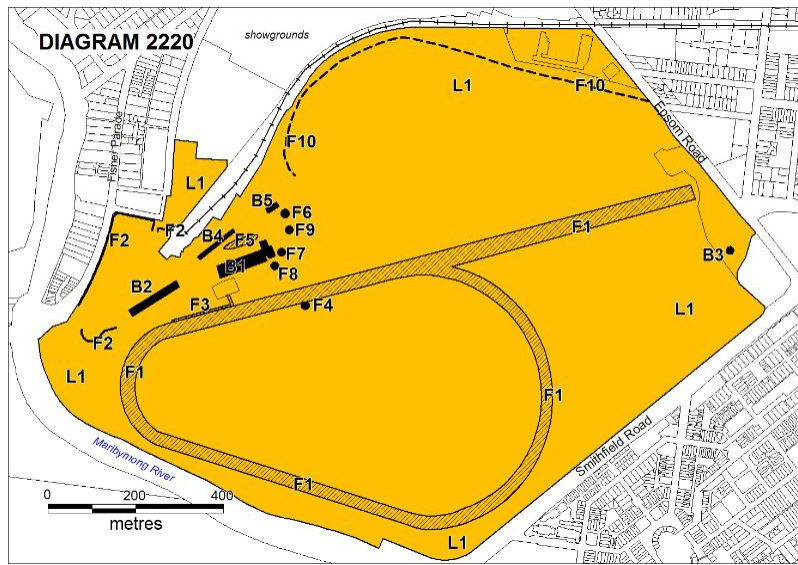


# Victorian Heritage Database Report FLEMINGTON RACECOURSE



**Location:**

EPSOM ROAD AND SMITHFIELD ROAD FLEMINGTON, MELBOURNE CITY

**Heritage Status / Level of Significance:**

Registered

**Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H2220**

**Listing Authority: VHR**

**Heritage Overlay Number: HO272****Statement of Significance:**

What is significant?

Flemington Racecourse has operated continuously since 1840, when the first race meeting was held here on the Maribyrnong River flats north of the city, and in 1848 352 acres of Crown Land was reserved as a public racecourse. Since then the course has undergone continual development and change. In the 1850s racing in Victoria boomed, with many courses established throughout the colony, but the annual autumn meeting at Flemington was already established as the main event on the racing calendar. In 1859 the results of the Australian Championship Sweepstakes were telegraphed to Sydney, a first for an Australian sporting event, and a railway line to the course opened in 1861. In the same year the first Melbourne Cup was run, over a two mile course, an event which has been held annually since then and has become internationally famous. The Victoria Racing Club (VRC) was formed in 1864 to organise racing at Flemington, and major improvements at the racecourse were carried out under the administration of the first two secretaries, Robert Cooper Bagot (secretary 1864-1881) and his successor Henry Byron Moore (secretary 1881-1925). Bagot replaced the coarse grass on the track, graded the lawns, and drained the swampy land in the centre of the course to make 'the Flat', with that area and 'the Hill' becoming the main viewing areas. In 1873 he built a members' grandstand, known as Bagot's Cowshed, at the base of the hill. Moore built four new grandstands, one a bluestone stand built in 1883-86 and incorporating elegant vice-regal facilities, elements of which survive beneath the Old Hill Stand. At the same time the existing bluestone walls were built around the base of the hill and, more extensively, around the northern perimeter of the Hill. Moore also initiated the creation of the impressive lawns and gardens, particularly the rose gardens, which are still an important feature of the course. Three paintings done from 1887 by the Austrian painter Carl Kahler, now in the Committee Rooms, show the appearance of the course at that time. Another initiative of Moore's was to establish a Distressed Jockey's Fund to assist injured jockeys, and in 1893 he built at the course a Jockeys' Convalescent Lodge, designed by the architect William Salway. The first newsreel filmed in Australia was taken at Flemington on Cup Day in 1896. In 1922 the VRC began a radical redevelopment of the course, with the major focus shifting further to the east. Many of the early timber structures were demolished, Bagot's stand became a public stand, and a new Members' Stand, designed by the architects Robertson & Marks, was built in 1924. The legalisation of the totalisator for betting in 1930 required the construction of new tote buildings in 1931, several of which remain (though altered) around the betting ring north of the 1924

Members' Stand. Racing continued at Flemington during both World Wars, though part of the racecourse was occupied by the armed forces during WWII. Further major redevelopment occurred during the 1950s, with the construction of what is now known as the Old Hill Stand and the Lawn Stand replacing Bagot's Cowshed. Fashion has always played an important part in Flemington race meetings, and the 'Fashions in the Field', which has become an institution at the course, was introduced at the Centenary Melbourne Cup in 1960. Many early structures have been demolished to make way for improved facilities. Further expansion has seen the construction of the new Hill Stand in 1978-79 and the Prince of Wales Stand in 1984, with The Grandstand (a new stand for members) built above this in 2000. Further changes have been carried out, particularly in the birdcage (where horses are stabled while awaiting their races) and car parking areas, in the early twenty-first century as part of a new master plan for the course.

