

The best of the best: Brisbane courses

INTRODUCTION

Through a series of articles written by “Plus” in the Telegraph and by H. Vernon Morcom and J. Kenny in the Courier-Mail this research offers a glimpse of the Brisbane golf courses of the 1930’s and the thinking among leading golfers and administrators of the period of what constituted an ideal golf course. A summary of the articles is provided here. References and links to the articles are provided at the end of the paper for those that wish to enjoy the full story. Comparative aerial photographs showing the courses as they were in 1947 and more recently, in 2017, are also included here.

The author acknowledges the opportunity to undertake this research using the National Library of Australia’s online database, Trove.

THE IDEAL COURSE

The concept of an ideal golf course challenged the mind of “Plus”, the Brisbane **Telegraph’s** golf columnist early in 1937. It followed a similar exercise among Melbourne golfers for their sand-belt courses. The motivation for the exercise was the interest in having one or more of the Queensland golf courses being placed on the open championship rota.

“Plus” had started the conversation with a brief treatise on the “Ideal Course” (19th February 1937) by selecting holes that were “typical and outstanding in their class”. Such a course would comprise four short holes and three long holes that would not-normally be reached in two shots of wooden clubs. The remaining eleven holes to require two shots and ranging in length such that one would “almost in reach from the tee to one just in reach of a drive and full brassie”. “Plus” noted that newer English courses built to that specification failed to make the championship rota while the old courses continued to be selected. He thought that natural golf holes must be considered superior to artificial holes despite “the greater distance of the modern ball, the greater efficiency of the steel shaft and other improvements to modern clubs, and the superior surface imparted to fairways and putting greens by the course managers”. “Plus” further identified the characteristics of holes of the ideal course. Short holes should vary in length from 140 yards to 220 yards for “which the all-air route is the only correct shot, the surroundings are to be taken into account and the element of psychology not overlooked”. The long holes “must be well over 500 yards” and “in different directions and crosswise to the prevailing wind prevailing in the region”. The two-shot holes “must be varied not only as regards distance but also with a view to distinct characteristics of setting, scenery, hazards, slopes and dog leg bends to right and left”, where “placing of the drive with a view to the second shot is a distinct consideration”, and “the protection of the greens must vary with the length of the second shot necessary to get well home to the pin after a full and well-placed drive”. The second shot to the green “should run the gamut of all the irons from the no. 7 or 8 up to the No. 1 or spoon”. He added, “no two holes should closely resemble each other in general characteristics or play” and “no hole should directly face the rising or setting sun”. The opening hole should be “an easy two-shotter with the whole of the fairway and green in full view, so that there is no delay in dispatching the field”. The finishing two holes should be testing “so that the player cannot relax the strain until the final putt is holed”. Plus’s course for the “Ideal Round” was published as part of the article (“Plus” 1937).

“Plus’” Ideal Round

Hole No.	Yards.	Par	
1	299	4	1st Royal Queensland
2	435	4	10th Brisbane
3	194	3	3rd Victoria Park
4	412	4	5th Gailes
5	405	4	14th Indooroopilly
6	522	5	2nd Virginia
7	195	3	4th Brisbane
8	320	4	2nd Sandy Gallop
9	435	4	15th Indooroopilly
Out	3,217	35	
10	397	4	2nd Oxley
11	132	3	12th Gailes
12	365	4	3rd Enoggera
13	528	5	10th Wynnum
14	423	4	5th Sandgate
15	180	3	2nd Nudgee
16	320	4	3rd Ipswich
17	533	5	4th Royal Queensland
18	380	4	18th Enoggera
In	3,258	36	Total 6,475 yards. Par 71.

On the following day (**Telegraph**, 20th February 1937) ("Plus" 1937), "Plus" explained why holes from the thirteen Brisbane metropolitan courses were chosen in his "imaginary composite course" that he built having given careful thought to the various holes and their relation one to another. He opened with the 299 yard 1st at Royal Queensland where the tee is alongside the clubhouse and the hole in full view. The 405 yard 14th at Indooroopilly formed his fifth hole as it provided "a spectacular drive from a height and a good second shot required". The 132 yard 12th hole at Gailes was described as the "best protected short hole we have and demands a perfect pitch" and included as the eleventh hole. The 15th at Nudgee was said to replicate the sixth at Pebble Beach, California. "Plus" closed the round with the 533 yard 4th at Royal Queensland (no. 17 – river on right, heavy rough on the left and thoroughly guarded green) and 380 yard 18th at Enoggera (no. 18 – long drive required to reach the green perched up on rising ground).

