

Heraldry in Natal

(The Natal Society's Annual Lecture delivered by the State Herald,
Frederick Gordon Brownell, on Friday 27 March 1987)

Those of you who watched the recent television series *Shaka Zulu* will no doubt remember seeing the British Union Flag, better known as the Union Jack, fluttering over Lieutenant Francis Farewell's little settlement at Port Natal. Since Farewell was an officer in the Royal Navy, 'showing the flag' in foreign parts would have been second nature to him.

Flags are an integral part of heraldry and the Union Jack, which is in itself a combination of three flags, based on the reputed arms of the patron saints of England, Scotland and Ireland, was thus the first heraldic representation to have been used in Natal. Apart from the Republic of Natalia interlude (1839 – 1842), the Union Jack has in fact flown over Natal in one form or another since 1824. This may sound strange since South Africa has been a republic for the past quarter of a century, but one must bear in mind that it is still an integral part of our national flag.

The Union Jack of course also appears in shield form charged on the shoulder of the dexter supporter to the arms of the City of Pietermaritzburg, while the sinister supporter is charged with the flag of the Republic of Natalia, also in shield form.

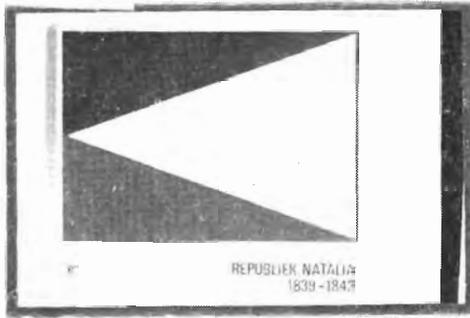
The fact that the short-lived Republic of Natalia also had a flag of its own was not widely known and it took considerable research to determine what the design of that flag had been.

The first known reference to Natalia's flag is in a contemporary report of the withdrawal of the British military detachment from Natal in 1839. The relevant part of the report reads as follows:

On 24 December the *Vectis* left Port Natal with the troops and the Boers thus released from their presence and very naturally interpreting their departure as a final abandonment by the British and recognition of their often-proclaimed sovereignty, fired a salute and for the first time hoisted their new colours — those similar to the Dutch, but placed transversely instead of horizontally — the colours of the Republic of Natalia.¹

Since the placing of the colours transversely could mean in any one of a number of ways, this description was hardly satisfactory.

I am afraid the contemporary French traveller Delegorgue was no clearer in his description of Natalia's flag, which he noted as being 'un pavillon nouveau, inconnu, fusion des couleurs français et hollandaises'² (an unknown new flag, in a combination of the French and Dutch colours).



The flag of the Republic of Natalia.

(Photograph: Author's collection)

From these two published descriptions it is clear that the colours of the flag were red, white and blue; but that is about all. It was only in 1953 that Dr W.J. de Kock, then engaged in research for the Archives in Europe, discovered an illustration of the Natalia flag, in colour, on the lid of the holder of a petition, and on a map of the Republic of Natalia, in the Rijksmuseum in The Hague.³

The author of this petition, asking for Dutch protection for Natalia, was J.A. Smellekamp who had arrived in Port Natal on the trading vessel *Brazilia* on 24 March 1842.⁴ Although Smellekamp's activities were warmly repudiated by the Dutch Government, we do owe to him the only known illustrations of the Natalia flag.

These illustrations, confirmed the verbal description by another contemporary Dutchman, Prof. U.G. Lauts, whose collection was bought for the South African State Archives in 1925. Of the Natalia flag, Lauts, who had obtained his information from Smellekamp, had written:

In de vlag heeft het Gemeenebest Natalia aan de Nedelandsche vlag gedacht, en dezelfde kleuren in dezelfde volgorde gekozen. Het wit echter gaat van eene punt in het midden aan die stok uit, om aan het einde der vlag de geheele breedte van het doek in te nemen.⁵

The British withdrawal from Port Natal in 1839 had, however, been linked with problems on the Cape Eastern Frontier. To prevent further pressure on that frontier from the Natal side, a British expedition under Captain Thomas Charlton Smith comprising a detachment of 237 men of the 27th Regiment and the Royal Artillery, accompanied by Rev. James Archbell the pioneer Methodist missionary of Natal (whose grand-daughter Elizabeth Archbell married my maternal grandfather), reached Durban on 4 May 1842. They encamped on the site of what is still known as the Old Fort, hauled down the flag of the Republic of Natalia and again hoisted the Union Jack.⁶

Although the Trekkers objected, claiming — on the strength of the petition which Smellekamp was then bearing to the Netherlands — that they were under the protection of Holland and besieged the British forces which forces were relieved after Dick King's famous ride to Grahamstown, Natalia had in effect come to an end. The formal annexation of Natal to the British Crown on 12 May 1843 was largely a formality.

