

A Medical Mace

Emblematic Heritage and the Authority of the AMA-in-Session

by Professor John Pearn and Dr Shane Sondergeld

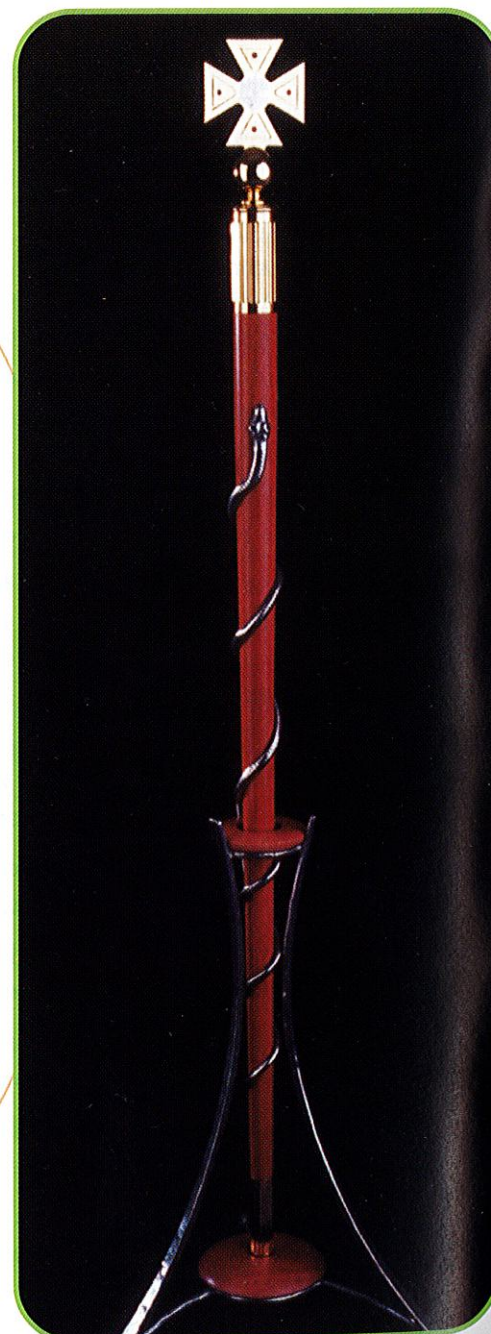
A mace is the ancient symbol of authority of session. Its carriage-in-procession and its display are symbols of formal meeting when matters of import are to be decided. The Queensland branch of the Australian Medical Association (AMAQ) has commissioned a new mace, that the traditions of medicine and significance of its forum-in-session might be enriched. Rich also in symbolism, the new mace takes its place as a significant addition to the cultural heritage of the Australian Medical Association in Australia.

A mace consists of a staff with its symbolic adornment, the whole surmounted by a capitellum. The Queensland AMA mace preserves this traditional basis. Its design fuses two distinct medical themes—the staff of Aesculapius together with the gold-headed cane, the latter traditional *accoutrement* of doctors travelling on their rounds. Its proposed implementation was the advocacy of one of us (SS) whilst President-Elect of the AMAQ; and its concept, form and design was the combined work of the authors.

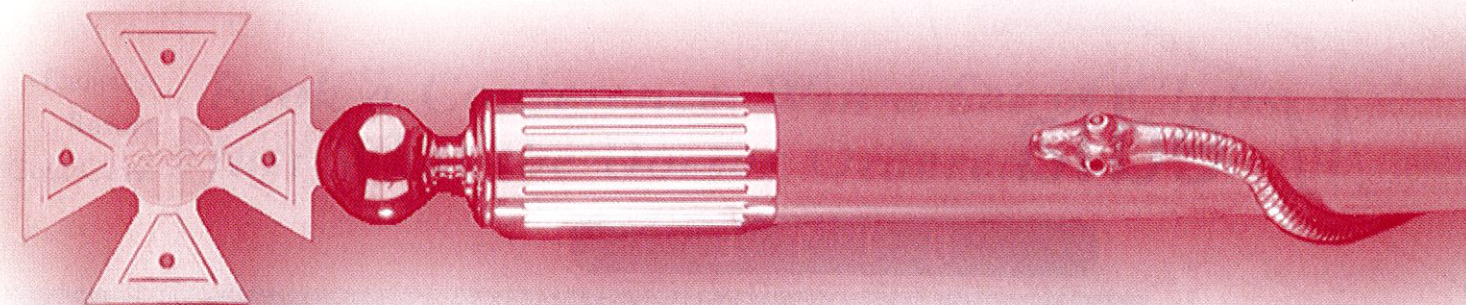
The Staff

The column of the mace is the size and proportion of the staff of Aesculapius—a tapering rod of wood, enspiralled by a serpent. The wood of the new mace is from the rare *Eucalyptus bancrofti*¹. This species was known to the Aboriginal Peoples for millennia; and was brought to the notice of the botanical world in 1904 by the botanist, Dr JH Maiden who named it after Dr Thomas Lane Bancroft, a general medical practitioner in one of Australia's most famous medical families. This latter's father, Joseph Bancroft (1836–1894), was Australia's foremost medical researcher of the nineteenth century; and a pioneer of the associative and collegiate of organised medicine in northern Australia. In 1867 he was the first to discover a nexus between insects and human disease². That disease was filariasis and the *Lancet* paper of that year, describing the adult filarial worm found in human lymph tissue, predated Sir Ronald Ross' malaria-mosquito discoveries by 20 years. Bancroft's son, Thomas Lane Bancroft (1860–1933) was one of the nation's foremost doctor-naturalists. At his home and his general practitioner's surgery in Eidsvold, in Queensland, he was the first to describe the life cycle of the Australian lungfish, *Neoceratodus*. He described dozens of new parasites, new genera of mosquitos, venomous reptiles hitherto unknown to western science and much more³. Of the many living Bancroft memorials, the orange *Eucalyptus bancrofti* blossoms are perhaps the most beautiful. Its densely grained, amber-pink-grey wood polishes beautifully and forms the core of the new mace.

