

## South Shields

Just off the Horsley Hill Road was a sports ground constructed just before the turn of the century and this was used by the newly formed rugby league team South Shields RLFC in 1902. New housing also came along around this time in the form of St Vincent Street to the north and Westcott Avenue to the east. The rugby club were voted out of the league in 1904 which led to rugby union side using the ground before South Shields FC moved from their previous home at Stanhope Road to Horsley Hill in 1908. The basic facilities of the ground were improved around 1916 with the addition of two main stands.

Horsley Hill underwent further development in 1919 which included new terracing and an increase to the main stand. The football team's fortunes had dived somewhat by 1930 leading to a decision to move to the newly constructed Redheugh Park in Gateshead. South Shields FC became Gateshead FC leaving Horsley Hill empty.

A new company was formed in 1932 called the South Shields Greyhound Stadium Ltd with the intention to construct a greyhound track around the pitch at Horsley Hill. The build duly got underway but the final expenditure was considerably more than the directors had planned.

The first race meeting took place on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 1933 under the NGRC rules of racing, the Managing Director was listed as Mr S J Hawes, the General Manager was R Gilfillan and the Racing Manager was Major H Carew. On October 31<sup>st</sup> the initial accounts were released showing a profit of £1,631 despite bank debenture loan repayments of £3,431 and income tax of £800. The company stated that the increased construction costs were incurred by club premises and totalisator building necessities and establishing training kennels outside of South Shields. Those kennels were at Strothar House Farm, six miles from the track in country surroundings and had accommodation for 200 greyhounds.

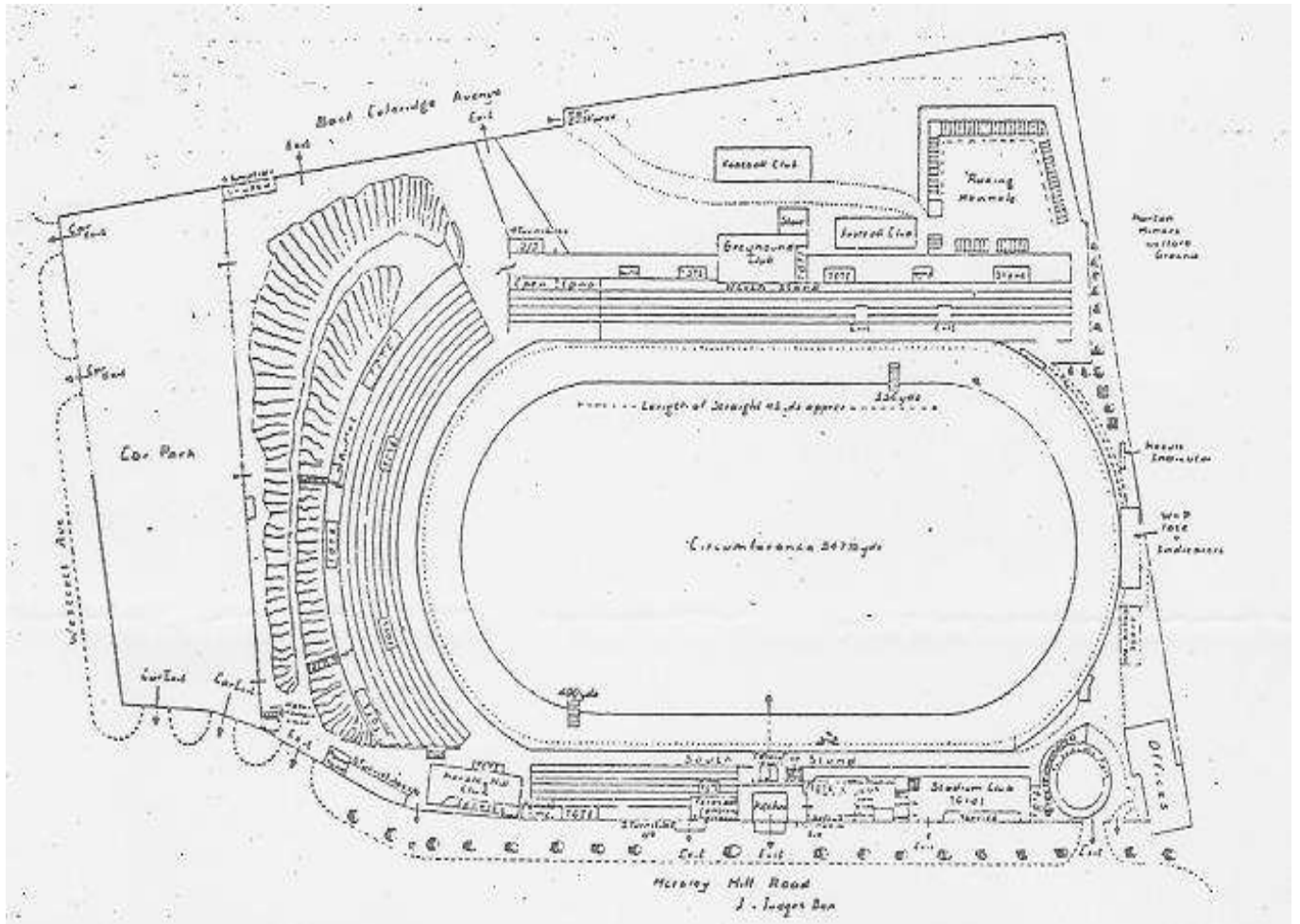
The stands were known as the North and South stands, the North stand had an exit onto the back of the newly Coleridge Avenue, behind this stand was the racing kennels and football club buildings, a new South Shields FC had emerged in 1936. The South stand included the Stadium and Horsley Hill clubs whilst the car park was situated behind the west terracing. There was no building of note on the east side because the stadium boundary stopped with the land on the other side consisting of bowling greens and the Welfare Park Sports Ground.

