

A flag for the Empire

Ralph Kelly

Abstract

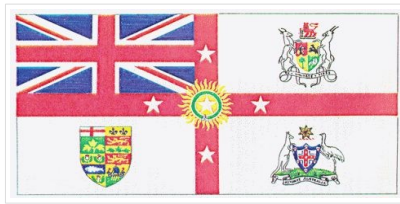
During the inter-war years a flag was created to symbolise the loyalty of the people of the Dominions to the British Empire. The flag was a British white ensign with the addition of the coats of arms of Australia, Canada and South Africa, together with a Star of India badge and four white stars to represent New Zealand. The origin of this flag is a mystery, with speculation ranging from the coronation of King George V in 1911 through to the coronation of King George VI in 1937. Various origin stories are considered and an alternative purpose is suggested. A number of examples of the Empire Flag survive, most of which are a souvenir size of 2ft × 3ft, printed on thin cotton. The lecture provides, for the first time, contemporary photographs of usage of the flag and details the major role a full-sized version of the flag had as part of a First World War memorial. The flag underwent several design variations that help to date individual examples. Imperial College is an apposite venue to take a fresh look at a historical Flag for the Empire.



'Our Flags, united we stand for Faith, King & Empire', in K.C. Byrde, *Our Flags and Their Significance* (Bristol: Bristol British-Israel Association, 1920), p. 1

Here we are at Imperial College, a distinguished institution founded in 1887 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria by displaying collections of art, products and innovations from across the Empire. Whilst Queen Victoria was only Queen of the United Kingdom, she was Empress of India and the term British Empire generally referred to all of her realms and territories. For 150 years London was the heart of a great empire upon which the 'sun never set'. So it seemed to me appropriate that my lecture today is about a flag that has intrigued me for nearly 40 years. In 1978, the *Flag Bulletin* published a short article, 'A Flag for the Empire', by another Australian, David Rogers.¹

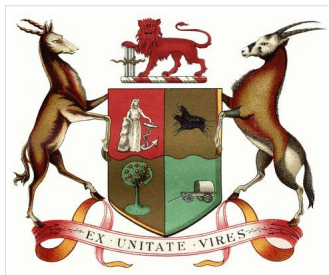
1 David Rogers, 'A Flag for the Empire', *Flag Bulletin*, XVII, no. 5 (September–October 1978), pp.158–60. David Rogers is described there as an Australian resident 'interested in vexillological topics relating to his native land and the world'. He also wrote two articles on the flags of East Timor (*Flag Bulletin*, XLI, no. 4; *Flag Bulletin*, XX, no. 1) but is not currently known to Australian



Empire Flag. Flag Bulletin, XVII, no. 5 (September-October 1978), p. 158

The article showed a drawing of a flag that was in the Morphett Vale Pioneer Village, a museum in South Australia.² No one knew anything about the flag and its origins. The flag was printed on thin cotton and was regarded as being for use during some public celebration.³ The size of the flag was not stated. However, from other surviving examples, it was probably about 45cm × 90cm (1½ft x 3ft) based on the *Flag Bulletin* illustration, though other examples of the flag are shown in the proportions of 3:5 and 5:8.⁴

The design consisted of a British white ensign with the coats of arms of South Africa, Canada and Australia in the three quarters, with the Star of India badge in the centre and four white stars on the arms of the St George Cross, presumably to represent New Zealand. The intent for this to be an 'Empire Flag' is self-evident, though Rogers presumed that the flag was unofficial.



Coat of Arms, Union of South Africa, 1910. Flags, Badges, and Arms of His Majesty's Dominions beyond the Seas (London: HMSO, 1932), p. 17

When was the flag first made?

South Africa was granted a coat of arms on 17 September 1910, a few months after the formation of the Union of South Africa. Australia was granted a coat of arms on 7 May 1908, featuring a shield reminiscent of the original New South Wales coat of arms, with a border of six small shields for the six states and a red kangaroo and emu as supporters. Canada did not have a coat of arms, however its flag badge from 1870 was the quartered arms of the four founding provinces of the Confederation.

