ICV23 YOKOHAMA

COUNTY FLAGS – DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITISH VEXILLOLOGY

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This paper discusses an exciting new development in British vexillology: county flags.
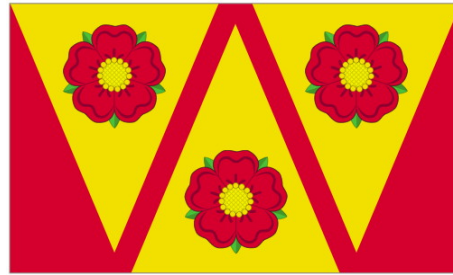
Over the last few years we've seen more and more British counties adopt these "people's flags". Nearly all British county *councils* have flags, in the form of a banner of their coat-of-arms, but these are solely for use by the Council itself and technically may not be used by private citizens of the county.
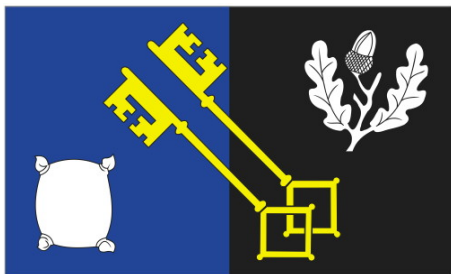
Surrey County Council
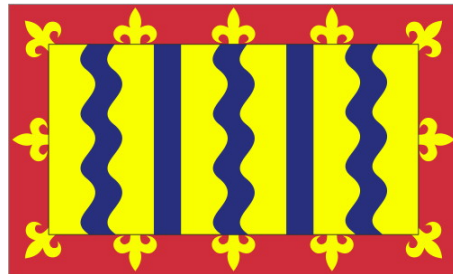
Cambridgeshire *County Council*

1. County Council Flags

IDENTITY

The new county flags are a reflection of the people's identity. Identity is a complex issue. I think of identity as a series of layers, none of which are mutually exclusive, and which vary over time and due to circumstance. I personally have an identity as a Bartram (my family), a Graham (my clan), a Macneil (my mother's clan), a Hillsider (my home village), Montrosian (my home town), an Angus man (my home county), a Mearns man (my home area), a North-easterner, (my home region), a Scot, a Briton, a European and a citizen of the world. That's a dozen different identities without going into my ancestry further than my parents! Many of these identities have flags and symbols that go with them. Montrose has a flag, as do Scotland, Britain and Europe; and each of these flags means something to me.
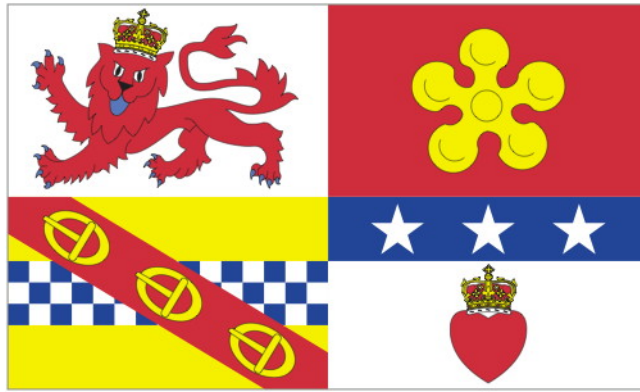
2. Angus County Flag

But what about the county, in my case, Angus? Does it form an important part of my identity? Well put it this way —there is always a feeling of pride as the train from London crosses over the Firth of Tay into Dundee and Angus. So yes, the county does play an important part and I believe it does for most of the people of Britain, and that is why county flags are becoming more popular. An important side note to this is that it's the historic counties that people feel a part of, not the modern administrative areas. Over the last few decades, successive British governments have tried re-organizing local government, splitting some counties, merging others into new bodies, but none of these changes affect the historic counties. I never felt an identity as a Taysider, a region imposed on the people of the area in the 1970's, and I very much doubt that anyone has claimed to be from Bath and North

East Somerset, a new part-county. That is why the county flags are also based on the historic counties and not the local government areas.

FLAG REGISTRY

Recent changes in planning regulations mean that these new county flags can be flown without permission from the local planning authority, helping to increase their popularity. To ensure that there's a definitive record of the flags that exist, both nationally and regionally, the Flag Institute now maintains and manages the national registry of UK flags. The registry has only just been set up and is in its early stages, but you can see it on the Flag Institute website.

3. Flag Registry Index

Each flag is accompanied by a large image and information about its creation.

