

AUSTRALIA'S BOXING KANGAROO FLAG: WHOSE FLAG IS IT ?

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It is now over 30 years since the famed Boxing Kangaroo Flag was raised triumphantly aboard the racing yacht "Australia II", on 26 September 1983, as it cruised back into dock at Newport, Rhode Island, USA, after winning the America's Cup. This flag immediately became an iconic sporting symbol and flag for Australia.

It is also 30 years since *The Flag Bulletin* No. 112 - July-August 1985, published my late friend and Co-FSA Founder, John Edwards' comprehensive article, "The Boxing Kangaroo - Apotheosis of a Myth", about the origins of this symbol and its use as a flag. Since then the Boxing Kangaroo Flag has multiplied into many variations of designs, each claiming the right to use this very Aussie sporting symbol.



Fig. 1

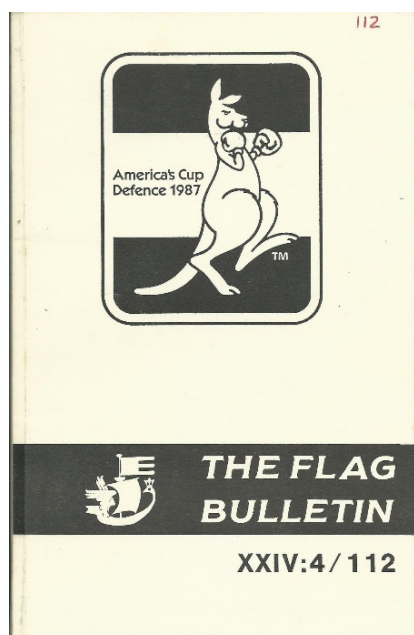


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

So why has this happened? Let us take the Kangaroo route tour, hopping through the maze of Boxing Kangaroo designs and the stories and legalities associated with these designs to try and unearth the answer to whose flag was it? and whose flag is it now?

Literally as the Americas Cup was being won in Newport, back in Australia various flag manufacturers were hastily sketching drawings of this fluttering Boxing Kangaroo Flag of the television screen and then quickly going into their production rooms and making up various renditions of this flag. While common copyright law states that ownership exists from the moment a distinctive design / object is created, i.e. in this case, the members of the Australia II yachting syndicate and/or Alan Bond's business entity, this did not stop any flag manufactures, particularly as the design had not been registered or trade-marked.

Originally the Bond sailing syndicate intended to restrict the supply of their Boxing Kangaroo Flag only to sponsors who contributed A\$24,000 or more. But this became impossible to maintain due to both the high demand from the general public and the proliferation of unofficial copy-cat Boxing Kangaroo Flags.¹

The following are examples of some of these initial Boxing Kangaroo Flag renditions.



Fig. 5 The Flag Shop – Melb. Oct. 1983



Fig. 6 DeeJay Flags – Melb. Oct. 1983



Fig. 7



Fig. 8 Carroll & Richardson Flags, Melb. 1983-85

This free-for-all was quickly brought to an end, when Bond Corporation in October 1983 officially registered the Boxing Kangaroo design as a trademark, with formal ownership of the logo held by “America’s Cup Defence 1987 Ltd”, a subsidiary of Bond Corporation. The first of these licences were issued the following month, with charges between 8% to 10% used to offset the cost of defending the next America’s Cup challenge off the coast of Fremantle, near Perth, WA in 1987.²

Initially in November 1983, licences to produce “legal” Boxing Kangaroo Flags were granted to two flag manufactures, Pennant House in Perth, who was given the sole selling rights for Western Australia, and to Evan Evans Flags in Melbourne, for the rest of Australia and all territories controlled by Australia.³ Evan Evans Flags were replaced by Carroll & Richardson Flags, also of Melbourne, in February 1985. Examples of licenced approved Boxing Kangaroo Flags:

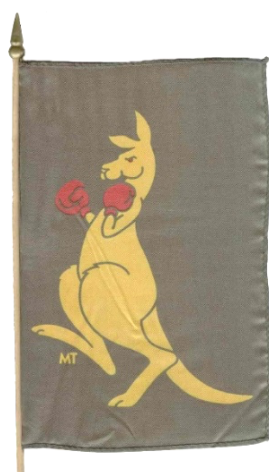


Fig. 9 ca June 1984



Fig. 10



Fig. 11 Carroll & Richardson Flags (1985-87)

In order to distinguish “legal” Boxing Kangaroo Flags from non-legal flags the Copyright “©” symbol was printed near the foot of the flag. In June 1984 this was changed to “TM” for trademark. This very versatile “Boxing” Kangaroo was also “co-opted” to represent other major sporting events in Australia in the months after it’s yachting triumph, such as:



Fig. 12
Test Cricket – late
1983



Fig. 13 Davis Cup
Tennis – Jan. 1984

In the years immediately after the flag’s successful debut, Bond Corporation allowed a few charity sporting teams to incorporate the Boxing Kangaroo design into their own promotional material. One such group was the Australian Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Sports Federation, who Alan Bond granted free use of this symbol in January 1984, and they used it at the VII World Wheelchair Games in England, July-Aug. 1984.



