

Golden ochre, blue down under

Antony Burton

Abstract

In a land of ancestral ochres, of endless horizons beyond the blue, the persistence of blue and gold in Australian flags and symbols since European settlement is explored and explained. Conclusions are drawn as to their enduring significance, and implications sketched that could influence flag innovations in the future. The essential criteria are respect for a sense of national belonging and a place in the sun, in a design striking enough to claim distinctiveness in a field already favoured internationally. Archive and other sources offer clues. Lesser known aspects of Australian vexillo-hagiography are brought to light, suggesting that the livery of green and yellow, suited perhaps to flags of equatorial zones, should be returned to Brazil.

Preamble

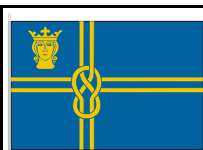
Though a land of golden ochres, Australia's flag is mostly blue. The Flags Act 1953 defines it in part as "a blue flag".¹ Why blue? For many, Australia still lies mentally as well as literally at the other end of the world. It is out there beyond the blue. It is still hazardous to get there, especially by boat, as even Norwegian captains have found.²

Australia is an island — a very large one. It is set not simply in sea but by whole oceans on three sides. A complex nation of blending cultures, Australia has developed its notion of nation from a British colonial toehold on the Pacific.

Among several discernible flag families, and as shown by the 15 in Figure 1, blue seems to be the colour of the Pacific. The name means peace, and blue is associated with serenity. Before even considering the traditions of history, geography alone suggests that a blue flag seems right.

Australia's flag is however not just blue. We should acknowledge what else in our heraldic tradition surrounds the Australian flag, and possibly muddies the distinctive clarity of the flag as the first national symbol. There is for example, the currency that Australia's colours are green and gold — at least "on all occasions on which such colours are customarily used".³ The 1984 decision got it partly right, for gold is the colour of the national flower.

Then there is the whole host of emblems and devices that differentiate flags. Australians have made one device our own. When our athletes — and lately, our military — march in their green and gold (or jungle green and khaki), the motif, if not a kangaroo of some kind, invariably is the cluster of stars known as the Southern Cross



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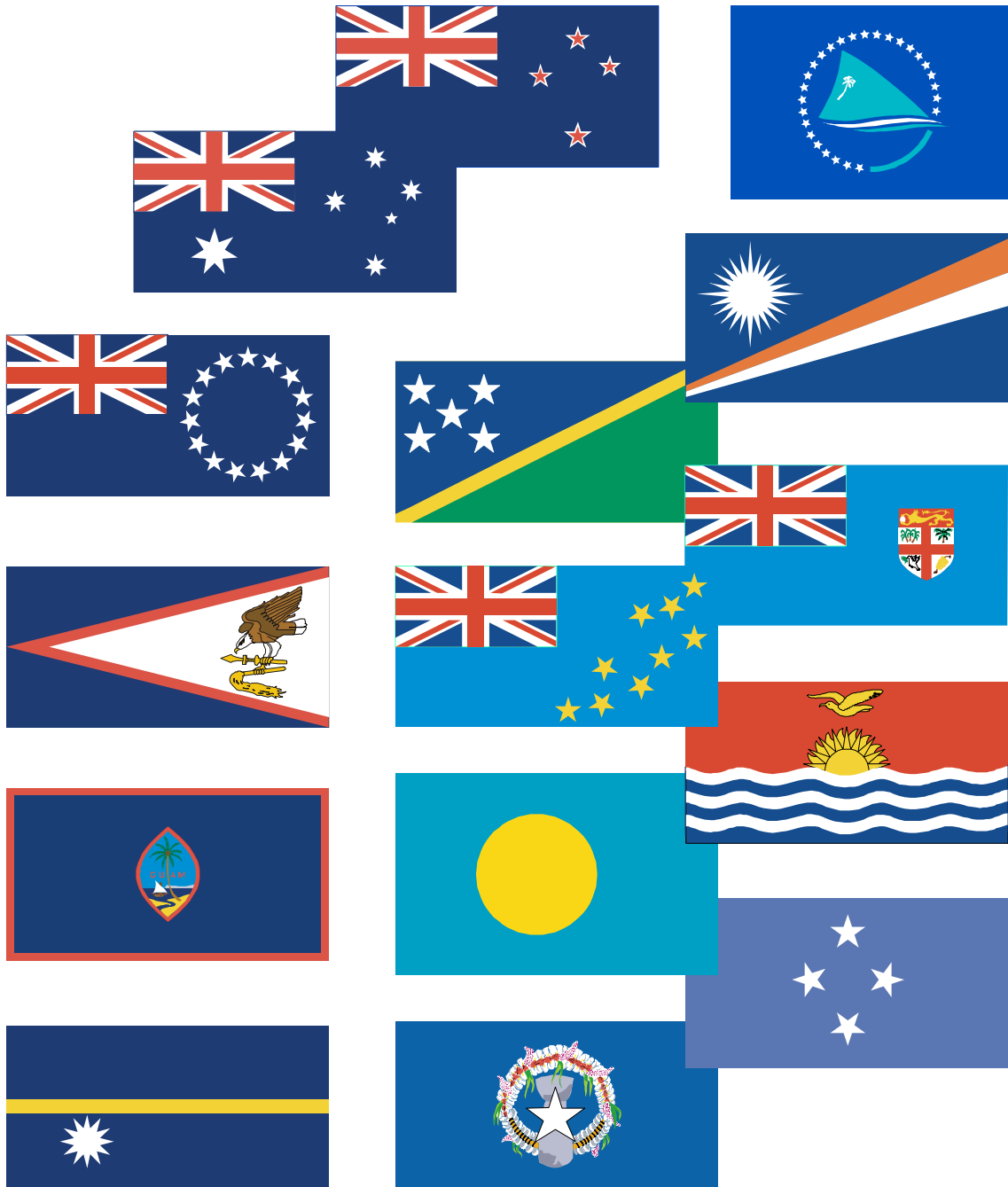


Figure 1 Flags of the blue Pacific.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

(Figs. 2, 3). Sometimes there are both — even in retreat.

Australians are however less aware that Australia's real heraldic colours⁴ are blue and gold, formalized in the Commonwealth Arms in 1913 (Fig. 4).

With this in mind, this paper seeks to broach some new ground. Part I — The Legacy of Livery — examines the incidence and significance of blue and gold as they appear in Australian flags and other symbols of local identity. Part II — The Challenge of Design — provides some hint of how these colours, often overlooked in Australia (though not elsewhere) might be used to devise a new flag simple, attractive and distinctive enough to win open-minded public consideration.

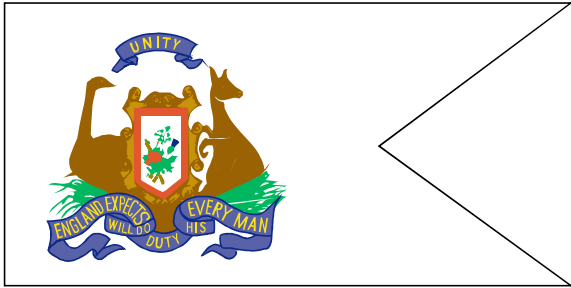


Figure 5



Figure 6

Part I – The legacy of livery

Definition

If the first meaning of livery — an heraldic term — is a distinctive and emblematic style of dress, the flag that dresses and proclaims the nation may be said to be its livery. Yet in Australia the official livery since 1984 is green and gold whilst the flag is red white and blue. An untidy muddle. Blue and gold in the official Arms by default have faded from public awareness. The way is thus open to inquire if Australian flags and symbols ever used livery of blue and gold, what symbolism did they express? This section will first explore the tradition of the blue, then consider the role of gold and the use of either in flags today.

First flags blue

Bowman's banner and others

Blue flags in Australia were a while in coming. Aboriginal vexilloforms, developed over thousands of years, related in the main to religious ceremony and defined numerous places. Foreign flags of various European explorers were used as important markers on a new continent, as if to assert right of property but in reality masking an act of theft. Such flags of usurpation also planted the idea for local flags that followed.⁵

Settlers' patriotic flags appeared in New South Wales at an early date. In 1806, to celebrate Nelson's victory over Napoleon at Trafalgar, John Bowman painted a kind of local Arms on pieces of his wife Hannah's wedding dress,⁶ hoisting it upon his farmstead roof (Fig. 5). Another home-made effort (Fig. 6) was the white-field campaign banner of Wentworth and Bland — "Australia's Hope and Sydney's Pride", candidates for election in 1843 to the first colonial Parliament.⁷ Such flags were essentially banners of British belonging, though Bowman used local devices — a kangaroo and emu and a blue ribbon with gold motto.