Therefore, the Empire flag could not have been designed prior to 1910. Rogers stated that 'it seems probable that the flag was made for the celebration of the

vexillologists.

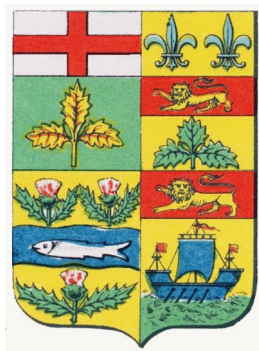
- 2 The museum opened in 1977 and was privately owned by Len Moore. When it closed in 1991 many of the old buildings were relocated to Old Tailem Town Pioneer Village. The current location of this flag is unknown.
- 3 David Prothero, an expert on British colonial flags, describes this as 'a patriotic decoration rather than a flag, in the sense that it was probably meant to be draped indoors, and not flown on a flag pole', in 'British Empire Flags and Patriotic Decorations', *Flags of the World (FOTW) website*, 2 July 2002, www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/gb_empir.html
- 4 Keir Heath, *Flags of Empire website*, imperialflags.blogspot.com.



coronation of King George V in the summer of 1911'.⁵ The fact that the 1908 Australian arms were replaced by the current version in 1912 reinforces the probability that the Empire Flag was made to celebrate the 1911 coronation.



Coat of Arms, Commonwealth of Australia, 1908. Australian Symbols (Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Awards and National Symbols Branch, 2000), p. 6



Flag Badge, Dominion of Canada, 1870. Drawings of the Flags in Use at the Present Time by Various Nations (London: HMSO, 1889), p. 15

Since 1978, examples of this early Empire flag have emerged in museums, at auctions and on eBay. These include an Empire flag that is now in a South Australian local history museum.⁶ Sized 18½in x 33in, it shows signs of age but is generally in good condition. There is no flag maker's name, but it is stamped 'Reg.' in one corner, indicating that it was a registered design and hence that originally there may have been a single flag-maker.



Two pre-1921 examples: left, from 'British Imperial Flags', Flags of Empire website, imperialflags.blogspot.com (original source unstated, perhaps eBay); right, a superior quality flag, size 20in x 36in, whose stronger colour registration (even allowing for fading) suggests a possible 'second' edition. David Dibble collection, posted British Ensign Club, Facebook, 2 October 2016

5 David Rogers, 'A Flag for the Empire', p. 159.

6 Flag in Southern Fleurieu Historical Museum, Port Elliot, SA. The flag came into the museum's possession a few years ago on the closure of the information centre at Yankallia. A museum volunteer contacted the author in March 2016 seeking to identify the flag and provided some detailed photos to assist in its understanding.



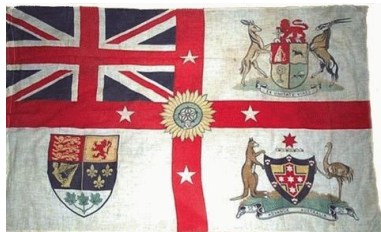
Left, a pre-1921 example in a South Australian museum. Private communication from Alan Williams, 14 March 2016

In 1921, however, Canada was granted a coat of arms.⁷



Grant of a coat of arms to the Dominion of Canada, 1921. Heraldic Science Héraldique, 'Arms of Canada', heraldicscienceheraldique.com/arms-of-canada.html

Other examples of the Empire Flag were made which show the 1870 Canadian emblem replaced by the shield of the 1921 arms.⁸



Post-1921 example: the crest of the Australian arms, the Commonwealth Star, is wrongly coloured red not yellow. Andrew Thomson; source unstated, fotw.fivestarflags.com/images/g/gb_emp-l.jpg

But it is unknown why the Empire Flag would be modified for the new Canadian arms but continue to use the superseded 1908 arms for Australia. Perhaps it was simply because the flag-maker, probably a British firm, was unaware of the Australian change when the design of the flag was updated.

The new Canadian arms would be well-known due to its use as the badge on the Canadian red ensign, whilst the 1912 Australian arms were complex and not used in connection with any other flag.

