

## Southampton

The city of Southampton is steeped in history due to its position on the south coast and having a port has meant that it thrived over the centuries. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the population was increasing and there was an area north of the town (as it was then) called Banisters Park that had so far escaped the cramped housing that was found to the south. Nevertheless the population craved entertainment so the Southampton Greyhound Racing Company was formed and a group of businessmen purchased Banister's Court situated on the south side of the Hampshire County Cricket Ground which some also called Banisters Park.

The site bought consisted mainly of a former well respected school called Banister Court Private School, the name Banister derived from Sir Edward Banister owner of the farms that made up area in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The company of course duly started construction on a greyhound track where the car park would be accessed from Court Road which itself originated from Banister Road. Knott named the stadium the Banister Court Stadium.

The new sport was sweeping the country and on the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> August 1928 the stadium opened to an expectant crowd, three other seaside tracks had just opened within a short four month period, Ramsgate, Plymouth and Portsmouth had all seen the traps open. Lord D.L.Lawrence performed the opening ceremony and the first ever race at 3.00pm was also the first of six heats forming the Southampton Cup over 500 yards and it went to Glengormley's Pride a 7-1 shot in 31.60secs. The third race a match race was won by Miss G.Knott's Jodonna, Knott was the daughter of one of the directors Charlie Knott.

The stadium already had a dirt track constructed ready for speedway to arrive and featured two large stands offering excellent viewing. The Chairman of the company Mr.J.Morgan and two of the directors Ronald Prideaux and H Pearl addressed the 3,000 people that had turned out to watch the opening. By the end of the meeting there were 6,000 present with another 3,000 attending the evening meeting held from 8.00pm until 9.30pm.

Speedway made its debut on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1928 and one year later the Southampton Greyhound Racing Company was bought out by the Hampshire Greyhound Racing Syndicate led by one of the existing directors and a local businessman and fishmonger called Charlie Knott. The company was soon renamed Southampton Sports Stadium Ltd.

A greyhound called Buckna Boy represented Southampton in the 1929 & 1930 English Greyhound Derby and was actually one of the leading fancies for the 1929 running. The fawn dog trained by Renwick later defeated Mick the Miller in the Champion Stakes, finished runner-up in the Welsh Derby but lost out when matched against Mick the Miller in 1930. It would be the only recorded instance of a Southampton hound competing in major races.

The track lay out was described as a fair-sized course, 393 yards in circumference with easy bends and short straights. The hare used was an 'Inside Sumner' because the track did not have room for an outside hare. Although the track did not have a principal event they held something called 'Patrons Nominations Sweepstakes', these were 36 runner competitions nominated by their owners with the winner from each of the six heats going forward to the final to receive prizes. An annual hospital charity meeting was also held to raise funds for local hospitals.

In 1931 the ice rink was built on the south side of the stadium and shared the car park area, the business continued to grow leading up to the war and remained a profitable venture. The track managed to race through the war years despite the town suffering considerable bomb damage, it had a lucky escape in 1940 when the ice rink was hit and burned down. Knott would have to dig deep into his pockets after vowing to build a new one for the public after the war. The track did receive some bomb damage that prevented the management from offering restaurant facilities after the war. The tote figure for the war period and forties can be found on page 2.

The stadium now consisted of a main grandstand with terracing around three sides; the empty side on the east featured the totalisator buildings, stadium club and kennels which backed onto a police club. The 300 resident kennels could be found at Netley March near Totton, six miles from the track and it was managed by the head trainer Thomas Appleby.

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Another change in company name resulted in Knott heading Southern Sporting Promotions Ltd and his son Charles Knott Jr. was now actively part of the company. Knott Jr. had played for the Hampshire County Cricket team, debuting in 1938 and had subsequently taken over the fishmonger side of the business. He retired from first class cricket in 1957.

In 1952 the new Sportsdome opened which not only offered the rebuilt ice rink as promised by Knott during the war but a bowling alley and world's largest open air roller skating rink into the bargain as well. Knott had stuck to his word and given the public new sporting activities.

Attentions turned towards Poole in 1960 when Charlie Knott Sr. & Charlie Knott Jr. initiated plans to construct a track around the football pitch and speedway track there. On 8<sup>th</sup> May 1961 racing got underway which may have been part of the reason why the Knott's listened to offers from perspective buyers for Banisters Court. The Rank Organisation made a very good offer in 1963 and it was initially accepted. However the deal threatened to break down because the Rank Organisation wanted to build housing on the entire site including the Sportsdome. After further negotiations Rank agreed to keep the Sportsdome so the deal finally went ahead.

The stadium was demolished and luxury housing went up almost immediately, the local council named the roads serving the housing Charles Knott Gardens in honour of his efforts for the town of Southampton. The last meeting was held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1963, one year later Southampton became a city. The Sportsdome closed in 1988 and was also converted to housing which is called Mayfair Gardens today.

### Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
440y	Alliquippa	25.26	29.09.1945	
600y	Millbrook	35.11	04.05.1946	

### Selected Tote Returns

Year	Turnover £
1939	206,895
1941	114,955
1942	264,684
1943	432,551
1944	619,247
1945	880,980
1946	1,729,291
1947	1,396,063
1948	1,300,648
1949	679,752
1950	618,113
1952	522,383
1953	509,850
1954	478,000