

Province of Bumbunga. Study of a Self-Proclaimed Independent State within Australia.

Ralph G. Barlett

Introduction:

Australians as a whole are a very individualistic people, who when they believe they are under threat or have their activities controlled or impeded too much, will quickly criticize or fight against this control.

This attitude of individuality may have its origins in the early European settlement of Australia, when the settlers were pitted against the harsh environment of Australia and had to be completely self-supporting, sometimes with the nearest neighbour hundreds of kilometers away in any direction.

Also many of Australia's early European settlers were convicts, often transported from Great Britain to the other side of the world for quite minor "self-preservation" offences, such as stealing food and clothing. Others came for political reasons, wanting a chance to be free of old established customs and class barriers. This resulted in a deep distrust of authority, which has been handed down to each Australian generation, although with lessening intensity. A further large influx of settlers arrived as a result of the discovery of gold in the mid 19th. century and these tended to be adventurous, determined people. All were hoping for a better life than they had behind, for themselves and their children.

Today Australia has developed into a modern independent nation, where its citizens have the right to free speech, including criticizing Governments, without the threat of being persecuted or punished.

As a result of this some individuals have taken their right to criticize and/or fight actions of Government, both State and National Governments, to the extreme of proclaiming themselves and their personal properties independent of a particular State of Australia and/or of the Commonwealth of Australia as a whole.

Origins of Self-Proclaimed "Independent" States in Australia:

The origins of the successful establishment of self proclaimed "independent" states within Australia, during the nation's recent history, can be traced back to 1969.

In that year, Mr. Leonard George Casley, a wheat farmer who owns a 7,487 hectare (18,500 acre) property north-west of Northampton, approximately 480 kilometers (300 miles) north of Perth on the central west coast of Western Australia, had a major dispute with the Wheat Quota Board of Western Australia. The dispute came about following the reduction in the size of Mr. Casley's wheat quota by the Wheat Quota Board. The argument was not resolved and on the 21st. April 1970, Mr. Casley declared his property an "independent province" to be known as the "Hutt River Province Principality", with himself as "Prince". On the 6th. May 1980, "Prince Leonard" upgraded the "Principality" to that of a "Kingdom" with himself as "King" (1).

Since then there have been declarations of several other

self-proclaimed "independent" states. These are;

- 1) "Province of Bumbunga",
at the railway settlement of Bumbunga, south of Snowtown, in the mid-north of South Australia, which seceded on the 29th. March 1979.
- 2) "Independent State of Rainbow Creek",
at Cowarr, north-west of Sale, in south-east Victoria, which seceded on the 23rd. July 1979 (2).
- 3) "Empire of Atlantium",
based in the Sydney metropolitan suburb of Narwee, New South Wales, which "officially" seceded on the 13th. November 1983, following its original establishment in 1979-80 (3).

Also during the research for this article, information came to light of a further two "independent states", called;

- 1) "Principality of Breffni",
based in the Sydney metropolitan suburb of Balmain, New South Wales (4).
- 2) "Independent State of Aeterna Lucina",
located near Cooma, in south-east New South Wales (5).

Historically, most of these states have come into being, because of resistance for one reason or another by their originators, who wish to change to a greater or lesser degree the present social and/or political institutions of Australia.

From these various "independent" states there is one, which instead of aiming to change the present system, is in fact aiming to continue and preserve the more traditional aspects of Australia's existing social and/or political institutions which influence the Australian way of life.

This is the self-proclaimed "independent" state of the "Province of Bumbunga".

Establishment of the Province of Bumbunga:

Situated 130 kilometres (80 miles) north-north-west of Adelaide (capital of the State of South Australia) and 6 kilometres (3.75 miles) east of the town of Lochiel, which is on National Route Highway 1, (approximately half way between Adelaide and Port Pirie), is the railway siding settlement of Bumbunga.

The topography of this area of South Australia, consists of very flat wheat fields running between the coasts of Spencer and St. Vincent Gulfs and a low range of hills. This area is still recovering from the effects of the 1982-83 drought, which occurred throughout south-east Australia.

