

Sheffield (Darnall)

The first greyhound track in Sheffield was Darnall situated in east Sheffield and it was surrounded by garden allotments at the time of the greyhound track construction. The ground already served as the Darnall Wellington Cricket and football ground but is not to be confused with the original Darnall cricket ground used by the Wednesday Cricket Club founded in 1820. This was north of the London & North Eastern Railway line and the Darnall greyhound track was south of the line.

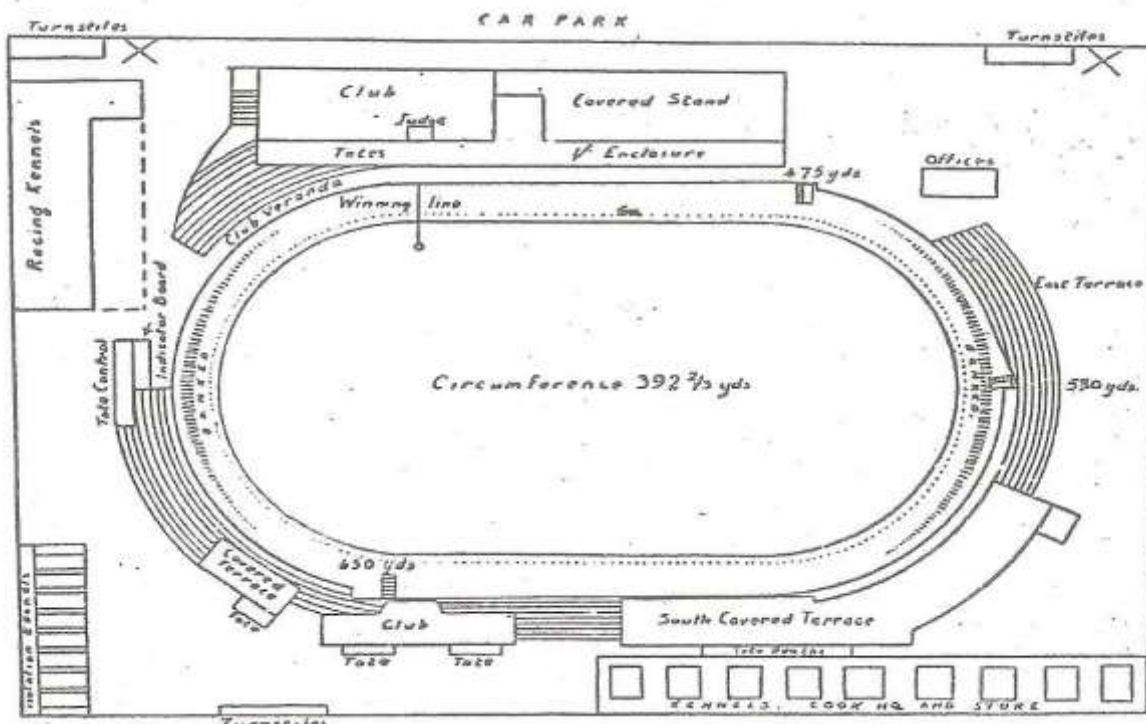
The track was accessed from Poole Road with the eastern side of the stadium adjacent to allotments and James Street. Directly to the north were a metal wire rope works and then the railway line and to the east was a huge collection of allotments that would eventually be converted into the Parkway market.

The date chosen as the opening night was unusually a Monday evening on May 23rd 1927 starting at 7.30pm. Trials had previously taken place to classify the runners into relevant races and the local press were excited by the fact that Latto the 1923 Waterloo Cup winner had sired some of the greyhounds due to take part in the event. There were some reservations about the fact that it was coursing greyhounds that were expected to take to the new oval from of racing but it had already been successful at the new GRA tacks.

The Darnall Working Men's Club band got proceedings underway at 6.30pm by playing to the eager audience before the six race card began. The manager was F Williamson and the A J Detheridge from Bristol was brought in as the judge. There were over 100 bookmakers and between 5-6 thousand spectators who witnessed a greyhound called Mission win the first ever race at 3-1 odds finishing two lengths clear of the field. The electric hare caused bewilderment and then keen interest as the crowd became thrilled by the new contraption.

It was long after when plans for a second track surfaced, Owlerton had been earmarked for a greyhound circuit and hopes were high that it could rival the Darnall track owned by the Associated Greyhound Racecourse Ltd. During 1929 the Owlerton track construction began but the Darnall company keen to increase their greyhound business had already opened a second track in Burnley during September of that year. Not stopping there a third track was brought under their umbrella, this time it was the Craven Park lease in Hull.

The long awaited opening of Owlerton finally came to fruition in 1931 and it is not known if this new track had an impact on The Associated Greyhound Racecourse Ltd but we do know that the company went bankrupt the same year. It may not have been linked due to the fact that there was simply not much time between the two events but it is possible that it had some bearing.



Darnall 1940's

Nevertheless Darnall continued to exist under new management and the totalisator turnover figures (on page 2) indicate a steady increase in business throughout the war years up until a peak in 1946. The company listed as owning the track at this stage was the Darnall Greyhound Racecourse Company Ltd.

The track itself was 393 yards in circumference with distances of 475, 530 & 650 yards behind an 'Inside McWhirter' hare and it was nearly entirely surrounded by some structure. There was a large covered stand and club with enclosures on the home straight, on the first bend was the club veranda and then the totalisator board, tote control and terracing all the way round to the back straight. At this point were another club, more terracing and the very large 'South Covered Terrace' that also swept around the third bend which finally met the east terrace and offices. The office provided the only break in the terracing and buildings. Three sets of kennels existed, the racing kennels and small paddock were found behind the first bend, the isolation kennels well behind the second bend and finally the 120 resident kennels, cook house, stores and four acre training paddocks stretched along the south of the stadium behind the 'South Covered Terrace'. Furthermore rest kennels were situated with a resident head trainer 12 miles from the track at Loyal Trooper Farm, South Anston.

Darnall always played second fiddle to Owlerton and the independent track of Hyde Park also contributed to healthy competition in Sheffield. R Randall was replaced as Racing Manager by V Holland in the mid-fifties and open race success was limited due to Owlerton's success. Two race victories of note however were the 1959 Northern 700 secured by Come To Johnny and handled by Jim Brennan and 1962 Ebor Stakes winner Cushmine Snob trained by A Dryhurst. Brennan of course would gain most of his impressive training feats at Owlerton.

A decline in attendances led to the track closing in 1964 which was a dark period for the industry. The track was demolished and a road called Acres Hill Lane was built to meet an extended Poole Road on the area that would have been the northern part of track today. Later industrial units were constructed encompassing the southern part of the track (1° 24' 57.889"W 53° 23' 2.826"N).

Selected Track Records

| Distance | Name | Time | Date | Notes |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 470y | Hilarity | 26.98 | 25.08.1948 | |
| 530y | Belle of Killarney | 29.91 | 03.07.1948 | |
| 650y | Camp Bugler | 37.81 | 16.06.1945 | |
| | Clady Border | 37.73 | 01.07.1946 | |
| 480yH | Lone Legion | 28.70 | 28.08.1939 | |