

The Crown & Kangaroo Victorian Colonial Flags.

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After separating from New South Wales in 1851, the Colony of Victoria lacked a distinctive flag to indicate that its vessels belonged to a the colony of Victoria. It has previously been believed that this state of affairs continued until 1870 when a Victorian flag was available for flying from the colony's vessels. The research detailed below indicates that two types of official Victorian flags were in use prior to 1870. It would appear that history had simply forgotten about them.

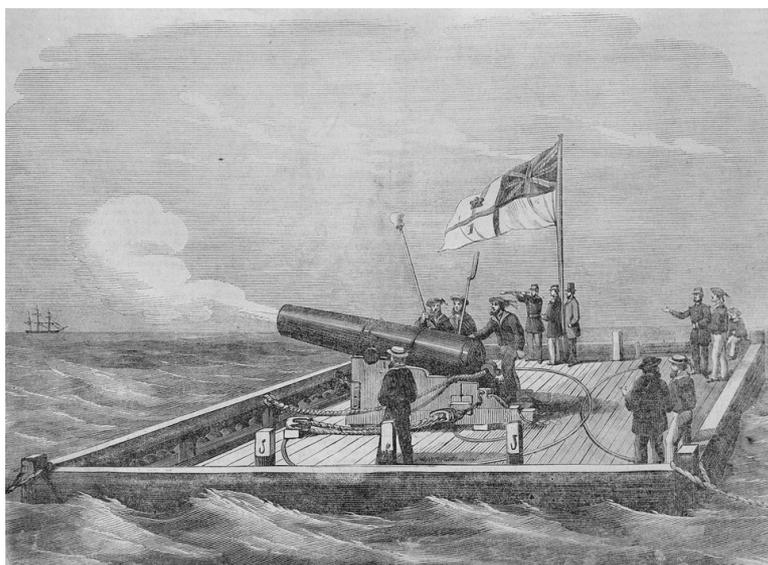
Inauguration of the Victorian Flags in 1870

On the 9th of February 1870 Her Majesty's Victorian Ship (HMVS) *Nelson* and the reformatory Ship, *Sir Harry Smith* fired a 21 gun salute. The occasion was the unfurling of the new blue Victorian Government flag and new red Victorian Merchant flag on board the ex-Line-of-Battleship HMVS *Nelson*. Described by *The Argus*¹ newspaper as an event of some importance, the *Naval & Military Gazette*² pointed out that the new (government) flag was "adopted at the suggestion of the Admiralty to distinguish the vessels of the Victorian Navy".

This 1870 Victorian flag was very similar to the current Australian flag. Naturally, being prior to federation, the 1870 flag did not include the federation star and unlike the current Australian flag, the stars of the Southern Cross on the Victorian flag had, and still have, five, six, seven, eight and nine points. The 1870 flag soon evolved into the 1877 flag when the size of the Southern Cross was reduced and an imperial crown added above it. The Victorian flag changed again in 1901 when the Imperial crown was replaced by the Tudor crown which was itself replaced by the St. Edward's crown in 1953 thereby creating the current Victorian State flag.