An expatriate Englishman, Mr. Alex Brackstone, a former circus monkey trainer from Surrey, England, migrated to Australia in 1947, and settled at Bumbunga as the Postmaster, after an unsuccessful attempt at mineral prospecting in Queensland and the Northern Territory. On the 29th. March 1976, he seceded from the State of South Australia and declared his 4 hectare (10 acre) property an "independent British Colonial Province", known as the "Province of Bumbunga", with Mr. Alex Brackstone as its "Governor".

The formal declaration of "independence" from South Australia, was made in the form of a letter or notice of independence addressed to the then Governor of South Australia, Sir Mark Oliphant, A.C., K.B., K.St.J., dated the 29th. March 1976.

Mr Brackstone declared his property "independent" for what he believes are purely patriotic reasons and out of his loyalty to the British Crown.

He had become alarmed at the erosion of Royalist sentiment in Australia and what he detected as a drift to Republicanism. He felt that this was intensified following the dismissal of the Australian national Labor Party Government of Prime Minister Edward Gough Whitlam, by the then Governor-General of Australia, Sir John Robert Kerr, A.K., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., K.St.J., on the 11th. November 1975. Because of these events Mr. Brackstone, who considers Australia as his home and himself as a loyal citizen, was determined to guarantee that at least part of Australia, however small, would remain loyal to the Crown with Queen Elizabeth II and her heirs and successors as the Constitutional Monarchs.

Flags of the Province of Bumbunga:

In 1976, shortly after the declaration of "independence" of his property, Mr: Alex Brackstone designed and raised a special flag for the "Province".

The flag is a defaced British Blue Ensign, with a solid yellow map of the Australian Continent in the lower fly of the flag. On the yellow map of the Australian continent, appears a royal blue coloured 'place dot' representing the location of Bumbunga.

Mr. Brackstone believes that the adopted design is the only one suitable in the circumstances, for the use of the British Blue Ensign as the major component emphasises his and the "Province's" loyalty to Queen Elizabeth II, and the presence of the Australian continent on the flag immediately identifies the flag's origins, i.e. Australia.

Australia's island State, Tasmania, was excluded from the flag's design because Mr. Brackstone only wanted to show the land on which the "Province of Bumbunga" lies. He feels that if Tasmania had been included, the flag may have been construed as representing the whole of Australia.

Mr. Brackstone said that the design adopted for the flag was the only design considered. He also stated that there have been no suggestions for a change to the design, and he would be very hesitant to accept any change.

It is interesting to note that unlike most "independent" states (official or otherwise) which adopt distinctive flags, the "Province of Bumbunga" has used an existing type of flag, -that is- the defaced British Blue Ensign, which was officially adopted by the Secretary of State for Colonies of Great Britain following an Admiralty Letter of the 16th. January 1866, prescribing the use of a defaced Blue Ensign by all Colonial Governments (6). Although his use of a Union Flag canton is unauthorized, when asked if he (Mr. Brackstone) would remove the Union Flag from the canton of the "Province's" flag if requested by either the Governments of South Australia, Australia, or by the Royal Family, Mr. Brackstone said, "No way".

The use of the British Blue Ensign to represent an Australian self-proclaimed "independent" state does not originate with Bumbunga. In 1980, Mr. Thomas Barnes, "Governor" of the self-proclaimed "Independent State of Rainbow Creek", (which was established on the 23rd. July 1979) in south-east Victoria, contemplated using the Blue Ensign as the base for the design of his flag. This idea was discarded because of his doubts over the legal use of the Ensign, as he did not wish to offend Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, for whom he has deep and strong feelings of loyalty (7).

The main feature of the "Province" was an 8,550 square metre (92,029 square feet) map of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) made out of 50,000 strawberry plants, which were carefully planted in order to show all the borders of the Counties of Great Britain. This map was drawn at a scale of 1:4,800 (9 feet ground cover at Bumbunga equalled 22 1/2 miles across Great Britain).

