

Southend (Grainger Road)

Greyhound Racing in Southend did not start at Grainger Road but instead had its beginnings around the Southend United football pitch in the Kursaal grounds in 1927. Two Scotsman called Jimmy Shand and Tom Wilson ran the show until the landlords forced them out and they moved the greyhound operation to Liverpool two years later.

In 1932 planning permission for a new stadium was submitted to the Southend Council by the a new company called Southend Stadium Ltd headed by none other than Wimbledon supremo Bill 'WJ' Cearns.

On Saturday 15th April 1933 the Southend public experienced the thrill of racing once again. The new stadium built on the site of the Milton Hall Brickworks featured two main stands, the east stand which would later have a restaurant and the west stand with covered seating, the remainder of the stadium being uncovered terracing. The Milton Hall Brick Company Ltd had just opened the Star Lane Brickworks in the nearby village of Great Wakering allowing the sale of the older Brickworks located between the Redstock Road to the north, Maldon Road to the south and Sutton Road on its east side. After the stadium had been constructed it could be accessed from the new Stadium Road via Redstock Road or from Grainger Road via Maldon Road.

Over 5,000 turned up to witness the first meeting and on a perfect April evening as the first race honours went to a greyhound called Janet McNab over 525 yards, the hound won by 5 lengths in a time of 32.22 secs. There was no let-up in the new venture as additional meetings took place on Monday afternoon in addition to Wednesday and Friday evening. Distances used in the early days of racing were 300, 500 and 525 yards including hurdles.

The Thames Silver Salver was inaugurated in 1933 and became a well-respected and established competition that would attract some of the sports best greyhounds in future years.

In 1934 the Southend United FC relocated the club from the Kursaal to the Southend Stadium in a complete reversal of proceedings that had taken place in 1927. A seven year lease had been agreed despite reservations from the Football Association. The Racing Manager was T F Fenton-Livingstone and the timekeeper is listed as Les Cox who would later become Racing Manager at Romford.

