Symbols of Australia

Flags and Coats of Arms



Samone Bos

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GLOSSARY WORDS
When a word is printed in **bold**, click on it to find its meaning.

Symbols of Australia

Symbols of Australia represent Australia and its people. They represent our land, governments and stories. Most importantly, symbols reflect our shared experiences as Australians.

What are symbols?

Symbols can take many forms, such as objects, places and events. Some symbols are official, while others are unofficial. Official symbols include government flags, **emblems**, commemorative days and the national anthem. Unofficial symbols include folk songs, foods, landmarks and icons.

Why do we have symbols?

Australian symbols have special meanings. They inspire a sense of pride and belonging in Australians. Symbols identify us as uniquely Australian.

Who chooses Australian symbols?

Some symbols are created by Australia's governments and other authorities. Other symbols are items from our **culture**, natural environment and history that have become important to Australians over time.



The shape of Australia's coastline, as seen on this globe, is one of the most recognisable symbols of the country.

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Australian flags and coats of arms

Australian flags and coats of arms officially represent Australia's people, and its Federal, state and territory governments. They are symbols that connect Australians with their country and state or territory.

How do flags and coats of arms represent Australia?

Flags and coats of arms carry symbols that have special meanings. There are many symbols on Australian flags and coats of arms. These symbols may represent the history of our country or features of its culture and natural environment. Australian flags and coats of arms represent Australia as a young country with an **Indigenous** heritage that includes the oldest continuous living cultures in the world.



In 2000, Cathy Freeman proudly carried the Australian and Aboriginal Australian flags at the Olympic Games in Sydney, New South Wales.

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

The stars of the Southern Cross appear on many Australian flags and coats of arms. The Southern Cross symbolises Australia's position in the Southern Hemisphere.

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Who chooses Australian flags and coats of arms?

The Australian National Flag and coat of arms were chosen by the Australian government to represent the entire country. State and territory governments chose flags and coats of arms to represent the history, industries and natural environments of their individual states and territories. Other Australian flags were chosen by groups of people to symbolise things that are important to them.

How were Australian flags designed?

Australian flags were designed to represent the country, state or territory through the use of important symbols. For example, the Southern Cross is a symbol that is relevant to all Australians, so it is shown on most Australian flags. The **Union Flag** is also common to most Australian flags. This is because it represents the role of the British in Australia's modern history.



The Australian flag represents Australia's location, government and people. Here, it is seen flying above Parliament House in the Australian Capital Territory.

SYMBOL FACT

National, state and territory flags were proclaimed, or made official, by Australia's governor-general.

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How were Australian coats of arms designed?

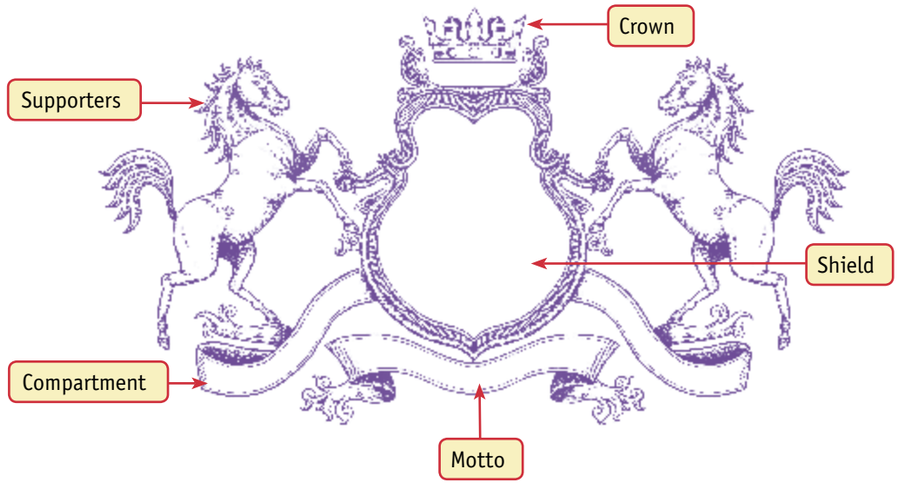
Australian coats of arms were designed to represent our history, **culture** and natural environment. Some states and territories chose symbols that honour their industries. Others chose **native** plants and animals that represent our natural environment. Australian coats of arms were granted, or approved, by the British king or queen.



Australia's Commonwealth Coat of Arms is used on official documents, such as passports.

Features of a coat of arms

Many features work together to create a coat of arms. All coats of arms have a shield. Beside it, there are usually human or animal figures called supporters, who stand on a base called a compartment. A motto with inspiring words or a name might be written on a scroll. Towards the top of many coats of arms is a helmet or crown.



A standard coat of arms may have a crown, shield, motto and supporters on a compartment.

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The Commonwealth of Australia

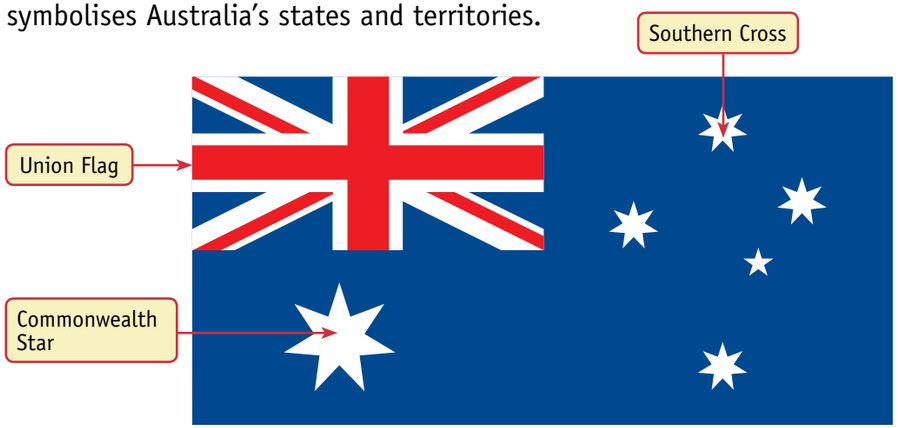
In 1901, the British colonies of Australia united to form the Commonwealth of Australia. This new country kept the British queen as its head of state, but had its own government and constitution. A national flag and coat of arms were created to represent the Commonwealth of Australia and its people.

Flag

The Australian National Flag is also known as the Commonwealth Blue Ensign. It carries three symbols that represent Australia. The **Union Flag** represents Australia's colonial history. The Southern Cross is the group of five stars easily seen in the **Southern Hemisphere**. The seven-pointed star, known as the Commonwealth Star, symbolises Australia's states and territories.