The two **Telegraph** articles appear to have failed to draw any interest from golfers. On the question of adding a Queensland course to the championship rota, following a championship played at Yeerongpilly, "Plus" again commented in the **Telegraph**, 28th May 1937 ("Plus" 1937), that "we will have an Australian championship when we have a course fit for it". Again, in the **Telegraph** on 8th October 1937, "Plus" opined that "it becomes bounden duty of every club which has the remotest chance of being the favoured choice of the southern selectors to put its house in order and be worthy of the honour when it comes" ("Plus" 1937). The following week, 15th October 1937, a proposal for a new course at Caloundra was described as having many features new to Brisbane course and that "the general contour of the country here lends itself admirably to the making of a first class course and every advantage has been taken of it" ("Plus" 1937). Nine holes of that course would not open until 1951 and the full 18 holes in 1966.

THE CONCEPT TAKES-OFF

J. Kenny, golf reporter for the **Courier-Mail**, picked up the Brisbane composite course challenge in an article on 11th June 1938 (Kenny 1938). In it he announced that, following selection of the holes, the course of courses was "to be played by the two greatest rivals in Queensland professional golf", O.V. Walker and E.W. Anderson. Kenny's article followed the first two of a series of six articles published in the **Courier-Mail** on golf course architecture by Mr Vernon Morecom in which he covered site selection (Morcom, *Courier Mail*, 14 May 1938. p 11), the purpose of the course and hole parameters including a

length of “7000 yards for titles” (18 May 1938), principles of hole design (21 May 1938), grass types and turfing the course (25 May 1938), remodelling and modernising courses (28 May 1938) and requirements of the greenkeeper (4 June 1938).

Kenny started off the selection of holes with a proposed course of 6685 yards that comprised four holes at Brisbane GC, four at Royal Queensland GC, two each from Enoggera GC (now Keperra CGC), Gales GC, Victoria Park GC and Indooroopilly GC, and one each from Virginia GC and Peninsula GC. Only two of Kenny’s holes featured in “Plus’s” course of 1937, the 195 yard 4th at Brisbane GC and the 383 yard 4th at Royal Queensland GC. Course descriptions providing the bogeys and yardages of all holes in the Brisbane courses had been circulated to clubs and players. The **Courier-Mail** planned to publish proposed courses over the following two weeks.

A course was proposed by Mr W. Hendry of Wynnum was published on 22nd June 1938 (Kenny, *Courier-Mail*, 22 June 1938. p 12). He included the 126 yard 3rd hole at Wynnum in his course which, with eight other of his selections, would make the final course.

Victoria Park GC’s Handicapper, Mr R.B. Dore, submitted a course that was published (Kenny 1938, *Courier Mail*, on 27th June 1938. p 9). Of the three holes at Victoria Park that he included, only the 589 yard 18th made the final course and was included as the final hole. Hendry also selected the short 3rd hole at Wynnum and had a total of six holes in the final course.

Len King, secretary of the Royal Queensland GC, proposed a course of 6769 yards (Kenny, *Courier-Mail*, 21st June 1938. p 9.). The course emphasised the “strength in length” comprised only three par 3 holes of 159, 195 and 245 yards, three par 5 holes but only one over 500 yards and, of the twelve par 4 holes, five were over 400 yards. The par 72 course finished with “a quartet of stiff two shotters” of which the “15th and 17th invite real slams off the tee, and the others respond only to controlled steadiness”.

On 6th July 1938, the **Courier-Mail** published three composite courses submitted by Royal Queensland professional, Alex Denholm, Victoria Park GC member G.G. McCartney, and, J. McInnes, an assistant professional at Indooroopilly GC (Kenny 1938). Denholm included seven Royal Queensland holes in his course. McCartney’s course was par 73 but less than 6500 yards and closed with two par 5 holes, the 9th at Brisbane GC and 10th at Wynnum GC. The course selected by McInnes was also par 73 and measured 6626 yards with the five par 5 holes evenly spaced across the two nines.