Another example is shown here, sized 17in × 34in (43.2cm × 86.4cm).⁹

⁷ Arms of Canada granted by proclamation of King George V, 21 November 1921. The official drawing changed in 1923, 1957 and 1994.
⁸ David Prothero speculates that the flag was produced for celebrations linked to George V's Silver Jubilee, or the Coronation of George VI, www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/gb_empir.html
⁹ Flag is made of cotton, edges machine sewn with the design printed onto the fabric. It does not have a header.



*Empire Flag, post-1930 example.
Greenwich, National Maritime
Museum, Cook Collection,
item AAA0513*

In addition, in 1930 the South African coat of arms was modified to add a green compartment at the base,¹⁰ and this appears in some Empire flags. I have not been able to locate any example of the Empire Flag that included the 1921 Canadian arms and the pre-1930 South African arms. Note also that the Australian arms have altered slightly – the field of the shield is now yellow and the Commonwealth star is red (both are errors) and the compartment has been re-coloured.

On 2 September 2015, during ICV26 (Sydney, 2015), we travelled to Canberra, where the conservation facility at the Australian War Memorial Annex (Treloar, ACT) had on display another example which had been signed by prisoners of war in the Changi prison, Singapore upon its liberation in August 1945.¹¹ This photograph demonstrates the relatively small size of most surviving examples of the Empire Flag.



*Sekhar Chakrabati and Changi Flag,
Australian War Memorial Annex,
2 September 2015.
Sekhar Chakrabati, *Flags and Stamps
Blog*, 22 September 2015,
[flagstamps.blogspot.com.au/2015/09/
sydney-international-flag-congress-
26th.html](http://flagstamps.blogspot.com.au/2015/09/sydney-international-flag-congress-26th.html)*



*Empire Flag signed by POWs at Changi
Prison, Singapore. Australian War
Memorial, Canberra, item RELAWM
32165 (no online catalogue entry).
Photo, Ralph Bartlett*

10 In 1930, at the request of the South African government, the College of Arms replaced the original drawing of the arms shown in the royal warrant of 17 September 1910. On 21 September 1932, 'embellished' arms were recorded by the College of Arms, adding a helmet and mantling, and improving the drawing of the provincial elements and the supporters. It was not intended that this new drawing would replace the 1930 drawing, but it was available for uses where a more decorative version was appropriate; see F.G. Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols* (Johannesburg: van Rensburg, 1993). This might explain why the 1930 version of the arms continued on the Empire Flag, or it could, as with the continued use of the 1908 Australian arms, simply be that the flag-makers were not aware of the new version or did not bother to change their artwork.

11 Several other flags (Union Jacks and Australian red ensigns) display signatures from Changi POWs – each being referred to as 'The Changi Flag', as if each was unique.

Other examples show the Empire Flag as a small hand-waver.



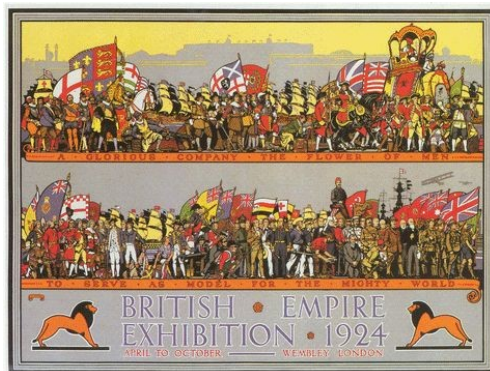
*Empire Flag hand-waver.
'Antique British Empire Union Flag',
sold by Quirkabilia, eBay UK,
15 October 2016*

The various surviving examples of the post-1921 Empire Flag suggest that several different flag-makers produced the Empire Flag and over an extended period. A modern replica, with enhanced graphics, is shown below.



