

The Symbols of Queensland

The Maltese Cross and the Colour Maroon

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We adopt symbols to give our lives extra dimensions of meaning. The creation of symbols is one of the unique characteristics which distinguishes humankind from other animals. Symbols identify us as individuals whether we be a monarch, a Lord Mayor, a bride or bridegroom, or a member of a local club or association. Symbols identify us as sportsmen or women. Symbols identify our commercial organisations. As examples of the communicative power of symbols, the “Golden Arches” of the McDonald’s fast food chain and the red insigne of “Coca-Cola” are recognised internationally. The Red Cross on a white background is the world’s most recognised symbol, its display and its use protected by law in Australia.

Our Order of Australia uses the symbol of our national flower, the blossom of the Golden Wattle, *Acacia pycnantha*;, and our former unofficial national colours which, prior to the adoption of green and gold in 1984, were royal blue and gold.

Governments also use symbols to engender pride in the identity of a town or city, a State or a Nation. In the international context, the three symbols which are most used are stars, crosses and colours. They adorn flags, letterheads and badges. Nations and states tend to use floral and faunal emblems, and occasionally inanimate objects such as gems to define themselves.

Queensland has several such emblems. These are the Maltese Cross, the colour maroon, the Cooktown Orchid, the koala, the Anemone Fish and the sapphire. Of these, the Maltese Cross and the colour maroon are the two dominant metaphors for Queensland, both with their genesis as State identifiers dating from the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The Maltese Cross

The Maltese Cross was gazetted as the official emblem, or badge, of Queensland, on 29 November 1876. The emblem, as the formal Badge of the Colony, was designed as a silver circlet on which was placed a blue Maltese Cross (also known as the Crusader or St John Cross) at whose *centrum* was placed Queen Victoria's crown. Formally:

‘Argent on a Maltese Cross, azure a Queen's Crown proper’.

Impetus for a special badge for the new Colony of Queensland (1859) can be traced to a decade earlier; and specifically to the spontaneous wishes of the local citizens to add a device to a new and distinct flag which might herald the birth of the new Colony.

The final adoption (1876) of the Maltese Cross as the Colony's emblem followed seven years of debate about a formal identifier for Queensland. The chronology began at the Queen's summer house, *Osborne House*, on the Isle of Wight on 7 August 1869. On that day the Queen as ‘The Queen's Most Excellent Majesty in Council’, presided over her regular Privy Council Meeting and directed that the Governors of ‘British Colonies and Dependencies be authorised to fly the Union Flag, with the Arms or Badge of the Colony emblazoned in the centre thereof’.

Five weeks later, on 14 September 1869, the (Second) Earl Granville (1815-1891), Secretary of State to the Colonies and based at Downing Street in London, wrote to the Governor of Queensland (Colonel Blackall) requiring that his ‘Responsible Advisors’ submit to him a proposal for a:

“Drawing of the Badge with which it may be proposed to distinguish the Flag of the Colony under your Government.”

The ‘Responsible Advisor’ was Mr William Hemmant, the Queensland Colonial Treasurer (1874-1876). He, or an unknown colleague, created the proposed design using a Maltese Cross, surmounted at its *centrum* by the Queen’s Crown, to be encircled ‘within a wreath of laurel’. On 15 March 1876 Mr Hemmant submitted the design to the Governor of the day, Governor (later, from 1887, Sir) William Wellington Cairns (1828-1888).

His Excellency, Sir William Cairns wrote:

“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 secure the immediate attention of the Executive Council”.

Who finally approved the use of the embellished Maltese Cross as Queensland’s Badge? It was the recommendation of the Lords of the Admiralty to the Earl of Carnarvon, and ultimately his final authoritative approval.

The design for that formal Badge of Queensland was Proclaimed ‘For the Future [as] the Badge of the Colony’ on 25 November 1876 by William Cairns as Governor-in-Council .The Proclamation was published in the *Queensland Government Gazette* on 29 November 1876. It was published over the signature of the Queensland Colonial Treasurer, James Robert Dickson (1832-1901), who at the time was the Member for Enoggera in the Legislative Assembly.

