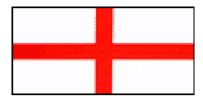# British Flag: A Short History

Scottish Flag 832 AD

White saltire (x) on blue background

Legend says that in 832 AD, an army of Scots faced a Northumbrian army. The Scottish King prayed to St. Andrew for help, and saw the white saltire of St. Andrew (the saint had been matryed on a diagonal cross) in the heavens against the blue sky. He swore that if the Scots beat the English in the battle, then St. Andrew would forever be the patron saint of Scotland.

English Flag 1277 AD

Red cross (+) on white background

The Cross of St. George symbolized England since the time of the crusades, and dates back at least to 1277 AD. On June 2, 1497 John Cabot planted it on the shore of present day Labrador. After the adoption of the King's Colors (below) it was flown on the foremast of English merchant ships, as a small identifying jack (Scottish ships flew the St. Andrew), while the larger King's Colors flew from the main mast.

King's Colors 1603-1801

Combined cross (+) and saltire (x)

King James of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth I in 1603, thus uniting England and Scotland under one ruler. To signify this union he created this flag, combining the red cross of St. George and the white saltire of St. Andrew (see flags above). This flag (the first "union" jack) flew over all England's new world colonies. Note the difference from the modern Union Jack (shown below).

Modern Union 1804-today

Present day design of Union Jack

In 1801 the old Union Flag or "King's Colors" was modified by the addition of the thin red saltire (x) of St. Patrick. This addition represents Northern Ireland. This is the national flag of the United Kingdom.

Today on British ships the jack or ensign flown today is a small red flag, with the modern union in the upper left corner.