On the 14th. November 1980 (Prince Charles' Birthday), Mr. Brackstone officially "opened" the strawberry map of Great Britain. As a part of the ceremony, Mr. Alex Brackstone raised the Union Flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on a flag pole placed on the strawberry map where the City of London is located. This flag had been presented to Mr. Brackstone by the Lord Mayor of London, following a request from Mr. Brackstone.

Unfortunately during the 1982-83 drought of south-east Australia, the entire strawberry map died, and has not been re-planted.

It is interesting to note that the Union Flag has often been used in one form or another to represent 'loyalty' to the English Monarchy. Apart from appearing in nearly all the cantons of the flags of Great Britain's remaining dependencies, the Union Flag has been used in many previous territories of the former 'British Empire', to denote either continued allegiance to the Crown or as an historical symbol of a flag.

The now independent nations who still use the Union Flag as part of their own flag, are (8):-

Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, South Africa, Tuvalu. Interestingly, the first flag of the United States of America (1st. January 1776 to the 13th. June 1777), known as the 'Continental Colours', had a Union Flag (1st. version) canton.

The Union Flag has also appeared in some of the flags of the internal political divisions (States, Provinces, etc.) of the previously mentioned nations and in other nations, such as (8):-

Australia - the State flags of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.

Canada - the Provincial flags of British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland (15th. May 1931 to the 24th. June 1980), and Ontario.

United States of America - the State flag of Hawaii.

Also the Union Flag is used throughout the Commonwealth of Nations to represent either the presence of a member of the Royal Family or Queen Elizabeth's official representative (Governor-General or Governor) to a country or state/territory.

On the 21st. July 1980, the "Province of Bumbunga" issued its firsts

"postage stamps". The first issue consisted of four stamps depicting H.R.H. Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, in various activities. This first issue is of special vexillological interest, because each stamp includes a facsimile of Bumbunga's flag, in four different colours for the field. These are in order from lowest denomination to the highest; Cream, Blue, Blue-Green, and Red. The only other colour used in these illustrations is Brown, for the outline of the Australian Continent, the 'Place Dot', and the St. George's and St. Patrick's Crosses of the Union Flag Canton.

To date this is the only stamps series issued by the "Province", to show its flag.

In recent years the use of the colours green and gold have become very popular throughout Australia. As a result many flags, some new and some existing, both officially and unofficially, have been changed to include these colours. On the 19th. April 1984, the Australian Government issued an official proclamation announcing that Australia's national colours had been changed from Blue and Gold, to Green and Gold. Because of this I asked Mr. Brackstone if he were contemplating a change of his flag to include the new colours. His reply was a very definite "No".

The "Province of Bumbunga" flies any one of three different flags, depending upon the occasion. The flags are; the Union Flag on Royal Occasions, the "Province's" Flag normally on all other occasions, and the flag of England (St. George's Cross), which was flown from the flag pole over the strawberry map of England upon request from visitors to the "Province" who are from England.

In 1981, Mr. Brackstone had cause to fly, for a few hours, a further flag -the white flag of surrender. This came about one day while Mr. Alex Brackstone was working in his strawberry map. According to him, he was literally swooped upon by Royal Australian Air Force Fighter Jets. Following the third swoop Mr. Brackstone asked his wife for a white sheet, where upon he raised this 'Surrender Flag' up the flag pole over his map.

Mr. Brackstone followed up this action with a telephone call to the nearby Air Force Base at Elizabeth, about 30 kilometres (18 1/2 miles) south-east of Bumbunga, and told the R.A.A.F. Commanding Officer "I've surrendered". The Commanding Officer, not very amused, explained that as far as he knew the Airforce jets were flying at an altitude of 500 feet. In reply Mr. Brackstone remarked, "in that case I'm 10 feet tall"!

Coats - of - Arms of the Province of Bumbunga:

As well as a flag, the "Province of Bumbunga" also has an 'official' coat-of-arms, which was adopted on the 29th. March 1976.

