Flags by King for country

Ralph G.C. Bartlett

Abstract

Vexillology, as we all know, can cover everything from the traditional types of flags used for official national, state and municipal purposes, right through to flags for personal use. There are, however, other types of flags, or flag usage and design, such as 'Art Flags'. At ICV13 (Melbourne, 1989) we had a display of Artist Flags by Création Baumann of Geneva, Switzerland, and at ICV20 (Stockholm, 2003) Ralph Kelly presented a lecture, 'The Art of Flags'. A sub-type of this classification are community 'fun flags', which are totally free of all the normal design standards and regulations associated with 'traditional' flags. Today, I wish to take this opportunity to talk to you about a person in Melbourne who over 45 years ago realised the potential of such flags to create a sense of community engagement, pride and civic celebration in the many social opportunities of living in a large city by creating a series of 'fun' flags. Sit back, relax and prepare to broaden your vexillological field of knowledge with these unconventional flags.

Over 30 years ago, while researching the Australian State of Victoria's 150th Anniversary Flag and Logo design for an article in *Crux Australis*,[1] I met with the then Superintendent of the Arts for the City of Melbourne, Robert (Bob) King Crawford. As shown here on his website, Bob King Crawford is a person of several creative professions, who I soon discovered designed a great many flags for community and entertainment events as a way to bring together the people of Melbourne as a culturally richer community.

Robert King Crawford, 1980s and 2010s. www.kingcrawford.com.au

Having established himself in the local musical and arts community as a record producer, promoter and artist, in early 1972 Bob was appointed by the City Council as the City of Melbourne's first 'Superintendent for the Arts'. Coinciding with his appointment, Bob introduced the first of his many flags to the Melbourne community. On Australia Day (26 January) 1972, at a ceremony to commemorate the first British settlement in Australia, in Sydney in 1788, and perhaps also as the first public acknowledgement of Australia's prior ownership

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[1]   Ralph Bartlett, 'Victoria's 150th Anniversary Flag', *Crux Australis*, 1, no. 5 (January 1985), pp. 26-48.

by its many Aboriginal tribes, a 'Corroboree' Flag[2] was raised together with the British pre-1801 Union Jack[3] on two flagpoles outside the relocated Captain Cook's (Family) Cottage,[4] in Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne.

According to Bob Crawford, the design of this 'Corroboree' Flag, which he had originally produced in 1962, and which features yellowy-orange and white concentric circles, or 'rings of eternity', symbolises the 40,000–60,000 years of Aboriginal habitation of Terra Australis, prior to European discovery and later settlement. Over the years the yellowy-orange of these rings radiating out from an ochre-coloured Australia have deepened to almost the same shade as the Australian continent.

Left, 'Corroboree' Flag.
Photo, Ralph Bartlett, mid-April 1985

The flag went on to feature at a number of other events organised by Bob Crawford over the next fifteen years, thereby educating the general public that Australia's human occupation is far older than European discovery and settlement. The flag's initial significance was subsequently overtaken by the black-yellow-red Aboriginal Flag, designed by Aboriginal Harold Thomas, then a student activist, in July 1971.

While technically not part of the programme, the raising of the 'Corroboree' Flag in January 1972 became Bob Crawford's first public park event, which later that year became the City of Melbourne's 'Free Entertainment in the Parks' (FEIP) Festival. This festival was an umbrella organisation of year-round community events, which grew in both size and popularity over the years. It was created and run by Bob Crawford between 1972 and 1987.

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2   Bob King Crawford, 'The First Aboriginal Flag', *Crux Australis*, 29/3, no. 119 (July–September 2016), p. 147.

3   In Australia, the term 'Queen Anne Flag' is used to describe the Union Jack of the period 1606–1800. In the United States, it is applied more specifically to the British red ensign adopted as the merchant shipping flag following the Act of Union in 1707, when the Union Jack replaced the St George Cross in the canton of the red ensign. The term is not used in the United Kingdom.

