

Cradley Heath

In North Staffordshire was a speedway and greyhound stadium by the name of Cradley Heath, it was located on the Dudley Wood Road in Dudley just north of the area Cradley Heath.

The origins of the track date back to 1917 and the Cradley Heath St Lukes Football Club. The club was looking for new venue after the First World War because the lease at their previous ground had expired. They found farmland that was suitable for a pitch and constructed a basic football ground and stadium.

In the thirties many football clubs went bankrupt due to recession and many others turned to greyhound racing to save the club from going under. Cradley St Lukes were heavily in debt and Barclays Bank held the deeds but in 1936 Frederick James Bullas loaned capital to the club who were then able to acquire the deeds. The expensive interest payments to Bullas meant that the club needed income and in July 1939 a proposal for a greyhound track was submitted and a betting licence was granted.

The plan was led by one of the directors George Bridgewater who had taken out a lease and would sub-let to a greyhound company but the Second World War intervened. However after the war another betting licence was obtained and Cradley Heath Enterprises started work on the stadium that would include a speedway track. The football club successfully gained permission from Stanley Rous (Football Association) to play on a ground that also held the other sports on the proviso that they did not interfere with the running of the club. So in December 1947 the racing action sprang to life with the potential to accommodate 15,000 spectators. The football club decided to sell the ground to the greyhound company for £3,500 instead of leasing it and Bullas had his loan repaid.

The racing continued throughout the fifties as an independent track and the football club moved out in 1960. During this time the Midlands track continued to apply to the NGRC for a full licence without success, the first application way back in 1948 had been refused and subsequent applications had gone the same way. Finally in 1966 the track then under the management of Fred Jeffcott (the breeder of Fine Jubilee) received the news that they would be under the NGRC banner by the end of the year. NGRC racing began in September 1966 under the watchful eye of Racing Manager Lionel Clemmow; to celebrate the new venture a competition called the Golden Hammer was inaugurated in 1968. The first winner of the event was Shannon Water from Perry Barr. The event was suspended after the 1972 running until 1983 due to the fact that the track flittered in and out of NGRC licencing.

Derek Pugh a former Monmore trainer purchased the track and the popular Cradley sales trials became embedded at the track during the eighties as the auctioneers Hall, Wateridge and Owen held regular events, Pugh an auctioneer by trade had always had involvement in the greyhound sales at various venues across the country. The Bridgewater family also had a stake in the company. Despite the limitations of the venue there were eight bookmakers, a manual tote and automatic ray timing. Racing was held on Tuesday and Friday nights with trials on Wednesday mornings, the circumference of the circuit was 413 metres with distances of 231, 272, 462 and 647 metres behind an 'Outside McGee' hare.

The speedway team called the Cradley Heath Heathens became one of the leading sides in the country during this excellent spell for the track.

Racing Manager Sean Doyle left at the end of 1980 to join Coventry owned by Midland Sports. Doyle had worked hard to help Cradley improve their image; improvements had been made to the running surface and the tracks amenities. Doyle was replaced by P Griffiths.

Success for Cradley greyhounds came in the form of a decent spell in the early eighties period, starting with Pineapple Choice in 1980, a crowd favourite the fawn bitch won the 1980 Stow Marathon. This open the floodgates as Red Prim trained by Jim Barrett claimed the 1981 Eclipse Stakes, Pineapple Barrow was steered through to the Greyhound Derby final by Michael and Barbara Compton in 1982 as well as raiding Shawfield and bringing home the St Mungo Cup, the Ken Reynolds Slender Boy was victorious in the 1983 Northern Flat and finally the puppy Glenamona lifted the 1983 Trafalgar Cup.

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Some years later in 1993 Our Timmy trained by Jim Barrett won the prestigious Juvenile but this was during a time when Cradley was threatened with closure. Pugh and the Bridgewater family decided the stadium was no longer viable and the greyhound racing ended on 17 March 1995 but the speedway team refused to go and put up a fight before being evicted later in the year.

Dudley council rejected the plans for 121 houses in 1996 and the locals produced a 33,000 signature petition. Despite countless rejections Barratts Homes continued to alter and re-submit plans before finally getting the go ahead in 2001.

The stadium was demolished and Barratts Homes built their development moving on to the next endless demand for housing. The council named some of the roads Stadium Drive, Racemeadow Crescent and The Lukes in memory of leisure facilities that once existed (2° 5' 6.061"W 52° 28' 32.291"N).

Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
500y	Shannon Water	27.95	05.1968	
272m	Tea Punt	15.91	24.07.1981	
462m	Slender Boy	28.12	08.11.1983	
647m	Ballybeg Grand	40.35	28.09.1977	
692m	Ritas Hero	42.40	23.04.1982	
875m	Pineapple Choice	55.73	20.07.1982	

+ Date when record was held, not necessarily the year it was set.