



LOOKING TO THE HEAVENS: THE AUSTRALASIAN LEAGUE FLAG OF 1851

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Launceston's Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery holds in its collection one of the most important flags in Australian flag history; the Australasian League Flag of 1851. It is almost four metres long (360 x 270 cm), sewn of silk, and is the only original example known to exist. It was designed by (or for) Launceston non-conformist minister and mastermind of the Anti-Transportation campaign, Reverend John West.



The Australasian League Flag

This flag is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, its design includes the first known use of the Southern Cross in its 'natural' formation (as it appears in the night sky). Secondly, it represented the 'Australasian League for the Prevention of Transportation' (or more commonly, the 'Australasian League', which was to become Australia's first major movement arguing for national (in fact trans-Tasman) self-determination. Thirdly, it arguably represents the genesis of the ideas that were to result eventually in Australia's current national flag.

THE CONVICT SYSTEM

Understanding the significance of this flag requires some knowledge of the political situation in colonial Australia during the early to mid-19th century, and in particular the system of Convict Transportation.

Transportation was the British system of sending convicted criminals to overseas colonies, rather than incarcerating them in British prisons or executing them. Prisoners were transported for sentences of seven years, fourteen years, or for life. This was seen as a practical way of easing the burden on British gaols while expanding overseas territories.



Above: **Road Gang.** Detail of a trifold plate from *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* depicting a chain gang "originally drawn from the Hulk Chain Gang, Hobart Town". When engraved, the lithograph was incorrectly given the title of "Convicts going to work, near Sidney, N.S.Wales".

Two main systems were used in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) to control transported convicts – Assignment and Probation.

The Assignment System

The first colonial system for controlling convicts was known as *Assignment*. Convicts were 'assigned' to free settlers as unpaid labour.

Although this system was in use from 1824, it officially became part of the apparatus of convict control in 1832 when Lieutenant Governor Arthur's Assignment Board was established.

The government did not have to feed and clothe its prisoners, passing the cost on to free settlers. Settlers did not have to pay convicts wages, saving money and helping the economy. Convicts supposedly became 'reformed' through hard work. In the early days of the colony of Van Diemen's Land, the system was extremely loose, as due to the small number of Europeans on the island and the necessity to establish themselves and become marginally sustainable as quickly as possible, convicts received a remarkable amount of freedom. However, as the colony became established under Lieutenant Governor George Arthur, the system was refined into a highly sophisticated system. The records of this system are an incredibly valuable historical assemblage, allowing us to track the lives and careers of virtually all transportees.



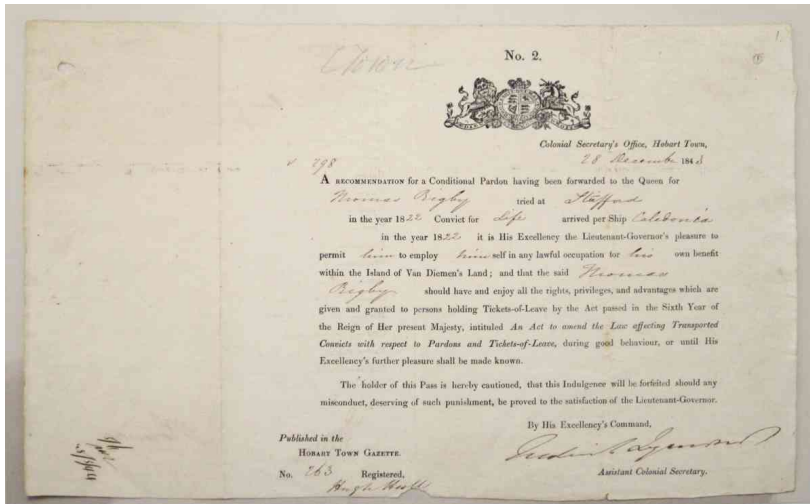
Landscape - reality of convict assignment. View on the South Esk (near Launceston) QVM 1957:81:13