4. Flag Registry Details

TRADITIONAL COUNTY FLAGS

Some of the county flags in the registry are brand new, but a number are very old. Three of these are the traditional symbols of the counties' people as well as the later councils, which is why they are included in the register.

Cornwall

Cornwall's St. Pirran's Cross dates back to at least the early 19th Century, and possibly much earlier. It's named after the 6th Century saint, the patron of tin miners - one

explanation of the flag's colours are that they represent tin ore and tin metal. Cornwall really started the movement for county flags.

5. Cornwall County Flag

Essex

Essex has had a traditional flag since the time of the Saxons, when Essex was one of the seven kingdoms of the ancient English Heptarchy. The three seaxes are traditional Saxon weapons.
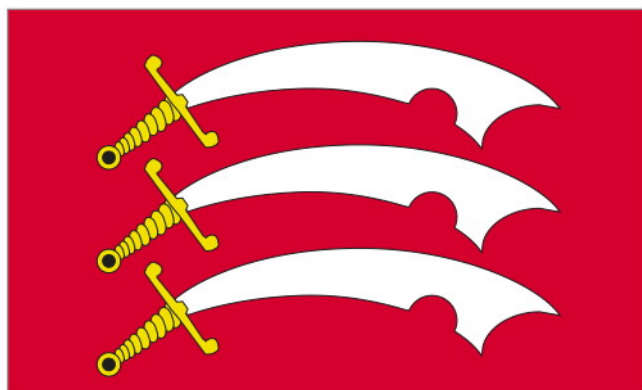
6. Essex County Flag

Kent

Kent has had a traditional flag since at least 1605. The design is based on the supposed flag of the Jute, Hengest, who became King of Kent in 455 after defeating Vortigern at the Battle of Aylesford. His name apparently means "stallion" in Anglo-Saxon!

7. Kent County Flag

Middlesex

Middlesex used to have the same flag as its fellow Saxon kingdom of Essex, but in 1910 Middlesex County Council asked the College of Arms for their own symbols and the Saxon crown was added above the seaxes. This has been the county emblem ever since. Middlesex is an example of a county which no longer has any administrative bodies, but still exists in the identity of its people. A few weeks ago I attended the Middlesex County Show on the County Showground in Uxbridge, and my home is still Ruislip,

Middlesex.
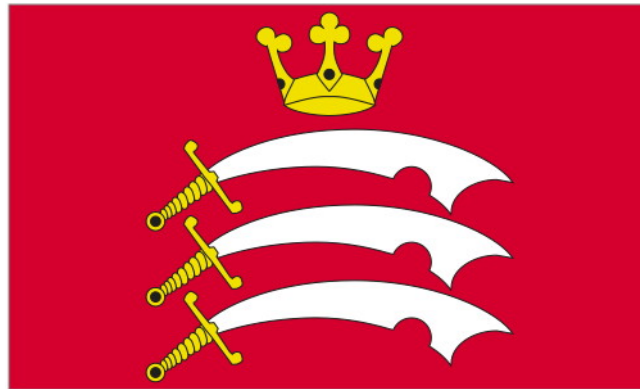
8. Middlesex County Flag

NEWER COUNTY FLAGS

Those are the older flags, now on to flags that have been introduced since the 1960's.

Yorkshire

Yorkshire is one of the latest counties to register its flag, but it's one of the older designs. For some years a white rose on a blue background has been the symbol of Yorkshire. The combination appeared on the county patch of Scouts and Cubs from at least the 1960's. The Yorkshire Riding Society worked with the Flag Institute to produce the definitive Yorkshire Flag, complete with a double white rose.

9. Yorkshire County Flag

The flag was formally presented to the Lord Mayor at the end of July 2008 in Kingston-upon-Hull. There was a great deal of local and national media interest in the flag.

10. Yorkshire Flag after the Presentation

Shetland Islands

Shetland's flag was created in 1969 by Roy Grönneberg and Bill Adams to mark the 500th anniversary of the

transfer of Shetland from Norway to Scotland. In 2005 Lord Lyon recognized the flag and added it to the Lyon Register. The colours come from the national flag of Scotland, whilst the Scandinavian Cross references the Islands' close ties to Scandinavia.

