

YACHTING FLAG LORE

LtCol E. Bruce Starrett ED, (RL)

CONTENTS

PART 1	Origins
PART 2	Australian National Flag and Ensigns
PART 3	Burpees and other Flags
PART 4	Positions of Flags
PART 5	Dressing Ship, Half Mast and Saluting

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YACHTING FLAG LORE

PART 1 - ORIGINS

Down through the ages there have been three essential marks of identity in a ship. Regardless of anything they chose to fly In the way of other flags, a vessel has usually always indicated:

1. Her Country
2. Her Fleet
3. Her Master

This has developed a protocol for ship's flags which in turn provides a precedence for yachts.

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Her Country | The Ensign |
| 2. Her Fleet (or Club) | The Burgee |
| 3. Her Owner | The House Flag |

After that come others as required:

- Courtesy Flags
- City Flags such as the Greater Sydney Ensign
- Other Burgees

The positions in which they are flown is covered later in this article.

COLOURS

This is a general term describing any flag which is flown to denote the nationality of a ship. These include National Flags, Ensigns, Standards (armorial bearings of a person entitled to such e.g. the Royal Family) and Distinguishing Flags (showing rank, appointment etc authorised by the Head of State). They are said to be worn by a ship, but may also be said to be flown in a ship or at a place. Other types of flags are only described as being flown, never as worn.

ENSIGNS

The Ensign is a distinguishing flag worn by a vessel to show her nationality. The word ensign comes from the Latin "Insignia" - a distinguishing token, emblem or badge.

In general Australia follows the British system which, as far as is known, dates back to about the middle of the sixteenth century. Initially the Ensign was a flag with the Cross of St George or the Cross of St Andrew in the canton to denote the ship was from England or Scotland. Later, by Royal Proclamation in 1606 at the time of the accession of James 1, these crosses were combined to form a Union Flag for use at sea; this was to be flown at the maintop although the individual crosses could still be flown from the foretop to indicate whether they came from England or Scotland. It was not until 1707 that the flag was confirmed for use on land as well as at sea and not until 1801 that the Cross of St Patrick was added to form the Union Flag as we know it.

The Union Flag was restricted to the exclusive use of H.M. Ships in 1660 but only worn whilst in harbour. In 1823 the Union Flag with a white surround was approved for use by merchant ships and later was flown at the stem-head as a Pilot Jack.

WHITE ENSIGN

After 1660 the Royal Navy had used Red, White or Blue Ensigns at sea to identify their tactical divisions. In 1864 the White Ensign, the St George's Cross with the Union Flag in the first quarter, came into general use by the Navy when the classification of Red, White and Blue Squadrons was discontinued. It is worn by H.M. Ships and at specified Royal Naval Establishments ashore, although certain British yacht clubs were given permission to wear this Ensign in 1828, this permission was withdrawn in 1859 except for the Royal Yacht Squadron.

THE BLUE ENSIGN

This is the Ensign of the Royal Naval Reserve although permission has been given by the British Admiralty and later by the British Ministry of Defence (Navy) for its use by certain yacht clubs.

A number of clubs in the Commonwealth have permission to use the Ensign in its original form and others to use the Blue Ensign (defaced), i.e. with the Club's identification or badge etc, added to it.

Clubs in Australia permitted to wear the Blue Ensign in its original form are:

- The Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron
- The Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron
- The Royal Brighton Yacht Club
- The Royal Yacht Club of Victoria
- The Royal Geelong Yacht Club
- The Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron
- The Royal Perth Yacht Club
- The Royal Queensland Yacht Club
- The Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania

Examples of clubs with the right to wear the Blue Ensign (defaced) in Sydney are:

- The Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club - With a Crown
- The Royal Prince Edward Yacht Club - With the Prince of Wales Feathers
- The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia - With the letters C.Y.C.A.
- R.A.N. Sailing Association - With a Naval Crown and the letters R.A.N.S.A.

A member of a club which has been granted this permission may then, subject to certain specific conditions, be given a warrant from that club to use the Blue Ensign.

As with the White Ensign, the Blue Ensign is a purely maritime flag and, although in general its use ashore is incorrect, it may be flown at the club houses of those yacht clubs given permission to use it.

THE RED ENSIGN

The Red Ensign in one form or another has been commonly used by British Merchantmen since about 1700. The Red Ensign now used by merchant ships was introduced at the same time as the White Ensign in 1864 and, in addition to the British Merchant Service, it is the only ensign that can be worn by all other ships and vessels belonging to H.M. subjects. British yachts were classed as merchant vessels in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 and may wear the Red Ensign whether registered or not.