Why did the Queensland Treasury officials promote the Maltese Cross as the Colony’s emblem? Archival details are silent. The most likely explanation is that the Queen’s officials noted her special

preference for the Maltese Cross – Her identity with its symbol of *caritas*, and her widespread use of the Cross in the institutions which were founded during Her reign. The Maltese Cross became, in one sense, Her emblematic metonym. It is conjectured that the Queensland Government officials were familiar with this personal identity of the Queen with the Maltese Cross; and that, conscious from 1859 of her references to ‘Our Colony of Queensland’, they proposed the Maltese Cross as the emblem for the Badge of the Colony, after 1901 to be renamed the State of Queensland.

Origins of the Maltese Cross

The Maltese Cross (Crusader or St John Cross) is formally defined as:

A Cross pattée formée with anseriform “V” indents.

In or about 950 A.D., a religious guild of merchants in the independent maritime state of Amalfi adopted an emblem based on the *crux formée*.

The Amalfitans had established a hospice in Jerusalem which cared for pilgrims there before the First Crusade. As the Crusaders, especially crusading Benedictine monks, travelled to the Levant from Western Europe, many passed through Italy on their travels to the Holy Land. *En route*, they adopted the emblem of the Amalfitan state as their religious insignia. The Order of St John was established by a Papal Bull of the 15 February 1113.¹ Under this edict, Pope Paschal II recognised the foundation of the Hospital of St John, and established the Sovereign Military Order of St John, as a religious Order of Chivalry, formally the *Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem Called of Rhodes, Called of Malta*. As a Catholic Order, today with its

headquarters in Rome, it remains the oldest continuously functioning Order of Chivalry in the world. It enjoined the Knights Hospitaller to provide care and protection for the sick and the traveller, in the Benedictine tradition.

The final form of the eight-pointed Maltese (or Crusader) Cross evolved over a period of five hundred years. Its genesis and transformation occurred in the former Eastern Roman and Byzantine states from *circa* 1000 to the late 15th century, by which time its definitive form had been formalised. Specifically, by 1480, the outline and detail by which it is designated today, had been defined. The characteristic of the Maltese Cross is its eight points, produced by an incised “V” at the tips of each of its four arms. This is a form of anseration – “anserated” being an heraldic term describing a modification of the ends of the arm of an heraldic cross. In simple terms, a Maltese Cross is:

“A cross made from four straight-lined pointed arrowheads, meeting at their points, with the end of the arms consisting of indented ‘V’s”.

Queen Victoria, the Maltese Cross and Queensland

Queen Victoria evinced a special identity with the Maltese Cross and the ethic of its symbol – that of care and service to others. Throughout her life, Queen Victoria held a special sympathy for the sick and injured and held esteem for those who served others. Her *persona* communicated esteem for those who served in volunteer and charitable roles. She admired the heritage of the St John Hospitallers and used their emblem, the Crusader or Maltese Cross, as the forme for the insignia of the three chivalric bodies which she instituted – the Victoria Cross (1856), the (secular) Order of St John (14 May 1888) and the Royal

Victorian Order (1896). In addition, she authorised the use of the Maltese Cross on the first postage stamp (the Penny Black, in 1840) as the only symbol to accompany the image of her profile face.

These points highlight the special association of Queen Victoria and the emblem of the Maltese Cross, then as now, identified with Queensland, in her words, “Our Colony”; and (from 1901) the State of today.

The Maltese Cross – Widespread Adoption in Queensland

In 1893, the Queensland Parliament self-proclaimed its own Badge, a modified and embellished Queensland Badge, as an identifier of (then) both Houses of Parliament. The new Parliament Badge featured a blue Maltese Cross surmounted by Queen Victoria’s Crown, the whole encircled by a maroon buckler.

From the first decade of the twentieth century, various public and institutional bodies used a derivative form of the Maltese Cross as their corporate emblems. Almost all removed the anserated (eight-pointed) ends of the bases of the arms of the Cross; and thus modified the Maltese Cross to take the form of the simpler cross *pattée formée*. One conjectures that this modification, widely employed, was the result of necessity as the cross *pattée formée* was simpler for metal workers and die casters to fabricate; and easier for foundry men and smiths to cast. The anserated arms of the eight-pointed cross are delicate and are prone to damage both in casting and in general use.

One example of this “Queensland” cross was soon used in the Armorial Bearings of the University of Queensland, established by the *University Act of 1909*. Soon after its establishment, the University Senate sought to acquire Arms. The new University’s first Chancellor,

the Governor Sir William MacGregor, wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in June 1911 to begin the process of acquiring Arms. On 14 March 1912, he wrote with the advocacy that:

The Arms of the University in respect of Cross, Motto, etc. are to run on parallel lines with those of the State.