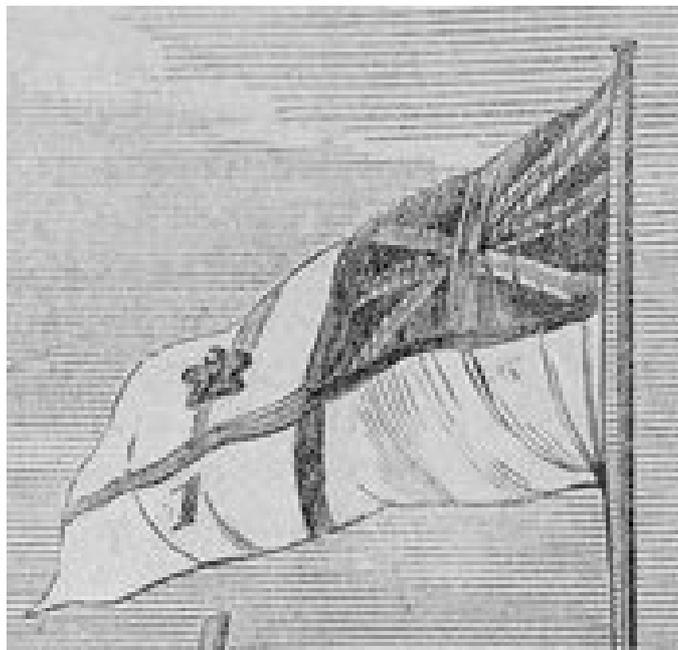
1865 Victorian Flags

In all of the coverage of the inauguration of the 1870 Victorian flags, no mention was made that the Colony of Victoria already had a flag. While researching Victoria's Colonial Navy I came across a fascinating engraving of the Victorian Navy's Gun Raft, known as *The Elder*³. Of particular interest in the engraving was the flag being flown by the Gun Raft.



Captain Elder's Gun Raft manned by the Williamstown division of the Victorian Volunteer Naval Brigade

The Illustrated Melbourne Post, 18 February 1865, courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.



Most likely the letter T partially obscured by the fold in the flag.

Detail from *The Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 February 1865.

The *Victorian Government Gazette* of the 27th of January 1865⁴ described the new flag for Her Majesty's Ships of War as "shall bear a white ensign, with a red St. George's cross and the union in the upper canton." This item referred to ships of the Royal Navy and was for general information only.

Clearly the Victorian Government was inspired by and acted on this gazetted information and used the new British white ensign as the basis for their own new flag. In the *Victorian Government Gazette* of the 12th of December 1865 it was stated that "in accordance with the Admiralty Regulations, published in the *Government Gazette* of 27th January, 1865⁵, the Blue Ensign with the Union described therein, together with a Crown and the initial letter H.M.C., will be borne by boats, &c., in the Customs Department, in lieu of that previously in force."

If the initials H.M.C. indicate a practise of using initials to indicate that Her Majesty's Customs Department controlled the vessel, then the hard to distinguish letter on the Gun Raft flag of the 18th of February 1865, could be the letter T. This would make sense, as the Treasury Department controlled the Victorian Navy until the establishment of a Defence Department in the 1880s.

The reason that the blue ensign was adopted was an instruction from Downing Street stating that, following from the circular despatch of the 19th of May 1865 containing a copy of the *Colonial Naval Defence Act* 1865, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty instructed "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." The instructions further stated that non-defence government vessels "should wear a similar blue ensign, but not the pennant."⁶

While debating the Murray Customs Bill in the South Australian House of Assembly in 1866, the question of the use of the image of an emu on the South Australian flag arose. The South Australian Treasurer, Mr Walter Duffield, stated "the emu was adopted because, as he had stated before, the kangaroo and emu were recognised as the arms of Australia, **and the former had been adopted for the Victorian flag.**"⁷

Yet another reference to the kangaroo image being used on the Victorian flag appears in 1867⁸ when a correspondent named Weather-Gage writes "In Victoria, the colonial sloop of War, the 'Victoria,' flies the Blue Ensign, with a kangaroo in it...."

A third reference to the crown and kangaroo flag appears in Ian MacFarlane's unpublished manuscript regarding the Royal Visit of Prince Alfred to Victoria in 1867. Ian writes "In 1867 the *Victoria* and Naval Training Ship hoisted blue ensigns with a crown and kangaroo design".⁹

Fortunately it was during this 1867 Royal Visit by Prince Alfred to Victoria that Her Majesty's Colonial Ship (HMCS) *Victoria* was photographed with the crew having dressed ship and manning the yardarms. *Victoria* is shown flying the Union flag from the bow, the pre 1864 red Naval Ensign from the foremast, the post 1864 White Naval Ensign from the main mast and the Victorian Naval Ensign from the stern. Luckily a copy of this photograph was hand tinted at the time and presented to HMCS *Victoria*'s captain, Captain Norman. That the tinted photograph survives in the hands of Captain Norman's Great Grandson is extremely fortunate. Given that the original dimensions of the photograph are 355 mm by 204 mm, the length of the Victorian Ensign of 20 mm is not going to hold a lot of detail. Clearly the tinting of the flag was not intended for future researchers to definitively identify elements of the flag. On its own the image of the flag is not sufficient evidence for identification purposes. However, taken with the preceding information the tinted flag does allow us to confirm that the animal that we know to be a kangaroo is standing erect rather than squatting or leaping, is coloured yellow, and is under what we know to be a crown. What is missing from this flag is the St George cross which was mentioned in the 1865 *Victorian Government Gazette*. Perhaps the cross was only used on the department flags and not on flags flown by Captain Norman's "executive ships", as mentioned later in this article. In any case the St. George cross is missing from both the 1867 coloured photograph and from an uncoloured copy of the photograph held by the *National Library of Australia*¹⁰.