Fig. 14 The Boxing Kangaroo
supports the Australian Paraplegic
& Quadriplegic Sports Federation



Figs. 15 and 16 Evan Evans Flags (1987-92)

The first formal challenge to Bond Corporation’s exclusive use of the Boxing Kangaroo Flag came in early January 1987. The Bond syndicate’s yacht “Australia IV” lost all defence trials races to another Australian syndicate, “Kookaburra III” owned by Kevin Parry. As the Bond syndicate was not going to be the Australian defenders of the “America’s Cup”, the new Kookaburra III syndicate wanted to use the Boxing Kangaroo Flag. After a brief very terse exchange between the two syndicate owners, which included Kevin Parry angrily telling Alan Bond, “... *the boxing kangaroo belonged to all Australians*”⁴, Alan Bond relented giving Kevin Parry a cheque for \$100,000 and “.. *his blessing to fly the flag which adorned Australia II at Newport ..*”

Does this transaction mean that Bond Corporation has given up or sold its exclusive ownership to the Boxing Kangaroo Flag or was it a temporary loan? This is a moot point, as there is no known record of either Kevin Parry or his Kookaburra III syndicate, claiming ownership of this symbol and/or flag. What is known is that Kookaburra III syndicate never flew the Boxing Kangaroo Flag,⁵ and ultimately were defeated in the “America’s Cup” races off the Fremantle coast of W.A. in early February 1987. After these races, royalties from the sale of this flag and any other use of this symbol continued to be paid to Bond Corporation, so I guess that we can call this transaction between Bond and Parry as a kind of loan.

The Boxing Kangaroo design was also incorporated into the designs used by the Australia's Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games' team emblems.



Fig. 17 Aust. Olympic Team – Seoul 1988



Fig. 18 Aust. Team Flag – Auckland, NZ 1990

Following Alan Bond being declared bankrupt in April 1992,⁶ and the collapse of his Bond Corporation, formal rights / ownership of the Boxing Kangaroo symbol and flag, together with all other related merchandise, were sold to the Australian Olympic Committee (“AOC”) in 1993 for approximately \$100,000.⁷ With the change of ownership the Boxing Kangaroo logo and flag was given a full “*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*” style make-over, giving it a more “metrosexual” gender neutral appearance.⁸ This new version of the Boxing Kangaroo, now referred as “BK”, was unveiled by the AOC in July 2004 as their official mascot, replacing *Willy the Koala*, which had been the AOC’s mascot since 1984. From a vexillological perspective, the greatest change was in the direction of the Boxing Kangaroo on the flag. Originally the design faced the hoist; now it faces the fly. Moreover, in the lower fly corner of the flag there now appear the following, “©® AOC”, so that this is an officially licenced version Boxing Kangaroo Flag.



Fig.19 Design 1983 – mid. 2000s Boxing Kangaroo Flag



Fig. 20 Design since mid 2000s



Fig. 21 “Metrosexual BK” Boxing Kangaroo



Fig. 22 A J Flags – Peakhurst, NSW – 2000s

While I have not definitely been able to find out why this change was necessary, I suspect that it was to distinguish future sales of the Boxing Kangaroo Flag from the previous licensee, thus preserving a hopefully steady flow of income to the AOC. Together with the change of ownership there was a change of official flag manufacturer for the Boxing Kangaroo Flag. The licence to produce this flag was then given to AJ Flags of Peakhurst, NSW, who imported a printed version of this flag from Taiwan, but for some time now the production licence for this flag has been returned to Evan Evans Flags in Melbourne, Victoria.⁹

Far from ending the sale of non-licensed Boxing Kangaroo Flags, they have proliferated by redesigning the form of the kangaroo and / or including extra elements, and giving the flag a different name. Examples are:



