

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** HAMILTON RACECOURSE

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Henty Highway HAMILTON

**STUDY NUMBER:** 410

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

---

**PRECINCT:** outside

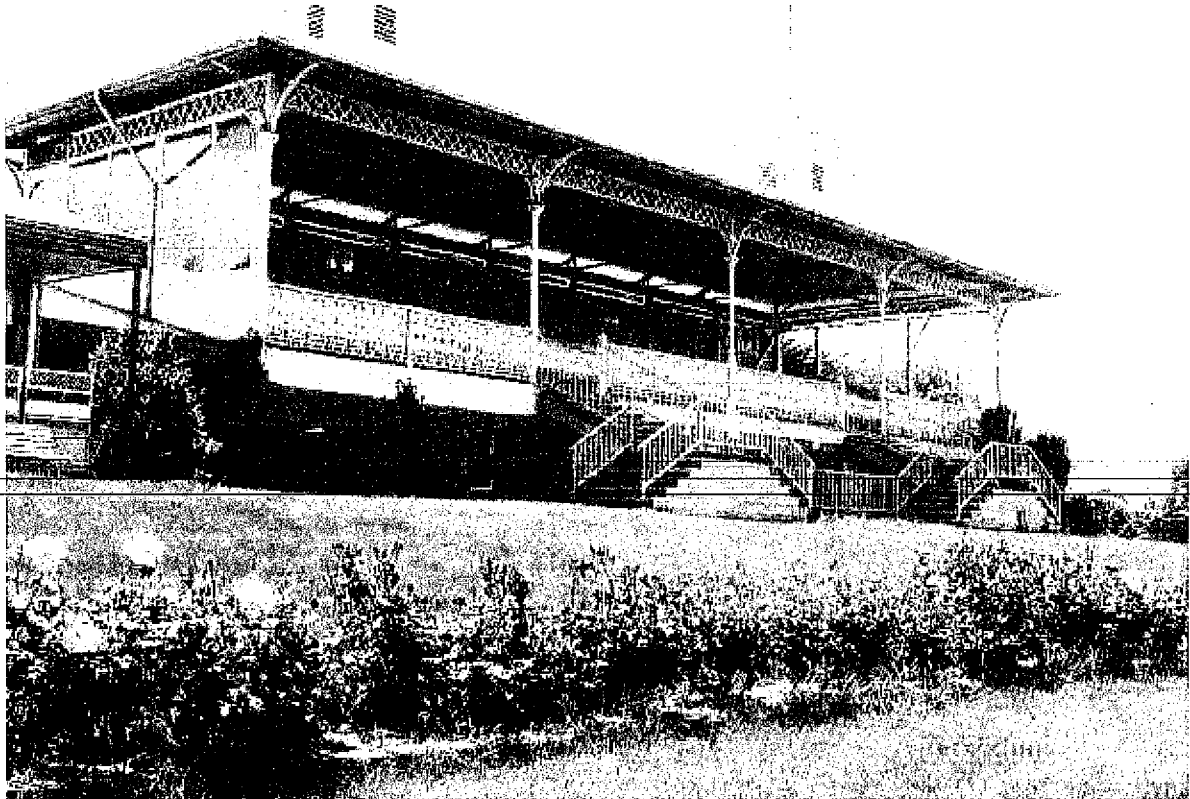
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** 23      **SECTION:** 25      **PARISH:** PARISH OF HAMILTON NORTH

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 431k 29; VicRoads 72 H5; located on the west side of the Henty Highway about 0.7kms north of the intersection with the Glenelg Highway and about 4.0kms north-west of the centre of Hamilton.

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** State



Hamilton Racecourse, Old Grandstand, Henty Highway, North Hamilton

**Image Date:** 19/03/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the main buildings including the two grandstand, horse stalls, betting ring, committee room, bars and dining room, photo finish box, judges box, and the racecourse tracks, fence and all the land in the reserve.