*Post-1921 Empire Flag, modern, fully
sewn example, 900mm x 1800mm.
Brisbane, Artelina Sewn Flags, 2007*

This revised post-1921 version, which is the more commonly observed, has been frequently attributed to the British Empire Exhibition, a colonial exhibition held at Wembley in 1924 and 1925. Keir Heath, who operates the Flags of Empire website, suggests that the Empire Flag was originally created for the British Empire Exhibition, apparently on the basis that this was the first major Empire event following the adoption of the Canadian arms in 1921.¹² The Empire Exhibition was designed to strengthen the bonds of Empire and stimulate trade, and it was a British equivalent of an International Exhibition, with pavilions from all the Dominions (except the Irish Free State), India and almost all of the colonies.



*Richard T. Cooper, British Empire Exhibition, lithographic poster
(London: John Waddington Ltd, 1924). Image: Christie's auction, 2012*

However, I doubt that the Empire Flag relates to the British Empire Exhibition, one of whose official aims was 'to enable all who owe allegiance to the British flag to meet on common ground and learn to know each other'.¹³ There was an

¹² imperialflags.blogspot.com

¹³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire_Exhibition

iconography for the exhibition that featured a stylised lion, but no exhibition flag is known to have existed, other than the Union Jack. A large number of souvenirs were created for the exhibition, but no flag is shown in any of the available collections.¹⁴ The BEE-origin hypothesis also ignores the pre-1921 versions of the flag.



King George V Silver Jubilee hand-waver, 1935. www.picclick.com



King George VI Coronation, 1937. www.great-republic.com

Other potential Empire celebrations possibly connected with the flag were the Silver Jubilee of George V in 1935 or the Coronation of George VI in 1937. These would be consistent with the 1930 addition of the green compartment in the South African arms, which is a further indicator that the flag was not related to the British Empire Exhibition. But again, what of the pre-1921 versions?

Having now researched the origins of the British Empire flag, I am of the opinion that it was not created to celebrate any specific major public event but to help in the general celebration of Empire Day. The first Empire Day was celebrated in Canada on 24 May 1902, the anniversary of Queen Victoria's birth, though it was not officially recognised as an annual event in the UK until 1916.¹⁵



*Empire Day postcard,
New South Wales, 1907.
State Archives of New South Wales,
Facebook post, 23 May 2016*

Empire Day was an exercise in propaganda seeking to teach the public, and especially working-class children, about the virtues of Empire.¹⁶ Schoolchildren

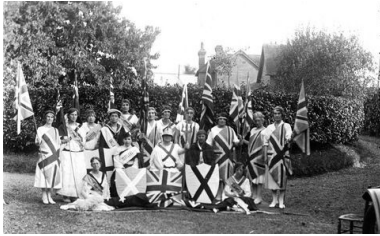
14 Many different types of souvenir – but no flags – are displayed at www.oldcopper.org/special_topics/wembley%20exhibition_1924-26.php

15 The Earl of Meath, an ardent Anglo-Irish imperialist politician, introduced Empire Day in the UK in 1904. It had first been started by Clementina Fessenden in Canadian schools in 1897, and began in Australia in 1905. The concept was promoted by the Empire Day Movement and the British Empire League, a British organisation with branches throughout the Empire. Prior to 1916, flags were not flown on public buildings in the UK, let alone Empire Day being a public holiday.

16 'Empire Day Movement', in Peter Barberis, John McHugh and Mike Tyldesley, *Encyclopedia of British and Irish Political Organizations* (London: A&C Black, 2000), p. 97.



throughout the Empire celebrated by saluting the Union Jack, listening to inspirational speeches and singing patriotic songs, including 'Flag of Britain', and after school, enjoying various forms of public parties, including fireworks in Australia ('Cracker Night').¹⁷



*Empire Day, patriotic pageant, 1910.
Hampshire County Council, UK*

Students were encouraged to feel proud of their country and to understand that they were part of the British Empire. An exchange of Union Jacks was organised by the British Empire League, whereby schools in different countries exchanged flags to be flown on Empire Day to engender the feeling of kinship.