Golden ochre, blue down under

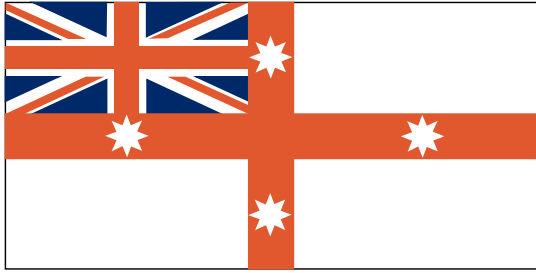


Figure 7

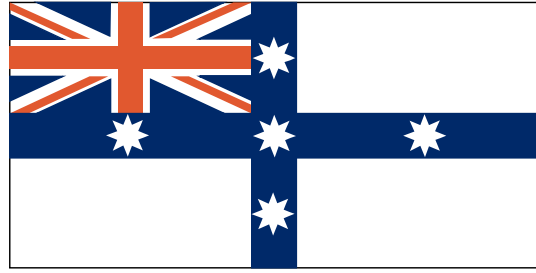


Figure 8

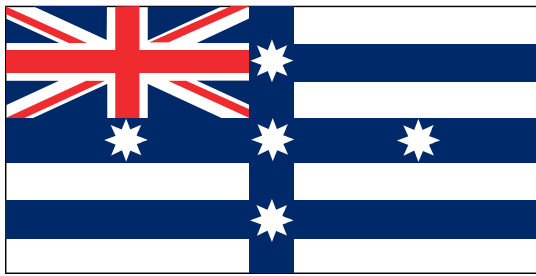


Figure 9

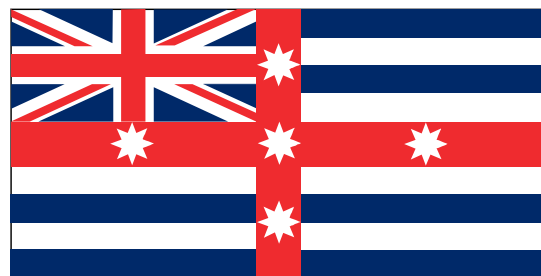


Figure 10

John Bingle's flag

The white ensign of the Royal Navy was important in the development of local flags in Australia. Self-styled co-designer John Bingle, claimed around 1883 in his memoirs that this flag was modified by Sydney Harbourmaster Captain John Nicholson, by adding stars to its cross bars (Fig. 7) “in 1823 or 1824” and that it was officially accepted.⁸

Nicholson and Bingle's flag seems to have set the style for using stars in various ways to represent the Southern Cross:

- in unofficial Australian flags of the 19th century,
- in official badges of several colonies,
- the current national flag,
- the flags of two states and of two territories of the Commonwealth,
- as well as the older national flag of New Zealand.⁹

The Australian ensign

The earliest documented evidence of a flag resembling this design is the Sydney Post Office chart of 1832.¹⁰ The Chart shows the red cross of St. George as blue, adorned with *five* white stars of eight points (Fig. 8). This blue cross ensign is the “gay Australian flag” in accounts of the half century celebrations on Sydney Harbour in 1838.¹¹ The ensign came to be known as the New South Wales, or Australian, Ensign. It was widely used in the 1800s on Australian ships on the east coast as far as New Guinea. Variations include John Nicholson's 1830s blue cross NSW Merchant flag (Fig. 9), and from the 1850s, the mysterious Murray River flag (Fig. 10).¹²

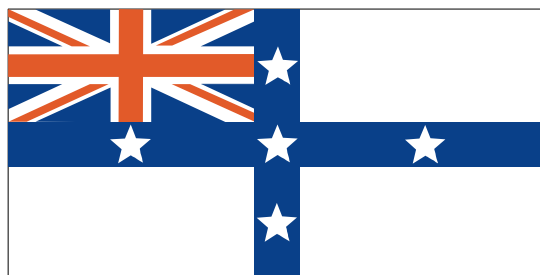


Figure 11

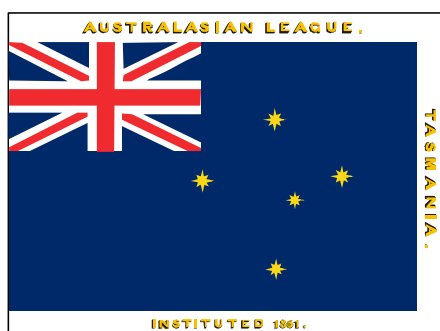


Figure 12

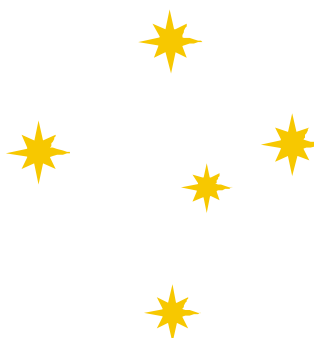


Figure 12a

The Federation flag

In 1892, the same blue cross ensign was adapted (Fig. 11) as the flag of the Federation movement, in use well after Federation.¹³ Australia's first Prime Minister Edmund Barton sent it to the British authorities in 1902 as an alternative to the blue ensign selected in the 1901 competition.¹⁴ The blue cross and stars of the NSW ensign may have influenced elements of unofficial badges and Arms that appear in New South Wales from the 1830s onward, as the colony inched toward self-government.¹⁵

No More Convicts flag

Other flags reflect rising political consciousness in the mid-19th century among the European settlers. These also consolidated the custom of blue flags and blue as at least one of the future heraldic colours of Australia. Little known outside, and even within Australia, is the 1851 flag of the Anti-Transportation League — ATL (Fig. 12). Like local flags before, the ATL depicted the Southern Cross, but roughly in its astronomical display. To note is that the stars (although distorted) have eight points each and unlike its white ensign predecessors in NSW, it was a blue field flag — in fact, it is the blue ensign of the Royal Navy “defaced” — a flag model that would be copied throughout Australasia from 1865.

Most remarkably, the stars are gold (yellow) — not white (Fig. 12a).

Eureka blue

In the same year the ATL was campaigning to end imported convict labour — and thus seeking to define the sort of society Australia ought to be — gold was discovered in New South Wales and Victoria. The word spread round the world and the result was to be even more rapid social change. The goldfields would generate what is arguably Australia's most famous flag of all.

In Australia blue is not just a colour. It can refer to a red-head. Or his red temper if it comes to a stoush — a barney, a fight. Australia's most famous flag is in fact a blue flag and the symbol of the country's most infamous and bloody blue. It deserves close consideration.

The richest gold fields proved to be in Victoria. At the height of the rush, Melbourne and its docks were deserted, and the small port of Geelong to the southwest, closer to the diggings, boomed as the busiest on the continent.

The goldfields generated immense wealth for a few and misery for many. Petty-minded bureaucracy and a bloody-minded colonial government combined to deliver ever more oppressive and arbitrary administration of digger's licensing laws. Resentment rankled and in October 1854 crackled into open unrest at Ballarat in central Victoria. On 29 November, after several incidents including murder and arson, an assembly of armed miners took their stand behind a wooden stockade, swearing an oath under a new flag of stars to defend their rights. Although he had earlier met with miners' delegations, Governor Hotham lost patience and saw this as sedition. Goldfields Commissioner, Rede, determined that force was prudent. A column of troops was despatched from Melbourne.

The troopers attacked in the early hours on 3 December 1854. In a short skirmish, the few diggers remaining inside the stockade were routed. 22 were killed on both sides and many more seriously wounded, including the miners' spokesman, Peter Lalor. The bold blue flag (Fig. 13) that had appeared over the stockade was torn down, trampled in the dust and carried off by one of the troopers, John King. Kept in a drawer, it remained effectively lost to history for a hundred years.¹⁶

The Eureka flag has its own complex story, better detailed in another place.¹⁷ Suffice here to focus on its design, colour and the continued influence of stars as a sign for Australia.

Much ink has been spilt about Eureka — and yet not enough, for myths about it abound. The incident has been described by its detractors as a "rebellion" and by its eulogists as the birth of an Australian republic. In fact it was neither. That the Eureka flag was blue was probably an accident of textile — the practical and available colour of the digger's shirts.¹⁸

The Eureka flag and the events of which it was such a powerful signal were long considered best forgotten, as if identity were a matter for shame. The legend of Eureka lingered and became embroidered. The flag was so thoroughly suppressed that when it did reappear episodically it was often as an approximation:

- as the banner at anti-Chinese incidents on the Lambing Flat goldfields in 1861,¹⁹
- in the shearers strike of the 1890s at Barcaldine, Queensland,
- in the 1947 film *10,000 Horsemen*.

The True Blue had seemed to fade.

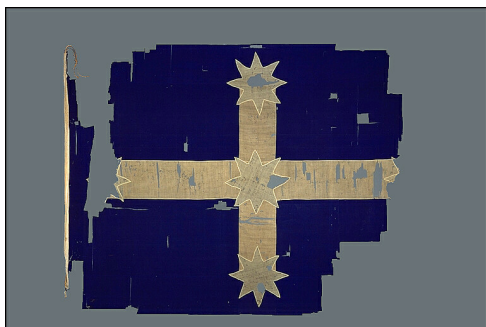


Figure 13

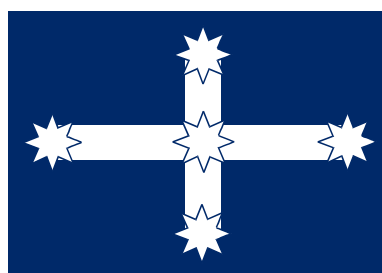


Figure 14

Authenticity of the flag held at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery was finally established in 1967, due to the research and efforts of Frank Cayley and Len Fox.²⁰ It has thus been possible to retrieve the complete design – though today the flag is usually made with an unauthentic blue edge about the stars (Fig. 14).