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** HAMILTON RACECOURSE

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Henty Highway HAMILTON

**STUDY NUMBER:** 410

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

---

## **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

The Hamilton Racecourse comprises two main grandstands, one built in the later nineteenth century and the other, designed by local architect Frank Punch, in the later twentieth century. They provide an important comparison for the accommodation of patrons and forms of construction for their building type.

The older grandstand is typical of the nineteenth century in its raked form with service areas below the seating section. The large structure is framed in timber with walls clad in corrugated iron. There are small-paned windows in the rear wall. The framing of the walls is essentially post-and-beam with massive diagonal braces. Cast iron columns support the front of the roof with a web-truss beam, which continues on the sides of the structure. The elaborate double-curved roof, also clad with corrugated iron, is supported on iron trusses made up from angled sections riveted together. Iron brackets springing from the timber posts and iron columns of the structure support its very wide eaves. Two octagonal turrets or pavilions with flagpoles surmount the roof and act as ventilators. The seating comprises timber slats on wrought iron frames, possibly dating from the Interwar period rather than the original construction. The balustrade is cast iron with panels in a common design. The ends of the grandstand are glazed. Two modern stairs have been built in front of the grandstand to provide access from the lawn.

The newer grandstand is typical of the twentieth century in two-storey form with service and office areas below and a bar and dining room above. There is an open, bow-fronted balcony across the façade, which extends at one end to form a staircase. The balustrading is an open metal mesh. The structure is built of light pink/cream bricks with contrasting courses of dark brick.

There are the usual supporting structures such as stables, stewards' rooms, mounting yard, judges' box, betting ring and bars to complete the racecourse complex. The grounds are landscaped traditionally.

## **HISTORY:**

According to Margaret Kiddle, horse racing was a very popular recreational pursuit in the Western District in the mid 19th century, and large crowds flocked to local race meetings held in the growing towns of the region (Kiddle, 463). ~~The first races at Hamilton were a two-day meeting held in January 1854 (Garden, 41) on the flat near the Grange Burn.~~

---

This began the annual or biennial race meeting cycle which continued to see racing held on the Grange Burn flat, followed by a dinner at the Victoria Hotel (Garden, 62). However, Garden (ibid.) notes that at least once, a race took place through the township and across a number of newly fenced allotments. Races continued on the flat until 1859 (ibid.), when the present racecourse, then known as Kippen's flat, was made available. In the following year, the Hamilton Turf Club was formed (ibid., 114). William Kippen Jr. had taken up the Bochara run in June 1846 and held it until December 1853.

Horse racing was an important and highly popular sport in the district, with a range of different types of attractions. "In 1866 the club held its first Grand National Steeplechase, which started and finished on the course, but in between ran through neighbouring farms" (ibid. 114). Like the very famous race at Coleraine, this steeplechase would have attracted gentleman riders from all over the Western District, and possibly the much-loved poet and horseman Adam Lindsay Gordon who rode at Coleraine.

Although the popularity of the sport did not wain, the Turf Club went into financial decline at the end of 1866, but revived in new form in 1867 as the Western Racing Club. Its committee contained a mixture of pastoralists and leading townsmen. In 1873 the club built the large grandstand at the course (ibid.). In the 1880s, the North Hamilton Racing Club (1883) and the Hamilton Turf Club (1887) were started, but were soon swallowed by the larger Hamilton Racing Club, amalgamating in 1893 (Garden, 62).

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** HAMILTON RACECOURSE

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Henty Highway HAMILTON

**STUDY NUMBER:** 410

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

---

In 1888, Victoria and Its Metropolis stated that "the Western Racing Club has a fine racecourse of 120 acres, and they hold a grand meeting annually, with occasional programmes of bye-races" (Sutherland, Vol. 2, 58). By 1903, the Cyclopaedia of Victoria stated "There is a large racecourse situated about three miles from the town, upon which three meetings are held during the year. It contains a good grand-stand, and the whole of the land belonging to the club comprises an area of nearly 600 acres. The fixtures are very popular, and attract a large number of visitors to the town" (Smith, Vol. 2, 527). There are the usual horse stalls and mounting yards, stewards' rooms and judges' box, bars and other facilities which date from various times.

