

Crayford & Bexleyheath

Greyhound racing goes hand-in-hand with speedway and Crayford is another example of this relationship. There was a section of land known as the Crayford Fairfield that had hosted travelling fairs for a reported 500 years. It was in 1930 that the Bexleyheath and District Motorcycle Club started making plans for a grass speedway track at this location and during the spring of that year speedway meetings were held for the first time.

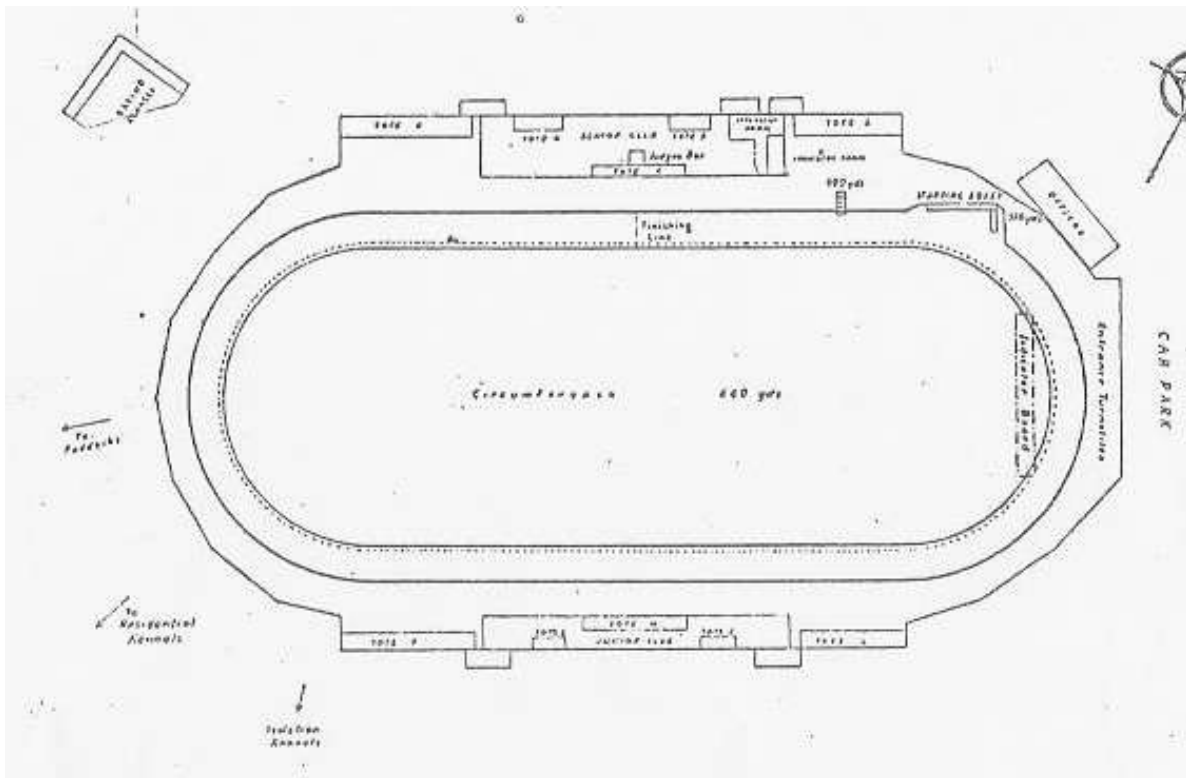
Following the 1931 season it was decided to postpone any further speedway meetings due to the work involved in organising them and this led to Wilson Greyhound Racing Track Ltd building a 450 yard circuit around the grass track. The area was already experiencing the taste of the new sport at nearby Sidcup and Dartford.

Racing duly opened on Easter Monday 1932 and is believed to have continued throughout the following years because in the Kelly's directory of 1934 Crayford greyhound track is listed and in 1935 the speedway returned with a new cinder track inside the dog track presumably still active at the time despite the fact that now the stadium was known as the Crayford Speedway Stadium.

Events changed in 1937 when plans for a new greyhound track and stadium on the site came to fruition. Sadly for the speedway there was no provision made for the sport in the new venture. Builders W & C French completed work quickly on the £50,000 project. There were two glass fronted grandstands, a restaurant and all was under cover. An interesting scenario materialised during the build when a workman digging foundations for the greyhound kennels stumbled across a human skull believed to be over 300 years old and this gained the attention of archeologists.

Opening on 10th July 1937 the distances created were 462, 650 and 880 yards and the running surface was a deep peat which would soon gain a reputation for being helpful to greyhounds with toe and foot ailments. There were some early problems and in particular the track seemed to suffer at the hands of dopers, two such events in 1941 and 1946 resulted in prison sentences for several individuals and the track were forced to employ a private security force.

