

**LESSER-KNOWN FLAGS AND COAT OF ARMS:
SYMBOLS OF THE ISLAND GROUPS OF SCOTLAND**

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Introduction

Three island groups with partial autonomy are located north and northwest of Scotland: Shetland, Orkney, and Western Isles. During the 1950s these islands formed into administrative units within Scotland. The current coats of arms for these islands were granted in 1975-1976. Earlier coats of arms and in some cases flags existed for these administrative units. For example, the flag of Shetland dates from 1969 but was only officially recognized in 2005. The symbols of these islands are very beautiful and have interesting histories with strong ties to Scotland and Scandinavia.

Shetland

The Shetland Islands are located in Western Europe north of Scotland at latitude 60° 30' N and longitude 1° 30' W. They comprise 100 islands and islets; only 20 are inhabited. The total area of the islands is 1,462 square kilometers. Nearly 23,500 people live in Shetland, with 7,000 in the capital city of Lerwick on the island of Mainland.

Shetland's strategic location had a major influence on their history. Vikings from Scandinavia overwhelmed the earlier Pictish inhabitants during the early 9th century. From 875 to 1472 Shetland was part of Norway. In September of 1468, Christian I, King of Norway and Denmark, was unable to raise the dowry of 60,000 Rhenish florins promised for the marriage for his daughter Margaret, to James III, King of Scotland. As a result, in May of 1469 Christian impignorated (pawned) Orkney for 50,000 Rhenish florins to James and did the same with the Shetlands for 8,000 Rhenish florins. Despite Christian's stated intent to redeem the pledge, Scotland proceeded to annex Orkney and Shetland in 1472.

Because of their geographical position, the sea and fishing have played an important role in Shetland's history. Local fish have been exported around the world and many foreign fleets have fished in Shetland waters. Shetland's unique legislature, the Alting, lasted until about 1600, while the islanders kept their Norse language until 200 years ago. Since 1707, together with Scotland, the island group has been part of the United Kingdom.

Until the late 19th century, a body of landowners and other influential people governed Shetland under the Commissioner of Supply, which since 1667 had collected the Scottish land tax and decided how those funds should be expended. Under Scotland's local government Act of 1889, two local authorities were set up in Shetland: the Lerwick Town Council and the Zetland (Shetland) County Council, which covered rural areas. The Zetland County Council had designed its own flag.

During World War II the islands were used by the Norwegian Air Force, which had a base in Port Scalloway, then the capital of Shetland. After the second major reorganization of Scottish local government in 1975, the two local authorities were amalgamated into one, the Shetland Islands Council. Under the most recent administrative reform in 1996 the island groups retained their status.

In 1969 Roy Grønneberg, a student of the University of Aberdeen, and his colleague Bill Adams, a fellow Shetlander and Scottish nationalist, proposed a flag for Shetland. They decided on a flag of a white Scandinavian cross on a blue field (white and blue being the traditional colors of Scotland). The Scandinavian cross is a reminder that Shetland was once settled by Vikings and indicates that the islands are part of the Nordic countries. The ratio of the flag is 2:3. (Fig. 1)

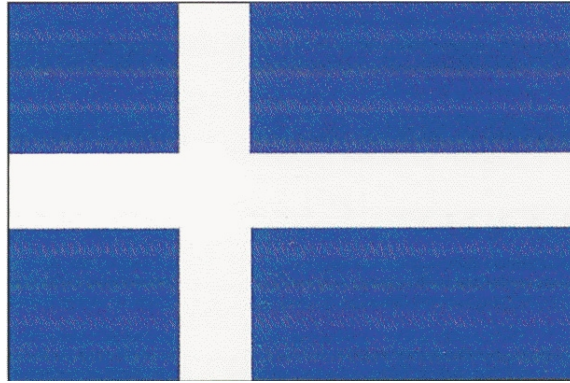


Figure 1
Flag of Shetland

The flag is very popular on the islands, but official recognition took nearly 25 years. In January 2005 the Scottish Heraldry Authority (Court of the Lord Lyon) officially recognized it as a community flag representing the islands. When council convener Sandy Cluness received confirmation from the Court of the Lord Lyon that the combination of the Scottish colors and the Scandinavian cross was been accepted, the news was especially welcomed as it meant that the Shetland Flag could officially be flown by the Shetlander sport team at the upcoming International Island Games.

