

# Minutes of 2016 Annual General Meeting of Flag Australia

## **Date, Venue & Time:**

Tuesday, 29 November 2016, at 'The Barn', Mosman foreshore, Sydney. Commencing at 6:00 pm.

## **Present:**

T. Burton, R. Kelly, G. Naughton, R. Bartlett, S. Berry, J. Dixon, P. Haylen & D. Keegan

**Proxies:** 10      **Apologies:** 10

## **Items of Business:**

- Minutes of the 2015 AGM were accepted by acclamation.

- Office Holder's Reports;  
President's - Ralph Kelly  
Vice-President's - Tony Burton  
Secretary's - Ralph Bartlett  
Treasurer's - Ralph Kelly  
Editor's - Tony Burton  
Webmaster's - Ralph Kelly

All Reports were accepted by acclamation.

- Subscriber-Membership Fees for 2017 set at the same amounts as 2016. Being; \$60 Australian, \$60 International & \$30 Concessional and once only first time Subscriber-Member (Australia).

- Election of 2017 Office Holders;  
President - Ralph Kelly  
Vice-President - Tony Burton  
Secretary - Ralph Bartlett  
Treasurer - Gerald Naughton  
Editor - Tony Burton  
Webmaster - Jonathan Dixon

Committee Member;  
Edwin Crump, Peter Haylen, Damien Keegan & Bruce Luxford,

All of the above were elected by acclamation.

Formal part of the AGM finishes at approximately 7:30 pm.

## **National Meeting #29:**

- Presentation of NAVA 50 Flag & Desk-size Flag (San Jose, Ca., USA) to Tony Burton - Designer, on behalf of the NAVA 50 Organising Committee (14-16 Oct. 2016).

- Update and discussion, lead by Tony Burton, about ICV 27 - London, to be held in August 2017. This discussion also included unveiling the first image of the ICV 27 Flag, by both Ralph Kelly & Tony Burton.

- Unveiling of The Flag Institute's (UK) new association Flag and Logo, by both Ralph Kelly & Tony Burton.

- General discussions, lead by Ralph Kelly, about future directions / projects for the Society, such as:

- Creation of a Facebook and / or Wikipedia entries for the Society.
- Establishment of a "Register of Flag Designs" or "Flag Register", by the Society (initially suggested by Tony Burton).

The consensus of Members present was of being positive to both suggestions, but with further investigations into logistics, etc. of both projects.

- Flag Locker Items:

- Display of significant flag books by Dr Whitney Smith, co-founder of modern vexillology, who died on the 17 November 2016, by Ralph Kelly.
- Display of some Commercial Flags, by Damien Keegan.
- Display of some Royalist Flag of Europe, by Gerald Naughton.
- New flag book, "Worth Dying For - The Power and Politics of Flags" - Tim Marshall (2016), informed by Ralph Kelly.
- Info. about an Australian patriotic website, 'Thank You For Your Service', run by Rick Stubbs (Smithfield, NSW).

National Meeting finished at about 9:00 pm.

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2016 - Ralph Kelly**

Having been elected last year to the position of President of Flags Australia, I have had a relatively quiet period in that capacity, at least compared to my prior role of Chair of the Organising Committee for ICV26.

Earlier this year the New Zealand new flag consideration process ended with a referendum that decided to reject change and stay with the long-standing current flag. I was interviewed on Radio NZ and followed the debate with great interest. A similar new flag project in Fiji also ended with the decision to retain the current flag after the Fijian Rugby sevens team won a gold medal at the Rio Olympics – a flag that waves in support of a nation's sporting heroes can't be changed. Both these nearby outcomes probably means that any proposal for a change in the design of the Australian National Flag will not achieve any political traction in the foreseeable future. That is probably a good thing for Flags Australia as our political neutrality will be less likely to be challenged by partisans who support or reject a national flag change in Australia.

My colleagues Ralph Bartlett and Tony Burton were also interviewed by the media in respect of the New Zealand and Fijian flag change proposals. We continue to receive unsolicited new flag design proposals, and I get extra designs through Ausflag. I sometimes respond politely and offer some practical comments about the better designs, and some proposals are just filed in my archived emails mailbox. All requests for support for a new flag are refused, with firm advice that Flags Australia will not endorse any specific new flag design. Any proposed designs that are added to the Society's website are merely for information, and they are generally included because they represent a good example of a particular design concept, have received fairly wide media or social media attention, or they are designed by members of the Society.