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

Fig. 27 and Fig. 28

Carroll & Richardson Flags



The Boxing Kangaroo Flag has been so enthusiastically accepted by the general population since September 1983, it is now almost inconceivable that any sporting event would occur without a version of this flag being displayed in the audience. In February 2010 at the Vancouver Winter Olympics, a large (approximately 50 square metres) unofficial Boxing Kangaroo banner was draped over the balconies of two floors where the Australian team was staying. An International Olympic Committee (IOC) official complained about the flag because it was a registered trademark and regarded it as too commercial, contrary to the ban on marketing displays at Olympic venues. The then Australian Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard described calls to remove the flag as “ridiculous”. The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) explained that the Boxing Kangaroo had been a team mascot since the Sydney Olympics, and it was not selling any boxing kangaroo merchandise in Vancouver. The IOC was persuaded to agree to the banner remaining, and the AOC undertook to register the design with the IOC as an official team identifier. The banner remained attached to the balconies for the duration of the Winter Olympics.¹⁰



Fig. 30

Winter Olympics – Vancouver 2010



Fig. 29

The Flag Shop – Vancouver

In response to this Olympic defiance, local Vancouver flag manufacturer, The Flag Shop, came up with their own Boxing Kangaroo Flag design for selling to the many visiting Olympic tourists. “If you cannot beat them – join them.” The display of this Boxing Kangaroo banner at the Vancouver Winter Olympics, and the refusal of the Australian athletes to remove it, and supported by our political leaders, shows just how much this symbol has become embedded in the minds of millions of Australians. I do not expect that this attitude will end any time soon.

On a lighter side I should now like to share with you some comical humour to do with the Boxing Kangaroo. In the mid-1980s Australia's friendly neighbour and rival in all things, New Zealand, won a succession of Cricket Games against Australia. In response to this Kiwi vexillologist, Dean Thomas, was approached by a customer at his father's then Hotel in Auckland, to design a suitably not so subtle flag design showing a victorious Kiwi getting the better of a Boxing Kangaroo, in time for New Zealand's cricket tour of Australia in 1987-88.¹¹

The result was a pleased looking Kiwi standing on top of a knock-out and / or dazed Boxing Kangaroo, with stars above its head. Even though New Zealand's then supremacy over Australia in Cricket was only short-lived, this one-off "Triumphant Kiwi" flag has been displayed on both sides of the Tasman Sea, at ICV 13 in Melbourne - Sept. 1989, and on various occasions in Auckland, Dean Thomas' then home city.¹²



Fig. 31 “Triumphant Kiwi Flag” – c.1987-88

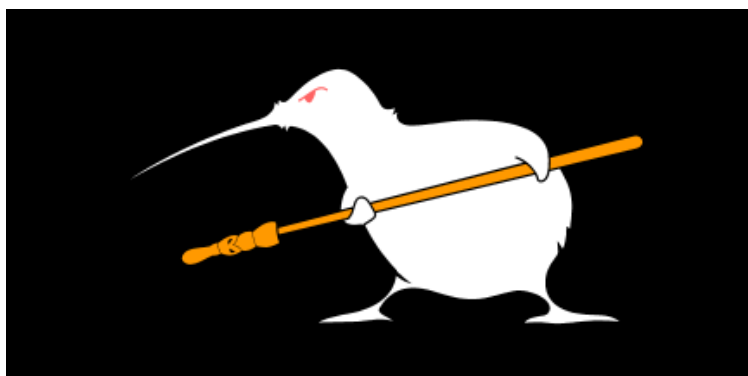


Fig. 32 “Fighting Kiwi Flag” – since 1988

For those of you who may be concerned, the Kangaroo made a full recovery, and the Kiwi went on to have its own unique feisty sporting flag, the “Fighting Kiwi” Flag.¹³ designed by New Zealand artist, Peter Bonner, at the request of Peter J. Hume, Director of Flagmakers in Thorndon, Wellington in early to mid 1988, as a response to Australia's "Boxing Kangaroo" Flag.

The Boxing Kangaroo has come a long way from an early 20th Century comical portrayal (Fig. 33), then a cartoon painted on the side of an RAAF aircraft during WW.II (Figs. 34 & 35).¹⁴ And evolving further into a flag version first hoisted in defiance of the British “Winston Bulldog” Flag, at the Admiral’s Cup yacht races off the Isle of Wight, England in August 1981 (Fig. 36),¹⁵ to that raised in victory aboard “Australia II” on 26 September 1983. Now, today, it is used as a motivational symbol in both sporting and military situations.



