

Tamworth

HERITAGE

Magazine
THMS-01, 2024

Staffordshire County Flag Its history and use.

by Margaret George, Staffordshire Heritage Group



Preserving the Past, Recording the Present
Safeguarding the Future



Staffordshire Heritage Group

The Staffordshire Heritage Group originated in 1994 to provide a forum for the many historically based groups in the county of Staffordshire.

The historic county includes many areas that do not correspond with the current administrative regions.. These include The Potteries, the Black Country and a number of towns and villages that have now been incorporated into Shropshire, Derbyshire Cheshire and the West Midlands. The current County Council only covers a small part of this historic county that has made major contributions to the nation.

We are an umbrella group for all the local history, genealogy and archaeology groups within Staffordshire, providing a networking hub via email, social events and meetings

We promote, maintain, and encourage good practice, research, preservation of records and historic buildings and collaboration with other interested bodies in connection with local history, genealogy and archaeology.

There are two classes of membership, Group and Individual. The majority of people are members of member groups, but any individual with an interest in our activities is welcome to join.

<http://www.staffsheritage.uk>



Tamworth Heritage Magazine

Tamworth Heritage Magazine covers all and any history and heritage from in and around Tamworth. That is Tamworth Staffordshire, but we maintain links to the other four Tamworth's around the world.

A lot of the things covered in Tamworth Heritage Magazine are about the "ordinary" people as much as notable names. This hopefully fills in the many blanks between the dates of battles, kings and MP's. Including people whose names and AKA's are so ephemeral that we don't really know who they were... outside the name they used at the time.

[Tamworth Heritage Magazine](#) works with several Tamworth [history](#), and [genealogy](#) groups but we welcome content from any source if it has a link to the Tamworth area or its people.

[The magazine is Free to download and read.](#)

Contact: Editor@TamworthHeritage.org.uk Web site www.tamworthheritage.org.uk

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Staffordshire County Flag

Its history and use.

by Margaret George, Staffordshire Heritage Group

This is the story of the official County flag of Staffordshire, its origins and action to promote its historic design.

County Flags are an important visual symbol of our regional and national identity. Over 50 British counties have a registered county flag, but Staffordshire did not until 2016

In 2015 Staffordshire County Council (SCC) released its own banner of arms for general use and applied to the [Flag Institute](#) (FI) for registration of their design as the official county flag of Staffordshire.

Staffordshire County Council Banner



The FI is the UK's national flag charity maintaining the register of official flags and works with county organisations to come up with suitable designs.

Applications for county flags must comply with the FI conditions for inclusion on to the UK Flag Registry. They may represent a city, town, urban district, village, historic county or traditional regional area, island or province. Only flags that are freely owned and used by the local community it represents, and *not subject to copyright restrictions*, may be used. **They exclude flags of modern local authorities.**

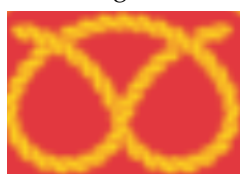
The SCC application came to the attention of the [Staffordshire Heritage Group](#) (SHG), which acts as an umbrella organisation for historically related groups within the county. The SHG did not feel that the SCC banner fully represented the historic county of Staffordshire.

County Flags must be based on their old historic counties, which for Staffordshire would encompass the Potteries, Wolverhampton, the Black Country, areas that fall outside the SCC's area, who now administer to around only 40% of

the modern county. Therefore, the SHG felt that the proposed banner of arms did not represent the much larger historic county of the past.

SHG's main objection was that the flag design put forward by the SCC includes a blue strip, or "chief", overlaid with a large gold lion. This represents the council's authority, as handed by the crown and is an extremely common emblem used on local authority flags and arms nationally and globally, which while serving well as a local council banner, does not represent a unique symbol for our county. This "chief" has been removed from other county council arms, so allowing their own traditional historic county emblems and patterns greater prominence and simplicity of design, which works well visually when flown.

However, the indisputable county emblem, the unique Stafford Knot, lacks prominence on the SCC design and is hardly visible when the flag is flying from a pole. Also, the SCC Knot is not only the wrong way round, but the shape of it has been altered from the traditional recognised version.



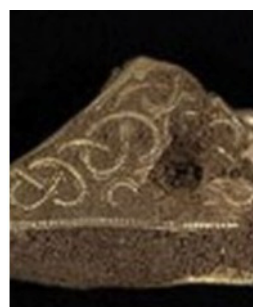
SCC knot

The SHG, along with the Association of British Counties, conducted a campaign to bring these deficiencies to people's attention. The SHG submitted an alternative design, using the pattern of chevron and knot found on the 17th century John Speed map as the actual design for the county arms and associated with the county for centuries.



Why the Stafford Knot and Chevron and what are their origins?