I was also interviewed by ABC National Radio about the design and significance of the Northern Territory flag. We also receive occasional requests to identify a flag, and some members of the public ask in hope whether their old Australian flag has any particular value. They rarely do, especially when the flag was found in a relative's storage locker and there is no information as to its age or provenance and no apparent special aspects.

Less than two weeks ago Dr Whitney Smith died after a long illness; he was aged 76. Dr Peter Orenski died three months ago also at the age of 76. The President of the Flag Foundation of India, Commander K V Singh died a day after Whitney Smith, aged 77. The death of these esteemed vexillologists is a sad reminder that our hobby interest has made great progress over the past 50 years, but many of the leading vexillologists are getting old and it is time for the next generation of flag enthusiasts to step up to take a more active role in our shared interest. We are lucky that the internet now makes it possible for flag enthusiasts to communicate globally, and learn far more about flags than was possible in the past. But I look at what passes for vexillology on social media, and many of the comments represent emotive responses and sometimes a politicised passion for or against particular flags, and they often display their ignorance about flags – their design, history and usage. At best they hunt through Google Search and post images of flags that catch their attention – but there rarely is any considered research.

Flags Australia has members with a wide range of interests in flags and their engagement ranges from a pleasant social interest in something that is regarded as interesting, through to active research and engagement with the subject of flags. That's fine, but as someone whose enjoyment and interest in flags has always risen when I made the effort to research and learn more about flags and their usage, I urge you all to be as active in pursuing your interest in flags as your circumstances permit. It's a bit like exercise – the more you do, the happier you feel.

## VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT - Tony Burton

A year not very controversial – mostly run of the mill. In summary (and as public go-to officer with requests and information on flags) dealt with an average of 5 phone calls or emails a week.

- \_Consulted on flag protocol and etiquette;
- \_How to dispose respectfully of a tattered Aboriginal flag;
- **\_Enquiries about supply of Australian and other flags were all referred to the retail merchants on the related page of FSA website. Sign that the website is not properly read or understood?**
- \_Special requests: Montenegro flag for a wedding
- \_Purchase of *Vexillogistics* here and overseas
- \_Ditto back issues of *Crux Australis*
- \_Assistance to High School and college students in Adelaide and at Brigham Young University, Utah
- \_Request to address Probus Springwood - declined
- \_Request for research on Murray River flags
- \_Advice on design of school house banners Edmund Rice College, Wollongong
- \_Identification of obscure flags discovered in attics – help form colleagues
- \_Questions about federation flag without stars
- \_Offers to sell flags - are we interested?
- \_Orders for ASSI flag – mostly from ASSI community members
- \_Proposed Australian flag designs
- \_Dealing with (or not) with persistent email from Slovenia
- \_Contact with other vexillos overseas

## SECRETARY'S REPORT – Ralph Bartlett

This past year has for me, and I think for the rest of the Executive, one of readjustment and relaxation, after the previous years of preparation and hosting of ICV 26. For me I have unwind by going on three holidays to regional areas of across Australia, being;

East Gippsland in Victoria, Kangaroo Island in South Australia, and more recently a “glamour” camping (glamping) tour in The Kimberley’s region of far north Western Australia. All the time keeping an eye out for local flags and other emblems. I believe that the other ICV 26 Committee Members have also taken holidays.

Locally, in Melbourne, we continue to hold approximately quarterly Society Meetings. Unfortunately, they are now very poorly attended. In an effort to change this situation, I have changed the format from just a meeting with a self-provided afternoon tea, to a bistro lunch meeting, at a mutually convenient location. While the new format is more relaxing, it has made no difference to the attendance numbers.