*Empire Day certificate
(London: Overseas Club, 1915).
Canadian War Museum*

Origin of the idea of a flag for the Empire

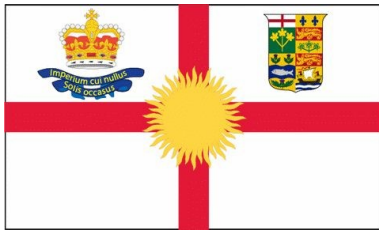
In 1890, Sir Henry Parkes, the leading advocate of Federation in Australia, reminded colonial representatives considering Federation or separate self-government that, 'The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all.'¹⁸ All Australians belonged together because they shared a British heritage.

In March 1902, the London *Daily Express* newspaper reported that the new King Edward VII favoured a suggestion that a new flag could serve as a flag for the entire Empire, whilst the Union Jack would continue as the flag of Great Britain. The flag design proposal was for a Cross of St George on a white field, with a golden sun shining in the centre and in the left-hand corner an Imperial Crown above a Latin motto that translates as 'The Empire on which the sun never sets'. The intent was that in each Dominion, their coat of arms or emblem would be shown in the right-hand top corner as their version of the Empire Flag.¹⁹ A reconstruction from the description is shown for the Empire Flag that would be used in Canada.

17 Empire Day was renamed 'British Commonwealth Day' in 1958, and 'Commonwealth Day' in 1966, when the date changed to 11 June, the official birthday of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1977 it moved to the second Monday in March. See Ben Johnson, 'Empire Day', Historic UK website, www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Empire-Day/

18 Quoted by Elizabeth Kwan, *Celebrating Australia: A History of Australia Day* (Parkes: National Australia Day Council, 2007).

19 'An Empire Flag: Colonies represented on a new ensign', *World News* (Sydney), 1 March 1902, p. 12; proposal by Mr C.D. Bennett.



*Empire Flag proposal, 1902.
Hand-drawn reconstruction
by Ralph Kelly*

The suggestion of an Empire flag was revived in 1910, but it was deferred by the British Government until the next Imperial Conference, when it was not raised with the Dominions.²⁰ At the 1911 Imperial Conference of the Prime Ministers of the Dominions, the possibility of an Empire-wide Imperial Parliament was however considered, but it was rejected by British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith as infringing on Great Britain's power to control defence and foreign policy for all the otherwise self-governing countries in the Empire.²¹

In 1916 the need for the Dominions to be recognised in some way by adding some symbol to the Union Jack was raised again, this time by the Australian Natives' Association (ANA). The ANA President stated, 'We want only a truly union flag, and it cannot be a truly union flag of the Empire without a distinguishing mark for the Dominions.'²² However, the ANA conference resiled from the suggestion, observing that the Union Jack, unaltered, 'is Our Flag – Our British Flag'.²³



*'The Only Flag for the Empire', in
For Empire: Australia's Rally to the Dear
Old Flag (Sydney: Osboldstone, 1914):
this souvenir booklet of photographs of
the First NSW Expeditionary Force
includes a full list of soldiers and
officers; similar booklets for Victoria
and Queensland were also published*

The Empire Day Movement Committee in November 1919 decided to urge the British Government to adopt a new flag, combining the Union Jack with the symbols of the Dominions, the Colonies and India.²⁴ The time had come for an Imperial flag that should be flown on Empire Day as a token of 'humble thanksgiving for the preservation of the Empire'.²⁵

20 'Empire Flag', *Daily Herald* (Adelaide), 11 November 1910, p. 5.

21 '1911 Imperial Conference', in James Stuart Olson and Robert Shadie (eds), *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire*, vol. 1 (London: Greenwood Publishing, 1996) p. 548.

22 'Imperial Flag: will tighten bond of Empire', *Mail* (Adelaide), 29 April 1916, p. 10. The Australian Natives' Association was a patriotic group of Australians who were born in Australia or were descendants of people born in Australia. Its primary role was that of a mutual society providing medical insurance, but it was politically active in advocating Federation and Australian nationalism.

23 'The Flag', *Register* (Adelaide), 11 May 1916, p. 4.

