

## **1927 Review of the Year – *The Incredible Boom***

In 1927, GRA acquired the near-derelict White City Stadium (originally The Great Stadium) that had been built in 1908 for the Summer Olympics. The White City track was grassed over for greyhound racing whilst speedway, athletics and football would also take place; the first race was on 20<sup>th</sup> June won by a dog called Charlie Cranston. Major Percy Brown was installed as Racing Manager soon after the track opened and stayed for nearly 50 years.

With club house accommodation for a 1,000 people, and a 500 yard track circumference with wide sweeping turns and fast times the venue was an immediate hit with the public. Early visitors included the Prince of Wales and Prince George, later King George VI.

GRA also moved its headquarters to White City Stadium from Belle Vue Stadium at the same time. Belle Vue was by now attracting huge crowds.

Harringay Stadium was the third greyhound racing stadium to be bought by the GRA. It was constructed by Messrs. T.G. Simpson of Victoria Street, London, at a cost of £35,000. The 23-acre site had been the Williamson's Pottery Works from the late 18th century through to the early 1900s. On completion the track had a capacity of 50,000. The main stand running along the north of the site seated 3,000. The remaining 47,000 spectators were accommodated on terracing constructed on earth banking. When it opened on the 13<sup>th</sup> September it was originally called Harringay Park.

The GRA's finances were helped with the use of a sophisticated automatic totalisator betting system. By the end of the year GRA had an interest in no less than 19 tracks that were operating or due to open. In London they had White City, Harringay and Crystal Palace and in the provinces they had Birmingham (Hall Green), Bradford, Brighton, Cardiff (White City), Edinburgh (Powderhall), Isle of Man, Leeds (Fullerton Park), Leicester, Liverpool (Stanley), Manchester (Belle Vue), Margate, Nottingham (White City), Plymouth, Portsmouth, Newcastle (White City) and Stoke.

Two of the 19 tracks failed to go ahead. Despite the trustees allowing the Crystal Palace site to be used for greyhound racing it never got off the ground. A protestant church petition of 43,434 signatures helped the National Anti-Gambling League prosecute the trustees and the racing proposals failed.

The proposal on the Isle of Man to provide a race track at Onchan Head Bay and a bathing pool, with changing facilities were to cost around £60,000. A bill was put before Tynwald (Isle of Man parliament) to prohibit betting and gaming except on the existing horse racing activities and it was passed.

The 17 tracks remaining was a remarkable achievement due to the fact that GRA had only come into existence the year before. Within two years there were 68 greyhound tracks operating or under construction.

A rival company called the Greyhound Racing Company surfaced and certainly upset the GRA, suddenly this rival company could get in the way of the plans drawn up by GRA and they did their best to close shop stating publicly that they had no connection with the new company.

Ireland had been a hot bed of coursing for many years and the new version of track racing had everyone wondering what this would bring. A greyhound called Mick the Miller was born in June 1926 and the brindle dog was named after Michael Greene, who was the odd-job man at the vicarage and Millbrook house where the dog was born and raised. One of his duties was looking after the dog and the other eleven in the litter when they were puppies. Bred by a parish priest called Father Martin Brophy, Mick the Miller was sent coursing and was actually beaten in his first course against a greyhound called Hidden Jew.

A quartet of Irish enthusiasts Hugh McAlinden, Joe Shaw, Jim Clarke and Paddy O'Donoghue introduced track racing to Ireland and it all started at Celtic Park in Belfast when the first Irish track was built and opened on 18<sup>th</sup> April. This was followed by Shelbourne Park in Dublin one month later on the 14<sup>th</sup> May. Shelbourne employed four track trainers in their kennels, Mick Horan, Paddy Quigley, Billy Donoghue and Ben Scally. Harolds Cross (Dublin) soon followed.

Suddenly Ireland experienced the craze and plans were afoot to build further tracks at Dunmore Park (Belfast), Clonmel, Limerick, Galway, Dundalk, Enniscorthy, Mullingar, Kilkee, Tralee, Ballybunnion, Sligo, Clones, Dungannon, Longford and Ballina.

Incidentally tracks were being built in Australia and the popularity spread to Europe and in Paris on 26<sup>th</sup> September the first racecourse 'Chantilly', known as the eynodrome saw sixty greyhounds (some Belgian) entered for 12 events. Australia would remain as a popular racing country but the European scene would never match the boom that Britain and Ireland would see.

