

WE DID BUT SEE HER PASSING BY ... THE 1954 ROYAL VISIT AND ITS IMPACT ON AUSTRALIAN VEXILLOLOGY

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Flags Australia

INTRODUCTION

The 1954 Royal Visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Tonga, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia was a signal event in Australia's post-war social and economic transformation. It was a summer gala that lifted spirits and led into a decade of stability and prosperity.

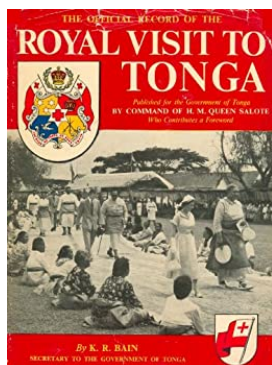
At a time when the British Empire was disbanding - or as some would prefer, transforming - the Royal event was in many ways the last hurrah of empire, even for Australia, though with the odd distinction that the new emerging reality was not - and still is not - reflected in the national flag.

Local political decisions over the flag - indeed, *which* flag (there was choice between two) - and the Queen's role, ceremonial but also constitutional legal, in culmination of that 50-year process also left an indelible print on Australian vexillology, fixing the flag and thinking about national symbols for a whole generation more. The longer impact continues to influence, even distract, debate about the national flag - at least in Australia, if not with the same passion in Fiji and New Zealand in regard to their own national flags of similar design.

This paper outlines and illustrates

- how the connection between flag and monarchy was manifest in the symbols displayed during the Royal Tour;
- how the actual presence of the monarch helped consolidate proposals on the national flag already advocated, especially in Victoria;
- how the powerful myth of monarchy ensured that imaginations did not roam far from a flag of familiar usage;
- and how that flag's case was strengthened through incumbency.

The paper concludes with some observations about the future of emblems of identity as an ever more poly-cultural society comes to terms with its evolution and role as a significant, possibly irritating, regional reality, a bridge of liberal values between Asia and the island world of the Pacific.



THE ROYAL VISIT to the farthest ends of the Empire began in Tonga, in response especially to the warm invitation from Queen Salote Tupou of this traditional monarchy and from 1900 British Protectorate (fully independent in June 1970). Queen Salote had attended the British Queen's coronation seven months before. Never a colony, an indigenous Kingdom under its own flag carried kudos; the state visit was very much a case of *noblesse oblige*.

The Tours of Fiji and New Zealand followed, full of formal ceremony, processions and cheering crowds – for everyone, the first opportunity to see their Head of State on their own ground.



There were also, as the focus of this paper, further implications for the self-identity at least for the two settler dominions - New Zealand and Australia. ¹

For Australia, the much longer royal progress across the continent, lasting 81 days, had a profound and lasting effect on a population that revelled, as it still does, in adulation of celebrity - raising questions about the way prolonged isolation can distort social sanity and a sense of perspective.



In the short-term perspective of the day, however, the glitter of royalty brought a touch of glamour after 20 years of austerity - severe economic depression, global war and post-war rationing. Basking in the reflected glory of the real presence of Royalty, Australia's Prime Minister of the day, Robert Menzies, would later that same year secure a crushing electoral victory over the opposition Labor Party he sought to portray as soft against Communism, perceived as a risk to the stability that an 1100-year monarchy was seen to represent.



**THE QUEEN IN NEW ZEALAND
JANUARY 1954**

Left: Note the New Zealand flag with four stars.

Below right: The Queen invested with a Maori *korowai* (feathered cloak) a symbol of high chief.



Right: Welcome to former timber town, central North Island. *Raetihi Welcomes You.*



**THE QUEEN IN AUSTRALIA
FEBRUARY 1954**



Above: Royals arrival in Sydney, 3 February 1954 Farm Cove, Sydney Harbour "Among us at last!" - *Women's Weekly* ecstatic. Australian flag and State flag of NSW displayed in reverse protocol.



Above: Delivering her first speech on Australian soil.

Meticulous planning for the Tour paid off. The people were largely beguiled, gathering and waiting patiently for hours in advance to “get a glimpse”. Victorian writer Robyn Annear captures the mood of the time. ²



“Thousands of school-children waved flags and cheered to drown the anthems. Multicultural motifs, some depicting the Royal Standard, were etched on playing fields for the Royal appraisal and approval as her aircraft flew over. Here was the magical Monarch and her dashing prince ‘among us at last’ as radio comperes crooned. Overweight aldermen levered themselves into formal dress; the bunyip aristocracy learned to bow, bob and curtsey: “we did but see her passing by ...”