11. Shetland County Flag

Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire has our only Welsh entry. The flag was designed by Peter Stock when the government announced in 1972 that Pembrokeshire was to become part of Dyfed. The flag is based on that of St David, with the Tudor rose symbolising Henry Tudor (Henry VII). The blue is for the sea and green is for the land and cliffs of Pembrokeshire.
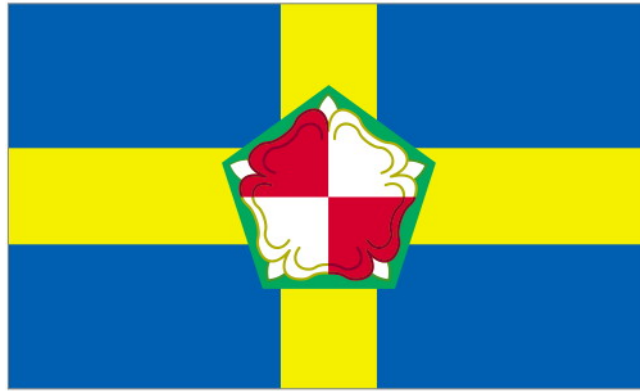
12. Pembrokeshire County Flag

Northumberland

Northumberland's flag is actually a banner of Northumberland County Council's arms, granted in 1951, but in 1996 the Council decided to give the flag to the citizens of Northumberland for their county flag. The design is based on that of the ancient kingdom of Bernicia, which had alternating stripes of red and gold.
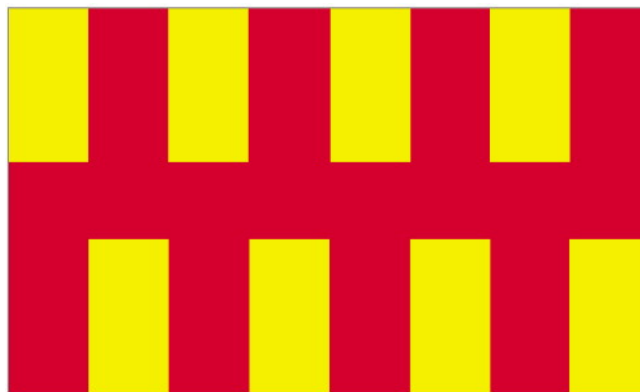
13. Northumberland County Flag

The Isles of Scilly

The Scillonian Cross of the Isles of Scilly was created by a

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popular vote in February 2002. It was designed by the Scilly News and won a competition to choose between a number of designs. The orange represents the sunsets for which Scilly is famous. The blue represents the ocean that surround the islands, which is an important part of Scillonian life. The stars represent the islands' locations and sizes and for some reason were placed in the flag's fly, furthest from the pole.

14. Isles of Scilly Island Flag

Devon

Devon's St Petroc's Cross was introduced on the 23 July 2002 and was designed by Ryan Sealey, winning a competition organized by BBC Devon. The colours represent the green hills of Devon, with black for the moorlands and white for the salt spray from Devon's two coasts.
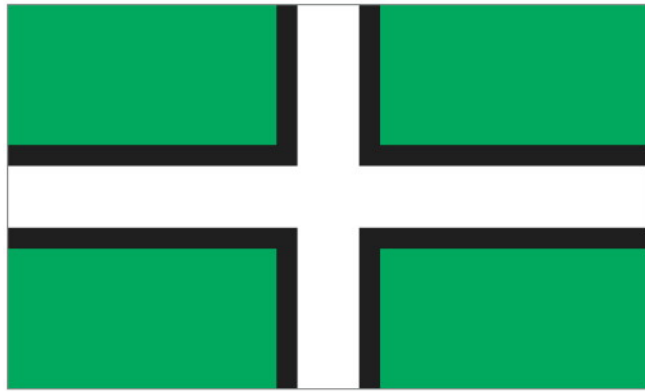
15. Devon County Flag

Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire's flag was the winner of a competition organized by BBC Lincolnshire and *Lincolnshire Life* magazine in October 2005, and was designed by Michelle Andrews. The green symbolizes the fields and blue the sky and sea-coast. The gold fimbriation, or narrow border, represents the nickname of the people of Lincolnshire, "Yellowbellies". The red cross and gold fleur-de-lys are from the flag of the city of Lincoln.

