

## Sheffield (Owlerton)

With Darnall opening in 1927 the Owlerton track lost the race to hold the first oval circuit greyhound racing in Sheffield. The actual construction of the new Owlerton stadium began in 1929 on a 20 acre freehold site but the public still had to wait until 12<sup>th</sup> January 1932 before an official opening took place in regards to greyhound racing. The venue was initially used for speedway only, with a first meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1929. The stands were subsequently altered to accommodate the impending greyhound racing.

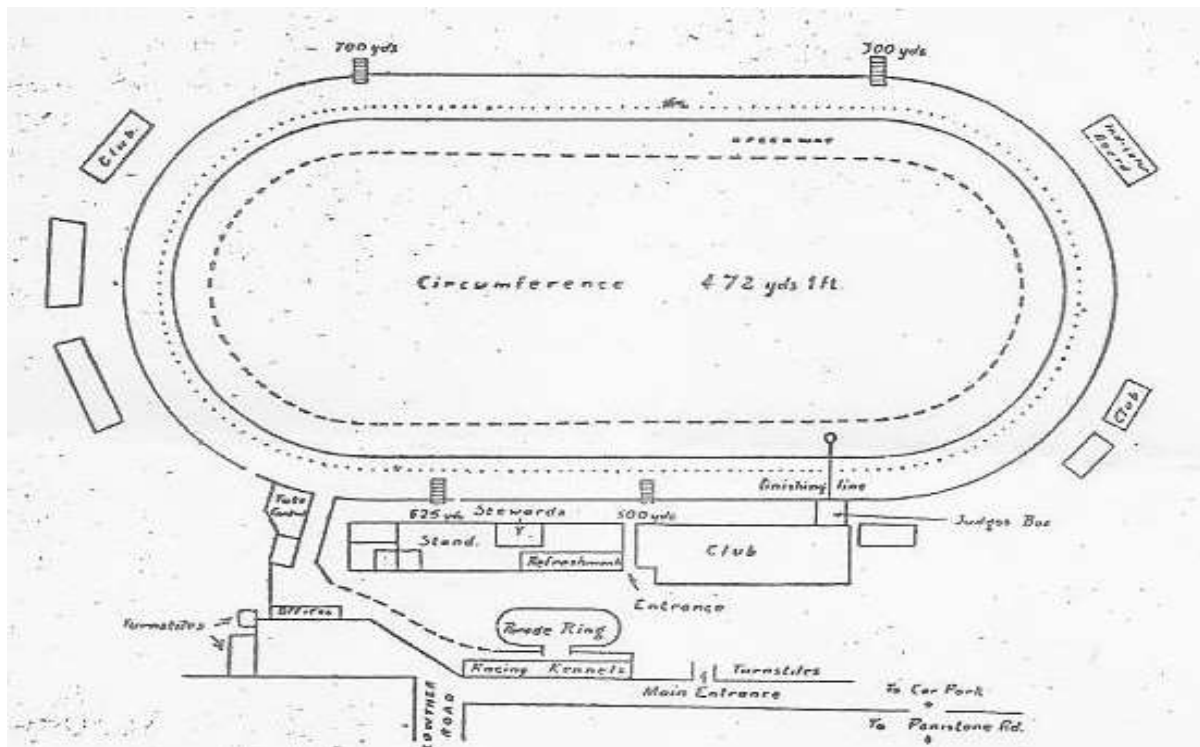
The city famous for its steel of course was covered with steel works of various types and surrounding Owlerton was a steel forge directly on the north side, a cutlery forge directly on the west side. Within a stones-throw to the south was the Birley Meadow steel forge and Owlerton Bridge Rolling Mills steel works. In fact the only area without steel works was the east side where allotments and gardens were to be found. The Penistone Road ran alongside the east and where Lowther Road originated it could take you directly to the stadium although today the main car park is on Livesey Street on the south side.

The opening night attracted an eager crowd of 10,000 including many ladies who enjoyed the cosy seating in the newly built glass fronted grandstand. The press described the tote as a mechanical and electrical marvel as it registered bets within fractions of a second as they were placed. Seven races formed the racecard with many of the greyhounds already appearing in previously held trials. The first race over 525 yards the 'Oxford Stakes' was claimed by 3-1 shot Carbrook Ted trained by George Platts winning by two lengths in 33.63 secs. Adding variety to the meeting was a 700 yard race and a hurdle race.

It is very interesting to note how inconsistent racing must have been if compared to modern races. The five 525 yard flat race winning times spanned 32.40 to 35.78 secs.

