

# THE TASMANIAN FLAG



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## THE TASMANIAN FLAG

Its history and meaning.

by  
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*"A nation's flag is the most sacred thing that a nation can possess. Libraries, museums, exchequers, tombs and statues of great men - all are inferior to it. It is the illuminated diploma of a great nation's authority. It is the imperishable epitome of a country's history." - THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER –*

**(Book: “The Life and Times of Thomas Francis Meagher” - political exile to Van Diemen's Land by Reg. A. Watson. 2017 edition.)**

## THE TASMANIAN FLAG.

*It has the Union Jack in the left hand corner and the State badge to the right on a dark blue background. The red lion is within a white circle.*

The Tasmanian Flag is a most beautiful flag. Even though it was only officially proclaimed as our State Flag in 1975, it has been with us for quite some time. It is complementary to our Australian National Flag. Tasmanians are exhorted to fly the State Flag as much as possible and as

prominent as possible. The correct flying of the State flag is important and a brief sketch how and procedure, is provided in this short narrative.

The vast majority of Tasmanians are proud of their beautiful State Flag and newcomers to our shores adopt it quite happily as their own.

Occasionally there are calls for its replacement, but like the Australian National Flag, any alternative suggested is never an improvement on the existing one. Most of the attempts to discredit our flag can be generated by political and philosophical reasons, while others are simply misunderstanding the valuable symbols and meaning that our flag carries. It is unfortunate that there are few attempts in our education system for young people to understand and value our State Flag. While other flags of various countries are taught as part of a curriculum, the educating of our young regarding their own flag is neglected. It is our attempt (Australian National Flag Association – Tas) to readdress this situation.

To commemorate and to bring attention to our flag in a positive way, a Tasmanian Commemorative Flag Day has been inaugurated. This falls on December 3<sup>rd</sup> annually to herald the anniversary of the official birth of our flag. (1975). It also solicits all State Government buildings, businesses, churches, clubs and private dwellings to fly the flag proudly on that day.

It is a very strange situation where latter-day State Governments do not promote their own State Flag. It should be pointed out that it was a Labour Government that first proclaimed our flag. Next to the National Flag, the State Flag is the most important flag in Tasmania. It represents all Tasmanians, bringing us together as one people or so it should be promoted in that capacity. It is our aim to do just that.

So be proud of your flag; be proud of your heritage. Be proud of the achievements of Tasmania! Now let's look at the following in reference to the Tasmanian State Flag.

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- The history of our Tasmanian flag.
- The meaning of its symbols.
- The legality of the flag.
- The flying of the flag

## HISTORY.

Responsible Government was granted to Tasmania 1<sup>st</sup> January 1856. It was also time for a name change from Van Diemen's Land to become the new British colony with self-internal government of Tasmania. In a short period of time, despite the set backs, we had come a long way from the humble beginnings in September 1803, when Lt John Bowen, Royal Navy, led 48 persons to settle at Risdon Cove, the first British settlement in our State.

It was not, however, until September 25, 1876, by proclamation from the Governor, Frederick Aloysius Weld, did the colony receive a flag. Then, there were three official flags, they being the Governor's flag, the Tasmania Government vessel flag, and a Tasmania merchant flag. Up until 1856, the Union flag and the British Ensign (see photo at the end of this work) were primarily used on state occasions.

Queen Victoria ordered on August 7 1869 colonial Governors to fly the Union Jack with the arms or badge of the colony emblazoned in the centre, following the suggestion of Tasmanian Colonial Secretary, Thomas Reiby. (1)

This proclamation added, "*that the distinguishing flag or ensign of the colony for vessels belonging to or permanently employed by the Government of Tasmania shall be a Blue Ensign with a Lion 'Passant' red on a white shield in the fly*"

Between the years 1876 and 1975 the blue ensign flag containing the Union (more commonly called the Union Jack – *see following*) in the left top corner with a Lion "Passant" red on a white shield on the fly, was used when representing the State. This was the original Tasmania Government vessel flag.

On December 3, 1975, however, the Governor Stanley Burbury, issued another proclamation, (see below) officially recognising the Blue Ensign with a Lion "Passant" red on a white shield on the fly, as the State flag. The Labour Premier, Mr Bill Neilson, endorsed it. Tasmania, therefore, was the first State to officially recognise its flag. It was also the first State to authorise the flag for general use.

THE HONOURABLE SIR STANLEY CHARLES BURBURY, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia acting with the advice of the Executive Council of the said State do by this my Proclamation declare that the Blue Ensign with a lion "Passant" red on a white shield in the fly thereof being the flag or ensign more particularly

described in the Schedule hereto shall be the distinguishing flag or ensign of the State of Tasmania and shall be known as the Tasmanian Flag.