4   https://whatson.melbourne.vic.gov.au/PlacesToGo/CooksCottage/Pages/ CooksCottage.aspx [and] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Captain_Cook%27s_ Cottage For those who may not know, Britain's Captain James Cook discovered and sailed the entire east coast of Australia from 19 April to 22 August 1770, before claiming the eastern half of the continent for Britain and calling it 'New South Wales' ('*Australia's Heritage – How the* Endeavour*'s Voyage Opened Up the East Coast*' (Hamlyn, 1970) pp. 52–4). Originally located in North Yorkshire, England, the cottage was built by Cook's parents in 1755 and moved to Melbourne by Sir Russell Grimwade in 1934. Astonishingly, each brick was individually numbered, packed into barrels and then shipped to Australia.

'Corroboree flag' raised, 26 January 1972.
www.kingcrawford.com.au/flags/indigenous

The FEIP Logo, designed by Bob Crawford, has a number of meanings. It is a stylised Tree shape, emphasising Victoria as the 'Garden State', with an Eye representing the very visual nature of all the shows and festivals that comprised the FEIP programme. The Eye also refers to the 'Eye in the Tree', the scar that can be left on the trunk of a tree when a branch breaks off.[5]

Left, FEIP logo. http://www.kingcrawford.com.au/stage/feip
Right, 5 FEIP flag, 17 April 1985. Photo, Ralph Bartlett

As stated earlier, my initial meeting with Bob Crawford in April 1985 was to photograph those of his flags that combined Victoria's 150th Logo with the FEIP Logo. In the process my attention was directed to the existence of all these other festival flags, which I also photographed for possible future research or lecture use.

Victoria 150th: FEIP flag and pennant, 17 April 1985. Photos, Ralph Bartlett

In order to liven up FEIP, and to encourage greater community involvement, Bob Crawford designed and had made up a series of 'festival' flags, as shown on the

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5   Telephone conversation wIth Robert (Bob) King Crawford, 4 January 2017; follow-up letter received 10 January 2017.

accompanying FEIP Festival poster. All these flags were very bright in colour and design, each representing a particular event of FEIP's annual programme.

FEIP 1980-81 poster, 1 January 2017.
Photo, Ralph Bartlett

To gain an appreciation of, and to discuss, Bob Crawford's design style and diversity of flag subjects, here is a selection of his FEIP festival flags. Some of his designs are obvious but some are more obscure.

The ANZAC troops of Australia and New Zealand

Australia Celebrates – Australia Day (26 January)

Autumn Earth Celebrations

Carnival of Instruments

Corroboree – Aboriginal Exposition

Easter Festival

Echoes of Scotland

Festival of Masters

Media and Writers' Day

Herald 'Garden State' Show

Winter Festival

One design that is definitely not obvious is that for the 'German-Austrian-Swiss Day' festival flag.

Although these three nations do not share a 'National Day', I believe that Bob Crawford wanted to acknowledge that Germany and Austria not only share a border but that both also abut the significant German-speaking region of Switzerland, and that all are to be included in his annual 'Oktoberfest' celebration in Melbourne.

German-Austrian-Swiss Day

The flag's design shows a German 'Pied Piper of Hamelin' character, with a 'Teddy Bear' beating a drum to attract children and parents to come to the German cultural celebrations.

Regarding the flag's colours, the red-yellow-black are those of the German national flag, with green possibly representing the location of the festival in Melbourne's parks.

Another such flag was the 'Irish Festival' flag. Its symbolism is very clear. A

British red St Patrick's Cross, separating the Catholic green hoist and fly from the Protestant orange upper and lower field. Within the triangular section of the flag there are further symbols, reading clockwise: green Irish Harp, orange Ireland map, green four-leaf clover, and an orange Australian map.

Irish Festival

The festival flag 'Italian Memories' celebrates the large post-war Italian migration to Australia, and particularly to Melbourne.

One could safely assume that its main chequered colours of green and red, plus a central overlapping white square, come from the colours of the Italian national flag, while the simplified black Kangaroo and black Italian map symbolise the former and current home countries of Melbourne's Italian community.

Italian Memories

Another festival flag I wish to highlight is the 'South American Colours Fiesta' – a ray of diagonal colours with hands beating a drum, designed to represent the Rio Carnival, Brazil's and South America's world-famous annual samba dancing and musical parade, often described as 'the greatest party on earth'.

