



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

## **The Queen's Colour RFA**

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The Queen's Colour RFA

### **1. Historical summary**

It is generally understood that the practise of displaying and carrying Colours or Standards originated in Ancient



Greece. From mediaeval Europe the Colour or Standard acted in a dual role of both a rallying point for troops as well as to mark, on the battlefield, the location of the commander.

Within the British Army these mediaeval standards developed into the Colours of the Infantry, the Standards of 'heavy cavalry' and the Guidons of the 'light cavalry'.

As time passed, Regiments were awarded battle honours, which were added to their Colours, Standards and Guidons. As a result they increasingly became a link to a Regiment's past and a memorial to its fallen. So significant was this that for a regiment to lose its Colour became a major disgrace. Equally the capture of an enemy's Colour was seen as a great achievement. This is why whenever a Colour is paraded, it is escorted by an armed guard and paid the highest respect by all officers and other ranks, second only to those paid to our Sovereign.

Colours are consecrated and, eg, can serve as an altar for a drumhead service. They are never destroyed. When too old to use they are replaced and then traditionally laid-up in an appropriate church or chapel. Of course today Colours are no longer carried into battle, instead they are carried in parades and reviews and at remembrance ceremonies.

## 2. Origins of The Queen's Colour

In March 2005 Mr Graham Bartram the Chief Vexillologist of the UK's Flag Institute was asked to design a *national standard for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Association* (RFAA). This was consecrated as the RFAA national standard as part of the centenary celebrations of the RFA. In May 2005 the First Sea Lord, Sir Alan West (now Lord West) approved this Standard. A 4:5 blue ensign with the badge of the RFA in the fly and a double gold scroll under the Union Flag saying RFA Centenary 1905-2005. On the use of the RFA badge – this was modified with the word Service replaced by Association. Unfortunately the Standard was not a good match to the original drawings and was considered to look 'faded or washed out'. Consequently a new national Standard was made and consecrated on 27 January 2007.



The National Standard of the RFA Association

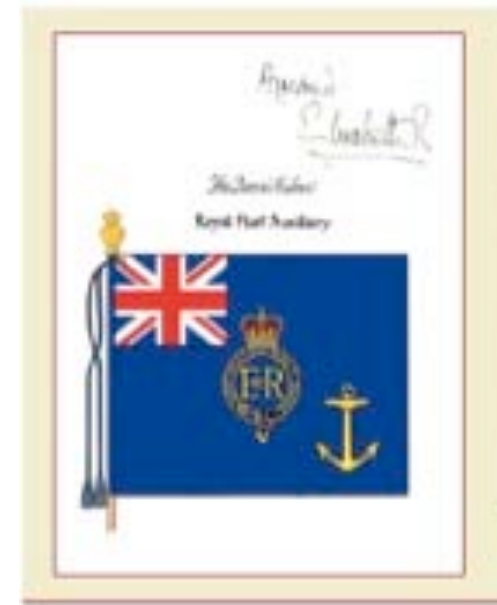


This consecration of the RFAA Standard made the Commodore RFA (Commodore Bob Thornton) explore the possibility of a Colour for the RFA. Following talks with the First Sea Lord it was agreed to discuss it with HM The Queen. She gave her approval for the idea, along with the appointment of HRH The Earl of Wessex as Commodore-in-Chief of the RFA. The Flag Institute's Chief Vexillologist drafted ideas and arranged to visit to a major manufacturer of Colours for the UK armed forces including the Royal Navy – Hobson & Sons (London) Ltd of Thundersley, Essex.

### 3. Design of The Queen's Colour RFA

Graham Bartram's design of the Colour was to complement that of the Royal Navy. Made of silk with hand embroidery work. The field is in Midnight Blue, with the Naval-pattern Union Flag forming the upper canton. The central device consists of the Royal Cypher of Her Majesty The Queen surrounded by the Garter, all ensigned by St Edward's Crown. In the lower fly is the anchor badge of the Admiralty representing the RFA. The field of Colour represent the field of the RFA's Blue Ensign, as that of the Royal Navy reflects the White Ensign.

The design, repainted by the College of Arms. Unfortunately the College get the details of the Garter wrong. They put the Crown above the Garter when it should completely overlap the top of the Garter, to match the Garter on the Queen's Colour for the Royal Navy.



Signed College of Arms painting

The College of Arms painting was approved by The Queen. The manufacturer's of the Colour (Hobson & Sons) used the RFA's digital files so the actual Colour matches the Royal Navy's style as originally intended.

### 4. Consecration of the Queen's Colour

18 July 2008 in RNB Portsmouth, aboard the 16,000 ton landing ship dock RFA LARGS BAY, HRH The Earl of Wessex KG KCVO ADC presented the Colour to the RFA. This followed an inspection of units of the Royal Navy, RFA and the Royal Logistic Corps (Port and Maritime



Regiment) who work closely with the RFA. Music was provided by the Band of HM Royal Marines Portsmouth. The ceremony was attended by former First Sea Lord, Lord West, senior officers and invited guests including members of the RFAA.

This was the first time that a Queen's Colour has been presented to a non-combatant maritime service.

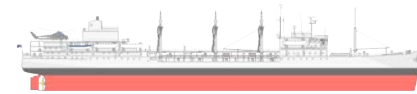


The Queen's Colour RFA being laid for it's first 'drumhead' service on RFA LARGS BAY 18 July 2008 [T A Adams]

## References

Bartram, Graham. Queen's Colour Royal Fleet Auxiliary, **Flagmaster** 128 (The Journal of the Fag Institute) September 2008

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