24 'One Flag: Empire Suggestion', *Newcastle Sun*, 20 November 1919, p. 1, reproducing an article in *The Times* (London), 19 November 1919; same report in the *Daily Mail* (Brisbane), 21 November 1919.

The possibility of a change to the design of the Union Jack arose in 1921 with the partition of Ireland, and this briefly revived consideration of a distinctive Empire Flag.²⁶ The tenth anniversary of ANZAC Day in 1925 was another occasion to suggest that the time had come for a 'Union Commonwealth Flag that represented all the dominions of the Commonwealth of the British Race'.²⁷

Tantalising as these press reports of the 1920s are, whilst they indicate a willingness of some to consider replacing the Union Jack with something more representative of the British Empire as a whole, none of the newspaper reports provided evidence as to the origins and design of the Empire Flag, which we know existed from surviving examples.

The Dangarsleigh War Memorial

Three years ago, whilst travelling on holiday through northern New South Wales, I came across a remarkable monument that proves the existence and significance of the Empire Flag.



*Dangarsleigh War Memorial,
Armidale, NSW.
Photo, Ralph Kelly*

At Dangarsleigh, a district south of Armidale, NSW, there is a First World War monument erected in 1921. There are thousands of memorials to the dead of that conflict throughout Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the British Commonwealth. This one is different. It was designed and commissioned by Alfred H. Perrott of Armidale in memory of his son, Alfred H. Jnr, who was killed in action at Passchendaele in 1917 when hit by an exploding shell. It was also to 'do something to keep forever green the memory of those poor boys who would never return'. In 1918 Perrott planted a Memorial Park of 1,600 trees in memory of the war dead, reserving a corner of his property for a war memorial to all the British soldiers who fell in the Great War.

The memorial had a unique design – an obelisk 40ft high, surmounted by a globe that represents the world and surrounded by five short pillars (each 4ft 6in high) representing Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and India.

25 'Proposed Imperial Flag', *Chronicle* (Adelaide), 3 January 1920, p. 34, a correspondent's report of the London meeting (19 November 1919) that advocated 'an Imperial flag, displaying thereon the Union Jack, with symbols representing the Dominions, the Crown colonies and the Indian Empire'.

26 'The Union Jack: Will it be changed?', *Daily News* (Perth), 20 January 1922, p. 6.

27 'War anniversary: Empire flag suggested', *Federal Capital Pioneer* (Canberra), 20 August 1925, p. 3.

Its triangular base represented England, Ireland and Scotland, and the octagonal spire represented the eight countries united.

Each pillar supported a flag and at the top of the monument was a 12ft flagpole with a large British Empire flag.



Rededication of the Dangarsleigh War Memorial on its transfer from the Perrott family to Armidale Regional Council, 1999. Armidale & District Historical Society Inc.

At the unveiling of the memorial on Empire Day 1921, this flag was described 'a flag of the United Empire, embodying the flag of every country within the Empire',²⁸ and a photo of the event clearly shows a flag that has become known as the British Empire Flag.²⁹



Dangarsleigh War Memorial, unveiling, Empire Day, 1921. Armidale & District Historical Society Inc. (Image cropped by the author to highlight the memorial and its flags.)

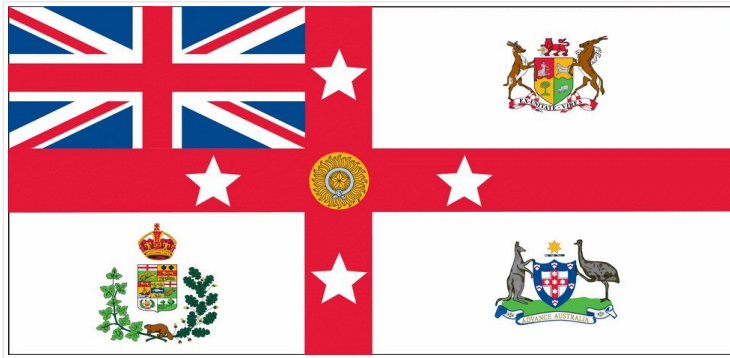
The Dangarsleigh Memorial gives a proven date for the use of the flag, and is the only example of the Empire Flag in full size, believed to be 5ft x 10ft. The original flag, or a replica, was held by the Uralla War Museum until it was sold

28 'At Dangarsleigh: Memorial unveiled', *Armidale Chronicle*, 25 May 1921, p. 8.

