# Pensioners’ upside-down Union Flag sparks wave of anonymous complaints and community tensions



A couple of pensioners in Weymouth are at the centre of a controversy after receiving an anonymous letter admonishing them for flying their Union flag upside down. Betty and Maurice Curtis, both 96, had unwittingly displayed the flag incorrectly from their 15-foot pole, prompting an irate note that accused them of arrogance and ignorance. The letter stated, “To do so, other than in genuine need to send an ‘S-O-S’, is an insult!” It included a diagram illustrating the correct positioning of the flag, asserting that the predominantly white diagonal must be atop the red diagonal.

The couple expressed their feelings of indignation upon receiving the letter, acknowledging their mistake but questioning the necessity of such a harsh response. Betty remarked, “They could have just knocked on the door, and we would have changed it around straight away. Why can’t people just be nice?” Her comment highlights a wider issue about civility in personal communications, especially within the community.

This incident is not isolated, as there have been several reports across the UK where homeowners have received similar complaints about the flag's display. In Westonzoyland, Somerset, Julia Bicker also found herself on the receiving end of an anonymous letter after mistakenly flying the Union Flag upside down. Bicker described the situation as “absolutely bizarre” and expressed a desire for the complainant to have approached her directly. This suggests a growing trend where anonymity in complaints overshadows direct community dialogue, leading to unnecessary conflict.

Moreover, the Union Jack's improper display has stirred sentiments among veterans and patriotic citizens alike. George Stanford, a veteran with 38 years of service, expressed his disappointment upon seeing the flag upside down at a Remembrance service in Bury St Edmunds, which underscores the sensitivities surrounding the flag’s correct representation. Similarly, an elderly pensioner in East Riding of Yorkshire received a letter from a self-identified former serviceman demanding immediate rectification for flying the flag incorrectly, further illustrating the emotional weight associated with national symbols.

The complexities surrounding proper flag etiquette have even reached local governance, where councils have been compelled to address similar issues. In Troon, South Ayrshire, for instance, pensioners Duncan James and Joe Stirling were directed by local authorities to remove flags, including the Union Flag, due to public complaints. Both men expressed surprise at what they felt was a heavy-handed response to flags they had displayed for years, raising questions about the role of community standards in public displays of patriotism.

Compounding this sensitive issue is the general public's understanding of flag protocol. A 2017 YouGov poll indicated that fewer than half of the UK population could accurately recognise when the Union Flag was displayed upside down, illustrating a lack of awareness that can lead to unintended offence. Given that flying the flag upside down is officially regarded as a distress signal, the implications of misrepresentation extend beyond mere aesthetics; they delve into the realm of national sentiment and respect.

The wave of complaints surrounding the Union Flag points to a broader cultural phenomenon where the interpretation of patriotic symbols can provoke varied reactions. For Betty and Maurice Curtis, their unfortunate mistake led to an uncomfortable encounter, but one that also shines a light on the need for kindness and patience in a society rich with diverse perspectives and experiences.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062473/pensioners-sent-furious-letter-flying), [[4]](https://www.nationalworld.com/news/patriotic-pensioner-branded-disrespectful-with-union-jack-mistake-4956499)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062473/pensioners-sent-furious-letter-flying), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-54191606), [[5]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/people/furious-scottish-pensioners-told-to-take-down-offensive-flags-by-council-1412122)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.suffolknews.co.uk/bury-st-edmunds/news/veteran-blasts-council-after-union-flag-flown-upside-down-du-9391541/), [[6]](https://metro.co.uk/2016/12/06/council-fines-pensioner-2500-for-flying-flag-in-memory-of-war-heroes-6303727/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.nationalworld.com/news/patriotic-pensioner-branded-disrespectful-with-union-jack-mistake-4956499), [[5]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/people/furious-scottish-pensioners-told-to-take-down-offensive-flags-by-council-1412122), [[7]](https://rnzncomms.org/union-jack-do-you-know-the-correct-way-up/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062473/pensioners-sent-furious-letter-flying> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-54191606> - In Westonzoyland, Somerset, Julia Bicker received an anonymous letter after mistakenly flying the Union Flag upside down outside her home. The letter, addressed to 'this house' and featuring a Google Street View image, provided instructions on the correct display of the flag. Bicker found the situation 'absolutely bizarre' and expressed a preference for the complainant to address the issue in person.
3. <https://www.suffolknews.co.uk/bury-st-edmunds/news/veteran-blasts-council-after-union-flag-flown-upside-down-du-9391541/> - During a Remembrance service in Bury St Edmunds, veteran George Stanford noticed the Union Flag was flown upside down atop Abbey Gate. Shocked by the oversight, Stanford, who served for 38 years, expressed his disappointment, especially on such a significant day. West Suffolk Council acknowledged the mistake and apologised, stating they would provide additional training to staff to prevent future errors.
4. <https://www.nationalworld.com/news/patriotic-pensioner-branded-disrespectful-with-union-jack-mistake-4956499> - Susan Creaser, a 78-year-old pensioner from East Riding of Yorkshire, received an anonymous letter accusing her of disrespect for flying the Union Jack upside down. The letter, claiming to be from a former member of HM services, demanded immediate rectification. Creaser's neighbour, Su Clyne, expressed outrage over the 'cowardly' letter and highlighted Creaser's longstanding support for servicemen and women.
5. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/people/furious-scottish-pensioners-told-to-take-down-offensive-flags-by-council-1412122> - In Troon, South Ayrshire, pensioners Duncan James and Joe Stirling were instructed by a council warden to remove flags from their homes, including the Union Flag, due to potential offence. The council cited concerns over anti-social behaviour and complaints. Both men, who had displayed the flags for years without issue, found the council's response heavy-handed and surprising.
6. <https://metro.co.uk/2016/12/06/council-fines-pensioner-2500-for-flying-flag-in-memory-of-war-heroes-6303727/> - Janis Patterson, 64, from Nottingham, faced a £2,500 fine from her local council for flying flags, including the Union Flag, in her garden to commemorate Remembrance Sunday. The council claimed the flags breached advertising laws. Patterson, a former Women's Royal Air Force drill instructor, expressed confusion and sadness over the fine, stating she wasn't advertising anything.
7. <https://rnzncomms.org/union-jack-do-you-know-the-correct-way-up/> - A 2017 YouGov poll revealed that fewer than half of the UK population can correctly identify when the Union Flag is flown upside down. The article provides guidance on the correct display of the flag, noting that the wider diagonal white stripe should be above the red diagonal stripe at the top left-hand side nearest the flagpole. Flying the flag upside down is considered a distress signal and can be seen as insulting.