

## **Chesterton (Newcastle-under-Lyme)**

The land south of Chesterton and north of Newcastle-under-Lyme had been dominated since 1912 by the imposing Holditch colliery. The colliery was responsible for mining coal and ironstone creating a tangled web of railway lines, pits and an unused 18<sup>th</sup> century canal. In the early seventies the community decided to construct a speedway and greyhound track possibly spurred on by the fact that nearby Hanley and Cobridge had both closed some years before leaving the area without two popular sports. The colliery was experiencing heavy investment at the same time which may have also incentivised the construction.

In 1973 the Chesterton Potters speedway was founded by stadium owner Russell Bragg and they rode the first season before changing their name to the Stoke Potters. Many other buildings and roads were being constructed during this period with modern housing beginning to appear in the immediate vicinity. The stadium itself was located on the south-east of the relatively new Loomer Road which followed part of course of the old canal which by now was filled in. Bragg wanted the stadium to be used more so entered into an agreement with John Bryant to start dog racing.

Opening on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1975 for greyhound racing the public were able to view the racing from a large covered stand. There was large car park in what was still a rather remote location between the former mining village of Chesterton and the market town of Newcastle-under-Lyme and there were forty racing kennels on site.

The track known as Chesterton was small with distances of 400 & 525 yards before it was switched to the outside of the speedway circuit in February 1979. Unusually for a greyhound track it had been on the inside of the speedway which clearly limited the type of greyhound that could manoeuvre around the tight bends. The switch included a new 'Outside Sumner' hare but resulted in the need to use sheets to cover the all-sand track during speedway meetings; this was of course a regular occurrence on other tracks to ensure the shale did not mix with the sand. The new distances were initially measured at 259, 455 & 658 metres and the total cost of the alterations was £15,000.

Chesterton joined the NGRC permit scheme in the summer of 1981, this decision to race under rules was taken by directors Bill Corbett & Jack Eisenberg and left to Racing Manager Stephen Pardoe to uphold. However a year later the experiment had failed and Chesterton reverted back to independent status on 30 November 1982. Pardoe stated that "the reasons were purely economic", adding that the costs of registrations and transfers were turning owners away and with the re-opening of Cobridge they were left with no choice but to go independent once more. The track suffered more heartache following the miners' strike and subsequent closure of the local colliery leaving much of the area with little money to live on let alone spend at the dog track.

The racing schedule consisted of a Wednesday and Friday night fixture at 7.30pm with trials on Thursday and Sunday. Race distances of 272, 425, 469, 673 & 815 metres formed the basis of meetings around a 360 metre circumference course. Events included the Tardelli Handicap and Potters Classic which was overseen by the Newcastle-under-Lyme Stadium Ltd company led by Michael Corbett. The track gradually regained a consistent patronage, one of who was trainer Jimmy Gibson who would later become a major player on the NGRC circuit.

A new manager called Dave Tattum suspended greyhound racing in 2003 claiming threats from an unknown anti-racing protester (including an arson attempt) had forced him to close the operation until further notice. Despite the fact that the police were called in to investigate the claims the track still closed to greyhounds.

It seems that short lived attempts to revive racing failed and although speedway and stock cars still takes place it looks unlikely that greyhounds will ever return. The Loomer Road stadium and Dave Tattum still have problems because the buildings on site were subject to vandal attack in 2014 that causing major damage.