Discussion of the ideal course took a break while the British Open Championship was played at the Royal St. George course, Sandwich, (**Courier-Mail**, 7th July 1938) before completion of the selection of courses with submissions from by Mr L.E. Walker, a vice-president of Victoria Park GC, and Gales professional, Mr A.S. McArthur. Published in the **Courier-Mail** on 26th July 1938 (Kenny 1938), both courses measured over 6670 yards and provided a good variety in length from short one-shotters of under 130 yards to three-shotters well over 530 yards. The article stated that Walker intended to play his course himself and that State professional champion, Mr E.W. Anderson, and runner-up 1937 Australian Open, Mr O. Walker, would soon play a course arranged from the most popular holes of the courses submitted.

TESTING BRISBANE’S IDEAL COURSE

A page 1 story (Kenny, *Courier-Mail*, 3rd August 1938. p 12) announced that Anderson and Walker would play the selected course that day. It proclaimed the course of 6791 yards was “longer than any course in Queensland” and a “severe test”. Details of the course were included in a page 12 article along with an analysis of the submitted selections.

The following day, Kenny wrote a detailed report on the match during which Walker prevailed over Anderson scoring 72 to 79 (Kenny, Courier-Mail, 4th August 1938. p 12). The report included descriptions of many of the highlights of the play, hole-by-hole scores and club selections for both Walker and Anderson. Kenny wrote "The story of Walker and Anderson's rounds is told in the following, table, in which the abbreviations used are: D., driver; S., spoon; figures, iron clubs; C, chips from fairways or shots from bunkers; P., putts."

Hole	Yards (Metres)	Selected Hole	Bogey	Par	Walker	Anderson
1	371 (338)	2nd Royal Qld	4	4	D, 7, 3P - 5	D, 6, 3P - 5
2	390 (355)	7th Brisbane	4	4	D, 4, C, 1P - 4	D, 2, 2P - 4
3	195 (178)	4th Brisbane	3	3	5, 2P - 3	4, C, 1P - 3
4	528 (481)	4th Royal Qld	5	5	D, B, C, 2P - 5	D, B, 7, C, 1P - 5
5	435 (396)	10th Brisbane	4	4	D, 3, 1P - 3	D, 2, C, 3P - 6
6	126 (115)	3rd Wynnum	3	3	7, 2P - 3	7, 2P - 3
7	435 (396)	10th Indooroopilly	4	4	D, 5, 2P - 4	D, S, C, 1P - 4
8	412 (375)	5th Gales	4	4	D, 2, 2P - 4	D, 5, 2P - 4
9	429 (391)	15th Gales	5	4	D, 2, C, 2P - 5	D, 3, 3P - 5
	3321 (3027)		36	35	36	39
10	434 (396)	10th Royal Qld	5	4	D, S, C, 1P - 4	D, S, C, 2P - 5
11	411 (375)	8th Royal Qld	4	4	D, 7, 7, 2P - 5	D, 5, 3P - 5
12	414 (377)	16th Gales	4	4	D, 5, 2P - 4	D, D, 2, 1P - 4
13	165 (150)	14th Royal Qld	3	3	6, 1P - 2	5, 2P - 3
14	395 (360)	15th Indooroopilly	4	4	D, 7, C, 1P - 4	D, 2, C, 2P - 5
15	427 (389)	15th Brisbane	4	4	D, 4, C, 2P - 5	D, 4, C, 1P - 4
16	240 (219)	2nd Victoria Park	4	3	D, 2P - 3	D, C, C, 2P - 5
17	395 (360)	17th Brisbane	4	4	D, 7, 2P - 4	D, 7, 2P - 4
18	589 (537)	18th Victoria Park	5	5	D, S, C, C, 1P - 5	D, S, C, 2P - 5
	3470 (3163)		37	35	36	40
	6791 (6189)		73	70	72	79

NOTE: The author assumes that the "B" on the 4th hole played by both players is an abbreviation for Brassie.