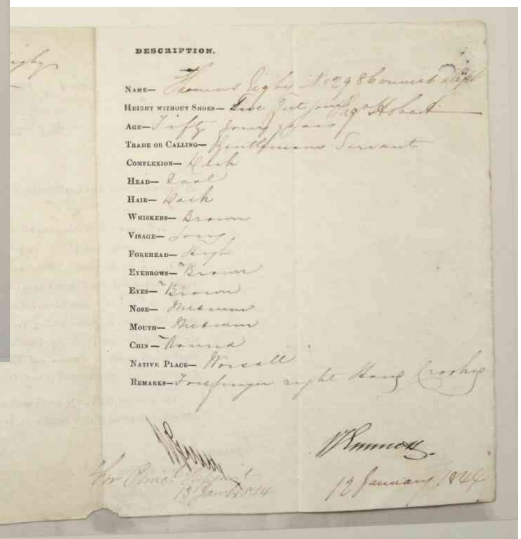
Kerry Lodge Bridge, and brick mould
(Source: http://ontheconvicttrail.blogspot.com.au/2014_07_01_archive.html)

However, there were many problems. The treatment of convicts by their masters varied from almost no supervision to brutal oppression. Treatment also varied depending on how valuable a convict's skills were to the colony. 'Mechanics', or skilled people with a trade other than general labour would inevitably receive better treatment, and often easier assignments than the general run of prisoners, as useable skills such as carpentry, leatherworking, administration skills etc. were highly valuable and necessary in the colony.

Assignment was very similar to slavery, which Britain opposed from 1807. The military government effectively used the free settlers as part of the criminal justice system.

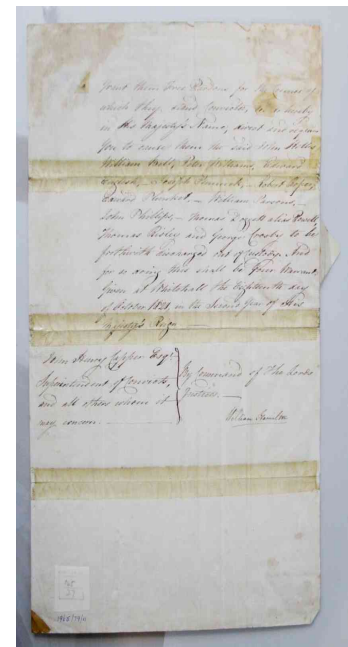
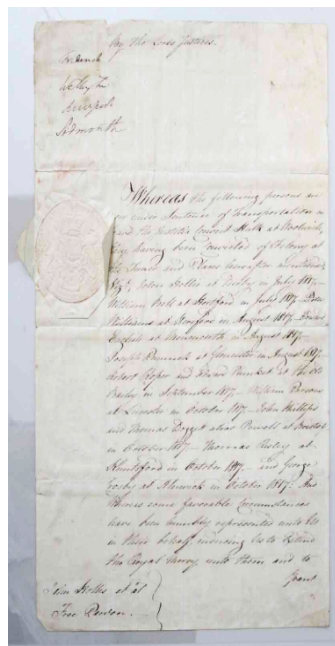


Ticket-of-Leave, 1843
QVM 1966.79.52



During their sentence, prisoners could be granted a 'ticket-of-leave'. This allowed them to buy land and goods and to earn money within specified districts. Church attendance was compulsory, and they had to appear before a Magistrate when required. They could also eventually receive a Conditional Pardon, a Free Pardon, or a Certificate of Freedom. Despite official sentence lengths, good behaviour (and a certain amount of luck) usually resulted in a ticket of leave within a few years rather than after the entire period of a convict's sentence.

Free Pardon 1821
QVM 1965:79:1

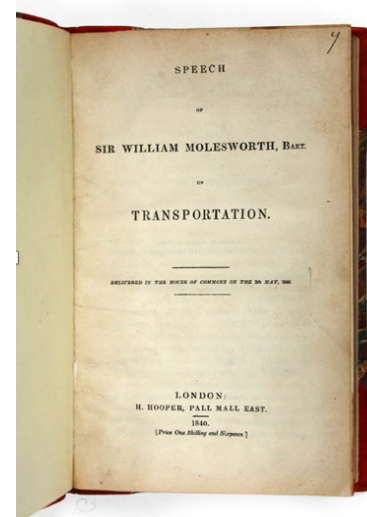


THE MOLESWORTH REPORT

In Britain, opposition to the assignment system gradually increased through the 1820s and 1830s. The *Select Committee on Transportation* was convened in 1838 and was chaired by young aristocratic radical Sir William Molesworth. This became known as the 'Molesworth Report'.

