

# Off to the races

The two restored houses that form part of *The Switch Kensington* have been associated with the nearby Randwick Racecourse for over 120 years.

The story of Randwick Racecourse, located just to the south, dates back to 1832 when permission was granted by Governor Bourke to hold horse races there. The track was called 'Sandy Course' due to its poor quality, and races were soon moved to Homebush. However, in the late 1850s, the Australian Jockey Club applied to use the old Sandy Course as a permanent racecourse, and the new racecourse quickly became a popular destination for tourists and Sydneysiders.

The land around the racecourse, including Doncaster Avenue, was used for facilities and accommodation associated with the racecourse. In 1896 a two-storey Victorian terrace was built at 10-12 Doncaster Avenue, with No.10 being used as a stables and riding school.

A Federation house for senior racecourse staff was built at 4-8 Doncaster Avenue in 1914, with George T. Law, the manager of the racecourse, living there from 1916 to 1933. In 1957, 12 Doncaster Avenue was acquired by the Australian Jockey Club and, in 2024, 10-12 Doncaster Avenue became part of new student accommodation, *The Switch Kensington*.



G.T. Law, c1900s  
(City of Sydney Archives)



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# The Switch Kensington

## Stories from history

The site of *The Switch Kensington* has a long history with many stories to tell.

From its time as a site for stone tool production to its close relationship with the horseracing industry, it has been an important place in the landscape for thousands of years.



The Switch Kensington, Sydney  
4-18 Doncaster Avenue, Kensington, NSW 2033

The Switch

# The stones that sailed the globe

This is the traditional Country of the Gadigal and Bidjigal peoples, who have cared for the land and waterways here for tens of thousands of years.

When the First Fleet arrived in Sydney in 1788, they were among the first Aboriginal peoples to encounter European colonists, beginning a relationship marked by violence, dispossession and disease. Yet fascinating cultural exchanges were also taking place. Evidence of one such exchange can be seen in the artefacts uncovered by archaeologists in 2018 in the Randwick Stabling Yards, just behind Doncaster Avenue. Thousands of Aboriginal stone artefacts were discovered, including a large number of tools made from flint.



Flints found at the Randwick Stabling Yards (GML Heritage)

This flint did not naturally occur in the Sydney region. Analysis revealed that the flint came from the River Thames in London. The flint stones may have been used as ballast in a ship headed from England to Sydney in the early 1800s, where the ballast was discarded and acquired by the Aboriginal community for making stone tools.

Archaeologists believe that this area, which was originally sand dunes surrounded by wetlands, was used as a quarry where sophisticated techniques were used to manufacture these stone tools. The amazing story of the stones that sailed across the world is one of the many ways that Aboriginal people and new colonists interacted during the early days of European occupation.



Bennelong Point from Dawes Point, c1804 (State Library of NSW)

# A model suburb

The land around Kensington was originally wetlands, with the Lachlan Swamps supplying water to the Sydney colony from the 1830s. A shantytown of one-room huts known as Tin Town housed workers for the mills and tanning facilities at the Lachlan Swamps in this area. A proposal to build a village here in the 1850s was stopped by development restrictions, but in the late 1880s the restrictions were lifted, a tramline was constructed connecting the city to the local Randwick area and Randwick Racecourse, and the area was ready for development. A planning competition for a model suburb was announced in 1889.



The first subdivision of the Kensington Model Estate, 1891 (State Library of NSW)

The suburb was to be named Kensington, after London's distinguished suburb. The winning entry was titled '*Rus In Urbe*', Latin for 'country in the city', and showed Kensington as sophisticated and beautiful, with straight streets lined with trees, elegant terraces, pathways for nature walks, and Doncaster Avenue as the main boulevard. The first lots of land in the model suburb of Kensington went on sale on 11 April 1891. Over one hundred years after the first land sales, it has grown into a vibrant community, with people from across the world choosing Kensington for their new home.



Kensington Estate, early 1900s (Randwick City Library)