

## Wisbech

Wisbech is a market town sitting in the Fens of Cambridgeshire an area with strong coursing ties. The oval form of greyhound racing began to appear in this part of the country not long after the invasion of track racing in 1926 that gripped London and major cities around the country. Norwich had two tracks by 1932.

Wisbech found themselves with a small circuit a few years later situated alongside the South Brink just north of New Bridge Street. The track ran parallel with the River Nene on its west side and the Cromwell Road on its east side. With little in the way of nearby dwellings and industry the track relied solely on the town of Wisbech to the north for the means to make a profit.

The Wisbech Sports Stadium made its official bow on Whit Monday 17 May 1948 and was a small arena with no major facilities of note available for the public. Despite this fact 4,500 people turned up to witness the greyhound racing officially opened by Col J W A Ollard and managed by Freddie Bamber. Fifteen bookmakers attended and the inadequate facilities included a tea room and marquee with the eight race winners received a case of cutlery

It is believed that it was built sometime after World War Two to capitalise on the boom that the sport was experiencing. The 1947 track listing states that it could hold 2,000 spectators but it is clear that the track was independent and would have attracted mainly those from the 'flapping' fraternity.

In 1966 the current owner Herbert Barrett branched out by purchasing another independent track Kings Lynn and introduced greyhound racing there. Wisbech is known to have had a large covered stand and licensed bar & coffee room by the sixties in addition to an undercover kennel and paddock complex with fifty kennels.

During the sixties racing took place on Wednesday & Saturday evenings at 7.30pm, the circumference of the track was 430 yards with an inside hare and distances of 310, 460, 525 & 760 yards. The surface was all-sand and described as having easy bends. The stature of the track had improved immensely with resident kennels now used, looked after by Jack Goldsmith, seven bookmakers in attendance and a racing management team of Graham Welland and Dennis Hayward.

With the change to metric in the seventies the dimensions were listed as a 390 metre circumference and distances of 286, 484 & 700 metres. By 1980 little had changed except that racing was on Friday nights instead of Saturdays but a big change was about to take place.

A company called Spedeworth International purchased the track and introduced stock cars and they were also keen for the greyhound operation to grow. The greyhound promotion came under the control of former NGRC trainer Eric Vine who had also been working part time at Nottingham. Vine made the decision to apply to the NGRC in 1987 for a permit licence hoping to move the track forward in terms of integrity.

The licence was granted and after investment such as track dimensions, increasing the number of racing kennels and ensuring NGRC specifications were adhered to, the track was ready to make its debut under NGRC rules. Distances by now were 275, 460, 700 & 900 metres under a new circumference of 440 metres. The debut finally arrived in January 1989. Unfortunately after just a few years trading Vine pulled out and the racing ceased in 1993 with the site being used just for Sunday markets afterwards.

Three years later in 1996 new promoters in the form of the Meads family took over with the intention to re-open the stadium to NGRC racing. Gary Meads a former bookmaker then spent two years and a considerable sum upgrading the facilities and also appointed former Peterborough Racing Manager Mike Middle. On 27 March 1999 NGRC racing was underway again. The hare had been changed from an 'Inside Sumner' to the new Swaffham and once again race distances changed, this time to 250, 440 & 630 metres. The Wisbech trainers included Henry Chalkley and Michael Bacon.

Once again however racing under rules only lasted until 20 Sep 2001 although the track continued to run independent racing until 2007 when it closed for good and was eventually bulldozed, nothing happened to the site until 2011 when a Tesco superstore and cinema complex announced plans to build there.

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There is still a house called Birchwood Grange which whilst it remains will serve as a memory to the track because it was once part of the site (0° 8' 34.614"E 52° 39' 5.175"N).

### **Selected Track Records**

<b>Distance</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
275m	Tomas Creake	16.84	1987+	
430m	Midway Alice	27.82	07.05.1999	
	Three Wells	27.74	27.07.2000	
460m	Derby Hero	28.85	1987+	
	Slaneyside Holly	28.78	23.01.1990	

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