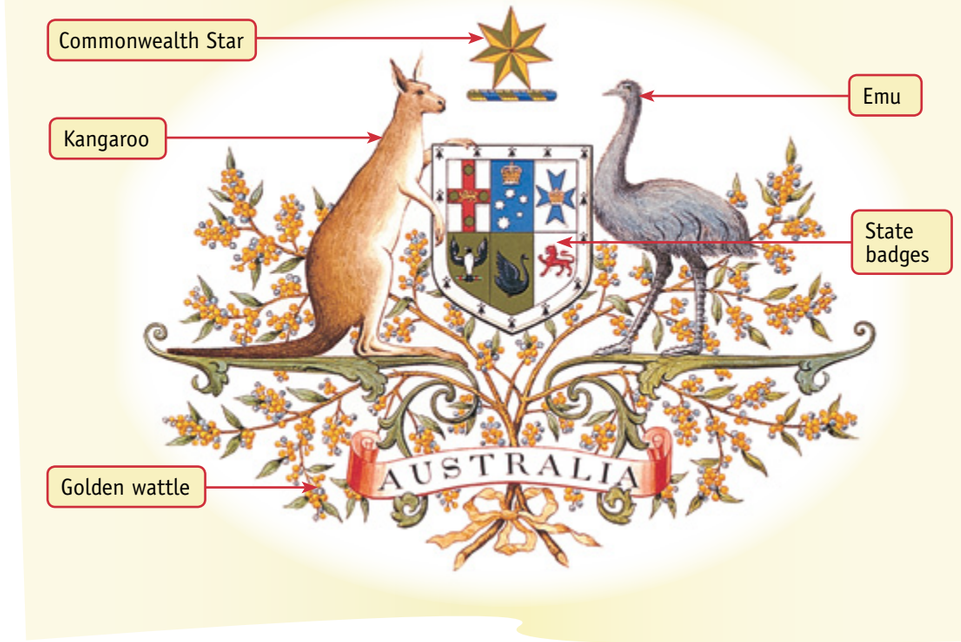
SYMBOL FACT

The Australian National Flag was first flown on 3 September 1901. This day is known as Australian National Flag Day.



The Commonwealth Star was originally a six-pointed star representing six states. In 1908, an extra point was added to represent the territories.

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The Australian coat of arms contains symbols that represent all of Australia.

Coat of arms

The Commonwealth Coat of Arms was adopted in 1912 to represent Australia and its government. An emu and a kangaroo support a shield featuring six state badges. The Commonwealth Star symbolises the states and territories. Australia's floral **emblem**, the golden wattle, forms the background.

OFFICIAL SYMBOL OF THE GOVERNMENT

The Commonwealth Coat of Arms is an official symbol used in letters, books and government buildings. Some Australian sports teams are allowed to display it on their uniforms when representing Australia.

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Indigenous flags

Indigenous Australians are represented by the Australian, state and territory flags. Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander flags are flown as symbols of **Indigenous** heritage and **cultures.** These flags inspire a sense of pride and belonging among Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal Australian flag

In 1971, Indigenous Australian artist Harold Thomas created a flag to unite Aboriginal Australians. It was flown as a sign of solidarity and became a symbol of protest in the fight for land rights against the Australian government. The red, black and yellow flag is a proud symbol of Aboriginal Australian cultures. It has been an official Australian flag since 1995.

SYMBOL FACT

The Aboriginal Australian flag was first raised on National Aborigines Day in Adelaide, South Australia, on 12 July 1971.

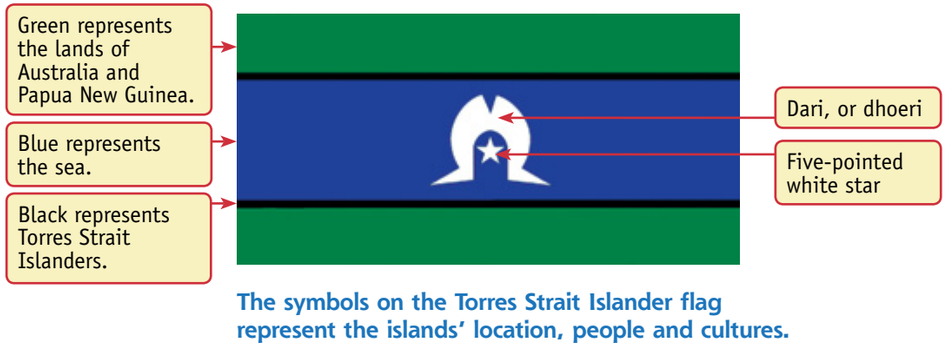


The colours of the Aboriginal Australian flag represent Aboriginal Australians and their connection to the land.

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The Torres Strait Islander flag

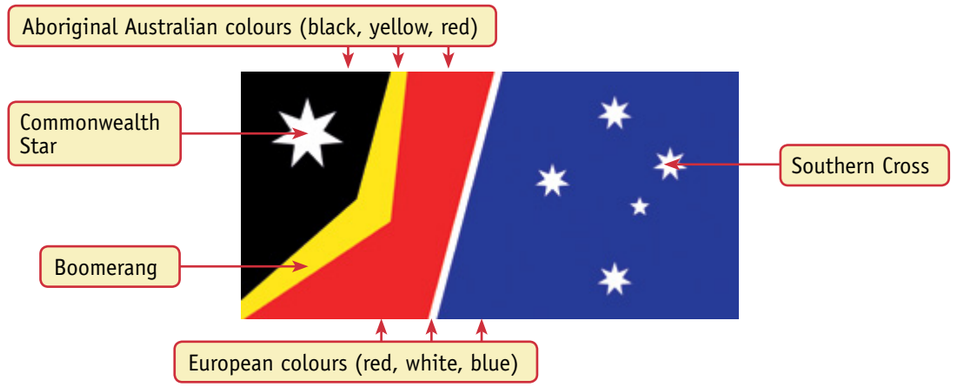
In 1992, Bernard Namok designed the Torres Strait Islander flag. It was made an official flag in 1995. The land, ocean and people are symbolised by green, blue and black. A five-pointed white star represents the Torres Strait's five main islands. At the centre, a traditional dari, or dhoeri, headdress is shown.



The symbols on the Torres Strait Islander flag represent the islands' location, people and cultures.

The reconciliation flag

In 1995, the reconciliation flag was created by Brendan Jones as a symbol of togetherness for all Australians. It is not an official Australian flag, but represents Australia's Indigenous and European heritage, and hope for a positive and **tolerant** future.



The colours and symbols on the reconciliation flag work together to represent all Australians living in harmony.