Sydney, the gateway to Australia, with its magnificent harbour, turned it on for the Queen. In Melbourne close to a million people, or four-fifths of the city’s population, turned out to line the streets on the day the Queen arrived. “Emotion travelled down the road like a wave,” said a report in the next day’s paper.

Annear, again: “As capital of a province named for the goddess-queen Victoria, Melbourne had long held a view of itself as regally, if not divinely, favoured. True, the Queen and Prince Philip had made their first Australian landfall at Sydney, but Melbourne’s civic pride was assuaged by press reports retelling Sydney-siders’ every gaffe and gaucherie: the royal visitors had been jostled and ogled and hailed familiarly as ‘Liz’ and ‘Phil’. A psychiatrist quoted in Melbourne’s *Argus* newspaper characterised Sydney folk as “highly strung” compared with the “easy-going” inhabitants of the southern capital, who were assured that “there will be none of Sydney’s mass hysteria and selfish scrambling” when it came their city’s turn to welcome the Queen.

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And yet, in Melbourne ... (according to Annear)
 “grown men hung off lamp posts oblivious to the perils of approaching trains. People camped out overnight on suburban median strips along the royal route.”

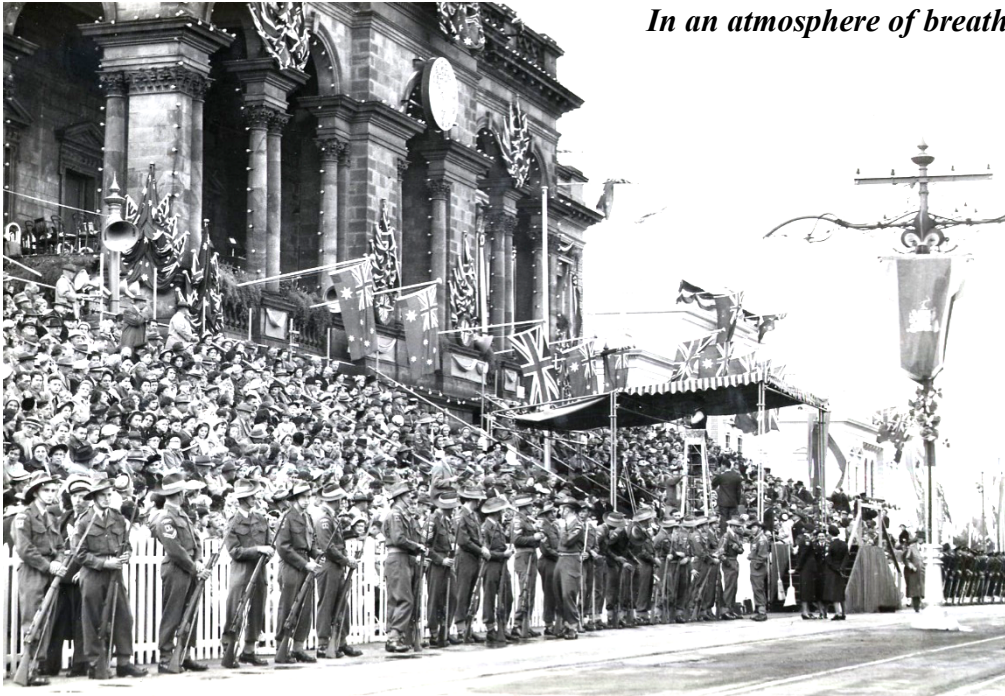


Left: Even in Brisbane enthusiastic citizens scrambled for vantage points.

Right: school children say “Yay!” with flags of two colours. **Below:** Her Majesty enters Parliament in Canberra on the arm of Prime Minister Menzies.



In an atmosphere of breathless adoration ...



Above:
Crowd on grandstand erected at Adelaide Town Hall, March 1954 awaiting the royal visitors. (As the three Australian flags hanging from the balcony appear to show contrast between the crosses in the canton and the field, these flags would appear to be blue ensigns, not red).

Right:
The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh meet the people, in staged settings

and

(below)
informally - and with few flags.



STREET DECORATIONS

Decorations along the Royal route may seem kitsch and unsophisticated to our eyes - there were no laser light shows then - but considering the economics of the time, they were relevant and adequate. They show that government, civic authorities and private enterprise cooperated to maximise the propaganda effect of the royal progress in a timed-to-the minute schedule exhausting even for a couple with youth on their side.

Symbols of monarchy and Empire were dominant but also profusely loyal, even down to flower beds cultivated to bloom in the imperial colours. The Union Jack spread across buildings, including that also advertised a spectacle IN CINEMASCOPE, regalia such as crowns and the dynastic arms of the United Kingdom.

The blue ensign, originating as that of the colonial governments "on the waters" and the red ensign (reserved for the merchant marine) also were hoisted, sometimes interspersed, sometime alone - and not always presented correctly.



