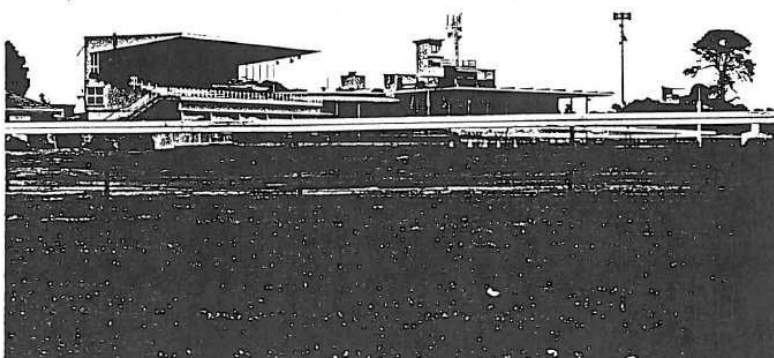


# HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

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**Name** Werribee Racecourse  
**Address** Bulban Road (cnr Ballan and Racecourse Rds) Werribee **Significance Level** Local  
**Place Type** Racecourse  
**Citation Date** 1997



Werribee Racecourse

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**Recommended Heritage Protection** VHR - HI - PS Yes

## History and Historical Context

On 22 April 1861, the same year that the Wyndham Township was proclaimed,[1] a Wyndham Racecourse and Recreation Reserve (400-500 acres of Crown Land) was gazetted.[2] This early date suggests the importance of horse racing within the Werribee district.

Thomas Chirnside reputedly was instrumental in having the land reserved and gazetted.[3] Thomas, with his brother Andrew, had an interest in horse racing which went back to their years in Geelong. The Chirnsides trained many of the best horses in Victoria in the second half of last century. At their property Werribee Park imported bloodstock were bred, while there was a training track at the stables at the Point Cook homestead. Andrew Chirnside's Haricot won the 1874 Melbourne Cup.[4]

However, at first, following the gazetting of the racecourse, there seems to have been "nothing in the way of formal horse racing... in the 1860s and early 1870s".[5] Later, in March 1878, Michael Wall, publican, called a meeting at Armstrong's Hotel, renamed the Racecourse Hotel by Wall. It was decided to hold races on 4 May 1878. A Wyndham Racing Club was formed with Wall as its Secretary.[6] The formation of this club, according to William Ison, a club member, was to avert the cutting up of the racecourse reserve into five-acre blocks for closer settlement. Chirnside gave 300 pounds to fence in the reserve.[7] By January 1880 the course had been fenced and an entrance fee introduced. The club borrowed further money to finance improvements, including the installation of a grandstand.[8]

# HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

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During the 1890s depression years the racecourse became neglected and regarded as "the town common and swagman's home".[9] It was claimed in April 1903 that although the racecourse "possesses one of the best racing tracks in the state" it was used only for a couple of mixed meetings with small prize money.[10] The debts were so large by this time that the reserve was temporarily leased for cultivation and grazing purposes. An advertisement in the local press of 19 February 1904 called for tenders "to cultivate, graze or train horses on above reserve". Cultivation leases of three years and grazing and training leases of seven years were offered. Wall signed the advertisement.[11]

From 1907 the Agricultural Society sought to secure the course as a showground. Later, in 1910 the Government declared that the reservation would be revoked unless racing commenced and a new Racing Club was formed. If these terms were not complied with, part of the land would become a showground and the rest opened for settlement.

Finally, in 1912, after the formation of a new Wyndham Racing Club, the Wyndham Racecourse Bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament. This Bill, introduced by the local Member, Robertson, licensed the racecourse for two meetings a year. In his introduction to the Bill, Robertson described the Wyndham Racecourse as "one of the best and truest courses in Victoria". A later 1932 Act provided for four meetings a year.[12]

James claims that the totalisator was first used at Werribee at the winter meeting on 10 July 1935, "and after its erection, no metropolitan course was without a tote. The future of the Werribee Racecourse within the Victorian Racing Calendar was secure".[13]

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## REFERENCES

- [1] Links with the Past in Werribee History Kit, p.11 of 14.
- [2] James, p.135.
- [3] Wyndhamshire Banner 9 Jan. 1903. Ison letter.
- [4] James, pp.134-135.
- [5] James, p.135.
- [6] James, p.136.
- [7] Wyndhamshire Banner 9 Jan. 1903.
- [8] James, p.137.
- [9] James, p.137.
- [10] Wyndhamshire Banner 24 April 1903.
- [11] Wyndhamshire Banner 19 Feb. 1904.
- [12] James, pp.137-139.
- [13] James, p.140.

## Previous Studies / Reference Nos.

Werribee Heritage Kit

## Relevant Historical Australian Themes

10.1 Sport and recreation

# HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

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## Description

### Physical Description

Werribee Racecourse has been located on this site since 1861. Today the racecourse is a modern facility, with large grandstand and other buildings probably dating from the 1950s onwards. Some of the trees may be earlier.

Detailed inspection of the racecourse was not undertaken, and it is possible that some earlier features remain. However, it is the site and the history of continuous use for more than 130 years that is of particular interest.

### Recommended Management

Further detailed investigation should be undertaken into the site and any early features that may remain. In addition, the architectural merits of the modern buildings should be assessed.

### Occupancy

Private

### Site Context

Area of Significance

The whole of the racecourse: however, it is the longevity of the use of the site that is of interest rather than specific buildings or features

### Statement of Significance

The Werribee Racecourse, gazetted in 1861, has local significance as an illustration of the importance of horse racing as a district recreation from Werribee's earliest years. It has significance, too, for its associations with a number of prominent residents including Thomas Chirnside, Michael Wall (publican) and William Ison.

### Recommendations 1997

External Paint Controls

-

Internal Alteration Controls

-

Tree Controls

-

Fences & Outbuildings

-

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

-

Incorporated Plan

-

Aboriginal Heritage Place

-

## **Other Recommendations**

Wyndham Heritage List Planning Scheme Further detailed investigation should be undertaken into the site and any early features that may remain. In addition, the architectural merits of the modern buildings should be assessed.

This information is provided for guidance only and does not supersede official documents, particularly the planning scheme. Planning controls should be verified by checking the relevant municipal planning scheme.