Many reports were given, including some from former colonial Governors George Arthur and Richard Bourke. Some reports presented a balanced view of the Assignment system. Others were exaggerated, and focussed on the 'depravity', 'moral evils' and 'unnatural crime' (homosexuality) which was supposedly rife in the colony. Many of the conclusions drawn were from people with no actual experience in the colonies.

As an example, the report declares the following:



'At times... [female convicts] ... are excessively ferocious, and the tendency of assignment is to render them still more profligate; they are all of them, with scarcely an exception, drunken and abandoned prostitutes...'

...the two main characteristics of Transportation, as a punishment, are inefficiency in deterring from crime, and remarkable efficiency, not in reforming, but in still further corrupting those who undergo the punishment...these qualities of inefficiency for good and efficiency for evil, are inherent in the system... there belongs to the system... the yet more curious and monstrous evil of calling into existence, and continually extending societies, or the germs of nations most thoroughly depraved, as respects both the character and degree of their vicious propensities.'

Report from the Select Committee on Transportation, 1838



(1854 painting by John Watson Gordon)

Assignment was branded an unsatisfactory 'lottery'. The lives of assigned convicts could be good or bad according to the character of their masters rather than the nature of their crimes. It could be too harsh - barely different from slavery - or too lax, with the convicts enjoying better conditions than they had left at home. This view showed assignment as neither reforming the prisoners nor provided a deterrent to potential offenders in Britain.

The committee recommended replacing Assignment with Probation – a system with even more problems!

Probation and 'Exile'

The Probation System, introduced in 1839, was a unique experiment in penal discipline. Convicts were first imprisoned with hard labour in England and then transported to Van Diemen's Land to work in government gangs. Those sentenced for life went to penal settlements such as Port Arthur, while all others were housed at probation stations. If prisoners behaved well, they received a probation pass and could be hired for work by settlers. Unemployed pass holders remained at the stations labouring on public works. Good behaviour eventually led to a ticket-of-leave or pardon.



Probation was deeply unpopular. Settlers lost their free labour and convicts suffered greater misery in work gangs. An economic depression made the situation even worse.

From 1847 a new system was imposed. Prisoners, now known as 'exiles', received industrial training before being transported and immediately given a conditional pardon or ticket-of-leave.

The new systems were disastrous failures. They were poorly planned and run, and the economy could not cope with so many new arrivals, and inadequate support from the Government in Britain was provided to deal with such a huge number of new arrivals.

Newspapers, voicing the settlers' concerns, were obsessed with the topic of assignment, regretting the loss of a system they now saw as effective.

Probation shared a theoretical base with the penitentiary system; the key principles being that both punishment and reform could be achieved by separate confinement and a regime of hard labour, religious instruction and education. It required all prisoners to be classified according to the severity of their offences. Individuals and classes were meant to be isolated to remove the corrupting influence of the more hardened offenders.

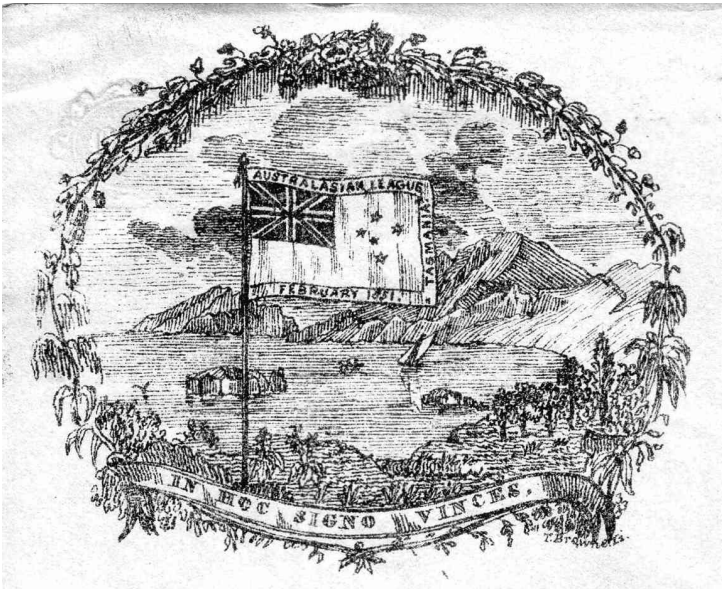
The start of the Probation system in 1839 signalled the beginning of the end of Transportation. With the end of Transportation to New South Wales in 1840 all convicts were sent to Van Diemen's Land.

