



A research note on the history of ships, places, organisations and events associated with the
Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA)

Heraldry of the RFA

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1. Background

Over the centuries mariners have always required symbolisms that would add to the individuality of their ships. Early Northern European men-of-war used figure-heads and probably to a lesser degree devices on their sails. The Vikings did so and it is reasonable to assume that the 'English' ships that fought them did so too. There is evidence, eg, from paintings, that English ships used both these methods of symbolism at the time of the Hundred Years' War. It is quite possible that in this they were continuing a practice dating back to the time of Alfred-the-Great and possibly earlier.

About the middle of the 16th century ensigns began to be used by men-of-war and the ensign in Elizabeth's Navy and seemingly until about 1600 was largely individual to the ship. It was not necessarily any indication of nationality. It seems to have been a counterpart of the regimental, or company, colour used in the land service.



The use of 'individual figure-heads' helped to identify ships during the period when it was not the practice to mark up their names. In the latter part of the 17th century, however, there was a tendency to use a standard 'figure-head of a lion' as the mark of a man-of-war. During Anne's reign this was established as uniform and continued into the first half of the 18th century. From circa 1760 the 'figure-head' was again used to symbolise the name of the ship and for some 100 years this system continued until rendered obsolescent by the introduction of straight-stemmed and latter mastless ships. For a period during the French Revolutionary War, British men-of-war were for economic reasons built without figure-heads. However, in most, if not all, such cases, a figure-head was added by the officers and crew.

Instances of some ornamentation at the stem head, and the mounting, in a few cases, of a figure-head, occur in the Royal Navy until the beginning of the 20th century. HMS BARFLEUR (1892) and HMS ODIN (1902) are understood to be the last large and last small ships of the RN to be fitted with figure-heads.

As figure-heads began to go out the use of badges began to come in, seemingly shortly after the Crimean War. These were used, as now, on boats, on letter headed paper etc.

In February 1879, J K Laughton from the Royal Naval College Greenwich, presented a paper at the Royal United Service Institution. In this he suggested that the Navy might, with advantage, follow the example of the Army. "A regiment has, in addition to the national flag or Queen's Colour, its own flag – the regimental colour on

which are inscribed the name of the regiment's distinguished services ... could not each ship have, in addition to the ensign, a flag of her own recalling the glories of her name ... it would have very real value in teaching and continually reminding our seamen and our officers of the grandest tradition of our Service ... in this very material age we are too apt to overlook the force of sentiment".

After this records of the War Honours of individual ships began to be published. The Admiralty took much interest in these records and consequently issued to ships, on commissioning, a record of the service of their predecessors. Shortly before World War One they authorised the placing of a scroll of battle honours on the quarterdeck or in some other suitable place.

In November 1918 the question of the future of ships' badges was raised officially. It was proposed that badges should be as representative and unchanging as those of Army regiments. Existing badges should be reviewed and those that were considered unsatisfactory removed. New badges should be officially authorised and that ships' Battle Honours should be reviewed.

In Board Minute 461 of 7 November 1918, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty appointed to scrutinise Ships' Badges and War Honours. This Committee consisted of:

- Naval Secretary (as Chairman)
- DTSD
- Admiralty Librarian and



- Fourth member nominated by the Controller – Commander G H H Holden RN serving with the Director of Naval Equipment.

They were tasked to consider and report to the Board upon those questions generally and to recommend a procedure for securing official control of the selection of Ship's Badges and Mottos and of the record of War Honours in the Scroll of HM Ships.

Within weeks (5 December 1918) Admiralty Board minute 519 recorded that they had considered the procedures recommended by the Committee. This covered research (to be undertaken by the Librarian), badge designs should be prepared by a special adviser on heraldry (working in conjunction with the Librarian and DNE) with executive action for carrying the designs into effect resting with the Controller's Department. It was also recommended that an adviser on heraldry and designer of devices should be appointed. A standing committee to be known as the *Ships' Badges and Mottoes Committee* was set up, consisting of:

- The Naval Secretary (as Chairman)
- The Admiralty Librarian
- A representative of the Controller's Department, and
- The Admiralty Adviser on Heraldry.

Interestingly, it was suggested that the procedures in force with the War Office regarding the grant of War Honours to be added to a Regimental Colour should be applied, with the necessary adaptations, to the recording of War Honours in the Scroll of H M Ships. At the same time the Board approved a draft Admiralty Order 'Battle

Honours, Badges and Mottoes for HM Ships' – so introducing the term 'Battle Honours' and accepting that this was the naval counterpart of the military Regimental Colour.

Office Memorandum 339 entitled 'Battle Honours, Badges and Mottoes for H M Ships', dated 16 December 1918 announced that Major Charles J ffoulkes RM, Curator and Secretary of the Imperial War Museum was to be the Admiralty Advisor on Heraldry and Designer of Devices.

