

## **Stoke (Cobridge)**

The Athletic Ground was built on top of land that included derelict coal shafts belonging to the Sandbach colliery which must have required a considerable amount of filling before it was safe to build on. The ground opened around 1880 hosting athletics and cycling before Burslem Port Vale FC moved there in 1885 following a 21 year lease agreement with the Sandbach charity.

The ground was located west side of the Waterloo Road just north of where it met the Cobridge Road in an area known as Cobridge which in turn was south of Burslem and north of Hanley. The entire area of Stoke-On-Trent and North Staffordshire was arguably England's coal capital and the arrival of greyhound racing in the late twenties resulted in the same area becoming strongly attached to the new sport.

Burslem Port Vale FC became just Port Vale and they stayed at the ground for 27 years making full use of the 1,000 capacity grandstand on the north side. By 1913 the football team left leaving the ground underused, it was renamed the Cobridge Athletic Grounds just before Stoke-On-Trent became a city in 1925.

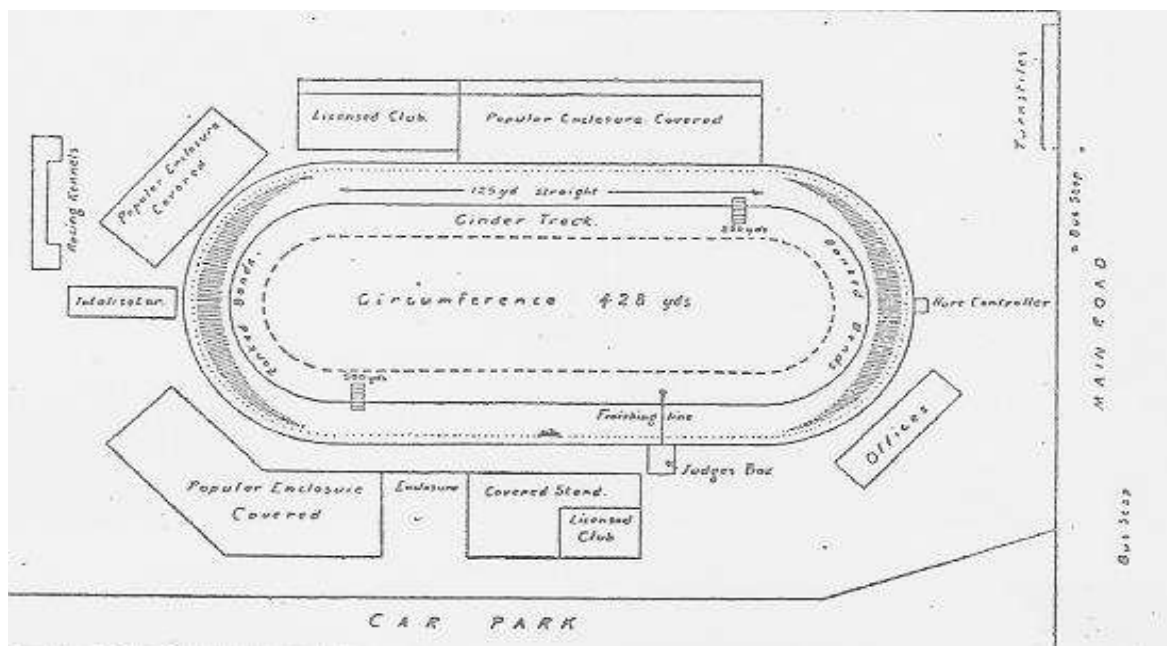
In 1927 a Glasgow company called Albion Greyhounds affiliated to the National Greyhound Racing Society had begun work on their new stadium in Glasgow and would feature heavily in the future of Cobridge. In the meantime however the first greyhound track to feature in Stoke was a large facility in Hanley which opened for racing on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1928, it was called the Sun Street Stadium and was south of Clough Street. Four years later Albion greyhounds acquired Cobridge and the company formed Albion Greyhounds (Stoke) Ltd by raising £40,000 capital in £1 shares. The rush to open for the summer and when it was ready it was advertised as the first track in the Potteries to race under National Greyhound Racing Club rules and also the first to use the all-electric totalisator.

The General Manager was Brigadier-General Frank Logan and with the other management it was decided not to have track bookmakers which would backfire because later the same year the government restricted the use of totes. It would force the track to close its doors for three months before re-opening with bookmakers in December. Racing would be held on Friday and Saturday evenings with former Albion Glasgow Racing Manager Major J.S. Woolley taking up the same position at Stoke.

Racing got underway on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1932 at 7.30pm with W.W.Colonel Dobson waving the flag for the first race, the winner was Silent Marble, a one length winner from The Padre in a time of 29.50 secs over 480 yards. All races were over 480 yards with winners times ranging from 28.65 to 30.29. The tote that consisted of 31 issuing machines struggled to cope with the crowd and resulted in the immediate ordering of more.

Cobridge constantly remained in the shadow of Hanley despite the fact that Cobridge was NGRC affiliated, it was unusual for an independent venue to outpoint a registered venue but Hanley had opened four years earlier than Cobridge resulting in better attendances and tote figures right up until 1949.

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**Cobridge track layout 1947.**

After the war the circuit was 428 yards in circumference with long 125 yard straights and a good run-up but bends were described as very sharp. The Outside M.S Cable hare was in operation with distances of 280, 500 & 650 yards being used. The north covered stand was called the popular enclosure and had a licensed club next to it and there was also a smaller south covered stand with an enclosure separating a further covered popular enclosure and licensed club. Unusually the hare control was between the first and second bends but the small judge's box was of course directly next to the winning line. The racing kennels could be found well back behind a third covered popular enclosure on the third bend and the 250 resident kennels were situated in countryside surroundings at Trentham, seven miles from the stadium.

It was little comfort that the track was more popular than Hanley because attendances had nose-dived in the area during the early fifties resulting in Cobridge becoming one of the few tracks in this period to close. Many tracks had closed pre-war and many were to follow in the sixties but most tracks enjoyed experiencing some of the sport's greatest hounds perform in the fifties. The final meeting was on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1954 but Hanley would survive until 1963.

The exact details of closure are sketchy but it is presumed it was something to do with Albion Greyhounds based on the fact that Albion in Glasgow closed within a year. The company for whatever reason had closed both tracks but luckily for Cobridge the stadium remained intact and was used as a sports stadium afterwards.

Massively underused it was unknown what future the stadium might have and it seemed unlikely that greyhound would return because nearby Chesterton had opened on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1975 off the Loomer Road. However a company called Aclecourt Ltd re-opened the stadium to independent racing on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1982.

Unfortunately the lease would change hands several times before time finally ran out on the old stadium in 1991 when the council sold the site for housing that now includes the Greyhound Way and Stadium Court (2° 11' 18.571"W 53° 2' 4.456"N). The last meeting was held on 17 Sep 1991.

Racing in the Stoke-on-Trent area came to an end in 2010 when Chesterton also closed.

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### Selected Track Records

<b>Distance</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
280y	Highland Tom	15.96	1947+	
500y	Novices Handicap	28.25	1947+	