At first many settlers favoured returning to the Assignment system, but having already condemned it, the British Government was not willing to bring it back.

The only way to end the unpopular Probation system was to end transportation altogether.

A social movement started to grow. In Hobart in 1845 public meetings were held demanding representative government. However, it was in the north that the movement gained its greatest momentum.

THE ANTI-TRANSPORTATION MOVEMENT



Anti-Transportation letterhead

In April 1846 the *London Agency Association of Van Diemen's Land* was established. They acknowledged that the real seat of government was in London. A permanent paid representative, John Alexander Jackson, was sent to London to lobby for their cause.

Soon after taking office in 1847, Lieutenant Governor Denison unwittingly sparked some of the discontent that led to a more populist Anti-Transportation movement. He wrote to 161 magistrates, asking for their opinions on Transportation.¹ Of the 161 men, 123 replied to the survey, with all opposing the probation system. Just over half supported the continuation of transportation, but objected to Probation, favouring a return to the Assignment system, with the rest supporting the abolishment of the entire transportation system.

An organised meeting of the Anti-Transportation movement, or 'antis', took place in March 1847 at the Cornwall Hotel in Launceston, chaired by wealthy landowner James Cox. This meeting called for a united voice against Transportation.

JOHN WEST

The campaign was masterminded by Launceston Independent minister, John West. He coordinated the campaign from a distance, often publishing articles under pseudonyms, and not chairing most meetings himself. This approach had the effect of making the fledgling movement appear to have a far broader base of support, and although being a movement rooted in the non-conformist church, West's approach made it appear to be a far more spontaneous campaign. His approach also aimed to pull in not just the wealthy and influential (although these men were the bedrock of the campaign) but a base of 'mechanics' to represent the respectable lower classes.

The campaign bore little resemblance to earlier campaigns for the abolition of slavery however. Where anti-slavery campaigns sometimes focussed on the essential humanity of slaves, the Anti-Transportation campaign did not have the best interests of convicts at heart.

Both sides of the Anti-Transportation debate used extreme language. In many cases they used exaggerated arguments and made outrageous claims.

"The gangs are stained with appalling vices in fearful proportions. They are scenes of indolence, evasion and brutality"



The Reverend John West, ca 1854
(1854 painting by Myra Felton)
QVM.1957.FD.32

We dare not dwell on the MORAL evils which arise from the new system, and are spreading over the land. A residue of prisoners was left at Norfolk Island to corrupt new arrivals; and hundreds initiated in the detested crimes, naturalised in that rank soil, visited Port Arthur, passed through probation stations, and have at length reached private service. The dreadful—the disgusting—evils to which we refer appal the most inconsiderate. The English language is destitute of terms to designate practices so abhorrent to human nature, and a new vocabulary has been invented, the

expressions of which are becoming familiar to the public ear. The pestilence has passed from Norfolk Island to the chain gangs in the interior; from thence it has spread into the settled districts, until the retired alleys of towns witness abominations, the perpetrators of which have become so callous as almost to cast aside disguise. We repeat, these practices are found in the chain gangs, at the probation stations, in the penitentiaries, in the female factory, and in our public thoroughfares! Who would barter the best interests of himself and his family for gain? But, if it has been shown, the system is unprofitable in a pecuniary point of view—it is madness to hesitate decision.

Newspaper article:
Launceston *Examiner*
Saturday
November 23, 1844

In their attempts to sway public opinion and the British Government to their point of view, the antis presented not only the convict system as evil, but the convicts themselves as morally corrupt.

From beginnings with some sympathy to the plight of convicts, the debate alienated many ex-convicts. Without a moral high ground to fall back on, opposition to the antis also sank to the use of personal attacks and ridiculous statements.

THE GUARDIAN;
OR, TRUE FRIEND OF TASMANIA.
HOBART TOWN.
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1851.
ELECTORS DO YOUR DUTY!!
A bas THE TERRORISTS!!!

A TRAGEDY, deep, dark, and terrific as ever excited the attention of the world, has, for a few years past, occupied the stage of this beautiful, but sadly distracted island. Cruel work has been going on behind the scenes! The whole world civilized and uncivilized—new and old—has pronounced upon us the unanimous verdict of “contempt.” There is no disguising it, in every country still characterised by heroism, manliness, and respectability, the fatal conclusion has been almost arrived at, that for the sake of humanity it would be better, that such a population of mere reptiles, ruffians, burglars, and fiends of all sorts, such as we are represented to be, should perish—should be swallowed up by the waters of the deep, or destroyed by the fire of Heaven, than continue to present to the world’s eye a spectacle so loathsome and pestilent.