The coat of arms was granted to the Shetland Islands Council on 17 June 1975 by Letters Patent of the Lord Lyon King of Arms. (Fig. 2) The official description is as follows:

Azure, a base inverted barry Argent and Sable, the alternate party lines being engrailed and plain, a dragon ship Or, the sail charged with a raven Proper, oars in action Or, flag and mast Gules.

Above the Shield is placed a Coronet appropriate to a statutory Islands Area, *videlicet*: a circlet richly chased, from which are issuant four dolphins two and two respectant naiant embowed (two visible) Or; and on a Compartment below the Shield, with this *Motto*: "Med Lögum Skal Land Byggja", are set for *Supporters*, dexter, a Shetland pony Proper, and sinister, a unicorn Argent, armed, maned, and unguled Or, and gorged with a collar Gules, from which is pendant an oval badge Azure, fimbriated Or, charged with a saltire Argent.

The coat of arms, based on those granted to the Zetland County Council in 1956, places a golden warship, with a red mast, yard, and pennant, on a blue shield. The sail is silver with a black raven, symbolizing the ancient ties to Norway and Denmark. The ship is sailing on sea waves represented with six waving alternatives stripes of silver and black. Above the shield is a golden coronet with four golden swimming dolphins (two are visible). The supporters are a Shetland pony in light brown and a unicorn in silver (common to all islands councils' coats of arms). The unicorn has a golden horn, mane, tail, and hoofs. Around its neck is a red collar with an oval pendant framed in gold with a silver St. Andrew's cross on blue. The compartment on which the supporters stand is of silver stones. The scroll is silver (with a reverse of red) with an Old Norse inscription: *MED LÖGUM SKAL LAND BYGGJA*, "By law will the land be built up". This motto, from *Njál's Saga* (the 13th-century Icelandic epic), section 69, was used earlier by the Zetland County Council.

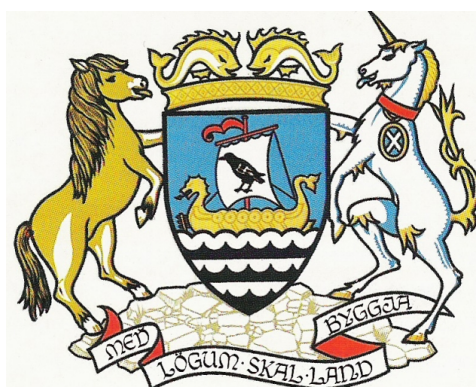


Figure 2
Coat of Arms of Shetland

These arms ultimately derive from the colors of Orkney County and the arms of the Sinclair family, the Burgh of Lerwick, and the Jarls family. Gold and blue were the colors of the old Orkney County of which Shetland was a part. In 1379 that county came under the ownership of the Sinclair family of Roslin (sometimes written as "St. Clair"), as an inheritance by marriage with the Norman Jarls family. The sea waves are the black and silver of the Sinclair arms. (Fig. 3) The ship's sail comes from the 1882 coat of arms of the administrative center of the islands, the Burgh of Lerwick. (Fig. 4) The raven is the symbol of the Jarls family, whose arms also bear a warship. (Fig. 5)



Figure 3
Coat of Arms of Sinclair Family, Earl of Orkney

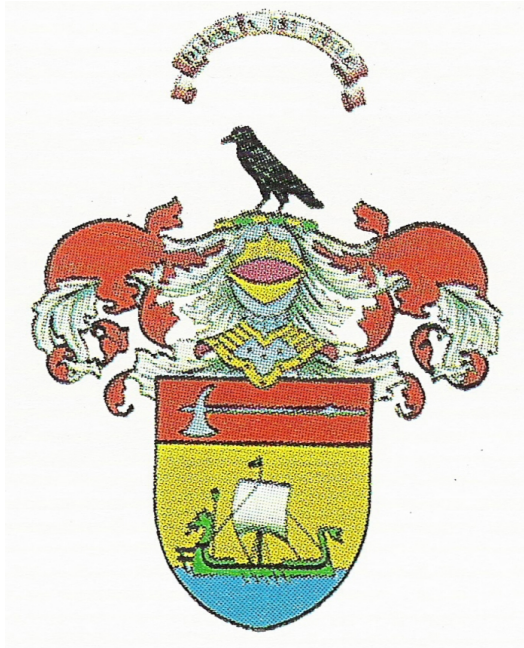


Figure 4
Coat of Arms of the Burgh of Lerwick
(1818-1975)



