The Queensland Badge

by Mamie O’Keeffe, B.A., A.L.A.A.*

The oldest part of the State arms of Queensland is the Maltese cross in the crest, which was gazetted as the State badge just one hundred years ago, on 29 November 1876.1 Efforts to discover a reason for the selection of this device have so far been unavailing. The popular theories which connect it with the Victoria Cross, Queen Victoria, or Lady Bowen appear, on investigation, not to be substantiated. Information recently has been found which makes the question appear in a new light.

The Maltese cross is, in fact, Queensland’s second badge. On 22 December 1865 a circular was sent to the British colonies concerning the flags borne by colonial vessels:2

Downing Street,
22nd December, 1865.

Sir,

With reference to my Circular Despatch of the 19th May last, enclosing a copy of the Colonial Naval Defence Act, 28 Vic., cap. 14, I have now the honor to inform you that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty have laid down the following Rules as to the Flag to be borne, by any Vessels maintained by any Colony under the Clauses of that Act:—

1. That any Vessel provided and used under the 3rd Section of the Colonial Naval Defence Act, should wear the Blue Ensign, with the Seal or Badge of the Colony in the Fly thereof, and a Blue Pennant.

2. That all Vessels belonging to, or permanently in the service of the Colonies, but not commissioned as Vessels of War under the Act above referred to, should wear a similar Blue Ensign, but not the Pennant.

You will take care that these instructions be in future strictly complied with.

I have at the same time to request you to furnish me with a List of any such Vessels belonging to the Colony under your government, and to send me, for the information of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, a correct Drawing of the Seal or Badge, which is to form the distinguishing mark adopted by the Colony of

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient, humble Servant,
GRANVILLE.

Queensland seems to have made no reply to this circular. It is possible, however, that the suggestion of a badge may have been acted on. Another circular was sent over the signature of Earl Granville on 14 September 1869:4

Downing Street,
14th September, 1869.

Sir,

I transmit to you, herewith, a copy of an Order in Council regarding Flags to be used by the different Branches of Her Majesty’s Service and requesting me to bring this Order before my Responsible Advisers, I have now the honor to enclose a Drawing of the Badge adopted for this Colony and to inform your Lordship that my Responsible Advisers have not thought it necessary to submit this Badge to Her Majesty’s Government previous to its adoption and that it may now be considered the Flag of Queensland.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your Lordship’s most Obedient, Humble Servant,
Earl Granville

This circular was answered in a despatch from the Governor, Samuel Wensley Blackall, dated 22 March 1870:4

Government House
Brisbane, 22 March 1870

My Lord,

Adverting to your Lordship’s Circular Despatch of 14 September 1869 enclosing copy of an Order in Council regarding Flags to be used by the different Branches of Her Majesty’s Service and requesting me to bring this Order before my Responsible Advisers, I have now the honor to enclose a Drawing of the Badge adopted for this Colony and to inform your Lordship that my Responsible Advisers have not thought it necessary to submit this Badge to Her Majesty’s Government previous to its adoption and that it may now be considered the Flag of Queensland.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your Lordship’s most Obedient, Humble Servant,
Sam. W. Blackall
Governor

The copy of the badge which was sent to Earl Granville and forwarded by him to the Admiralty has not been located. However, on 23 August 1875 another circular over the signature of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Carnarvon, requested the Governor of each colony to certify the correctness of the badge so that the colony’s flag could be inserted in the ‘Admiralty Flag book’.5 This circular was accompanied by a memorial dated 28 July 1875 from the Admiralty and coloured sheets showing the badges adopted by the various colonies up to that time, together with the flags upon which the devices were to be borne.6 The badge for Queensland showed a head of Queen Victoria very similar to the design used for the ‘penny black’ postage stamp of 1840 except that it faced to the

* Oxley Librarian, John Oxley Library, Brisbane.
right instead of to the left. It showed the head on a blue background and was surrounded by a white circle bearing in its upper portion QUEENSLAND.

The reception of this circular was apparently followed by discussion in the Queensland Government occasioning the Colonial Treasurer (and Acting Colonial Secretary), William Hemmant to write on 15 March 1876 to the Governor, William Wellington Cairns:

The Treasury, Queensland.
Brisbane, 15 March 1876.

Sir,

Referring to the Circular Despatch of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated the 23rd August last, upon the subject of distinctive badges proposed for the flags of the several Colonies, I have the honor to advise Your Excellency that the difficulty of producing upon bunting a fair representation of the head or bust of Her Majesty has proved so great, and the effect, when produced, so unsatisfactory, as to render it necessary to abandon the idea of using that device for the Queensland Ensign, and I beg therefore to recommend that the accompanying design, within a wreath of laurel, be adopted for the flags of this Colony in lieu of that formerly advised.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,
Wm Hemmant

To
His Excellency
W. W. Cairns Esq; C.M.G.
Brisbane.

