

The St. Andrew's Cross, or Saltire, is Scotland's national flag. Tradition has it that the flag, the oldest in Europe and the Commonwealth, originated in a battle fought close by the East Lothian village of Athelstaneford in the dark ages. The date is believed to have been 832AD.

An army of Picts under King Angus, and aided by a contingent of Scots, was invading Lothians (at that time still Northumbrian territory), and found itself surrounded by a larger force of Saxons led by Athelstan.

Fearing the outcome of the encounter, Angus led prayers for deliverance and was rewarded by seeing a cloud formation of a white saltire (the diagonal cross on which St. Andrew had been martyred) against the blue sky.

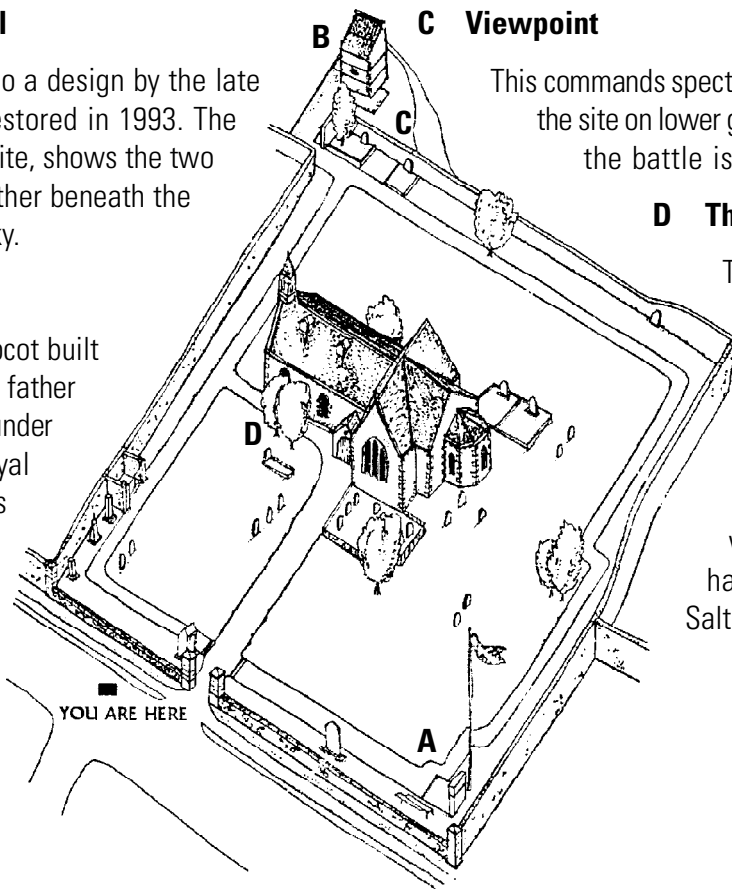
The king vowed that if, with the saint's help, he gained victory, then Andrew would thereafter be the patron saint of Scotland. The Scots did win, and the Saltire became the flag of Scotland.

A The Saltire Memorial

This was erected in 1965 to a design by the late Dr. F. R. Stevenson, and restored in 1993. The battlescene, carved in granite, shows the two armed hosts facing each other beneath the St. Andrews Cross in the sky.

B Flag Heritage Centre

This occupies a lectern doocot built in 1583 by George Hepburn, father of Sir John Hepburn, the founder and first colonel of the Royal Scots. The doocot was restored and converted in 1996. Visitors can enjoy a short audio-visual dramatisation of the traditional origins of Scotland's flag.



C Viewpoint
This commands spectacular views northwards towards the site on lower ground near the Peffer Burn where the battle is believed to have taken place.

D The Parish Church

The original church in Athelstaneford was built in 1176 by Ada, wife of Henry Prince of Scotland and mother of William the Lion. The present building, which dates from 1780, has a fine stained glass window of St. Andrew, and also has on display the 'Book of the Saltire'.

Entry is free, but donations can be made in the box by the Memorial and are greatly appreciated. Responsibility for the upkeep of the Heritage Centre and the Memorial rests with the Scottish Flag Trust, a registered charity.