Figure 5
Coat of Arms of the Jarls Family

Orkney

The Orkney Islands are located in Western Europe just north of Scotland at latitude 59° 0' N and longitude 3° 0' W. They comprise an archipelago of approximately 90 islands, islets, and skerries in the Atlantic Ocean; 29 islands are inhabited with a population of 19,600. The total area of the islands is 972 square kilometers. The main island, sometimes incorrectly called Pomona, is named Mainland (as in Shetland), where the capital, Kirkwall, has 7,000 inhabitants. Other major islands are Hoy, Sanday, Westray, Stronsay, and South Ronaldsay.

Megalithic buildings show that the islands were inhabited as early as 2000-1000 BC. During the first centuries AD, raiders from the North visited some of the islands. The territory was joined to Norway in the 875 during the reign of Harald I. Norwegian administrators, who held the title of Count, ruled from 875 until 1472. In 1379, the Sinclair family (or St. Clair of Roslin) became the new counts. Old Norse language and customs were retained on Orkney until the end of 17th century. In 1472 Orkney came under Scottish sovereignty during the reign of King James III (see Shetlands, above).

In the 1707, already an integral part of Scotland, Orkney became part of Great Britain, and in the 19th century a British Naval base was built in the main island, which became the focus of the Scapa Flow action during the Second World War. Orkney has local autonomy within Scotland. Executive Power is in the hands of the Orkney Islands Council. Two flags exist, one official and the other not.

The unofficial flag of Orkney is a red Scandinavian cross on a yellow field, known as the Cross of St. Magnus (the patron saint of the Cathedral of Kirkwall). Two members of the Flag Institute had already written on the flag. Norman Logan and in 1994 James Gunter, who also took part of a seminary on regionalism held in Hull. St. Magnus was the son of Jarl Erling and was forced to flee

the islands when they were invaded by King Magnus Barefoot of Norway. He returned to Orkney in 1116 but was murdered by his cousin Haakon on the island of Egilsay.

The flag design was originally promoted in 1994 by Spencer J. Rosie, chairman of both the Orkney Movement and the Kirkwall community council. (Fig. 6) He sold the flag in the form of stickers, badges, and other souvenirs; it has become very popular among tourists and local inhabitants. The proportions of the flag are not codified, but in *Flagmaster*, Flag Locker No. 077, they are approximately 3:5, the traditional ratio for British flags on land (at sea it is 1:2). The width of the cross is approximately 1/6 of the length of the flag, although in some depictions it is as narrow as 1/10.

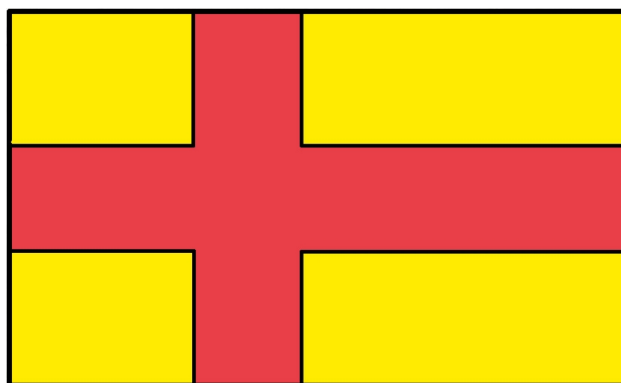


Figure 6
Flag of Orkney (non-official)

The official flag of Orkney is the flag of the council. It is an armorial banner, in proportions of 2:3, of the council's arms. The flag is of two equal vertical stripes, blue at the hoist and red at the fly. The blue stripe bears a galley (from the arms of the counts of Orkney) with mast and yards of yellow, with white oars. The red stripe bears a yellow rampant lion with yellow crown holding a yellow battle-axe in his forepaw. The lion has blue tongue and claws. (Fig. 7) The crowned lion holding a battle-axe was used in the common seal of Orkney as early as 1425. (Fig. 8) The seal reads "SIGILLUM COMUNICATIS ORCADIE".