Newspaper article:
The Guardian
or *True Friend of Tasmania*
4 October 1851

Eternal God! We blush for the whole human species when we reflect that any individuals belonging to it, could possibly be found, base enough to lend themselves to such a work of wholesale defamation, against a peaceable and unoffending community. Such however, have been found, and thanks to the untiring exertions of a T. D. Chapman, an F. Haller, a J. West, *cum multis aliis*, Van Diemen’s Land is now considered the country the most abject, crawling and degraded on the face of God’s earth. This triumvirate of Terrorists with their factious clique, their factious agents, and their factious organs, have used every means—employed every scheme, that unblushing misrepresentation, malicious calumny, hellish lies could devise, in order to render our island and its inhabitants odious to the whole world.

We have had for years past, frequently, nay daily, hourly, to bear the virulence of their paid orators, the misery-engendering influence of their vile pimps and panders; we have had our ears stunned with their philippics; we have had to crouch under the rabid and base attacks of our would-be Mentors of public opinion. All this and much more, we have had to bear at the hands of these factious designing few. Shall this go on any longer? Shall this fair island continue to be degraded, vilified, and eaten up by the hideous ferocity of a set of vile ascarides? Or will it swallow, and at once, some drastic purgative which may dislodge them from the country’s vitals, and consign them to their proper repository.

Up then, Citizens, up then and *en masse*, all of you who experience an earnest craving to advance the cause of freedom, and redeem the character of the population of Tasmania, up then, and ealmlly, but boldly and, face to face, let us meet on the hustings, the enemies of ourselves, our children, and our acquired liberties. Let us strike the blow that will free us, let us crush to the ground the dastardly cowards, who not contenting themselves with propagating throughout the length and breadth of the world, the basest misrepresentations, and the most abominable lies, ever concocted by a set of disaffected men, against yourselves, your families, and the land you inhabit, have yet, within the last few days, carried their audacity so far as to actually commit and applaud deeds of an atrocity from which savages would shrink.

Have we not been doomed to see within the precinct of this city, the head triumvir, T. D. Chapman, daring to threaten the constituted authorities, and actually denouncing riot and blood-shed unless his dictatorial orders were obeyed! Did we not see him the same night, aiding and abetting the midnight burners, the midnight assassins in their infernal deeds of ruffianism. Was he not seen the next day making a base attempt to rob some forty or fifty freed-men of their right of voting. Where, we ask you, Citizens, where will this new Cataline stop? How far will he and his unworthy confederates go? How long will these base traders in politics continue to convulse the community? Citizens of Hobart Town, as long as you allow it, and no longer!

Why did the abolitionists take this view? Michael Roe² places the Anti-Transportationists within a broader cultural context of the 'moral enlightenment' of the period - a merging of rationalist thought, Romantic style,

Protestant ethics and liberal ideas, centred on political authority, land policy, convict transportation, religion and education. The Anti-Transportation cause pulled all of these threads together, but gained additional moral outrage from an additional impetus - that of the reports of homosexual acts on Norfolk Island and in the Probation gangs. Due to 19th Century squeamishness about this topic it is always couched in evasive language, but the meaning was understood.

Did the majority of the antis see claims of the moral poverty of most convicts as accurate and justified, or simply as a political ploy to ensure the success of the campaign? Did the ends justify the means? Much has been written about the resulting 'convict stain', and it is difficult to conclusively answer this question. However, a comparison between the colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land do show a distinct difference in attitudes towards convicts. There are a number of possible reasons for this – the far more rigid structure imposed in VDL prevented much of the social upward mobility that characterises New South Wales and its convict population. Prevailing attitudes amongst the elite of Britain and its colonies also pre-disposed people towards a prejudice against those with criminal convictions. However, I do not believe that these can entirely account for the difference between later attitudes in the two colonies. The Anti-Transportation campaign undoubtedly had an impact.

Three years of campaigning convinced John West that local organisations had little influence with the British government. In August 1850 at a large protest meeting in Launceston he proposed to seek the co-operation of all abolitionists throughout Australia.