Note right: the Australian Red Ensigns on the building above the awning depicting





Large city building such as department stores (Anthony Horderns Sydney, **left**) were festooned with predominately British flags of the empire, the red and blue Australian ensigns interspersed inexplicably with the gold and red Scottish Royal flag to honour a German dynasty.



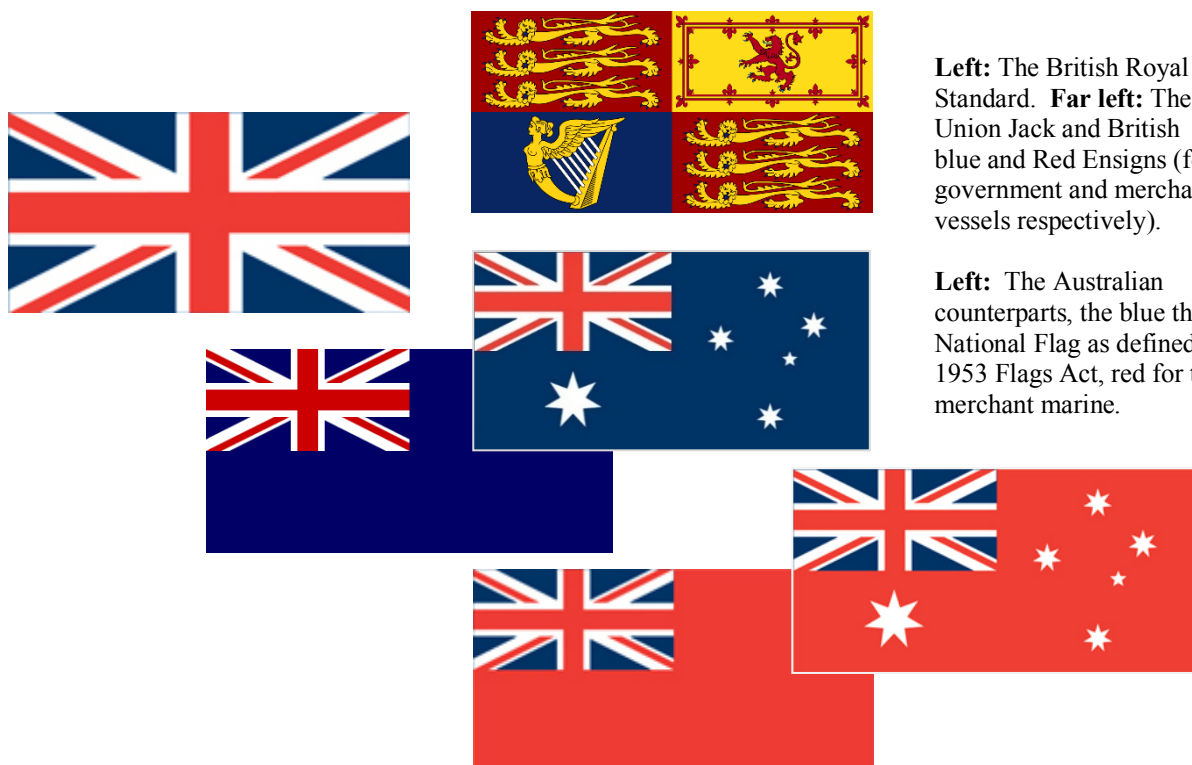
Flags above the main doors of St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, Sydney. Note precedence: Australian flag (blue), United Kingdom (*dexter*), the Vatican flag (*sinister*).



Left: Parliament House, Melbourne decorated with flags and the Royal Arms, the Union Jack in prime position, the blue Australian ensign on the *dexter* pole, above the Arms of the Commonwealth and visible on the *sinister* pole (far right), the State flag of Victoria, Southern Cross with crown and but no federal star below the Union Jack.

THE FLAGS

As to the flags hung out along the royal route, the monarch represented by her personal emblem of dynasty - the Royal Standard on her open car – was honoured also by that of a union of three other - and foreign - flags, the main feature also of the Australian flag (and those of New Zealand and Fiji) to this day - the national flags of England, Scotland, and part of Ireland (see below).



Left: The British Royal Standard. **Far left:** The Union Jack and British blue and Red Ensigns (for government and merchant vessels respectively).

Left: The Australian counterparts, the blue the National Flag as defined in 1953 Flags Act, red for the merchant marine.

Unsurprisingly, non-Australians are the first to perceive the puzzle, not to say anomaly, in these flags modelled on those of British colonies (and 15 residual overseas territories today). As 55 of the former colonies now have their own distinctive flags, as member-states of the Commonwealth, the Pacific four that retain the Union flag seem to express and reinforce a sense of colonial wistfulness - “Are you still a colony?”