16. Lincolnshire County Flag

Derbyshire

Derbyshire's flag was introduced on 22 September 2006. It was designed by Martin Enright and won a competition organized by BBC Radio Derby. The blue is one of the traditional colours of Derbyshire and represents the rivers and reservoirs; the cross marks the fact that Derbyshire is at the centre of the country and it's green because Derbyshire is "a lush county with outstanding countryside". The symbol in the middle is the Tudor Rose, which has been Derbyshire's Royally-awarded county badge for over 500 years, and it's been used in many county symbols and coats-of-arms over that time. The rose is in gold to symbolise quality and avoid confusion with neighbouring Lancashire and Yorkshire. The narrow white border separates the two darker colours, following the principles of flag design.
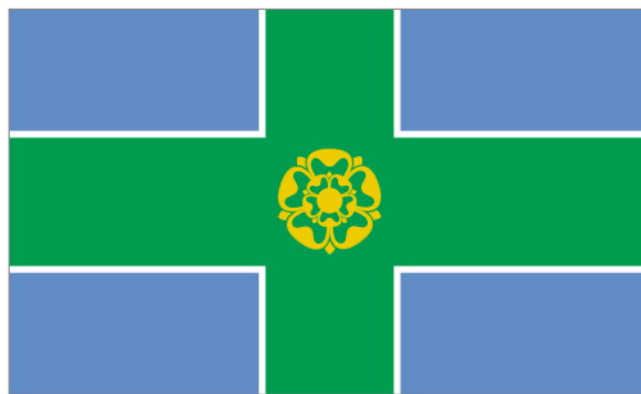
17. Derbyshire County Flag

Orkney

For many years Orkney used a flag with a red Scandinavian cross on gold, but the Lord Lyon, who controls flags in Scotland, refused to register it as it was too similar to the arms of the Earls of Ulster. In 2007 Orkney Council held a competition to select a new flag which was won by Duncan Tullock of Birsay. Lord Lyon approved this design and entered it into the Lyon Register.

18. Orkney County Flag

Gloucestershire

In September 2007, Jonathan Carr, then High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, announced a competition for a county flag. This was to commemorate the 1,000th anniversary of Gloucestershire being granted county status. The only qualification for entry was that entrants were to be resident within the county.

The response was spectacular. More than 1,000 entries were submitted, many from schoolchildren. This shows again, as in other counties, how readily people respond to the idea of county flags.

In judging the entries, preference was given to the simpler designs, usually, but not always, a very good preference. The High Sheriff stated that his idea of a county flag was it should be "clear, uncomplicated and instantly recognisable".

The winning design, announced in March 2008, was by Jeremy Bentall, of Cheltenham. The field of the flag is apple-green for a rural county. Over it is a blue St George-style cross for the river Severn, edged in cream for the local Cotswold stone.

19. Gloucestershire County Flag

Lancashire

Lancashire has for some years used a red rose on a white

flag, but the Flag Institute was not prepared to register it as it was the flag of the Town of Montrose, dating back to the 16th Century. Discussions with the Friends of Real Lancashire in 2008 resulted in a new design with a gold background, red and gold being the livery colours of the county. The rose is a single rose, unlike Yorkshire's double rose.

20. Lancashire County Flag

Dorset

Dorset has used the most democratic method of selecting a flag, following the example of Orkney. The local press and county council cooperated to hold a competition to generate possible designs. The entries were then whittled down to a shortlist of four, using the design criteria that had been published as part of the competition. The shortlisting panel included the Vice Lord Lieutenant, the High Sheriff, the editors of the two local papers that had

helped organize the competition, myself and two members of the Dorset Youth Parliament.
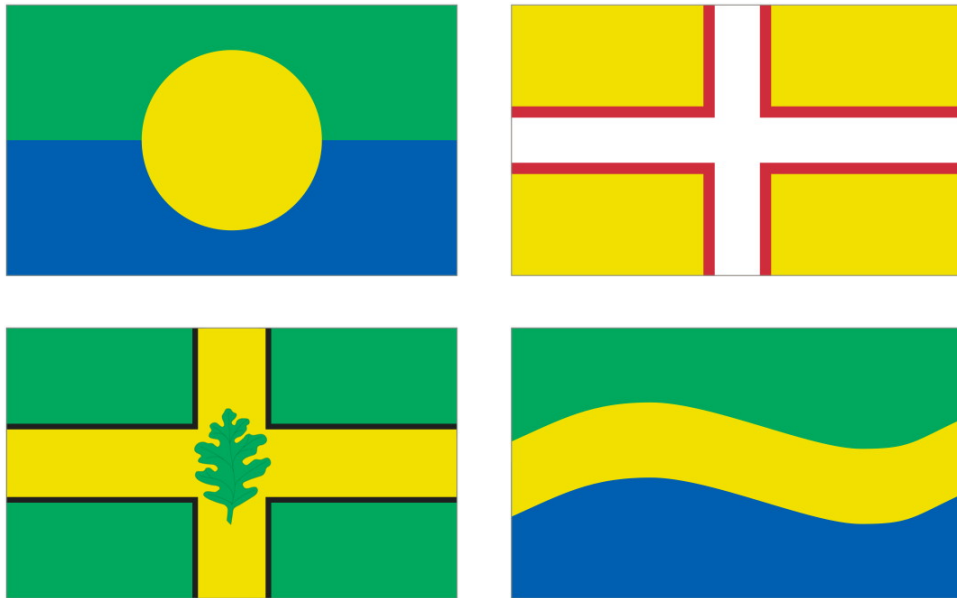
21. Dorset Shortlist