Her Majesty's Colonial War Steamer *Victoria*, 1867

Celebrating the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Alfred, to Melbourne in 1867.

The crew of the *Victoria* have 'dressed ship' and manned the yard-arms.

The photograph was hand-tinted for presentation to the ship's Commander, William Henry Norman.

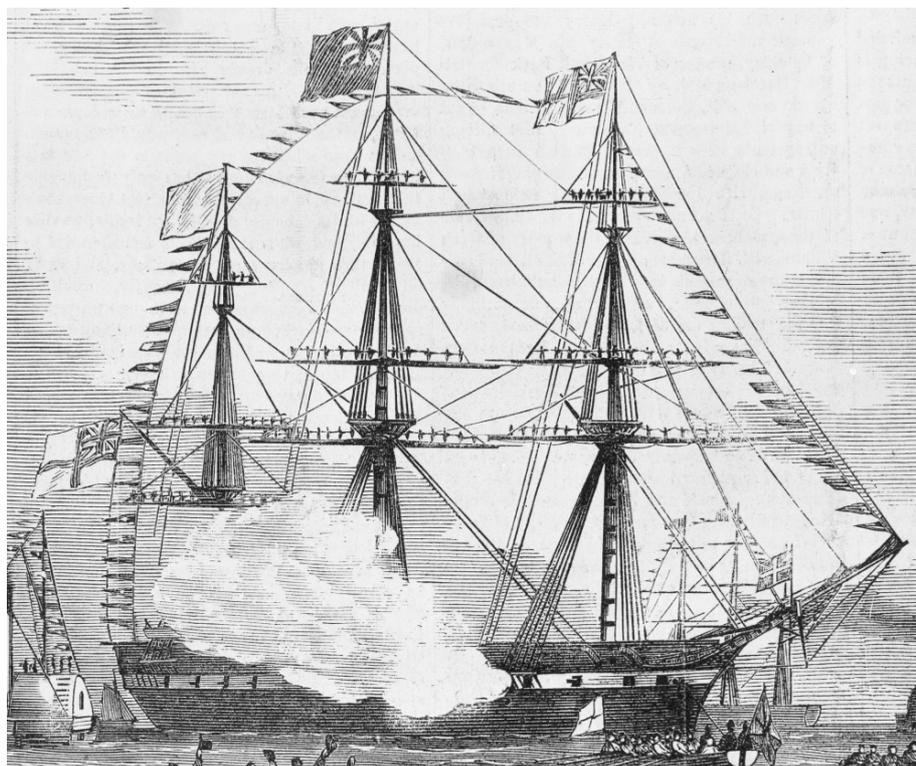
Reproduced courtesy of Captain Norman's Great Grandson, Martin Lemann.



Detail from the hand-tinted photograph of HMCS *Victoria* in 1867 showing a yellow kangaroo and crown on the fly. The image has been enlarged, flipped horizontally and rotated 40°.

As mentioned earlier, the 1877, 1901 and 1953 Victorian flags featured different crowns which related to the monarch of the day. Given that the 1877 flag featured the Imperial crown used by Queen Victoria¹¹ it is reasonable to assume that, as the 1856 and 1865 flags were created during Queen Victoria's reign, the type of crown that they would have incorporated would also have been the Imperial crown.

