



What happened to the Eureka Jack?

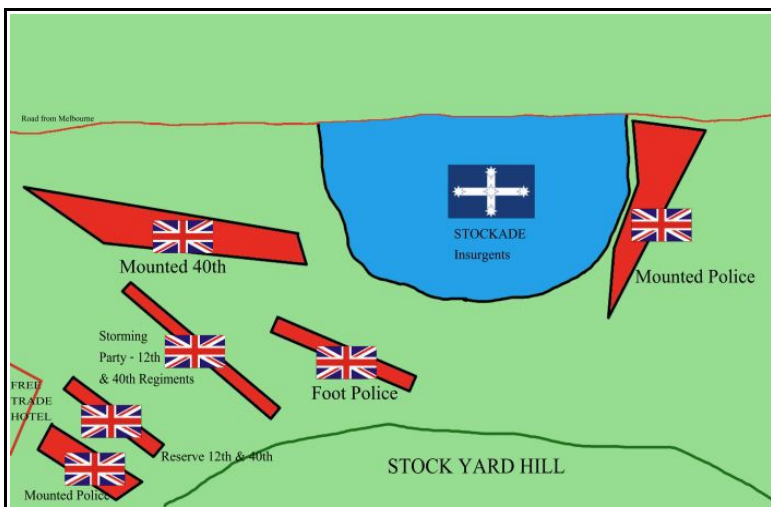


Conventional wisdom may need to be turned on its head, as the Eureka historians of today find reasons to believe the Union Jack also had pride of place with the rebel Eureka flag at arguably Australia's most celebrated armed uprising.

When the first reports of the Battle of the Eureka Stockade began to appear in Melbourne the next day, readers of the *The Argus* newspaper were told:

'The flag of the diggers, "The Southern Cross," as well as the "Union Jack," which they had to hoist underneath, were captured by the foot police.' [1]

It has been argued that newsmen were sticklers for getting things right in those days and presumably had eyewitness accounts of the two flags being seized available to them: according to one theory the red, white and blue colours may have been raised at some stage in the proceedings because of divided loyalties among the heterogeneous rebel force which was in the process of melting away; at one stage up to 1,500 of 17,280 men in Ballarat were present, with only around 150 remaining by the time the clash with the authorities took place at sunrise the next day. [2] The stockade itself was never erected as a strong point, described as a 'higgledy piggedly' enclosure mainly for drilling the men. [3]



The government force was set in motion for a time when most of the insurrectionists who had affirmed the oath would be gone and the numerical odds would be at their greatest. Lalor who lost an arm in the fighting was free to confess it had been a rash but honourable place to bring matters to a head.

At the time Victoria was already about to become virtually independent from Britain in full co-operation and with support from the 'Mother' country. Victorians in the 1850s seemed satisfied enough living in a self-governing, democratic colony within the British Empire, with the chief cause of the Eureka Stockade being the very steep licence fee local miners were being charged to prospect and the officious way it was being collected. [4] At the time there were those who were otherwise disposed to support the rebels who stayed away when word got around that the question of Irish home rule had become involved, being mainly attributable to the fact the password used at the Eureka Stockade the night before the clash with the authorities took place - Vinegar Hill - was the site of an 1804 Irish convict uprising in New South Wales. [5] Eureka historians know that a majority of those present were Irish and it has been discovered that, in the area where the stockade sprung up, there was a large concentration of Irish miners. Peter Lalor, who swore the 'Eureka Oath' was himself an Irish immigrant, and Professor Geoffrey Blainey has advanced the view, that the white cross behind the stars on the Eureka flag 'really [is] an Irish cross rather than being [a] configuration of the Southern Cross'. [6]

Phillip Benwell of the Australian Monarchist League has said that few contemporary historians are prepared to admit that the Union Jack was also seen around the diggings at the time as an expression of loyalty to the powers that be. [7] At the mass demonstration held on 29 November, there was disquiet among moderates that the Eureka flag was the only flag hoisted over the platform. [8] The writings of Raffaello Carboni, who was in Ballarat at the time, author of the main, complete eyewitness description and analysis of the causes of the attack on the Eureka Stockade, published a year after the event, make it clear that:

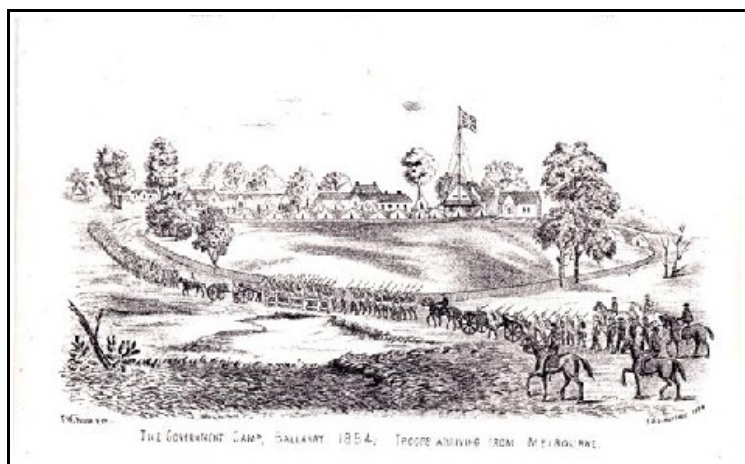
'amongst the foreigners ... there was no democratic feeling, but merely a spirit of resistance to the licence fee'; and he also disputes the accusations "that have branded the miners of Ballarat as disloyal to their QUEEN".' [9]

Although Carboni's description of the Eureka flag stars as being diamond shaped counts against the whole of his work of history, attempts to stir up miners at nearby Creswick Creek are known to have failed when talk turned from abolition of the licence fee to 'separation from Great Britain', [10] and he did have the advantage of being there in 1854; today the actual location of the Eureka Stockade itself is in doubt. Under those circumstances as the day of the inevitable government counter attack drew near and with the whole perimeter to defend, it begins to seem possible that the flags were flown one beneath the other as shown in an illustrated history resource for students dating from the 1950s, which positively sings the praises of what followed on from what was something of a massacre, with women throwing themselves on the line to protect the wounded from being killed by shot and bayonet.



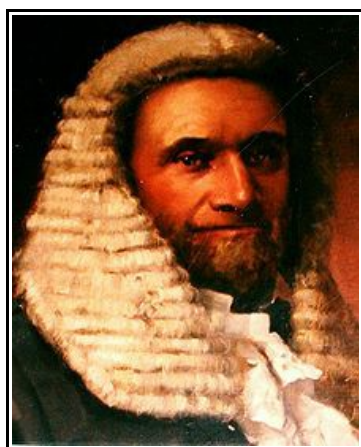
Ray Wenban, "The Revolt at Eureka", Pictorial Social Studies, Vol. 16, pp. 25.

Leading Australian vexillographer and former CEO of the Royal Australian Historical Society, John Vaughan, posits that the Union Jack in the adjacent government camp may have created the appearance that both flags were being flown from Bakery Hill, from a certain perspective common to artists. Yet this neither explains why the investigating journalist found there was pressure to fly the Union Jack at the stockade, or the source of their information that both flags were by then in the possession of the foot police.



Was the 4 December 1854 report erroneous and based on an optical illusion?

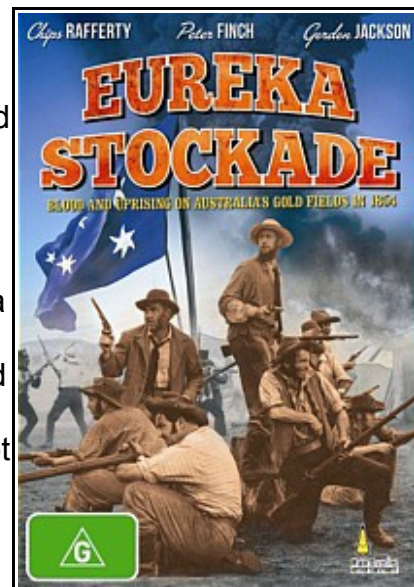
Whilst Trooper King who souvenired the rebel flag makes no mention of any other flags in his memoirs, nor is it part of his family collection, Australians have been known to lose track of the cultural wealth. Also unaccounted for are the portraits of Eureka commander in chief Peter Lalor in his wig and gown as the Speaker of the Victorian parliament, once on display at the Ballarat Town Hall, with the last surviving photograph taken by Vaughan all the remains in circulation on the world wide web, also featured on the front cover of a 2007 reprint of Carboni's volume, and Captain Cook on Possession Island, missing from the Victorian headquarters of the Royal Society in Melbourne, last mentioned in 1947. [11] Its lack of notability in any other contemporary accounts may be the result of the Union Jack not being flown from the masthead until after the oath was taken, with the Eureka flag being first mentioned by the Ballarat Times a week earlier on 24 November 1854, and hence it was only seen during the final hours of the unrest, as the endgame drew near, with the negative reaction to Lalor's choice of password beginning to surface.