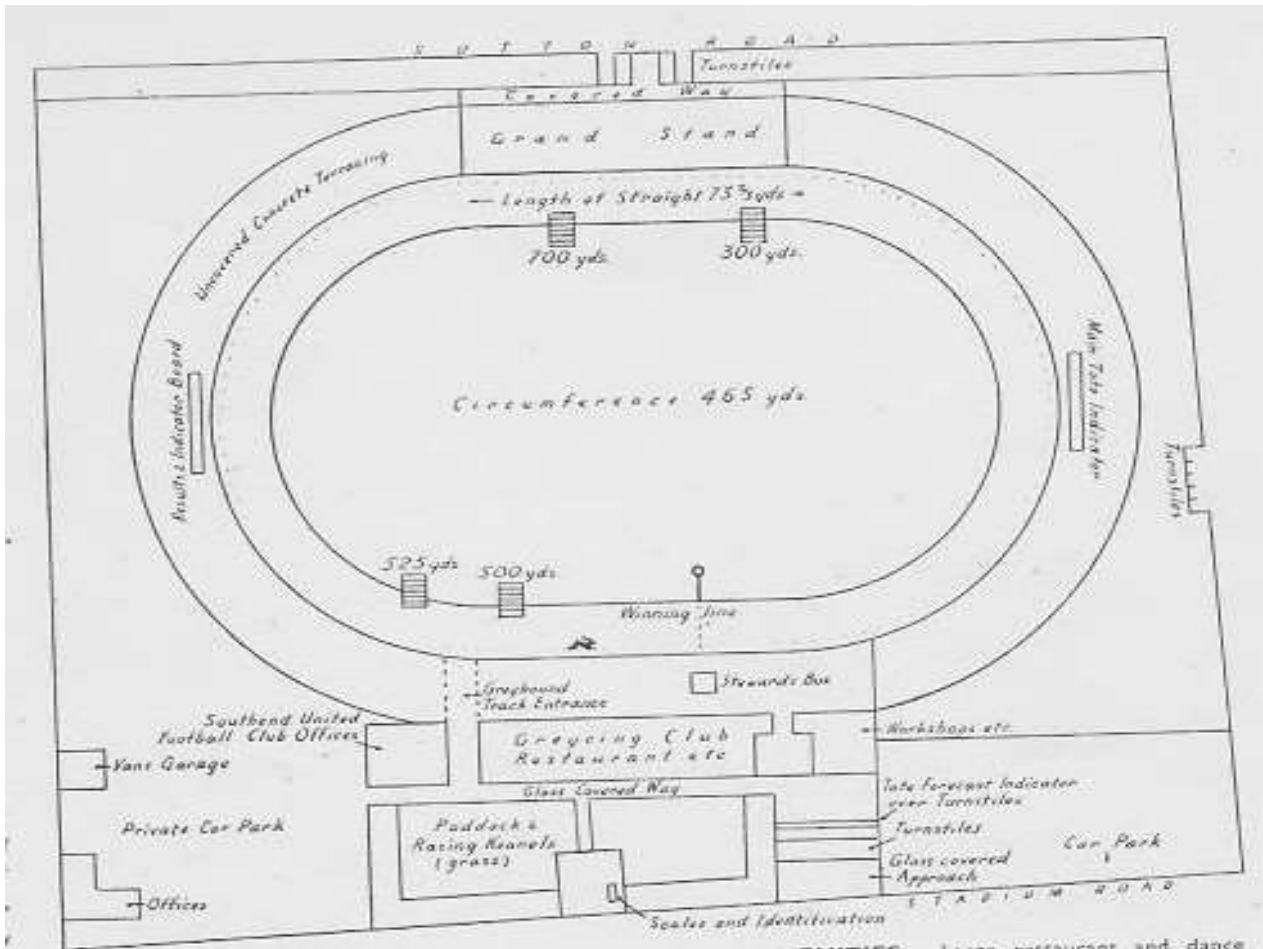
Some of the earliest trainers at the track included J Bartlett, Stan Gray, A.F Dandridge and Frank Clarke, the latter left the stadium in 1937 to be replaced by Bill Cowell. Gray and Cowell brought the first honours to the track, Cowell won the Scurry Cup and Lincoln with Hexham Bridge in 1937 whilst Gray steered Happy Squire to Essex Vase glory in 1939. Jim Syder Jr. trained here for eleven years from 1935-1946 before joining Wembley.

The vast majority of tracks continued to trade throughout the war but Southend had been requisitioned by the Army Officer Training Corps in 1940 leaving the football team and greyhound racing without a home. When the hostilities had ceased in 1945 the stadium was in need of major repairs and the pitch had to be re-laid before the football team could play again. Greyhounds returned during April of 1946 which was a prime trading period resulting in excellent profits over the next few years. The football team had to give way to greyhound fixtures on a Wednesday souring the relationship somewhat.

The circuit was a 465 yard circumference described as a particularly easy galloping track with good straights which gradually merge into the banked bends. The hare system was an 'Outside Sumner' with the racing kennels being located behind the east stand that now included a restaurant and the Greycing Club with dance floor. Below the east stand Greycing Club was the Junior Greycing Club and cheaper enclosure. The residential kennels were to be found seven miles away in the village of Canewdon.

Rayleigh opened a new greyhound track in 1948 becoming a healthy competitor for business and one year later Ballymac Ball was emerging as a star as he finished runner-up to Red Wind in the Thames Silver Salver final. It took a track record to beat him. A Gray became Racing Manager before a pivotal year in 1955 for Southend Stadium because the football team decided not to renew the lease and left for Roots Hall. Bill Matthews also won the Thames Silver Salver for his home track.

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The sixties provided three times a week racing on Monday, Thursday and Saturday and the practice of closing from January to March was still practiced here. The hare changed to an 'Outside McKee' There were five buffet bars and two licensed bars listed in the facilities during a time when Arthur Hall became General Manager and Terry Evans replaced A Gray as Racing Manager. There was very little open race success because the resident trainers concentrated mainly on providing enough greyhounds for the regular racing schedule. The track trainers were Stan Gray, Dennis Mansfield, Bill Matthews & Bert Stephens although Kenny Linzell had a spell at the seaside track as well.

