

Monmore Green (Wolverhampton)

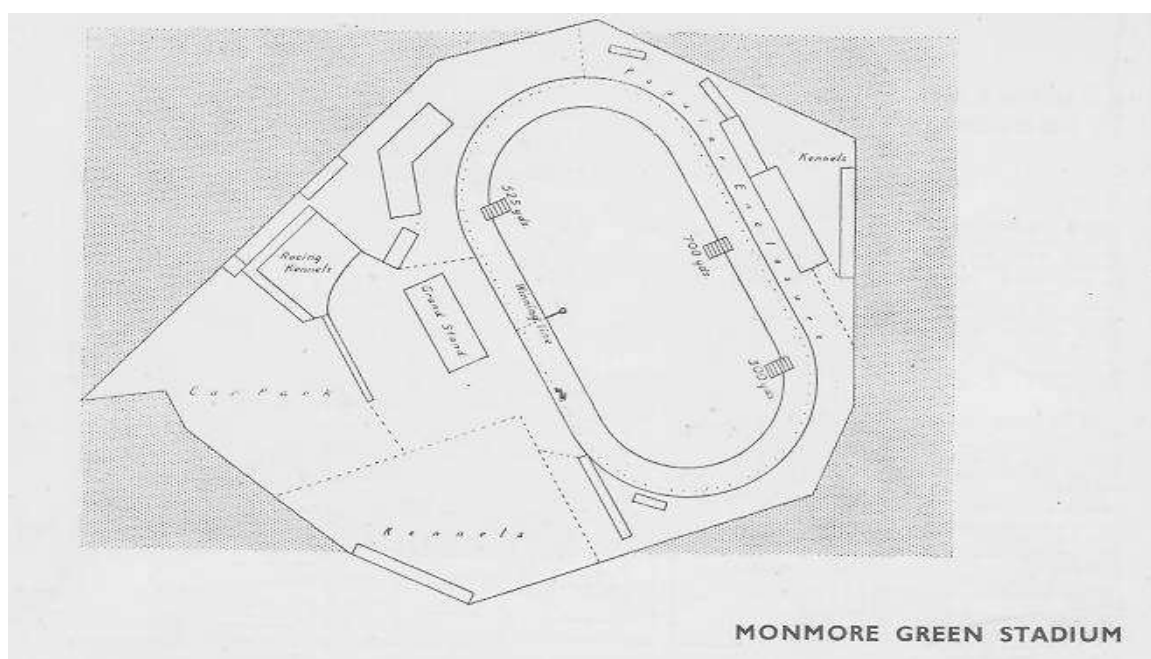
There have been many quotes regarding changing times but one that we hear a lot is “funny how things change”. In 1960 the bookmaker shops opened and fourteen years later Totalisator and Greyhound Holdings Ltd (TGH) were bought out by Ladbrokes, both events spelled the end for countless greyhound tracks and the bookmaker firms were seen as evil apparitions. Fast forward just thirty years and the bookmaker owned tracks began to establish themselves as the primary tracks in the country; furthermore it is realistically the only type of track where connections can make a stable career and now seen as the jewels in the crown. Today Monmore is considered to be one of the leading stadiums in the industry.

The area known as Monmore Green can be found south-east of Wolverhampton and in 1928 a greyhound track opened for business just south of the Sutherland Road between the Great Western Railway, Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton line and East Park, a large sculptured park and gardens that opened in 1896. The plot chosen was open uncultivated land which also gave name to some of the surrounding areas such as Stow Heath and after the stadium has been constructed it stood in an excellent tranquil setting with the nearest buildings being the Monmore Green schools on west side of the railway lines.

The official opening night was Wednesday 11 January 1928 and all of the arrangements had been organised by a company called the Midland Greyhound Racing Association. A 10,000 strong crowd were thrilled by the new sport and were also in awe of the electric lights that lit up the track. There were seven races including two hurdle events due to be run but the last race was voided due to a greyhound fighting the field. The first past the line on the night was Arrow Tranby winning one of the 500 yards races in a time of 32.08 secs at odds of 6-1 when winning the Shirley Stakes.

The Midland Greyhound Racing Co Ltd stepped in to take ownership of Willenhall in 1935 with the greyhounds used there trained out of the very large resident Monmore kennels split into two sections, one found south of the car park next to the railway line with the other behind the Popular Enclosure on the back straight. Unlike sister track Willenhall the larger Monmore Green did not suffer closure during the war and in fact introduced the Midland Puppy Championship in 1943, the event would be known in several guises such as the Midland Puppy Derby and in recent times the Ladbrokes Puppy Derby when the prize money would dwarf the more prestigious Puppy Derby held at Wimbledon.