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Australian Capital Territory

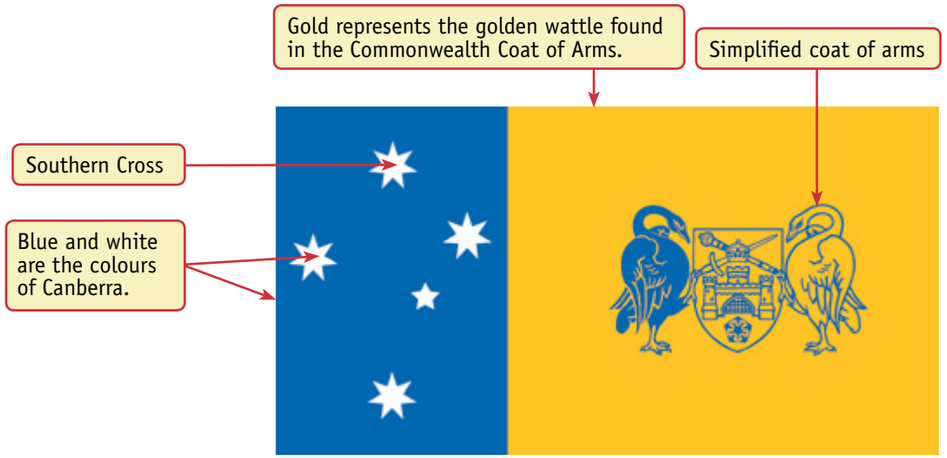
The Australian Capital Territory was formed on 1 January 1911. It is home to our capital, Canberra, and the Parliament of Australia, where Federal laws are made. The territory's flag and coat of arms contain symbols that represent the important role of the Australian Capital Territory in Australia.

Flag

In 1992, a competition was held to create a flag for the territory. Ivo Ostyn designed the winning flag, which was adopted in 1993. The five stars on the left symbolise the Southern Cross. A simplified version of the territory's coat of arms appears on the right.

SYMBOL FACT

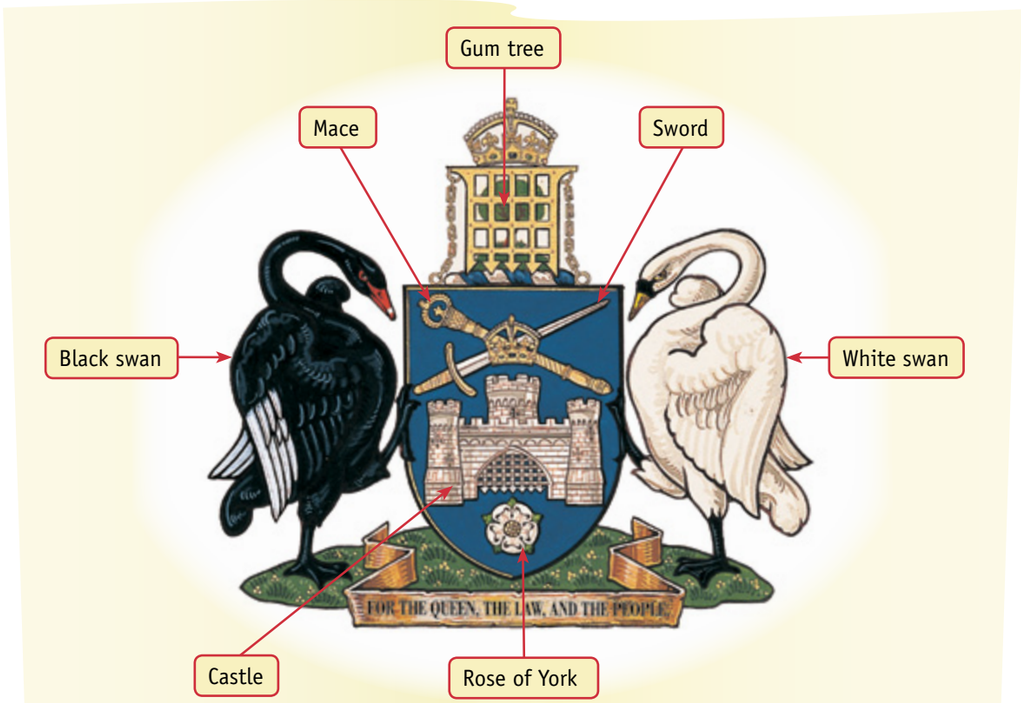
The Australian Capital Territory used the Australian National Flag until 1993, when its own flag was adopted.



The colours and symbols used in the Australian Capital Territory's flag link it to Australian history.

Coat of arms

The Australian Capital Territory uses Canberra's coat of arms. The black swan and white swan represent **Indigenous Australians** and European settlers. On the shield, the sword represents justice and the mace (a decorated rod) represents the Australian government. The castle represents Canberra as the government's seat of power. The tree in the background is a gum, or eucalypt, tree which is **native** to Australia.



Canberra was granted its coat of arms in 1928.

ROSE OF YORK

The rose on the shield of Canberra's coat of arms is a symbol of the Duke of York. The Duke officially opened Parliament House in Canberra on 9 May 1927.

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New South Wales

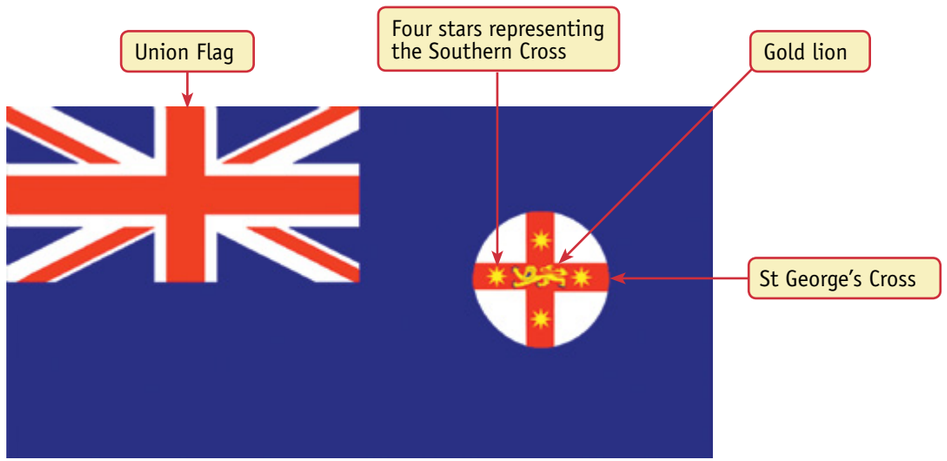
New South Wales was formed in 1788 as a British penal colony. It soon developed a thriving wool and wheat industry. The state's flag and coat of arms symbolise the agriculture of New South Wales and its British heritage.

