

## Old Craven Park (Hull)

Hull Kingston Rovers were a very prominent rugby league team in England by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had up to this point in time led a nomadic existence moving from ground to ground including a venue in East Hull on Craven Street near the Holderness Road. Incidentally this was a site that would host independent greyhound racing from 1934 to 1937.

By 1922 the rugby team had left Craven Street and moved into a new ground called Craven Park. The club had purchased a site behind the tram and bus depot on the eastern end of Holderness Road at a cost of £18,281. The stadium hosted some high profile matches in the twenties.

In 1927 greyhound racing had arrived at the Boulevard in Hull and a company called Entertainments Hull Ltd jumped on the bandwagon by opening a track at Craven Park a year later to rival the Boulevard. The first meeting took place on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1928. The lease was soon secured by the Associated Greyhound Company who also had control of Towneley in Burnley and Darnall in Sheffield.

By 1931 the Associated Greyhound Company had gone bankrupt and the greyhound operation suffered difficult times with a depression on the horizon. With the end of the depression and impending war the country was in a state of unrest but greyhound racing was booming. Huge crowds flocked to stadiums all around the country and in 1938 the Hull Kingston Rovers rugby league team sold the Craven Park stadium to the Greyhound Racing Company called Hull (Craven Park) Stadium Ltd following financial difficulties. The rugby team would however secure a 21 year lease in the £10,750 sale.

The track raced under NGRC rules and the circuit was described as a handy sized track with a circumference of 407 yards with good length straights and with starting boxes that are nicely set back to take full advantage of the length of the straight. Banking was 1 in 12 and an inside Sumner hare was used. Distances of 292, 496 & 698 yards made up the races and the stadium kennels charged owners one guinea per week, an agreement that included veterinary attention.

Facilities included three covered enclosures; the large home straight enclosure offered two clubs, the Silver Ring Club and the Stadium Club. The Supporters Club was to be found within the back straight covered stand whilst the totalisator and racing office was situated between the third and fourth bends. Distances changed to 500 and 700 yards by 1946.

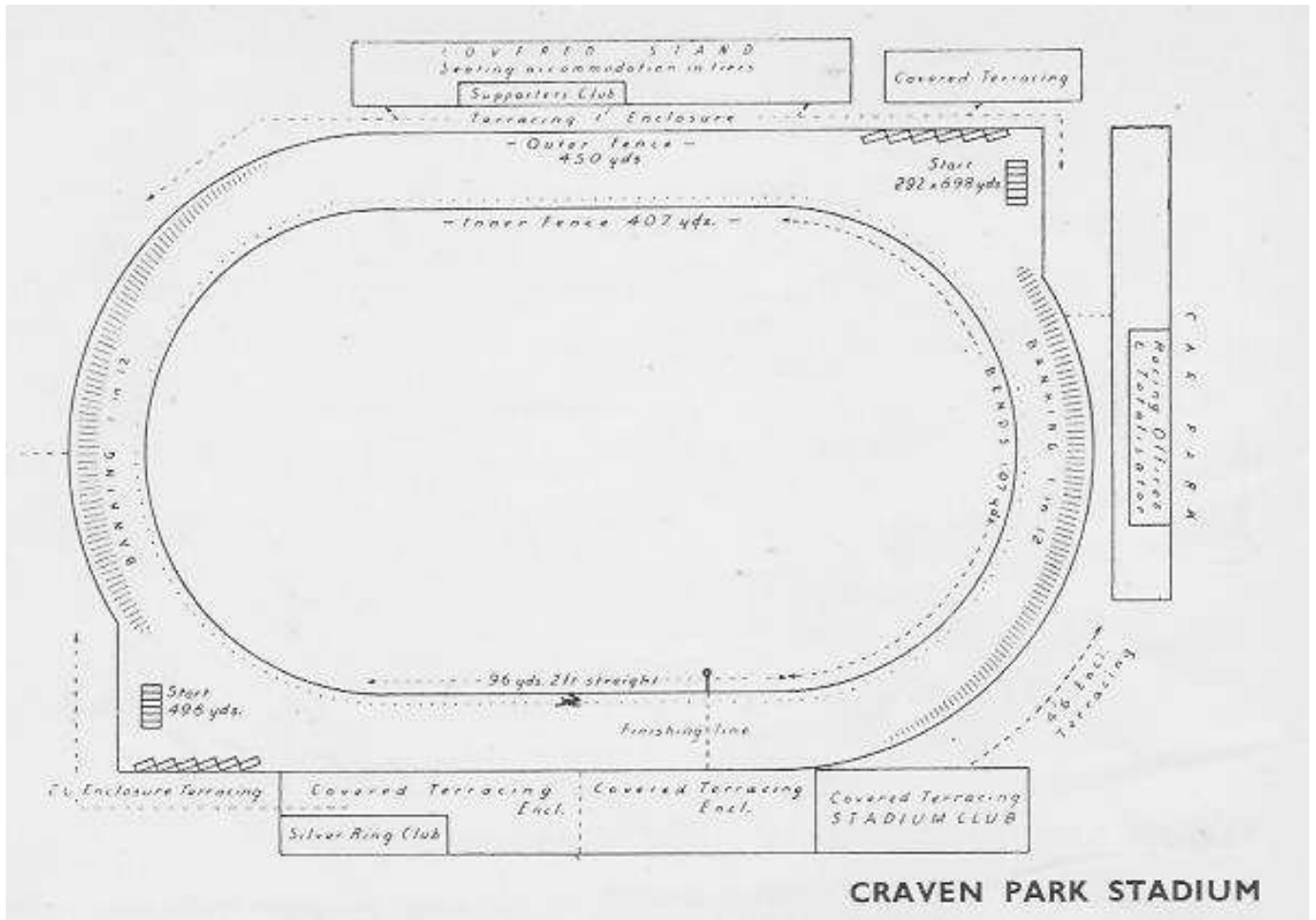
Business far exceeded the much larger Boulevard venue which was a little strange because they were both about the same distance from the centre of Hull. The Boulevard was to the west and Craven Park was to the east. Craven Park managed to pass the £1 million mark in 1946 in regards to tote turnover and one year later set figures of £578,628 which was 25 times more than the Boulevards £23,363. Despite its popularity the track never attained success in big races around the country, the trainers employed tended to supply the track with graded runners only.