The set-up of the track was described as a good galloping track, 447 yards in circumference with a slight dip on the bends with consequent banking and fairly easy turns suiting dogs that incline to run wide. The hare was an ‘Outside Sumner’ and track distances were 300, 525 & 700 yards including handicaps and hurdles.



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The company ran a policy of having joint Racing Managers due to the fact that both were expected to cover the tracks of Willenhall and Monmore, J Bell responsibilities lay mainly with Monmore but Peter Cartwright was also named as joint Racing Manager.

After the war the track experienced the first taste of major open race success when the J Yarwood trained Still Dreaming won the Midland Puppy Championship in 1946 and one year later Just Killeedy lifted the Midland Flat trophy for M Baker. Baker was also the trainer who was represented in the 1949 Derby final with the greyhound Glencloy Regent. A third trainer Les Brown got into the act after a Birmingham Cup win by Kilcaskin Mail in 1949 before Baker successfully defended his Midland Flat crown with Perfect Peter II in 1950. Cartwright left the company to take up a position with the NGRC and Bob Harwood replaced Cartwright as Racing Manager.

John Bassett joined the training ranks for a short spell in the fifties and his Silent Worship scored three notable victories for Wolverhampton, the Pall Mall & Stewards Cup in 1956 followed by the Birmingham Cup the following year. Further competitions were introduced at the track that included the Midland St Leger, Midland Classic Potential, Pride of the Midlands and Staffordshire Knot. There was under-soil heating to ensure racing through winter periods and a regular schedule of Thursday & Saturday night racing. All was going swimmingly until 1963 when a devastating fire swept through the main grandstand resulting in the closure of the track for a considerable period whilst repairs were made. The annual Midland Puppy Championship had to be switched to Willenhall.

Monmore experienced further open race glory in 1964 when Shotblast won the Eclipse for Les Brown and Total Barber travelled to Newcastle picking up the All England Cup for trainer Alf Prentice.

The fire of 1963 instigated a major change with the grandstand undergoing a serious cash injection in the mid-sixties to include an ultra-modern glass fronted restaurant with tiered viewing and waitress service. It brought the facilities up to date which may have been one of the reasons why the venue attracted outside interest. That interest came in the form of the Totalisators and Greyhound Holdings (TGH) and in 1970 they purchased Willenhall and Monmore from the Midland Greyhound Racing Co Ltd to add to the existing tracks that had been bought in the sixties. THG now had Crayford and Bexleyheath, Gosforth, Leeds and Brough Park bringing the portfolio to six tracks. The changes were not restricted to the stadium because the face of the surrounding areas was changing. A giant wholesale fruit and vegetable market had sprung up served by Hickman Avenue formerly a pathway to the east of the stadium bringing an end to the quiet fields that had existed on that side of the track.

Four years in 1974 Ladbrokes bought out TGH and added another racetrack in the form of Perry Barr. Arthur Aldridge left the GRA to take up the position of Racing Director for Ladbrokes. In between the Bertie Gaynor trained Silly Rocket claimed the prestigious Welsh Derby. The following year Ladbrokes sealed the deal to host the BBC TV Trophy for the first time and in 1978 they were also selected to hold the Trainers Championship for the first time.

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***Monmore stadium in the seventies
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In 1981 the terrible British weather decimated the horse racing fixtures leading to an urgent requirement for more BAGS greyhound fixtures to fill the void. Monmore, Cambridge, Romford and Crayford were chosen to save the day for the betting shops.

Scurlogue Champ won the BBC TV Trophy in 1985 breaking the track record twice; it was a coup for Monmore to host the event for a second time in just seven years. Although life under Ladbrokes seemed progressive it was worrying time for staff, owners and trainers the company had sold five of the tracks in the portfolio leaving just Monmore and the newly rebuilt Crayford by 1987. The track kennels had also been demolished making way for the contract trainer system. When Willenhall had closed in 1980 John Anderson, Peter Billingham and Pat Ryan had moved to Monmore to join Ken Reynolds and Jack Simpson and since the contract trainer system was introduced the further appointments of Maurice Buckland, D Edwards & D Bennett.

