



The College flag flying for the first time in New Zealand, on the occasion of the annual meeting of New Zealand Fellows, Hamilton, 1968.

The Flag of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

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SINCE arms were granted to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1931, after negotiations which have been detailed comprehensively by Jones,¹ these have been displayed in various ways. Apart from their normal use on the printed page, they are graven above the entrance of the College building, and displayed in tapestry form at the entrance to the Great Hall. Since 1968 they have also appeared on the College flag.

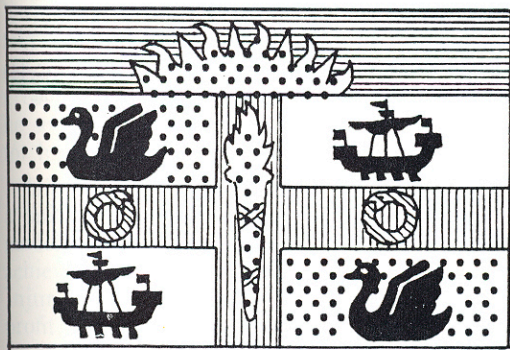


FIGURE 1: Layout of the College flag.

The production of this flag followed discussions during the visit of the then President, B. K. (now Sir Benjamin) Rank, to New Zealand. Two specimens were produced, one becoming the gift of the New Zealand Fellows to the College, and flying for the first time on the occasion of the meeting of Heads of Surgical Colleges in May, 1968. The second was retained in New Zealand, where it is flown at meetings of New Zealand Fellows (Frontispiece) and when the Court of Examiners is in session in New Zealand. (Its appearance above the entrance to Wellington Hospital during the final examination in 1971 prompted newspaper comment, and the observation that this particular flag did not, despite the yellow in it, indicate quarantine!)

The flag (Figure 1) depicts, in rectangular form, the shield portion of the arms: a red cross, indicative of the English origins of the College, bears a torch of learning and, embowed respectant in fess (that is to say, on the side limbs of the cross), two serpents seemingly gratifying an impulse to self-destruction. The serpent, of course, has a long history as a symbol of healing, with its roots in both the Mosaic and Æsculapian traditions.² From the latter derives the common representation of the serpent wound round a staff. The English College, however, displays its serpents rearing, cobra-like, from a coiled position, the Irish College used to depict its serpents as tied in a figure-of-eight knot, and ours, by their circular form, symbolize regeneration and everlasting life.¹

The "quarters" defined by the cross bear emblems symbolic of Australia and New Zealand. The first and fourth quarters have, on a gold field, the black swan, which, of the emblems gathered in Australia's national arms (Figure 2), derives from Western Australia, and shares with the shrike,³ the South Australian emblem, the distinction of being an



FIGURE 2: National arms of Australia.

indigenous Australian creature. The second and third quarters bear, against a white background, the lymphad or antique ship, which appears in pale in the New Zealand arms (Figure 3) and symbolizes discovery by sea.

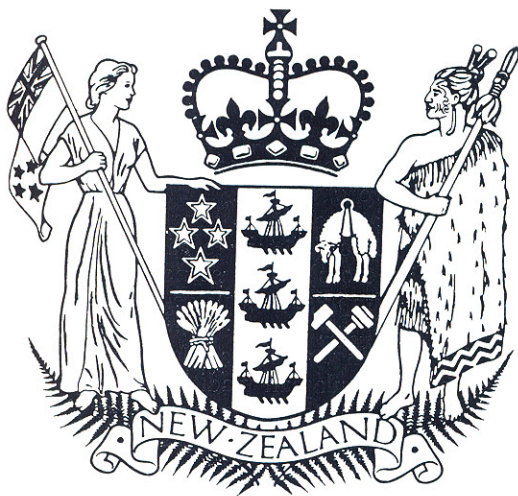


FIGURE 3: National arms of New Zealand.

The device of the rising sun in chief, that is to say, across the top of the flag, alludes to the royal status of the College, and is particularly appropriate to an organization in the eastern hemisphere.

The flag has the proportions 3:2, a compromise between the figures of 5:3 for a fair-weather flag and 4:3 for a storm flag advocated by Brooke-Little.⁴ The flagmakers were Messrs Hutcheson, Wilson & Co. Ltd, of Wellington, New Zealand.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful for the assistance that has been extended to me by the members of the photographic staffs of the Waikato and the Wellington Hospitals.

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- ¹ JONES, P. G. (1970), *AUST. N.Z. J. SURG.*, 40: 105.
- ² GASK, G. (1950), "Essays in the History of Medicine", Butterworth, London.
- ³ SCOTT-GILES, C. W. (1958), "Boutell's Heraldry", Warne, London.
- ⁴ BROOKE-LITTLE, J. P. (1969), "A Complete Guide to Heraldry (Fox-Davies)", Nelson, London.