The stadium opened a restaurant and four buffet bars for the patrons as racing was held on Thursday and Saturday nights in the fifties and sixties. S C Burfield was the Racing Manager during this period and L.O.Unsworth was brought in as Assistant Racing Manager. As the seventies approached both were promoted until Arthur Rising replaced Burfield as General Manager.

It was the early seventies when Hull Kingston Rovers started looking for a new home and they managed to purchase a site at Winchester Avenue, these plans however never materialised and the land they had purchased was sold for a profit to developers. With the extra money the rugby team bought the stadium back in 1975 from the same company they had sold it to in 1938.

As the seventies progressed Mr V Holland was brought in as the new Racing Manager and Roy Thickett became General Manager after Arthur Rising retired. Popular events at the track included the Hair Belle Trophy, Art Wells Stakes, Charles Key Memorial Stakes and the Jack Lawlor Trophy but open race success still eluded the track. The main trainers were Jack King and Sylvia Cooke and they had been joined by Ray Jones and John Tollafield.

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Following the Bradford City fire in 1985 all grounds needed to be upgraded to meet new legislation and it quickly became apparent that Craven Park was not going to be able to meet the demands without undergoing large scale improvements and investing considerable funds. A decision was made that a new venue would be preferred so plans were initiated to start looking for new sites. John Kennedy the new General Manager of the greyhounds was tasked with securing the future of the greyhound operation.

A new site was found just two miles away and would also be called Craven Park (referred to as New Craven Park). The Old Craven Park closed on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1989 and was sold to developers eventually becoming a Morrisons supermarket and car park (0° 17' 34.500"W 53° 45' 47.668"N).

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### Selected Track Records

<b>Distance</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
292y	Noblesse Oblige	16.62	1946+	
295y	Spring Shower	16.47	14.08.1948	
496y	Down Signal	28.43	1946+	
500y	Dronmore Printer	28.25	07.07.1948	
	Promotive	28.22	05.10.1950	
	Galbally Gallop	28.04	20.06.1963	
	Ryedale Swallow	28.01	28.04.1966	
700y	Lilacs Luck		April 1946	
	Mileys Bridge	40.53	29.05.1948	
	Clonalvy Sue	40.30	16.07.1964	
268m	Spiral Gigi	15.91	10.07.1986	
458m	Autumn Opinion	27.60	27.08.1987	
462m	Inchy Sand	27.70	1987+	
644m	Black Lupin	40.70	29.01.1987	
837m	Versatile Fury	53.90	19.05.1988	

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