In fairness, that is not how Australians see ourselves today. How we *do* see ourselves is another issue, and national maturity is a work in progress, as examined further in this presentation.³ The key to the apparent anomaly lies in a history that impelled Australia’s longest-serving Prime Minister to secure the Sovereign’s personal imprimatur on a flag that not only reflects that history but also suited his political ends. That effective manipulation of the flag - and in the process, the Sovereign - endures.

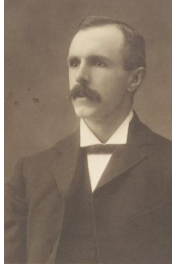
Amid the pageantry of flags as adding to the theatre of the Royal Visit of 1954, the Union Jack was accorded pride of place, and when it wasn’t displayed separately in its own right, it was still there in prime corner of two others – blue or red. Even so, photos and film footage of the 1954 visit show that Union Jacks far outnumbered what Robyn Annear has called “the new-fangled” Australian flags.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND - FIFTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

Annear is referring to the blue ensign formalised in 1954 as the Australian national flag, ending a half-century of imprecision. However, neither of these flags - the blue and red ensigns - were really new. They are essentially slightly amended versions of pre-existing colonial flags. Historian Elizabeth Kwan and Flags Australia’s Ralph Kelly have detailed the history and the reasons over half a century behind a confusing trinity of flags, each a guarantee of the complacency and ideological assumption that the two trans-Tasman outposts were and should remain bastions of the British Empire.⁴

However, there was a pre-history, well before Federation. Whatever Anner's intent, in a sense the flag was neither new nor "new-fangled": its design followed the matrix mandated from 1864 by the Admiralty and the Colonial Office in London. And with that Imperial pedigree, its bestowal on a federation of colonies, as the flag of the Australian Government in 1903, affirmed by the Queen's great-grandfather in 1902, was probably inevitable.

The fact is that the flag most often seen on land, and in popular use, a practice that endured from the First World War and well into the 1960s, was the Red Ensign.



The design of stars and (foreign) crosses selected in 1901 (and substantially the same today) was not without its critics, especially from the Australian Natives Association.⁵ The issue was pursued then and later by such as politician and soldier Richard Crouch. There had been debate from the start about the design.⁶ Despite gazettal, post-marking and point-scoring continued, especially from military and naval interests anxious that the link with the Empire not be diluted in Australian symbols, on forts and after 1911 the foremasts of Australia's new navy.

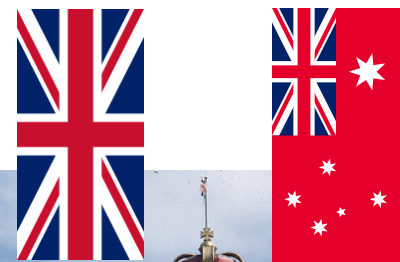
Nowhere was this controversy more protracted than in regard to the weekly flag-raising rituals in public-schools in Victoria⁷ in the 1930s, when United Country Party leader and Premier Albert Dunstan (**right**) promoted adoption of the blue ensign in preference to the red and certainly with precedence and preference to the Union Jack.⁸



Dunstan's view and lobbying eventually prevailed, with press statements firstly in Prime Minister Menzies' name in 1942 during the war and by Labor Prime Minister Chifley after it in 1949, that the blue flag be used as the national flag for all Australians, not just the Commonwealth Government.

With plans to celebrate 50 years of Federation in 1951, the second Menzies government in 1949 sought to have the national flag issue settled, for this was unfinished business. A **Flags Act** was drafted and the Bill passed in December 1953.

On this building (**right**), with flags displayed in vertical, the Union Jack is correct, but not the red ensign - see diagrams **below right**, and in the corner niche of London Stores **below**: the canton at hoist takes *dexter* position, in vertical mode.



By the time the Royal visitors reached Melbourne, where the Australian blue ensign had first been raised in 1901, the Queen had signed the **Flags Act** enacting the same flag, slightly amended, as Australia's definitive national flag, no longer reserved for government use officially, shown **at left** opposite Flinders Street Railway Station, itself decorated in the colours of the Union Jack.



An extra fillip to the Australian tour was the unique opportunity it provided for the Sovereign's personal signature and thus enactment of the **Flags Act** - the Queen's first formal act before opening Parliament the following day. The Bill had been held over for this very purpose.

The **Flags Act** formally defined as the national flag the blue version designed from a public competition in 1901, and gazetted with some amendments in 1903.

The Bill was presented to the public as entailing minimal change, and display of the Union Jack would still be legal. Introducing the legislation in the House of Representatives on 20 November 1953, Prime Minister Robert Menzies stated:

"The Bill is very largely a formal measure which puts into legislative form what has become almost the established practice in Australia."