ENDNOTES

2. Circular dated 22 December 1865, C.O. 854.7 (Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm reel 2531).
4. Samuel W. Blackall, Governor of Queensland to Earl Granville, Secretary of State for Colonies, 22 March 1870, C.O. 234.24 (A.J.C.P. microfilm reel 1920). A copy, with slight variations, may be found in Queensland State Archives GOV/25, pp. 334-5.
5. 'Secretary of State for the Colonies to Officer Administering the Government of Queensland, 23 August 1875', printed in Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, 1876, vol. I, p. 655. The 'Admiralty Flag book' referred to in the circular was the Admiralty's Drawings of the Flags in Use at the Present Time by Various Nations (London, 1875).
6. The memorial from the Admiralty was printed with the circular in Q.V.P., 1876, vol. I, pp. 655-6. The illustrations of the flags forwarded with the circular may be found on pp. 171-4 accompanying Secretary of State for the Colonies to Officer Administering the Government of Queensland, 23 August 1875. (Public Record Office, London C.O. 854/16, pp. 169-70, A.J.C.P. microfilm reel 2557).

Four designs were considered, the Governor noting on the drawing showing the Maltese cross:

This, within the Wreath (vide 16) seems preferable.

The blue to be the dark blue of the Flag 16.10

The Governor forwarded on 23 March 1876 a copy of this letter to the Earl of Carnarvon with two copies of the device which Mr. Hemmant and myself have approved in substitution for the present badge of the Colony. ... If Your Lordship should be pleased to adopt the proposed device of a Maltese Cross, with a Crown in the Centre, as the future badge of the Colony for the Governor and Government vessels an intimation to that effect would receive the immediate attention of the Executive Council.11

On 14 July 1876 the Governor was informed by the Earl of Carnarvon that the Lords of the Admiralty had approved the badge of the Colony of Queensland to be 'argent on a Maltese Cross azure a Queen's Crown proper'12; an illustration of the new badge, prepared by the Admiralty was enclosed.13

Notification of its adoption, together with an illustration appeared over the signature of James Robert Dickson14, the Colonial Treasurer, in the Queensland Government Gazette on 29 November 1876.15
12. As for endnote 1.

13. Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor, 14 July 1876 (Original Despatches from the Secretary of State, vol. XVII (1876), Premier’s Department, Brisbane).


15. As for endnote 1. The Queenslander (2 December 1876, p. 21, col. 1) drew a humorous comment on this illustration noting it as a picture which may be intended for a Maltese cross, argent, and a proper Queen’s crown, but which looks suspiciously like a double-necked eagle that has swallowed a coal scuttle; or, as the drawing is rough it might be a turkey which the eagle seems to be struggling to digest. We hesitate to offer an opinion on this matter, but in view of present European complications, it seems to have grave significance. Can emissaries of the Czar have already penetrated even to the Treasury?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The text of the two circulars, together with the despatch from Governor Blackall to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 September 1865 is taken from the Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm and reproduced by courtesy of the National Library of Australia. The heraldic descriptions for illustrations on pages thirteen and fourteen have been provided by the courtesy of the College of Arms, London.
Queensland's first badge
A Queen's head upon a Hurt [blue roundel], bordered Argent, a representation of the head of Queen Victoria facing to the sinister and wearing a diadem.

Queensland's badge after 1876 as prepared by the Admiralty. Argent on a Maltese Cross Azure, a Queen’s crown proper.
Argent on a Maltese Cross Azure, a Queen’s crown proper

Gold a Cross engrailed voided of the field, between four Mullet [stars] Azure

Gold three Lions passant guardant Gules

Azure on a Bend Gules between two Crowns, a Lion passant guardant Gold

Four designs submitted to Governor Cairns
The flag to be used by governors of the Colony, Dominions, or foreign parts, and by governors of all ranks and descriptions administering the governments of British Colonies or Dependencies, or a white ensign with a blue ensign is the Union Jack, with the union jacks of the colony distinguished in the centre, the rest on a white ship's anchor, by a green grizzled.

Vessels in the Service of the Colony but not commissioned as Vessels of War under the Colonial Naval Defence Act were authorized to wear a similar Blue Ensign but not the Pennant.
The Treasury, Queensland,
Brisbane, 16th November, 1876.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.

His Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has been pleased to direct that for the future the Badge of the Colony, to be embroidered in the centre of the Union Flag for use by the Governor, and to be inserted in the Blue Ensign for use by vessels in the employment of the Queensland Government, shall be as hereinafter described:—

ARGENT ON A MALTESE CROSS Azure A QUEEN’S CROWN PROFIL.

Drawing of Badge.

JAMES R. DICKSON,
Colonial Treasurer.

By Authority: JAMES C. BEAL, Government Printer, William street, Brisbane.