The Coat of Arms was granted to the University by Letters Patent on 27 June 1912.

From the first decade of the twentieth century, the colour maroon was progressively used to colour the Cross to produce a symbol of double emblematic significance as the metaphor for Queensland which endures today. The Queensland Branch of the British Medical Association issued doctors with an enamelled maroon cross (*pattée formée*) to affix to their cars, to signal parking privileges when visiting patients. Both Government and private institutions printed maroon crosses on many of their documents.

In February 2011, the Hon. P.T. Lucas, Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, spoke in Parliament of:

“The comfort that members of the community gain when they see a person in uniform there to help them in their hour of need—the Maltese Cross of the police, ambulance and SES ...”.

The insignia of Scouts Australia (Queensland) and that of the (former) Royal Women’s Hospital in Brisbane have used the Maltese Cross as their Queensland State emblem. Armorial Bearings of the Royal Brisbane Hospital were granted by the London College of Arms in 1979. They were designed by the late Dr David Brand, with collaborative input from the present author. The Coat of Arms , today the Arms of the Royal

Brisbane and Women's Hospital, features seven Maltese (Crusader) Crosses. Each cross symbolised one of the seven separate hospitals within the governance of the (then) North Brisbane Hospitals Board within the Queensland Department of Health.

From the nineteenth century, the cross came to be used as a metaphor in two quite distinct domains—that denoting Christendom, and as a secular emblem of rescue, charity and care, collectively referred to as “caritas”.

The Colour Maroon

Queen Victoria had a special association with colour generally, and a special affinity for the colour maroon. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert (1819-1861), chose maroon for the painting of the Queen's summer house on the Isle of Wight. In addition, the Royal Rooms at the Isle of Wight Royal Home, *Osborne House*, were painted in what was to become known as “Osborne maroon”.

Queen Victoria herself instituted the Royal Train and had the carriages painted a distinctive maroon with a grey roof. The second postage stamp issued in her reign was maroon (the “Penny Red”). The doors and panels of the Royal Mail coaches were also painted maroon.

For the colour of the riband of the Victoria Cross, the Queen chose a maroon colour, which some have speculated symbolised the shedding of blood in the service of others. She bestowed the same maroon colour (formally “dull cherry”) as the Regimental colour of the Royal Army Medical Corps which she founded in May 1898. It was subsumed as the Corps colour of the Medical Corps of several British nations, including of course that of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps.

Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, a number of Queensland institutions adopted the colour maroon, it is speculated because it was the Queen's favourite colour. In 1895, the Queensland Rugby Union team changed their livery from Oxford Blue to "a deep red or maroon jersey". The Queensland Rugby League team wore maroon jerseys from 1908. Queensland's first non-heraldic emblem to be formally designated was the Cooktown Orchid, *Vappodes bigibba*, chosen because of its distinctive maroon flower. It was proclaimed as the State Flower in 1959 to mark the State's centenary. The colour maroon was incorporated into the new (2001) Queensland State tartan, "the colour being symbolic of the maroon of the Queensland floral emblem, the Cooktown Orchid".

In 2003, the State member for Indooroopilly, Mr. Ronan Lee (ALP, later Greens), began advocating in Queensland's Legislative Assembly for the proclamation of maroon as the State Colour. The Queensland Governor of the day, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce, proclaimed that maroon was the State Colour on 13 November 2003.

In 2006, The National Trust of Queensland conducted its third annual public poll to determine how Queenslanders identified themselves. The icons identified in that poll were, in rank order: Maroon; Birdsville races, cane toads, Droughtmaster cattle and the Great Barrier Reef.

Conclusion

The two most identifiable symbols of Queensland and Queenslanders are the colour maroon and the Maltese Cross. They span origins of identity across a thousand years, brought together by the

preference of a queen, and Queenslanders' wish to associate this preference with their State which bears Her name.

The Maltese Cross (the Crusader or St John Cross) of Queensland traces its genesis from an original medieval Latin Cross with Benedictine overtones of care and sanctuary. Over the ensuing thousand years, as a secular symbol it has come to reflect an ethos of hospitality, rescue and succour; and voluntary care of the poor, the sick and injured, the homeless and the disabled. Together with the colour maroon, these symbols forge an enduring link with the Monarch who gave the State its name.

Their symbolism is an affirmation of intent – that those Queensland institutions which display them affirm an aspiration for a higher ethic.

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Endnotes