Flag

The New South Wales flag was first flown in 1876. It contains strong symbols of the state's first British settlers. The **Union Flag**, the **St George's Cross** and the gold lion represent England. New South Wales's location in the **Southern Hemisphere** is marked by the four stars representing the Southern Cross.

SYMBOL FACT

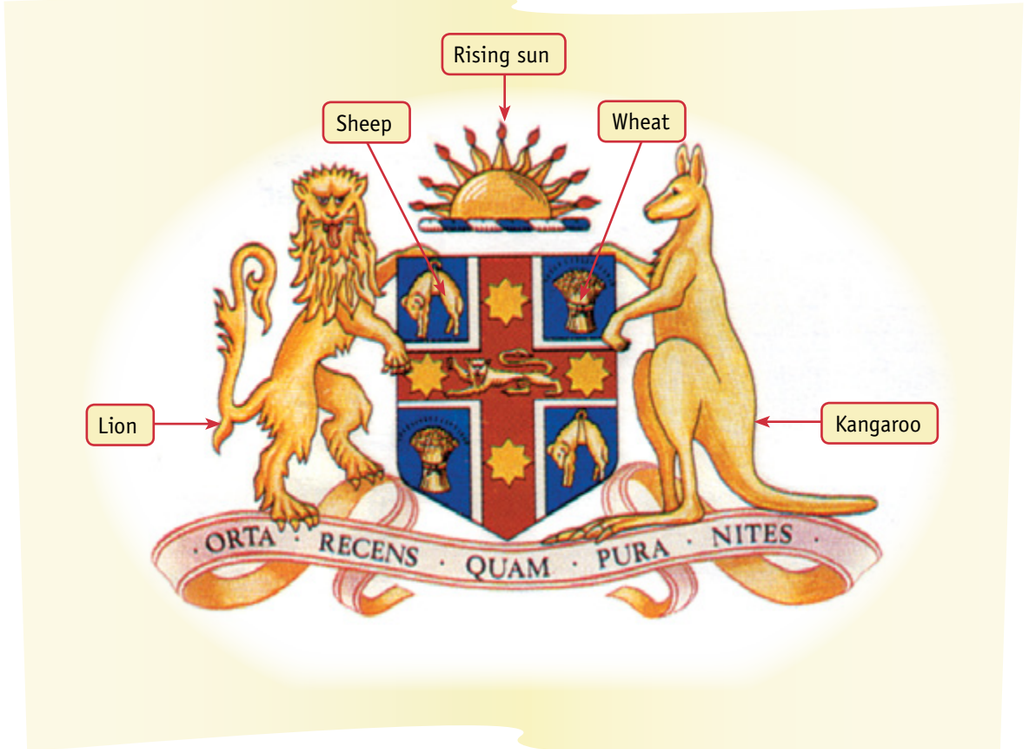
The New South Wales flag was created by James Barnet, the Colonial Architect, and Captain Francis Hixson, President of the Marine Board.



The only Australian symbols on the New South Wales flag are the four stars representing the Southern Cross.

Coat of arms

The New South Wales coat of arms was adopted in 1906. It features a kangaroo and a lion, symbolising Australia and its British heritage. The shield represents New South Wales's agricultural industry, with wheat and sheep surrounding the St George's Cross. The rising sun represents the future of the state.



The New South Wales coat of arms is a symbol of the state's bright future.

NEW SOUTH WALES'S MOTTO

The scroll at the bottom of the coat of arms says, 'Orta recens quam pura nites'. It is Latin (an old Roman language) for 'Newly risen, how brightly you shine'. This motto symbolises progress and development.

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Victoria

Victoria separated from New South Wales and became a colony in 1851. That year, gold was discovered near Ballarat and thousands of people rushed to the Victorian goldfields. The Victorian flag and coat of arms represent its British heritage and hopes for a rich and peaceful future.

Flag

The **Union Flag** and the crown represent Victoria's British heritage. The five white stars symbolise the Southern Cross – each star has between five and eight points to represent how brightly this group of stars shines.

SYMBOL FACT

In 1870, an early version of the Victorian flag was flown on the state's first warship, the HMVS *Nelson*.

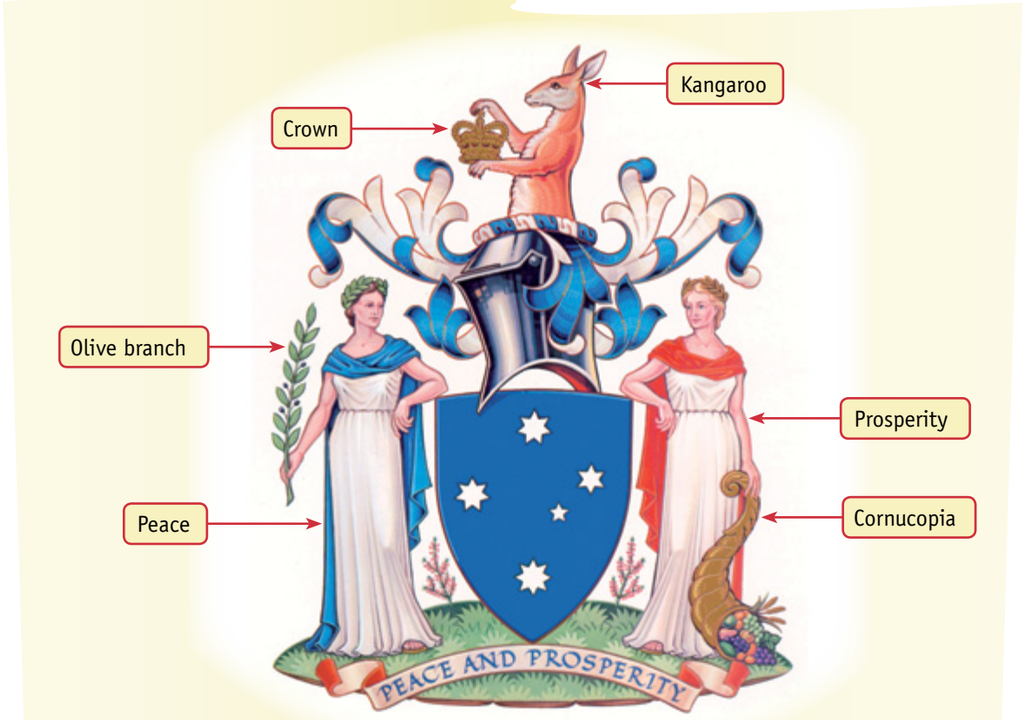


The crown on the Victorian flag has changed twice. The current crown is known as St Edward's Crown. It was added in 1953.

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Coat of arms

The Victorian coat of arms was granted in 1910 by King George V. The shield represents the Southern Cross. The kangaroo holds a crown, symbolising the state's British heritage. Two female figures named Peace (left) and Prosperity (right) support the shield. They represent Victoria's motto and hopes for the future.