The Eureka flag and its legend, in my view, have also played some part to entrench affection among Australians for a blue flag. Standing before the restored Flag today, with holes from the bullets and snippets snuck from it by pilgrims of the past, the visitor is struck by the quiet dignity and eerie power of its presence. Perhaps this is the common reaction to any kind of holy icon. There is much about Eureka and its flag, and the values the folk memory of it all embody, that tugs at the Australian heart and intimates that, yes, here we began to be a nation, something more than immigrant settlers. Here on this holy hill, this sacred site, was where Europeans in the Antipodes began to define themselves as special selves and no longer as transplanted English, Irish, Scot or other. Perhaps our current flag is blue not just because Australia is set by sea, but because red blood was shed beneath that other bonny blue, when at the Eureka Stockade, settlers first felled their own brothers. Though not a banner of republic by any means, perhaps it can be said that this was our first truly national flag, and does symbolise an ideal, the struggle for authentic belonging in a new, adopted, but also native, land.

New flags blue

Ironically, British colonial authorities helped cement blue as a predominant colour in Australian flag usage. By the late 1800s other emblems and flags were appearing. Confronted with the chaos of unofficial flags, officialdom took a hand, appreciating — some 35 years after the New Zealand vessel Sir George Murray had been seized in Sydney for having no flag — that clear identity oils the engine of trade.

Badges were devised for the Governors, and from the 1860s affixed to the blue ensign of the Royal Navy to denote government vessels, and on the red ensign, a merchant vessel of the colony.²¹ The Southern Cross was selected as a common — and to Colonial minders, confusing — Badge by four of the colonies — NSW, Victoria, South Australia and New Zealand. (Asked to revise, New Zealand and NSW ended up with two badges — the very result authorities wished to avoid, and South Australia reverted — until 1904 — from such simplicity to the full depiction of its 1836 foundation Seal) (Figs. 15-18).²¹ But again, whatever the badge, all of them on a blue field. Blue was, through the blessing of officialdom, here to stay. The same design matrix



Figure 15

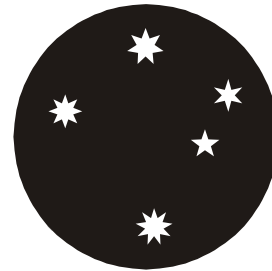


Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

survives in the blue flags of the six Australian states. Only the two Territories created since Federation have flags in any way deviating from the blue ensign and badge model.

The flag of the colony of Victoria approved in 1870 (Fig. 19) is especially interesting. Ralph Kelly's paper to the 13th Congress and recently, in *Crux Australis*,²³ traces the Byzantine manoeuvres that saw the Victorian colonial — and later, State — flag that began, in 1870, as blue, sanctioned separately the same year by the British Board of Trade as a red ensign, and, via the Admiralty, confirmed as a blue ensign, with only the Southern Cross as a badge in the fly (the crown was added in 1877). The same colonial ensign was promoted in Victoria, perhaps as early as 1868, as an Australian flag alternative to the white and blue cross flag popular north of the border in the rival colony of New South Wales. The red ensign version was certainly used as a Federation flag — Figure 32 in this paper.

Most significantly in the consolidation of blue flags in Australia is that in 1901 the Victorian blue ensign was adapted by designers for a new Federal flag, by enlarging the Southern Cross and adding (beneath the Union Jack) a large star of six points for the federating colonies (Fig. 19). Upon gazettal on 20 February 1903, a blue flag thus acquired formal and national status as a flag of Government (though the people had to wait another 51 years for a comprehensively national flag).

Melbourne blue

Several grounds suggest that the blue of the Australian flag ought to be designated Melbourne blue.

- the winning design for a new Federal flag was chosen in Melbourne,



Figure 19



Figure 20

- the public competition had been instigated in 1900 by a Melbourne newspaper,
- most of the judges, Admiralty and other specialists, were based in Melbourne,
- two of the five entries considered so similar as to be the same, were from Victoria.

It is hard to avoid the apprehension that Australia's flag was sealed from the start as a Victorian creation. And if there lingers any doubt about a move to establish Australia's federal livery in Victoria, it is worth examining closely the invitation to the opening of the first Federal parliament, again in Melbourne (Figs. 21 and 21a). This is a coloured card, held in the National Library in Canberra, and portrays an allegory of young Australia paying homage to Britannia. Australia bows to Britannia beneath their respective shields, the Union flag for the one (dexter), and for Australia (at sinister), the Southern Cross, as on the Victorian flag. Although the Star points are indistinct, the original tints can be discerned. The shield is blue — and the stars are definitely not white. *They are gold.*

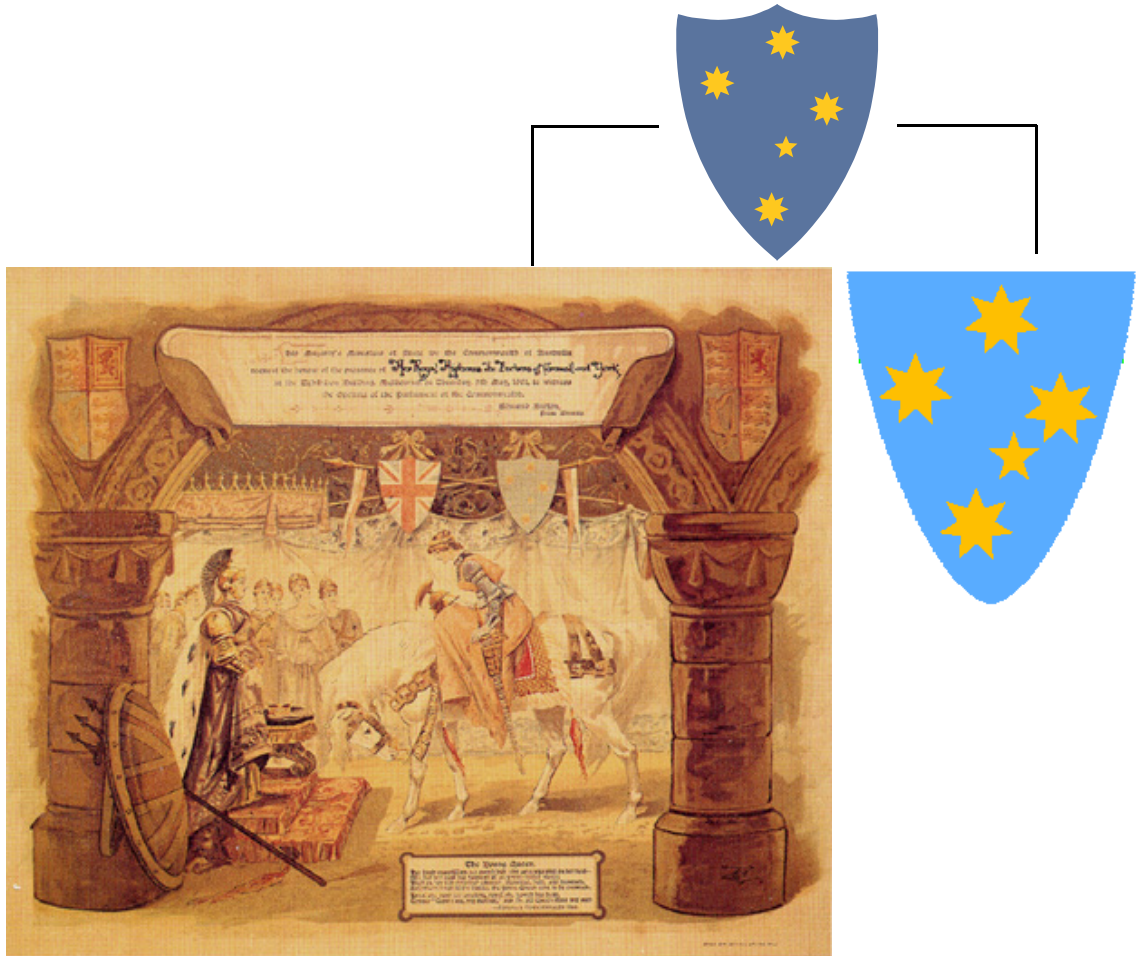
Gold in the weft

Does gold — or yellow — have a place, then, in Australian flag tradition? Stars on the Australian national flag today are white, and most of colonial flags of the 19th century also used white stars. Yet even today, considerable licence is taken in the commercial world of advertising — the stars sometimes green and sometimes gold (or yellow) on sports apparel and equipment.

A puzzle

Despite the heraldic fitness of reference to the national Arms and the national flower, and surprisingly in a land of ancient ochres, gold is understated in Australian flags. Apart from four 20th century and official exceptions, gold was not used on Australian flags since the Anti-Transportation League. If gold — or yellow — is not in the national flag, entries in the 1901 competition indicated that it should be. Of interest too is that in 1956, Prime Minister Menzies seriously considered “gold” as a second “royal” colour (after red) in a proposal to remodel the Commonwealth Arms to match those of New Zealand.²⁴

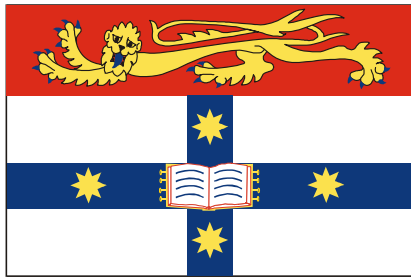
Golden ochre, blue down under



Figures 21 and 21a



Figure 22 Governor's badge NSW 1870-1876.



