

Heritage Citation

Deagon Racecourse

Key details

Also known as	Sandgate Racecourse
Addresses	At 133 Board Street, Deagon, Queensland 4017
Type of place	Sportsground
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Lot plan	L1_RP886794; L2_RP159310
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 17 February 2012 Date of Citation — December 2011
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (G) Social

Established in the early 1880s as Sandgate was peaking as Brisbane's premier seaside resort, Deagon Racecourse was expected to become a successful racing venue. Despite some success, by the turn of the 20th century the racecourse was sold by the mortgagee. During the 1920s and '30s the racecourse became a regular venue for motorcycle races as well as various community events. Embroiled in racing enquiries of the 1930s, Deagon racecourse was refurbished and reopened for horse racing in 1938. Since the 1980s the racecourse has been used as a racehorse training facility.

History

“Horse racing was one of the earliest sports practised in Queensland following the opening of the Moreton Bay district in 1842. Organised by the Moreton Bay Racing Club, the first recorded horse races in Brisbane were held at Coopers Plains on 17 July 1843. A racecourse at New Farm had been established by May 1846, when the first races were held there during that year and operated until the early 1860s. The establishment of the Eagle Farm Racecourse in 1863 signalled the demise of the course at New Farm. A grant of 320 acres was approved with the site being named the 'Brisbane Racecourse'. A grandstand capable of seating 350 people was erected

and a saddling paddock was constructed and the first three day meeting at the Eagle Farm Racecourse took place on 14 August 1865.

Despite the early establishment of the Queensland Turf Club horse racing in Queensland did not become popular on a larger scale until the 1880s."¹

By 1885 the Sandgate Amateur Turf Club was established and holding full day race meetings such as that held on St Patrick's Day when a programme of seven races ran from 1 o'clock until the last race at 4.30pm. The races were run under Q.T.C. rules and prize money of between 5 and 10 sovereigns was offered as well as the "Sandgate cup" and a lady's bridle.² Sandgate was well established as a seaside resort for Brisbane by this time.

"In September 1852, J C Burnett made the first survey of the Sandgate area and the first sales of land were held in 1853. By 1858 there were 25 people living there and a hotel and shops had been established. In the 1860s, as access to the area improved, Sandgate developed as a seaside town on the English model providing salubrious sea air and a refuge from the oppressive heat of a Brisbane summer. Early Governors of Queensland and other prominent citizens spent holidays at Sandgate and there were guesthouses and houses available for rent from an early date. By 1871 Sandgate had a population of 155 and in 1872 the first Baptist chapel, a small building in Loudon Street, was built. Within two years the settlement had a school and was linked by coach to Brisbane three times a week. By 1877 coaches travelled between Sandgate and Brisbane twice a day. In 1880 Sandgate was declared a town and in 1882 was connected to the capital by train. This dramatically reduced travel time to less than half an hour and boosted Sandgate's popularity as a place of residence and for holidaymakers and day-trippers."³

At the same time, horse racing, along with the economy generally, was also booming. "By the end of the 1880s, the boom in racing had resulted in an increase in the number of meetings. A new code of rules (1885) modelled on those of the English Jockey Club was adopted and a system of registration of all racing clubs under the Queensland Turf Club rules was instituted. The Club thereby constituted itself the supreme racing authority in the colony and the ultimate court of appeal. Another significant step undertaken during the 1880s was the publication of the first edition of The Queensland Racing Calendar in 1886. A boom in racing at the end of the 1880s led to a mushrooming of clubs and meetings. The senior club was the Queensland Turf Club, which staged four 2-3 day meetings per year at Eagle Farm, coinciding with the main public holidays: Christmas, New Year, the Queen's Birthday, the Exhibition and the Prince of Wales's birthday. With several clubs and courses in operation in Brisbane, meetings often clashed; consequently, in May 1890 of the leading racing clubs agreed to empower the Queensland Turf Club to allot dates for meetings, thereby confirming it as the premier club. The second major metropolitan club was the Tattersall's Club, which did not have its own track but preferred to rent the Eagle Farm. The Tattersall's Club held its first meeting at the Eagle Farm Racecourse on 10 December 1884."⁴