Jim Woods arrived from Nottingham to take over as Racing Manager and Bob Harwood was General Manager. The stadium hosted the former Harringay Golden Jacket classic race in 1986 before it moved to Crayford and big race winners came from the Ken Reynolds and Pat Ryan kennels. Copper King took the Lead and Coronation Cup for Reynolds whilst Ryan's Holiday Hope put his name on the Eclipse roll of honour. The late eighties saw a revival for the sport and Monmore concentrated heavily on their BAGS contract introducing eight dog handicap races in January 1988. Once again the surroundings had changed, there was now a large industrial park north of Sutherland Avenue and industrial units next to the fruit and vegetable market, the stadium was now pinned in.

Stability was the name of the game with the track over the next few years as Monmore became established as a leading BAGS track. Over the next few years new names arrived in the training ranks as some left over the preceding years such as Ryan & Reynolds, Maurice Buckland pursued new interests at Perry Barr leaving the kennels to Stuart Buckland. The TV Trophy was held for the third time at Monmore in 1991.

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The Midland Gold Cup came back in 1994; the race had been an event before the war and would soon be renamed to the Ladbrokes Gold Cup with increased prize money. John Wileman secured a TV Trophy win in 1995 with Last Action and Sandra Ralph picked up the former classic Laurels race in 1998 with Ardant Jimmy.

The country's leading trainer at the time the double Derby winning Tony Meek joined the track but with a profile of training top class open racers the schedule did not suit and he soon left. Monmore had an extremely strong reputation but it was also notorious for being a difficult place for a trainer to forge a career. Priorities were the BAGS contracts overseen by their operations director Gordon Bissett and a trainer would either love it or hate it there. In 2000 Ken Bebbington lifted the Golden Jacket with Knappogue Oak.

Ladbrokes upped the stakes in the new millennium possibly as a consequence of the William Hill involvement in the sport. Prize money was increased and major open race competitions became very lucrative for leading trainers. In 2002 the Ladbrokes Summer Classic offered a tasty £7,500 winners prize, the Ladbrokes Gold Cup and Ladbrokes Puppy Derby then received decent increases.

Richard Brankley became the new General Manager and the likes of Pat Rosney and Chris Allsopp joined the training ranks. Rosney in his time at Monmore handled two Gold Collar winners and a Select Stakes winner before leaving the track. Allsopp began winning major races in 2006 and a host of winners culminated in the Trainer of the Year award in 2011. Some of the leading highlights from 2006-2011 during that time included two Scurry Cup wins, two Pall Mall wins and an East Anglian Derby with stars such as Ballymac Ace and Drumcove Lad.

Peter Billingham retired in 2008 handing the kennels to daughter Kim and instant success arrived just six months later when Meenala Amy went on to win the Oaks for the new licence holder, Southwind Harry won the Gold Collar the following year forming a memorable first year. Patrick Curtin arrived from Oxford in 2011 and also experienced the thrill of winning a big race by lifting the Cesarewitch trophy by virtue of a dead heat win by Farloe Kraven.



Ballymac Ace after winning the Pall Mall in 2010. Copyright – Chris Allsopp

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The new BAGS Track Championship initiated in 2011 went to the hosts Monmore proving that Monmore dogs were amongst the strongest in the UK. Paul Sallis strengthened the training ranks in 2012 and one year later Jim Woods retired after a 31 year career handing the reigns to Tony Williamson.

Chris Allsopp continued to be in the forefront of open race action winning the Select Stakes in 2013 with Daddy Knowsbest but the track lost their leading trainer to Towcester at the end of 2014. A double blow for Monmore came when they lost by just one point to Peterborough in the 2014 BAGS Track Championship final.

Allsop returned to Monmore in 2015 and the prestigious Trafalgar Cup for puppies also returned after Des Loughrey sponsored the competition; it had been dormant following the closure of Oxford in 2012. The race went to Roxholme Barkley on the same night that Swift Hoffman claimed the Gold Cup final.

Selected Pre-Metric Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
300y	General Radiance	17.22	27.05.1937	
	Hurry Kitty	17.17	08.11.1945	
475y	Neidins Bunty	27.53	23.03.1939	
	Coynes Castle	27.14	08.08.1946	
500y	Lucky Joan	28.10	10.1962	
525y	Kilpeacon Bride	30.09	05.02.1944	
	Red Captain	29.34	04.1965	
	Aughrim Glen	29.19	1970+	
650y	Derry Fame	37.04	06.1964	
	Hogans Express	=37.04	1970+	
700y	Half Term	40.79	14.10.1944	
	Clahane Girl	40.05	09.1962	
	Forward King	39.82	1970+	
880y	Chantilly Lace	51.80	04.1960	
	Old Irish	51.10	1970+	
525yH	Baytown Express	30.90	29.10.1944	
	Coast Raider	30.60	09.1957	