Certain British yacht clubs are also authorised to use the Red Ensign (defaced).

PART 2 - AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG AND ENSIGNS

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG

On 24 April 1901 a design competition for The Flag of Australia was announced by the first Prime Minister of Australia, Edmond Barton. The winning design was officially raised on 3 September 1901, which day is now Australia National Flag Day.

The Australian Army is the protector of the Australian National Flag by which it is represented. It is worn as an Ensign on Army vessels.

The Royal Australian Navy fly the National Flag at sea only as a Battle Ensign when in combat. It is worn as a Jack in harbour when secured to a buoy or wharf, or when the Sovereign is present and naval ships are assigned special duties.

Residents of Australia may choose to fly the National Flag or the Australian Red Ensign on privately owned, unregistered small vessels.

Special days of National Commemoration for flying the Australian National Flag are.:

1 Jan	Anniversary of establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia (1901).
26 Jan	Australia Day.
- Mar	Second Monday - Commonwealth of Nations Day.
25 Apr	Anzac Day (flags flown at half mast until noon, then at the peak for the remainder of the day).
- Jun	Second Monday - Queen's Birthday celebrated (WA celebrates in Oct).
3 Sep	Australian National Flag Day - first flown on 3 Sep 1901
11 Nov	Remembrance Day (flags flown at the peak until 10.30 am, at half mast until 11.03 am then at the peak for the remainder of the day).

AUSTRALIAN RED ENSIGN

The Australian Red Ensign was adopted in 1901, proclaimed by the King in 1903, confirmed under the Navigation Act 1912 and again confirmed in the Flags Act 1953. It is the proper flag to be flown by merchant vessels registered at an Australian port. It may also be flown by unregistered vessels and small craft, the property of residents of Australia.

The ensign is flown only at sea and never on land unless with express permission.

AUSTRALIAN WHITE ENSIGN

The Royal Australian Navy adopted its own White Ensign after World War II and it was first flown on 1 March 1967 during the Vietnam War. It is used only by the Navy in ships and at shore establishments.

THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE ENSIGN

In December 1946, King George VI approved a distinctive light blue ensign for use by the Royal Australian Air Force. This ensign incorporated the Southern Cross with the Commonwealth Star and replaced the Royal Air Force Ensign which had been in use in Australia since 1922. In 1981 the leaping kangaroo was placed at the centre of the Ensign's roundel The Ensign is flown at RAAF establishments and worn on RAAF vessels.

THE AUSTRALIAN SHIPPING REGISTRATION BILL

This bill was introduced into Parliament on 22 May 1980 and provided for the establishment of an Australian Register of Ships. The Government at first proposed that the National Flag should replace the Red Ensign as the proper colours for all civilian vessels, whether registered or not. However, after further consideration, it was announced on 21 August 1980 that Australian merchant ships will continue to fly the Australian Red Ensign as their national colours. Also, that yachts and other civilian vessels outside the merchant service will be allowed to fly either the Australian National Flag or the Australian Red Ensign and that yachts holding a warrant for the use of the British Blue Ensign could continue to wear this ensign.

YACHT ENSIGNS

When racing, the ensign should not be worn after the Preparatory Signal and during the race. This is to signify that for that period the yacht is subject to the International Sailing Federation (I.S.A.F) Rules.

A yacht having a warrant to fly a special ensign should always fly the burgee of the club through which the ensign has been authorised.

If a yacht owner is a member of more than one club he should normally fly the ensign and burgee of the senior club in that port unless he is sailing from one of his other clubs, when that ensign should be used

If the owner of a yacht is a member of several clubs, but is a Flag Officer of one of them, he should use the flag officer's burgee and ensign of the club of which he is a flag officer in preference to others.

Seniority in clubs is difficult to define in detail, but a guide can be taken from the ensign the club is entitled to use:

1. White Ensign
2. Blue Ensign
3. Blue Ensign (defaced)
4. Red Ensign (defaced)
5. Red Ensign

PART 3 - BURGEES AND OTHER FLAGS

BURGEE

Each club has its own burgee, a pendant bearing the colours or special device of the club. All members of the club may fly the burgee unless specifically disallowed.