A third track arrived to the city of Sheffield in the form of Hyde Park which would always remain independent leaving Darnall and Owlerton to licensed racing. The owners of Owlerton, Sheffield Sports Stadium Ltd began to nurture the business and it soon grew into the primary track in Sheffield.

The set-up of the track consisted of a 472 yards circumference with distances of 300, 500, 525 and 700 yards. The grandstand and club were situated on the home straight and there was a parade ring to be found behind these which allowed the public to view the greyhounds pre-race. The track had two hares, an 'Inside Sumner' and an 'Outside MS cable'. The racing kennels were next to the parade ring and there were another 120 resident kennels that replaced the kennels formerly located at Wardsend Farm in a range of stone buildings.



Sam Vintner joined the track in the thirties as Racing Manager and owner/breeder Alf Morton supplied the track with some excellent greyhounds using Irish Derby winner Marching Through Georgia as the sire. Morton was responsible for breeding Victor Ben Hur a track champion and record holder over both 500 & 700 yards in 1940. Duffys Arrival was once trained at the track before he went on to bigger and better things with Coventry trainer George McKay and two of the early trainers at the track was Harry Bidwell who would have a thirty year association with Owlerton and Ted Brennan.

Trade during the war was exceptional but there was very little open racing due to travel issues and it was not until 1950 that Owlerton boasted its first major winner. Mad career trainer by Ted Brennan took the honours at the St Mungo Edinburgh competition. Brennan would soon establish himself as one of the leading Northern trainers and the track proved it had a strong kennel by claiming the 1951 News of the World Intertrack Championship, the greyhound racing equivalent to the F.A. Cup at the time. Brennan then became national news in 1954 after steering Matchlock to the Cesarewitch crown and St Leger runner-up spot.

Ronald James 'Jim' Hookway became a resident trainer in 1953 and joined Brennan in dominating the local scene. An Oaks final appearance soon followed for Hookway in 1954 before two classic final appearances in 1955 made the big London trainers realise there was a serious Northern challenge from Sheffield.

As the decade came to an end it was in 1959 that Ted Brennan's brother Jim switched from the Darnall kennels to join Owlerton and a first Derby final appearance for the track arrived in the shape of Dancing Sheik trainer by Ted Brennan.

It was the sixties and there was sad news in 1964 when fellow track Darnall closed its doors whilst it would also prove a pivotal time for Owlerton when the Sheffield Corporation took over the track after a £185,000 offer had been accepted. The corporation converted the three private clubs into public bars which helped boost attendance figures and in 1969 they made £30,000 improvements to the Lowther Road grandstand.

Ted Brennan and Jim Hookway continued to dominate proceedings on the Northern open race circuit, so much so that Hookway was rewarded with the title of Trainer of the Year which he shared with John Bassett in 1965. The feat had been helped considerably by a greyhound called Clonmannon Flash who had won the Scottish Derby & Edinburgh Cup double. In February of the same year an Irish litter had been bred by Leo Stack, the Crazy Parachute – Supreme Witch bred litter included Tric-Trac, Spectre II, Forward King and Forward Flash. This litter made its way to Hookway and Brennan brothers kennels and would arguably become one of the greatest litters of all time.

At White City on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1967 Tric-Trac defeated his brother Spectre II by one length in the Greyhound Derby final. Owlerton, Jim Hookway and owner of the pair Nat Pinson had experienced the ultimate moment in greyhound racing. The remaining pair lit up the open race circuit culminating in an English St Leger & Scottish St Leger double for Forward King and a Juvenile crown for Forward Flash. Hookway received the Trainer of the year accolade for a second time.

By 1970 Owlerton introduced the Steel City Cup to give the locals a taste of top open race action. Jim Hookway scored his final classic success the same year with Cesarewitch winner Gleneagle Comedy. As the seventies progressed many of the old brigade retired starting with Sam Vintner the long serving Racing Manager in 1973 to be replaced by Terry Meynell. Ted Brennan finished the following year and his place was taken by Harry Crapper. Jim Brennan would join Leeds a few years later and Jim Hookway also retired after a very successful career.

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**Harry Crapper joined Owlerton in 1974.  
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Sheffield replaced the grass circuit with an all-sand surface in 1978, a year that brought the first major triumph for Crapper after he lifted the Cesarewitch trophy with Sportland Blue. The following year another win arrived after Jebb Rambler won the Derby Consolation; the greyhound also won the local Bass Cup event breaking the track record in the final.