Refining the point, **Section 8. Flying of Union Jack** states:

"This Act does not affect the right or privilege of a person to fly the Union Jack." 9

In this last, Menzies meant, "in addition to, separately" - or even alternatively (?) This was a nice bit of legerdemain: how could it be otherwise, when the Union Jack is an integral part of the Australian and all the colonial Ensigns on which the Australian versions are modelled? And note: the display of the Union Jack is a "privilege" - another (deliberate) ambiguity, so as not to frighten the horses, maiden aunts or dyed in the-wool Empire-loyalists.

While the Union Jack and the two Australian ensigns dominated the pageantry of flags, other motifs sometimes appeared - for example, the actual badge in the fly of the Australian flags - the Southern Cross, all the stars of seven points on this building advertising a supermarket. and on many suggestions since, that this device alone constitute a distinctive national flag. The first emerged in 1956, only two years after the Royal Visit. A similar design was published by the *Australasian Post* in 1967 - though there had been precedents - as the crest of the 1936 coat of arms of South Australia and that still of Adelaide University.



Queen Elizabeth's signature to the **Flags Act 1953** was the definitive act that settled (or seemed to settle) the untidiness of half a century of double - even triple - flag use in Australia. It ensued the confusion as to which flag to fly on land as the de facto national flag and which de jure. The Union Jack had been the national flag, the red the de facto national flag on land, and the blue ensign reserved for Government and official use.

Including the Union Jack in the first quarter, the Australian ensign flag can indeed be considered a trinity of symbols. Each could well stand as a simple flag in its own right, with meaningful symbolism, as in the graphics on the following page.

Dispensing with the Union Jack was suggested as early as 1956 by the Republican Socialist League, and in slightly different arrangement of the stars, combining the Commonwealth Star and Southern Cross devices, as published in *The Australasian Post* in 1968. Neither are in any way dynamic.



A blue flag with only the Southern Cross was part of the crest of the first coat of arms of South Australia used 1936-84, and as the panel in Chief of the Arms of Adelaide University, "By the Light of the (Southern) Cross", granted 14 July 1925.



MATURATION

A hint of growing national self-confidence was apparent even the first-time round. Not all the placards, drapery, and tableaux featured flags. Some depicted Australia in its own colours. Others said it with flowers - eucalyptus blossom, golden wattle, the red waratah - and across the street (**below**) the red ensign.



Such change, generated by a new type of settler to this ancient land, would become clearer as the next generation came of age and ex-colonial world beyond Australia's shores flexed new-found independence and identities.

CUSTODIANS OF COUNTRY

An inkling of greater national importance was also emerging. Indigenous culture had not expired on its pillow as commonly expected at Federation, when most Aboriginal people, remnants of former tribal groups in the southern settled areas had been sequestered in state government hamlets, often located at the town edges, or out of sight altogether. The political renaissance launched by the 1938 *Abo Call* was bearing fruit, the arches over the royal motorcade in Sydney repeated in Melbourne at least a sign of shift in general Australian consciousness - though the question arises as to what extent the gesture of boomerangs bearing imagined approximations of Aboriginal symbols was something more than tokenistic.



Royal Visit 1954: Ornamental arches, continuing a long tradition marking processional routes, these marking the royal itinerary in Sydney and Melbourne.

Right: Park Street, Sydney looking west to the Town Hall, the T and G Building (1930-76) left, displayed the coat of arms of Sydney, suspended from four stylised boomerangs with simplistic "Indigenous" symbols, clichéd references to traditional Aboriginal culture and motifs. One of the supporters in the very colonial Arms represents an Aboriginal above the strange and ambiguous motto: "I take but I surrender!"



IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN VEXILLOLOGY

Is it possible to exaggerate the significance of the Royal Visit in 1954? The Epilogue summarises the enthusiasm. There had been such visits before. Senior members of the Royal Family presided over the inauguration in Sydney of Australian Federation on 1 January 1901, opening the first Federal parliament in Melbourne on 9 May that year, when the Union Jack was still the national flag.





The Duke of York and future King George VI opened the permanent Parliament building in the new federal capital Canberra on 27 May 1927 – this last a red letter day for the red flag, in Septimus Power's impression of the occasion.

Queen Elizabeth II went further. An act that has sustained vexillological debate ever since, was her signing into law a new - and blue - national flag, after much dithering in the dark decades since Federation - the world at war, deep economic depression, global war again. In this simple act by the first reigning monarch to visit Australia, our normally absent Head of State, the long-since federated colonies in a sense came of age, at least in the symbol no longer reserved to certain government activities, but for all Australians to claim as their own.