The Flemington Racecourse occupies a 127 hectares site on flat land bordered to the south and west by the Maribyrnong River and to the north by a raised escarpment running along the northern boundary, which culminates in the Hill at the north-west corner. Internally there is a road system which accesses all parts of the course, and has entrances from Epsom Road, Leonard Crescent, Fisher Parade and Smithfield Road. The centre of the site contains the course proper, with the Flat and two other tracks and a car parking area inside this. To the north are most of the site infrastructure and public facilities (grandstands, betting facilities, public and members' areas and car parking) and to the east are recently-constructed horse training facilities, the new VRC Administration Offices and the former Jockeys' Convalescent Lodge. The most significant features are: the main race course, including the old distance post, the oldest feature at the course, and the horse walk from the track to the mounting yard; the 1924 Inter-War Stripped Classical style Members' Stand; the remains of the 1880s bluestone stand (part of which lies beneath the Old Hill Stand terraces); the 1880s bluestone walls at the base of the Hill and along Fisher Parade, Leonard Crescent and adjacent to the Hill Gate (which retain some remnant painted signage); the picturesque octagonal former Convalescent Jockeys' Lodge near Epsom Road; the betting ring with its old elm trees, bordered by the 1930s tote buildings and the 1920s men's toilets; the statues of Phar Lap, Bart Cummings and Makybe Diva; the chronographic clock in the VRC Committee Rooms; the 1870s brass bell near the Racecourse Manager's Office; the murals by Harold Freedman depicting the history of thoroughbred racing in the Hill Stand; the Members' Drive, its extensive plantings, and the entrance box at the Epsom Road end; and the plantings, particularly the roses throughout the public and members' areas and the elms at the western end of the course and in the betting ring.

How is it significant?

Flemington Racecourse is of aesthetic, architectural, historical and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Flemington Racecourse is architecturally significant for its collection of structures relating to racing in Victoria since the

nineteenth century, which demonstrate the various stages of development of the course. The most significant of these are the remaining nineteenth century structures (the 1880s bluestone stand remnants and bluestone walls and the former Convalescent Jockeys' Lodge), the 1920s Members' Stand and betting ring, and the 1930s tote buildings. The remnant of the 1880s bluestone grandstand, though partly hidden beneath the Old Hill Stand terraces, is an interesting example of a nineteenth century grandstand and demonstrates building techniques of the period. The bluestone walls at the base of The Hill and along Fisher Parade and Leonard Crescent are also of interest as examples of nineteenth century bluestone construction. The former Convalescent Jockeys' Lodge is of significance as a possibly unique example in Victoria of a centralised hospital building, a form which became popular in the 1880s in England. It is an exceptional example of a picturesque structure of the late nineteenth century. The 1924 Members' Stand is significant as an unusual and largely intact example of a 1920s Inter-War Stripped Classical style grandstand.

Flemington Racecourse is historically significant as the oldest racecourse in Victoria, which has operated continuously since 1840. It has been the site of the running of the Melbourne Cup since its inception in 1861 until the present day. This is Australia's most famous horse race, which 'stops the nation' and has been a public holiday in Victoria since 1877. The Melbourne Cup has been a stimulus for the arts, including literature, painting, drama, ballet and fashion design. The 1870s chronograph now in the Committee Room, once used to time the races, is significant as a fine example of nineteenth century clockmaking, and as the most famous work of the Melbourne jeweller Thomas Gaunt, who became a household name in Australia and England for his manufacture of large public clocks.

Flemington Racecourse is of social significance as a venue of Victoria's and Australia's greatest horse races, especially the Melbourne Cup. This is accepted as being one of the world's great horse races with its own distinctive features and is centrepiece of the Victorian spring racing carnival. Racing is one of Australia's major spectator sports, and Derby Day 2006 attracted a crowd of 129,089, one of the largest crowds in Australian sporting history. Flemington racecourse is an important venue for Australian fashion, and the Spring Carnival is a major part of the fashion industry's year. Oaks Day has since as early as the 1880s been seen as a 'ladies' day' and has continued to be recognised as the fashion event of the Melbourne year.

Flemington Racecourse has aesthetic significance as one of the finest racecourses in the world, set in an expansive landscape with views towards the City of Melbourne. It is significant for its works of art, including the Harold Freedman murals in the Hill Stand, which are an extraordinary depiction of the history of thoroughbred racing; for the bronze statues of Phar Lap and Makybe Diva, two of Australia's greatest racehorses; and of Bart Cummings, considered to be Australia's greatest horse trainer. It is also significant for its gardens, particularly the rose displays, which are carefully cultivated to be at their most spectacular during the Spring Racing Carnival, when the Melbourne Cup is run.

Construction Date Range	1840 -
Architect / Designer	Salway, William Hanlon, HL
Municipality	MELBOURNE CITY
Other names	
Hermes number	13910
Property number	

*This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to [Planning Schemes Online](#)*