With a long shadow cast over the Leeds track Joe Kelly had joined Sheffield and reached the final of the 1981 Greyhound Derby final during a short spell at the track. Following the closure in March 1982 Sheffield held the Ebor Stakes in 1982.

On Spec a fawn dog trained by Harry Crapper provided more glory for the track as he won the Scottish Derby in 1982 and finished runner-up in the Daily Mirror Greyhound Derby final behind Im Slippy.

Troubles surfaced in the mid-eighties when an ageing stadium would become a problem in the near future, Terry Corden who held the lease at Derby added Sheffield to his portfolio by attaining the lease at the track. There was an occasional major open race claim such as the 1988 Scottish Derby, an event won by Killouragh Chris from the Pete Beaumont kennels but the Hillsborough disaster in April 1989 resulted in ramifications for the track. The Taylor report and subsequent government actions on stadium safety meant a substantial financial boost was required at many stadia and as a result Corden let go of Derby and the local council closed Sheffield until the improvements were completed. Corden, General Manager Jon Carter and Racing Manager Jimmy Nunn could do nothing to keep the stadium open as it was forced to close for the first time since it had opened in 1932.

The next few years would bring a few trials and tribulations, first the stadium re-opened following some investment and Corden took up the lease on Nottingham after selling Derby. David Gunson was brought in as Racing Manager but the track suffered a second closure in the spring of 1990 following a cock-up with the betting licence. Some respite arrived when the track secured pulled off a coup recruiting Tennents into major sponsorship deals.

Even with the extra sponsorship the track was still struggling until the moment in 1991 that A&S Leisure (owners of five casino restaurants) stepped in and purchased the track spending a staggering £3 million on refurbishment. The massive investment soon reaped rewards with crowds flooding back to watch the action. Dave Baldwin stepped in to take over from Dave Gunson.

Starved of open race success the track bounced back in 1996 claiming another Scottish Derby title, this time with the Dave Hopper trained Burnpark Lord. It served as a taster of things to come because He Knows trained by Barrie Draper finished runner-up to Some Picture in the 1997 Derby final and then Frisby Full emulated the feat finishing runner-up in 1999 behind Chart King for Harry Crapper. Sheffield could have had two Derby winners had they not come up against two freak greyhounds.

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The good times were returning with 1999 a particularly good year, Stouke Tim won the Derby Consolation, Frisby Folly became St Leger champion, I'm Okay won the Juvenile and Ron Hough's Spewood Wizard lowered marathon track records around the country.

Sheffield's reputation grew quickly once again; David Proctor became General Manager and David Perry Racing Manager, Dave Baldwin was brought in as Director of Racing. Trainer Elaine Parker won the inaugural William Hill Classic in 2007 with Mahers Boy and Barrie Draper was building a fine kennel of greyhounds including 2003 Derby finalist Farloe Pocket and 2008 Laurels champion Boherna Best.

Former GRA man John Gilburn soon stamped his mark on proceedings when he arrived as General Manager; he secured the prestigious trainers championship for the first time in the tracks history in 2009 and the again in 2014. Additionally the second home competition the 'Three Steps to Victory' is rising in stature since its inception in 2003. David Perry Sam Tweed

More recently Barrie Draper has staked his claim as one of the best trainers in the country and has handled superb greyhounds such as the 2011 Puppy Derby, Juvenile and Laurels champion Eden Star, 2012 Laurels & Puppy Derby winner Farloe Warhawk and the incredible Scottish Derby and Juvenile triumphant Ballymac Eske. Elaine Parker also sent out Pay Freeze for the track when claiming the Select Stakes in 2014.

John Gilburn took the role of MD in 2013 with Perry switching to General Manager with Sam Tweed and Richard Munton becoming joint Racing Managers. It surely is just a matter of time before the track claims a second Derby crown adding to the 1967 success.

### **Selected Track Records (Pre-Metric)**

<b>Distance</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
300y	Silver Wire	16.70	12.05.1939	
450y	Brilliant Shore	25.63	06.03.1938	
500y	Victor Ben Hur	28.02	19.10.1940	
525y	Latin Pearl	29.25	29.07.1946	
	Mad Astley	29.16	1954+	
	S.S.Leader	28.66	22.09.1961	
	Tric Trac	28.48	09.09.1966	
550y	Airbourne General	30.07	10.04.1964	
	Eleventh Wonder	29.95	06.07.1971	
	Kudas Honour	29.88	1972+	Steel City Cup Final
700y	Victor Ben Hur	40.28	17.08.1940	
	Leinster Elm	39.04	19.07.1963	
770y	Black Magic	44.03	09.08.1955	
	Airbourne General	??	27.05.1966	
	Rainbow Trout	43.12	22.07.1966	
880y	Poor Barney	49.70	09.10.1971	
525yH	Gaullsmill Again	30.67	1950+	
	Celtic Rebel	29.78	1970+	
	Bingo Basher	29.76	24.03.1972	

