

New Cross

In Deptford, south-east London there stood a patch of land situated next door to the Den, home of Millwall FC. The football ground had been built in 1909 and opened in 1910 leaving just the one open space in the immediate area. Wikipedia quotes that it there was an athletics track in this space in the 1900's but maps fail to show the existence of any sort of stadium so it is unknown if there was a structure before the greyhound track. It was actually used by Millwall FC as their training ground from time to time.

What is known is that the greyhound track was constructed and had opened by June 1933 on Hornshay Street just off the Old Kent Road. The stadium was small compared to the average London track and had a very tight circumference of 354 yards and was initially an unlicensed (flapping) track. There was little in the way of facilities which probably accounts for the fact that even the greyhound track fails to be shown on maps until after the war. The circuit was peat and had short straights of 86 yards and heavily banked bends. When speedway arrived in 1934 the circuit was called the 'Frying Pan' because the speedway track was also heavily banked as a consequence of being built inside the greyhound track. Sadly in 1935 a popular speedway rider called Tom Farndon was killed in a crash around the Frying Pan.

Before the start of war the stadium applied to become fully licensed with the National Greyhound Racing Club (NGRC) with the first meeting under rules taking place in January 1938. Early trainers included Albert Bedford, John 'Jack' Kennedy', Bill Smith and Harry Spoor.

In 1939 the track introduced the Berkeley Cup over 415 yards as their principal event and it soon became a prominent race on the open race circuit. Being in an area of London that was heavily populated attendances were excellent and the stadium could accommodate 25,000 people. Despite interrupted racing throughout the war years totalisator figures were impressive as shown on page three.

The healthy bank balance of the New Cross Greyhounds Ltd Company had allowed the construction of three major covered stands, two on the home straight and one on the back straight and the track resembled a stadium rather than just a track. Restaurant buffets, tea buffets and licensed bars were to be found in all three enclosures.

Harry Spoor trained Rushton Ranger to the Circuit title at Walthamstow in 1945 and Highland Melody to victory at White City in the Longcross Cup in 1947. These two successes were sandwiched between a new competition called the Greenwich Cup being introduced at the track.

An inside Sumner hare was used and the kennel facilities for the New Cross trainers were situated at nearby Silwood Street on the other side of the railway lines but within ten minutes walking distance of the track. In 1949 the stadium featured in a film called 'Maniacs on Wheels' also known as 'Once a Jolly Swagman' which starred Dirk Bogarde and Sid James.

One of the leading trainers in the north Jack Tallantire joined the New Cross training ranks in 1952 and another Joe Pickering experienced great success that included a double English/Scottish Grand National win by Prince Lawrence when he was attached to New Cross as a trainer in 1954 & 1955. Pickering also lifted the Trafalgar Cup with Our Tim II.

In 1954 stock car racing featured at the stadium, this was the first instance of the sport taking place in the Britain around an oval and continued until 1956.

In January 1959 Mr M E Le Sueur stepped down as Racing Manager, his replacement K A Obee only lasted a year when Le Sueurs former assistant R F Lee took over. The changes in management did not affect trainer John Shevlin who won three Berkeley Cups on home turf with Victory Streak in 1960, Tralong Jet in 1964 & Local View in 1968. Shevlin also claimed a Grand National with Halfpenny King in 1966, a feat matched by another trainer Norman Chambers in 1968 with Ballintore King. Amidst all the excitement a third major competition called the Ben Truman Stakes had been initiated at the track in 1962

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New Cross Stadium (Copyright – GRA)

The training ranks in 1965 consisted of Norman Chambers, Sanders, John Shevlin, Smith and Charlie Smoothy.

John Field arrived as the new Racing Manager in the mid-sixties and in August 1968 the usual racing schedule consisting of Thursday and Saturday nights was upset by the advent of afternoon BAGS fixtures. Stamford Bridge had closed resulting in New Cross being selected as the replacement track for the BAGS meetings.

The BAGS racing lasted less than a year when the stadium was closed with relatively little notice on the 3rd April 1969. It is believed there were issues over the lease and landowners British Rail. Trainers Charlie Smoothy and John Shevlin joined Clapton and West Ham respectively.

The stadium was left derelict for six years before being demolished in 1975 as part of a plan to redevelop a new football ground for Millwall FC. These plans failed to materialise and the area became the Bridge House Meadows instead (0° 2' 56.788"W 51° 28' 55.260"N).

In 1977 trainer John Gibbons persuaded Lewisham council to lease him space where the old New Cross Kennels used to exist. The site which was effectively a mass of rubble was cleared by Gibbons and his team to make way for kennels and a schooling track.

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Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
415y	Bantown Banner	24.02	31.05.1938	
	Floating Dingy	23.92	13.07.1946	
	Home Luck	23.48	13.04.1954	
550y	Prince Norroy	32.26	25.10.1941	
	Tuturaama	31.26	1963+	
600y	Kinauld Demonstrator	35.17	26.07.1938	
	Shadowlands Delight	35.02	06.09.1947	
	Gambling Dick	34.95	09.1951	
	Silent Leader	34.50	27.08.1964	
770y	The Black Freak	46.12	11.1958	
	Magic Brooklyn	=46.12	12.1959	
	Buckwheat	45.38	26.10.1963	
880y	Ray-O-Vitol	52.62	02.06.1962	
415yH	Knockbrack Flyer	24.82	06.04.1938	
	Vintners Cup	24.16	13.04.1957	
600yH	Mira Chara	36.57	24.08.1939	
	Mazel Tov	36.22	11.1958	
	R.S.II	35.47	01.09.1962	

