

Milton Keynes

The greyhound track in an area called Ashland opened on 25th July 1963 during a very difficult time for the industry. Significant tracks would close regularly during this period as a consequence of the formation of the Afternoon Greyhound Service and the opening of betting shops.

Originally the track operated as an independent and was known as the Groveway Greyhound Stadium but many would refer to it as Bletchley because Milton Keynes as we know it did not exist at this time. It was called the Groveway based on the fact that the Grove Way road passed the stadium on the north side joining the small town of Bletchley with the village of Simpson.

The track had been built four years before the birth of a large new town called Milton Keynes (named after one of the 15 villages) in a planned 34 square mile area. Milton Keynes proceeded to grow at an incredible speed eventually becoming the size of city.

Racing took place on Tuesday at 8pm and Saturday at 7.30pm and the circumference was 410 yards with an 'Inside Sumner' hare. Facilities included licensed bars, a refreshment bar and a children's playground. The promoter and Racing Manager Robert Beckett organised annual events called the Groveway Autumn Cup, Groveway Derby and Bletchley Trophy. Trial day was a Sunday and six bookmakers were in attendance. Race distances were 305, 440, 460, 525, 745, 900 & 965 yards.

In 1972 the NGRC and NGRS amalgamated to form one controlling body the National Greyhound Racing Club Ltd. Groveway Stadium, Bletchley joined the NGRC banner and the NGRC also relaxed the rule that previously did not allow any NGRC owner or trainer to attend an independent track. Although they could now attend, they were still not allowed to run their greyhounds on independent tracks.

In the early seventies housing estates called Bean Hill and Netherfield popped up to the north and the Mount Farm Industrial Estate was constructed to the south bringing a new audience to the track. One of the trainers joining the track at this time was Reg Young the former breeder and owner of 1970 Derby champion John Silver. The track would go by the name of Bletchley at this point.

The Bletchley Derby was now official in terms of being an NGRC affiliated race so the 1972 running was seen as the first of note. Legendary trainer George Curtis traveled from Brighton to claim the event with Easy Investment. Success came surprisingly quickly for a small track but it did have the advantage of being very central in the UK and as a result many trainers of note would have spells at the track.

In 1974 Stage Box won the BBC Television Trophy for Natalie Savva and one year later Gwen Lynds pulled off the biggest coup when winning the Greyhound Derby with Tartan Khan. After only three years as an affiliated track it has scooped the number one prize; Reg Young then added the Cesarewitch with Silver Sceptre the same year. Bletchley would experience a wonderful spell of racing with Derby finalists from 1975 through to 1978 and many significant winners especially from the Natalie and Nick Savva camp.

In 1980 the A5 road was built and passed just south of the track putting it in a very busy area. Robert Beckett retired and the track reverted back to independent status for a short while but trainer Reg Young stepped in as the new promoter as the track rejoined the NGRC permit scheme under the name of Milton Keynes instead of Bletchley. Robert Beckett's son David took over the Racing Managers chair.

It was not long before Milton Keynes greyhounds continued where they had left off mainly fuelled by the success of the Savva kennels and their famous Westmead prefix. Natalie Savva steered Special Account to the Scottish derby crown and English Derby runner up in 1982. Other trainers such as Theo Mentzis, Jack Coker, Peggy Coper, Ron Bicknell, Mel Bass and Derek Law all scored major open race success for Milton Keynes over the coming years but it was the Savva camp that made all the headlines. Greyhounds like Flashy Sir, Right Move and Phantom Flash lit up many competitions in the late eighties and early nineties.

Reg Young retired in 1987 but made a comeback as General Manager in the early nineties followed by Dan McCormick before the track was sold by Milton Keynes Stadium Ltd to the BS Group who also owned the Eastville track in Bristol.

The conveyor belt of big race winners showed no sign of stopping and even the great Geoff De Mulder had a spell at the track as a trainer. Moaning Lad trained by Theo Mentzis finished third in the Derby final for Milton Keynes in 1994 and one year later the fawn dog claimed the title but unfortunately he was training privately at that time. Amends were made as soon as 1998 when Toms The Best did win the Derby as a Milton Keynes hound.

Sandwiched in between these events in 1997 was the sale of Eastville stadium by the company, they had promised that a new stadium would be built but it was ending greyhound racing in Bristol, there was some comfort in the fact that most of the trainers and greyhounds were all sent to Swindon which had recently become a sister track to Milton Keynes along with Poole.

In 1999 the BS Group purchased the Milton Keynes Bowl (an entertainment venue) to add to their assets and soon after plans were unveiled for a new state of the art greyhound track around the Milton Keynes Bowl. The plan had council backing and would include a cinema, hotel and revamp of the entertainment venue. The news ended speculation about the BS Group selling off their greyhound tracks after the Bristol sale. Chief executive Clarke Osborne commented: "There is no substance in the rumours whatsoever" he added: "You only have to look at what the group has done during the past couple of years or so and what it has planned for the future. The industry knows that BS Group is constantly looking for new sites for tracks."

Osborne also confirmed that they were still looking at sites in Bristol for a new track and when the company purchased Reading from Allied Presentations in 2002 they were challenging GRA as the leading greyhound operator. Meanwhile David Beckett passed away and Bill Johnson became Racing Manager in 2001.

Bristol never materialised and in 2005 the new Milton Keynes track was never started but the old site was closed regardless of no new site being ready. The last meeting took place on Boxing Day 2005, Reading would follow suit a couple of years later.

The stadium became derelict and then suffered major fire which resulted in the demolition of the site before yet another housing estate sprung up recently in 2014. The actual position of the stadium would have been underneath the current road called Wetheringsett.

Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
245m	Westfield Earl	14.76	24.08.1978	
	Tims Crow	14.73	23.10.2003	
430m	Super System	26.31	26.04.1975	
440m	Fortune King	26.72	25.09.1983	
	Siroco	26.56	22.03.1984	
	Dawlish Chance	26.55	11.10.1986	
	Broken Quest	26.28	21.04.1998	
620m	Countville	39.05	26.07.1975	
	Weston Oak	38.19	29.04.1976	
	Frame Evelyn	38.19	12.04.1984	
	Glenowen Queen	38.11	08.08.1985	Autumn Cup semi-final
	Jerpoint Diamond	38.08	19.01.1989	
	Cushie Amazing	37.96	31.01.1998	
	Farloe Bonus	37.86	22.08.1998	Summer Cup
805m	Silver Sceptre	51.84	29.03.1975	
815m	Tartan Sarah	51.84	19.04.1984	
	Grange Glen Sam	51.73	08.09.1984	
	Spewood Gem	51.22	24.04.1999	
995m	Souda Bay	64.79	27.02.1997	
	Gift of Gold	64.10	19.09.2000	
440mh	Springwell Boost	27.15	21.10.1997	
620mh	El Tenor	39.31	31.08.1998	

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