The GRA decided to introduce major races to be held on an annual basis, and the first one would be 'The Derby' to be held at White City. They also created the Champion Hurdle (later to be named the Grand National) for hurdlers and the Oaks for bitches (both at White City), these races were of course named after the big horse races. Belle Vue introduced the Northern Flat as their major event. The meetings at the tracks would be managed by the Racing Manager and stewards who would normally be selected from prominent military backgrounds (i.e. captain or major).

GRA had thought of everything and even purchased the Hook estate at Northaw some 13 miles from the centre of London. They saw it as the ideal place for GRA trainers to train greyhounds for White City and Harringay and later other London tracks. The 140 acres of park and grassland would become famous within the industry. The estate at this time was solely for racing hounds and puppies over nine months old and could house 600 dogs. The pups under nine months were reared under the supervision of William Skerratt on farms in and around Blythe Bridge near Stoke-on-Trent before graduating to Northaw.

Scotland opened its doors to the public in the form of Powderhall (North Edinburgh) located in Beaverhall Road on 3<sup>rd</sup> August. This was a track with easy bends and long straights and over 10,000 attended the first meeting.

Greyhound Racing came to Wembley on the 10th December and although the venue will forever be known for football, the irony is that it was the then fledgling sport of greyhound racing that had kept the stadium afloat in its early days. This was due to the fact that it was only being used for the FA Cup final and Arthur Elvin brought in greyhounds and improved the finances that prevented the stadium from being demolished.

Elvin had secured Wembley by putting a 10% deposit down for a total of £122,500. He had originally won the contract to demolish the site for owner James White who died shortly after leaving the stadium in the hands of the receivers. Elvin set up a new company and he became the managing director. The Director of Racing was Captain A.E. Brice, he was well known as the judge for the Waterloo Cup, the Blue Riband of coursing.

Two Scotsmen named Jimmy Shand and Tom Wilson approached Southend F.C who played at Southend-On-Sea, they agreed a deal to start racing on July 27<sup>th</sup>. The pair struggled to make ends meet at the Kursaal track and actually had to sell a stake in the company to electrician John Bilsland in order for him to repair electrical problems. Clearly some tracks would need time to work.

Other rival companies were being created that would compete with the GRA for years to come but under the current climate there were plenty of punters to go around. A National board of control of canine and greyhound racing held a meeting in Manchester to form a control board for greyhound racing. Tracks represented were Cardiff, Wembley, Swansea, Southampton, Birmingham, Southend, Hull, Bristol, Blackpool, Sheffield and Bournemouth. Most of these were outside the control of the Greyhound Racing Association.

Eventually on the 30<sup>th</sup> December the National Greyhound Racing Society (NGRS) was formed to represent the commercial interests of the racecourse promoters.

The tracks arrived thick and fast, the following started racing in 1927.

23<sup>rd</sup> April - Breck Park (Liverpool), 21<sup>st</sup> May - Kings Heath (Birmingham), 16<sup>th</sup> July - Leeds (Elland Road), 23<sup>rd</sup> July - Knowle (Bristol), 1<sup>st</sup> August - Henlow (previously a straights track), 17<sup>th</sup> August - Stanley (Liverpool), 24<sup>th</sup> August - Hall Green (Birmingham), 24<sup>th</sup> September - Aylston Road (Leicester), October - Greenfield (Bradford), 4<sup>th</sup> October - Leeds (Fullerton Park), 10<sup>th</sup> December - Raikes Park (Bolton)

In the South local businessman and fishmonger Charlie Knott purchased the land at Banister Court and began the task of building the Southampton stadium.

Bookmaker Joe Coral took a pitch at Harringay and then White City; the Coral Empire was born and would go via Clapton and Walthamstow greyhounds before branching into betting offices.

## **Greyhound Derby**

The first Greyhound Derby, launched by the GRA, had a first prize of £1,000. Heats were organised by regions and there was a Northern Final and a Southern Final, with the first three home in each being invited to the final, which was to be run at the White City over a distance of 500 yards.

The qualifiers from the Northern final were Great Chum, Elder Brother and Banderlo but following the illness of Great Chum who actually won the Northern final he could not take his place in the final and that went to fourth placed Derham Boy. The Southern final, which was run at the White City, was won by Entry Badge by four lengths in a time of 29.00 watched by a crowd of 80,000.

The first final was held at the White City on 1st October 1927. It was run over 500 yards and was won by Entry Badge, a brindled dog weighing 66 lbs., trained by Joe Harmon and owned by Mr Edwin Baxter, who won the race by six lengths from Ever Bright, in a time of 29.01. Incidentally Mr Baxter owned the first two home.