West toured to promote this cause, and drafted a letter that was sent to organisations and influential men opposed to Transportation. In February 1851 West and his delegation travelled to Melbourne where representatives met to form the 'Australasian League for the Prevention of Transportation'. After this, other conferences were held.

The motto of the League was 'The Australias Are One', and their constitution was '...to secure by moral means only, the abolition of Transportation to the Australian Colonies'.

THE CONFERENCE OF 1851

The Australasian League formally began on 1 February 1851, at the Queen's Theatre, Melbourne, at a meeting known as the 'Australasian Conference'. John West attended representing Hobart Town (despite residing in Launceston), and William Weston attended as Delegate for Launceston and the Midland Counties. There were three delegates representing Victoria, including the Mayor of Melbourne.



Australasian League flag

The original hand-sewn League flag, probably showing only four stars in the Southern Cross, was unfurled at the conference to great acclaim. It was designed by or for John West and sewn by ladies from his congregation. This flag represents the first use of the Southern Cross in its 'natural' formation (as the stars appear in the night sky) on any flag or banner, and it is the first flag to resemble the current Australian flag in layout.

The flag was displayed at League conferences across Australia. It was also flown at the mastheads of some Australian ships as far away as the United States.

The delegates resolved that they would not employ convicts, would work to prevent the establishment of English prisons in the colonies, and would support each other in promoting their cause.

Mr. William M Weston gave this description of the flag's design when it was first shown in 1851.

*'The colour, true blue, has been adopted as indicating the justice of our cause. It was the emblem of truth and loyalty. The white border has not been affixed for ornament. What better emblem could be found of purity? In the corner was the flag of Britain, to show it was no banner of rebellion. But above all, in the centre of the flag were five stars ... The idea had been taken from the heavens; so that whilst they looked forward to success they might be enabled to look upward for support'*⁴

Despite this, it should be recognised that the flag is essentially a modified British naval ensign. The design may have been inspired, but it was certainly not original!

A further meeting was held in Geelong soon afterwards, and later meetings were held around Australia as more states and colonies joined the League.

CESSATION

In December 1852 the British Government ended transportation to Van Diemen's Land. The news arrived in the autumn of 1853, and the final group of 201 male convicts arrived on the 26 May 1853.

The League asked Lieutenant Governor Denison to declare a public holiday on 10 August, but he refused.

Celebrations were held across Tasmania, with the day named Jubilee Day. This date was claimed as the 50th anniversary of the Colony's foundation, although the actual date was in September. Placing the celebrations on another anniversary was diplomatic, making the League appear less triumphant.

In Hobart, Government employees were forbidden from attending celebrations but celebrations still took place.

IMPLICATIONS

As the flag of a middle-class political movement, the Australasian League flag has been largely forgotten by the public, in distinct contrast to the more confronting and slightly later Eureka flag. However, the movement it represents, although having less public appeal today than Eureka, was at the time, a far more politically influential group. Henry Reynolds⁵ argues persuasively that it also represents a far more 'Australian' mode of revolt and political agitation than the violent Eureka Stockade. Because of its strong links to Britain, political debate in Australia has, and still remains, a decidedly non-violent affair, although one could argue that in many cases (including this one) the language used in the ensuing debates was as damaging as any violent unrest to the psyche of those involved.

Although now taken up and regarded as a seminal moment in Australia's history, the Eureka rebellion has had greater influence as a later symbol than as an influential event at the time, and in reality, it was the subsequent court cases that had a great impact on the politics of self-determination in Australia. Eureka was, at the time, only relevant to Victoria, and was little reported or even noticed outside that colony until far later.

The aims of both the Eureka rebellion and the Australasian league reflect a very British style of insurrection, with Eureka being firmly grounded in Chartism⁶, whereas the Australasian League, despite having ostensibly similar aims, appears to have had no such background, being, as previously touched upon, a product of the 19th century Protestant 'moral enlightenment', with an added strong dose of moral outrage. In fact, the Anti-Transportationists' aims, and their insistence that the campaign would achieve 'by moral means only' the cessation of transportation grounds it firmly in British traditions of non-violent rebellion.

