

Harringay

Harringay was one of the finest greyhound tracks in the country; it was widely regarded as being the second most important track behind White City for nearly sixty years.

It was during 1927 that the Greyhound Racing Association (GRA) and Brigadier-General Alfred Critchley turned their attention to an area of North London near Finsbury Park on the east of Green Lanes. The 23-acre site had been the Williamson's Pottery Works from the late 18th century through to the early 1900's but in more recent times had been used as a rubbish tip for the spoil from the digging of the Piccadilly line to Finsbury Park. Construction started in early 1927 with over 300 workmen but was delayed due to problems with levelling the site.

Harringay Stadium became the third greyhound racing stadium to be owned by the GRA. It was constructed by Messrs T.G. Simpson of Victoria Street, London, at a cost of £35,000 and on completion the track had a capacity of 50,000. The main stand running along the north of the site seated 3,000. The remaining 47,000 spectators were accommodated on terracing constructed on earth banking. On the east end there was a giant 'Julius Tote' (mechanical totalisator board) invented by Australian George Julius. When the stadium opened on the 13th September 1927 it was originally called Harringay Park.

GRA had thought of everything and even purchased the Hook estate at Northaw some 13 miles from the centre of London. They saw it as the ideal place for GRA trainers to train greyhounds for White City and Harringay. The 140 acres of park and grassland would become famous within the industry. The estate at this time was solely for racing hounds and puppies over nine months old and could house 600 dogs. The pups under nine months were reared under the supervision of William Skerratt on farms in and around Blythe Bridge near Stoke-on-Trent before graduating to Northaw. Bookmaker Joe Coral aged 22 took a pitch at Harringay and then White City; the Coral Empire was born and would go via Clapton and Walthamstow greyhounds before branching into betting offices.

The opening night was a miserable evening from a weather perspective with persistent rain getting worse throughout the night, hampering the enjoyment of the 35,000 attending. The opening race was the Chorley Wood Stakes and it was won by Baltard Castle over 500 yards in a time of 30.80 sec at 3-1 for trainer Sid Jennings. Another greyhound racing that night in race three was Ever Bright trained by John 'Jack' Kennedy and although only finishing third he would end up being the Greyhound Derby runner up less than one month later. The trainers supplying runners on that first night were Kennedy, Jennings, William Spoor, Harry Buck and Reginald Grey. Track lighting added to the thrill of a nights racing because for many it was the first time they had experienced it, even football did not have floodlights for another 30 years.

During the first five years of trading congestion in the area on dog races nights caused serious problems and it took a further five years before the Piccadilly line extended through to Arnos Grove to help solve the issues. On 29 May 1928 speedway arrived at the stadium but only lasted initially until 1931 before returning again in 1935.

Sid Jennings won the 1927 Oaks with Three of Spades and Jack Kennedy steered Bendeemer to fourth place in the 1928 Greyhound Derby final before the legendary Mick The Miller appeared at Harringay in 1929. This would be the only Harringay race that Mick would compete in and he duly defeated the Billy Chandler (grandfather of Victor Chandler) owned Bishops Dream in a match race on December 11th.

The stadium business boomed despite the Great Depression experienced by Britain with further Greyhound Derby final appearances in 1931 and 1932 by Brunswick Bill and Fret Not respectively. Two of the sports greatest trainers would have a spell at the track, Leslie Reynolds and Jack Harvey; the latter would provide Harringay with their first Derby champion in Davesland in 1934.

The prestigious Pall Mall Stakes was set up in 1935 at the track and quickly became Harringay's feature competition attracting most of the greats over the years. One year later the famous Harringay Arena was built next door in an attempt to rival the Wembley Arena. Critchley along with Dr Oscar Faber studied stadiums throughout Europe before deciding on the eventual shape. The Harringay Arena Ltd Company was formed and the Arena was completed by October 10th, just nine months after construction had started. The state of the art facility had cost £200,000 to build but when completed it rivalled any Arena in Europe and was held significant ice hockey and boxing matches.

.....continued

Shove Halfpenny the first winner of the Pall Mall switched kennels to Jack Harvey in 1937 finishing runner up in the Derby final, the same year that Romford owner Mr Archer Leggett introduced his Cheetah racing to the UK, although they did race at Romford the plans to race at Harringay never transpired.

With war arriving on the horizon Harringay had successive winners in the St Leger in 1938 and 1939 followed by new Hook kennels trainer Eddie Wright steering Carmel Ash to second place in the 1939 Derby final.

