

ADVANCE AUSTRALIA

...AND A COLLECTION OF DOG REGISTRATION TAGS

Working with material at the Museum's repository at Mitchell is always a rewarding experience, and one is always surprised at the variety of material which tells so many different stories of an Australia long gone. Such was the case when I set out to investigate a set of dog registration tags which had been purchased at auction several years ago.

Researching dog registration tags at first seemed a simple task. The tags vary in shape and form, and depicted on each are variants of the 'Advance Australia' coat of arms. Each registration tag has either one or two drilled holes, some with rivets, so that the tag can be fixed to a dog collar.

Wait a second – a coat of arms was depicted on a dog registration tag? Isn't Australia's coat of arms normally displayed to identify Australian government authority and property? Although the phrase 'Advance Australia' is known as the title of the Australian national anthem, it is often forgotten that the phrase had a life as a slogan and as a coat of arms extending well into the early years of the colony.

The 'Advance Australia' coat of arms comprises of a four quadrant shield supported by the kangaroo on the viewer's left (dexter) and the emu on the viewer's right (sinister). In the first quarter of the shield is a golden fleece; the second quarter a three-masted schooner with its sails rolled up; the third a wheat sheaf; and the fourth a shovel and pick in saltire (crossed). A six-pointed star appears above the shield, and a scroll, on which is 'Advance Australia', appears below.

Used on-and-off since the 1820s, the term has been closely linked with the formation of a national identity which slowly developed in the colony due to the emergence of the native-born 'currency', the decrease in transported convicts, and the prominence and success

of the emancipists and free settlers in the colony. Because the 'Advance Australia' arms never had any official status, they were readily varied and adapted by different groups during the colonial period.

In the collection of the State Library of Victoria is a powder horn from the 1820s which depicts Masonic emblems of the Australian Social Lodge CCLX, combined with the 'Advance Australia' slogan. Alluvial miners too were known to use a variation of the 'Advance Australia' arms on bank notes printed by Thomas Ham in Victoria in 1853. The arms portrayed miners as the supporters, and depict on the shield a pick and shovel in saltire in the first and fourth quarters, a cradle in the second and a gold pan in the third. In true alluvial miner form, an earthen demijohn replaces the rising sun as the shield's crest.

'Advance Australia' evolved into the slogan of nationalists of the late 1800s, who pressed for the unification of the colonies for protection against a perceived 'yellow peril' as well as defence. By the 1880s the formation of workers' unions and an increase in anti-Chinese sentiment (a by-product of the gold rush era) fuelled an ever growing sense of nationalism. Ideas of a 'white Australia' were supported by the *Bulletin*, which stressed the need for a common policy against Chinese migration and forewarned a Japanese invasion. 'Advance Australia' consequently became associated with the movement of nationalists who wanted to see all non-whites, including Aborigines, excluded from Australian society.

The Australian Natives Association (ANA) was one such nationalist group which adopted the 'Advance Australia' arms as their own during this period. Primarily a mutual society, the ANA was exclusive to men born in Australia and provided sickness, medical and funeral cover for its members; however it viewed itself as a the perfect base for a forward-looking, idealistic political movement. ANA committed itself to the federation of the Australian colonies and provided much of the organisational and financial support for the Federation Leagues which led the campaign, especially in Victoria. Although it withdrew from political activity after Federation in 1901, the ANA still kept the 'Advance Australia' arms as its identifier well into the 1920s and 1930s.