*Figure 23 University of Sydney
1856.*



*Figure 24 Badge celebrating Federation 1 January
1901. Dixson collection, Powehouse Museum
Sydney.*



*Figure 25
Livery of the
Order of Australia.*



*Figure 26 Blue and Gold Web banner of
the Order of Australia.*

Further indicators

Thirty years before the opening of Federal parliament in Victoria, gold stars on blue had been proposed and accepted as an emblem for New South Wales. The story of its adoption and later supersession has its moments of farce.

In April 1870, in response to a request from the Colonial Office the previous September, the NSW Governor at the time, Lord Belmore, sent a drawing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Granville.²⁵ The suggested badge for the Governor comprised five stars to represent the Southern Cross in yellow on deep blue, surmounted by a crown. Notwithstanding that the badge (Fig. 22) was virtually indistinguishable from the white star version of Victoria, also pointed 9, 8, 7, 6, and 5, the badge was approved.

Lord Carnarvon's circular of 1875 depicted the Admiralty drawing of colonial badges for the Governor's use — on the Union Jack, that is (the incorrect blue ensign usage depicted on the Ausflag website arises from confusion between the Governor's badge and the flag of the colony). Noting the rash of badges all versions of the Southern Cross — Victoria, South Australia and New Zealand and NSW (both with two such badges!) — London became somewhat confused and asked for revisions. In 1876

Golden ochre, blue down under



Figure 27 Seal of the Bank of Australasia.

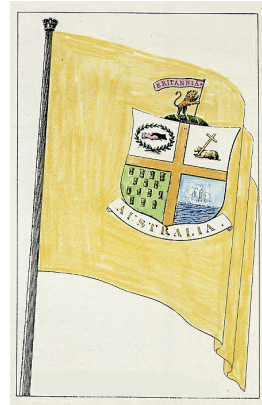


Figure 28 Proposal of 1830.



Figure 29 Unofficial arms.



Figure 30 Unofficial arms.

NSW complied, furnishing the gold lion and stars on a red St. George cross on a white field that remains as the State badge.

Gold on blue as Australian colours were quietly forgotten — at least in New South Wales — except in the banner of the badge of the University of Sydney (Fig. 23) and in the medallion struck for the opening of Parliament in 1901 (Fig. 24). As a theme, blue and gold reappeared in the torse of the Commonwealth Arms and in the livery of the Australian Awards and Honours system, Figures 25 and 26.

The Glow from the Past

So what price gold? The blue Eureka flag was an important cultural by-product of the 1850s bonanza. Gold also found its expression in symbols, for various reasons. As nickel, bauxite and iron were in the 1960s, gold was the Australian metal of the 19th century. Rich lodes were discovered not only in Victoria, but in central NSW and, on the eve of Federation, at Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie in the Western Australian desert — a discovery that ensured that all parts of the continent joined the Commonwealth, despite certain reserve and isolationism in Perth.

The worth and wealth of gold had indelible social impact. In just fifty years, immigrants turned Australia from a collection of British backwaters to a highly urbanised

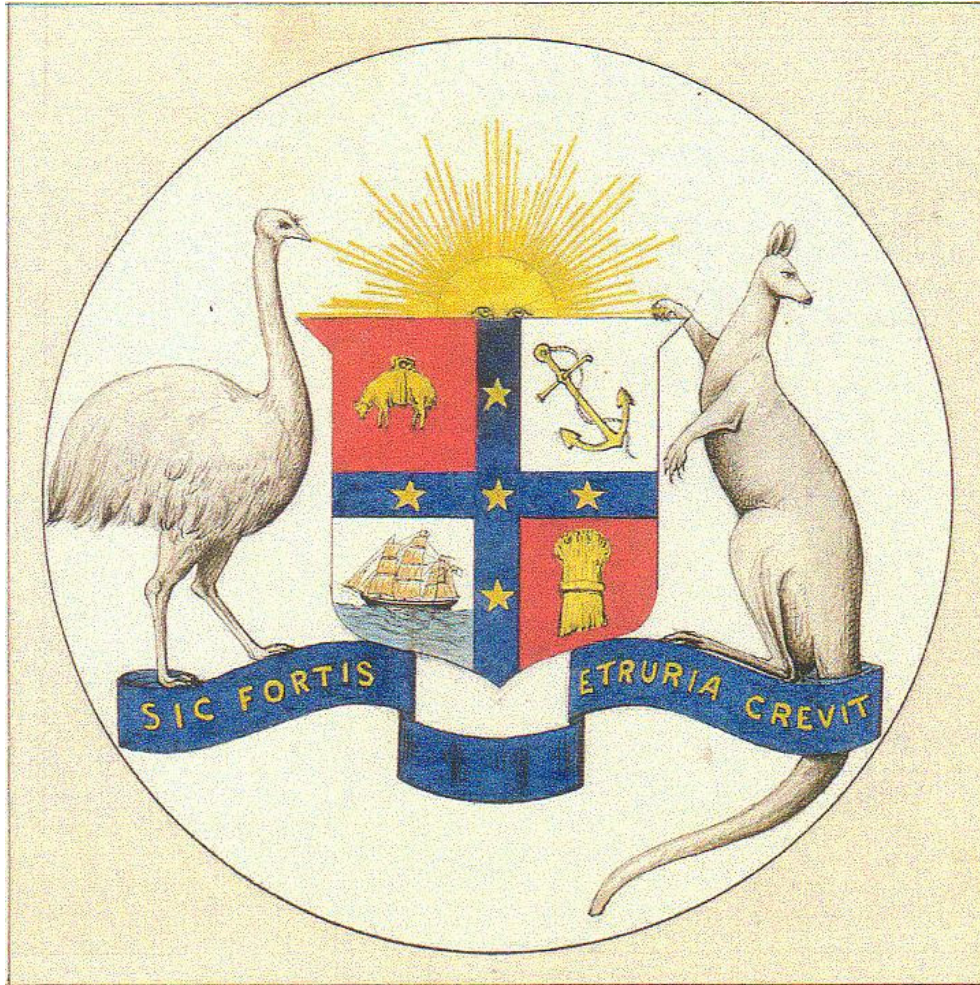


Figure 31

and continental nation of golden promise. The idea of gold as a symbol of prosperity and optimism had appeared in several unofficial insignia well before the gold-rushes. Perhaps the earliest is the 1835 Corporate Seal of the Bank of Australasia (Fig. 27). It survives in the gold stars on a red cross in the State Arms of New South Wales.

There were numerous variations of Arms drawn up for Australia — though none sanctioned by the Colonial authorities. One rather fanciful version dating from 1830 actually made it into a flag (Fig. 28) of golden background.²⁶ Such Arms had various common features: the kangaroo and emu as supporters — first recorded on the 1806 Bowman flag; a shield bearing emblems, in random order, of commerce and prosperity — the golden grain, the golden fleece, the gold-diggers' pick and shovel and the ships that took it all away. Figures 29 and 30 are examples of such glowing devices.²⁷ The idea of prosperity is further emphasised in the symbol, popular as an armorial crest from 1853 to Federation, of a resplendent sun shedding beneficent rays upon the whole busy enterprise. Another example (Fig. 31) only recently come to light in the Public Records Office, London²⁸ reinforces this idea — and the use of blue with gold, in the ribbon and in the stars on the cross bars. It is a prototype for the later State Arms of New South Wales. The motto, from the Colony's original Seal taken from Virgil: *Sic Fortis Etruria Crevit* — *Thus the Etruscans grew Strong*, was also used by the



Figure 32

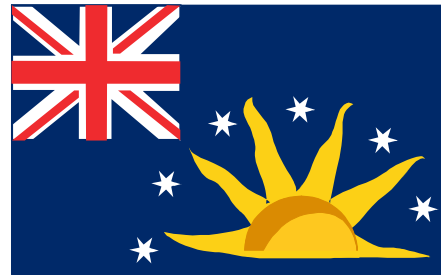


Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35

Bank of New South Wales. For the settlers, latter-day Tuscans taking what they could, the future looked good in the mid-19th century. The land seemed empty — or at least, there seemed plenty to spare, and despite flood, drought and severe economic depression in the early 1890s, the coming century promised nationhood and a better place in the sun for most.

A Golden Dawn

As an heraldic colour and symbol, gold and the rising sun came into their own with the approach of Federation, as shown in a silk tapestry (Fig. 32) from the late 1880s.²⁹ It seemed obvious then that the symbol of a golden sunrise should embellish the banners and paraphernalia of Federation when it finally arrived on 1 January 1901. Not surprisingly, the sun also appeared in design suggestions (Fig. 33) for a new flag.³⁰ In 1904 South Australia saw the light and replaced its complicated Seal of Britannia and an Aborigine with a simpler device (Fig. 34) — a magpie upon a golden roundel — the Sun fully risen, as an emblem associated with the new Commonwealth.