Major competitions were badly hit with many postponed until 1945, even the Greyhound Derby was affected after the 1940 edition at White City was cancelled despite already starting on June 15th. The GRA had announced a ban on fixtures at the stadium and moved the race to Harringay, a move that did not go down well with many. The circuit was renowned for being a fair galloping track with a 438 yard circumference but despite this the negative feeling towards racing in general at the time by the press meant that they described the 1940 Derby as being the forgotten Derby. Nevertheless Harringay became the first track other than White City to host the event that ended with a 1-2 for the local dogs GR Archduke and Duna Taxmaid. Racing was restricted during the next four years with Saturday matinee meetings being the only fixtures.

When racing resumed the population flocked in, tired of the war they clearly saw greyhound racing as a release borne out by the tote spend over the resulting years.(see page 5)

In 1948 the popular totalisator board underwent extensive improvements, the small stand next to the board was demolished and the tote doubled in size displaying results automatically. Into the fifties and the grandstand received a glass front to accommodate a restaurant but Harringay remained largely basic in terms of facilities despite the fact that they offered 14 buffet bars and 10 licensed bars.

In 1958 the Harringay Arena closed after just 22 years action, made famous by world title fights in boxing the venue had been losing money as costs spiraled. Many were saddened by the loss of such an iconic venue which would turn into a food storage facility. Back at the stadium following his wonderful Derby performance in June, Pigalle Wonder cruised to victory in the Pall Mall; his time of 29.03sec for 525yds was not beaten for years. One year later in 1959 the Oaks from given to Harringay by the GRA transferring from White City.



***Harringay Arena closed in 1958
Copyright - GRA***

.....continued

KA Obee replaced H Ingleton as Racing Manager in 1956 before Obee left with George Gough taking over in February 1959. Charlie Birch was named as the new Racing Manager in January 1960, the fourth in just four years and he oversaw the BBC Sportsview Trophy held at the track the same year, Birch had arrived from sister track White City.

Also during the fifties the stadium was used to host school sports and stock car racing.



*View of Harringay Stadium
Courtesy of Adrian Hurt*

In 1961 the GRA introduced under track heating systems at Belle Vue, Harringay and White City following a successful trial in Scotland. Electric cables were basically sewn into the track by the tractor and a team of workers about eight inches under the turf. They would prove to be useful until the advent of all sand tracks.

In 1962 Harringay secured their third St Leger title when Powerstown Prospect trained by Ronnie Melville took the honours. The stadium hosted

.....continued

Cutbacks in 1965 resulted in the sale of the GRA breeding establishment at Naas, near Dublin and sacked five trainers from the Northaw kennels. Harry Buck, Dick Clarke, Albert Jonas, Eric Hiscock and Jack Cooper all go whilst the remaining ten had to cover the three tracks of White City, Harringay and Stamford Bridge.

The 1966 trainers were Les Parry, Wilf France Gordon Hodson, Jim Singleton and Randy Singleton, France claimed the 1966 St Leger with Summer Guest. Harringay was no stranger to oddities with two particular items that seemed restricted to only Harringay. The first was the fact that they advertised being able to use two hares, an outside McGee and outside Sumner and the second was the fact that they held hurdle races and races described as chases, the latter presumably offered slightly larger hurdles. Harringay held BAGS meetings from 1967 after being chosen as one of the tracks to host the service. Approaching the end of 1968 Harringay was subject to a facelift, thousands of pounds were spent producing new stands and laying down a new track surface with improved banking and new distances of 450, 725 & 900 yards.

GRA trainer changes saw West Hams Peter Hawkesley replace the retiring Wilf France in 1970 and Jimmy Keane replace Frank Melville in 1971 after he left for Rochester. In 1971 eight dog racing was trialed at Harringay and one year later Harringay dogs was beamed into the nations TV sets when the stadium became the home of greyhound racing on London Weekend Television's World of Sport, this would continue throughout the seventies.

Westpark Mustard completed win number seven on her way to the famous 20 consecutive wins in 1974 and a new major competition called the Golden Jacket was inaugurated at the track in 1975. This was of course during the time of the GRA Property Trust and the total mismanagement by the company's decision makers, £20 million debts had arisen from somewhere and upgrades of Harringay were out of the question. At least there were still big race successes, Case Money won the 1973 St Leger for Ted Parker and Switch Off took the 1977 Oaks when trained by Jim Singleton, in addition Harringay claimed two Grand National wins in 1975 & 1978.

By the mid-eighties rumours persisted that the stadium would not survive into the future as the GRA looked to reduce debts, Racing Managers came and went; PJ Saunders and Charlie Boulton to name two. Ray Peacock arrived from the recently closed White City in 1984.