A modern grandstand was built in the early 1990s with a dining room and bar on the first floor, above the ground floor service rooms and offices, so patrons could watch the races in comfort from the inside. An open balcony across the front also provides an elevated view. The important local architect, Frank Punch, designed the building, which was intended to be used for functions on non-racing days. It is ironic that Frank Punch's wake was held there when he died prematurely in 1996.

The Hamilton Racing Club continues to provide an excellent and attractive venue for recreation, and is still a popular sport within the area.

## **THEMATIC CONTEXT:**

Theme 8: Developing Australia's cultural life

8.1 Organising recreation

8.1.1 Playing and watching organised sport

8.1.2 Betting

8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests

## **CONDITION:**

Both grandstands in excellent condition and the other facilities range from good to very good condition.

## **INTEGRITY:**

High degree of integrity

---

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

The Hamilton Racecourse complex, located on the west side of the Henty Highway about 4.0kms north-west of the centre of Hamilton, dates from 1859 when the land, then known as Kippen's flat, was made available. In the following year, the Hamilton Turf Club was formed. The land, comprising 120 acres, was permanently reserved in 1864. The first Grand National Steeplechase was held in 1866, starting and finishing at the course but passing through adjacent farms on the way. This was a year before the Great Western Steeplechase began at Coleraine in which the famous horsemen, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh would ride. The Turf Club went into financial decline at the end of 1866, but revived in 1867 as the Western Racing Club. Its committee contained a mixture of pastoralists and leading townsmen, a convention continued during later amalgamations and re-constitutions of the local racing clubs. In 1873, the club built the impressive large timber and iron grandstand. The architect and builder are not known but the combined elegance of its design and novelty of its construction are notable for such an early date and indicate very competent professional involvement. The structure remains substantially intact and in good condition. It can be contrasted with the new grandstand built more than 120 years later, which was designed by the notable Hamilton architect, Frank Punch. The other usual racing facilities support the two grandstands, the whole complex being located within grounds landscaped traditionally.

How is it significant?

The Hamilton Racecourse complex is of historical, social and architectural significance for the city of

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** HAMILTON RACECOURSE

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Henty Highway HAMILTON

**STUDY NUMBER:** 410

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

Hamilton, the southern Grampians Shire and for the State of Victoria.

## Why is it significant?

The Hamilton Racecourse complex is of historical significance for its association with the early history of horse racing in Victoria. It has further historical significance for its continuous association with the thoroughbred horse racing industry over 100 years. It has social significance as the provision of substantial facilities for mass public entertainment, bridging the gaps between town and country, rich and poor. The two grandstands are of architectural significance; the older as one of the earliest surviving large grandstands in Victoria, all the more significant for the sophisticated elegance of its design achieved through its novel construction; the newer for providing a contrast in its modern facilities. It is also of interest as an example of the Hamilton architect, Frank Punch.

## COMPARISON:

033 Coleraine Racecourse, Glenelg Highway, Coleraine  
293 Racecourse and Grandstand, Racecourse Road, Peshurst  
Melville Oval Grandstand, Market Street, Hamilton  
H751 Fitzroy Cricket Ground Grandstand, Brunswick Street, Fitzroy  
H803 Queen Elizabeth Oval Grandstand, 88 View Street, Bendigo  
H976 Benalla Showgrounds Grandstand, Bridge Street, Benalla  
City Oval Grandstand, Sturt Street, Ballarat

Princes Park, Maryborough

**ASSESSED BY:** AEN

**ASSESSMENT DATE:**

18-Feb-03

## EXISTING LISTINGS:

## HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR  Include in RNE  Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

## REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
Alexander Sutherland	Victoria and Its Metropolis, Vol. 2	1888	58
Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh	After many days: being the reminiscences of Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh	1918	
Diane Luhrs	Personal Communication	2004	
Don Garden	Hamilton a Western District History	1984	28, 35, 41, 62, 114, 120, 127- 8, 142, 183
James Smith	The Cyclopaedia of Victoria, Vol 2	1903	527