

## Three Ensigns: the red, the white and the blue

St Dunstan's Church in Stepney wore the Ensign of the principal Admiral of the Royal Navy from 1620. By wearing the Red Ensign, the church tower was visible from the River Thames and was a landmark for sea Captains who needed to record any births, marriages and deaths on English registered ships whilst at sea. The wearing of this Red Ensign was permitted by the Crown.

In 1709 with the increasing development of London the new parish of St Anne, Limehouse was formed from the parish of St Dunstan, Stepney. As the church of St Anne was closer to the river, HM Queen Anne permitted that this new church was to wear the Ensign of the second most senior Admiral, the White Ensign. The church's 200 foot high tower with its prominent position to the river became a Trinity House sea mark on all navigation charts for this part of the river and is the reason for the large ball on top of the flag pole.

In 1801 an Act of Union joined Ireland with Great Britain to form the United Kingdom which resulted in the cross of St Patrick being added to the Union Flag in the top left quadrant of all three Ensigns; the Red, the White and the Blue.

In July 1864 an Order-in-Council provided that the White Ensign was to be the exclusive Ensign of the Royal Naval Service. The Red Ensign was to be the exclusive Ensign of the British registered merchant fleet. The Blue Ensign was reserved for ships commanded by an Officer of the Royal Naval Reserve and in government service. This situation continues to this day.

Within the 1864 Order-in-Council is a 'Let' that allows certain places to continue to wear the White Ensign for limited time on various occasions. However, to reflect it's long association with the White Ensign and under Queens' Regulations, St Anne's is permitted to wear the White Ensign at all times.

St Peter's, London's floating mission church and the daughter church of St Anne, Limehouse and permanently moored in West India Quay, Canary Wharf in 2004 is a converted 500 ton Dutch Trading Barge and under Royal Warrant is now permitted to wear the undefaced Blue Ensign at all times. This Ensign was worn for the first time on Sunday 26th February 2012 at 4.30 p.m..

Thus, three local churches, St Dunstan, St Anne and St Peter preserve a very privileged and cherished tradition with the United Kingdom's maritime services.