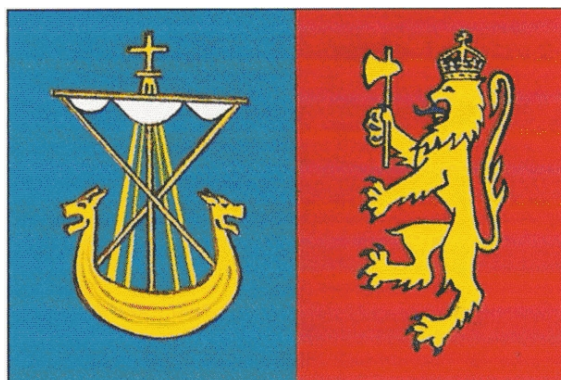


Figure 7
Flag of Orkney (Banner of Arms)



Figure 8
Common seal of Orkney (1425)

The coat of arms was granted to the Orkney Islands Council on 3 March 1975 by the Lord Lyon King of Arms. (Fig. 9) The official description is as follows:

Parted per pale Azure and Gules: in the dexter a dragon galley Or, sails furled Argent, and in the sinister a lion rampant imperially crowned Or, armed and langued Azure, holding in its forepaw a battle-axe erect in pale Gold.

Above the *Shield* is placed a Coronet appropriate to a statutory Islands Area. *Videlicet*: a circlet richly chased, from which are issuant four dolphins two and two respectant naiant embowed (two visible) Or; and on a Compartment below the Shield, with this *Motto* "Boreas Domus Mare Amicus", are set for *Supporters*, dexter a udaller [land-owning farmer] habited of the fifteenth century, and sinister, a unicorn Argent, armed, maned, and unguled Or, and gorged with a collar Gules, from which is pendant an oval badge Azure, fimbriated Or, charged with a saltire Argent.

As with the arms of Shetland, the coat of arms of Orkney derives from an earlier coat of arms of Orkney, from 1931. (Fig. 10)

The shield is divided in blue and red. On the dexter is a golden dragon galley of the Ancient Earldom of Orkney. The galley has a golden mast and yard with silver sails. On the sinister is a golden crowned lion. The lion holds in his right forepaw a golden battle-axe, its tongue and claws are blue. The lion recalls that Orkney was once Norwegian territory. The coat of arms is based on an old Orkney common seal from 1425. With small differences this last device is almost identical to the arms of Norway. Above the shield is a golden coronet with four golden swimming dolphins of which only two are visible. The supporters are standing on light green compartment with light gray edges and tufts of grass. The dexter supporter is an *udaller*, a term still in use in Orkney and Shetland, referring to the land-owning class under the *udal* system of land tenure. The supporter is appropriately dressed in his *braws* (best clothes) for the important role of supporter of the council's arms. The sinister supporter is the silver unicorn (common to all islands councils' coats of arms). The unicorn has a golden horn, mane, tail, and hoofs. Around its neck is a red collar with an oval pendant framed in gold with a silver St. Andrew's cross on blue. The scroll is silver (with a reverse of red) with a Latin inscription in black: *BOREAS DOMUS MARE AMICUS*, "The North is our home, the sea our friend". The motto was in the 1931 arms.

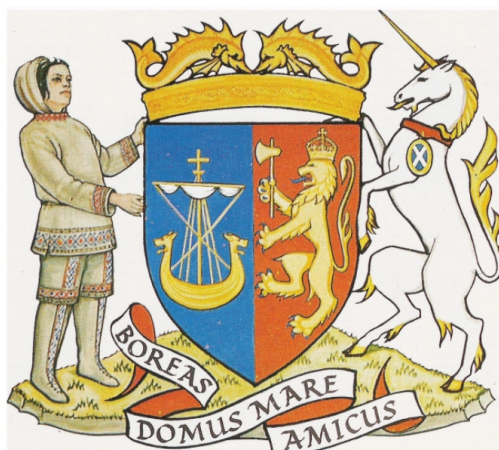


Figure 9
Coat of Arms of Orkney

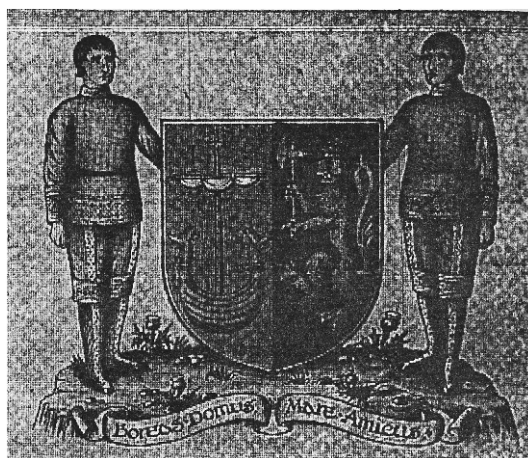


Figure 10
Coat of Arms of Orkney (1931)