Vexillologically, the first six months of the this year have been dominated by my researching and writing of the three part series on Australian Police Force’s Flags & Banners. From the public I receive the occasional enquiry, which are usually about flag flying protocol. I was interview twice by ABC regional radio about the Murray River Flag and the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

the Aboriginal Flag. I was also asked to identify a military blue ensign style flag, by and RSL Branch in Tasmania. This ensign turned out to be the British Royal Engineers Ensign, dating back to 1855, with a sun burst surrounding a raised hand holding a spark of lightening. This ensign is on display at the Glenorchy RSL, north of Hobart. As a thank you for identifying this ensign, I have been promised a beer, should I visit this RSL.

The second half of the year has been dominated with the deaths of two great figures in vexillology, Dr Peter Orenski (13 Aug. 2016) and Dr Whitney Smith (17 Nov. 2016) – the founder of modern Vexillology. They were both very good friends, both personally and to our Society, and had each visited Australia twice, in 1989 & 2015 by Peter, and 1989 & 2004 by Whitney. Each person had made great and fundamental contributions to vexillology. Each of their deaths, at the same age of 76, are very much mourned, and leaves a great hole in vexillology. I will be attending Whitney Smith's Memorial Service in Winchester, Massachusetts this coming Saturday, 3 December.

On a happier note, I have started to re-examine my flag files, to update the information about each flag. Down the track I hope to produce several articles for "*Crux Australis*".

Looking towards the future I believe that the Society should take-up Tony's suggestion of an Australian "Register of Flags", of some kind.

Finally, next August (2017) ICV 27 will be held in London. I urge all Society members who can to attend.

## **TREASURER'S REPORT – Ralph Kelly**

I have distributed to you copies of the Society's financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2016 together with a form that certifies that the statements give a "true and fair" view of the financial position of our incorporated association.

For the year ended 30 June 2016, Flags Australia incurred a small deficit of \$748 on its operating activities compared to a similar deficit of \$1,654 in 2015. Total Income of \$5,243 was received, of which \$4,540 was for new memberships and renewals and \$510 interest was received. The higher interest amount is due to the timing of term deposit maturities. Total expenses were \$5,992, with the largest cost being \$5,550 for the printing and postage of four issues of *Crux Australis*. The printing costs were the same as the prior year, but postage costs continue to increase. We currently have 56 Australian members and 23 overseas members, a little bit lower than last year. At 30 June 2015 we had \$14,842 in the society's general cheque account.

The presentation of the Society's annual accounts overall is distorted by the receipt of almost \$32,000 in ICV registration fees in 2015 and the spending on the ICV in 2016. \$45,032 Congress expenses were incurred in the 2016 financial year, plus \$20,000 being the deemed value of the venue provided by Telstra. Sponsorships and donations received totalled \$22,854 in 2015/16, including the deemed value of some donations made in kind. So please ignore the specifics of the ICV26 aspects of the annual accounts of the Society as most of the apparent surplus was spent in July and August.

The third page shows the final financial results of ICV26 on an all-years basis. Whilst we feared that there would be cost over-runs or losses due to low numbers, the results are positive and very close to budget. We achieved total registration fees of \$36,100 from 100 participants. Sponsorships and donations totalling \$18,719 allowed the cost of registration and each of the events to be significantly lower than otherwise.

I again acknowledge the generosity of Colin Randall, Ralph Bartlett and Tony Burton as well as several suppliers who provides goods and services to us as a donation. The total cost of hosting the events and excursions (including the deemed value of the venue) was \$66,216. Other expenses were \$10,795. At this stage, we have a surplus of \$5,557 compared to the \$2,100 that was planned to be retained to fund the publication of the proceedings by CD.

This is my last Treasurer's Report. Having held the position since 1999, it is time for a hand-over. The financial records have been given to Gerald Naughton in anticipation of his election as Treasurer at this AGM and he has been handling renewals and bank accounts for the past two months. I know that the Society's finances will be in safe and diligent hands.

## **EDITOR'S REPORT - Tony Burton**

The four quarterly editions of the journal were published in 2016 as scheduled, and mailed out in early January, April, July and October.

In keeping with the Society's brief to encompass flags of all kinds, Volume 29 continued a mix of information and commentary on Australian and other flags as well as aspects of theoretical vexillology.

To summarise:

2016 has been a year of Referendums, each with implications for flags: flag change failed - or foiled - in New Zealand; suspended in Fiji; the European flag and its meaning rejected in the UK. Who knows what is to come from the United States, other than the portents of jingo.