The "Coat-of-Arms" consists of a shield with a margin around the outer edge. Inside the margin the shield is divided into four quarters. The 1st. Quarter has three Quills, 2nd. Quarter has the Declaration of Independence Scroll, 3rd. Quarter has three Cannon in a stepped vertical arrangement facing the dexter, and the 4th. Quarter has two Curved Sword pointing in opposite directions.

The significance of the four quarters of the Shield are as follows:-

1st. Quarter (Three Quills) and the 4th. Quarter (Two Swords), to show that "the pen is mightier than the sword".

2nd. Quarter (Independence Scroll) and the 3rd. Quarter (Three Cannon), the depiction of the Declaration of Independence Scroll reinforces the power of the pen, and then if the "sovereignty" of the "Province of Bumbunga" were ever threatened, the three cannon represented the physical force that would be used to defend the "Province".

Apart from the fact that there are more Quills than Swords in the Shield, there is no specific significance to their actual numbers. This is the same for the number of Cannon.

Below the Shield there is a stepped rectangular name plate which reads, "PROVINCE OF BUMBUNGA - AUSTRALIA".

The Shield of the "Coat-of-Arms" has two supporters, one on either side, which are animals native to Australia, an Emu on the dexter and a Kangaroo on the sinister.

It is interesting to note that in the Coat-of-Arms of Australia, which uses the Emu and Kangaroo as supporters, these animals are in the opposite positions to that of Bumbunga's "Coat-of-Arms". Mr. Brackstone said that the Emu and Kangaroo Supporters were placed in the reverse to that used in the Australian Coat-of-Arms as a sign of courtesy.

At the feet of the two supporters next to the base of the Shield are some Strawberries, four on the dexter and one on the sinister, representing the Strawberry Map of Great Britain.

Placed centrally above the Shield is a Crown, very similar to the English Imperial Crown. This symbolizes the "Province's" loyalty to the English Crown. When Mr. Alex Brackstone was asked what kind of Crown is on the "Coat-of-Arms", he said it was supposed to have been the St. Edward's Crown, except that design errors were made during the printing of stationery.

The entire emblem (Shield, Supporters and Name Plate) sits on a compartment which is a horizontal map of Great Britain.

On the occasion of the 6th. Anniversary of the establishment of the "Province of Bumbunga", 29th. March 1982, the "Province" issued a block of four commemorative "postage stamps". All four stamps portrayed an amended version of the "coat-of-arms". This version shows only the Shield, Supporters (in opposite position), and the Crown, of the "official" version, placed centrally inside a circular title band. Underneath the "coat-of-arms" there is a horizontal title band spanning the width of the lower portion of the circular title band. The circular title band reads at the top, "PROVINCE OF BUMBUNGA", and at the bottom, "6th. ANNIVERSARY". The horizontal title band reads, "SOUTH AUSTRALIA".

This design was based on the Australian 1949-50, King George VI (Commonwealth Coat-of-Arms) Definitive Postage Stamp Series.

Asked why there is no quarter in the "coat-of-arms" to represent the State of South Australia, Mr. Brackstone said, "This Province is in South Australia - not part of South Australia".

Although it is not widely publicised by Bumbunga, the "Province" has a motto, "We Back Up - We Don't Back Down". According to Mr. Brackstone this motto symbolises his strong and deep feelings about the "correctness" of having Queen Elizabeth II as the Constitutional Monarch of Australia, and that under no circumstances will his attitude change.

Asked why the motto is not more widely used, such as on the "Province's" "Coat-of-arms", Mr Brackstone said that he had difficulty finding a suitable Latin translation for the motto.

"State of War" between the Province of Bumbunga and the Empire of Atlantium:

On the 14th. June 1984, Mr. George Cruickshank, "emperor" of the self-proclaimed "independent" "Empire of Atlantium", in Sydney, New South Wales, wrote to the "Province of Bumbunga" requesting information about the "Postage Stamps" of Bumbunga. Following the receipt of details from Bumbunga, Atlantium wrote back to Bumbunga on the 7th. November 1984, requesting a number of their stamps. Enclosed in this letter was a cheque to cover the cost of these stamps plus postage.