Kenny reported that Walker considered that "it was a great experience" and that he scored better than he had expected. Kenny described many of the highlights of the round's including many of Walker's brilliant recoveries and Anderson's failure to handle the greens, 3-putting many times and failing to place his drives as well as Walker. In the report Kenny said that "Anderson considered Indooroopilly's 15th the most difficult hole in the course, a distinction Walker gave Brisbane's seventh. As was expected, the course called for use of all main clubs, although not every one of the 18 Walker had in his bag or Anderson's 19."

Footnote on holding the Australian Open championship in Queensland:

Royal Queensland GC hosted the championship in 1947. Since then the event has been held at Gales GC (1955), Royal Queensland GC (1966, 1973) and The Grand GC, Nerang (2001) (Wikipedia 2022).

Author

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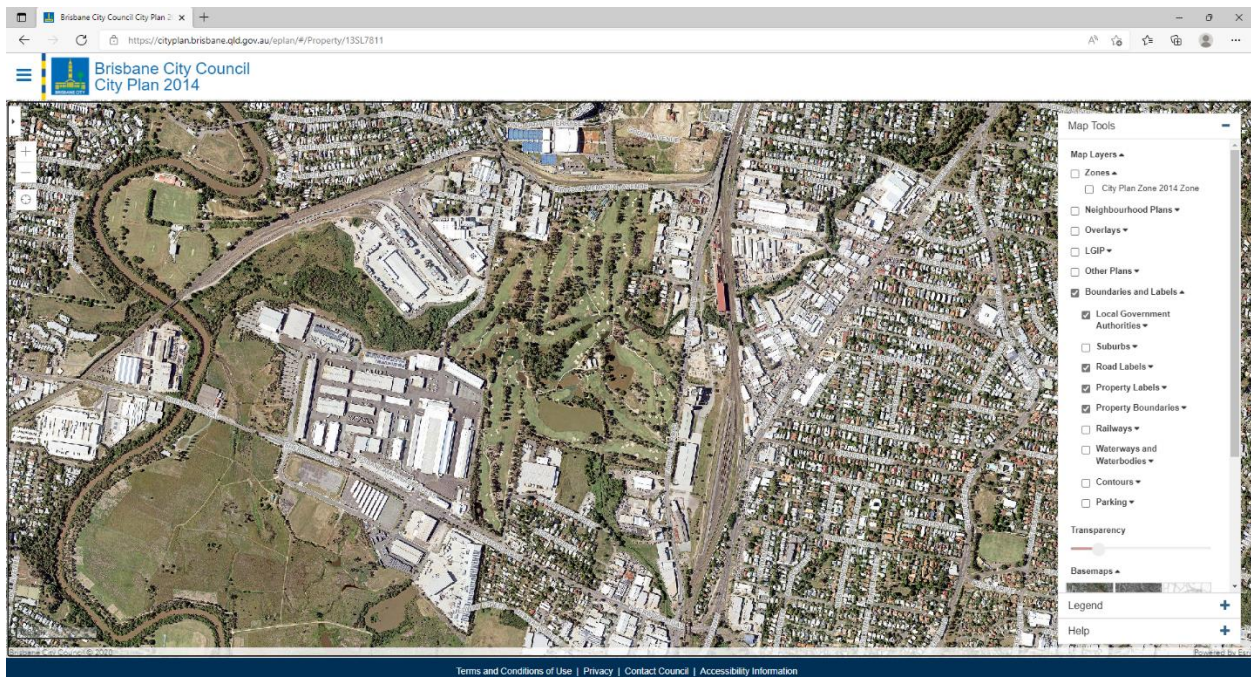
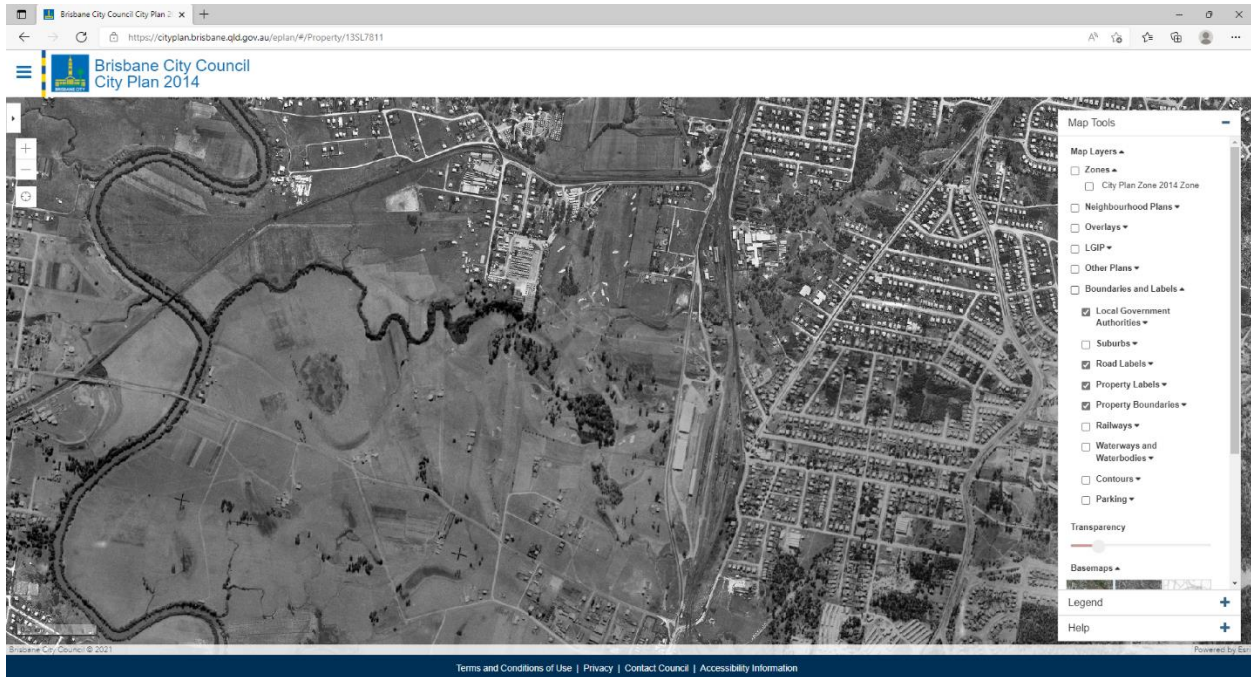
A keen golfer for some 60 years, he is a member of the Eastern Golf Club in Melbourne's Yarra Valley and a regular photographer of club and inter-club competitions.