In contrast to Eureka, the Australasian League for the Prevention of Transportation was a genuine trans-colonial movement, and although it started with purely self-interested motives, the movement grew to become Australia's first truly national movement for Australian (and Trans-Tasman) self-determination. Possibly the reason for its lack of recognition by the Australian public is the middle-class nature of the campaign. It simply lacks the romantic appeal of Eureka. Whereas Eureka was a rebellion by working-class aspirants to the middle class through their aim of accumulating wealth, the Australasian League was a movement primarily to protect the interests of those already ensconced in this class. The implications of the Australasian League were nevertheless far greater, even though Eureka has since captured the public imagination in a way that the Australasian League never has.

The flag and the movement it represented led to a series of essays published in the Sydney Morning Herald under the pen-name John Adams, all relating to Australasian self-determination and identity and the union of the colonies. The author was, of course, John West, writing in his new role as editor of that newspaper. His choice of the pseudonym 'John Adams' is interesting,⁷ Adams being the co-author of the American Declaration of Independence and second President of the United States, and a man West obviously respected. In typical John West fashion, he also used this pseudonym to create in the minds of knowledgeable readers parallels between his arguments and attitudes and those of Adams.

As well as the effect of John West as a writer, the Anti-Transportation campaign had a long-lasting effect on the political life of Tasmania, and by extension, Australia, for an entire generation of Tasmanian politicians and political thinkers began their careers as members of the League. The cessation of Transportation in 1853 catapulted a number of key figures into positions of political power and influence, and their impact continued to be felt in the colony many years on.

THE AUSTRALASIAN LEAGUE FLAG AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN FLAG

Australia's National Flag has been used since 1901. However, all of its design elements have been in use on various flags for much longer.

The Australasian League banner, designed in Launceston in 1851, has an important place in this development. Although not the first Australian Flag, it is one of the first to represent Federation, and the first use of a design recognisable as our current flag. It probably influenced many later designs, including those of the winners of the 1901 competition to design Australia's flag.

Union Jack 1801



Obviously, the Union Jack of 1801 plays a key part in the design and intent of the Australasian League flag. The flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was the official flag of Australia until Federation and, (like it or hate it), remains a key part of the current Australian flag. The 1801 version added a Cross of St Patrick to the existing British flag to reflect the addition of Ireland to the Union.

The key point to take from this is that the flag was included as part of the Australasian League flag, against British regulations on the use of this flag in canton, as a statement that the movement was not one of rebellion against the crown. Although seeking to see the apparatus of Convict Transportation disassembled, which almost by necessity required some degree of civilian self-determination, members of the League still saw themselves as loyal citizens, rather than secessionists.

British Red ensign 1801

This flag sometimes referred to as the *Red Duster* was flown by all merchant ships in the British Empire.



NSW Ensign 1832-1883

This flag was first illustrated in an 1832 book, and is believed to have been used as a local merchant shipping flag in Sydney and on Australia's east coast. It became known as the *Australian Ensign*. In 1883, the British Admiralty prohibited its use, as it was claimed to be too similar to the Royal Navy's White Ensign



Flag of the Australasian League 1851



This banner represents the first use of the Southern Cross in a non-stylised or naturalistic form. It probably influenced the design of some later flags, particularly the Victorian ensign of 1870, and is one of Australia's first flags representing Federation.

The Australasian League flag had far greater exposure than many realise today, and may have embedded itself far more deeply in the minds of viewers than was previously realised. As part of the campaign, the flag was reproduced many times - in fact the QVMAG flag is not the original flag sent to the 1851 conference, but one of a number produced on the Australian mainland during the tour of the conference delegates, and given to the Tasmanians to take back.

In addition, copies were made in bunting⁵ and flown at political rallies, and on ships. The *San Francisco Herald* reports it being flown on a ship in the harbour there on the 5th July 1852.

Eureka Flag 1854



This is the flag of the short-lived Eureka rebellion in Ballarat in 1854. At a meeting of 12,000 miners this flag was raised as a gesture of defiance against the Victorian Government. In the eyes of many Australians the Eureka Stockade and its flag have become symbols of the struggle for democracy and a national identity.

Victorian Blue Ensign 1870



In 1865 the British Government established an act requiring that colonies with warships fly a version of the British blue ensign with an added badge on the fly (right-hand side). When Victoria acquired the first colonial warship, HMCS *Nelson*, in 1870, they needed a design for an ensign. They chose the Southern Cross as their badge, appearing on both a red and a blue ensign, the blue modified by adding a crown above the stars. The 1901 Australian flag design is very likely to be a modification of the earlier Australasian League Banner, and also to have influenced the design of the current Australian Flag, which is the same design with the Federation Star added. Victoria still uses the Southern Cross (with crown) as its badge.

