

## Hackney

On Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April 1932 the Hackney Wick Stadium held its opening greyhound meeting. A busy schedule was planned in the coming weeks with evening racing at 8pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays plus two matinee meetings at 3.15pm on Mondays and Saturdays. This incredible six race meeting week would take place under the affiliation of the British Greyhound Tracks Control Society (BGTCS) the rival to the NGRS at the time.

Thirteen thousand people attended the first night and watched Marjory Graves, MP for South Hackney officially open the track that cost £70,000 to build. The capacity of the track was put between 30,000-50,000 and a totalisator had been installed for the first night. A greyhound called Bullseye took the accolade for being the first official winner at the track. Bizarrely although the first official meeting was on 8<sup>th</sup> April a dress rehearsal two days before on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April attracted 12,000 people.

The company responsible for the project was the Hackney Wick Stadium Ltd headed by Managing Director Arthur Gilbert and Racing Manager Fred Whitehead. The stadium was to found on the Waterden Road and William Chandler also held shares in the new company, Chandler of course would buy the Crooked Billet independent and turn it into Walthamstow one year later.

Totalisator turnover was significant especially in 1946 after the war, a period when Hendon and Hackney Wick merged to become the Hackney and Hendon Greyhounds Ltd company. The resident kennels featured six ranges with each able to house up to fifty greyhounds; this resulted in ample facilities to serve both Hendon and Hackney. Paddocks sat next to each range and with modern cooking facilities and veterinary attention the kennel fees were 17s 6d for each greyhound.

In the early fifties Mr S Pay became the Racing Manager after Fred Whitehead was promoted to Director of Racing for both Hackney and Hendon, Pay was replaced by Hendon Racing Manager D G Lewis in the late fifties. Further management changes were on the horizon in the sixties with Hendon's Michael Marks taking over the Racing Managers hot seat from Lewis who had switched back to Hendon. Marks would remain Racing Manager at Hackney for three decades until the day the stadium closed.

Speedway arrived at the stadium in 1963 in the form of the Hackney Hawks amidst stadium improvements that included restaurant and general improvements. There were no less than eight buffet and licensed bars during a time when racing took place on Thursday and Saturday nights at 7.45pm, a far cry from the six meetings a week in the thirties. The circuit had a circumference of 472 yards and the greyhounds raced behind an 'Outside Sumner' hare. Attached trainers in the sixties included Annetts, Reg Bosley, Brown, Colebrooke, Cox, Paddy Gordon, Hedley and Lionel Maxen, the latter won Hackney's first significant open race success when scoring with Cons Duke in the 1966 Cloth of Gold.

As the seventies approached Mr G. Crookbank the tracks chief electrician had invented an extremely useful photo-electric timing gear that would revolutionise the sport. Hand timing would become a thing of the past after Crookbank came up with the idea that a greyhound's race time could be recorded electronically. When the traps opened an amber light would show followed by a red light after 10 seconds (The period when any greyhound would pass the line for the first time (known as sectional timing point today.) The next step was the clock stopping when the winning greyhound finished the race and passed the ray. This was known as 'automatic ray timing' and would remain as the timing method until the advent of modern computer timing. Almost all tracks installed a version of Hackney's invention soon after.

The Hackney sales became a major feature of business throughout the year, these sales became prominent for the industry and in 1968 Ballygill Rover was sold for a record 1,600 guineas.

In 1969 Park Royal and New Cross both closed resulting in the BAGS service being switched to Hendon and Hackney, the image of Hackney would change forever and would be known as the BAGS track. Afternoon meetings were introduced and eventually there would be no evening meetings at the track with the Saturday matinee BAGS replacing the Saturday night.

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In 1970 businessman George Walker brother of boxing champion Billy Walker arranged a reverse takeover of Hackney and Hendon Greyhounds Stadium Ltd. This meant his private company bought a public company and the new merger resulted in a new company called Brent Walker. This was a disaster for Hendon because plans were afoot for the UK's first stand-alone shopping centre on the site that would soon be known as the Brent Cross shopping centre.