In 1881 388 acres of land in the vicinity was set aside for Park and Recreation purposes. In 1887 Sandgate Town Council took steps to have a portion ... excised for a racecourse. On 9 October 1890 an area of 87 acres 22 perches (portion 12) was granted to Sandgate Amateur Turf Club trustees Hiram Wakefield, George Agnew and Nathaniel Corrigan under the Crown Lands Act of 1884. "Testimony given at a Select Committee on the Sandgate Racecourse Bill in October 1896" indicated that the racecourse was well established with a "grandstand, stabling, drainage, clearing, fencing, gates, saddling paddock, weighing room and other items" available. Information from early residents of Sandgate records that the grandstand faced west with a refreshment stand and bar underneath.⁵ The trustees took out a mortgage for £2,000 with the Queensland National Bank in 1889. In 1894 Hiram Wakefield was replaced as trustee by Herbert Hunter, who was replaced by Andrew Lang Petrie in 1897. In 1900 the mortgagee exercised its power of sale and the land and mortgage was transferred to George Gray and Andrew Joseph Thynne who took out a further mortgage for £2,980 from

the Queensland National Bank.⁶

By 1901 Tattersall's Club was holding Spring Meetings "on the club's seaside course at Deagon" which were advertised as very popular and attended by large crowds when the weather held fine. A complete train service from Central was arranged with a horse train leaving Ascot at 11.45am. The course was reported to be in "capital order" and the Sandgate Town Band would be there, with catering organised by Mr. Foster of the Oriental Hotel.⁷ The racecourse was transferred to Robert Fraser, President of Tattersall's Club in May 1902.⁸ The economic reality of the Club's seaside course was not so successful however.

On 21 December 1911 the mortgagees sold the property to John Wren and Benjamin Nathan for £2,800. This was the second racecourse purchase for this partnership who intended to acquire a monopoly of metropolitan racing (outside of Eagle Farm) in Brisbane.⁹

During World War One Patriotic Carnivals were held at Deagon Racecourse. Processions featuring bands, banners, local interest displays, decorated lorries and tableaux arranged by the Sandgate Girls' Club, the Sunshine Party, and by local Sandgate School children started at Moora Park before proceeding to Deagon Racecourse. The all-day programme of events there included school events, athletic contests, national dances, billy goat races as well as turf events.¹⁰

In the 1920s the Deagon racecourse continued to be the focus of community activities. The Queensland cross-country championship in August 1921 started and finished with circuits of Deagon Racecourse, and the Sandgate Show in 1922 was held there. That year was the start of just over a decade of use of the racecourse of motor cycle racing. In October, John Wren donated the free use of the racecourse for a motorcycle carnival held in aid of the Children's Hospital which included 3, 5, and 10 mile championships of Queensland as well as many novelty events. In November the Queensland Motor Cycle Club's Carnival was held with proceeds also being donated to the Children's Hospital.¹¹ By February 1924 the races had escalated to speed tests with the favourite crashing after hitting a patch of sand at 85 miles an hour while overtaking the field. In July the main event was a race between a Harley-Davidson and the Ascot Garage aeroplane. In August crack motorcyclists at Deagon Racecourse attempted to break Australian and world grass track records for various distances and classes.¹²

Motorcycle and road races continued, with McDonnell and East reviving a prewar event of a road race from Virginia to Deagon Racecourse, followed by a sports programme for employees (male and female) and culminating in a dinner and social evening at Sandgate Town Hall.¹³ In 1927 the Hopper Bros, well-known motorcycle dealers, secured a lease to hold regular motorcycle races at the popular track "distributing good prize money and catering for the riders in every way."¹⁴ By 1928 Deagon Racecourse had been turned into "an up-to-date motorcycle track" by Deagon Speedway Ltd, catering for spectators as well as having "considerable improvements to the course". In 1930 the Brisbane Motorcycle Club planned a 100-mile track race at the racecourse. Various motorcycle events continued until the early 1930s.