Prior to this letter the "Empire of Atlantium" announced in one of Australia's most popular philatelic magazines, "STAMP NEWS", of October and November 1984, their intention to issue stamps commemorating the existence of other "independent states" within Australia, such as the "Hut River Province Principality" in Western Australia. Upon reading this, Mr. Alex Brackstone, fearing that any information, including stamps, supplied to Atlantium, would be used to produce similar commemorative stamps about Bumbunga, wrote to Atlantium stating that he does not recognise any of the other "independent states", including Atlantium, and therefore he was not going to satisfy Atlantium's order (for which the cheque was returned), and requested that no "Jam Labels" ("Postage Stamps") be issued by Atlantium featuring the "Province of Bumbunga".

In reponse to this the "Empire of Atlantium", through its office of "Prime Minister" and "Minister for Foreign Affairs" (Mr. Geoffrey Duggan), on the 26th. November 1984, wrote a letter to Bumbunga, declaring that if no apology were received by Atlantium within 30 days, "the most severe of circumstances can be expected". In this letter Atlantium described Bumbunga as a "Stawberry Patch", and a "Glorified Dust Bowl", and their "postage stamps" as "Publicity Labels", a "Revenue Raising Gimmick", "Perforated Envelope Decorators", and "British Charity Labels".

To this threat Mr. Brackstone offered his gauntlet.

On the 4th. January 1985, Mr George Cruickshank wrote to Bumbunga stating that as no apology had been received by Atlantium, on the 1st. January 1985, the "Imperial Senate" of the "Empire of Atlantium" in "Emergency Session" approved the immediate declaration of a "State of War" between the two "states". To this "action", Mr Brackstone on the 8th. January 1985, accepts the instituted "State of War", and wished to know in what manner this would take place.

On the 4th. February 1985, the "Province of Bumbunga" wrote to the "Empire of Atlantium" claiming victory in the "War", on the grounds that no physical action of any kind was instituted against Bumbunga. To this the "Empire of Atlantium" on the 8th. February 1985, replied stating that they never had any intention of taking physical action against Bumbunga, and that the "State of War" was to be interpreted to mean that no contact or recognition was to be initiated towards Bumbunga by Atlantium, until an apology was received.

Therefore Atlantium claimed to be the "victor", as it did not initiate the renewed contact between the two "states". It also states that hostilities between them shall continue until such time

as Bumbunga apologises and surrenders.

Conclusion:

Ignoring the question of the legitimacy of these "states", it should be interesting to vexillologists to look upon these as examples of the processes and concepts involved in the designing of flags by the founders of these "independent states".

The contrast between the reality of "true" independent states and these "fantasy" states is not always as great as might be supposed.

The flags of these "states" usually conform to the generally accepted form (rectangular) and style (Blue Ensign in Bumbunga's case). These procedures are carried out by these "fantasy" states, despite the absence of party, political, or other pressures, and in the full knowledge that these flag designers are responsible only to themselves.

These "states" are of some interest to tourists, stamp collectors and others in Australia and overseas, but are not recognized by the National or State Governments of Australia. There seems little likelihood of a "take - over".

R. G. Bartlett

Notes (Source Material):

Ralph Griffin Bartlett

1) "Hutt River Province Kingdom"

"Local Stamps of Australia", 1st. Edition 1982, by Bill Hornadge (Editor of "STAMP NEWS"). Published by; Review Publications Pty. Ltd., Dubbo, New South Wales, 2830, AUSTRALIA.

2) "Independent State of Rainbow Creek"

"CRUX AUSTRALIS", Volume 1 Number 2, August 1984, pages 32 to 40. Published by; Flag Society of Australia Incorporated, C/O The Secretary, 1 Green Street, Northcote, Victoria, 3070, AUSTRALIA.

3) "Empire of Atlantium"

Mr. Alex Brackstone, "Governor" of the self-proclaimed "independent" "Province of Bumbunga". Personal conversation between Mr. Brackstone and the Author of this Lecture.