The next step was to organize a public vote in the county, with votes accepted by email, by post or in special voting boxes in local libraries. The count took place on 16 September 2008 in County Hall, supervised by a returning officer.

The winning design was created by Stephen Coombs and Dave White and has two names, St Wite's Cross and the Dorset Cross.
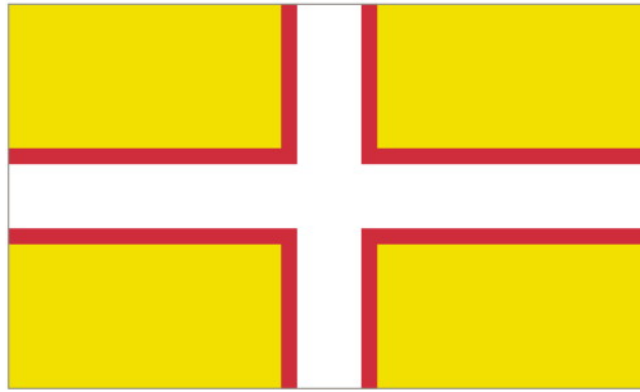
22. Dorset County Flag

Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire County Council has followed the Northumberland model and given its own flag to the people of the county. Under the leadership of Robert Gordon, the council passed a resolution on 19th November 2008: "This Council has, for the better representation of the County of Hertfordshire and its people, decided that the banner of the County Council's arms, namely 'Barry wavy of eight Azure and Argent an Inescutcheon Or charged with a Hart lodged proper' is a fitting and proper emblem for the county and its people and will from this day be the County flag of Hertfordshire. The use of the full achievement of arms, with supporters and mural crown as a crest, is still restricted to the County Council and those specifically authorised by it."

23. Hertfordshire County Flag

Isle of Wight

The Isle of Wight Flag Committee, in association with the County Press newspaper, organized a public competition to design a flag for the island. They received over 350 entries. These were whittled down to a shortlist of four designs which the public then had an opportunity to vote on.

24. Isle of Wight Shortlist

The winning design, by John Graney, features a stylized map of the Island over wavy lines indicating the importance of the sea to the Island.
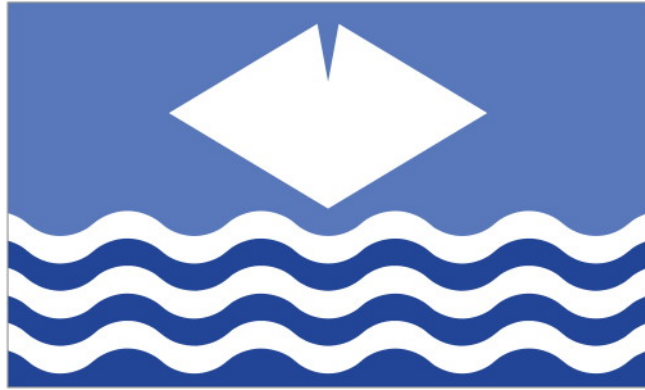
25. Isle of Wight Island Flag

26. Derek Bean and John Graney Raising the Flag

East Anglia

One region has a registered flag, that of East Anglia. This traditional design is St. George's Cross defaced with a blue shield bearing three gold crowns, the arms of East

Anglia, derived from the Wuffingas dynasty which ruled in Saxon times. The flag was designed by the London Society of East Anglians in the 1900's.

27. East Anglia Regional Flag

PROPOSED COUNTY FLAGS

There are several counties in the process of selecting their flag or for which proposals have been made.

Sussex Proposal

In June I headed a judging panel for a flag of Sussex. The competition was organized by BBC Southern Counties. The winning design, by Martin Shrimpton of Brighton & Hove, features the colours of West and East Sussex, the six gold martlets of Sussex, and a wavy gold and blue line that represents the Sussex Downs and Coast. The twin modern counties have yet to register the flag.