Almost immediately the Committee began with the design and issue of badges with over 250 designs and mottos being produced between 1919 and 1921. Initially Messrs Martyn of London and Cheltenham carved the patterns. The brass badges themselves were cast, coloured and completed in HM Dockyard Chatham. Since the closure of Chatham it is understood this responsibility rests with HM Dockyard Devonport.

From some 'incomplete records' it appears that in early 1919 The Ships' Badges and Mottoes Committee was informed that the College of Heralds had often designed badges for HM Ships and having learnt of the appointment of the Committee expressed a wish to be informed of decisions as to badges. On 14 March 1919 the Admiralty formerly wrote the Registrar of the College about the appointment of the Committee and stated "they would be glad to learn whether the College of Heralds would care to appoint one of its members to keep in touch with the Committee, in order that badges issued to ships by the Admiralty may be recorded in the College, and to obviate any danger of overlapping



between Admiralty Ships Badges, and Crests granted to persons by the College". The Admiralty also questioned any fees that would be raised by the College.

Since 1934, when Clarenceux King of Arms (Sir Arthur Cochrane) was appointed Adviser on ships' badges, in succession to Charles ffoulkes, the post has been held by an officer of, what is now, the College of Arms.

Reportedly the first ship to have an official Admiralty approved badge was the destroyer HMS WARWICK in 1919. Subsequently nearly every ship and submarine has had a badge.

For a period during World War Two, a 1940 Admiralty Fleet Order indicated that badges were not to be authorised for:

- for corvettes,
- for the majority of small vessels,
- for 'numbered' submarines or
- for merchant ships converted to auxiliary warships.

2. Approved RFA ships' badges

Ships' Badges are used for decorative purposes, eg, bridge front, brow gangway awnings with RFA 'NAME', ceremonial harbour lifebuoys, official ship's stationery.

Ships' Badges (or crests as they are *incorrectly* called) are official. A committee on behalf of the Board of Admiralty/Navy Board approves the individual designs.

The *Ships Names and Badges Committee** was formed in 1983 with the amalgamation of the Ships Names Committee (founded in 1913) and the Ships Badges and

Mottoes Committee (founded in 1918). The Committee's role is to advise the Board on all matters concerned with Ship Badges, and also for submitting designs when these are required. The Naval Heraldry Adviser may be called upon to prepare designs.

It is generally understood that ships' badges were first authorised for **Royal Fleet Auxiliaries** circa 1962. Some badges include a motto. For Example, RFA ARGUS: motto Oculi Omnium - They eyes of all (Psalm 145).

In 1976, ships badges were standardised and with this the shape of RFA badges was approved as 'pentagonal'. Irrespective of shape, the badge has a rim of stylised rope and is surmounted by the Naval Crown. Below the Crown is a panel bearing the ship's name in CAPITAL LETTERS.

*Since July 2000 the **Ships Names and Badges Committee** has four standing members

The Captain, Naval Ship Acceptance (Chairman)

Head of Naval Historical Branch, Naval Staff

Naval Regional Officer, Scotland and Northern Ireland

The Admiralty Librarian (Secretary)

The Committee may call upon additional specialist attendees, such as:

Naval Adviser on Heraldry

Directorate of Corporate Communications (Navy)

Representatives from the staffs of various naval commands, eg, Commander-in-Chief Fleet and Commodore RFA.



Example of RFA ship's badge and heraldic description.
RFA APPLELEAF, tanker, this Sealed Pattern was approved 10 December 1972; heraldic description: Blue, an apple slipped and leaved gold.

Example of RFA ship's badge and heraldic description that was inherited from the original HM Ship badge and reformatted to standard applied to RFAs.

RFA ARGUS, air training ship, this Sealed Pattern was approved 02 December 1919; heraldic description: Green, a peacock statant gold. Motto [*Occuli omnium: The eyes of all* (Psalm 145)]





3. Badge of Commodore Royal Fleet Auxiliary

This Sealed Pattern was approved 31 August 1994;
Heraldic description: White; the broad pennant of the Commodore Royal Fleet Auxiliary flying from a wooden flagstaff all proper.



4. Amphibious Warfare Badge (funnel or superstructure badge)



The origins of the amphibious warfare badge goes back to the World War Two and the Combined Operations Headquarters. This HQ was staffed by all three services, while independent of all of them and under command of a Director of Combined Operations. Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Roger Keyes was appointed as first Director in July 1940; he was succeeded October 1941 by Commodore Lord Louis Mountbatten with the title 'Adviser on Combined Operations'.

In March 1942 this title was altered to Chief of Combined Operations. It was also decided that the Chief of Combined Operations should attend meeting of the Chiefs-of-Staff as a full member.