The Victorian coat of arms is a symbol of peace and good fortune.

PEACE AND PROSPERITY

On the Victorian coat of arms, Peace holds an olive branch, which is a symbol of peace, while Prosperity holds a cornucopia, a horn-shaped object that symbolises plentiful food.

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Queensland

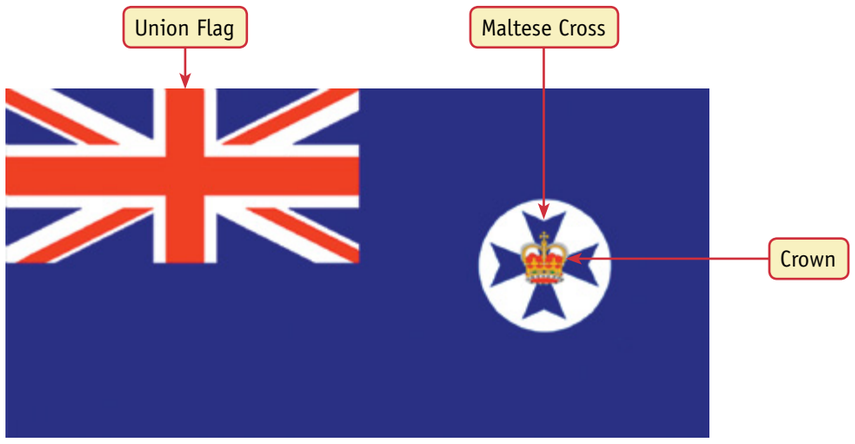
In 1859, Queensland was separated from New South Wales and became a colony. Gold, copper and tin were soon discovered, and sugar production became Queensland's biggest industry. Queensland's flag and coat of arms represent the state's British heritage, mines and life on the land.

Flag

Queensland's flag was first used in 1856. The **Union Flag** represents the state's British heritage. To the right is a blue **Maltese Cross**, with a crown at its centre.

SYMBOL FACT

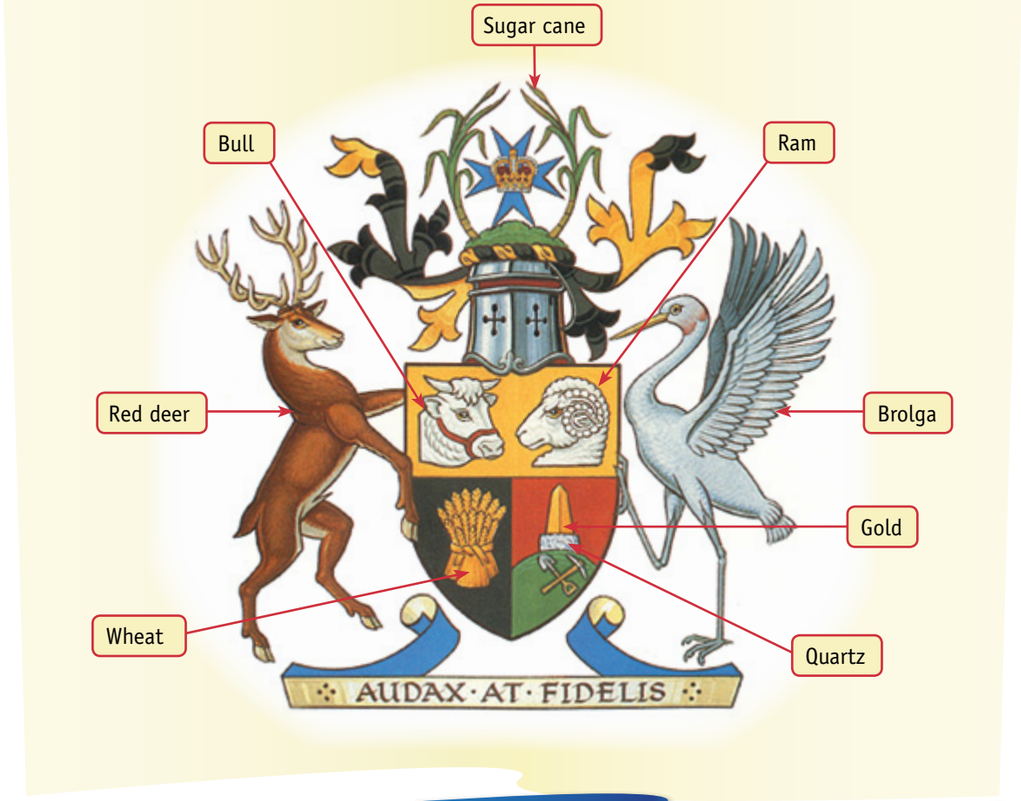
Queensland's flag was originally designed with an image of Queen Victoria's head. Queen Victoria was the queen of the United Kingdom (and Australia) from 20 June 1837 to 22 January 1901.



The symbols on the Queensland flag represent the state's British heritage.

Coat of arms

On the shield, a ram, a bull and wheat symbolise livestock and crops. Gold and quartz represent the state's rich mines. The shield is supported by a brolga, which represents **native** Queenslanders, and a red deer, which represents British heritage. Queensland's large sugar industry is represented by two stalks of sugar cane at the crest.



Queensland's coat of arms, granted in 1893, is the oldest in Australia.

QUEENSLAND'S MOTTO

The motto on Queensland's coat of arms is 'Audax at fidelis'. It means 'Bold but faithful' in Latin.

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South Australia

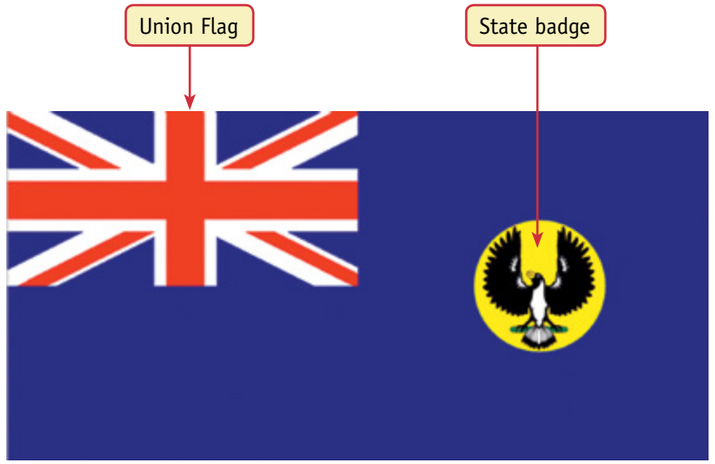
South Australia was founded as a convict-free British settlement in 1836. In the 1840s, the colony began farming sheep and wheat, and growing grapes to make wine. The symbols on the South Australian flag and coat of arms celebrate its natural environment, farms and other industries.