The Aesculapian snake of Greek antiquity is the species of *Elaphe longissima*. It was first recorded in oral history in post-Homeric times and in statuary in the Hippocratic era (460-388 BC). The Aesculapian serpent has become, together with the patera, one of the universal symbols of medicine in all contemporary cultures. The serpent on the AMAQ mace was crafted to represent both the Aesculapian serpent of Classical antiquity and also the Rainbow Serpent. This latter oral symbol of life, life giving and regeneration has had a centrality in the Dreaming of the Aboriginal Peoples of northern Australia, perhaps more than 40 millennia. Its deliberative use in the mace, linking Aboriginal, classical and contemporary medicine, acknowledges the health practices of Aboriginal forebears and the extent and sophistication of their medical lore; and



THE MACE OF THE QUEENSLAND BRANCH OF AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION. ITS SYMBOLISM INCORPORATES THE THEMES OF BOTH THE AESCULAPIAN STAFF AND THE GOLD HEADED CANE.



THE CAPITELLUM OF THE AMAQ MACE: THE MALTESE CROSS IS QUEEN VICTORIA'S EMBLEM AND IS INCORPORATED IN THE SYMBOLISM OF THE ORDERS AND INSTITUTIONS WHICH SHE FOUNDED AND WITH WHICH SHE WAS ASSOCIATED—INCLUDING THE STATE OF QUEENSLAND. ENCRUSTED WITH QUEENSLAND GARNETS, THE MACE HAS A RHODIUM CENTRE CHARGED WITH THE EMBLEM OF THE AMAQ.

symbolises the continuity of medicine in the northern State. The serpent, entwined about the staff of Bancroft's Gum, is of incised and beaten stainless steel.

The Gold-headed Cane

The mace has been designed to echo the traditions also of the "gold-headed cane". This has been achieved by the addition of a gilded globe surmounting the Aesculapian staff, with a gilded ferrule as its foot. The gold-headed cane—the traditional staff of doctors—was carried by both physicians and surgeons as they went about their rounds in Australia as indeed they did throughout the wider world in centuries past. The globe (the hand piece of the symbolic cane) represents the planet and its environment; and through it, the centrality of preventative medicine and public health in a world in which safe environment and preserved ecosystems will be necessary for the health of all in the future, as they have been in the past.

The Capitellum

It is the capitellum, which gives a mace its character; and its authority. The AMAQ mace has a capitellum of gilded metal and is surmounted by a Maltese cross. The Maltese cross is the centre of the arms and flag of Queensland. The northern State was established as an open-air gaol in September 1824⁴, and proclaimed an independent colony on 10 December 1859, at the height of Queen Victoria's reign. Queen Victoria chose as her personal emblem, the Maltese cross. It is incorporated in many of the emblematic representations identified with her. Three of the Royal Orders of chivalry which she established—the Victoria Cross, the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (The Order of St John) and the Royal Victorian Order—all have the Maltese cross in their heraldic devices. The name, Queensland, and its civic emblems, record the stability, justice and integrity of Her reign. The State emblem has long been the emblem also of the British Medical Association and its successor from 1959, the AMAQ, in Queensland.

Within the capitellar Maltese cross is a rhodium centrum on which is embossed the AMAQ logo. Rhodium was chosen because of its durability and because of its status as one of the most precious metals. It was one of the more recent of the stable elements to be discovered (in 1803). Found in rare association with platinum, its untarnishable gunmetal face symbolises the enduring nature of the collegiate aspects of medicine. The Capitellum is encrusted with four garnets, mined by one of us (JP) in an alluvial deposit at Boondooma, near

Proston and Murgon in south-east Queensland. The blood red garnets, of pyrope type, have been faceted in brilliant cut. They symbolise the timelessness of northern Australia as part of one of the oldest lands on the planet. Garnets have traditionally been used to encrust the *accoutrements* of royalty and authority since protohistoric times when they were so used by the rulers of ancient Egypt.

The AMAQ mace was crafted by Mr Trevor Allwood of Tolga in north Queensland; and the rhodium and gold was the work of smiths at HGP Finishing Services in Brisbane. The work was co-ordinated also by the AMAQ Chief Executive Officer, Colonel Kerry Gallagher AM, who in June 2000 was the foundation Mace Bearer. The mace has its repository in a specially crafted cabinet, made of cabinet timbers of both *Eucalyptus bancrofti* and *Bielschmiedia bancrofti*. These latter species are the living memorials of Dr Karl Traugott Beilschmied (1793–1848), apothecary, botanist and linguist of Germany; and of Dr Joseph Bancroft (1836–1894) of Cheshire, Nottingham and Brisbane.

Acknowledgement

We thank Colonel Kerry Gallagher AM, Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Branch of the Australian Medical Association, for much encouragement.

References

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