The gold background and red chevron comes from the coat-of-arms of the De Stafford family and used in connection with the county from at least the 17th century.



The knot has a long history as an ancient symbol unique to Staffordshire, with a

number of stories relating to its origin. A very early example of the Stafford Knot can be found on an artefact amongst the famous Staffordshire Hoard, which dates back to the 7th century indicating a link with the Knot within the county for at least thirteen hundred years!

The knot is also found on the shaft of an Anglo-Saxon stone cross within in the churchyard of Saint Peter Ad Vincula (Stoke Minster)



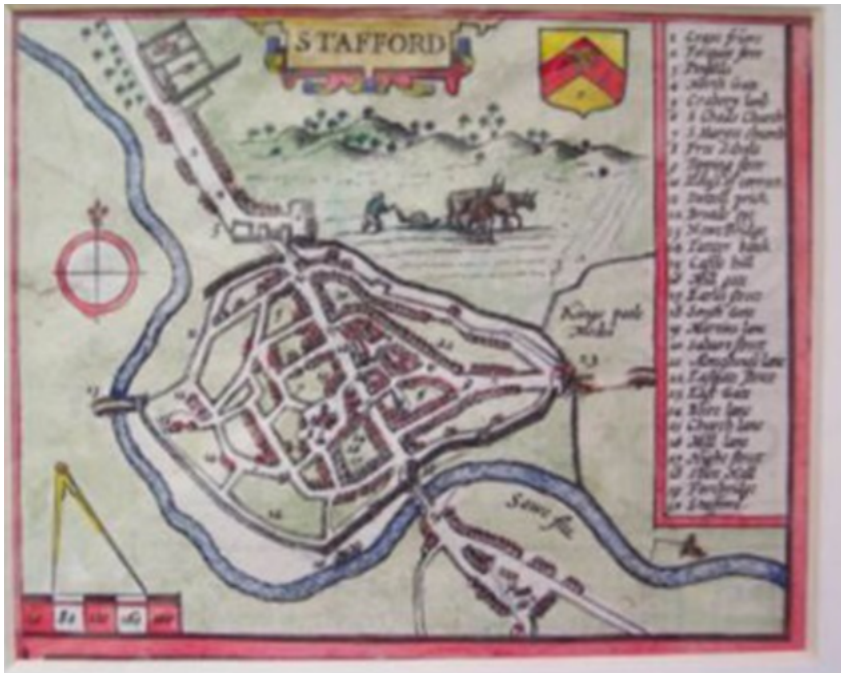
Ethelfleda, eldest daughter of Alfred the Great, defended strongholds (Burhs) that she established at Stafford and Tamworth in 913AD. She removed her girdle saying to the local lords: "With this girdle, I bind us all as one", symbolising the joining of three local areas into the newly created region of Staffordshire.



It is also suggested that the Knot forms the shape of a double 'S' representing 'Staffordshire'.

The Stafford Knot is found on the seal of Joan Stafford, Lady of Wake, a descendant of Hereward the Wake, she possibly inherited the so called "Wake Knot", which is now housed in the British Museum.

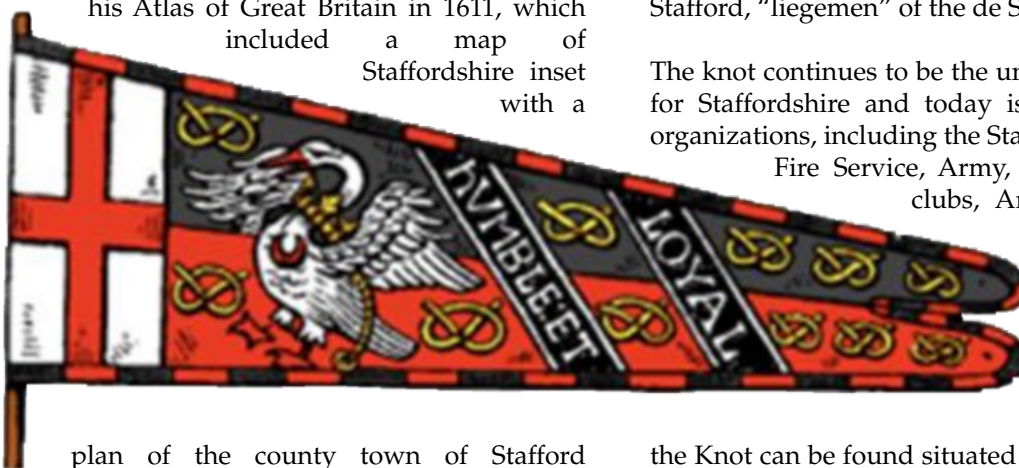
When Joan died childless in 1443, her nephew, Humphrey, Earl of Stafford adopted the Knot, to be known as the Stafford Knot, as his badge, probably just before his creation as Duke of Buckingham in 1444. The Knot is coloured gold on his standard.