The use of the wildebeest or gnu as the recognized emblem for Natal can be traced back as early as 1861. In a letter which appeared in the *Natal*

Mercury of 12 December 1861 in connection with the preview in Pietermaritzburg of the Natal exhibit at the Great Exhibition held in England in 1862, it was reported that:

The frame (of the entrance arch) bore a carved shield with the 'Gnu' of Natal at its apex, and white letters on a black background below, setting forth the inscription 'Colony of Natal'.

Not only has the wildebeest, since then, occupied the central position in Natal heraldry, but it is of more than passing interest that black and white (or silver), are also Natal's sporting colours.

In 1870 the wildebeest officially took its place in heraldry, following the adoption by Britain of a standard pattern for Colonial flags based on the Red and Blue Ensigns, with an appropriate colonial device in the fly.

In a debate on the proposed distinguishing flag for the Colony of Natal in the Natal Legislative Council, the Colonial Secretary is reported as saying:

I shall now, with permission of the House, conclude my motion on the subject of a distinguishing flag for Natal, and in doing so shall trouble you by reading the despatch from the Secretary of State relating to it. You will perceive that it was in consequence of the order in Council from 'Osborne, 7th August, 1869' that we have been asked to provide a device, and I think when you look at it, you will consider it very neat and pretty. It comes from the office of the Colonial Engineer, the badges contain the arms of Natal, with the usual wildebeeste (laughter), and the arms of England over all.⁷

The device was then duly approved by the Legislative Council.

When submitting the device for approval, the Lieutenant-Governor, Robert Keate, intimated that it had been designed by the Colonial Engineer Peter Paterson.⁸

The device was transmitted to the Secretary of State for the Colonies under despatch No. 57 of 4 August 1870.⁹

In this device, beneath the Royal arms, two wildebeest are depicted running from left to right within an ornamental border, encircled by the inscription 'Victoria dei Gratia Britanniae. Reg. F.D., Colony of Natal'. This inscription was suitably adapted when Edward VII came to the throne.

The flag of the Governor of Natal incidentally consisted of the Union Jack with the device for Natal within a wreath in the centre of the flag. In the succeeding years a number of variations of this colonial device appeared. The only known physical example of the Natal Colonial flag in existence, is in the Killie Campbell Africana Library, and shows wildebeest running from right to left, i.e. in the direction of the hoist. From a heraldic point of view this is more correct than in the approved design.

The present arms of Natal evolved from this earlier Colonial device. In 1905 *York Herald*, at the College of Arms in London, proposed a design showing a single wildebeest placed in a shield below a Royal Crown. This proposal was, however, not accepted and the arms granted to Natal by Royal Warrant on 16 May 1907 depict on a blue shield 'in front of mountains and on a plain, two black Wildebeest in full course, side by side, at random'.¹⁰

When the arms of the Union of South Africa were granted by Royal Warrant on 17 September 1910, the quartered shield was designed to represent the four territories which had come together to form the Union.

The second of these quarterings represents Natal. However, by Royal Warrant dated 4 May 1911, the quarterings of the Arms granted to the Union of South Africa by Royal Warrant in 1910, were assigned as the Arms of the Provinces of the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, respectively. The Arms previously granted to the Cape of Good Hope, Natal and the Orange River Colony were thus superseded.

This would have given Natal arms with the description: 'or, two black wildebeest in full course at random, both proper,' but the provisions of this Royal Warrant were never implemented and the Province of Natal continued to use the Colonial Arms granted in 1907.

In the 1907 grant of arms no crown ensigned the shield, neither did the word 'Natal' appear beneath the shield. But by 1910 a crown (the Tudor Crown) and the word Natal had been unofficially added, although the Natal Provincial Secretary has been unable to trace any records dealing specifically with this aspect.¹²

In 1954, at the request of the South African Government, informal authority was granted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for the Province of Natal to re-adopt its Colonial Arms. Consent was simultaneously granted for the crown resting upon the arms to be used. Her majesty, however, indicated that she preferred the design of the St Edward's crown with which she was crowned, to be used henceforth.¹³

When a certified copy of Natal's arms was received from the College of Arms in 1955, it was found that the crown now depicted was neither the Tudor Crown nor that of St Edward, since it differs from both in a number of significant respects. It must therefore be concluded that the College of Arms did not in fact intend to depict a specific Royal Crown, but merely a gold crown in general.