Focusing on the pageantry of the flags, related images from New Zealand are less prolific than the effusive record from Australia. While the implications of and inferences that can be drawn from the street displays for the vexillology of both countries are provocative, for Australia the coincidence of the Queen's presence and the new **Flags Act** demands particular attention.

In intention, and in practice, her Royal Assent in 1954 sealed the Australian flag, designed as it is, in hearts and minds for at least a generation.

The Royal Tour of 1953-54 was a success from many perspectives. From the point of view of the Palace it reinforced a sense of a united Empire transforming into a post-imperial order. The reassuring concept of continuity is an aspect of flag design for stable democracies that Ralph Kelly has explored in *Why Flags Change* in *Crux Australis*, Volume 8/No 34 April-June 1992. Both the real intent and effect of both flag and Visit were to emphasise and entrench the notion and sentiment that Australia (and New Zealand) remained integral parts of a comity that no longer called itself an Empire but a Commonwealth of Nations. The deck-chairs were repainted.

In Australia, the tour was promoted as a gala occasion, a therapeutic distraction from challenging local post-war developments - extended industrial unrest in 1949, related concern over the increasing influence of the Communist Party, and under the red carpet, the split already brewing in the Labor Party that, to Prime Minister Menzies' satisfaction, would keep that party out of office for 22 years. In Melbourne, as noted earlier, close to a million people turned out to line the streets on the day the Queen arrived. "Emotion travelled down the road like a wave," said a report in the next day's paper.¹⁰

But what *was* that emotion, and where has it gone since?

In Fiji and to some extent, New Zealand, Queen and Consort were welcomed and honoured with ceremonies that emphasised local and indigenous identity. In Australia the people responded "in an atmosphere of breathless adoration" to the glamour of a stately and regal progress, especially one by a beautiful young woman and her dashing Duke.

Success was measured not by the pageantry so much as the positive feelings generated towards the monarchy and the manner in which it was linked to the status quo - a conservative status quo and consistently balanced budgets. As to the flag, not much was going to change with Menzies, self-declared as "British to my bootstraps" at the helm.

The first Royal Visit to Australia of the first reigning monarch to do so has been followed by nearly a score more by royals, seven of these by Queen Elizabeth herself. With their frequency - and the familiarity - and the distractions of a television and electronic age, the initial fervour and enthusiasm of 1954 has diminished. The Monarchy is respected chiefly because the Queen is respected (the younger royals less so). That says something about the basic decency cherished and expected by Australians, but also fostered by Her Majesty's quiet but firm style ("Mr Blair, remember that I am the One who asks the questions!" may not be entirely apocryphal).

It could also be said that the relationship has matured. Interestingly, the Royal Standard that featured in the 1954 Tour has been replaced by a local equivalent based on the Australian Arms. For all that, it may be only a matter of time before visits of British royalty attract no more attention, especially in the women's magazines that feed on royalmania, than those of, say, Denmark - though in terms of historic pageantry, mere presidents don't seem to cut the same dash. In the meantime, the allure and assurance of an enduring Head of State, compared with the perils of an unknown bunyip alternative from local mediocrities, ensures that the existing monarchy remains at least for the duration of the Queen's reign.



It does not follow however that an equally acceptable monarchy has to be domiciled on the other side of the world. There is the precedent of Brazil 1822-1889, when the Portuguese Crown Prince Dom Pedro chose to stay in the colony as Emperor.

The pictorial record from the 1954 Royal Tour of Australia sampled in this paper highlights that amid the pageantry of flags the Union Jack was accorded pride of place. When it wasn't displayed as such, it was still there in prime position in the corner of the others – blue or red.

So, the Queen signed off on the flag, as had her great-grandfather had its similar predecessor.

A symbol of stability, the flag thus sealed has been perceived as here to stay. What is *actually* here to stay, under the 1953 Act, is that we at last formally had a flag. As the 1998 Amendment makes clear, the **Flags Act** is not a statement about design as be all and end all. While as a constitutional monarch the Queen had no real power in the matter, she could not easily refuse approving a flag that contained the chief emblem of her jurisdiction - the Union Jack.

Yet the consequences and implications of that definitive Royal act are with us still - and governments by the same Act, specifically reinforced in amendment in 1998, have the power they have always had to change (or not change) the flag, but by dint of the 1998 Amendment, with the specific and formal consent of the people, however that may be obtained.

A national crisis challenging Australia's legitimacy and/or sustainability as a nation could trigger that. In the 1940s such was actually threatened, and it was in that context that two Prime Ministers proclaimed changes desired for the use of an Australian flag. However, such a collapse is an unlikely scenario at this juncture. Australia is not Rwanda (which did change its flag). But Australia has been settled and built on a false foundation - the fiction that it was unoccupied (*terra nullius*) when claimed in 1770 by James Cook for the British king.