The stadium was valued at £1 million per acre and covered a 23 acre site which meant that anyone could work out what the GRA were thinking. Respite from the worry came in the form of the one and only Ballyregan Bob, the brindle appeared during December 1985 and twice in November 1986, all three wins formed part of the magical 32 record (two of them track records).

When 1987 dawned the GRA were taken over by Wembley plc, meaning that the Wembley greyhound operation now came entirely under the GRA banner as well. The first major action of the GRA under new ownership was the expected sale of the Slough and Harringay tracks. Harringay was sold for a supermarket redevelopment and the last meeting was on 25th September, a meeting that included the Oaks, the last race was won by Davdor Darra. Many major events duly switched to other tracks, the Oaks went to Wimbledon and the Pall Mall went to Oxford. The famous totalisator board was dismantled and parts of it went to the Science Museum at Wroughton, Swindon.

The GRA had given birth to the stadium in 1927 and had buried it sixty years later.

Site today (0° 5' 42.689"W 51° 34' 36.478"N).

.....continued

Selected Pre-Metric Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
440y	Houghton Spur	24.66	1968+	
450y	Gun Black	24.74	1970+	
500y	Demotic Mack	28.46	1946+	
	Welcome Home	28.41	20.03.1961	
525y	Fish Hill	29.40	1946+	
	Pigalle Wonder	29.03	24.11.1958	
	Cranog Bet	29.02	06.07.1964	
	Shady Parachute	28.89	07.1968	
	Yellow Printer	28.71	04.11.1968	Pall Mall heats
	Yellow Printer	28.60	08.11.1968	Pall Mall semi-finals
	Always Present	28.54	28.03.1969	
	That Cailin	28.47	1970+	
	Camira Story	28.39	1970+	
	Yellow Printer	28.20	1970+	
650y	Westpark Larch	37.12	26.07.1965	
	Summer Guest		25.07.1966	
	Brinmark Fire	36.80	1968+	
700y	Alvaston Lulu Belle	40.44	1946+	
	Noreview King	40.24	24.11.1958	
	Westpark Quail	39.69	15.02.1965	
725y	Cullen Era	40.27	1968+	
	Coldwells	40.15	28.03.1969	
	Houghton Tango	39.92	1970+	
880y	Tugwell	52.64	1946+	
	Greenane Airlines	52.08	28.09.1959	
	Boothroyden Larry	51.15	07.12.1964	
	Gezira	51.09	1968+	
	Hiver Whitenose	50.43	1970+	
900y	Breach's Biscuit	52.36	1968+	
	Greenville Fauna	51.86	28.03.1969	
	Breach's Biscuit	51.80	07.04.1969	
	Coldwell's	51.57	05.1969	
	Booked Six	51.56	05.1969	
	Greenville Fauna	51.29	1970+	
	Country Maiden	51.16	1972+	
963y	The Popular Streak	56.72	11.05.1959	
966y	Boothroyden Larry	56.49	19.10.1964	
500yH	Kilganny Bridge	29.53	1946+	
525yH	Juvenile Classic	30.24	1946+	
	Dark General	30.22	1950+	
	Blue Sand	29.81	24.10.1956	
	Sherrys Prince	29.02	1972+	
525y Chase	Fodda Champion	30.36	01.04.1957	
	Ballinagree	30.14	27.10.1963	
700yH	Misty Bridge	41.61	11.08.1958	
	Fawn Buffalo	40.79	20.09.1965	

.....continued

Selected Post-Metric Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
272m	Very Attractive	16.15	25.06.1984	
	Fearless Action	15.93	25.11.1985	
414m	Sampsons Pal	24.77	31.08.1979	
	Ballybeg Sport	24.60	04.09.1981	
475m	House Party	28.37	23.10.1978	
	Yankee Express	28.22	28.10.1983	
	Castlelyons Cash	28.85	14.05.1986	
	Fearless Swift	28.43	25.07.1986	
660m	Drynham Star	40.14	21.02.1976	
	Howl On Roger	41.38	05.10.1979	
688m	Scurlogue Champ	42.50	23.11.1984	
	Ballyregan Bob	41.94	06.12.1985	
	Ballyregan Bob	41.74	28.11.1986	
830m	Miss Kilkenny	51.79	03.10.1977	
891m	Welsh Cobbler	56.38	03.11.1978	
	Westmead Light	56.23	04.09.1981	
	Jos Gamble	56.23	28.10.1983	
	475mH	Derby Wonder	29.13	23.02.1980
	Westlands Steve	29.13	13.12.1980	
660mH	Howl on Rodger	41.38	05.10.1979	

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