On the departure of Prince Alfred from Victoria in 1868, his ship, HMS *Galatea*, was described as flying different flags from her three masts. *The Argus*¹² stated "...the *Galatea*, by this time carrying the Victorian ensign (we believe we have named it properly) at her fore, the Royal Standard at her main, and the white ensign at her mizen [sic]". In the engraving of HMS *Galatea* below the Royal Navy's white ensign can be seen flying from a line attached to the mizzen Mast (mast near the stern) and the Victorian ensign flying from the fore mast. Unfortunately the artist or the engraver has omitted any details from the Victorian ensign, but a comparison of the two ensigns with the shading on the Victorian ensign, and the gun raft flag, suggests that the blue mentioned in the Victorian Government Gazette may have been, unlike in the tinted photograph, actually a light blue.



Detail from the engraving "Departure of HMS *Galatea* from Hobson's Bay" with the Victorian Ensign flying from the Fore Mast.

Illustrated Melbourne Post, 1 January 1868 (*State Library of Victoria*)

1856 Victorian Flags

On consulting Ian MacFarlane, an expert on the early Victorian Navy, about the Gun Raft flag, I was advised that the Public Records Office held correspondence regarding a proposal for the various government departments to fly flags on their vessels. These flags were to bear initials so as to indicate which department controlled each vessel.

Although simply seeking further information on the 1865 flags, an examination of three documents and associated notes held by the Public Records Office, as well as information in the 12th of December 1865 *Victorian Government Gazette*, specifically the phrase “in lieu of that previously in force”, revealed that there was an even earlier flag than the 1865 design.

On the 28th of September 1856 Captain William Henry Norman of HMCS *Victoria* wrote¹³ to the Victorian Chief Secretary (Premier William Clark Haines) regarding the Chief Secretary’s desire to distinguish the various departments’ operating vessels by having them fly distinctive flags. This proposal was initiated by Chief Harbour Master, Captain Charles Ferguson, who recommended on the 11th of September¹⁴, that when on active duty, government vessels should fly distinguishing flags bearing initials so as to indicate to which department they belonged, such as was already the case with customs vessels. In a letter from the Office of Trade and Customs dated the 19th of September it was pointed out that the letter V was to be used for HMCS *Victoria*, W.P. for Police vessels such as the Blockship, *Sir Harry Smith*, P.D. for ships of the Penal Department such as the prison hulks and H.O. for the Health Officer’s boat. Unfortunately no mention was made of the initials already in use by the Customs Department.

Captain Norman disagreed with the proposal that his ship, HMCS *Victoria*, should have the letter V added under the crown on the flag. He wrote to the Chief Secretary on the 28th of September¹⁵ and argued that only ships belonging to civil departments such as Customs and the Harbour Master should have distinguishing letters on their flags. It was the practise in Her Majesty’s service and in the governments of other colonies for vessels which received their orders directly from the Head of Government, to not have letters as they were considered Executive Ships.

Frustratingly in spite of Charles Ferguson’s stated intention of “defining the description and colour of flags they (Government vessels) are to hoist”¹⁶ the exact nature of the intended flags is not known. We know that the flag bore a crown. It is reasonable to assume that there was a union flag in the upper canton (as on the Australian and later Victorian flags). The only other hint is in Captain Norman’s letter where he states that “I therefore beg to suggest that as the ‘*Victoria*’ has the Honor [sic] of being the first ‘War’ Steam Sloop belonging to this, and in these Colonies - and will be expected to do the customary honors [sic] to the flag of any of H.M. officers that may visit the Colony by flying **the same Colored** [sic] **flag**...”¹⁷ As the red ensign was the main ensign of the Royal Navy until 1864, particularly of visiting ships, it is likely that Captain Norman was referring to the Victorian Naval Ensign as also being red.

What is even more fascinating in Captain Norman’s letter is that, before he made the case for not including the letter V to his ship’s flag, he wrote the following.

“Before going to [sic] expense of making the alteration having the ‘Kangaroo’ in the position named for the letter, I beg most respectfully to bring to your notice what is customary in Her Majesty’s Service, and the Governments of other colonies.”¹⁸ Captain Norman then went on to argue his case against the use of the letter V. However it is the reference to the inclusion of a kangaroo image on the flag that is of interest here.