Flag

The South Australian flag was adopted in 1904. The **Union Flag** represents the state's British heritage. The state badge shows the piping shrike, a bird commonly found in South Australia. The piping shrike is contained within a yellow circle, symbolising the rising sun.

SYMBOL FACT

Another name for the piping shrike is the white-backed magpie.



The piping shrike on the South Australian flag is a symbol of the state's large areas of bushland and farmland.

Coat of arms

The South Australian coat of arms was adopted in 1984. Grapes, wheat, barley and citrus fruits represent the state's crops. Factories and mines are represented by cogs and a miner's pick. Sturt's desert pea, the state's floral **emblem**, features above the piping shrike on the shield.

SYMBOL FACT

The South Australian coat of arms is unique because its shield does not have supporters.



The South Australian coat of arms has symbols of the state's crops, industries and wildlife.

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Western Australia

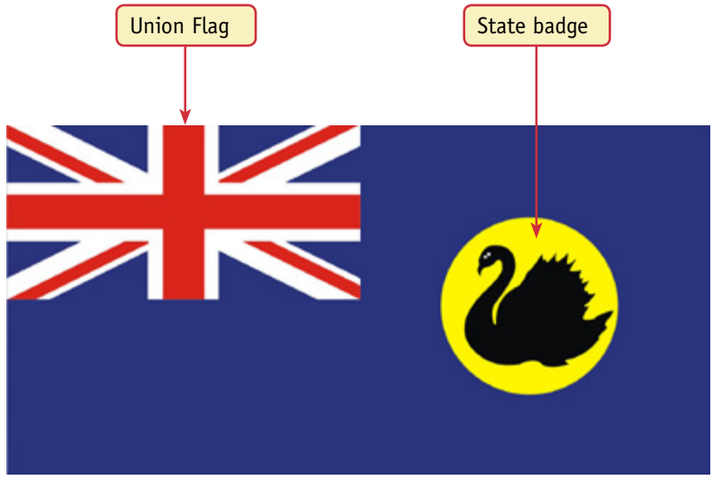
The first British settlement in Western Australia, Swan River, was established in 1829. Though originally a free settlement, Swan River became a British penal colony in 1849. The Western Australian flag and coat of arms recognise this heritage and also contain floral, bird and animal emblems.

Flag

The Western Australian flag was officially adopted in 1953, but similar flags have existed since 1860. The **Union Flag** represents the state's British heritage. The black swan in a yellow circle symbolises Western Australia's origins as the Swan River settlement. It is also the state badge.

SYMBOL FACT

Before the discovery of black swans in Western Australia, Europeans believed all swans were white. Black swans are native to Australia.



Symbols on the Western Australian flag represent the state's British heritage.

Coat of arms

The Western Australian coat of arms was adopted in 1969. It contains symbols of the state's animals, plants and **Indigenous cultures**. Two kangaroos support the shield and hold boomerangs. On the shield, a black swan is shown floating on a blue base, representing water. The crown, representing Western Australia's British heritage, is surrounded by red and green kangaroo paws, the state's floral emblem.



The Western Australian coat of arms has symbols of the state's plants, animals, Indigenous cultures and British heritage.

SWAN RIVER

Western Australia's Swan River was named after its many black swans by Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh. In 1697, he became the first European to sail up the river.

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Tasmania

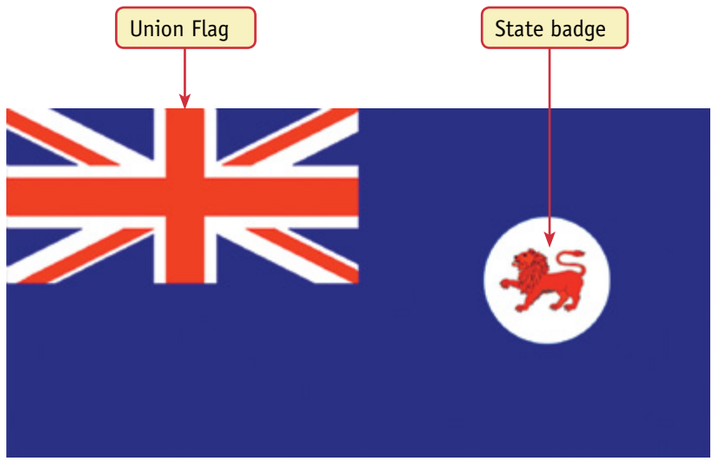
In 1856, the British penal colony of Van Diemen's Land changed its name to Tasmania and was granted self-government. The Tasmanian flag represents the state's heritage as a British colony. Symbols of Tasmania's native animals, crops and industries are shown on its coat of arms.

Flag

The Tasmanian flag was first flown in 1876. It features the **Union Flag** and the state badge, which is a red lion on a white circle. The red lion is a symbol of the state's British heritage and Tasmania's first white settlers.

SYMBOL FACT

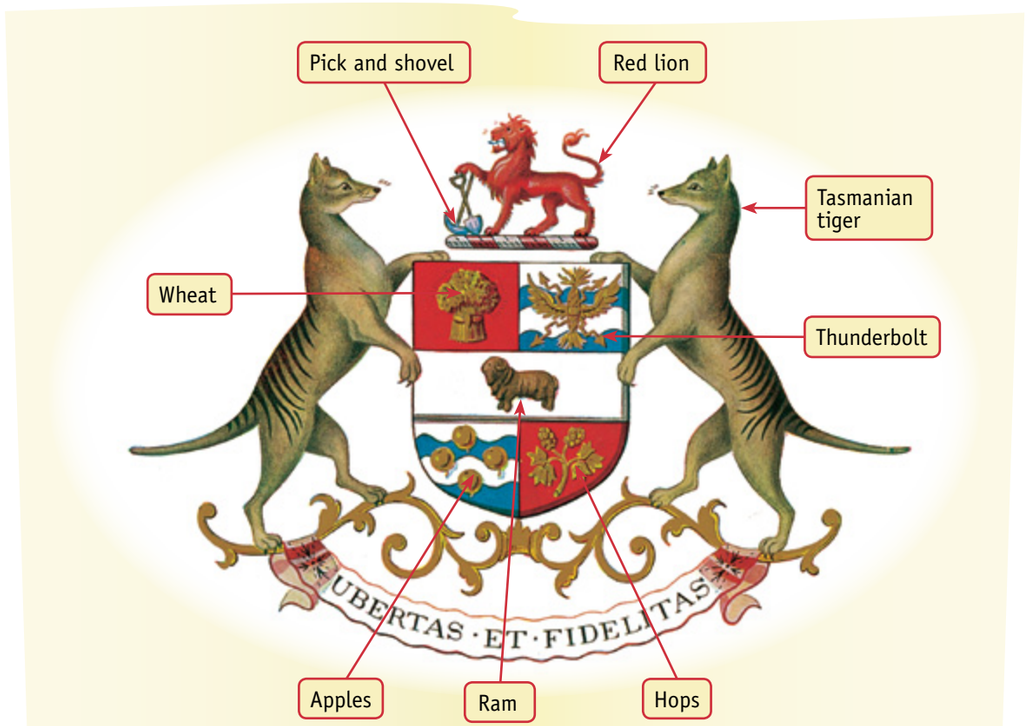
In heraldry, the image of a lion walking towards the viewer's left, with its right paw raised, is called a 'passant'. The word 'passant' means 'striding' in Old French.