So, there is a downside to the Royal signature in 1954. Australia's identity is yet to be fully recognised and reflected in symbols of who we truly are – relative recent settlers here uninvited and divesting actual owners who for thousands of years survived in the harshest physical conditions. In 1954 authentic Aboriginal culture was barely more celebrated than as a prop in street decorations or as a token diversion to the many mass rallies on sports grounds. Newcomers have brought things and knowledge that have made existence for the greater number the envy of many on the planet, but the rifts in the family have yet to be fully healed.

Perception of this issue has been gathering since the affirmation in 1938 by Indigenous descendants that their history was not finished, as had been assumed (or by some, hoped) in 1901. The issue of whose land this always was, is fundamental. But that is a call for much social reform before any celebration of a truly national corroboree.

In terms of the symbolism relating to national flags, there is a negative in continuing to clutch like some security blanket what is essentially a colonial hand-me-down from a vanished imperial era (when it may have been thought relevant and appropriate – indeed, well designed for that purpose, but intrinsically lacking in imagination).

The Australian flag, officially declared a national flag for all Australians to respect, at last blue rather than red, was and has since been made much of, especially by those who seem to think that such a strong symbol needs protection,¹¹ for it links the perception of the flag with the institution of the monarchy, and has created the impression that the flag itself was immutable, that the flag - or rather its design - is an integral reflection of the Constitution. In fact, unlike that of many other nations, the Flag as chief symbol of the nation is not mentioned anywhere in the Federal Constitution.¹²

The Flag is the subject and object of the **Flags Act** and the particular flag which it currently describes. The same Act would still apply to a different flag, were such chosen. The distinction is important as it has and will influence any future debate about the national flag that has already been amended from its original design (albeit in minor detail) three times.¹³ Australian self-image and thus identity go to the heart of flag design - and in that context, there are opportunities unexplored and a need for deeper understanding of vexillology, Australian and in general.

EPILOGUE: QUEEN OF THE WATTLE



In 1975 the Whitlam Government obtained Royal Consent to a change in title –and legal status - of Elizabeth II as “Queen of Australia” in the way that Her Majesty is Queen of Canada. For them it is the Maple Leaf; for Australia, the Wattle, a sentiment captured in Australian painter Sir William Dargie’s portrait shortly after the Royal Couple had left Australia, a copy of which is held in the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. The portrait is based on the specially designed gown she wore at the first and last formal functions of the 1954 Tour.

The text below is extracted from <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/collection/highlights/queen-elizabeth-ii-wattle-painting>

In the 1950s the idea of monarchy, and the attractive young Queen Elizabeth II as a role model, was firmly rooted in popular culture. Education instilled veneration for the pageantry of inherited European institutions and the presence of the monarchy shaped a generation for whom to be Australian was to be British.



While Australian attraction towards all things British has waned under the wave of post-war immigration and as the republican debate gains strength, this portrait remains immediately recognisable to several generations of Australians.

Dargie depicts the Queen wearing a Norman Hartnell mimosa gold tulle dress adorned with sparkling gold wattle motifs.

Hartnell designed the dress for the 1954 Australian tour. It is unambiguously patriotic and easily recognisable as the dress worn during her first evening engagement of the royal tour in Sydney, and again to her last evening function in Perth before leaving Australia.

Queen Elizabeth was crowned in Westminster Abbey in London in June 1953. The monarch toured the Commonwealth from November 1953 to May 1954 in a highly publicised venture which proved a cultural milestone during a period of immense social change.

When Queen Elizabeth II disembarked SS *Gothic* at Sydney on 3 February 1954, she was the first reigning monarch to set foot on Australian soil.

In eight weeks, Her Majesty and Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, visited all state and territory capitals (except Darwin) and many rural centres.

In an atmosphere of breathless adoration, the royal couple was presented with the very best of Australian industry and society. The Queen also fulfilled her constitutional role by opening state and federal parliaments.

One of the last great pre-television events, almost three-quarters of the population glimpsed her in person at least once in various cities and towns across the country.

Described in a commemorative book as ‘a thunderous progress through thousands of miles lit to incandescence by the affection and enthusiasm of nine million devoted subjects’, the tour was one of the major displays of mass public celebration of the Monarchy.