Western Isles

The Western Isles, *Na h-Eileanan Siar* in Gaelic, are located in Western Europe northwest of Scotland at latitude 57° 30' N and longitude 7° 10' W. It is an archipelago of approximately 50 island and islets also known as the Outer Hebrides. The area of the islands is 2,901 square kilometers and their population is 30,500. The largest islands are Lewis and Harris, North Uist, South Uist, and Barra. Most of the inhabitants live on the island of Lewis and Harris, with 6,000 in the capital, Stornoway.

Missionaries from Ireland arrived in the 5th and 6th centuries. In the 8th century the islands were occupied by Norse Vikings from Orkney and Shetland. The Scandinavian name for the islands was originally *Surdreyjar*, "South Islands". Norway retained control until 1266 when the islands came under Scottish administration. Following centuries of rule by Scottish clans, especially MacDougall and MacDonald, the kings of Scotland gradually restricted the power of clan chiefs. This process accelerated during the Hanoverian era after the unification of Scotland with England in 1707. Great Britain gained full control over the Western Isles after 1748. Today the Western Isles are a main bulwark of Gaelic culture in the United Kingdom, with 70% to 90% of the inhabitants speaking Gaelic, which together with English is the official language of this island group.

The Western Isles have local autonomy within Scotland. Executive Power is in the hands of the Western Isles Islands Council. Its administrative area comprises the districts of Barra, Harris, North Uist and South Uist (in the county of Inverness), and the burgh of Stornoway and the district of Lewis (in the county of Ross & Cromarty). The council seat is in Stornoway. Two flags exist of Western Isles and both are official.

The first official flag is the classic British Blue Ensign (proportions of 1:2) with the badge at the fly. The badge is white with a stylized *lymphad* (a small Medieval galley) with hull, mast, yards, sails, and oars all in black at the center. The badge was introduced on 9 September 1976 together with the coat of arms. It was the first time that a badge was granted to a Scottish local administration. The heraldic lymphad symbolizes the seafaring tradition and skills of the population. (Figs. 11-12)



Figure 11
Flag of Western Isles (Blue Ensign With Badge)

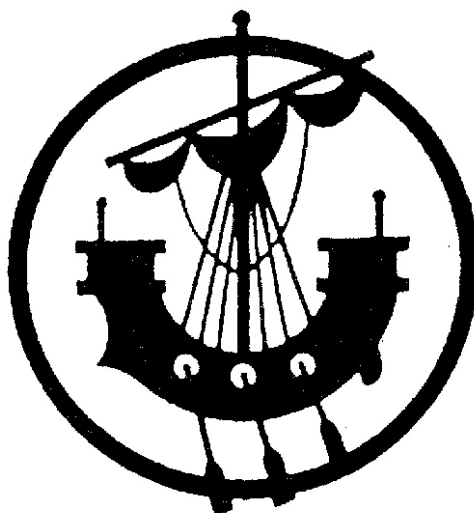


Figure 12
Badge (Detail)

The second flag is also official, or nearly official, and is hoisted every day at the local councils. It is an armorial banner (proportions of 2:3) of the council's arms.

The flag has a yellow field, five narrow horizontal wavy stripes of blue and white displayed alternately at the middle of the field, and three *lymphads*: in the upper fly, the upper hoist, and the lower center. (Fig. 13)

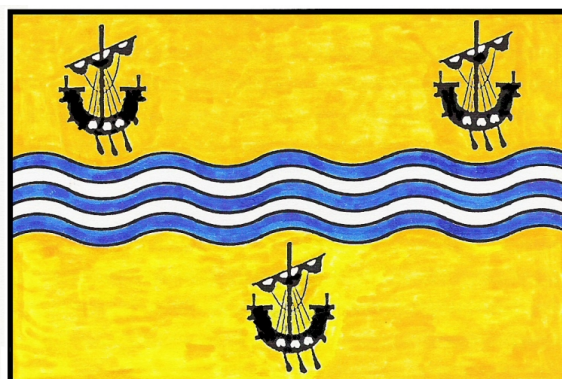


Figure 13
Flag of Western Isles (Banner of Arms)

The coat of arms was granted to the Western Isles Islands Council on 9 September 1976 by the Lord Lyon King of Arms. The official description is as follows:

Or, on a fess wavy Azure between three lymphads, oars in action, sails furled Sable, flagged Gules, two barrulets wavy Argent.

