

## Luton

When the idea of bringing the new sport of greyhound racing to the Luton area was first suggested in 1927 it drew objections from several fronts but mainly the clergy. The area suggested was a seven acre site on Beechwood Road in nearby Leagrave but the project failed to get planning permission. A second attempt was made in 1928 on open land on Icknield Road although it is possible that this was the same area as the 1927 plan due to the close proximity of the two sites. There was no open land on Icknield Road but there were two possible sites, one to the north and one to the west on the previously mentioned Beechwood Road. It was academic however because on appeal the District Council refused planning permission again in April 1928.

The failure to gain planning did not deter the Luton & Dunstable Greyhound Racing Club from applying for planning permission in a rural area on the corner of Skimpot Road and Dunstable Road. The area that consisted of fields was earmarked for development; there were a few cottages to the east and Skimpot Farm to the south but little else.

So it was that track underwent construction, it was built in 1931 offering a simple covered grandstand on the home straight with very few other facilities. Housing popped up around the track at the same time catering for the fast growing Luton population.

A 311 yard speedway track inside the dog track hosted the Luton Hatters from 1934 but due to financial problems only lasted three years. The greyhound racing however was booming all around the country despite efforts by the government to ban totalisator betting amongst other things.

Luckily the track survived the Second World War bringing dividends afterwards due to the popularity of the sport for the next decade. In 1946 the totalisator turnover was £308,810. The stadium was run by Luton Stadium Ltd in 1953 but it is not known if this was progression from the original company or whether they had sold to new owners. It is also known that for the majority of its existence it was unaffiliated to any governing body so was classed as an independent or flapper although there is a reference to being NGRC licenced at some stage.

By the mid-sixties racing was held on Tuesday & Saturday nights with trial days every other Thursday afternoon. The track characteristics were a circumference of 405 yards, distances of 410, 470 & 675 yards and an 'Inside Sumner' hare.

14 bookmakers were in attendance and the principal races were the Bedfordshire Derby (not to be confused with the Henlow version) and the Bedfordshire St Leger.

Racing continued until November 1973 when the stadium was closed. The exact circumstances of closure were a little confusing because the track had been purchased by the Totalisators and Greyhound Holdings (T.G.H) who owned some prominent tracks including Crayford & Bexleyheath, Leeds, Brough Park, Gosforth, Willenhall and Monmore. Around the same time a deal was on the table for a Ladbrokes takeover of TGH. When the Ladbrokes takeover was complete the track was demolished as Ladbrokes sold some of the land as industrial units and then built a new car park for their Caesars Palace Casino. Ladbrokes felt that the casino would be more profitable than the greyhound track and also made a significant income on selling some of the acreage.

The site today includes a Mecca Bingo, casino and fitness centre and the car parks for the three pastimes.

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**Luton Stadium pictured in 1961.**  
*'Image reproduced courtesy of the Luton News'*

**Selected Tote Returns**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Turnover £</b>
1939	59,050
1941	108,291
1942	131,693
1943	144,423
1944	143,425
1945	224,505
1946	308,810
1947	208,778
1948	191,461
1949	199,727
1950	178,813
1952	161,600
1953	162,000
1954	154,000