

## World news

# One flat, one bedroom, one Emperor of Atlantium

By Nick Squires  
in Sydney

YOU won't find them on any map but, in the minds of their creators at least, they are as real as Brisbane or Bondi Beach.

As Australia wrestles with the issue of whether to become a republic, it faces a constitutional challenge of its own as a growing number of mini-states declare their "independence".

The trend started in 1970 when a West Australian farmer, Leonard Casley, announced his property's secession as a protest over grain quotas, proclaiming himself Prince Leonard of Hunt River Province.

Prince Leonard and his wife, Princess Shirley, continue to run their tiny principality, issuing passports and welcoming thousands of tourists a year.

Australia boasts about 20 "nations", each undeterred by the fact that their existence has no legal foundation. Some are motivated by ideology, others by a grudge



The proposed official car of Atlantium and a mug with crest

against the local council or a reluctance to pay taxes.

"There's a long tradition in Australia, borne of our convict heritage, of showing disrespect for authority," said His Imperial Majesty George II or George Cruikshank, a sales manager from Sydney. "We've inherited the English love of eccentricity."

Mr Cruikshank, 38, has set himself up as the Emperor of Atlantium, which consists of his one-bedroom apartment in the harbourside district of Potts Point. It claims nearly 1,000 "subjects" from Azerbaijan to Peru, with

citizenship open to anyone prepared to fill out an application form and pay £3 for an embossed certificate.

A few miles away, on the north side of Sydney Harbour, lives Prince Paul of Wy, who seceded from his local council in November after 11 years of arguing over permission to build a driveway to his home.

He declared his property to be an independent principality on which he could build what he liked – an assertion yet to be tested.

The Gay and Lesbian Kingdom of the Coral Sea is

founded on loftier principles and consists of a handful of tiny islands scattered over thousands of square miles of ocean off Queensland. It is billed as a "homeland" for gays and lesbians and was founded last year as a protest at the government's refusal to recognise same-sex marriages.

No one lives on the islets of the Coral Sea but the kingdom boasts a high court, chief justice and an absolute ruler, His Majesty Emperor Dale.

While some mini-states come and go, Hutt River Province celebrates its 35th anniversary this year. Princess Shirley, 70, claims to have government documents that, she says, recognise the province as a legal entity.

Constitutional lawyers beg to differ. "These states have no recognition or status under Australian law whatsoever," said Prof George Williams of the University of New South Wales.

"It's a nice way of thumbing your nose at authority but ultimately it's just a fantasy."



His Imperial Majesty George II in his kingdom: "We have the English love of eccentricity"

NIGEL WRIGHT