The first
Australian flag
outside
Melbourne's
Exhibition
Building

Flagman
John
Vaughan
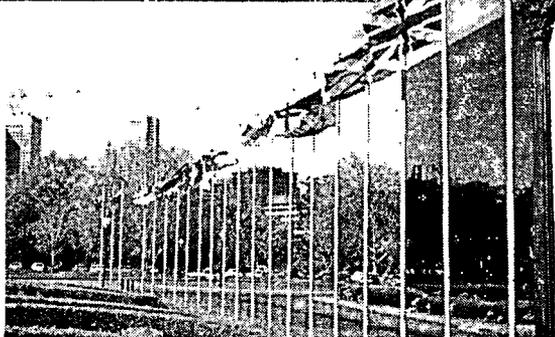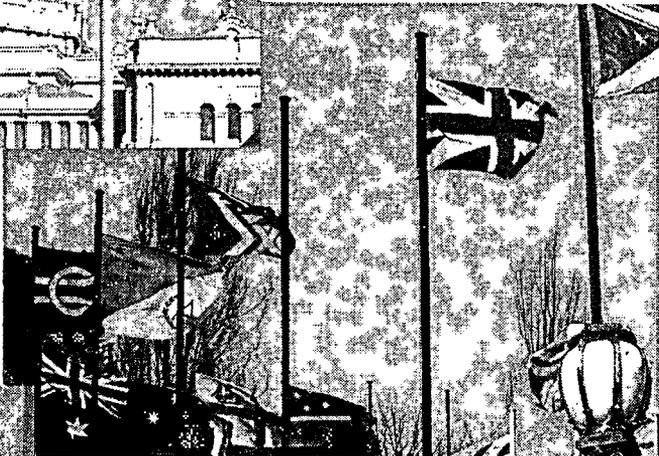
Australia's flag heritage is rich and various, as demonstrated in a presentation of flags with commentary by John Vaughan in the theatrette at Sovereign Hill gold mining and historical theme village, Ballarat.

Commencing with the 1707 or "Queen Anne" version of the British Union flag which attended the foundation of European settlement in Australia, John exhibited a selection in procession of original or facsimile flags which traced the evolution of Australian local identity. They ranged through the initial expressions of loyalty and homesickness reflected in the Bowman Banner to the Anti-Transportation League, The Eureka protest flag, various versions of a Federation flag to the definitive, present national flag, codified finally in 1953.

Throughout the display it became apparent that the influence of British Admiralty flag practice has been paramount in Australian flag development. This is evident not only from the conventions of size and proportion (1:2). The more fundamental point is that Australia's national flag, in it various versions, has been very much a part and relic of Empire, the Southern Cross doing duty as both national symbol and colonial badge.

These traditions influenced no less various expressions of dissent, notably the little known Queensland secession flag of 1854.

Some of these landmark flags from John Vaughan's collection are depicted opposite.

On the last day of the Congress a number of John's flags were displayed from flagpoles outside the Royal Melbourne Exhibition Building, site of the first public display of the Australian flag on 3 September 1901.

AUSTRALIAN BLUE ENSIGN (1901)
On 3rd September, 1901, the flag of Australia with its unique combination of stars and crosses was flown for the first time. The ceremony, at the Melbourne Exhibition Building was witnessed by an enthusiastic crowd. The five stars of the Southern Cross had 9, 8, 7, 6 and 5 points respectively reflecting the brilliance of the stars in the sky. The Commonwealth Star had six points representing the six states of the new nation.

FIRST UNION FLAG (1770-1801)

The Union Flag originated in 1606 when the crosses of St. George (England) and St. Andrew (Scotland) were combined. On 26th January, 1788, the flag was raised at Sydney Cove marking the beginning of white settlement in Australia. A replica of Australia's first flag is flown continuously alongside the Customs House in Loftus Street Sydney. This is the site where Governor Phillip first raised the flag in 1788. Captain James Cook R.N. had previously raised the Union Flag at Botany Bay on 29th April, 1770 and at Possession Island, near Cape York on 22nd August, 1770 where he claimed the east coast of Australia as British territory.

BOWMAN FLAG (1806)

It was flown by John and Honor Bowman at their farm, "Archerfield" near Richmond, New South Wales in 1806. The Bowman family were celebrating the victory of the Royal Navy at the Battle of Trafalgar which took place on 21st October, 1805. This is believed to be the first flag designed in Australia and it set the precedent for the use of the emu and kangaroo on our national coat of arms. The English rose, Scottish thistle and Irish shamrock indicate the origins and unity of the early settlers. The words beneath the shield were taken from a famous flag signal raised during the battle. The Bowman flag is on display at the Mitchell Library, Sydney.
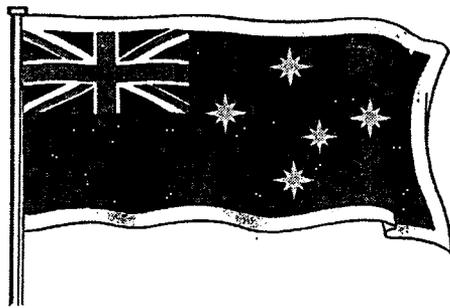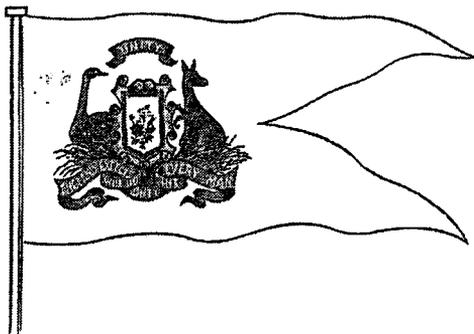