The colours may well represent the very bright colours of the costumes worn by the various participating groups. The boomerang above the drum signifies an acknowledgement that this festival forms part of Melbourne's FEIP programme.

South American Colours Fiesta

Australians enjoy all kinds of sporting activities and events and Melbourne is historically known as our 'sporting capital'.

Therefore, Bob Crawford included two significant Melbourne sporting events in his collection of festival flags, the Australian Rules football finals in September, and the Melbourne Cup horse race carnival in early November.

Melbourne Cup Carnival

Melbourne Dance Week

Victorian Football Finals

While from a vexillological perspective most of these flags are not refined professional designs and at first glance appear amateurish in style, this was a deliberate choice by Bob Crawford. He wished to create a festive feeling for the people of Melbourne, bringing them together, whatever their background, to enjoy life in the lovely parklands that surround most of the central city, at free, family-friendly festivals, celebrating the many facets of our community.

Bob Crawford's departure from the City of Melbourne's FEIP programme ended the use of this particular collection of festival or 'fun' flags, but not the use of festival flags for community events. Bob's festival flags greatly contributed to today's extensive use of street poles with banners and flags across Australia.

1981 Festival poster. Ralph Kelly and Australian Art Auction Records, *http://www.artrecord.com/ index.cfm/artist/8396-sharp-martin/*

Martin Sharp Retro Exhibit banner, Sydney 2009-10. Sydney Eye, *http://sydney-eye.blogspot.com.au/20 10/02/street-manhole-covers-banners-programme.html*

As an example, commencing in January 1977, the Festival of Sydney promoted art to city residents first by bright posters, such as this 1981 example by pop

artist Martin Sharp, and then later with street banners. In 2009-10, Martin Sharp became the subject of a Street Banner for a retrospective exhibition of his artwork at the Museum of Sydney.[6]

Sydney Festival banners, Martin Place.
Photo, Ralph Kelly

As shown by the following examples, mostly from Australia, street pole banners are now used for a variety of promotional purposes, with an equal variety of designs.

Australia Day, Melbourne, 2012.
Photo, Ralph Bartlett

North Sydney, NSW.
www.thefreshgreenbag.com.au/
street-banner-bags

Melbourne's (March) Moomba
Festival. www.studiobinocular.com/
2016/03/moomba-festival

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[6]   https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/dec/06/martin-sharp

Bayswater City Council, Perth WA.
www.manifesto.com.au/city-of-
bayswater-street-banners?
rq=bayswater

Mondrian en Rietveld Year Banners,
The Hague, Netherlands.
Jan-Patrick Fischer, Facebook post,
19 March 2017

These street banners are so successful that municipal councils such as the City of Sydney[7] and the metropolitan City of Randwick[8] have developed official guidelines and specifications for their design, manufacture and display, including illustrations showing the physical size of the banners, their poles and the method of attachment.

Since his time at Melbourne City Council running FEIP, Bob Crawford has turned his attention to developing, designing and promoting – yes you have guessed it – his own proposal for a new Australian national flag. While I do not intend to go into a detailed examination of this proposal,[9] the design reflects Bob's vision and interests, and it has been carefully researched, made and promoted at his own expense. Whether or not it is a suitable design for a national flag is another matter, and one for individual evaluation. Nevertheless, it does show Bob's continued interest in flag design.
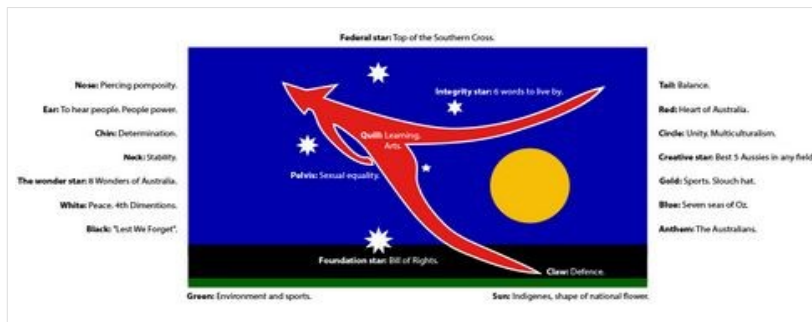

Proposed Australian Unity Flag.
Robert King Crawford.
www.kingcrawford.com.au/flags/

Designed over a period of about twelve years, Bob's proposed flag was launched in the year 2000. For the purpose of completeness, I have included his own explanation of the flag's anatomy.