The 28th Olympic Games in Rio, related innovations (a flag for refugees) and ritual, flag snafus, naturally prompted treatment also of the flags of Brazil – and by extension, an exploration of the now relatively rare flags featuring a lozenge.

Australiana was represented by considering electoral use of vexilloidal symbols (a theme also covered in regard to the US Presidential primaries).

Reflecting that flags are part of everyday civic life, various articles examined flag etiquette (including Madonna's breach of it in her flag-dance in Manila) and in Australia, a catalogue of Police Force banners, neighbours' feuds over backyard display of the Nazi flag and a German citizen's resistance to the similar tactics of the Stasi, statehood for the Northern Territory and that elusive eighth point on both the national and local flags – with a raised eyebrow at the then Prime Minister's confusion as to what exactly is on the Australian flag.

The design aspect of flags was covered

in **Australia** by:

- \_six dubiously "credible" alternatives to the Australian flag,
  - \_an historical note on the first Aboriginal flag, recent proposals for Jervis Bay,
  - \_a flag-like logo of City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder,
  - \_the Kangaroo as an Australian icon,
- and **overseas**,

- \_the emblem for CHOGM24 in Malta in 2015
- \_design suggestions for a reunified Cyprus,
- \_background on the Star of David.

The formal launching was confirmed per journal and website of *Vexillologistics: An Illustrated and Practical Guide to Flag Design*.

The journal and Society grieved at the sudden passing in August of Peter Orenski, life and soul of many ICVs and in many ways injecting the same to vexillology itself.

Vexillology as social science was explored through cross-cultural perspectives on whether national flags matter - with insights from the US (including the longevity of the Confederate flag), Japan and Denmark - and applying everywhere, the “familiarity principle” elucidated as both inhibitor and prompter in the evolution of flags.

The final issue for 2016 also summarised arrangements as known for ICV27 in London August 2017

## **WEBMASTER’S REPORT – Ralph Kelly**

The Society’s website ([www.flagsaustralia.com.au](http://www.flagsaustralia.com.au)) continues to be a significant forum for Flags Australia sharing its interest in flags. It is the most visible presentation of the Society and our flag interests to the general public in Australia and internationally.

Increased traffic in January again caused us to exceed our bandwidth limit and we were off-the air for three days after Australia Day. However I was able to negotiate an increase in our permanent capacity to avoid such temporary peaks without any additional cost. The problem should not recur.

Our website now receives an average of 9,750 unique visitors per month, about 5% lower than the prior year. A total of 218,000 pages were accessed during 2016, a 9% increase. 48% of visitors come to our site from search engines such as Google, down from 67% two years ago. The balance comes from direct links – some from websites with an interest in flags, vexillologist’s bookmarks, and others who use our illustrations for various purposes using our flag images as a link, rather than reproducing the images and giving proper attribution. We received visits from internet-users in 156 countries, with the top 5 being Australia, USA, Russia, China and Germany.

The main change made to the website was the division of the Possible New Flag webpage into four smaller focused pages. The New Flag page now links to pages that provide the reasons to change the flag, reasons not to change the flag and a page of new Australian flag designs. The dedicated page makes it possible to display more designs than previously. I also added a page and link to an order form for Tony Burton’s design book, *Vexillologistics*, similar to the link to the ASSI flag.

I have been remiss in not updating the website to reflect the successful completion of the Sydney ICV. I intend to create a few pages that represent a permanent record of the ICV, including some photographs of events and a full listing of the lectures given.

Last year I expressed the wish to step down from the roles of Treasurer and webmaster. Gerald Naughton picked up the challenge of looking after our finances, though we have not yet had a volunteer to look after our on-line digital presence.

## **REPORT ON ICV 26 – Ralph Kelly**

I have already commented on the financial results of ICV26 in my Treasurer's Report. I have also observed that there is a need to update the Society's website to create a permanent on-line record of the Congress. We have kept the dedicated icv26 website alive for those who want to access information about the event, though it will lapse after material has been transferred to the main website.

I will hand-over to Tony Burton to discuss progress on the large remaining task – publication of the proceedings.