As a symbol of optimism, the golden sun was carried into the new century and onto the Infantry badge on the slouch hats of a new generation of Diggers. Australians soon marched off, then as now, to fight in someone else's war, and for another Empire



Figure 36



Figure 37 and 37a

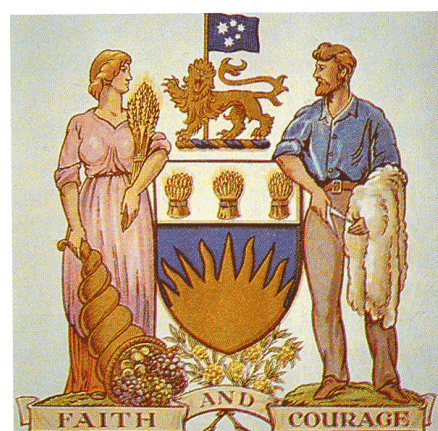


Figure 38

on which the Sun was supposed Never to Set. No longer digging for gold, but for King, God and country in the mud of Flanders.

Another legacy from the symbols of the 19th century, gold is also the colour of what even before Federation was considered the national flower. The golden wattle forms a backdrop to the Commonwealth Arms granted in 1912, harmonising with the tones of the torse and Star crest above. It is also part of the insignia of the Governor-General (Fig. 35), representing the Queen as Head of State.

Gold, Lest We Forget

Gold is enshrined in the Arms and also in other surprising places, like the armoury of the nation. A rising sun has been the Army badge since 1914 (Fig. 36), whilst the banner of the Returned Services League (Fig. 37) defaces the national flag with golden stars, and in place of the Union Jack, its own badge — the military marching out of the sun (Fig. 37a). Blue and gold — and the golden sunrise — also appeared on the first award of Arms to South Australia, by Edward VIII, on the occasion of the centennial of the foundation of the Colony in 1836 (Fig. 38).

Golden ochre, blue down under

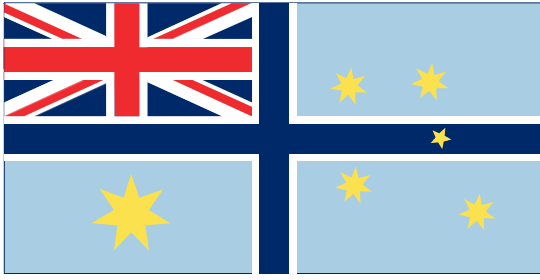


Figure 39



Figure 40

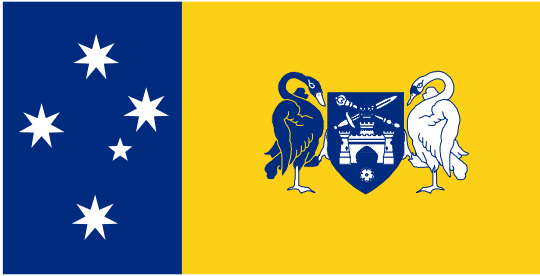


Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 43a and 43b

Official flags gold

One of four official Australian flags gazetted since Federation, the Civil Aviation flag (Fig. 39) was:

- modelled on its British counterpart,
- employed yellow stars from 1934 to 1948,
- not seen in Australian flags since the Anti-convict Flag of the 1850s,³¹
- a handsome flag — rarely seen today.

Still in place is the blue and gold standard (Fig. 40) of the Governor-General. As with the protocol at Buckingham Palace, the Queen's man's flag is flown whenever he — and it is still a he — is in residence. Taking cue from the torse in the Arms of the Commonwealth, gold joins blue as the livery of Awards under the Australian Honours system.³² The heraldic colours of Australia, blue and gold, are also dominant in the flag (Fig. 41) of the Australian Capital Territory, gazetted 31 March 1993.³² Of somewhat awkward design, there appear to be two separate flags here — the fly of the national flag, transposed to hoist, tacked on to an adaptation of the City flag in previous use. The device is a simplified version of the Arms granted by George V in 1928.

It is the golden sun above all that shines in full splendour and with great graphic effect from the centre of the Aboriginal flag (Fig. 42) — a bold, almost defiant beacon.



Figure 44

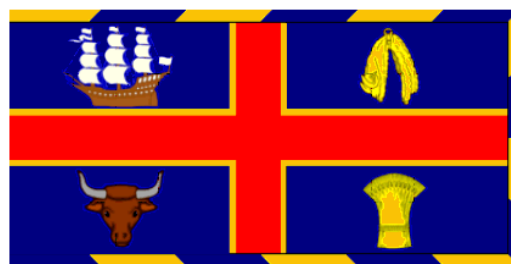


Figure 45



Figure 46



Figure 47

Officially recognised in 1995 among emblems of the nation under the Flags Act, this flag seems to demand even more than such tokenism: recognition of the Aboriginal peoples as a nation.

This is not the first Aboriginal flag, but an independent creation apparently conceived among local Aborigines in 1971 in South Australia. The design was refined by Harold Thomas, who thus is credited with the authorship.³⁴ There is much golden irony here. Thomas had grown up stateless in the same State that 66 years before had incorporated the same sun symbol of life and well-being into its new badge (Fig 43a). The further irony is that the new badge replaced one (Fig. 43b) depicting the initial meeting in 1836 of imperial Britain and his ancestors (and when it was the Aborigine, not Britannia, who sat enthroned).

State capital flags

As a civic footnote, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane each have flags that are predominantly blue and gold (Figs. 44, 45, 46). Finally, the idea of gold as some part of a future national flag has persisted. Wayne Stokes, winner of the 1985-6 Ausflag design competition, introduced a yellow band (Fig. 47) next to white. Breaching heraldic and flag design convention, the yellow band was later removed by Ausflag. As we shall see, subsequent designers have sought to restore it.

Ochre gold blue down under — Summary of part I

1953-81 Australia's national flag is "a blue flag:" — Flags Act
1984 Gold with green official to be used "as custom demands"

Theme Blue and gold recurring as a colour theme in Australian flags and other symbols of national identity

Blue

1832 NSW Ensign
1832 NSW Merchantmen ensign
1853 Murray River 1870 Victorian ensign
1854 Eureka Flag
1865-1901 Colonial ensigns for official Government use
1901 Commonwealth Flag design competition

Gold

1904 Badge of South Australia
1914 – Army Badge
1956 Menzies seeks to add gold to Commonwealth Arms
1971 Aboriginal flag 1971 and 1995
RSL badge
RSL banner

Blue and gold

1806 Ribbon on Bowman's flag
1850s - Unofficial arms NSW
1851 Anti Transportation Flag League banner
1853 Murray River flag
1856 Sydney University
1870 Victorian ensign
1870-75 Badge of NSW Governor
1901 NSW Commemorative badge of Federation
1901 Shield on Invitation to First Federal Parliament Melbourne
1901 Commonwealth Flag design competition
1912 Commonwealth Arms
1934-48 Civil Aviation ensign
1936 Governor General
1936 First award of Arms to South Australia
1975 Order of Australia
1979-84 Bicentennial flag — first edition
1985-1998 Ausflag and other design competitions
1993 ACT flag
City flags Sydney Adelaide Brisbane

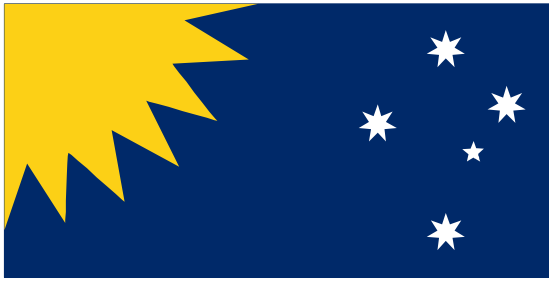


Figure 48



Figure 49



Figure 50



Figure 51

Part II — The challenge of design

Startling designs

Australia broke formally with Empire in 1942 and ties with Britain have loosened since, as the founding Motherland integrates with the rest of Europe. The issue of identity and symbols in Australia persists.³⁵ Since 1972 there have been six separate and formal flag design competitions in Australia, and many of the entries have favoured blue and gold.

Joe Bollen's design to the 1993 Channel 9 Flag Quest and again to the 1998 Aus-flag competition (Fig. 48) is derived from his flag for the 1992 City of Sydney Sesquicentenary, and echoes the sun in splendour theme tried in 1901. The hoist half has the appeal of the simplest heraldry, but then the Southern Cross appears to flee from the scorching brilliance, and off the flag altogether. A main device in the fly is not practical flagcraft.

Figure 49, also an entry to the 1993 Television Channel 9 competition, suggests a map of Australia, but also sausages with egg. It prompted an immortal line from former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam: *Will we salute when it gives birth?*³⁶ Most such efforts have been found wanting in some way. And small wonder. Derivative, undramatic, surely inspired by something, but in the end, uninspiring.

Figure 50 — a touch of the blue and gold Governor-General's flag. As the badge of the Bicentennial of European settlement in 1988 a design house took a twist of ribbon, turned it into a map of Australia stylised from shards of the Union Jack³⁷ in the blue and gold of the national Arms. Maps usually don't work on flags but as with the Bosnian map-flag (Fig. 51), this is a clever — even an inspired — approach.

Golden ochre, blue down under



Figure 52 Flags of blue and gold the world over.