The main events held at the Wick were the Eastwater Cup and Leaside Stakes which had attracted interest nationally and it was not until sister track Hendon closed in June 1972 that Hackney would host a major race. The Guineas long associated with Park Royal since 1939 had switched to Hendon in 1969 following the demise of Park Royal, this in turn resulted in Hackney hosting the competition from 1972. Three years later The Lead was introduced and would also become a valuable addition to the calendar.



View of the Hackney Stadium entrance.

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Brent Walker sold its 25% share of the Brent Cross shopping centre in 1976 the same year that Hackney experienced the greatest hound to be associated with the track. The greyhound in question was an April 1974 whelp by the name of Westmead Champ. Trained by Pam Heasman the fawn dog reached the final of the English Derby and won the Gold Collar, St Leger and Regency. By the end of the year Westmead Champ was rewarded with the accolade of greyhound of the year despite the fact that it had to be shared with Mutts Silver.

Hackney remained a prominent BAGS track even through 1978 when the changes in contracts meant that individual tenders were required. During the famously bad winter of 1981 the importance of the BAGS service was highlighted as all horse racing fixtures fell victim to bad weather.

Although Hackney patrons saw little of the major stars due to the fulfilling of BAGS races they were lucky enough to see Ballyregan Bob break the track record in December 1984 and produce one of his famous 32 wins in November 1985.

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The only time that Hackney had reason to fall out with regard to BAGS meetings was in 1987 when the NGRC caused an uproar when they announced that they would charge £300 to a track staging a meeting covered by Satellite Information Services (S.I.S) plus ten percent of the tracks BAGS fees. Hackney refused and Ladbrokes took legal advice over the move by the governing body but all BAGS tracks would eventually pay a fee to the governing body.

The Lincoln was hosted by Hackney from 1986; the event brought back in a new guise had been run at the old Kings Heath stadium in Birmingham.

In 1988 Minnies Siren trained by Terry Duggan claimed the TV trophy for Hackney and Brent Walker bought William Hill/Mecca from Grand Metropolitan. Gold Collar success arrived again in 1989 after Burgess Ruby lifted the trophy for trainer Arthur Boyce. In 1990 leading trainer John 'Ginger' McGee joined the track, a year in which he was trainer of the year and claimed the Scurry Gold Cup with Ready Rubbed.

During 1991 it transpired that Brent Walker had amassed debts of £1.2 billion, George Walker was removed from the board and the banker took control of the company's assets. With the bank controlling matters there were numerous rumours about the future before arguably one of the most infamous moments in greyhound history took place.

The year of 1994 had been good for the track with a second ever Derby finalist in Flag The Fawn trained by Patsy Byrne but the big news was the acquisition by a company called 'London Stadium Hackney Ltd' who were owned by Fleetfoot Racing formed in 1992. Work began on an ambitious project including a £12 million restaurant and state of the art facilities, top trainers were recruited and the stadium was even rebranded 'The London Stadium'.

Oddities started to arise at the end of 1994 when ex-Lloyds broker and racing journalist Robert Parker had left the company as its Director to be replaced by Stephen Rea. Beset with construction problems and internal disagreements the original £14 million scheme to develop the neglected stadium had ran into serious problems. More money had been sought for the build with cash raised by rights issues (an action that any normal person finds very hard to comprehend). Stephen Rea raised the extra cash with the companies involved in the rights issue including Rothschild, Henderson Venture Managers and Samuel Montagu. October 1995 arrived and the new stadium opened with superb prize money offered for the races held, the stadium facilities were incredible and propelled Hackney to the top of the list as the best stadium in Britain. However despite all of this some of the first night visitors were official receivers and it was announced that the stadium was incredibly in receivership. The stadium of the future was now looking to save its own future before it had even finished one nights racing. Investigations began as to where all the money had gone; Parker was famously pursued by Roger Cook on ITV's television program 'The Cook Report'.

Fleetfoot Racing Ltd had been born in 1992 and went into receivership in 1995 leaving the stadium once more to an uncertain future. Speedway returned for two more years but the situation looked grim despite the fact that top class open racing was still taking place. One of those events taking place was the Trainers Championship won by Ernie Gaskin.