Following the federation of Australia in 1901, the first official coat of arms of Australia was granted by King Edward VII in May 1908. Similar to the 'Advance Australia' arms, the approved design consisted of a shield in the centre, the seven-pointed star on a



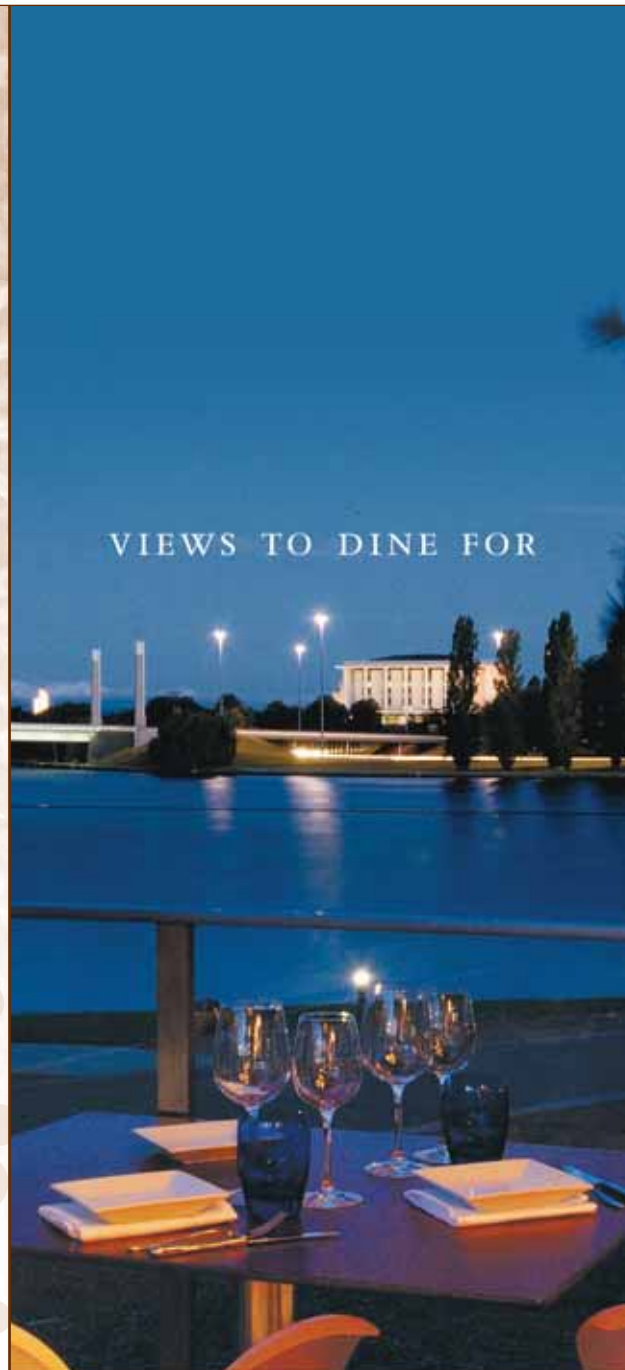


wreath as the crest above it, and a kangaroo and an emu supporting the shield, all on a bed of green grass with a scroll containing the motto "Advance Australia". Although the 1908 arms were redesigned in 1911 and the current Coat of Arms of Australia was officially granted by George V on 19 September 1912, the unofficial 'Advance Australia' arms were popularly used well into the 1920s and 1930s, and featured on the sixpenny coin until the introduction of decimal currency in 1966.

So what about the dog registration tags? Because the tags were purchased at auction, the provenance of the collection is unknown; however it still seemed odd to me that something as ordinary as a dog registration tag would carry a motif which was synonymous with Australian nationalism. So I dug a bit deeper. I found out that the markings on the reverse of each of the tags indicated that some of the tags originated from the Penrith area of Western Sydney, whilst the others came from Walcha in the New England area. Although dog registration has generally been the jurisdiction of local governments since the passing of the Dog Act in 1867, I gathered that the Penrith and Walcha councils must have adopted the 'Advance Australia' coat of arms as a signifier of their loyalty to the burgeoning Australian nation.

So my simple little task of researching dog registration tags blossomed into a project about Australian nationalism, and the usage of the 'Advance Australia' coat of arms in colonial Australia. Whilst the breadth of material held at the National Museum will never cease to amaze me, this seemingly simple little research project taught me always to expect the unexpected.

Aaron Pegram
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