

## **Blackpool (St Annes)**

Blackpool had emerged as a holiday destination by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but it was period between the two world wars which saw the town establish itself as one of the leading seaside resorts in England. The subsequent growth of the town then resulted in endless forms of entertainment being created for over eight million visitors per year.

One such form of entertainment was of course the new sport of greyhound racing introduced to Britain in 1926 and Blackpool soon had a track of its own. The British Greyhounds Sports Club (Blackpool) Ltd purchased land on the east side of St Annes Road, south of Highfield Road and duly constructed a new greyhound stadium. Around the same time a trotting track was being built by Charles Smith who had also purchased land south of the Highfield Road and it would sit next door on the northeast side of the greyhound track. Sometimes referred to as Blackpool Racecourse but having the full name of the Blackpool Trotting Track and Highfield Road Sports Club, it should not be confused with the original Blackpool Racecourse or Clifton Park.

The greyhound stadium was ready for action in the summer of 1927 and opened in front of the 5,000 eager spectators on the Saturday afternoon of 30<sup>th</sup> July. The six race card included one hurdle race with all races over the 500 yards distance, the first of which was claimed by Carrow Boy at 3-1 odds in a time of 31.25 secs. Because the stadium's location was in the Squires Gate area the press reported the meeting as being at Squires Gate, however it was known as St Annes. This is especially important because in late 1932 another track was being built at the old Clifton Park Racecourse which was to take the name Squires Gate.

The racing was initially held under National Greyhound Racing Club (NGRC) rules before the track took on independent status in 1929. This could have been something to do with a change of company because they were soon known as the Blackpool Greyhound Racing and Sports Company Ltd. The Blackpool Borough Rugby league team played their fixtures at St Annes but speedway never found its way here but did take place at the short lived Trotting Track at Highfield Road.

The Blackpool owners who also controlled Hanley in Stoke-in-Trent branched out further by constructing a track around the outside of Craven Park in Barrow but the project only lasted the two summers of 1933 & 1934.

After the war St Annes was once again licenced under the jurisdiction of the NGRC and inaugurated a race called the Hunt Cup. The Director of Racing was H.H.Carver and the Racing Manager was H.S.Long. The greyhound business boom of 1946 was reaped before profits dropped year by year afterwards.

It was evident that with the growing population of Blackpool the greyhound stadium was being squeezed out; to the north, housing on Lostock Gardens crept right up to the back straight terracing and to the south, Ivy Avenue housing forced its way on to the back of the home straight and main stand. Although surviving until 1964, the racing finally ended on 30 October 1964.

Blackpool was to experience greyhound racing again from 1967 until 1988 on the flapping track at Borough Park but the closure of St Annes had effectively ended any chance of regulated racing. The site today is at least remembered in the form of Stadium Avenue that features in the maze of housing in the area (3° 1' 57.557"W 53° 47' 3.434"N).

.....continued