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

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### Selected Track Records (Post-Metric)

280m	Parliament Act	16.38	22.07.2000	
	Laser Beam	16.27	14.08.2005	
	Magna Maisie	16.26	30.09.2006	
	Smooth Mac	16.19	17.10.2006	
	Camp Bugler	16.14	17.11.2006	
	Lunar Vacation	15.94	23.06.2007	
	Tyrur Hestor	15.84	28.02.2009	
	Tyrur Hestor	15.78	17.03.2009	
	Boherbradda Mac	15.78	04.04.2009	
	Droopys Quincy	15.70	07.05.2013	
290m	Fearless Prince	16.78	13.08.1980	
	Melton Hill	16.78	19.10.1990	
	Fosse Way	16.77	27.02.1999	
	Fosse Way	16.72	08.05.1999	
362m	Check Out	20.97	03.05.1989	
	Farloe Bubble	20.82	04.10.1997	
380m	Loughlass Champ	22.09	1987+	
480m	Cheeky Hero	28.07	1994+	
	Reggies Hero	28.04	14.11.1997	
	Farloe Superman	28.00	23.02.2008	
	Coolavanny Smoke	27.86	17.03.2009	
	Farloe Firefox	27.76	16.06.2009	
	Carden Bert	27.66	04.08.2009	
	Bandicoot Mafi	27.64	01.11.2009	
	Reluctant	27.55	06.07.2010	
	Eden Star	27.39	21.06.2011	
500m	Tillbrook Herald	29.21	1976+	Steel City Cup final
	Desert Pilot	29.65	1978+	Steel City Cup semi-final
	Jebb Rambler	29.61	1979+	Bass Cup final
	Desert Pilot	29.38	25.04.1980	Steel City Cup final
	Galtymore Lad	29.25	19.01.1990	
	Plasterscene Gem	29.00	08.08.1998	
	Zigzag Dutchman	28.93	05.09.2006	
	Farloe Hobbs	28.90	12.09.2006	Steel City Cup heats
	Farloe Reason	28.83	14.02.2009	
	Thurlesbeg Joker	28.79	07.03.2009	
	Thurlesbeg Joker	28.50	17.03.2009	
	Boher Paddy	28.44	31.08.2010	
650m	Brainy Prince	39.36	11.08.1979	
	Desert Pilot	38.80	09.08.1980	
660m	Suncrest Sail	39.40	19.07.1996	
	Droopys Rhys	39.40	27.11.2001	
	Larkhill Bird	39.39	10.12.2006	
	Stepaside Yoda	39.26	15.02.2008	
	Capel Wilson	38.88	07.03.2009	
	Raving Black	38.71	04.08.2009	
	Ballymac Eske	38.61	24.06.2014	Three Steps to Victory final
	Billys Bullet	38.29	07.04.2015	
715m	White Rooms	43.78	1987+	
720m	Let Us Know	43.48	30.03.2001	
	Cherry Andy	43.44	27.11.2001	
	Top Plan	43.40	29.03.2003	
	Droopys Sporty	43.28	17.01.2006	
	Tinrah Lad	43.04	21.01.2006	
	Swift Ninja	42.80	03.11.2007	

	Run of the Hawk	42.80	29.09.2009	
	Ballyard Buddy	42.33	14.08.2012	
730m	Beano Blondie	44.63	22.08.1986	
	Suncrest Sail	43.64	30.04.1995	
800m	Change Guard	49.02	15.08.1986	
	Hollinwood Poppy	48.25	27.12.2000	
915m	Souda Bay	57.97	22.03.1998	
	Hollinwood Poppy	56.25	04.07.2000	
	King Kane	55.80	29.07.2014	
	King Kane	55.58	06.08.2014	
934m	Thornfield Poppy	58.83	13.11.1998	
	Seathwaite Robby	57.87	05.09.2006	
	Barley Bussell	57.69	03.11.2013	
500mH	Castlelyons Cash	30.85	22.08.1986	
	Autumn Merlin	29.94	04.07.2000	
	Trojan Flight	29.72	24.04.2005	
	Jills Fault	29.65	06.11.2007	
	Bomber Bailey	29.23	04.08.2009	

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