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

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Selected Post-Metric Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
210m	Cry Havoc	12.64	20.03.1997	
264m	Parliament Act	15.32	28.08.2001	
	Boher Chief	15.30	27.05.2004	
	La Galga	15.24	11.08.2005	
	La Galga	15.23	26.08.2005	
	Winnies Dancer	15.22	08.10.2005	
	Ningbo Jack	15.09	12.06.2006	
	Paid Boss	15.08	24.08.2007	
	Jetharts Here	14.95	08.09.2007	
277m	Cross Bar	16.66	19.04.1984	
	Fearless Champ	16.34	09.11.1985	
416m	Devitos Chance	24.96	10.12.1997	
	Moynies Cash	24.57	03.07.2004	
	Woodcroft Jo	24.51	04.09.2004	
	Belindas Company	24.33	23.09.2006	
	Funtime Chunky	24.33	24.08.2007	
	Last Mohican	24.30	05.07.2008	
	Loughbeag Roopy	24.22	26.06.2010	
	Guinness Sky	24.21	24.06.2013	
460m	Larkhill Jo	27.15	10.04.1997	
462m	Hume Silver	28.15	14.06.1984	
	Fearless Champ	28.12	18.01.1986	
480m	Larkhill Jo	27.95	07.07.1997	Midland Gold Cup semi-final
	Knocktoosh Queen	27.93	09.08.2003	
	Express Hancho	27.91	23.08.2003	Ladbrokes Gold Cup semi-finals
	Westmead Eagle	27.85	17.03.2005	
	Ballymac Pires	27.82	17.03.2005	Ladbrokes Puppy Derby final
	Blonde Dino	27.81	08.09.2007	
	Ballymac Ruso	27.79	06.12.2008	
	Bandicoot Tipoki	27.76	12.03.2009	Ladbrokes Puppy Derby heats
	Farloe Lee	=27.76	12.03.2009	Ladbrokes Puppy Derby heats
	Target Classic	27.71	07.12.2009	
	Farley Blitz	27.60	13.02.2010	
	Ballymac Eske	27.48	28.06.2012	
484m	Duke of Avon	29.22	05.07.1979	
	Keen Mint	29.55	11.10.1982	
	Fearless Power	29.26	08.11.1986	
	Darragh Commet	29.08	11.02.1989	
630m	Spring Rose	37.90	10.05.1997	
	Slippy Elite	37.81	28.11.1998	
	Form of Magic	37.56	16.05.2002	Ladbrokes Summer Classic heats
	Marmions	37.42	20.05.2004	Ladbrokes Summer Classic semi
	Westmead Hawk	37.08	20.05.2005	
	Iceman Brutus	37.07	20.08.2007	Ladbrokes Gold Cup heats
647m	Telecomm Tiger	40.42	18.10.1986	
	Catunda Flame	40.33	08.07.1989	
	Easy Bimbo	40.18	13.07.1991	
	Highmoor Glen	40.10	10.07.1993	
684m	True Honcho	41.03	14.04.2001	
	Centour Corker	40.60	29.05.2003	Ladbroke Summer Classic final
692m	Desert Fame	43.41	25.04.1984	
	Miss Bluebird	43.37	29.10.1985	
815m	Lizzies Girl	52.16	1975+	BBC TV Trophy Final
	Scurlogue Champ	51.80	15.05.1985	BBC TV Trophy heats
	Scurlogue Champ	51.64	22.05.1985	BBC TV Trophy Final

	Angelas Girl		1985+	
835m	Spewood Gem	52.09	17.09.1998	
	Knappogue Oak	52.09	28.08.2001	
	Minglers Moth	52.01	15.08.2002	
	Hesley Gale	51.95	27.05.2004	
	Head Iton Tonge	51.60	21.06.2007	
	Flying Winner	51.26	29.08.2009	
880m	Thornfield Pride	54.79	19.07.1997	
900m	Make It Not	58.05	05.11.1983	
	Angelas Girl		1985+	
	Lilac Wonder	57.83	05.12.1992	
	Ladys Storm	57.02	09.07.1998	
1067m	Belladare	70.74	09.05.1987	
	Coverall	70.34	29.10.1990	
1104m	Travel Now	72.66	25.03.2000	
460mH	James Wish	28.19	1998+	
480mH	Brave Ruler	28.88	26.07.1999	
484mH	Distant Echo	30.54	18.07.1987	
	Nifty Kid	30.32	28.11.1988	
	Run On King	30.09	10.04.1991	
647mH	Tebroc Heathen	42.60	20.04.1989	

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