The Commodore of the club is entitled to a burgee with two tails (a swallow tail) with the same colour or device. The Vice Commodore has a similar swallow tail burgee with one ball in the upper corner of the hoist. The Rear Commodore has the same with two ball shapes next to the hoist.

When racing, yachts should not fly a burgee for the same reason that the ensign is not flown.

HOUSE FLAG

The owner of a yacht may fly his own House Flag with a device of his own design provided it does not infringe the Merchant Shipping Act.

GIN PENDANT

The Gin Pendant is a social flag and, when flown, indicates that the owner is "At Home" and guests are invited for a drink. It consists of a pendant of the same shape as a numeral pendant divided into three equal divisions, green, white, green with a cocktail glass shape in green on the central white section.

COURTESY FLAGS

When visiting foreign waters, the National Ensign of the host country should be displayed. This is usually a smaller sized flag than that vessel's ensign and is normally hoisted from the starboard spreader. This position is understood and acceptable in all countries.

Foreign vessels visiting Australia should fly the Australian National Flag as the courtesy flag.

QUARANTINE FLAG

The Quarantine Flag is Code Flag "Q" and flown on entering a foreign port or returning home from abroad to indicate there are no health problems aboard and that a clearance is required. It also serves to indicate to Customs that the yacht has been in foreign waters and requires a Custom's inspection.

DISTRESS

Distress signals can be made by flags in two ways:

- (1) Display Code Flags "N" over "C".
- (2) Hoist the Ensign upside down.

RACING FLAG

In the past a Racing Flag was required to be flown at the masthead whilst racing. This has not been a mandatory requirement for some time. If used, it is flown from the backstay or at the masthead.

PROTEST FLAG

When racing, a protest flag (Code Flag "B") should be flown in the rigging by a protester as soon as possible after an incident occurs to indicate that a protest is going to be lodged.

INFRINGEMENT FLAG

During a race the Code Flag "I" is flown by a yacht to acknowledge an infringement of the rules.

YACHT RACING SIGNALS

A number of International Code flags are used in racing. For example the Code Flag "P" is used in yacht racing as a Preparatory signal and indicates that racing rules apply from that time. It is flown from the committee boat normally five minutes before the start. Warning Signals (five minutes before the Preparatory) and Start Signals indicate the Class starting.

PART 4 - POSITIONS OF FLAGS

Certain flags have recognised positions, but for others it is a matter of matching flags in order of importance with available positions which are also graded in order of importance.

POSITION ONE

Designation of the after end of the ship for the Country's Flag was well established by the Romans and so it is still regarded. The Romans provided an area in their ships for VIP'S, decorated with statues of their gods and saints called "Pupae" on the after deck. Possibly the term Poop Deck originated from this word. To this day the after section of the ship has special significance, e.g. the Navy's Quarter Deck - the area in which the Ensign is located.

The most commonly accepted location for the Number One position is on a staff at the transom. However, with the advent of fore and aft rigging this became a problem as the boom of the after mast was apt to knock the flagstaff off the transom. The problem was overcome by transferring the ensign from the stern to either the peak of the after mast, the peak of the sail in the case of gaff rigged vessels or two thirds of the way up the backstay.

This arrangement is used on most shore establishments where the flagpole includes a gaff from which the Ensign is flown.

For the various types of yachts the Number One position is recognised as.:

- For Sloop, Cutter or Schooner - At the transom.
- For Ketch or Yawl - At the transom if possible, otherwise at the peak of the mizzen mast.
- For a Gaff Rigged yacht - At the peak of the gaff or at the transom.

POSITION TWO

The second position of importance is the peak of the mainmast. This is where the yacht's Burgee is normally flown, however, when not used the House Flag may be flown here.

POSITION THREE

The third position of importance is:

- (1) The starboard spreader of a sloop.
- (2) The mizzen mast of a ketch or yawl if the Ensign is flown from a staff at the transom, or the starboard spreader of the main mast when the Ensign is flown from the mizzen.
- (3) The fore mast of a schooner.

The House Flag is normally flown from this position, but it would have to take second place to a Courtesy Flag.

POSITION FOUR

The fourth position of importance is:

- (1) The port spreader of a sloop.
- (2) The starboard spreader of a ketch or yawl unless it is already used, in which case it would be the port spreader.
- (3) The starboard spreader of a schooner.

The Greater Sydney Ensign would normally be flown in this position.