GIVEN under my hand and the Seal of the State of Tasmania  
as aforesaid at Hobart in Tasmania this third day of December  
One thousand nine hundred and seventy-five.

**STANLEY BURBURY, Governor.**

**By His Excellency's Command,**

**W. A. NEILSON, Premier.**

Consequently it has only been of recent times that Tasmania has had its own official State flag that can be flown by all, including individual citizens.

## **SYMBOLS**

The Union flag of course, as with the National flag, tells of the origin of our State as a British colony, which was for many years a part of the British Empire. Then, at the time of Federation, Tasmania became a State of Australia, which became a Member of the British Commonwealth of nations. Today, even in the year 2020, the State has a common parliamentary system, Church, language, racial make-up, common law, ethics, morals and principles of its Mother Country, Great Britain, despite the fact that we are fully independent in our own right, within the federal system. As it is as written by British historian AJP Taylor, *"British communities throughout the world set up free institutions on the pattern of the mother country."* (2) We are a Constitutional Monarchy with the Governor representing the Crown in Tasmania. Our military traditions follow closely that of Great Britain.

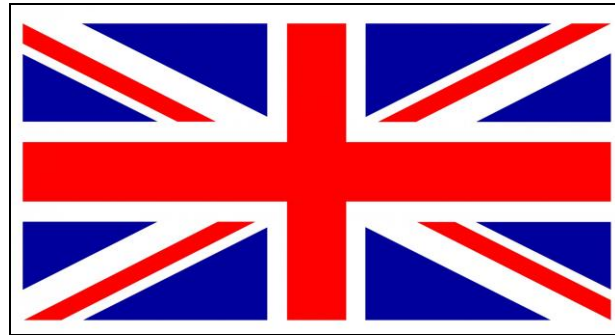
The Lion "Passant" (Lion of Judah) represents that connection and loyalty to the Crown, despite the fact that the current Tasmanian Government says they are not quite sure why it is there (website). Therefore the heraldic symbols are not without significant meaning; indeed go back many years and are as old as the human race. The banners of the Roman legions were in long use before the Crusades. There are records of banners used by both sides of the Trojan war. When we turn to the Bible we find that each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel had an emblem and were in regular use. *"Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house"* (Numbers 2:2).

In fact the Arms of William I (The Conqueror 1066-1087) shows two lions, passant guardant on a crowned Shield. Even long before that the

symbol of the lion; either Rampant (aggressive), Couchant (reclining) or Passant (sideways walking past) was a symbol of the ancient Kingdom of Judah. The Jews still retain in their heraldry a rampant Lion. The secondary emblem of the tribe of Ephraim of Israel was the Unicorn. Both the Lion of Judah and the Unicorn are found in British Royal and National Arms. The origins of this peculiarity are a subject in itself. However, the Lion is not exclusively a British emblem for it also appears in the Arms of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, the old Arms of Spain and the Royal Arms of Greece.

Recommended reading on this subject: “*Symbols of our Celto-Saxon Heritage*” by W.H. Bennett - Covenant Books, London.

## THE UNION JACK



This is contained in the right upper quarter. It acknowledges the important British settlement of Tasmania (1803). The Union Jack (or probably more accurate reference, The Union Flag) appeared in the early 1600s when James VI of Scotland became James I of Scotland and England. Two crosses were designed for the flag, the diagonal white cross on a blue background (Scotland – St Andrew) and the cross of St George (England) is vertical red cross on a white background.

The flag remained unchanged until Ireland became part of the kingdom in 1801. The symbol of Ireland was the cross of St Patrick which is a red diagonal cross on a white background.

The Union Jack remains the same to this day, one of most recognized flags in the world. But who were these patron saints of Scotland, England and Ireland?

## ST GEORGE



St George Flag

We are aware of the story of St George slaying the dragon. It has deep symbolic meaning, with the forces of Good (St George) destroying the forces of evil (Dragon). St George became the patron saint of England in 1277. St George was a Roman soldier who was martyred in the reign of Diocletian in A.D. 303 for his Christian faith.

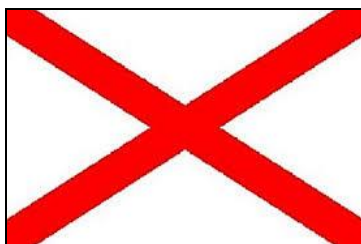
## ST ANDREW



St Andrew Flag

He was the apostle of the Bible, who in A.D. 69 was crucified on a diagonal cross (later known as a saltire in heraldry) and was buried in Patras in Greece. A monk, called Regulus, took an arm bone and other portions of the body of the saint and after a stormy voyage he was wrecked on a rocky coast, which turned out to be Scotland. The first record of the saltire of St. Andrew being used as the national emblem of Scotland was the end of the thirteenth century.

