

Recording Army Standards Guidons and Colours

General

Since very early times, it has been customary for military units to carry a flag or other emblem, partly to distinguish each one from any other and partly to act as a rallying point for the members of the unit, in the confusion of close quarter battle. Carrying the emblem was something of an honour and of course, uncommonly dangerous in battle. For a combination of these reasons the emblem itself began to attract a certain additional importance as a symbol not only of identity, but also of sacrifice. Eventually this was recognised, at first privately and later by War Office or Ministry of Defence order, emblems came to be consecrated when first presented. When, after a period, they were taken out of service upon replacement, they came to be "laid up" in churches or other public places. Previously, they had been retained by the Colonel of a Regiment (the usual practice upon disbandment, for example) or they were destroyed. We know or can find out when, where and by whom, most emblems were presented to army units over the last 150 years. We know some details from earlier periods; we doubt there is anything much around from the 17th century but we do not propose to try to go back before 1660! The question now is: what is still with us, where is it and in what condition? When we have the answers, we can make information available and we can consider what useful purpose can be served with it.

Descriptions

In the British Army, there are three types of textile emblem or flag. They are:

- 1 **Standards**
Either square or oblong flags of silk of different colours and with a variety of emblems painted or embroidered on them. Standards which were and are carried by cavalry units are usually quite small, around 2 feet square or a little more.
- 2 **Guidons**
Oblong flags with a swallow tail of silk and of various colours and designs as with Standards. Guidons were and are carried by light cavalry units and are usually over 2 feet on staff.
- 3 **Colours**
Larger flags which vary in size from 6 feet square to an oblong measuring over 3 feet on the staff. There are two basic designs: one is the Union Flag; the other may be of any colour except that if it is black or white it will also have a broad red cross. Each type may have a variety of painted or embroidered devices on it.

Note: Colours are laid up in pairs, called a Stand.

This consists of the Queen's Colour which may have battle honours from the 1st and 2nd World Wars, and the Regimental Colour which could have battle honours from other campaigns.