29 A number of interpretive display signs around the memorial explain its story in detail. They include a photograph of its unveiling on Empire Day, 24 May 1921. Mrs Judith Grieve, President of the Armidale & District Historical Society Inc. has undertaken extensive research on the Dangarsleigh War Memorial. I express my thanks to her for kindly supplying me with high-resolution images of the photographs on display at the site and additional information on the memorial and its flags. The foundation stone was laid on 21 February 1921 and the memorial was completed three weeks later.

on eBay in 2013.³⁰

From the photographs of the flag it is possible to reconstruct an accurate representation.



Dangarsleigh flag. Reconstruction by Ralph Kelly

This version shows a seven-province badge for Canada including a wreath of maple and oak leaves with an unusual Imperial Crown: this badge was relevant to the period 1876 to 1905, though examples of this version of the unofficial arms exist as late as 1917.³¹

The details of the arms of South Africa and Australia differ from those of most other examples of the period, as does the style of the Star of India emblem of India.

The St George Cross is off-centre, but this is consistent with the Union Jack being 1:2 proportion, as is the flag as a whole.

Is this the original exemplar of the flag, or only an Australian full-sized copy of a British souvenir flag that had existed for ten years prior to the memorial? I have found that a smaller example did exist in 1919 – shown in a photo of school children at Aldgate, in South Australia.

30 A large Empire Flag appears on the home page of Keir Heath's Flags of Empire website – imperial.flags.blogspot.com – where it is described as a 'multi-layer cotton sewn flag measuring approximately 156" x 60" [396cm x 152cm]. This particular flag was acquired at the closing of the Uralla War Museum in 2013.' Uralla is the nearest town to Dangarsleigh. Several photographs of sections of the flag were originally used to illustrate the flag for an eBay auction. The photographs give good details of the Dominion arms, but they do not support the claimed size of 5ft x 13ft (I estimate the size to be 5ft x 10ft). It is possible that the Uralla flag is a reproduction of the original, as the 1921 photograph shows a clearer appliqué patch of the Canadian badge than does the photographs of the Uralla flag.

31 This version of the shield appears on the Heraldic Science Héraldique website – heraldicscienceheraldique.com/dominion-shields.html – on a postcard postmarked December 1917. The emblem for British Columbia is correct for the period 1870-96, and the shield shows an example of the first emblem for Manitoba, correct for the period 1870-1903.



Empire Flag, Aldgate School, Adelaide Hills patriotic carnival, 15 February 1919. State Library of South Australia, Searcy Collection, PRG 280/1/24/128

Union Jack: the flag of empire

During the long reign of Queen Victoria, the concept of Empire loyalty had become fully established and the Union Jack was the flag of the British Empire – 'One Queen, One Empire, One Flag!'³² – and 'the visible evidence of... citizenship in the Empire of Great and Greater Britain'.³³ Robert Baden-Powell stated that the Union Jack stood for 'the Union of Great Britain with all our colonies across the seas', as well as 'closer comradeship with our brothers in those colonies'.³⁴



*'For Queen & Empire':
souvenir made for the 1897 Jubilee or
the onset of the Anglo-Boer War,
1899-1902.
Auckland Museum, Auckland, NZ;
accession no. 1999.163.6*

Ironically, despite its wide use in patriotic ephemera, in Great Britain there were considerable doubts as to whether the Union Jack could be flown by private citizens on land. There was a view that it was a 'royal flag' and could only be used by the Royal Navy, the British Army and on government buildings. It was not until 1908 that the Earl of Crewe officially stated, 'A Union Jack should be regarded as the national flag, and undoubtedly may be flown on land by all His Majesty's subjects'.³⁵

Public views about the meaning of the Empire, Empire Day and the Union Jack seem to have differed between Great Britain and the Dominions. Perhaps I am

