

## Portsmouth (Tipner)

The track known as Copnor had closed in 1930 to be replaced by a bigger track at the end of Target Road in Tipner west Portsmouth. The site was unused land at the time and in addition to the new greyhound track was an Athletic Ground built next door. The two new venues provided the Tipner public with decent facilities to take into the future.

The stadium opened on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1931 with trainer Fred Tolfree claiming all the first four places in a five dog opening race. The first winner was Tommy's Pup the 2-1 favourite.

In 1932 the stadium was bought by Joe Childs a famous jockey at the time because he was jockey to the King, also included in the new management team were Jack Parker captain of the Harringay speedway team and Bradbury Pratt.

As early as 1937 a 14 year old boy called George Curtis was to secure a job with track trainer Bill Peters and one year later in 1938 Hugo Spencer joined the track as a trainer.

The management of the stadium was run by Sporting Promotions (Portsmouth) Ltd and the track was particularly popular in summer. After the war at its peak the totalisator turnover was recorded as £1,108,662 in 1946 & £1,051,032 one year later.

Quick Surprise provided Portsmouth with its first taste of major success in 1956; the brindle dog won the Scottish Derby and reached the final of the English Derby for trainer Pat Mullins. Two years later Joe Childs passes away and the ownership of the stadium went into the hands of F A Childs who in turn became Racing Manager taking over from C Hulbert. Childs was replaced by E F G Wilkins in July 1959, it is not known if this was a result of the sad death of Childs. Childs had drowned in an accident but this was reported as 1960 but could have been earlier. Childs was remembered in the following years with the running of the F.A.Childs Memorial Trophy. Another race that was prominent at Portsmouth was the Golden Muzzle but this would not be held for many years yet.

In 1961 a second Scottish Derby triumph was sealed by the Hugo Spencer trained Hey There Merry; it was remarkable that two Portsmouth greyhounds had travelled to Scotland to claim this event. One year later Spencer steered Trip To Dublin through to the English Derby final.

The stadium came into the hands of the Nationwide Leisure Company and in 1963 Bill Francis became Racing Manager. It was around this time that George Curtis began to come to prominence as a trainer; his first big win arrived with Bad Trick who took the 1964 Puppy Derby.

In 1968 George Curtis left Portsmouth for Brighton leaving Hugo Spencer and Greg Doyle as the tracks resident trainers but Charlie Curtis, the brother of George took up the reins. Sadly just one year later in 1969 Charlie was killed in a car crash.

Hugo Spencer continued to fly the flag for Portsmouth when he won the 1971 Welsh Derby with Spectres Dream and would also win three National Sprints in 1961 with Hi There Merry and two in 1975 & 1976 following the race being transferred to Portsmouth for three years after the closure of Clapton and before it moved on to Harringay.

Worryingly in 1972 the GRA bought the track from the Nationwide Leisure Company for the sole purpose of selling it as a lucrative commercial property under there GRA Property Trust Company. Luckily for Portsmouth the property bubble burst in 1973 leaving the south coast venue with a lifeline. Reading in Oxford Road had not been so lucky and closed under the GRA which resulted in trainer Ron Jeffrey arriving at Portsmouth.

Bill Francis became General Manager and oversaw two Racing Managers spells, Jim Layton and Stuart Strachan both came and went before Dave Stow settled in the role. A third appearance by a Portsmouth dog in an English Derby final came to fruition in 1985 when Walstone reached the decider. Walstone was trained by John Coplestone who ran a top class kennel and would bring further success to Portsmouth in the near future.

In 1990 the track still had grass straights before finally becoming one of the last to go to all sand. The same year Jo Burridge won the Hunt Cup with Coloured Panther. Colin Barwick and Tony Lucas both scored decent wins in this era.

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Copplestone had another English Derby finalist in 1991, this time it was Summerhill Super but the white and black dog could only finish fifth. However consolation came in the form of the Select Stakes and International. Summerhill Super's achievements were eclipsed by another Copplestone hound called Murlens Abbey. The white and blue dog lifted the Greyhound of the Year accolade following wins that included the Arc, East Anglian Derby and Edinburgh Cup.