POSITION FIVE

The fifth position of importance is;

- (1) The port spreader of a ketch or yawl, if free.
- (2) The port spreader of a schooner.

GENERAL

The following are flags which may be flown by yachts under various circumstances, e.g. -

(1) A sloop on the register of The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia on a cruise to Fiji arrives at the Port of Suva.

The yacht flies:

- a. The CYCA defaced Blue Ensign on a staff at her transom.
- b. The CYCA Burgee at her masthead.
- c. The National Ensign of Fiji at her starboard spreader.
- d. The Code Flag. "Q" at her port spreader.

(2) A ketch on the register of The Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron is anchored at Coasters Retreat in Pittwater. Her owner is "At Home" and guests are invited for drinks.

The yacht flies:

- a. The Blue Ensign in its original form on a staff at the transom.
- b. The Burgee of RSYS at her main masthead.
- c. The owners House Flag at the mizzen masthead.
- d. The Gin Pendant at the starboard spreader of the mainmast.

(3) The Commodore of RAN Sailing Association sails his yawl to the Clubhouse of RSYS for a social event, he is also a member of RSYS.

The yacht flies:

- a. The Blue Ensign defaced with a Naval Crown and the letters RANSA on a staff at the transom.
- b. The Commodore's swallow tail Burgee at main masthead.

FLAGS AT CLUBHOUSES

The flying of ensigns and burgees at yacht and sailing clubs is recognised as an extension of their use in the same way as the Australian White Ensign is flown at RAN Shore Establishments.

Clubhouses normally have a flagstaff representing a ship's mast with yard arms and a gaff providing for the ensign to be flown at the gaff and the burgee from the flagstaff.

If it is desired to extend a courtesy to another club, the burgee of the visiting club may be flown at the starboard yardarm. In the case of an overseas club, the National Maritime Ensign should be flown at the starboard yardarm and the club burgee at the port yardarm.

Procedures for hoisting and lowering flags on a club flagstaff are the same as for yachts.

PART 5 - DRESSING SHIP, HALF MAST AND SALUTING

DRESSING SHIP

On special days such as Sovereign's Birthdays, National Days and Regattas a yacht may dress ship whilst at anchor.

Flags of the International Code are strung together so that as far as possible square flags and pendants are interspersed with some regard being given to the combination of colours. Ensigns, racing flags or private flags are not included in this dressing but remain in their normal places. Although it is acceptable for the flags and pendants to be arranged in no particular order, the approved order reading from the bow is:

E, Q, P3, G, P8, Z, P4, W, P6, P, P1, I, Code, T, Y, B, X, 1st, H, 3rd,
D, F, 2nd, U, A, O, M, R, P2, J, PO, N, P9, K, P7, V, P5, L, C, S

They should be extended from stem to stern over all mastheads. In a single masted vessel the line from the bow to the masthead could finish with the 3rd substitute and the line from the masthead be carried on from code flag D. In two masted vessels the line between masts starts with Y and finishes with O.

On National Days, when dressed, the Ensign can be flown at each masthead as well as the staff at the stern. The Burgee and House Flag may then be flown at a lesser position.

Under sail, yachts are not dressed in this way but may fly an Ensign at each masthead as well as at the staff.

When dressing ship abroad the Ensign of that country should be at the main masthead.

HOISTING FLAGS

Ensigns and other appropriate flags should be hoisted (Colours made), at 0800 hrs each day or as soon as the crew go aboard, and lowered at sunset or when leaving the yacht. Time is taken from the Navy, official sunset or your own assessment of sunset. Ensign, Burgee, Courtesy Flag, House Flag etc. go up and down together if there are sufficient crew, otherwise the Ensign precedes the others. When dressing ship, the dressing flags ideally go up and down at the same time as the Ensign.

At sea the Ensign and Burgee may be kept flying day and night, however, to save wear and tear they are often taken down and only displayed for recognition purposes. On entering a port by day or night they are kept flying until the yacht is secured.

HALF MAST

To bring the Ensign to half mast for mourning it is raised first to the truck then lowered to the half mast position, about two thirds of the way up the staff. It is then raised to the truck before lowering.

SALUTES

When, as a mark of courtesy, the Ensign is to be dipped in salute it should be lowered slowly one third of the way down then returned to the truck after it has been acknowledged.

When the Ensign is worn on a small staff at the stern and the above method is not viable, the practice has been to remove the staff from its socket then slowly lower it to the horizontal. After acknowledgment it is returned to its original position.