32 Barlow Cumberland, *The Story of the Union Jack* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1897), p. 221. Cumberland's comment was made in rebuttal of the Australian practice of creating local flags (presumably in reference to the Federation flag) that gave expression to local patriotism but 'did not succeed in expressing the dominant and prevailing sentiment of allegiance to "One Empire, One Flag"'.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
34 Quoted by Nick Groom, *The Union Jack: The Story of the British Flag* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), p. 250.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

overly critical, but it seems to me that the Empire was important to Britain because it was a source of pride, it was essential to the prosperity of British trade³⁶ and in wartime, it was a source of manpower and treasure for the war effort.



Trade: The Purpose of Empire.
Hugh Williams (1866-1955), Empire Marketing, painting and poster for the Empire Marketing Board, c.1930.
www.britishempire.co.uk/resource/empiretrade.htm

There are numerous examples of images that use the call of the Empire and Flag for the dominions to contribute huge amounts of manpower to the British Army during the First World War.



Come on Boys: Follow the Flag!, poster by William Hackett and James Northfield, for the State Recruiting Committee of Victoria, c.1916; six lithograph sheets forming a single poster, 103cm x 228cm. Canberra, National Library of Australia, item no. 7930795

One of the few photographs of the Empire flag in use features a girl holding the flag, which is one of several forming a street decoration in a wooded lane. This photograph supports the hypothesis that the flag was used for Empire Day celebrations, but unfortunately we have no information regarding its location or date. It does, however, show how the flag was used as street bunting.



Empire Flag as street bunting, 1930s.
Detail from an eBay listing that dated the flag to the 1920s or 30s; posted by Nick Artimovich, British Ensign Club, Facebook, 25 August 2015

³⁶ The poster *Empire Marketing* illustrates the importance to the UK of trade with its colonies, with 'Imperial Preference' policies restricting local manufacturing in favour of the export of raw materials and the import of finished goods.

The last known public use of the Empire Flag is shown in a remarkable photograph taken at the base of Nelson's Column in London's Trafalgar Square, where it is being waved in celebration of the end of the Second World War in Europe – VE Day. Its use on this special day and its preservation in Changi to 1945 suggest that there were a number of copies of the Empire Flag made in the late 1930s, probably to commemorate the Coronation of King George VI in 1937.



*Empire Flag, VE Day 1945,
Daily Mirror, 8 May 1945, p. 1.
Scanned from a copy in
author's collection*

Conclusion

The story of the Empire Flag remains only partly known, but there is now a larger body of evidence that demonstrates its importance in the inter-war years. The data suggests the earliest confirmed usage was in 1919 and that numerous variants were created and used until 1945. The large Empire Flag created for the Dangarsleigh Memorial in 1921 and the survival of smaller flags in Australia, Canada and the UK demonstrate that the flag filled a desire to demonstrate the active participation of the dominions in the British Empire in a way that symbolised a maturing of the Empire's relationships with the Mother Country.



*Empire Flag, size 25½in x 41in.
Author's collection*

As the United Kingdom Brexits, we in the former dominions hope that our countries' relationships can be partly restored to those that existed prior to Britain's abandonment of its Commonwealth links when it entered the European Community in 1973. The Empire Flag is a good reminder of times when we were much closer to the UK and to the other dominions beyond the seas.

Author biography

Ralph Kelly is an Australian vexillologist from Sydney. He has presented papers at ten previous International Congresses, based on his research into the history of Australian flags, his involvement in the Australian flag debate and a broad interest in world flags. At ICV22 (Berlin, 2007) he was made a Fellow of FIAV. Ralph is President and a former Treasurer and Webmaster of the Flag Society of Australia. He was Chair of the Organising Committee for ICV26 (Sydney, 2015).

Ralph is also a Director of Ausflag, where he provides a vexillological perspective on that entity's promotional and political lobbying for a new Australian national flag. By profession he is a former investment banker and is now a company director. He is currently a trustee director of First State Super, the NSW state government's superannuation fund.