Entry Badge was a daughter of the great coursing dog Hopsack and for whom Edwin Baxter had given 40gns. He had won on the opening night of White City winning his race by eight lengths in 30.13sec over the 525 yds course. Mr Baxter will always be remembered with affection by those who have followed greyhound racing from its start, for he was the first of the coursing men to believe that there was a great future for track racing. Entry Badge was fast from the traps and, in addition, possessed intelligence to move to the rails whenever there was the slightest opportunity, while he was always able to steer clear of trouble at the turns.

Entry Badge raced for the best part of two years and was beaten only once. In all he won eleven out of twelve races, all in top class, and was odds-on favourite in every race he ran. Within four months of winning the Derby, he earned £1,500 in prize money and was the first great champion track racing greyhound.

**Greyhound Derby White City 500y – Oct 15 (£1,000 & Gold Cup, 2<sup>nd</sup> £300, 3<sup>rd</sup> £100)**

Pos	Greyhound	Trap	Trainer	SP	Time
1	Entry Badge	5	Joe Harmon (White City, London)	1-4f	29.01
2	Ever Bright	1	John 'Jack' Kennedy (Harringay)	100-6	29.49
3	Elder Brother	4	Jack Rimmer (Liverpool)	100-8	29.53
4	Toftwood Milksack	3	Harry Buck (Harringay)	10-1	29.55
5	Derham Boy	2	Hughes (Powderhall)	20-1	29.79
6	Banderlo	6	J Buck (Belle Vue)	100-8	29.87
N/R	Great Chum		(Belle Vue)		

**Southern Championship & Evening News Cup  
(White City 500y – 8 Oct £250)**

1	Entry Badge (Joe Harmon)	1-4f	29.00	3
2	Toftwood Millsack (Harry Buck)	20-1	29.32	5
3	Ever Bright (Jack Kennedy)	10-1		6
u	Roving Ben (Sharman - Hall Green)	100-6		1
u	Knockrane Lass (Cross - Hall Green)	20-1		2
u	Cruiseline Boy (Joe Harmon)	10-1		4

**Northern Championship**

1	Great Chum (Belle Vue)			
2	Elder Brother (Jack Rimmer)			
3	Banderlo (Belle Vue)			
4	Derham Boy (Powderhall)			
u				
u				

**Champion Hurdle (Grand National) White City 500yH – 10 Oct**

1	Bonzo (J Buck – Belle Vue)	13-8f	31.12	1
2	Jasserand (Godfrey Hyde-Clarke White City)	5-2	31.16	2
3	Fanny's Chum (C Habin - Liverpool)	2-1		4
4	Billows (Jack Kennedy - Harringay)	8-1		4

**Chesham Hurdle (Southern Championship)  
(White City 500Hy – 1 Oct)**

1	Jasserand (Hyde-Clarke - White City)	5-2	32.01	
2	Billows (Jack Kennedy - Harringay)	8-1		
3	Ejector Breech	7-4f		
4	Cheerful Billy	2-1		

**Oaks (White City 500y – Oct 12)**

1	Three of Spades (Sid Jennings)	5-1	29.96	
2	Western Lass (Edinburgh)	5-1	30.12	
3	Peach Blossom II (W Smith -White City)	6-4f		
u	Annual Payment (Manchester)	4-1		
u	Hope Again (Birmingham)	5-1		
u	Wily Jess ( Liverpool)	20-1		

In the Oaks heats were held at various tracks within the GRA with the winner representing the track in the Grand Final at White City. The home representative Peach Blossom II started as hot favourite after taking the White City qualifying final two days previous in a smart 29.58. However it was the Harringay hound Three of Spades that took the honours defeating the Scottish challenger by two lengths.

Although Bonzo is listed as winner of the first Grand National in 1927, the title of the event he won was in fact the Champion Hurdle Race, the culmination of a competition organised by the GRA on the same lines as the inaugural Derby. North vs. South affair, restricted to dogs racing on tracks owned by the company.

Northern zone dogs, from Belle Vue, Liverpool and Powderhall, took part in a qualifying competition called the Westmorland Cup, while their Southern counterparts at Hall Green, Harringay and White City were sorted out in the Chesham Hurdle. Jumps races on GRA tracks were then confined to four runners, so only the first two qualified for the final.

All race times recorded by greyhounds are listed as the standard and modern version of 0.08 sec per length. Lengths were judged by different times in the past, for example up to 1950 a length in Britain was known as 0.06 and in Ireland until 1990 it was 0.07.



The 1927 Derby at White City