

FLAGS

By WHS Member Paul Eldridge 9 February, 2023

Paul described himself as a flag enthusiast, rather than a **vexillologist** proper, before giving a brief overview of the origin and development of flags. He was assisted by John Corke holding the **hoist** (the end of a flag nearest the flagpole) and Stefan Gatward at the **fly** (the free end), as several examples from his sizeable collection were demonstrated.

Every continent was represented, flags of such countries as Canada (its new flag from 1965), Brazil, Norway, Kenya, Sri Lanka (Paul's favourite flag), and New Zealand being introduced, among several others from each of those continents, with even British Antarctic Territory included.

Next up were the official flags of the United Nations, the British Commonwealth, and the European Union, before we turned to the counties of England. It was fun trying to guess the counties from the emblems on the flags: Leicestershire has a fox (hunting tradition), Staffordshire the noted 'Staffordshire knot', Lincolnshire a fleur-de-lis (Lincoln Cathedral is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, represented in Christian art by a lily), Warwickshire a bear and ragged staff (as worn by its county cricketers), Sussex its six martlets, plus a number of others, mostly unfamiliar, and impossible to identify.

Stefan then gave an interesting perspective of the importance of the '**colours**' in a military context, from the confusion of historic battle (*e.g.* Waterloo), to the annual Trooping the Colour ceremony, and described how the rank **Colour Sergeant** came about. Impressing on the audience the paramount importance of **communications** to the Army over the years, from semaphore to Morse code to field telephones to portable wireless sets to today's radio-equipped vehicles, he explained how enemy snipers would identify British signallers and signals instructors by their **crossed flags** badges and seek to eliminate them straightaway, so nullifying our ability to communicate effectively.

Finally, Paul recounted, with examples, how earnestly he had sought to establish a **Wadhurst flag**, thwarted by the **Flag Institute** on a number of occasions. One difficulty being the need for simplicity of design (a child is expected to draw a flag quickly from memory), another related to the colours themselves and colour strength. Predominantly green (for the countryside) and orange (for Wadhurst's iron-bearing clay), the flags put forward by Paul went through a number of incarnations before the current official Wadhurst flag was accepted.

A vexillologist Paul may not be, yet his knowledge, enthusiasm, extensive flag collection, and sheer doggedness in bringing us the Wadhurst flag was evident during this absorbing and informative talk. Happily, his two assistants did not complain of aching arms after holding up so many flags, and the evening was thoroughly enjoyed by all present.

Stefan Gatward