Wren and Nathan however were at the centre of ongoing tensions and suspicions in the horse racing industry. Between 1911 and 1922 they succeeded in acquiring all other courses and projected courses in and around Brisbane, other than Eagle Farm. In 1923 the Brisbane Amateur Turf Club was formed and Albion Park and Deagon racecourses were sold to it. The Royal Commission of Enquiry into the control and management of racing in 1929 found that the sale was not a genuine contract and that the club was an agency for Wren and Nathan who carried on a racing business for their own benefit.¹⁵ The Deagon Racecourse, originally granted for racing purposes was "now private land without encumbrances held by these two gentlemen".¹⁶ The Commission recommended that proprietary racing be prohibited.¹⁷

This had little impact on the Deagon racecourse however as it had not been a horse racing venue since 1922.

The course itself was in disrepair. It was described as a grass circular track, one mile in circumference, with a one furlong straight. The area had been divided into paddock and leger enclosures, each containing a small dilapidated stand. The fences were in disrepair or non-existent. The small totaliser building was “greatly out of repair” and the course would “require very considerable expenditure to ... make it suitable for racing”.¹⁸

A further Royal Commission in 1936 enquired again into the racing industry and the operations of the Racecourse Acts 1923-1930.

Despite speculation in 1933 that Deagon racecourse was about to be renovated, and approval for the construction of a new architect-designed Officials Room in 1936, it was noted in December that there had been no provision for the reopening of the racecourse in the calendar of events released by the Queensland Turf Club.¹⁹

In January 1938, Mr T. M. Ahern (chairman of the Brisbane Amateur Turf Club) announced that there was a need for another grass track in Brisbane and the Sandgate course had been improved in the last year and could be opened in March. Work began in earnest the next day with workmen clearing the track, setting new grass and installing a watering system.²⁰ By June 1938 new fences and a new totaliser building completed the refurbishment of the course.²¹

On Wednesday 29 June 1938, “after lying idle since the old Sandgate Jockey Club closed it sixteen years ago” the Deagon Racecourse was reopened with a programme of eight races.²² Further improvements to the course were made in September when “a depression was discovered ... approaching the home turn” that required an alteration to the approach to the home turn.²³ The rules of racing were amended to make provision for the fields at Deagon.²⁴ In January 1939 “the erection of a new totaliser building” was the latest improvement at the course. The old “blind” tote that had been used since the reopening was to be replaced with a Hodsdon machine. The old grandstand was still being used, but a new stand was “certain to be erected” if warranted.²⁵ In February 1939 the successful tenderer for the new totaliser building Deagon Racecourse was announced as architects Blackburne and Gzell, with Fisher & Tesch, builders.²⁶

This optimistic reopening was overtaken by world events as the second World War began in 1939. Although in the early war years races continued to be held, there is scant evidence that this continued during the 1940s. The postwar history of the course is little known. In 1948 John Wren's title was transferred to James MacFarland and George Rees, trustees for the Brisbane Amateur Turf Club. In 1972 the fence was declared unsightly by Council, indicating that the course was again falling into disrepair.²⁷ In 1982 it was registered as a horse training facility and considerable amounts have been spent on the maintenance and upgrading of the track. Since then the track has been used for training and barrier trials.²⁸

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history as a venue for sporting and community recreation events since 1885.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as a fully functioning racecourse established in the nineteenth century at the seaside resort of Sandgate.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as a venue used for horse racing and training from the nineteenth century.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

as a venue for horse racing, training and community recreation it has a special association with the Brisbane Amateur Turf Club, and the local horse racing industry and community.

References

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8. *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1930, p.1307 & Title 201064
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10. *Brisbane Courier* 31/12/17 p.5
11. *Brisbane Courier* 8/7/22, 20/10/22, 10/11/22
12. *Brisbane Courier* 29/1/24, 24/7/24, 1/8/24
13. *Brisbane Courier* 18/9/26
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 38. Queensland. Royal Commission on Racing and Racecourses. *Queensland Parliamentary Papers 1930 Vol.II*.
 39. Sandgate & District Historical Society and Museum. *By the Seaside*. No.29 23.5.1988
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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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