The original distances created were 390, 400, 535 & 560 yards including hurdle races and racing stopped during the worst winter period ending on Boxing Day before action returned in spring. In 1935 a new modern totalisator was introduced and tote indicators were squeezed in on the east side of the stadium. Racing continued every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday until wartime when the racing schedule was changed to suit blackout restrictions amongst other things. The venue also became well-known for holding significant boxing bouts during this period.

After the war had finished the industry experienced some glorious times with business booming and there was a huge boost in the summer of 1945 when a greyhound called Mondays Son trained by P Moores travelled to Glasgow for the Scottish Derby and prevailed in the competition.

The track was described in 1947 as having a 347½ yard circumference with straights of 95 yards, the inside draw offering a slight advantage. Distances were now 400 & 500 yards behind an 'Outside Sumner' hare with the principal events consisting of the Durham Cup and South Shields Cup.

.....continued



**Layout of the South Shield track**

It is known that Clapton Stadium Ltd had a financial interest in the track; the Managing Director H Garland Wells had been in the forefront of negotiations to purchase Reading in 1934 and Slough in 1936. It is not quite clear when the track came under the Clapton Stadium Ltd group but it is known that the Director of Racing in the mid-fifties was Eric Godfrey, the same man that was the Director of Racing at all Clapton Stadium tracks. The Racing Manager during this period was J Wightman. South Shields also raced under the 'combine' tag in the fifties which allowed C-Licence owner-trainer races to take place.

In 1963 the South Shields Derby was inaugurated with excellent prize money but was very short lived, the 1963 winner was Thimble Rigger trained by Norman Oliver from Brough Park. Despite the prize money boost it was during this year that the stadium's financial problems were unveiled. The board had invested in new ventures including a new restaurant, a bowling alley built on September 28<sup>th</sup>, a public house and a Jet filling station garage in the car park but plans had gone a little awry resulting in the board seeking state aid to help finish the project.

Clapton Stadium Ltd sold out to the GRA in 1966 but South Shield closed on March 1<sup>st</sup> the same year, it is not known as to who closed it. The takeover might have included South Shields and the GRA sold it or Clapton might have retained it for selling off. The stadium remained in situ with only the 'Dogs Bowl' bowling alley still in use before that was demolished and housing being built.

The housing where the stadium stood is named after golf courses, the Sunningdale, Birkdale and Turnberry roads cover most of the site (1° 24' 57.750"W 54° 59' 23.219"N).

.....continued

### Selected Track Records

<b>Distance</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
395y	Diamond Glory	23.34	12.08.1936	
400y	Terrys Monarch	23.41	21.06.1946	
540y	Joyful Holidays	32.51	22.05.1939	
565y	Clementine	34.54	19.09.1938	