The problems were soon resolved and under the ownership of Crayford & Bexleyheath Greyhound Stadium Ltd the totalisator turnover was a steady £1 million plus from 1945-1948.



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It was not until the appearance of Malanna Mace that Crayford had a greyhound to shout about. This Henry Parsons trained hound won the 1952 Test and Northern 700 and nearly won a classic after finishing runner up in the St Leger final. The following year the Wembley Gold Cup was also added to the haul.

In 1964 the ownership of the stadium changed when the company known as Northumbrian and Crayford Trust Ltd became part of the group known as the Totalisator Holdings Group (THG), owners of six other tracks and the second biggest operator behind GRA. Distances by 1964 were 490, 520, 650 and 700 yards with an inside Sumner hare and racing was held on Wednesday and Saturday nights at 7.30pm. Patrons could choose from 4 buffet bars and 3 licenced bars and a restaurant as the track entered its 30th year. In 1967 the Crayford Vase was introduced as the tracks first major event by Racing Manager Bill Jeffcoate.

Crayford became the first track in the United Kingdom to adopt the United States system of employing contracted trainers instead of trainers being based at the stadium and being direct employees of the track. This move left Henry Parsons with no kennels so he duly joined the racing office staff and would later become Racing Manager. The first batch of contracted trainers would be a very successful group. Former Arms Park trainer Paddy Coughlan, John Honeysett, John Gibbons, and Terry O'Sullivan associated with the track since 1955 all received contracts.

With such an array of top trainers the stadium then built a solid base of management as the bookmakers Ladbrokes purchased the T.G.H in 1974 which of course included Crayford. The highly respected Arthur Aldridge left GRA to take over as racing director at Ladbrokes at the same time.

1977 brought about the end of an era as the peat surface was replaced with sand, a move instigated by the fact that the peat was becoming very hard to get hold off and was also very expensive. Tony Smith replaced Jim Simpson as Racing Manager the following year. John Honeysett lifted the trainers championship in 1979 after the event was hosted by his home track, the championship would also be held at Crayford for a second successive year in 1980.

The first major achievement of a greyhound attached to Crayford also came about in 1980 when Corduroy trained by Honeysett made it all the way top the Greyhound Derby final. This was then repeated the following year but this time Honeysett steered Clohast Flame to the final. There was an increased workload on the Crayford trainers in 1981 due to extra BAGS fixtures replacing lost horse race meetings affected by bad weather.

The trainers still had time to lift the winning trophy of some major races including the Laurels in 1980 when Flying Pursuit trained by John Gibbons triumphed. Sugarville Pat claimed the Pall Mall in 1982, Flying Duke took the Grand Prix in 1983 and Amenhotep won the Laurels in 1984 for the latest contracted Crayford trainer called Linda Mullins who would of course go on to achieve astonishing success.

News emerged in 1984 that there were plans for rebuilding the entire stadium as part of a development project by Ladbrokes. The twenty acre site would be redeveloped with five acres of it being converted into a new greyhound track and sports stadium. Racing ended on 18th May 1985 and work began on the new stadium.
Site – (0° 10' 38.225"E 51° 26' 57.479"N).

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Selected Pre-Metric Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
440y	Rovers Companion	26.02	1948+	
490y	Not Coming	29.00	1948+	
	Coming Captain	28.21	22.05.1964	
500y	Hetton Ring	28.89	1948+	
	Ardine Glitter	??	30.05.1966	
	Quarrymount Bill	28.69	1970+	
	Dolores Rocket	??	1971+	
520y	Rio Cavallero	30.16	1948+	
	Dim Forecast	29.88	22.05.1963	
530y	Go the Bell	30.36	1948+	
650y	Lee Wind	38.92	30.12.1961	
700y	Knocknagoun Pleasure	41.38	06.05.1964	
	Shanes Pilot	??	1968+	
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	Mister Dash	40.71	1970+	
	Come On Wonder	??	1974+	
940y	Sams Bawnie	56.57	1970+	
500yH	Ballintore Tiger	29.70	1970+	
530yH	Cannuck's Wish	31.29	1948+	

Selected Post-Metric Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
240m	Bray Vale	14.77	02.06.1980	
	Travara Rock	14.76	26.08.1981	
462m	Pigeon Flyer	28.04	14.08.1978	
	House of Hope	27.78	23.11.1984	
648m	Noble Brigg	??	1979+	
	Cormacrusier	40.26	31.03.1980	
	Sundridge Bet	39.90	01.11.1982	
870m	Salina	55.31	02.06.1980	
1056m	Keem Princess	69.35	06.12.1980	
	Gala Special	67.68	07.11.1983	
462mH	London Rover	28.88	14.04.1980	
648mH	Howl On Roger	41.45	28.03.1979	

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