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 33

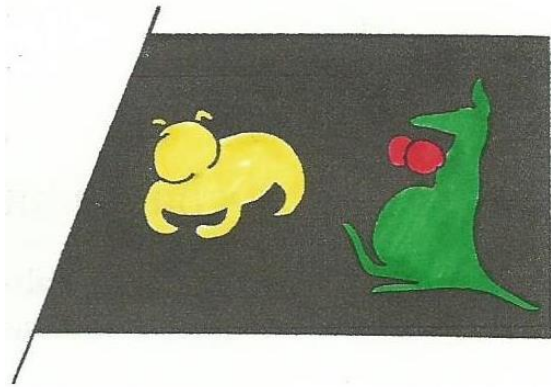


Fig. 36 “Apollo V” Battle Flag – Aug. 1981 ¹⁶



Fig. 37

On 17 September 2014, the Australian commercial television programme “Sunrise” held a mini-debate about which flag is more popular, the Australian National Flag or the Boxing Kangaroo Flag. At the end of the debate they displayed a combined flag replacing the British Union canton with the Boxing Kangaroo Flag as the canton.



Fig. 38
Afghanistan c.2000s Australian Army “Bushmaster”



Fig. 39

To show that Kangaroos do actually box, I would like to show you brief footage taken in early October 2014, Kangaroos sparring in a suburban street on the central coast of NSW.



Fig. 40



Fig. 41

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 Damian Fewster, *Australia II's* bowman, raises the Boxing Kangaroo "Battle" Flag as the victorious yacht heads back to Newport after winning the "America's Cup" on 26 Sept. 1983. Photo: Alan Stannard.
<http://museum.wa.gov.au/research/collections/australia-ii/marine-history-introduction/australia-ii-boxing-kangaroo-flag>
- Fig. 2 Front cover, *The Flag Bulletin* No.112 July-August 1985 – Flag Research Center, USA.
- Figs. 3 & 4 "30 Years ago in Rhode Island" by Debra Kolkka | September 26, 2013 at;
<https://bagnidilucca.wordpress.com/2013/09/26/30-years-ago-in-newport-rhode-island/>
- Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11 Photos by the author, some from his collection. Fig. 8 is part of the "Collier Flag Collection" donated to Flags Australia.
- Fig. 12 & 13 Photos by the author, of flags obtained by John Edwards. Also refer to; *The Flag Bulletin* No.112 July-August 1985, pp 126-127, 137.
- Fig. 14 John Edwards, "The Boxing Kangaroo: Apotheosis of a Myth" in *The Flag Bulletin* No.112 July-August 1985, pages 126 & 134.
- Figs. 15 & 16 Photo by the author. This flag is part of the "State Library – Museum of Victoria Flag Collection" donated to Flags Australia.
- Fig. 17 Australian Olympic Committee's website pages; <http://corporate.olympics.com.au/footer/the-aoc/state-olympic-councils/marketing-and-branding/olympic-insignia-protection> and <http://corporate.olympics.com.au/footer/the-aoc/state-olympic-councils/marketing-and-branding/the-boxing-kangaroo>
- Fig. 18 Photo taken by the author, of a flag from the collection of Ron Strachan.
- Figs. 19 & 20 Artwork prepared by Ralph Kelly for Flags Australia
- Fig. 21 Australia Post booklet of 20 stamps and 5 postcards, all relating to "B K".
- Fig. 22 Photo taken by the author, of flag held in his collection
- Fig. 23 Refer to; <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-flags/boxing-roo.htm> .
- Fig. 24 "Boxing Victory Roo" Flag, designed by Stewart van Raalte (Pennant House, Perth, WA.) Refer to;
<https://www.pennanthouse.com.au/content/page/novelty-.html>
- Fig. 25 Design owned by Flags 2000 Pty. Ltd. (Carroll & Richardson Flags) in Melbourne, Vic. See;
<http://www.flagsonline.net/Australia/fightings1.htm>
- Fig. 26 Flag design available from various on-line retailers.
- Fig. 27 Available on-line from; <http://www.lombard.com.au/boxing-kangaroo-supporter-flag-ea/> and at;
<http://www.thepartypeople.com.au/flag-boxing-kangaroo?cmp=cel&trigger=ac>
- Fig. 28 Photo taken by the author, of flag held in his collection
- Fig. 29 Refer to; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-02-08/boxing-kangaroo-flag/323598>
- Fig. 30 <http://shop.flagshop.com/index.php/fifa-2015/australia/go-australia-boxing-kangaroo.html>
- Fig. 31 Photo taken by the author, 1989.
- Fig. 32 http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/nz_fern.html
- Fig. 33 A chromolithographic poster published by Creber Plymouth – England c.1910
- Fig. 34 <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-flags/boxing-roo.htm>
- Fig. 35 <http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C303586?image=1>
- Fig. 36 Original diagram by John Edwards - *Crux Australis* Vol. IV, No. 4/20, October 1988, p9, coloured by Ralph Bartlett (based on John Edward's written description.)
- Fig. 37 Painting of a Boxing Kangaroo on the side of a Black Hawk helicopter dated 29 December 2005. Photo.
http://images.defence.gov.au/20051229adf8195319_039.JPG