There was a historic moment for greyhound racing in August 1970 when the BBC arrived at the track to film the annual TV Trophy at the track. Southend had been awarded the 1970 event that was transmitted to the nation's screens with one major difference; it was in colour for the first time. The management made a concerted effort to boost fortunes the same year following a constant battle against the bookmaker shops. A new stand was constructed with a new tiered restaurant which brought the required results with attendances and turnover up during the seventies. Unfortunately in 1970 further proposals for a new track to be laid inside the greyhound track for speedway and stock cars was refused by the council over noise concerns.

Stan Gray retired in 1971 replaced by Tony Barker and three years later Rayleigh closed after just a 26 year life after struggling to survive in a world that now included the bookmaker betting shops. Southend Stadium was keen to try and use the stadium for other events to make more money but without speedway they were finding it hard to maintain the figures it had experienced earlier in the decade.

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New trainer Tom Lanceman who also supplied runners to Ipswich was one of the first trainers to take dual attachment and in 1979 he brought some welcome success by entering Topofthetide for the Grand National and winning the classic. The brindle dog put his name in the record books for successfully defending his title because the previous year he had won the race for Harringay.

The stadium introduced the Coronation Cup in 1981 and Tony Dennis lifted the Grand Prix trophy with a greyhound called Rathduff Solara but these were the final two actions of note for a stadium that was coming to the end of its existence.

On Boxing Day 1985 the final meeting took place ending a 52 year span of racing. Two months later the stands and terracing were demolished. A retail park sits on the venue today with the Greyhound Way road running through the middle of where the track sat (0° 43' 2.005"E 51° 32' 42.920"N).

Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
300y	Westerham	17.07	24.10.1934	
	Royal Canopy	16.90	02.08.1948	
	Hi Tivoli	16.45	31.07.1961	Thames Silver Salver final
	Don't Gambol		1971+	Thames Silver Salver semi
500y	Happy Form	28.84	06.10.1933	
	Lone Keel	28.34	03.05.1937	
	Mondays News	28.22	1945+	
	Shannon Shore	27.89	25.09.1946	Thames Silver Salver final
	Red Wind	27.78	19.09.1949	Thames Silver Salver final
525y	Lutwyche	30.18	28.07.1933	
	Happy Form	=30.18	25.10.1933	
	Light of Castledown	29.99	21.06.1946	
	Rimmels Black	29.57	1947+	
	Royal Canopy	29.49	17.05.1948	
	Tinas Beauty	29.43	08.07.1965	
	Willing Blue	29.22	1970+	
700y	Ever Bonny	41.30	03.11.1933	
	Diamond Jim	40.55	26.06.1946	
	Aura Monarch	40.07	29.06.1948	
	Drastic O'Leer	40.04	1949+	
	Lucky Hi There	39.82	21.09.1964	Charles Neale Stakes
750y	Bradshaw Jim	44.12	25.07.1936	
500yH	Kilmoney Prince	29.73	11.08.1933	
	Macaroni II	29.64	24.06.1936	
	Carraigin Robairt	28.84	14.06.1948	
	Sprightly Peter	28.72	1948+	
525yH	Kilmoney Prince	31.17	31.07.1933	
	Terrys Hope	31.05	24.05.1937	
	O'Alaha	30.31	30.06.1948	
700yH	Inchacoumbe Boy	43.09	29.09.1933	
	Flying Wedge	41.98	10.04.1937	
277m	Mutts Silver	16.71	1976+	Thames Silver Salver final
	Knockrour Brandy	16.45	02.07.1979	
484m	My Royal	29.03	30.04.1979	
	Fosters Folly	29.03	12.06.1980	
647m	Montini's Flash	39.67	01.11.1979	
705m	Billys Glory	43.97	22.08.1974	
913m	Maldon West	57.66	12.08.1978	
462mH	Graceful Fellow	28.61	26.05.1973	
484mH	Shyan Trader	29.94	26.05.1979	

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