The Tasmanian flag displays symbols of the state's British heritage.

Coat of arms

The Tasmanian coat of arms was adopted in 1917. Two Tasmanian tigers (thylacines) support the shield, symbolising the state's unique wildlife. On the shield, apples, hops, wheat and a ram represent Tasmania's farming industries. The hydroelectric industry is represented by a thunderbolt. Hydroelectricity is electricity produced by the force of moving water. Above the shield, a red lion rests its paw on a pick and a shovel, which represent Tasmania's mines.



The Tasmanian coat of arms represents its wildlife and industries.

TASMANIA'S MOTTO

Tasmania's motto is 'Ubertas et fidelitas', which means 'Fruitfulness and faithfulness' in Latin.

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Northern Territory

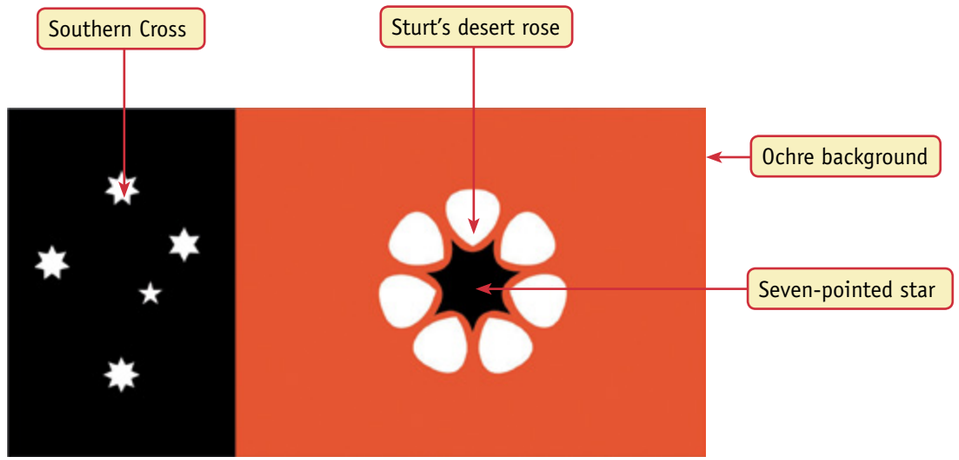
The Northern Territory was part of South Australia until 1911. The territory was then ruled by the Commonwealth of Australia until it gained self-government in 1978. The Northern Territory's flag and coat of arms represent its Indigenous cultures and sweeping red deserts.

Flag

The Northern Territory's flag was raised for the first time in 1978. The five stars symbolise the Southern Cross. The territory's floral **emblem**, the Sturt's desert rose, is shown against an **ochre** background. In the centre of the flower is a seven-pointed star representing the six Australian states and the Northern Territory.

SYMBOL FACT

The flags of both the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory do not feature the Union Flag.

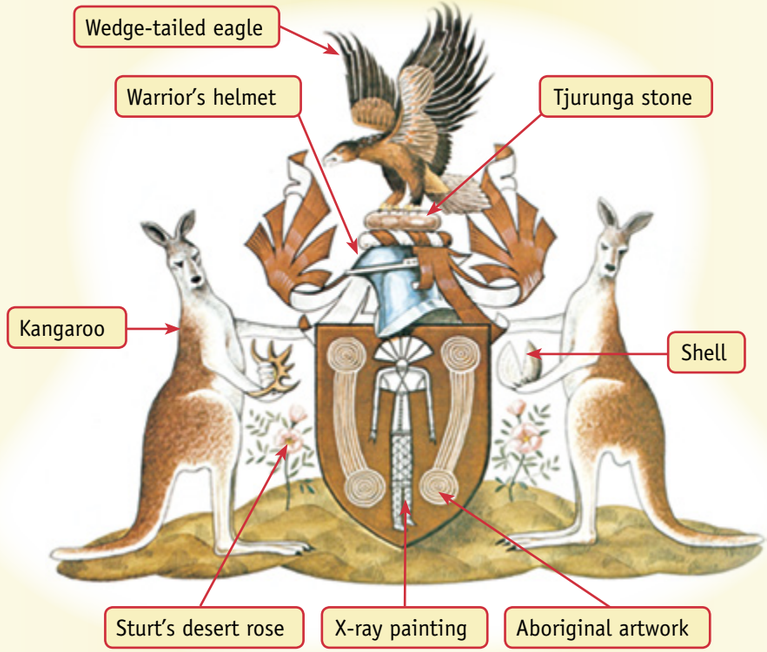


The colour ochre is used to symbolise the Northern Territory's rich soil and Indigenous cultures.

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Coat of arms

The Northern Territory's coat of arms was first used in 1978. The shield, which features Aboriginal artwork, is supported by two kangaroos holding shells found along the territory's coast. Above the shield, a warrior's helmet represents the territory's battles against Japanese bombers in World War II (1939–1945). At the top, a wedge-tailed eagle, the territory's bird emblem, clutches a **sacred** Aboriginal tjurunga stone. Below the shield is a sandy mound from which the Sturt's desert rose grows.



The Northern Territory's coat of arms includes strong symbols of its Indigenous peoples, history and environment.

X-RAY PAINTINGS

Aboriginal Australian X-ray paintings show the bones and organs of animals and sacred beings. The female figure on the shield of the territory's coat of arms was based on X-ray paintings found in Arnhem Land.

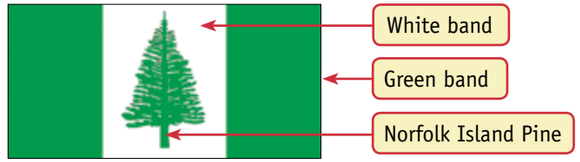
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Other Australian territories

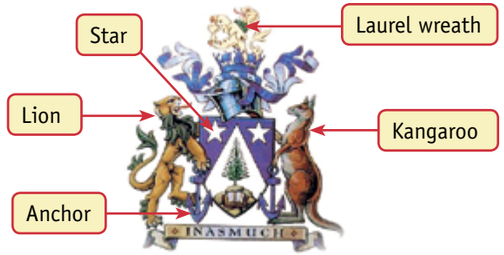
Australia has other territories on the mainland and overseas. Two of these territories have their own symbols representing their land, history and cultures.