In 1942, Lord Louis Mountbatten, asked his staff to submit a design for a 'badge' to represent the Combined Operations Command. Reportedly it was designed by Lieutenant D A Grant RNVR and it represents all three



arms of HM Forces – Royal Navy and Royal Marines with a stockless anchor, the British Army with a 'Tommy Gun' and Royal Air Forces with an eagle in flight. Known as the Combined Operations (CO) Badge, details on wearing it and obtaining supplies were first published by in 1942.

On 01 April 1948 Combined Operations Headquarters was placed under the administration of the Ministry of Defence and in 1951 it was renamed the Amphibious Warfare Headquarters.

In April 1952 Commander Amphibious Warfare Training Squadron informed C-in-C Portsmouth that he was painting-up the Amphibious Warfare badge on each side of the funnel of HM Ships MEON and REGGIO LST(A) – this was to be in the form of a 3-ft diameter disc in red on a navy blue ground. For the LCT(8)s it was to be placed on each side of the superstructure. Although the badge originated as a sleeve badge and later as a flag this was the first example of it being painted-up and the C-in-C Portsmouth felt the markings should be approved by the Admiralty. He filed a submission on 15 May 1952. Responses were interesting. On 03 February 1953 chairman of the Ships' Badges Committee recorded that the Admiralty should not agree to use of the badge in this way. However, Director of Tactical & Staff Duties Division did not agree and was supported by Director of Operations Division. In May 1953, over a year since C-in-C Portsmouth's initial request, the Head of Military Branch indicated that approval should be assumed.

29 August 1983 a sealed pattern for Commodore Amphibious Warfare (COMAW) badge was approved. Later the badge of Commander Amphibious Task Group.

The badge is carried on the funnel of all his ships. Although it has proved difficult to pin-down an acceptable date, this badge appears to have been applied to RFA 'SIR' class Landing Ships Logistics in the latter half of the 1990s and has been seen on the superstructure of 'BAY' class boats.

5. Badge of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service



College of Arms
March 1985

A. Blin Co.
Garter King of Arms



This badge was approved by HM The Queen, March 1985; heraldic description: Upon an oval cartouche azure a fouled anchor supported on either side by the Sons of Neptune (mermen) armed with a trident argent the cartouche environed of a circlet or inscribed with the name ROYAL FLEET AUXILIARY SERVICE and adorned in base with a naval crown or sails argent pennants flying guies.

Annex One: Approved RFA Badges

Royal Fleet Auxiliaries with approved badges and the date the Pattern was approved are given in this Annex. Where the date is before 1962, it means that the RFA inherited a ship name and that ship had a previously approved Badge, eg, RFA ARGUS, HMS ARGUS (12/12/1919) and the name was first carried by a RN ship in 1799; RFA RESOURCE, HMS RESOURCE (4/7/1927) and the name was first carried by a RN ship in 1778.

RFA ship name	Ship type	Sealed Pattern date first approved
ARGUS	air training ship	1919
APPLELEAF	support tanker	1972
BACCHUS	general store ship	1962
BAYLEAF	support tanker	1968
BLACK RANGER	small tanker	1964
BLACK ROVER	small fleet tanker	1973
BLUE RANGER	small tanker	1964
BLUE ROVER	small fleet tanker	1969
BRAMBLELEAF	support tanker	1978
CARDIGAN BAY	landing ship dock	1953
CHERRYLEAF	support tanker	1973
COMRFA	<i>Commodore RFA</i>	1994



DERWENTDALE	mobile reserve tanker	1968	LYNESS	air stores support ship	1968
DEWDALE	mobile reserve tanker	1967	MOUNTS BAY	landing ship dock	1949
DILIGENCE	forward repair ship	1952	OAKLEAF	support tanker	1986
EDDYFIRTH	coastal/harbour tanker	1977	OLEANDER	fleet tanker	r/n OLMEADA
ENGADINE	helicopter support ship	1966	OLMEDA	fleet replenishment tanker	1964
ENNERDALE	mobile reserve tanker	1969	OLNA	fleet replenishment tanker	1965
FORT AUSTIN	fleet replenishment ship	1979	OLWEN	fleet replenishment tanker	1964
FORT DUQUESNE	store ship	1967	OLYNTHUS	fleet tanker	r/n OLWEN
FORT GEORGE	auxiliary oiler replenishment	1988	ORGANGELEAF	support tanker	1963
FORT GRANGE	fleet replenishment ship	1974	PEARLEAF	support tanker	1962
FORT LANGLEY	dry cargo freighter	1964	PLUMLEAF	support tanker	1968
FORT ROSALIE	armament store ship	1964	REGENT	fleet replenishment ship	1933
FORT ROSALIE (2)	fleet replenishment ship	1964	RESOURCE	fleet replenishment ship	1927
FORT VICTORIA	auxiliary oiler replenishment	1987	RELIANT (2)	air stores support ship	1971
GREEN ROVER	small fleet tanker	1969	RELIANT (3)	Arapaho air support ship	1971
GREY ROVER	small fleet tanker	1969	RESURGENT	armament support ship	1963
GOLD RANGER	small tanker	1964	RETAINER	armament support ship	1968
GOLD ROVER	small fleet tanker	1973	ROBERT DUNDAS	coastal store carrier	1968
HEBE	general store ship	1936	ROBERT MIDDLETON	coastal store carrier	1968
LARGS BAY	landing ship dock	1952	ROWANOL	coastal/harbour tanker	1968
LYME BAY	landing ship dock	2000	SEA CENTURION	general cargo ro-ro ship	1998



