

RACECOURSE

At the meeting held on 29 February 1864, Mayor Allingham was instructed to write to the Colonial Secretary requesting the government to invest in council that piece of land known as Armidale race course for a public recreation ground. The Department of Lands informed council that there was no objection to the application. A formal application was made on 18 May and the Department of Lands informed council in September that the Armidale race course, about 80 acres would be vested in council as a public recreation ground. It was dedicated by *Gazette* on 22 December 1865 as a race course and the first trustees appointed on 14 May 1866 were John Moore, Thomas Bryan Fitzgerald, John Trim, James Tysoe and James Mulligan.

Council directed the council clerk in July 1866 to write to the Minister for Lands and seek the deeds of the race course reserve. By July 1868 problems were arising over the racecourse and council's rights. Council was informed in August by a solicitor Mr Abbott, the delay in obtaining the deeds was caused by a defect in the Land Titles Act where such grants could not be made to trustees. In an attempt to make the racecourse a source of revenue for the municipality, council decided to build a fence around the race course in August and in October, the tender of Michael McCann for £300 was accepted. This work was completed in May 1869.

A committee was established in February 1869 to improve the racecourse including the planting of trees and shrubs. Thirty four pounds was set aside for gates to be erected by a Mr Mason in March. Council was concerned that revenue should be raised from use of the racecourse. In June council received a report from the by-laws committee on laws for the reserve and took action to forward them to the government for confirmation. Concern was also expressed by council in July about the removal of palings from the fences and rewards were 'offered for the apprehension of the villains'.¹ In October George Holmes was given three weeks to paint the gates, wickets and posts for £3 15s. Council determined to drain the south-eastern corner of the course in November and approved the allocation of £14 for ploughing and seeding. It was decided to erect a stockyard for the convenience of lessees and £15 was set aside for construction and erection of three wicket gates. Council adopted a motion in December that a stockyard of four rails with slip rails for cattle and horses be erected in the south west corner of the course.

Council adopted a motion in January 1870 to provide a well on the racecourse and all appliances for watering stock at a cost of £25. Stock could then be depastured for a fee. In August R.I. Perrott suggested planting ornamental trees on the racecourse and offered 100 oaks and 25 pines towards the project. By November 1871 no tenders had been received for erection of the stockyard and the mayor had one erected by a Mr Duffy for £7. Initially council rejected the

¹ Council minutes, 6 July 1869.

cost because aldermen felt it was exorbitant but finally passed the account in December. That month, a waterhole in the course was also discussed and following an approach by the Armidale Cricket Club, council also discussed the possibility of enclosing a portion of the course for cricket.

The decision to rent the racecourse reserve was made in November 1872 and Mr Brereton's tender of £35 per year for the racecourse grass was accepted. Mr Joseph Wynne's tender for digging and packing the waterhole was accepted in March 1873. He was given six weeks to complete the work and the work was completed on 17 April. In December council was informed by the Minister of Lands that the racecourse could not be handed over to the council unless by an Act of Parliament as the grant had been issued.

The *Government Gazette*, 28 August 1871 published detailed by-laws of the Armidale racecourse reserve. Trustees were John Moore, Thomas Bryan Fitzgerald, John Trim, Joseph Scholes and James Tysoe.

A 1921 map of Armidale showed a cricket ground and pavilion within the racecourse. By March 1931 the racecourse was still managed by trustees appointed by the Minister for Lands. The New England Jockey Club conducted races at the course; the trustees paid £198 rates to council though they were not required to pay them by law and various sporting bodies conducted cricket, hockey, football and golf.

In November 1945 the trustees of the racecourse were informed council would like to have a conference 'on a proposal to revoke the dedication of the land as a racecourse and its use for town planned building sites'.²

By October 1947 two meetings had been held to discuss the provision of sports areas in Armidale. The finance committee felt that the recommended sports areas in Armidale was too expensive. Aware of the need to provide sporting areas, council took action to 'formulate a plan for the preparation of the racecourse areas as a sports area ... and call a conference of all sporting bodies and the racecourse trustees'.³ The Armidale West Progress Association objected to the proposal to develop the racecourse as a sports area. It was considered the area 'was too far from West Armidale and not suitable for a city sports area'.⁴ Next month, the Armidale Schools and Colleges' Sports Association asked to be consulted in discussions about the proposal 'particularly with reference to the establishment of an athletic track'.⁵

² *Armidale Express*, 14 November 1945, p.8.

³ *Armidale Express*, 15 October 1947, p.11.

⁴ *Armidale Express*, 27 October 1947, p.6.

⁵ *Armidale Express*, 26 November 1947, p.15.

The mayor's annual report indicated that by December 1948 four new cricket grounds, a hockey field and two football grounds as well as a shelter shed were placed inside the racecourse.

By January 1956 council was considering a further proposal to develop housing in the racecourse. The attempt to have the racecourse set aside as future housing blocks was defeated in August 1958 and council decided to retain the zoning as 'Recreational Purposes'. Twelve months later Mayor Ald P.G. Love outlined a plan for the trustees of the racecourse to retire so that council could develop the course 'as a sports centre, catering more fully for cricket, basketball, cycling and other sports'.⁶

In October 1964 members of the Armidale Improvement and Beautification Committee expressed concern over council's decision not to object to a galvanised iron fence around the racecourse.

In November 1964 the New England Cricket Association voted in favour of two more wickets on the racecourse. The area of 76 acres was gazetted for a racecourse and public recreation on 5 November 1965. Council staff levelled two new fields on the racecourse in October 1966 and improved existing fields there. By December there were seven cricket pitches on the racecourse. The proposal by the Chamber of Commerce that the course be given over to housing, led to an expression of alarm by the New England Cricket Association. The *Armidale Express*, 7 December 1966 saw 'the racecourse area as one of Armidale's priceless assets, and to do anything but as it is now used for recreation, would be a tragic blunder'.

⁶ *Armidale Express*, 19 August 1959, p.2.