Norfolk Island's flag and coat of arms

Norfolk Island's flag was adopted in 1980. It is green and white, with a tree representing the Norfolk Island Pine. Norfolk Island's coat of arms has many symbols, some of which are linked to the island's discovery by Captain James Cook in 1774. These include the star and laurel wreath, both taken from Captain Cook's coat of arms.



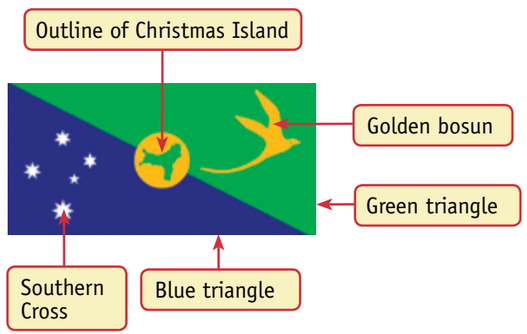
Norfolk Island's flag represents its lush natural environment.



On Norfolk Island's coat of arms, a lion and a kangaroo holding anchors symbolise the island's British and Australian heritage.

Christmas Island's flag

Christmas Island's flag was adopted in 2002. Blue and green triangles symbolise the land and sea, with five stars for the Southern Cross. A **native** bird, the golden bosun, flies off to the right and an outline of the island is in the centre. Christmas Island uses the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.



Symbols on Christmas Island's flag represent its island location, native wildlife and links to Australia.

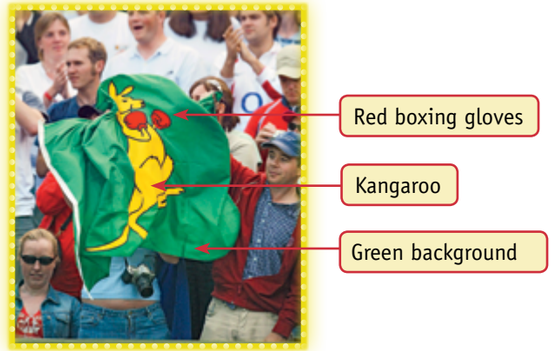
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Unofficial Australian flags

Australia has unofficial flags that are also important symbols to many Australians.

The boxing kangaroo flag

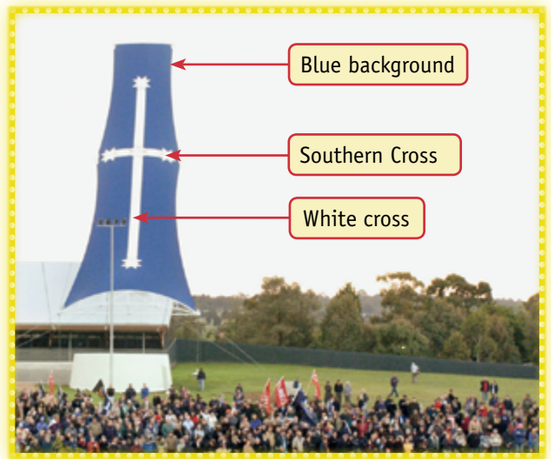
The image of the boxing kangaroo became an important symbol during World War II (1939–1945), when it was painted on the sides of Australian warplanes. Its image was first used on a flag during the 1983 America's Cup, when it was flown on *Australia II*, the yacht that won the race. The boxing kangaroo is often used to show Australia's fighting spirit in sport.



The boxing kangaroo flag is a modern symbol of Australian sport.

The Eureka flag

In 1854, the Eureka flag was flown during the Eureka Rebellion, when miners protested against the high cost of mining licences. The blue colour of the flag represents the miners' shirts and the white cross is a symbol of unity. The five stars represent the Southern Cross. The Eureka flag is also called the Southern Cross flag.



The Eureka flag, a symbol of unity, is a prominent feature at the Eureka Rebellion Historic Precinct in Ballarat, Victoria.

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Try this!

Symbols help us to remember things about our history. They also tell us what our culture values. Symbols of Australia exist all around us and are a part of our daily lives.

Do you know?

These questions will help you to think about some of the flags and coats of arms in this book. You can find the answers by turning to the page indicated.

- What is another name for the Australian National Flag? (PAGE 8)
- Which Australian animals are found on the Commonwealth Coat of Arms? (PAGE 9)
- How many official **Indigenous Australian** flags are there? (PAGES 10–11)
- Which state flag once featured an image of Queen Victoria? (PAGE 18)
- What is the name of Western Australia's floral **emblem**, which is found on the state's coat of arms? (PAGE 23)

Think about it

Look around you at home, at school and in your local community.

- What symbols can you see?
- How do these symbols represent Australia and its people?
- What other symbols do Australians use to show who they are?

Find out more

- http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/coat-arms/index.cfm

  The 'It's an Honour' website explains the history behind the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.

- http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/flag.cfm

  The 'It's an Honour' website also explains the history of and rules for flying the Australian flag.

- http://www.australiaday.org.au/toolkit/page171.asp

  The Australia Day National Network website's toolkit provides information about the Australian flag and Indigenous Australian flags.

- http://www.flagsaustralia.com.au/HistoricalFlags.html

  This website of the Flag Society of Australia explains important historical flags of Australia.

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Glossary

agriculture
farming

capital
a city that is the centre of government of a country, state or territory

colonies
places ruled or governed by another country

constitution
the set of political values, often set in a written document, by which a country is governed

culture
the ways of living that a group of people have developed over time

emblems
objects, or pictures of objects, that are used as symbols

governor-general
a representative of the British king or queen in Australia

heraldry
the study of coats of arms and the families or territories they belong to

Indigenous
naturally existing in an area or region rather than coming from somewhere else

Indigenous Australians
the first peoples of Australia, comprising Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders

Maltese Cross
a cross with four equal parts that get wider as they extend from the centre; originally the symbol of a group of Christian warriors

native
growing naturally in an area

ochre
the colour of a substance found in the ground, which is used to make paint

penal colony
a colony that is set up to take in convicts

sacred
considered to be very important to spiritual beliefs

self-government
political independence

Southern Hemisphere
the half of Earth that is between the equator and the South Pole

St George's Cross
a red cross on a white background; used on the flags and coats of arms of a number of countries, including England

tolerant
accepting differences between ourselves and others

Union Flag
the red, white and blue national flag of the United Kingdom; also known as the Union Jack

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