Blue and gold the world over

Here is a challenging point: just how many blue and gold flags can be sustained among some 200 nations? The field of blue and gold is pretty well taken. Internationally, blue and gold are well represented (Fig. 52). Yet Australia may have cogent claim — these are colours widely used among Pacific nations, and in as many shades as there are of the Swedish blue. That there is a family of colours for our region may be reason to join the club, and to revisit that 1830s suggestion — of a golden field, blending with azure bright, to convey a sense of place where Orient meets the Ocean. In the crowded field of blue and gold, it may be difficult to devise a design distinct and bold to draw attention flags should command. For all the variety of shade and device, anything new would have to be different from any of these.

The options for designers

- Option 1 Leave things as they are.
Perhaps this is appropriate, considering that Australia marched into the Middle East with canton and colours so clearly aligned with a so-called Coalition of the Willing. There may be long-term advantage not to have Australia's new flag sullied by association with the mistaken assumptions of that adventure.
- Option 2 Return to basics, and draw from the familiar.
- Option 3 Devise a flag entirely different. Canada, Antigua, South Africa did.
- Option 4 "Updating" — i.e. subtle changes to what we have now.

Updating is a variation on Option 2.

On 20 February 2003, the centenary of the gazettal of the Commonwealth's blue ensign, a descendant of Annie Dorrington, one of the designers, opened a door. Ms Jacqueline Whistler stated that while proud of her great-aunt's gift to the nation, she "had an open mind" on whether her image needed to be updated.³⁸

"Updating" might suggest that a new flag retain at least one element of the original concept. This narrows the field somewhat:

- to perhaps just the Southern Cross on Blue. This is not a new idea. Derived from the ATF of 1851 (Fig. 53), it is found in the 1936 first Arms of South Australia. Others have suggested various graphic arrangements — as with three of my own — Figs. 53 and 54a-c.

- or just the Federation Star.
- or both.

Ausflag (Fig. 55) in 1991 and the landscape artist Ken Done (Fig. 56) have tried. Ausflag tried again, awarding first prize in its 1998 competition to a combination (Fig. 57) of Southern Cross and Federal Star at opposing ends of the field. A safe reworking of the current national flag, but white and yellow fight against each other. The design itself is hardly different from the first of the new Australian flag proposals launched in 1968. But sorry, so far — no cigar for any of these.

Some new ideas

In the 1980s, Ralph Kelly offered something new (Fig. 58) in his boomerang throw-back to the heraldic colours and to Aboriginal culture. Figure 59 — a blue and gold white star entry to the 1997 Ausflag competition, made the final 100. It is not hard to see why. It is

- bold and innovative,
- the Southern Cross is dispensed with in favour of a Commonwealth Star,
- eight points recognise that the Commonwealth has expanded since 1901.³⁹

Australians may find this approach too stark, altogether lost to its subtleties. Perhaps for that reason the design did not capture the imagination of judges sufficiently to keep it in the final 10. Anthony Frost's design to the 1993 Channel 9 Flag Quest is based on

Golden ochre, blue down under



Figure 53



Figure 54a-c



Figure 55



Figure 56



Figure 57



Figure 58



Figure 59



Figure 60



Figure 61



Figure 62



Figure 63

the Golden Mean and features a yellow panel in the fly. It is a quirky design that also makes a feature of the Commonwealth Star. It drew favourable comment from judges at the time.⁴⁰ As flags, both work well enough in their minimalist approach to design yet both are rich in symbolism.

Figure 59 draws on the livery in the national Arms and conveys the idea of Commonwealth, of an ochre land set by ocean, offering a place in the sun for all citizens committed to the Australian ethos. Frost's design pays unambiguous heed to the longer Aboriginal occupation of the Continent. It could be adapted further to livery of blue and gold — as in Figure 61.

Of course, other devices than stars might make effective and distinctive flags in blue and gold. As examples we have only to consider the emblem of the Federation of Vexillological Societies (Fig. 62) and the Australian Flag Society itself, its logotype eminently adaptable to a flag (Fig. 63).

Golden ochre, blue down under



Figure 64



Figure 65

A possible solution: Ex machina, vexilla

The designers are out there, and still trying. Egos clash. It was ever thus. The issue is for all that unresolved. Australia's flag is clearly a relic of history but a history only half told on the national flag. We can do better. In Australian history there have been many — even too many — liveries for a flag.⁴¹ This paper has looked at one combination, and asks: Are there valid grounds for blue and gold in a new flag for Australia?

- if past precedent examined in Part I is to go by — yes,
- if what happened in history counts — yes,
- if present emblems are worth keeping — again, yes.

The challenge

How to present blue and gold — and the star cluster so familiar and cherished by Australians — in a design that is distinctive, when already there are so many flags in these colours — starting with that of one of our hosts (Fig. 64), the oldest, right down to the newest, Bosnia's.

The Bosnian case

The challenge is to work the colours and their alignment in ways not thought of before. The flag of Bosnia-Herzegovina illustrates the point with apparent criteria:

- a firm statement of presence in Europe and desire for harmony in Europe,
- a design neutral to all internal factions,
- some element(s) to suggest the country,
- without focusing on its ethnic and regional divisions.

The result (Fig. 65):

- a map of the country stylised to its roughly triangular shape,
- acknowledging, by its angles, the three main communities,
- further symbolism in that a triangle reinforces unity,
- colours from previous livery, yet those of the European Union,
- the highly unusual ragged stars seem to be broken but are actually a series in an unbroken chain among member states of a united Europe.

From something old drawn something new but also bold — and certainly distinctive. Though born of war and immense distress, the flag of Bosnia-Herzegovina is not revolutionary. It is evolutionary — and ingeniously so. Others might do the same.

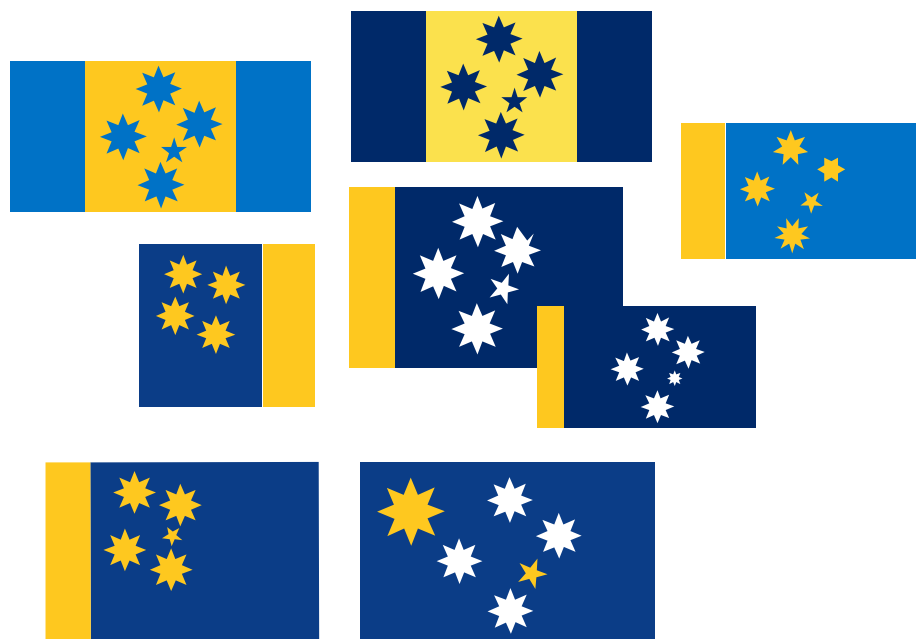


Figure 66

Australian criteria

For Australia, the foremost criteria in the 1901 design quest were:

- loyalty to the Empire,
- representation of Federation,
- respect for history,
- conformity with norms of heraldry,
- distinctiveness,
- ease of manufacture.

A century later, the criteria for a dynamic flag for Australia appear to be different. It seems that what is required is a combination of line, colour and symbol that:

1. will bring people together and transcend differences of many cultures,
2. acknowledge Indigenous Australians and a place in the sun especially for them,
3. reflects constitutional history,
4. recognises that a Commonwealth means common health and a common wealth,
5. recognises that there is a place and a fair go for every citizen,
6. includes some expression of where we are — our location as a land of the south,
7. combining colours to lend dignity to solemn occasions and bring pageantry and gaiety to festive celebrations,
8. all with simplicity of line for dramatic impact even at a distance — distinctiveness,
9. adaptability.

This is a large order. But as a start, Figure 66 is a cluster of eight suggestions by this writer. They retain the stars in a livery of blue and gold but the proportions, shades and arranging of shapes are open.

Golden ochre, blue down under



Figure 67 Commonwealth of Australia: A flag design suggestion based on a paper delivered the ICV XX, Stockholm, 2003.

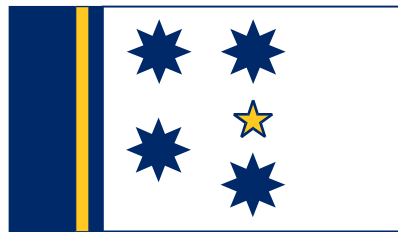


Figure 68

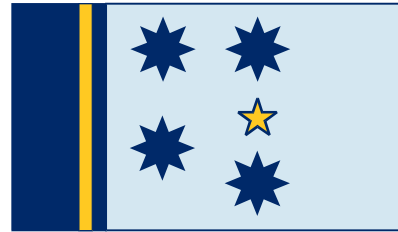


Figure 69

A more specific suggestion by the author

This paper concludes by offering another proposal. It is only one solution to the possible combination of two colours for an Australian flag that respects the past and looks to the future. It responds to the nine criteria listed above.