Mr. Bill Hornadge Editor of "STAMP NEWS"). Photocopies of letters received by Mr. Hornadge from Atlantium.

Mr. George Cruickshank, "Emperor" of the self-proclaimed "independent" "Empire of Atlantium". Photocopies of correspondence about the "War" received by the Author of this Lecture from Atlantium.

4) "Principality of Breffni"

Mr. Ronald Strachan (President of the Flag Society of Australia Incorporated). Photocopy of a letter received by Mr. Strachan from Breffni.

5) "Independent State of Aeterna Lucina"

Mr. George Cruickshank, "Emperor" of the self-proclaimed independent "Empire of Atlantium". Letter received by the Author of this Lecture from Atlantium.

6) Origins of the British Blue Ensign.

Refer to "INSIGNIA - STATE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA" Folder, State Flag leaflet. Issued by the Protocol Office, Department of Premier and Cabinet of Western Australia, 32 St. George's Terrace Perth, Western Australia, 6000, AUSTRALIA.

7) Proposed flag for the "Independent State of Rainbow Creek".

"CRUX AUSTRALIS", Volume 1 Number 2, August 1984, page 38. Published by: Flag Society of Australia Incorporated, C/O The Secretary, 1 Green Street, Northcote, Victoria, 3070, AUSTRALIA.

8) Use of the Union Flag in other flags.

"The New Observer's Book of Flags", revised edition 1984, by William Crampton (Director of The Flag Institute). Published by: Federick Warne (Publishers) Ltd., London.

"Flags of The World", revised edition 1961, by H. Gresham Carr, F.R.G.S. Published by: Federick Warne & Co. Ltd., London.

"The Flag Book of The United States", revised edition 1975, by Whitney Smith (Director of the Flag Research Centre). Published by: William Morrow & Company, Inc., New York.

"THE FLAG BULLETIN", Volume XX Number 2, March-April 1981, pages 35 to 43. Published by: The Flag Research Centre, 3 Edgehill Road Winchester, Massachusetts, 01890, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Acknowledgements:

I should like to thank the following people, without whose valuable co-operation and assistance this lecture would not have been possible.

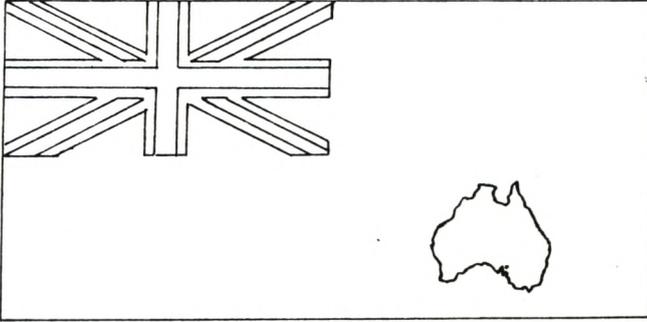
Mr. Alex Brackstone, "Governor" of the self-proclaimed "independent" "Province of Bumbunga".

Mr. Bill Hornadge, Editor of "STAMP NEWS".

Mr. George Cruickshank, "Emperor" of the self-proclaimed "independent" "Empire of Atlantium".

I should also like to thank the following two people for the valuable time, and assistance they gave me during the research and editing of this lecture.

Mrs. Norma Barlett (Author's Mother), and Mr. John Edwards (Friend and co-Member of the Flag Society of Australia).



"PROVINCE OF BUMBUNGA"

FLAG

Designed by ;

Mr. Alex Brackstone

("Governor" of Bumbunga),

in 1976.

Proportion ; 1:2

"COAT - OF - ARMS"

of the "Province of Bumbunga"

Designed by ;

Mr. Alex Brackstone

Adopted ; 29th. March 1976



"Province of Bumbunga"
 (First Stamp Issue)
 Issued ;
 21st. July 1980

Commonwealth
 of Australia



(King George VI
 Definitive Postage
 Stamp Issue)
 Issued ; 1949-50



"Province of Bumbunga"
 (6th. Anniversary
 Stamp Issue)
 Issued ;
 29th. March 1982