1997 got off to a disastrous start when the Hackney situation was resolved in the worst way. The dream was over when on 4<sup>th</sup> January the stadium closed its doors to the disbelief of every greyhound fan even though the writing had been on the wall. Rumours had continued that one of the big greyhound operators could come in and lease the track to save it from the dreaded planning permission for some other purpose. That operator did not and the venue would never race greyhounds again, the site suffered six years of vandalism before bulldozers arrived and knocked the multi million pound stadium down in 2003.

When London was announced as the venue for the 2012 Olympics the area underwent vast regeneration and the site of the greyhound track would have been directly under the International Broadcast Centre and very close to the Olympic hockey pitches that stand today (0° 1' 14.170"W 51° 32' 49.349"N).

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### Selected Pre-Metric Track Records

| Distance | Name               | Time  | Date       | Notes |
|----------|--------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| 500y     | Don Gipseý         | 27.93 | 24.04.1948 |       |
| 525y     | Fitzs Bell         | 29.30 | 27.06.1963 |       |
| 550y     | Parish Model       | 31.16 | 26.05.1947 |       |
|          | Narrogar Ann       | 31.09 | 1949+      |       |
|          | Prince of Speed    | 30.61 | 21.07.1960 |       |
| 570y     | Willing Billy      | 31.98 | 1970+      |       |
| 700y     | Spotted Nice       | 40.20 | 1970+      |       |
| 725y     | Surprising Paddle  | 41.36 | 20.07.1963 |       |
| 800y     | Chantilly Lace     | 45.86 | 14.04.1960 |       |
| 500yH    | Dollys Prince      | 28.55 | 1963+      |       |
| 550yH    | Fairfield Surprise | 31.50 | 20.06.1963 |       |

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

### Selected Post-Metric Track Records

| Distance | Name             | Time  | Date       | Notes |
|----------|------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| 247m     | Ballygroman Jim  | 15.17 | 1986+      |       |
| 260m     | Fast Copper      | 15.52 | 20.04.1994 |       |
| 304m     | Clear Reason     | 18.02 | 01.03.1975 |       |
| 400m     | Danesfort Slippy | 25.01 | 26.03.1994 |       |
| 440m     | Jurassic Park    | 26.70 | 23.09.1994 |       |
| 484m     | London Spec      | 29.02 | 27.03.1976 |       |
|          | Lassa Java       | 28.86 | 24.03.1994 |       |
| 523m     | Drynham Star     | 31.48 | 22.02.1975 |       |
|          | Wired To Moon    | 31.48 | 10.12.1977 |       |
|          | Sound Wave       | 31.48 | 12.01.1980 |       |
|          | Ballyregan Bob   | 31.07 | 11.12.1984 |       |
| 640m     | Coolmona Road    | 39.95 | 22.08.1994 |       |
| 683m     | Millies Corner   | 42.73 | 10.11.1983 |       |
|          | Blue Shirt       | 42.68 | 11.12.1984 |       |
|          | Ballyregan Bob   | 42.24 | 16.11.1985 |       |
| 685m     | Coolmona Road    | 42.95 | 15.07.1994 |       |
| 669m     | Mondays Style    | 41.80 | 24.10.1974 |       |
| 740m     | Dublin Daisy     | 46.17 | 01.01.1976 |       |
|          | Tally Ho Sabrina | 45.88 | 07.04.1980 |       |
|          | Swift Duchess    | 45.83 | 21.05.1986 |       |
| 825m     | Winetavern Celt  | 53.78 | 12.12.1994 |       |
| 909m     | Smart Decision   | 58.88 | 07.04.1994 |       |
| 920m     | Wild Surprise    | 60.29 | 07.03.1985 |       |
|          | My Tootsie       | 59.21 | 1986+      |       |
| 400mH    | Fancy Major      | 25.44 | 25.11.1994 |       |
| 484mH    | Westpark Clover  | 30.28 | 06.03.1984 |       |
|          | Kildare Slippy   | 30.10 | 20.07.1991 |       |
|          | Gis A Smile      | 29.72 | 07.02.1994 |       |
| 523mH    | Breakaway Slave  | 32.87 | 10.04.1982 |       |
| 640mH    | Freewheel Kylo   | 42.95 | 27.12.1993 |       |

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