Earl of Stafford's Shield and Staffordshire knot of the period



John Speed, a renowned map maker, published his Atlas of Great Britain in 1611, which included a map of Staffordshire inset with a



plan of the county town of Stafford featuring the De Stafford family arms, gold background with a red chevron, including the family badge, a gold Stafford Knot

of the county including the townsmen of Stafford, "liegemen" of the de Stafford family.

The knot continues to be the undeniable symbol for Staffordshire and today is used by many organizations, including the Staffordshire Police, Fire Service, Army, Scouts, sports clubs, Ambulance, many more shops, Burgesses and more.

Well-preserved

carvings of the Knot can be found situated either side of the medieval stonework fireplace within the great hall at Stafford Castle.

With the growth of civic organisations and liberties the Stafford Knot was increasingly adopted by the Citizens, Freeman and Burgesses



Local tradition holds that “there are no leftovers in Staffordshire”. This refers to the orientation of the Knot and which way it is displayed. Some historic images can be inconclusive, but the medieval stone carvings at Stafford Castle still survive as a clear image, which is also displayed on the SHG design as the accepted traditional orientation.

There is also a popular, but rather grisly, tale told that the story of the Knot originated when a Stafford County Sheriff devised a single noose into three loops to enable him to hang three criminals at the same time. Only being equipped with one piece of rope, he felt that it was only fair to hang all three at once rather than give precedence to any one of the condemned! Sounds dramatic in the telling, but the surviving historic evidence is probably much more convincing.

Eventually the FI received two applications, for a proposed county flag for Staffordshire. One from the SCC and a second from the SHG. As a result, in March 2016 the FI hosted a public vote on its website allowing the people of Staffordshire to choose which design they preferred as their county flag.

Despite having had very little time to discuss the design and publicise the vote, the design put forward by the SHG was declared the winner on March 28th, having achieved 72.84% of the vote and was recorded in the Flag Registry as the *official* County Flag of Staffordshire.

DESIGN CHOSEN BY THE PEOPLE OF STAFFORDSHIRE IN 2016

The SHG thank the [Association of British Counties](#) (ABC) and all who supported our campaign and those who helped in the design of our new flag. Details of the nation’s county flags, including the one for Staffordshire, can be viewed on the Flag Institute’s website www.flaginstitute.org

The Staffordshire County Flag as it appears in the Flag Institute Register is in the public domain and *needs no one’s permission to use it*. The SHG has written confirmation that *the county flag is copyright-free*.

The SCC design will, of course, remain *the Council’s* own banner and they will understandably proudly fly their own banner on

Council buildings. However, the SHG are concerned that this is often mistaken, and sold, as the official county flag. Our members do their best to promote the county flag both personally and within their own communities i.e. churches, clubs, parish offices, village halls. The SHG would also like to see your official county flag flown from public buildings in the county, especially within Stafford as the county town.

Many people fly the county flag all year round or on regular occasions. However, there are significant dates in the calendar to remember. Fly the flag in the month of May, especially Staffordshire Day on the 1st May when we celebrate and highlight all that is good within our county. In addition we have [Historic County Flag Day](#) on the 23rd July.

In 2014 the ABC conceived the idea of ‘[Historic County Flag Day](#)’, to celebrate the nation’s historic counties through the flying of their flags. The inaugural “County Flags Day” was Wednesday, 23rd July, 2014, the anniversary of the [creation of the flag of Devon in 2002](#), which started the modern concept of a county flag. The idea was approved by the FI and [the Government](#) and inspired annual displays around Westminster.

County Flags flying at Westminster

Finally, our Staffordshire County Flag, as defined by the FI represents the great people and unique identity of our ancient county from the Potteries to the Black Country.

The “Chevron & Knot” design offers an elegant and distinctive flag which you, the people of Staffordshire, can fly with pride!





The Staffordshire County Flag: Technical Specification

Flag Type:	County Flag
Flag Designer:	Traditional Design
UK Design Code:	UNKG7455
Pantone® Colours:	Yellow 116, Red 186

Flag Date:	28th March 2016
Adoption Route:	Popular Vote
Aspect Ratio:	3:5
Certification:	Chief Vexillologist

Notes:

The Staffordshire Flag is a community flag proclaiming the unique identity of this historic English county.

The Staffordshire Flag displays the gold field and red chevron of the de Stafford coat of arms.

Upon the chevron is the badge of the de Stafford family, a golden knot.

Organisations have used the de Stafford arms and badge to represent the wider county since at least the seventeenth century.

See <https://www.flaginstitute.org/wp/flags/staffordshire-flag/>

And <https://staffordshireheritage.weebly.com/staffordshire-flag.html>

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