AUSTRALASIAN ANTI-TRANSPORTATION LEAGUE (1851)

The League was formed in 1851 to campaign against the continuance of convict transportation to Australia and New Zealand. The flag of the League featured a gold Southern Cross on a Blue Ensign. A white border usually featured the League's name, year of institution and identified the colony in which it was flown. The five stars of the Southern Cross were said to represent the colonial settlements in Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and New Zealand. The League's flag strongly resembles the Australian National Flag and its influence can be seen in the design of the flag of Victoria.

NEW SOUTH WALES ENSIGN (1831-1901)

In a flag chart dated 31st December, 1831, and in subsequent charts, Captain John Nicholson, Harbour Master of Sydney, depicted a new flag for Australia, featuring the combination of Southern Cross and Union Jack. The Southern Cross consisted of five eight pointed stars on a large dark blue St. George's cross. It became the popular but unofficial flag of Australia for seventy years. In the 1890s it was best known as the Australian Federation Flag.
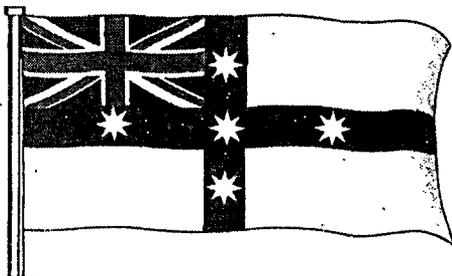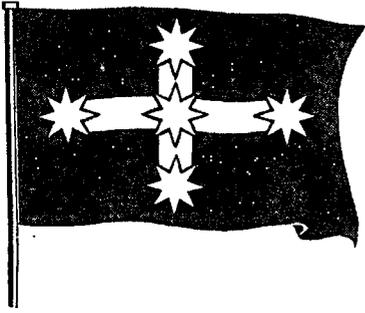
EUREKA FLAG (1854)
Flown during the battle at Eureka Stockade, Ballarat, Victoria, this Southern Cross design was the symbol of a group of miners under the leadership of Peter Lalor. They were protesting the high cost of gold mining licences and other grievances. It was first flown as the standard of the Ballarat Reform League on 29th November, 1854. After the storming of the miners' stockade by troops and police, on 3rd December, 1854, Trooper John King retained the flag until his death in 1881. His widow passed it on to the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery where it is on public display.

MURRAY RIVER FLAG (1853)
Distinguishing flags were flown aboard Murray River paddle steamers in the 1850s. This design, described in a press report of 1853, is influenced by earlier flags of Australia particularly the National Colonial Flag of the 1820s and the New South Wales Merchant Flag of the 1830s. This colourful flag, featuring the Southern Cross and stripes, can still be seen flying from some Murray River craft today.
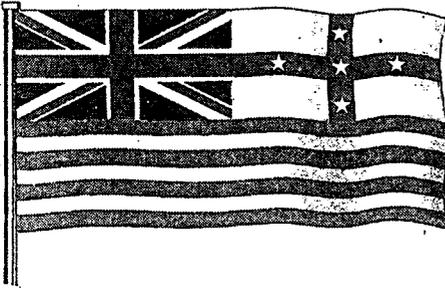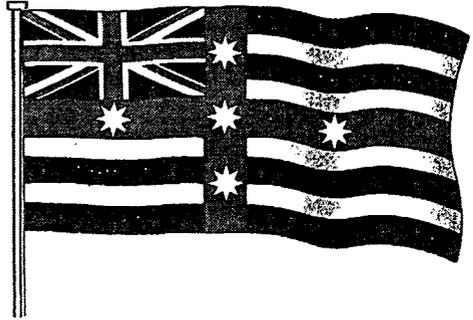
MURRAY RIVER FLAG (SOUTH AUSTRALIA)
This variation of the flag is popular in the South Australian part of the Murray River. A similar design with dark blue stripes instead of light blue is often flown by Victorian vessels on the Murray A newspaper description of the flag in 1853 was not precise and left the original concept of the flag open to interpretation.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL FLAG (1972)
The Aboriginal flag features a golden circle representing the sun uniting the Aboriginal people (depicted by the black uppermost half of the flag) with the earth (the red portion of the flag). The first recorded use of a flag to represent the indigenous population of Australia dates back to 1972 and was a variation of the above theme. Mr. Harold Thomas, an elder to the Aranda people of Central Australia, has been credited with designing this striking black, gold and red flag.