The Natal arms as received from the College of Arms in 1955.

(Photograph: Author's collection)

Had it not been for this decision by the College of Arms, Natal would no doubt have lost its crown when South Africa became a Republic in 1961. This Natal crown is thus of a distinctive design 'consisting of a circlet with eight crosses pattee, and four arches surmounted of a cross pattee, Or, with a cap of estate Sable'.¹⁴

Although the scroll appearing beneath the arms and bearing the name Natal has occupied this position for many years, it was only officially added to the arms in 1985.¹⁵

So much for the history of the arms and flags of Natal as such.

Another territorial flag which existed in what is now Natal for a short while in the late 19th Century was that of the short-lived New Republic (1884-1885), with Vryheid as its capital. The arms of the New Republic were, on its dissolution, adopted by Vryheid as its municipal arms and were subsequently registered with the Bureau of Heraldry.

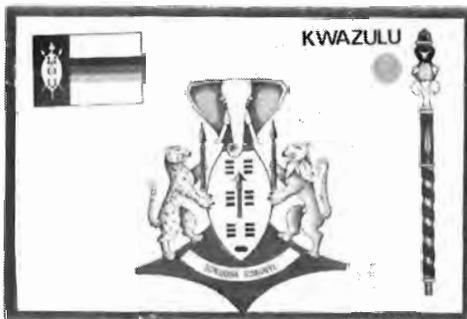
Reverting to the series Shaka Zulu, you will no doubt remember the traditional Zulu shield, weapons and dress. Since Natal and KwaZulu are geographically one, there has been considerable Zulu ethnic influence on Natal heraldry and for practical reasons I shall deal with Natal and KwaZulu as one.

KwaZulu as a self-governing state has its own arms and flag, both of which for obvious reasons draw heavily on Zulu cultural traditions. I would like to dwell briefly on the symbolism of the KwaZulu arms:

Shield: As is customary, the arms are depicted on a shield — in this case a traditional Zulu warrior's shield — which was used as a means of protection in battle. The colours of the shield, white (silver) with a black spot are significant in that these were the colours of the shields of members of the royal regiment and were made from the skins of royal cattle. As far as the single charge in the shield is concerned, the sceptre is in reality a short spear which symbolises the hereditary authority of the royal lineage.

Crest: The head ring is worn only by **men** of high standing and symbolises wise counsel. The head of the elephant in turn represents strength and intelligence.

Supporters: The shield is supported by a leopard, emblem of beauty and grace, and a lion which stands for bravery and dignity. Each hold a stabbing spear, representing the traditional spear of the regiments of King Shaka and allude both to the role of the State in ensuring the protection of its people and to the forging of the Zulu nation in the 19th century.



The KwaZulu arms.

(Photograph: Author's collection)

Motto: The motto *Sonqoba Simunye* means 'Together we shall surmount' and is in allusion to the motto of the Republic of South Africa, *Ex Unitate Vires* (Unity is Strength).

A similar shield appears on the red panel in the hoist of the flag of KwaZulu, with the colours of Inkatha in the fly.

The traditional Zulu shield has been used in a number of other coats of arms in Natal and KwaZulu, including the arms of His Majesty King Goodwill, in which is depicted the large hut of the King, accompanied by a



The arms of King Goodwill.

(Photograph: Author's collection)

number of smaller huts, since the King's hut never stands alone. Both supporters to the Kings arms are lions, since the King is the Ingwenyama or Lion of the Zulus. A parallel is found in neighbouring Swaziland, where the King is also known, and addressed, as 'Ngwenyama'.

The arms of the Buthelezi Tribal Authority employ the same type of shield but obviously with different charges and supporters. At present we are also registering arms for the Molefe Tribal Authority, which are somewhat unusual in that this tribal group which lives near Vryheid is of Basotho origin and their arms contain both traditional Zulu and Basotho emblems.

Even civic authorities use the traditional Zulu shield shape, one example being the arms of the Hambanathi Community Council.

Although we tend to avoid depicting specific monuments in arms, an exception was made in that the memorial to Shaka which stands in Stanger is commemorated in the arms of the Stanger Municipality. The arms of Hambanathi and Stanger incidentally both contain representations of sugar cane, the Natal and Zululand coastal area's principal cash crop.

The Zulu warrior and British soldier have also not been forgotten, both appearing peacefully together as supporters to the arms of Eshowe.

Apart from the black wildebeest (*Connochaetus gnou*) whose use in Natal heraldry — apart from in the Colonial and Provincial arms — has been widespread, the provincial bird, the lammergeier or bearded vulture

(*Gypaëtus Barbatus meridionalis*), and the provincial flower, the *Strelitzia regina* which are featured in the lower border of the symbolic heraldic tree, have also featured in Natal arms.



