1971) whereas municipal flags do not enjoy similar status or protection. Municipal flags are often simply adjuncts to the municipal arms, the latter being regarded by the Councils and citizens alike as being the main symbol of a town or city.

Other observations with regard to municipal flags in Zimbabwe are that, with the exception of the new flag of Harare, the flags of the major centres all incorporate the municipal shield or full arms. As such these are all examples of armigerous flags with either full achievement or shields. The Harare flag, while being an extension of the municipal shield, is the only attempt at an armorial flag or heraldic banner. Furthermore, it would appear that despite the opportunities to design new municipal flags following the changes since independence, only Harare has done so. Perhaps Mutare and other civic authorities in Zimbabwe will be more creative when designing new municipal flags in future.

## References

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Plate 1



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

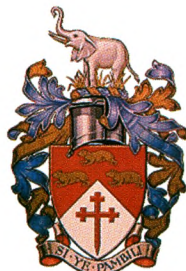


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Plate 2



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21