It appears that Captain Norman had decided to place an image of a kangaroo under the crown but was holding off on doing so until the letter V issue was sorted out. The notation signed by JM, (possibly Assistant Colonial Secretary John Moore) that “The letter V be dispensed with.” indicates that there was indeed room for the kangaroo image below the crown. Unfortunately, the Chief Secretary’s reply¹⁹ dated the 10th of October 1856 that, “The request of Capt. Norman may be complied with.”, although suggesting that Captain Norman was

free to proceed with his design, does not specifically mention that a kangaroo image was adopted. If only records always covered the points that we wanted to them to cover, research would be a lot more productive.

A further letter dated the 18th of December 1856 regarding payment of £9-0-10 for flags for the ship *Victoria*,²⁰ gives no details, and as it was for Major-General Edward McArthur's trip to Geelong, could possibly refer to pennants rather than flags.

When HMCS *Victoria* left for her second trip to New Zealand on the 24th of July 1860 carrying more members of the 40th Regiment of Foot, *The Argus* newspaper²¹ stated that "...there was a pervading feeling of gratification that a British general officer and his staff should take his departure **under our colonial flag...**" That the colour of *Victoria*'s colonial ensign was red is clear from the Herald newspaper's report of the same event which stated "...the *Victoria* moved slowly away, St. George's ensign at the fore, **the red ensign at the main**, and the Governor's flag at the mizen [sic]..."²² The Victorian Navy's first of its two overseas campaigns, known as the First Taranaki War, was at least partly conducted under the 1856 Victorian Ensign. The only known image of *Victoria* in New Zealand is a contemporary watercolour by Edwin Harris in the Puke Ariki Library and Museum, New Plymouth. This painting, also on the cover of Ian MacFarlane's book²³, shows HMCS *Victoria* landing a detachment of the British 40th Regiment of Foot with *Victoria* only flying the Union Flag. That *Victoria*'s departure on the 24th of July was her second trip to New Zealand indicates that she had not stopped flying the Victorian Ensign during the First Taranaki War and that it was either flown all of the time that she was in New Zealand or, if the painting is accurate, at the least when away from New Zealand.

On her return from New Zealand in 1861, HMCS *Victoria*, under Captain Norman, travelled to the Gulf of Carpentaria in search of the Burke and Wills expedition. On the banks of the Barkly river Captain Norman caused a flag to be raised so as a signal to the missing explorers²⁴. Whether Captain Norman raised the Victorian or Union flag is not mentioned. It would appear that the explorers being searched for did use a Victorian flag. At least two poems of the day refer to Burke and Wills traveling to the Gulf of Carpentaria with the Victorian flag.

Third verse of poem titled Burke & Wills by M.M.E.

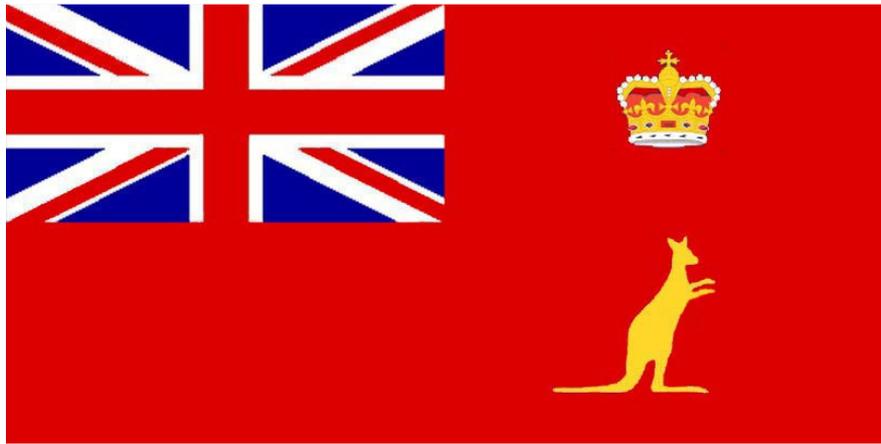
They travelled [sic] o'er the desert wild,
Victoria's flag they bore,
And rested not until they gazed
On Carpentaria's shore.²⁵

Poem by J.