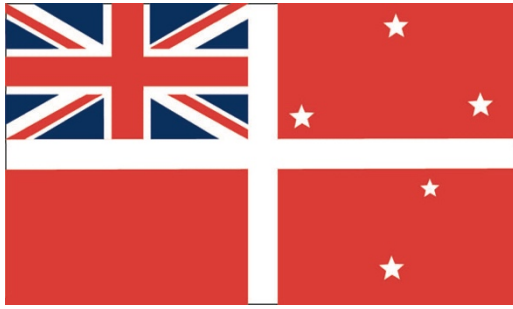
Victorian Red Ensign 1870

In February 1870, Victoria also adopted a flag for use by locally registered merchant vessels – this was the same design as the blue government vessels flag, but in red. Whilst its use as a shipping flag ended in 1875, it continued to be used on land by private citizens and it became widely used in the southern states as a flag in support of Federation.

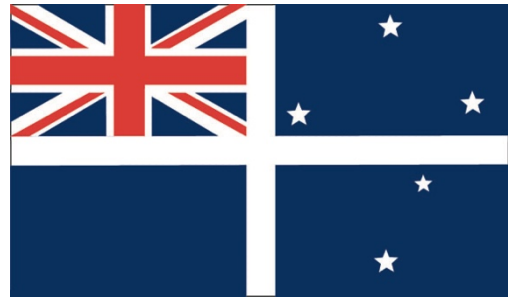


Tasmanian Colonial Flag 1875

On 9 November 1875, the Tasmanian government brought in this design as a new *Colonial Flag* for use by local ships. However, it was very short-lived. Only fourteen days later it was revoked, as it broke British Admiralty rules for colonial flags.



Tasmanian Colonial Flag



Tasmanian Government Ensign

Federation Flag 1890s

The original unofficial flag designed for NSW in 1832 and later described as the Australian Ensign was adopted by the Federation Movement and widely used in the 1890s and in the period after Federation before an Australian flag was adopted.



Australian Flag (original 1901 version)

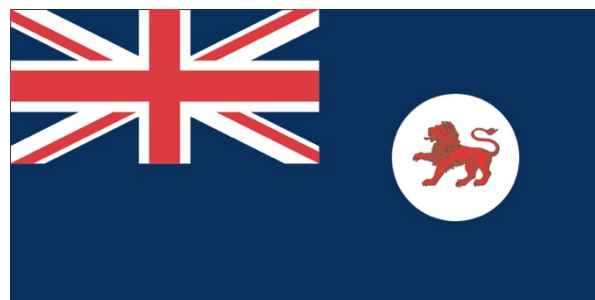


The Australian flag was chosen through a public competition run in 1901. It is a British ensign with the addition of the Southern Cross and a six-pointed star to represent the colonies, now states. The number of points on the stars of the Southern Cross varied to reflect the relative brightness of each star.

The design was submitted independently by five different people. Although there is little evidence that any of the competition winners directly copied previous flags, it is very likely that the winning design was influenced by knowledge of the Australasian League flag and the similar and more recent Victorian Ensign. The competition winning design was formally adopted in February 1903 with the stars of the Southern Cross standardised to 7-points each. On 23 February 1908 the large Federation Star was changed from 6-points to 7-points to represent the territories collectively.

Tasmanian Colonial Flag 1875

The current Tasmanian state flag was adopted on 25 September 1876, and it has remained unchanged.



A medal was issued in 1853 to commemorate the cessation of transportation of convicts to Tasmania. It also marked fifty years since European settlement in Tasmania in 1803. The medals were made by the Royal Mint, London, and arrived in the colony in 1855. They were issued to Tasmanian children who were part of the celebrations on 10 August 1853 when the news was received of the British decision to end the sending of convicts to Tasmania. The crowd cried out “Hurrah for the noble Leaguers”. Over 73,500 convicts were transported to Van Diemen’s Land from first settlement. 9,000 medals were struck in white metal and a further 100 in bronze for people who had rendered services to the anti-transportation cause. They had a diameter of 58 mm. The unofficial Australian Arms are on the reverse of the medals, with the head of Queen Victoria on the obverse. This represents one of the earliest official examples of these Australian Arms with emu and kangaroo.



Source: Museums Victoria



Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston

NOTES

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