- Fig. 38 Boxing Kangaroo and Australian Flags on an Australian Army “Bushmaster” vehicle in Afghanistan.
Source: <http://www.foxflags.com.au/> (lower front-page image).
- Fig. 39 Television still image from 17 Sept. 2014.
<https://au.news.yahoo.com/video/watch/25025516/flagging-the-changes/>
- Figs. 40 & 41 <http://www.news.com.au/technology/science/boxing-kangaros-filmed-having-it-out-in-suburban-street/story-fnjwkt0b-1227081916200>

END NOTES

- 1 E-mail 16 Nov. 2012, from Ralph Kelly, information from Stewart van Raalte of Pennant House, Perth, WA
 - 2 John Edwards, “The Boxing Kangaroo: Apotheosis of a Myth” in *The Flag Bulletin* No.112 July-August 1985, p. 124
 - 3 *ibid.* p. 124
 - 4 John Edwards, “The Boxing Kangaroo Loses its Title” in *Crux Australis* Vol.III, No. 1/13 January 1987, p.9
 - 5 *ibid.*, p. 8
 - 6 *ibid.*, p. 9
 - 7 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Bond_\(businessman\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Bond_(businessman)) and <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/bond-corporation-holdings-limited-history/>
 - 8 *The Age* (Melb.) 24 July 2004. See: <http://theage.com.au/articles/2004/07/23/1090464860217.html> .
 - 9 *ibid.*
 - 10 E-mail 6 Feb. 2010, Ralph Kelly to Susan Braverman of The Flag Shop, Vancouver, BC, Canada. See also <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-02-08/boxing-kangaroo-here-to-stay/323594> and <http://www.smh.com.au/sport/flying-the-flag-australians-defy-ioc-request-over-boxing-kangaroo-20100205-nimr.html>
 - 11 Cricket games between Australia and New Zealand, see: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/cricket-in-nz/playing-australia> and <http://www.cricketworld4u.com/series/history/australia-v-new-zealand.php>
 - 12 E-mails 18–19 May 2015, between Dean Thomas and Ralph Bartlett.
 - 13 Ralph G.C. Bartlett, “Fighting Kiwi Flag” in *Crux Australis*, Vol. V, No.2/22, April 1989 p. 3 and http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/nz_fern.html
 - 14 <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-flags/boxing-roo.htm>
 - 15 Fig. 34 is a photograph of leading Aircraftman Jack Featherby, putting the finishing touches to the boxing kangaroo nose art on a Kittyhawk aircraft flown by the 'Desert Harassers' of No. 450 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force. This was adopted as an insignia during operations over Sicily and Italy. Courtesy: Australian War Memorial, photo no. MEA0597.
- Fig. 35 is a photograph of a boxing kangaroo wearing a slouch that is painted on the nose of a RAF Consolidated Liberator B-24 bomber aircraft flown by a RAAF crew and based in Agra, India in April 1943. Courtesy: Australian War Memorial, photo no. P02366.001.
- 16 Kangaroo and Bulldog flag illustrated in John Edwards (1985) *op. cit.*, p.116 & 125, and John Edwards, “Australian Yachting Battle Flags” in *Crux Australis* Vol. IV, No. 4/20 October 1988, p. 8-9. This flag was designed by Mrs Lee Case, wife of Bernie Case (skipper of Bond owned “Apollo V” in Admiral’s Cup) in early August 1981 .

BIOGRAPHICAL

RALPH G.C. BARTLETT is one of the original seven founders of the Flag Society of Australia and currently the Society's President. He has attended every ICV since and including the 11th in Madrid in 1985, presenting lectures at most of them, and made many contributions to *Crux Australis*. He runs **Vexventures**, a Melbourne-based flag information enterprise with a specialisation in flag charts. Between 1989–97 he served as FIAV Secretary-General for Congresses, and was awarded a Fellowship of the Federation in 2003. He also published in 1989 a summary history of the International Congresses of Vexillology to that time and was the leading organiser of the 13th Congress in Melbourne that year and is a member of the Organising Committee for ICV26 in Sydney.

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