Ian enjoys his games of hickory golf and has had published previous research of the transition from hickory to steel in Australia and the 1937 Melbourne composite course.

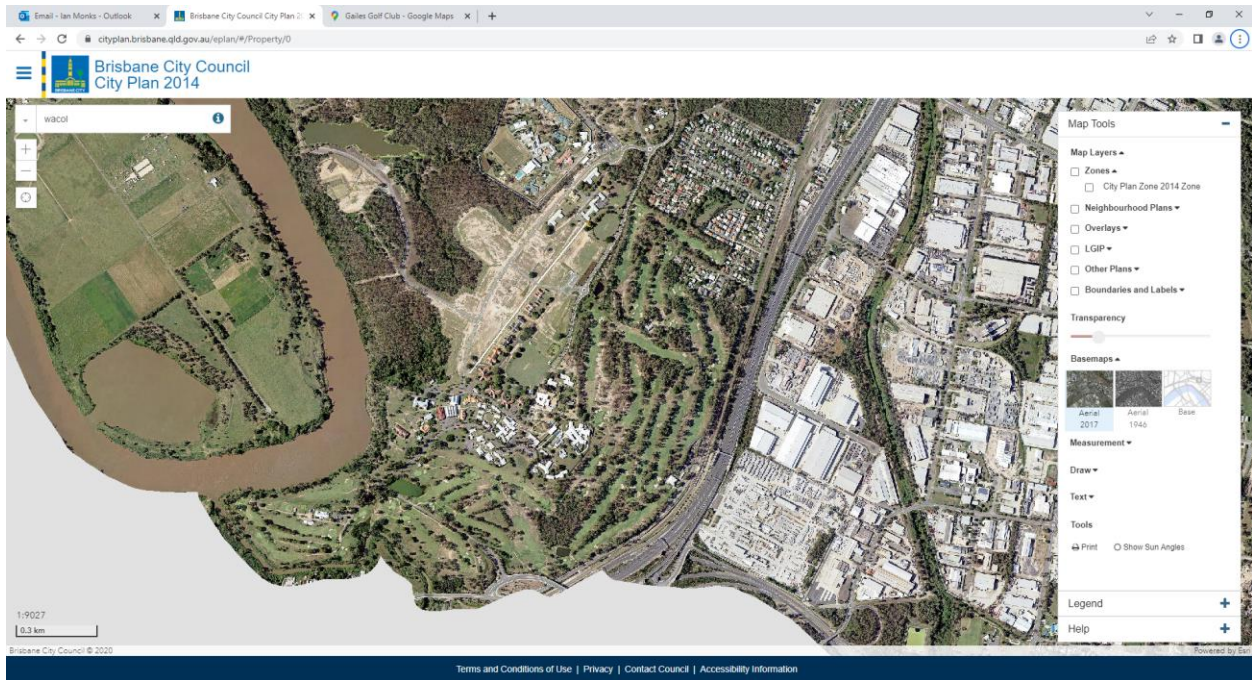


AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS (Brisbane City Council 2022)

Brisbane GC 1947 and 2017

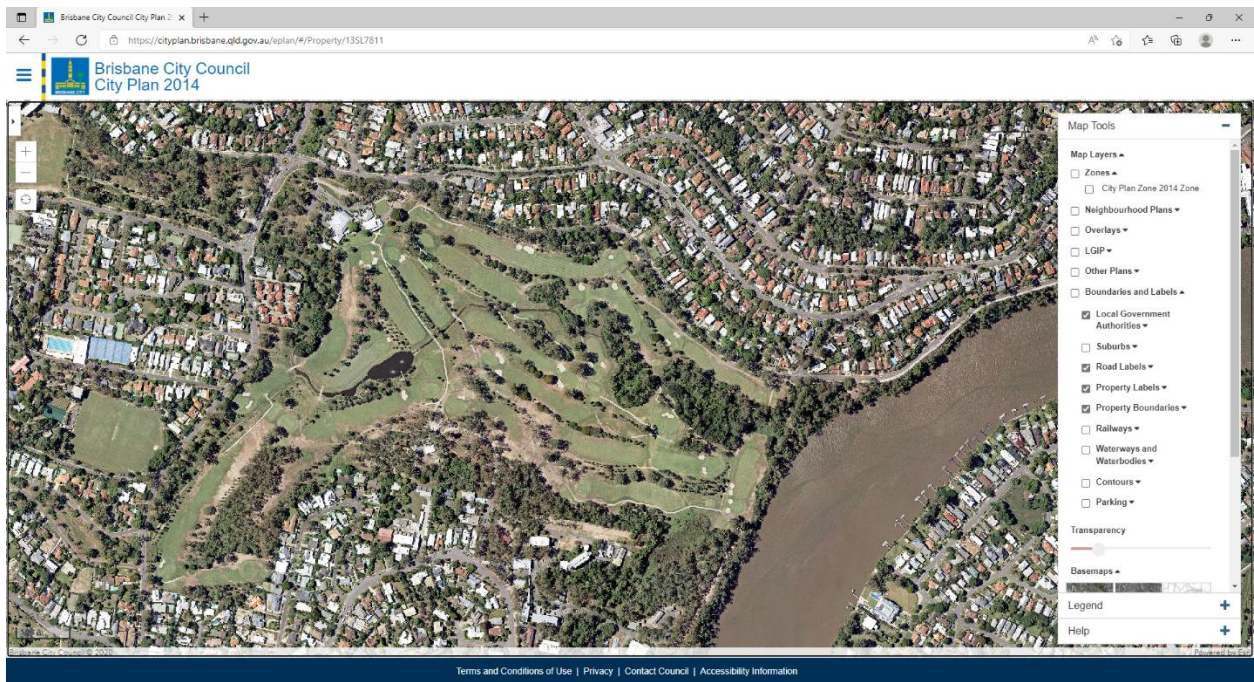
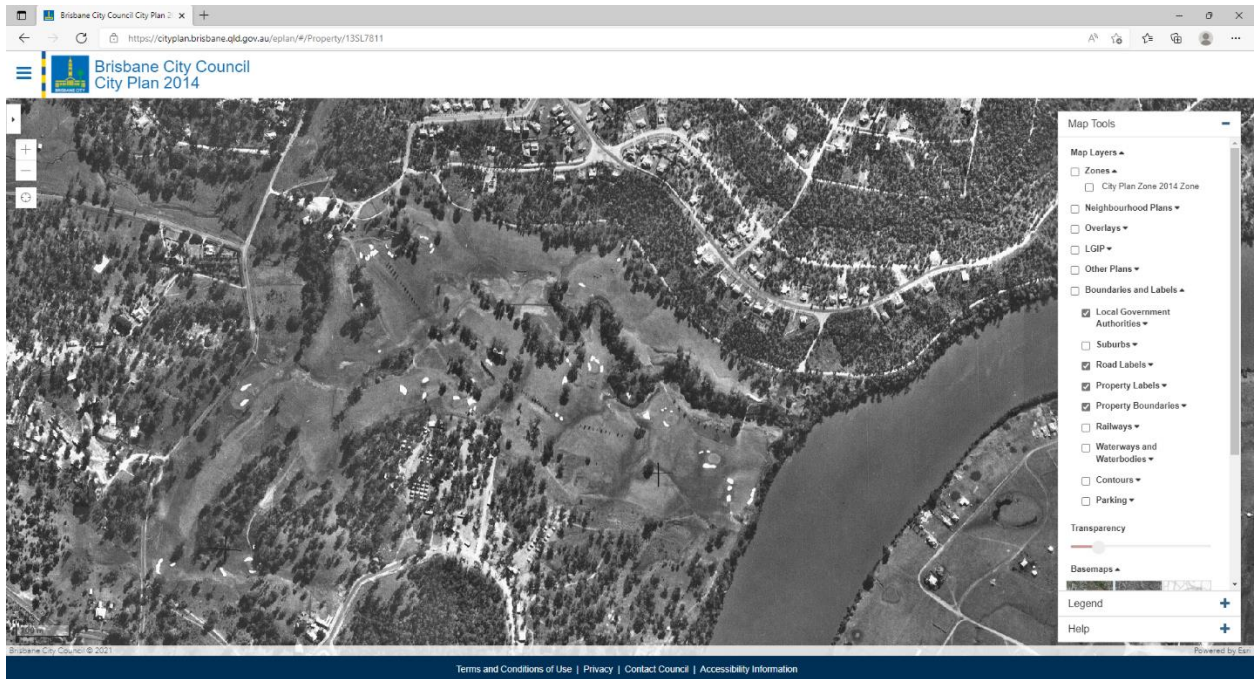