## ST. PATRICK



St Patrick's Flag

The Patron Saint of Ireland was born about 387 A.D. He was actually born in Britain and went to Ireland as a missionary. Although not martyred and possibly therefore not entitled to a cross as his badge, nonetheless, his profound influence on early Ireland is well known.

## Wales



St David Flag

Its main symbol is the dragon and there is a feeling among some Welsh people that their country's dragon symbol should be placed in the centre of the cross of St George on the Union Jack. The St David flag is a yellow equal cross against a black background.

## LEGALITY

Tasmania does have its own Constitution (1934) more accurately a "Constitution Act". The Tasmanian flag, sadly, is not written into the Constitution Act.

In June 2003, the late Premier of Tasmania, Jim Bacon, stated that there should be changes to the State Flag. On television news, I replied that neither he nor any of his party members should have any right to change the flag without the consent of the people through the avenue of referenda.

While there have not been determined moves by any State Government to change the State Flag, its future should only be fully determined by the people, thus it was important that pertinent legislation should be considered.

It was therefore gratifying when Independent Member of the Lower Tasmanian House, the House of Assembly, Hon Bruce Goodluck MHR moved a motion on September 24th 1996 which read: *"That the Government introduce Legislation to ensure that the Tasmanian Flag cannot be changed without the approval at a referendum or plebiscite. This means that no politician, no political party and no special interest group will be able to tamper with the design of our State flag."*

Mr Bruce Goodluck's re-introduced the motion a second time in the Lower House in September 1997 and was supported both by the Liberal and Labour Parties and passed. It was resolved in the affirmative and agreed on 12th November 1997.

## **FLYING OF THE TASMANIAN FLAG**

*(This information will allow the flying of the Tasmanian Flag in its right order)*

- The Tasmanian State Flag should be accorded the dignity as our State symbol. It should be flown aloft and free, with all parts of the flag able to be readily seen. It should be raised quickly and lowered slowly and ceremonially.
- It should be illuminated if it is to be flown at night.
- It should be flown on all State Government buildings during working hours. Private citizens and burgess should be encouraged to also fly the Tasmanian flag.
- If it is flown with the Australian National Flag, the Australian Flag should take priority. In raising the flags, the Australian National Flag should be first raised and the last lowered.
- If there are two flagpoles: Left: National Flag. Right: State Flag.
- If there are three flagpoles. Left: National Flag. Middle: that of a sovereign nation. Right: The Tasmanian Flag.
- If the flag is carried with the Australian National Flag in a single file procession, the National Flag must be the first flag, followed by the State Flag.
- If the flag is carried in a line, the Australian National Flag should be carried (if possible) not only to the extreme left, but to the extreme right i.e. either end. If there is only one Australian National Flag available, the National Flag should be in the centre. .
- If the Tasmanian State Flag is to be displayed on a wall, the upper hoist of the Tasmanian Flag (Union Jack) should be on the top left as one faces the flag, no matter whether the flag is suspended horizontally or vertically.
- If the Tasmanian Flag is displayed with the Australian National Flag on a horizontal rope across a street, the National Flag must be on the left.
- If it is desired that the Tasmanian Flag cover a casket or a Coffin the upper hoist should be draped over the left shoulder of the deceased. The flag should be taken from the casket before burial or cremation.



## DO NOT:

Deface the Flag by any other object or badge attached to it or superimposed on it. It should not be flown upside down. It is a myth that it should be flown upside down as a signal of distress.

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## APPENDIX.

1. Archives file (Hobart) on Coat of Arms. Parliamentary Library.
  2. AJP Taylor, essay, "Lament for a Commonwealth" History of the English Speaking Peoples magazine series (No.1 - Published Purnell, London.)
- Recommended reading regarding National Flags: “The Australian National Flag” by Carroll and Richardson.



Reg Watson (left) addressing a local school on the meaning of the flag

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# TASMANIAN HISTORICAL FLAGS



Tasmania's Van Diemen's Land Flag



Tasmanian Red Ensign 1875



Tasmanian Anti-Transportation Flag cloth flag\* (now in Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston)

- Convict Transportation, ceased in 1852. The last convict to arrive to Van Diemen's Land was in 1853. (see Reg A. Watson's book, "Tasmania!")

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

John Vaughan of the Australian National Flag Association (NSW) for his use of Tasmanian historical flags.

NB: For further information of Tasmanian sovereignty and autonomy see the case for [Tasmanian independence](#) written by the author. This column is the sole responsibility of the author (Reg. A. Watson) and not of The Australian National Flag Association (Tasmania).

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