<i>Design feature</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
- Combines blue, gold and white – 1908/1913 Arms	3, 7
- Gold of the sun and stars of the Southern Cross implies a relationship between the ochre earth and the heavens that glitter above all Australians, for the First Peoples from millennia, for every settler since and for all to come — symbols that invite national reflection and insight.	1, 2, 4, 5
- Blue and white recall earlier flags in history	3
- Blue associates with serenity	4, 5
- A blue field. Our land is set by sea	8
- Southern Cross in the blue Antipodes	8
- Gold bar at the hoist — a place in the sun for all, the same sun found on the flag of the First Peoples	2, 3
- Use of golden ochre – PMS 116	3, 7
- Simplicity of line	8, 9
- Includes but transcends colour symbols of Indigenous peoples and flags devised by settlers since 1788	1
- Adaptable to ancillary flags — e.g. armed services	9
- Small star in the centre of the flag stands for a fair go for every citizen, a guiding star for all but especially the weakest — strength of democracy is measured by the way minorities are treated.	1, 2, 4, 5

The design and a possible adaptation to use by the navy and air force are shown in Figures 67-69. Figures 70 and 71 show its construction.

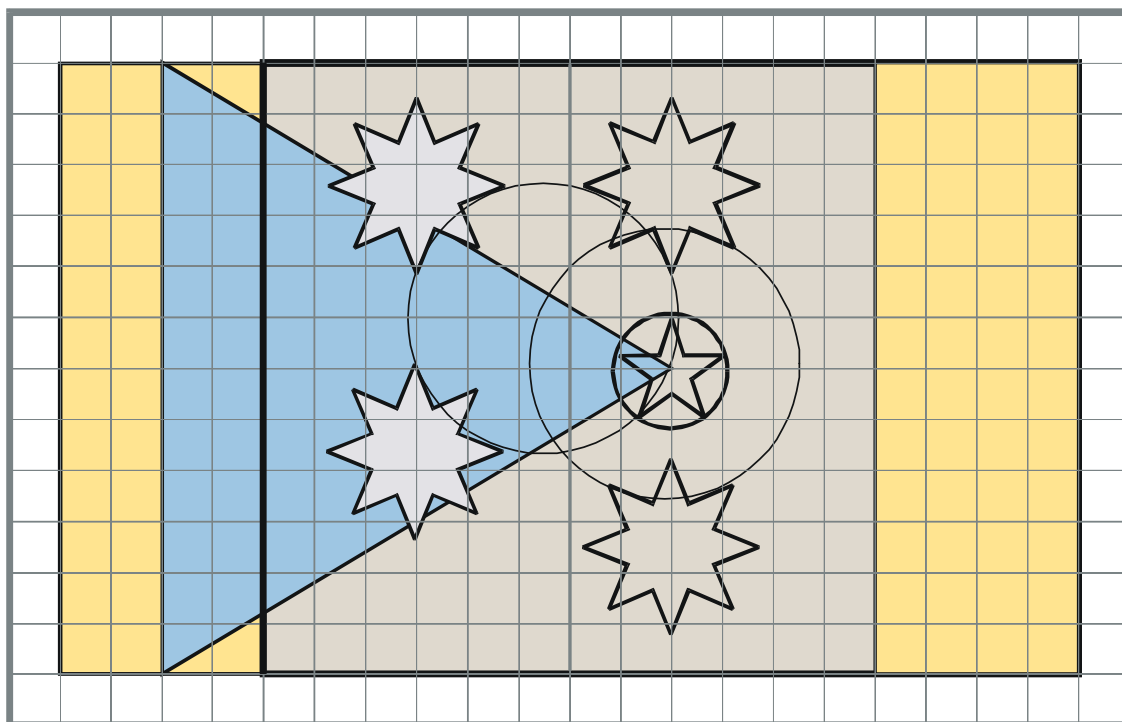
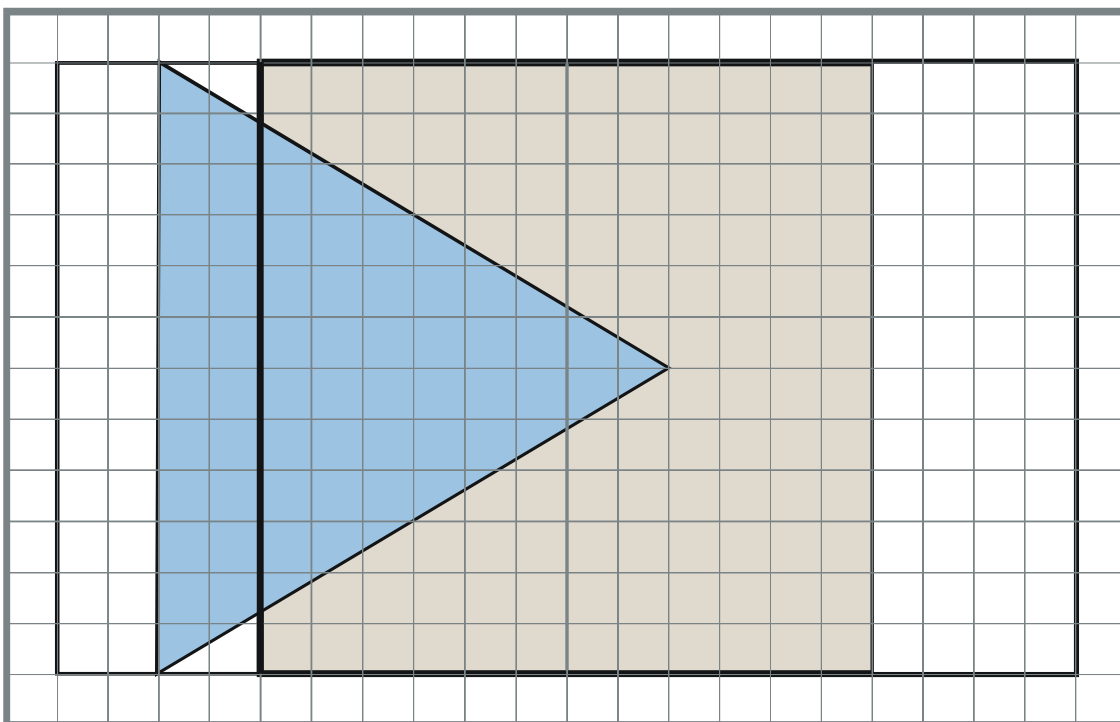


Figure 70 and 71 Geometry of the blue and gold flag of the southern cross.

Acknowledgements

Flag images illustrating this article are by courtesy of research exchange with Flag Institute, UK, acknowledged in *Crux Australis*, or made available to the author from the personal artwork library of Ralph Kelly, of the Flag Society of Australia Inc.

Notes

¹ The Flags Act (1953) Commonwealth of Australia
SCHEDULE 1 (s3 and 4) THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG
AND THE AUSTRALIAN RED ENSIGN

1. The Australian National Flag is a blue flag, and the Australian Red Ensign is a red flag, the design of each of which is specified in clause 1A

In 1953 it was described as a “British blue ensign”, but this was amended in 1981 to “a blue flag” without defining the shade of blue.

² The reference is to the MV Tampa, a Norwegian-registered container vessel that in August 2001 rescued castaways in the Timor Sea in international waters but was refused entry to Australia because the people rescued were seeking asylum in Australia. Since then the Australian government has compromised its claimed sovereignty by declaring various offshore islands and reefs not part of Australia for immigration purposes.

³ “Gold” is taken to mean, throughout this paper, rich yellow, PMS 109 or deeper. Green and “gold” were declared Australia’s official colours — PMS 348c and PMS 116c respectively — “on all occasions on which such colours are customarily used.” by Proclamation of the Governor-General, Commonwealth Gazette S-142 of 19 April 1984 — a decision partly in response to lobbying by such groups as Ausflag. Prior to that Australia is said to have had “no official colours” as such, though blue and gold were frequently used in a de facto sense, the Proclamation does not however invalidate or revoke blue and gold as the heraldic blazon of the Arms of the Commonwealth — colours that “by default had faded from public awareness” and remain the official base colours of the National Honours system, after the Arms. See Edwards, J., *Flags in the News*, *Crux Australis*, Vol. 1/1, No 1 June 1984, p. 16, and Ralph Bartlett, *The Australian Bicentennial Flag*, in *Crux Australis*, Vol. 3/3, No 15, June 1987, pp. 3-10.

⁴ Commonwealth Gazette, No 3 of 18 January 1913, after Royal Warrant of George V dated 19 September 1912.

⁵ Eastern Australia was claimed for Britain by Captain James Cook in 1770. Cook’s flag was of course blue, white and red, a crossing of crosses of the national flags of Scotland and England — the one cross white on blue, the other red on white.

⁶ The original is held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. See *The Bowman Flag, A Pledge of Loyalty*, in *Crux Australis*, Volume 11/2, No. 46, April-June 1995, pp. 36, 56 and 78, and Cayley, F., *Flag of Stars*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1966, p. 56-57.

⁷ Cayley, op. cit. pp. 35-37. The two eight pointed stars are white (on white!) at the hoist and red in the fly.