The arms of the Natal Museum.

(Photograph: Author's collection)

In the arms of the Natal Museum, for example, the wildebeest and lammergeier feature together as supporters. In the crest a Hilton daisy, a local flower, appears between two elephant tusks, the latter in allusion to the importance of the elephant in Natal history, while the iron age clay pot — an artefact dating back hundreds of years — and a particularly rare Natal butterfly feature in the shield. Virtually every facet of Natal's history which one would expect to find represented in a museum is thus reflected in these arms.

The strelitzia appears in the arms of Stanger Manor Primary School, together with stars, in allusion to the Star of Bethlehem, the 'Terra do Natal' traditionally having been 'discovered' by Vasco da Gama on Christmas Day 1497 while pioneering the Cape sea route to the East, although this was not recorded in his log-book. Although this name initially referred to the coast of Pondoland, it was later in the Portuguese period extended to cover the coast northwards probably as far as the Bluff.¹⁶

We now move to a selection of Natal municipal arms. In the arms of Pietermaritzburg this 'star' theme is repeated in the crest, an elephant features prominently in the shield and, as already mentioned earlier, the wildebeest supporters are charged on their respective shoulders with shields of the earliest Natal flags.

A wildebeest head is employed in the crest of the arms of Greytown together with — as in the arms of Pietermaritzburg — an elephant in the shield.

New Germany, as its name implies, owes its early origins to German settlers, hence the use in the shield of the old Imperial German colours of

red, white and black. The sailing ship in the crest, which alludes to these settlers' immigrant origins, is appropriately charged on the sail with another star to indicate that the ship was sailing for Natal.

The white rose in the base of the shield alludes to Natal as a then British colony, while the cotton-boll and cogwheel are self-explanatory when one considers the subsequent development of New Germany.

Glencoe's arms allude symbolically to coal-mining, to the generating of electricity — by means of Jupiter's thunderbolt in the upper part of the shield — and to the Scottish origins of the name of the municipality.

Umhlanga's arms create a very seaside atmosphere with their combination of blue and green and little sea-horses. The star in the crest links up well with their motto which, with all the modesty one expects of a seaside holiday resort, declares Umhlanga to be the Star of Natal!

One of Pietermaritzburg's well known 'stars' is, I believe Mark Shute, for many years a leading light in the Royal Agricultural Society of Natal. This Society's arms not only link up with those of the capital of Natal but, with their wavy shield partition, stretch symbolically down to the coast. The red rose of Lancaster in the crest and the unicorn supporter portray Natal's links with the British Isles.

One could argue that more than enough has already been said about the wildebeest, but I must point out that it also appears in the chief, of the Army's Natal Command shoulder flash. Although the lower part of each Command shoulder flash is similar, having close links with that of Army Headquarters, each Command has its own distinctive chief. The others are Western Province Command, with Table Mountain; Witwatersrand, with three battery stamps used to crush gold-bearing ore; Southern Cape, based at Oudtshoorn, with an appropriate plume of three ostrich feathers; and Eastern Cape, based at Port Elizabeth, with an elephant — bearing in mind that the Addo Elephant Park is nearby and that the elephant also features prominently in that city's arms.

Over the past few years, we in the Bureau of Heraldry have developed a number of new heraldic charges. One of these is a demi-cogwheel trefly. This is in effect half a cog-wheel, with the teeth terminating in trefoils. It is used as a common charge in the arms of technical colleges to indicate that in addition to technical subjects, a wide variety of other courses is offered. Apart from the demi-cogwheel trefly usually only one further charge is added to the shield. This ensures simple yet particularly striking designs. It is said that the essence of good heraldry lies not in adding more to the shield, but when nothing more can be left out! In other words one should aim at utter simplicity without cluttering the shield, yet still strive for a unique design.

In the case of the Pinetown Technical College a pine-cone, which appears in the municipal arms, was the obvious choice.

The arms of the Durban Technical College, situated as it is on the coast, sports a shell, while the arms of the Port Shepstone Technical College display a traditional heraldic lymphad or galley, in allusion to the 'ship in full sail' in Port Shepstone's municipal arms. A lymphad with its stylized rounded hull fitted better into this design.

While on a nautical note, the badge of Naval Command East (formerly Natal Naval Command) displays above crossed see-axes, distinctively shaped

Saxon swords with a suitable nautical pun, the provincial flower. Naval Command West has a similar design but with a disa in place of the strelitzia.