NOTES

1. In 1954 Australia was still 32 years away from final formal independence in the Statute books. Australia had finally acceded in 1942 to the 1931 Statute of Westminster recognising the separate status of four main settler Dominions of the Empire, but the residual option of appeal to the Privy Council in London was not revoked until 1986.
2. Robyn Annear, **A Royal Pilgrimage: Queen Elizabeth’s Melbourne Visit**, *The Monthly* June 2012 <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/june/1340078220/robyn-annear/royal-pilgrimage#mtr>
3. Elizabeth Kwan, **Flag and Nation: Australians and their Flags since 1901**, UNSW Press, 2006 and Ralph Kelly, *The 1901 Australian Flag Competition: The Reality Behind the Myths*, **Crux Australis**, Volume 10/1, No. 41, January-March 1994.
4. A parallel with expenditure on the respective celebrations of the ANZAC centenary this year suggest something of the civic maturity of either country, or at least something of the natural - or engineered - mood of the time and even now. www.theguardian.com/australia-news/postcolonial-blog/2015/nov/11/lavish, by Paul Daley 11 November 2015; In June the **Honest History** secretary, David Stephens, calculated that the ANZAC100 spend \$552 million over 4 years - \$8,800 to commemorate each Australian soldier killed in the First World War.
5. Australian-born European-men - not Aborigines.
6. Adopted by Canada and ultimately imported from the United States, the weekly flag ritual had been introduced to Victoria by Empire loyalist Sir Frederick Sargood in 1898, and in Australia centred on the Union Jack. See Kwan E; **Flag and Nation: Australians and their Flags since 1901**, UNSW Press 2006, pp. 24-31, 92.
7. Symbols were approved (and some locally designed devices not accepted or even counter-devised) from the 1860s. These included flags such as the blue cross and stars NSW Ensign and its revision in that colony as the Federation flag, the former banned in 1883 by imperial authorities, the latter ignored by Whitehall in 1902.
8. Elizabeth Kwan has documented (**Flag and Nation**, pp. 88-90 and 92) how this promotion ran up against objections on the grounds that the blue flag was a Commonwealth emblem, whereas education was a state responsibility. A blue flag in every school yard was presented as the first step in creeping Federalism. The states had already given up too many powers.
9. As in South Africa (until 1961) and Canada still at special places and on special occasions. With the adoption of the Maple Leaf as the national flag of Canada in 1965, the role of the “Royal Union Flag” changed within Canada. It continues to serve as a symbol of the nation’s allegiance to the Crown and the country’s membership in the Commonwealth. As a result, the Royal Union Flag can still be flown in Canada (alongside the national flag) at federal government buildings, on military bases, at airports on particular days, including the Queen’s birthday, the anniversary of the Statute of Westminster, on Commonwealth Day, during Royal visits and those of officials of the United Kingdom.

10. Robyn Annear, **A Royal Pilgrimage:** Queen Elizabeth's Melbourne Visit, The *Monthly* June 2012
<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/june/1340078220/robyn-annear/royal-pilgrimage#mtr>
11. If the flag were as strong as its worshippers claim, it would not need such bolstering.
12. The Constitution was devised before a distinctively different flag was formally considered. The national flag is often, but not always, mentioned or described in a country's Constitution, but its detailed description may be delegated to a flag law passed by the legislative, or even secondary legislation (as in Australia) or in monarchies, by a decree (as in for Australia by EIIR in 1954).
13. In 1902, 1903 and 1908 – in regard to the graphics of the stars.

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Anthony Hordern's department store, Sydney,
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The Queen's Speech on Arrival
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BIOGRAPHY

Based in Sydney, Tony Burton is a member of the Flag Society of Australia Inc. (**Flags Australia**) and its executive, and Editor of its quarterly journal, **Crux Australis**. He is also a member of the **Heraldry Society of Australia** and the **North American Vexillological Association (NAVA)**.

He has a keen interest in the principles and practice of flag design, reflected in emblems of Aboriginal Councils and the community flag of the Australian South Sea Islanders. Other designs of his have been among finalists in public competitions conducted as part of the debate over the Australian flag.

PUBLISHED

- 1990-2015 Many cross-cultural articles on flags and aspects of early Australian flags.
- 2010 *A Clash of Symbols: Does the Flag Matter?* in **Caught in the Breeze**, Blemish Books, Canberra, a collection of cross-generational Australian opinion on flags.
- 2015 *Australia and Britain: A Flagging Relationship?* in the Anzac Edition, no. 6 of the **British Political Review** published by the University of Norway, Oslo.
- 2015 **Vexillogistics: An Illustrated and Practical Guide to Flag Design**, Frontline, Artarmon (Sydney) NSW Australia 130pp

FLAG DESIGNS ADOPTED

- 1989 Flag Society of Australia
- 1998 Australian South Sea Islanders
- 2011 ICV24 and NAVA 46 - Alexandria VA
- 2014 ICV26 Sydney
- 2016 NAVA 50 San Jose CA

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