28. Sussex Proposal

Hampshire Competition

The local press in Hampshire are organizing a competition to generate designs for their county flag. So far the Hampshire competition has received over seventy designs. The Hampshire Hog is proving a popular motif. The local council has so far shown a lack of interest in helping with the creation of a county flag.
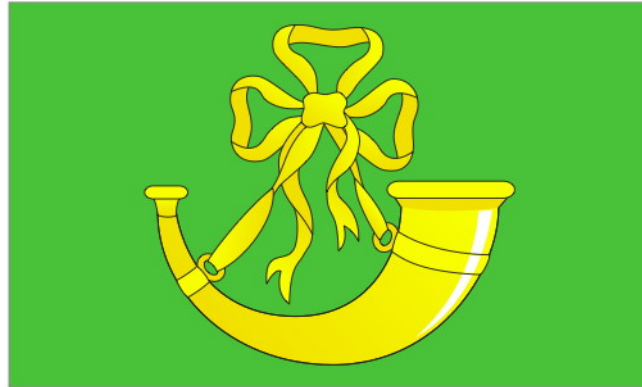

29. Map of Hampshire

Huntingdonshire Proposal

Richard Barnes of the Huntingdonshire Society has devised a flag for their county. It is based on the small

flag held by the lion in the crest of the old county council's arms.

30. Huntingdonshire Proposal

Suffolk Proposal

Bill Bulstrode, a supporter of the campaign to have St. Edmund made patron saint of England, has proposed this design for Suffolk. It uses the badge of St. Edmund, an East Anglian king, on a blue shield on a St. George's Cross, very similar to East Anglia. The badge is a gold crown pierced by two arrows in recognition of St. Edmund's martyrdom. This is probably too similar to the East Anglian flag to be accepted, but one possibility is to simplify the design to blue with the badge in gold.

31. Suffolk Proposal

TOWN & VILLAGE FLAGS

I've been discussing county flags but towns and even villages are beginning to show interest in having flags of their own and two competitions have already been held.

Petersfield

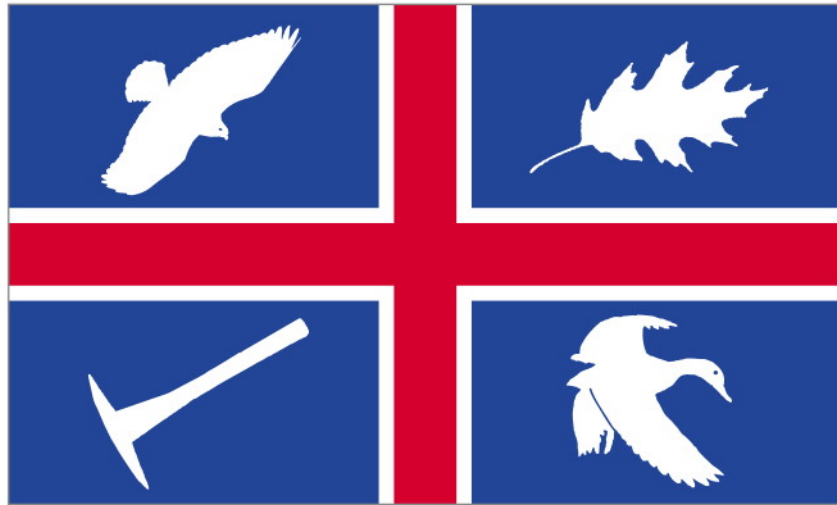This is the flag chosen for the market town of Petersfield in Hampshire.

32. Petersfield Town Flag

Wroxton

And this is the flag chosen by the village of Wroxton in

Oxfordshire.

33. Wroxton Village Flag

SUMMARY

As you can see, county flags are an exciting area of British vexillology with new developments happening all the time. This is a real case of people-power, with most of the designs coming from the people of the counties themselves. The Flag Institute is working with many of the counties to try and ensure that we get good quality designs that are distinguishable from other counties.

Over the past few years several significant events have contrived to make people much more conscious of their culture and identity. The growth in importance of the EU in our everyday affairs, UK devolution, the marginalization of traditional counties by the creation of

unitary authorities, have all had an impact. And in many parts of the UK, we're still coming to terms with the changes brought about by the more multicultural nature of our communities. This has all taken time to embed itself within our nation's consciousness, but now it has, and one manifestation is people's wish to have a clear focus for their national and local identity, and their common purpose as a community. County flags are providing a striking, dynamic, colourful, cheap and effective means to achieve this. They're important, they're culturally significant, they're here to stay!