Gailes GC 1947 and 2017



(White areas indicate land outside the Brisbane City boundary)

Indooroopilly GC 1947 and 2017 (now the St Lucia golf course)

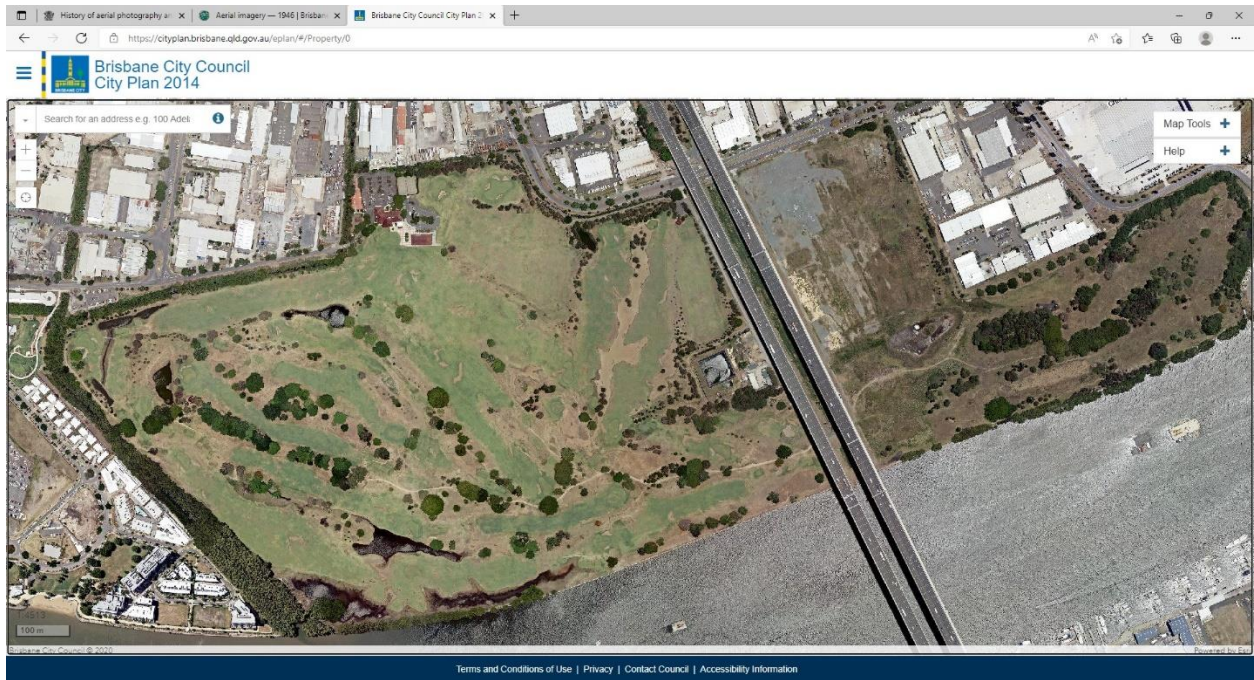
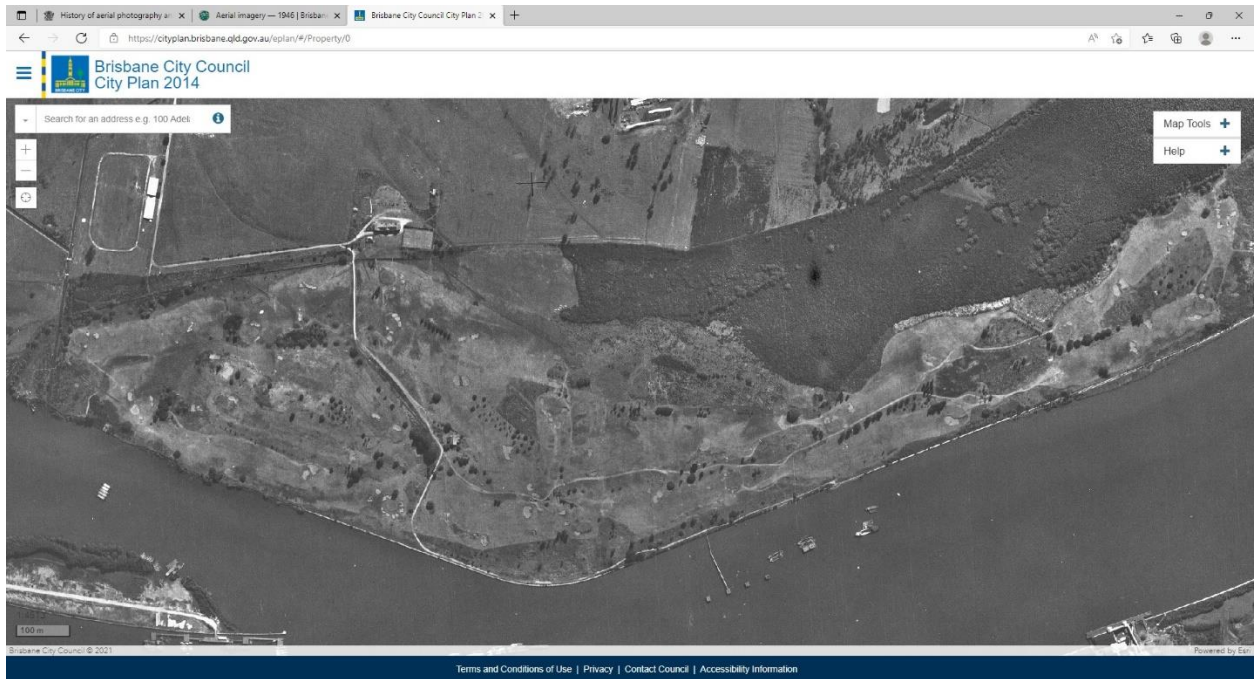


Keperra GC 1947 and 2017



(White areas indicate land outside the Brisbane City boundary)

Royal Queensland 1947 and 2017



Victoria Park GC 1947 and 2017



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