⁸ Bingle J, *Illustrated Retrospect of the Present Century*, 1881 (Mitchell Library Manuscripts, microfiche, Sydney). Writing in the 1880s, Bingle states that the flag was “adopted by the Government of Sir Thomas Brisbane” — i.e., in the 1820s. Bingle claims a date of “1823 (or 1824)”. The full text is reproduced in A. Burton *Australia’s Forgotten Flag*, in *Crux Australis*, Volume 8/4, No. 36 1992, p. 162.

⁹ Kelly, R. D., *Australian State Flags (1865-1904): A British Admiralty Legacy*, paper to ICV13 Melbourne, 1989, and in *Crux Australis*, Volume 10/4, No. 36 1992, 183-206. The “Southern Cross” colonies were NSW, Victoria, South Australia and New Zealand.

¹⁰ *The New South Wales Calendar and General Post Office Directory 1832* (Facsimile edition, Trustees Public Library NSW, Sydney, 1966).

¹¹ Horne, D., *Ideas for a Nation*, Pan Books, 1989, p. 17. See also the report from *The Australian newspaper*, 30 January 1838. Full text in A. Burton, *Australia’s Forgotten Flag*, in *Crux Australis*, Volume

8/4, No. 36 1992, p. 162.

¹² Unresolved is the exact design provenance of this flag — seen in at least two versions — for amongst the striped flags used in Australia in the 19th century, the US flag was popular, particularly at the South Australian outlet where the river trade had its hub.

¹³ Burton art. cit., *Crux Australis*, Volume 8/4, No 36 Oct-Dec 1992, pp. 176-179.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 174-175.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 166-169.

¹⁶ Fox, L., *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, Southwood, Marrickville NSW, 1982, pp. 174-182.

¹⁷ Carboni, Raffaello, *The Eureka Stockade Melbourne 1855*. See also *The Eureka Rebellion — Brief history and background*, <<http://www.alphalink.com.au/~eureka/eukand.htm>>.

¹⁸ Cayley, F., *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁹ Burton, A., *Two Cultures Crossed: The Flag of Lambing Flat and Lambing Flat 1860: Gold, Wealth and Turbulence*, Young Historical Society, after William A. Bayley in *Crux Australis*, Volume 12/4, No. 52, pp. 169-190.

²⁰ Cayley, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-86 and Fox *op. cit.* pp. 174-19, and the author's conversations with Mr. Fox in Sydney 1999-2000.

²¹ Kelly, R. D., art. cit. *Crux Australis*, Volume 10/4, No. 36 1992.

²² Kelly, R. D., *New Light on South Australia Flags*, in *Crux Australis*, Volume 15/4, No. 64 January 2003, pp. 197-193, based on material from PRO London. Images in Figures 16 and 18 also in *Crux Australis*, p. 182 courtesy of Ralph Kelly. Fig. 16 is the earliest blue ensign with Southern Cross badge for South Australia. The cameo of Britannia and a seated Aboriginal superseded the Southern Cross badge until 1904.

²³ Kelly, R. D., art. cit., *Crux Australis*, pp. 187-188 and 198-199.

²⁴ Kelly, R. D., *Filibuster: The Century-Long Australian Flag Debate*, paper to ICV-17 Cape Town, 1997, amplified in *Crux Australis*, Volume 14/1 No 57 January-March 2000, pp. 4-45 and especially pp. 20-21.

²⁵ Governor Belmore's dispatch of 20 April 1870, to the Colonial Secretary, (PRO No. 1838, London). See Kelly, R.D., art. cit., page 190, footnotes 28 and 29 on p. 204, citing (PRO No. 1838) and also John Edwards, *The Flags of Tasmania*, in *Crux Australis*, Vol 2, No 5 July 1986, p. 33.

²⁶ Kelly, R. D., art. cit., *Crux Australis*, Volume 10/4, No. 36 1992 pp. 184-185, citing as source *The Friend of Australia, or, a plan for exploring the interior and for carrying on a survey of the whole continent of Australia*, attributed to T.J. Maslen, ca 1830, Hurst Chance & Co, London.

²⁷ Images of these unofficial Arms from Vane Lindsay, *Aussie-Osities*, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Greenhouse PB, Richmond, Victoria, 1988.

²⁸ E-mail David Prothero to Ralph Kelly 9 May 2003 re Arms of New South Wales. A coloured drawing of the Arms of New South Wales in CO 323/326 (PRO 2405) *General Despatches 1876*, is described as "in use from the early days", and shows: Emu dexter, Kangaroo sinister supporting shield with rising sun crest. On Shield: Five, five-pointed yellow stars on blue cross (ctd) Quarters as follows: 1st. yellow fleece on red; 2nd. yellow fowl anchor inclined at 45 degrees, head top left on white; 3rd. three-masted ship on blue sea and white sky; 4th. yellow sheaf on red. Scroll below with motto SIC FORTIS ETRURIA CREVIT.

²⁹ Image courtesy of Ralph Kelly from art. cit., *Filibuster: The Century-Long Australian Flag Debate*, Kelly, R. D. These Arms date from ca. 1880s. The original artefact in coloured silk depicting the blue cross white Federation ensign and the colonial red ensign of Victoria, is part of the Powerhouse Museum collection in Ultimo, Sydney.

³⁰ Reconstructed image courtesy Ralph Kelly, and his paper to ICV-17 Cape Town 1997.

³¹ Gazetted in 1935. In 1949 the stars were changed to white to reflect those of the national flag. As a flag of a Commonwealth Authority (and thus distinct from the national flag) the Southern Cross is tilted toward the canton — an interesting symbol of obeisance. It is also lowered, to ensure that the smallest star is not lost in the white fimbriation around the blue cross.

³² See <<http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au>> and *Australian Symbols*, Dept of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Awards and National Symbols Branch, National Circuit Barton ACT 2600.

³³ See detailed coverage of the selection of this flag in *A Capital Banner: An Australian Flag ACT*, in

Crux Australis, Volume 9/2 No 38 April-June 1993, pp. 91-104. The Heraldic Society of Australia, Canberra Branch, and the designer have lobbied the ACT Government — so far without success — to have the flag simplified.

³⁴ Burton, A., Indigenality and Australian Vexillography, in Crux Australis, Volume 10/4 No. 44 October-December 1994, pp. 170-186. The Aboriginal Flag was proclaimed as an official flag of Australia in Special Gazette No. 159 on 14 July 1995. The proportions shown here are those conveyed to the author by Harold Thomas in 1994 (31) and are to match those in the Gazette of 14 July 1995. Current marketing of the flag in proportions of 1:2 appear to reflect the convenience of the manufacturer and flag merchant who in 1998 signed a monopoly agreement with Mr. Thomas.

³⁵ Australia finally ratified in 1942 the 1931 Statute of Westminster, giving the former dominions of the Empire equal constitutional status with Britain.

³⁶ Anecdote: Ralph Kelly to the author after the judging.

³⁷ Bartlett, R., The Australian Bicentennial Flag, in Crux Australis, Volume 3/3 No 15, July 1987, pp. 3-10.

³⁸ On 20 February 2003, the centenary of the gazetting of the Australian blue ensign as the flag of the Commonwealth of Australia, a great-niece of one of the designers, Annie Dorrington, was interviewed. Ms. Jacqueline Whistler's remarks about the flag — Whistler's wind in 100 year old flag — were not as confident as the editorial on page 12 which declared, at a time when Australia was about to go to war in Iraq, that the current flag "has served us well". The Australian, 20 February 2003, pp. 1 and 12.

³⁹ Indeed the Constitution allows for the creation of new states but the abolition of none.

⁴⁰ The Fifty Finest: Channel 9 Flag Ideas Quest 1993, in Crux Australis, Volume 9/2 No 38, April-June 1993, pp. 51-90 especially pp. 66-69.

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About the author



Antony (Tony) Burton: With a keen and native interest in Australian affairs, Tony Burton is currently a policy adviser to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the elected representative Council of Indigenous people in Australia. A member of the Flag Society of Australia since 1987, and fascinated by vexillology long before that, Tony is the designer of various flags. Some have won place in design competitions held since 1978 for a new Australian flag. Recently he has submitted ideas to the UN-sponsored competition for a flag of an eventually reunified Cyprus. He is also the designer of the flag of the Australian South Sea Islanders and of the corporate flags of the independently elected Aboriginal Councils of Murdi Paki and Queanbeyan in NSW. He has edited *Crux Australis*, the journal of the Flag Society of Australia, since 1990 and is currently President of the Society. Tony is also a member of the Heraldry Society of Australia. He has written on a wide range of flag themes. Apart from a specific interest and output on the semiology of Australian flags, and in major recent work, on the Great Seal of the Commonwealth, he has also written on the flags of Iraq, Kurdistan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kartvelia and, to use his own coinage, *xenovexilla* — flags of uncommon and sometimes provocative design. Among fellow members of the Flag Society of Australia and in the wide family of *Fahnenkraftwerk*, Tony wishes to acknowledge and express appreciation to Ralph Kelly especially, for his assistance over the years in developing his flag knowledge and with many of the graphics for this and other articles.

Author's address: Antony (Tony) Burton
Flag Society of Australia
PO Box 233
Milsons Point NSW 1565
Australia
E-mail: <tony.burton@atsic.gov.au>