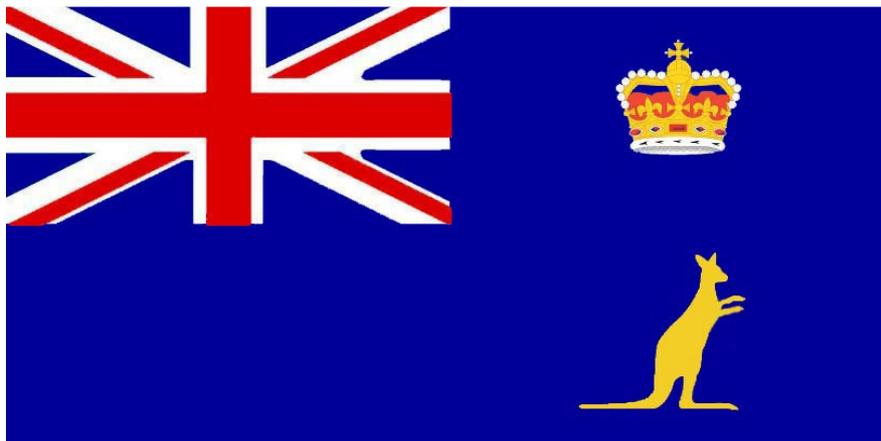
Mourn for the brave heroic souls who bore
Victoria's flag to Carpentaria's shore,
Achieved the object of their country's pride,
And, left to fate by bungling *savans*, died.²⁶

While in the Gulf of Carpentaria the brig, *Firefly*, was placed under the command of Captain Norman. A painting of the *Firefly* on the Albert River, labelled The Victorian Naval Depot, by Lieutenant G. A. Woods V.N. shows *Firefly* flying a red ensign. Unfortunately there is no detail on the fly (body) of the flag. The 1856 red ensign was certainly travelling around Australasia. Another painting of HMCS *Victoria* on Ian MacFarlane's website, shows *Victoria* flying a red ensign with a hint of yellow on the fly of the flag.

Due to letters preserved by the Public Records Office of Victoria, reports in newspapers and Government publications of the mid 1800s and photographs, engravings and paintings of the same time, we now know that *Victoria* had two colonial flags prior to the previously known 1870 and 1877 colonial flags and the two Victorian 1901 and 1953 State flags. Not only do we now know that 1856 and 1865 Victorian flags existed, but we have a reasonably good idea of their appearance.



Possible 1856 Victorian Naval Ensign



Possible 1865 Victorian Naval Ensign.

¹ *The Argus*, 10 February 1870. Page 5

² *Naval and Military Gazette*, 30 April, 1870.

³ *The Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 February 1865

⁴ *Victorian Government Gazette* item of 27 January 1865 page 189

⁵ *Victorian Government Gazette* item of 12 December 1865 page 2888

⁶ *Debates in the Houses of Legislation during the Third Session of the Fourth Parliament of South Australian*, Andrews Thomas & Clark, Register & Observer Offices, Adelaide, 1867, 1 November 1866, column 839

⁷ *Debates ...South Australia*, op cit, 1 November 1866, column 837

⁸ *Bell's Life in Sydney & Sporting Chronicle*, 29 June 1867 page 3.

⁹ *Victoria: A History of HMCSS Victoria*. Ian MacFarlane. Unpublished Manuscript page 195.

¹⁰ *National Library of Australia*, E. M. Humphries Collection.

¹¹ PROV VPRS 1163/P0008 Unit 1

¹² *The Argus*, 6 January 1868 page 5.

¹³ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 690 56/8028

¹⁴ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 690 W56/8028

¹⁵ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 579 X8282

¹⁶ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 690 W56/8028

¹⁷ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 579 X8282

¹⁸ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 579 X8282

¹⁹ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 579 X8282

²⁰ PROV VPRS 1189 Box 579 Y56/10531 ½

²¹ *The Argus*, 25 July 1860 page 5

²² *The Herald*, 25 July 1860 page 4

²³ *Victoria & Australia's First War*, Ian MacFarlane & Neil Smith, Mostly Unsung Military History, Brighton Victoria, 2005

²⁴ *Commander William Henry Norman's Journal*, www.burkeandwills.net.au

²⁵ *The Cornwall Chronicle*, 26 July 1862 page 2.

²⁶ *The South Australian Advertiser*, 13 November 1861 page2.