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[7]   http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/business/city-spaces/city-banners/
   design-guidelines

[8]   http://www.randwick.nsw.gov.au/facilities-and-recreation/using-a-public-
      space/banner-hire/street-banners

[9]   'Australia: A Flag for Unity', *Crux Australis*, 30/1, no.121 (January–March
      2017), p. 43.

Anatomy of the Flag of Unity. Slogan: Day and Night, the Flag of Light. The Living Flag of Australia. www.kingcrawford.com.au/flags/anatomy-of-the-flag

Shortly after designing and launching his 'Unity Flag', Bob Crawford wrote *The 55 Flags of Australian History*, a history of Australia via the flags flown either in its waters or on land. Written in the early 2000s, Bob offers an interesting interpretation of Australian history, giving background information on each of the flags described, from those used by the first explorers of the waters surrounding Australasia, through the flags of the individual Colonies, the national ensigns and flags of the Commonwealth of Australia, the two recognised indigenous flags, and finishing with his own proposed national flag.
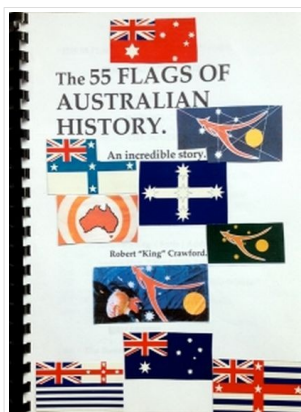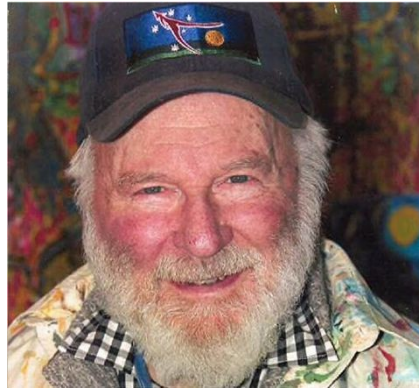

Bob Crawford's book.
www.kingcrawford.com.au/gallery

At this point I should state that since 2009 Croatia has held its own community 'Street Festival of Art Flags' in Zagreb. These flags made their first international appearance in my home city of Melbourne between 11–13 November 2011, as part of the 'CrOz – Festival of Australian–Croatian Friendship'. I visited this display at Zeljko Heimer's invitation, and wrote a report, with photos, for *Grb I Zastava,* the bulletin of the Croatian Heraldic and Vexillologic Association.[10]

While on the surface the flags designed by Bob Crawford may appear amateurish and of no great significance, I should like to suggest that they were in fact ahead of their time, promoting harmony, fun and civic pride and enjoyment in community events which brought together the citizens of Melbourne. The fact that many municipal councils, state, territory and national governments, and other organisations now use such flags and banners decorated with bright, festive designs to promote their various activities serves as the ultimate testament to Bob Crawford's vision way back in the early 1970's.

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[10]   *Grb I Zastava*, VI, no.11 (May 2012).

Bob Crawford and more of his designs.
www.kingcrawford.com.au/art/designer

Author biography

Ralph G. C. Bartlett is a Land Titles Registry officer for the State of Victoria. In August 1983 he was one of the seven founders of the Flag Society of Australia (now known as Flags Australia). He is the Society's past president and currently its secretary. He has attended every ICV since ICV11 (Madrid, May 1985), presenting lectures at most of them. He has written many articles for *Crux Australis*, the journal of Flags Australia,, and runs Vexiventures, a flag information enterprise which specialises in flag charts and talks. In 1989 he published a 25th anniversary history of vexillology. From 1989 to 1997 he served as FIAV Secretary-General for Congresses and was appointed a Fellow of the Federation in 2003. He was the lead organiser for ICV13 (Melbourne, September 1989) and a member of the organising Committee for ICV26 (Sydney, August-September 2015).