Following the takeover by Wembley plc the GRA pledged a new state of the art Portsmouth stadium would be built in the near future but in 1992 Wembley plc announced significant losses leading to cost cutting exercises and Portsmouth suffered as a result. Lee McAlpine replaced Dave Stow as Racing Manager before leaving some years later to be replaced by Eric Graham. In 1998 Jim Snowden left Catford to take over as Portsmouth General Manager from the retiring Bill Francis.

During 2006 the track 'Inside Sumner' was replaced by a 'Swaffham' along with further investment in a new running rail and traps.

News suddenly came to light in 2008 that Portsmouth City Council were considering selling the site for redevelopment, many had forgotten that the track was on a long term lease and that was nearing its end. By this time Jim Snowden had left and Eric Graham had taken over as General Manager, Paul Clark was the Racing Manager.

Now the story of how Portsmouth came to an end is a very strange and confusing one and rumours surfaced of underhand dealings but facts that we do know are these –

- Lease holder GRA offloaded the track to a company called PGS Ltd newly registered in March 2008. The person listed as the Director of that company was the General Manager Eric Graham.
- It was agreed that PGS Ltd could pay the council a peppercorn rent of £1,000 per year because there was no value in redeveloping the land at that time.
- Graham attempted to renew the lease two years later in 2010 but it was rejected by the Tipner Regeneration Company and South East England Development Agency.
- Within weeks of the attempt to renew the lease the company was wound up with immediate effect and liquidators were appointed.
- Staff and trainers went unpaid and Paul Clark had been suspended by Graham for comments made to him over his role in the closure.

Many questions were left unanswered such as why was there an attempt to renew the lease if the company was making a loss but at the end of the day another track had bit the dust. The last meeting was held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and to add insult to injury within a few weeks vandals moved in and caused severe damage to the site. The Tipner regeneration project was described by some as sucking the life out of Portsmouth.

The site today would be found at the end of Target Road on the east of Range Green.

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### Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
470y	Clam	27.30	1950+	
	Hey There Merry	26.68	24.05.1963	
655y	Shaggy Lass	38.34	1946+	
	Laurdella Guest	37.67	06.06.1964	
850y	Woodville Fortune	50.54	03.07.1964	
470yH	Tuathal Teachmar	28.29	1950+	
246m	Gold Tip	15.04	17.03.2009	
256m	Mr Belvedere	15.72	26.06.1987	
	Lissadell Tiger	15.55	09.06.1989	
430m	Ivory Dave	26.30	08.04.2006	
	Coolside Lucky	26.27	20.10.2006	Golden Muzzle heats
438m	Northwood Double	26.95	1977+	
	Blakes World	26.15	29.10.2006	Golden Muzzle final
	Skelligs Tiger	26.63	19.07.1985	
	Beaver Dip	26.37	16.09.1988	
	Knockeevan Magic	26.26	05.10.2003	Golden Muzzle final
601m	Bills Paid	37.51	02.06.2006	
610m	Wellington Sand	38.32	16.10.1984	
	Crohane Lucy	38.26	06.10.1989	
	Firmount Flapjack	38.14	13.10.2000	
784m	Active Pearl	50.43	04.08.2006	
792m	Airmount Sand	50.65	16.10.1984	
	My Texette	50.62	28.07.1993	
	Winetavern Sooth	50.60	28.07.2000	
955m	Zuzu's Petal	62.18	02.06.2006	
964m	Wheres Dunait	62.94	28.07.1993	

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

### Selected Tote Returns

Year	Turnover £
1939	210,584
1941	220,126
1942	302,335
1943	368,554
1944	463,434
1945	744,735
1946	1,108,662
1947	1,051,032
1948	759,044
1949	423,373
1950	335,660
1952	269,683
1953	242,000
1954	208,000