Portraits of Peter Lalor as speaker of the Victorian parliament and Captain Cook on Possession Island, which have both disappeared without a trace. Did the Union Jack flown at the Eureka Stockade meet with a similar fate?

Gregory Black, military historian and author of *Eureka Stockade: A Ferocious and Bloody Battle*, concedes two flags may have been flown on the day of the battle, as the miners were claiming to be defending their British rights, with a further article in *The Argus* on 9 December 1854, reporting that Constable Hugh King had found a Union Jack like flag being carried by a prisoner; and, according to *The Eureka Encyclopedia*, Sergeant John McNeil at the time shredded a flag at the Spencer Street Barracks in Melbourne, which was said to be the Eureka flag, but which may well have been a Union Jack.

Blainey has said that Eureka has undoubtedly taken on significance as Australia had no real military history in the mid 19th century, and the Eureka Stockade was a 'godsend' to the nationalism of the day, [12] and from World War II radicals started to weave Eureka myths into the folklore. [13] However, like the reported presence of the Union Jack, Lalor's subsequent record as a strike breaking mine owner and MP, where he opposed universal white male suffrage and accepted the speakership, hardly fits in with the image of him being leader of some great revolutionary movement for freedom and independence. [14] General public interest in the Eureka Stockade is a thing of the relatively recent past, and the Eureka flag used in the 1949 motion picture *Eureka Stockade* starring Chips Rafferty and associated promotional material was not five stars arrayed on a white cross, rather the free floating stars of the Southern Cross, as per the official Australian national flag; the original specimen was not put on public display until 1973, and was only irrefutably authenticated in 1996 when sketchbooks of Canadian artist Charles Doudiet sold at auction, with the practice of the custodians snipping bits off and giving them to visiting dignitaries still going on within living memory. [15]



Perhaps like other less than convenient Eureka facts, this historical artefact was also destined to be forgotten, by historians and those who retained knowledge of it in the immediate aftermath, or even intentionally suppressed and airbrushed out of history and done away with for purely ideological motives?

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Footnotes

[1] 'By Express. Fatal Collision at Ballarat', *The Argus* (Melbourne), 4 December 1854 <<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/4801224>> 5.

[2] The numbers 1500 and 150 are estimates. Official statistics kept by the colonial administration showed a total of 24,600 people in Ballarat on 2 December 1854, figures given by Ian MacFarlane in his *Eureka From the Official Records* (Public Records Office, Melbourne, Vic, 1995).

[3] Phillip Benwell, *Eureka. Be not misled! The Eureka Stockade has nothing to do with a republic or the Labor Party but everything to do with the Ultimate Supremacy of Law and Justice Under the Crown.*, (2004) Australian Monarchist League <www.monarchist.org.au/articlesarchive_detail.html?SKU=12154821304659065&startat=26&index_no=26>.

[4] Stephen Copeman, *Eureka: An historic distraction* (3 December 2004) Online opinion <<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=2823>>.

[5] *The Eureka Rebellion: Miscellaneous* (1993) <<http://ausnatinfo.angelfire.com/2eureka.htm>>.

[6] *Historians discuss Eureka legend* (2001) <www.abc.net.au/lateline/stories/s290806.htm>.

[7] Benwell, above n 3.

[8] Manning Clark, *A History of Australia IV*, (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., reprint 1987) 74.

[9] Raffaello Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade* (Currey O'Neil, Blackburn, Vic., 1980) 108, 153.

[10] E. Daniel Potts & Annette Potts, *American Republicanism and Disturbances on the Victorian Goldfields*, *Historical Studies*, April 1968.

[11] *The Royal Society's Missing Cook, or Have You Seen This Painting?* (2001) Royal Society of Victoria <www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/smv/187.html>.

[12] Above, n 6.

[13] John Vaughan, *Flags under the Southern Cross and the Eureka Myth* (2009) Australian National Flag Association newsletter <www.flagaustnat.asn.au/newsletter2009.pdf> 3.

[14] Weston Bate, *Lucky City: the first generation at Ballarat, 1851-1901*, (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1st pbk. ed., 2003) 133, 184.

[15] Dr Joseph Toscano, *Reclaiming the Radical Spirit of the Eureka Rebellion* (2004) <<http://www.takver.com/history/eureka.htm>>.