Above the Shield is placed a Coronet appropriate to a statutory Islands Area, *videlicet*: a circlet richly chased, from which are issuant four dolphins two and two respectant naiant embowed (two visible) Or; and on a Compartment below the Shield, with this *Motto* "Ardaichidh Fireantachd Cinneach", are set for *Supporters*, dexter, a golden eagle Proper, and sinister a unicorn Argent, armed, maned, and unguled Or, and gorged with a collar Gules, from which is pendant an oval badge Azure, fimbriated Or, charged with a Saltire Argent; and for *Badge* a lymphad, sail furled, oars in action, surmounting a circlet Sable.

As with the arms of Shetland and Orkney, these derive from an earlier coat of arms, in this case that of the Lordship of the Isles. The shield is gold, with a horizontal wavy band of blue and silver. On it are three lymphads, two above the band and one centered below, with black hulls, masts, yards, and sails with red pennants. Above the shield is a golden coronet with four golden swimming dolphins (only two are visible). The supporters are standing on green grass compartment. The dexter supporter is a golden eagle (*Aquila crysaetos*) proper (brown, with silver wings, golden paws, gray beak, and red tongue). It is typical in this area and also recalls the eagle of the arms of the Lordship of the Isles. The sinister supporter is the silver unicorn (common to all islands councils' coats of arms). The unicorn has a golden horn, mane, tail, and hoofs. Around its neck is a red collar with an oval pendant framed in gold with a silver St. Andrew's cross on blue. The scroll is silver (with a reverse of red) with a Gaelic inscription in black: *ARDAICHIDH FIREANTACHD CINNEACH*, "righteousness exalteth a nation", *Proverbs 14:34*. (Fig. 14)

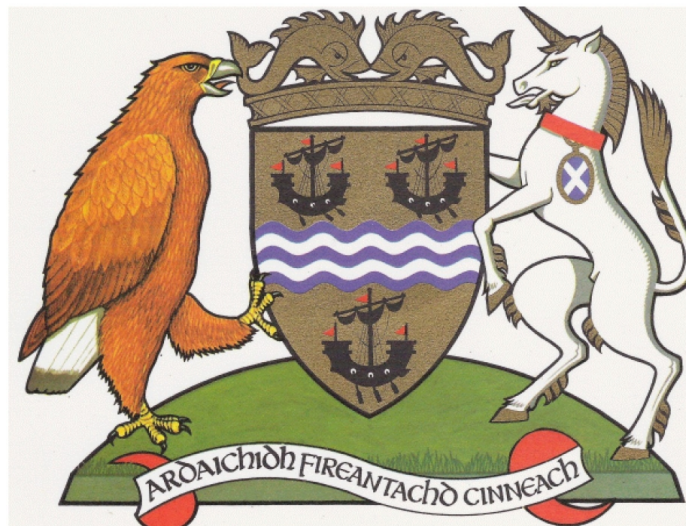


Figure 14
Coat of Arms of Western Isles

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Roman Klimeš was born in Prague in 1948, emigrated to Germany in 1976, and returned to Prague, Czech Republic, in 2003. He studied Slavonic philology and politics at University of Bonn. Although interested in flags from childhood, since 1980 he has been involved in the methodical study of flags, coats of arms, and seals.

Roman is the founder and director of the World Vexillological Research Institute, established in 1992 and a member of FIAV since 1993. Since 1986 he has published the quarterly journal *Flaggen, Wappen, und Siegel* (Flags, Coat of Arms and Seals), whose publication was taken over by the World Vexillological Research Institute in 1992.

He has participated in and presented papers at several International Congresses of Vexillology, and written numerous articles in many vexillological and heraldic journals around the world. He has also published a booklet on the symbols of the Free State of Danzig, 1919 to 1939. His main fields of interest are the territory of the former Czechoslovakia, Carpatho-Ukraine, Baltic Sea Area, Oceania, Antarctica and dependent and autonomous territories all the world.