SEA CHIEFTAIN	general cargo ro-ro ship	1998
<i>[badge designed, ship did not actually enter RFA service]</i>		
SEA CRUSADER	general cargo ro-ro ship	1997
SIR BEDIVERE	landing ship logistic	1971
SIR CARADOC	ro-ro landing ship	1983
SIR GALAHAD	landing ship logistic	1971
SIR GERAINT	landing ship logistic	1971
SIR LAMORAK	ro-ro landing ship	1983
SIR LANCELOT	landing ship logistic	1971
SIR PERCIVALE	landing ship logistic	1971
SIR TRISTRAM	landing ship logistic	1971
STROMNESS	stores support ship	1968
TARBATNESS	stores support ship	1968
TIDEFLOW (1)	fleet replenishment tanker	1963
TIDEFORCE	MARS fleet tanker	2013
TIDEPOOL	fleet replenishment tanker	1963
TIDERACE	MARS fleet tanker	2013
TIDERACE (2)	MARS fleet tanker	1963/2013
TIDEREACH	fleet replenishment tanker	1968
TIDESPRING (1)	fleet replenishment tanker	1962
TIDESPRING (2)	MARS fleet tanker	1962/2013

TIDESURGE (1)	fleet replenishment tanker	1968
TIDESURGE (2)	MARS fleet tanker	1968/2013
WAVE CHIEF	fleet tanker	1964
WAVE KNIGHT (1)	fleet tanker	1964
WAVE KNIGHT (2)	fleet replenishment tanker	1997
WAVE RULER (2)	fleet replenishment tanker	1997

*LARGS BAY precise date of approval not confirmed.

Annex Two: Miscellaneous

Unapproved badges – for reasons that are difficult to pinpoint a number of RFAs that were operational after 1962 were not actually awarded a Ship's badge. For example, RFA EMPIRE GULL together with a number of the wartime built FORT and WAVE class. Out of this sprung a number of unofficial badges, such as: RFAs EMPIRE GULL, FORT BEAUHARNOIS and WAVE PREMIER.





MASF and FAA badges – relative to individual Naval Air Squadrons embarked in RFAs but unusual to see them being openly displayed. The same applies to the badge of MASF – Maritime Aviation Support Force was first commissioned as an RN Unit in 2010 and provides support teams to, eg, RFAs ARGUS, FORT AUSTIN, FORT VICTORIA, WAVE class tankers and the BAY class landing ships.



Fleet Tugs – a badge collectively representing HM Fleet Tugs was approved for use in 1955. There is no evidence of it being used by RFA tugs.

NATO badges – NATO squadron badges have occasionally been placed on the funnel of individual RFAs supporting, for example, NATO standing squadrons in the Atlantic and Mediterranean:



References

- ADM1/8542/283 Ship's Badges and Mottoes Committee, 1918/19, TNA Kew
- ADM1/23826 Funnel Markings and Amphibious Warfare Badge, TNA Kew
- Admiralty Board minutes 7 November 1918
- AFO701/52 Standardisation agreement NATO – hull and funnel markings
- AFO1722/57, TNA Kew
- AFO4366/42, TNA Kew
- AWO3943, 19.12.1918 Battle Honours, Badges and Mottoes for H M Ships



Badges of His Majesty's Ships, Gieves Gallery, London, booklet supporting exhibition, December 1921

Badges and Mottos of HM Ships (memorandum by Admiralty Secretary 1 Nov 1918)

CAFO1631/42 Combined Operations

DEFE1/1773, TNA Kew

Maritime Aviation Support Force publicity leaflet (MoD) undated

Miscellaneous papers (Naval Historical Branch, Portsmouth)

Stopford T P. Badges, Admiralty Ships, Original Patterns 1919-1994. Stonefrigate, Kent ISBN 0 9529346 0 4. Two volumes – Vol I A to L, Vol II M to Z, plus short addendum.

Stopford T P. Admiralty Badges Encyclopaedia. An PC compatible interactive encyclopaedia illustrating and describing some 1,900 RN and RFA ship badges, shore establishments and Fleet Air Arm squadron badges from 1919. Published by Stonefrigate.



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