Similarly, the badge of the Naval Dockyard, Durban, is based on that of its counterpart in Simonstown, but with a star in the centre instead of the Simonstown Martello Fort.

The badge of the South African Navy's new fleet replenishment vessel *SAS Drakensberg* named for the mountains which separate Natal from the interior, appropriately displays a dragon surmounting a barrulet dancetty to indicate the distant mountain peaks. The Navy having received some mention, I would now like to pass briefly to the arms (or shoulder flashes) of some of Natal's army units.

That of the Congella Regiment speaks for itself, in the light of what I have already said. Commandos, on the other hand, are essentially territorial units and in consequence their shoulder flashes tend to have a local flavour, but nevertheless often allude to a commando's functions. That of the Umgeni Commando which operates in a coastal area contains a shark, while the pallets depicted allude to the shark nets which, like a Commando, must keep the predator (or enemy) at bay. The Umvoti Commando has in its shoulder flash a hamerkop. This is a shy bird but when provoked makes a determined attack on any predator.

Durban South Commando's shoulder flash contains a sword-fish. This once again indicates that the commando is coastal based, while the sword of course also has a definite military connotation.

Griqualand East is now a Xhosa-speaking part of Natal, and its Commando, which is based at Matatiele, has a shoulder flash which is a pictorial representation of the name of their home town in Xhosa, literally, 'where the frightened wild duck take to the air', thus warning the inhabitants of intruders.

In the area of operation of the South Coast Commando, jackal are still found. The Commando, like that wily animal, must be cunning if it wishes to catch its prey. Although considered in some parts of the country as vermin, the jackal is in many respects a most useful animal which deserves its place in heraldry.

With the cricket season drawing to a close I cannot resist a passing mention of one of Natal's thorough pests which has succeeded in making its mark in Natal heraldry. I refer here to the Kingsmead Mynah's Club badge of 'a mynah bird passant vested in cricketing attire . . . '.

Heraldry does have a sense of humour!

In conclusion, I am sure that all of you would at some stage or another have seen illustrations of the flag of the State President. It is in the National flag colours of orange, white and blue, with the National arms and letters SP as used by the State President, on the white in the hoist. However, I do think that particularly those of you who live in Pietermaritzburg, will find the basic design of the flag to be somewhat familiar! Shortly before the inauguration of our first executive State President, I was asked to come up with one or two suitable flag designs as soon as possible. Quite by chance my eye fell on the flag of the Republic of Natalia on a chart on the opposite wall of my office. Merely by swinging around the triangle and changing the colours, this flag literally designed itself in under two minutes, while at the



The flag of the State President.

(Photograph: Author's collection)

same time perpetuating into a symbol in the new constitutional dispensation, a part of Natal's heraldic heritage.

NOTES

- ¹ Chase, J.C.: *The Natal Papers*, part II, pp. 115-116.
- ² Delegorgue, M.A.: *Voyage dans L'Afrique Australe*, part I, p. 99.
- ³ Schoeman, J.M.: Die vlag van die Republiek Natalia, in *Argiefnuus*, XIX, 8 February 1977, p. 9-10.
- ⁴ Shuter, C.F.: *Englishman's Inn*, p. 24.
- ⁵ Lauts, U.G.: *De Kaapsche Landverhuizers of Nederlands Afstammelingen (1847)*, p. 42.
- ⁶ Brookes, E.H. and Webb, C. de B.: *A History of Natal*, p. 38.
- ⁷ *Natal Witness*, 2 August 1870.
- ⁸ Leverton, B.J.: The origin of the Natal Coat of Arms, in *Lantern*, XII, 1 September 1962, p. 79.
- ⁹ CSO 384. (1051/1870).
- ¹⁰ Natal Government Gazette No. 3626 of 13 August 1907: Government Notice No. 470, 1907, dated 9 August 1907.
- ¹¹ *Flags, Badges and Arms of the British Dominions beyond the Seas*, Part II, Arms (1917), inset containing Colonial Office notice dated August 1911.
- ¹² Bureau of Heraldry file 2/3/5 (closed series), Letter dated 30 July 1968 from the Provincial Secretary to the State Herald, under reference P.S. 116/1/1.
- ¹³ Circular I from the Department of the Prime Minister to the heads of all Government Departments, ref. PM 55/9, dated 23 March 1955.
- ¹⁴ Official description of the crown contained in Certificate of Registration No. 102 issued by the Bureau of Heraldry on 29 January 1969.
- ¹⁵ Government Notice No. 430 in Government Gazette 9597 of 22 February 1985.
- ¹⁶ Muller, C.F.J. (ed): *Five Hundred Years, A History of South Africa*, p. 8.

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