

Stamford Bridge

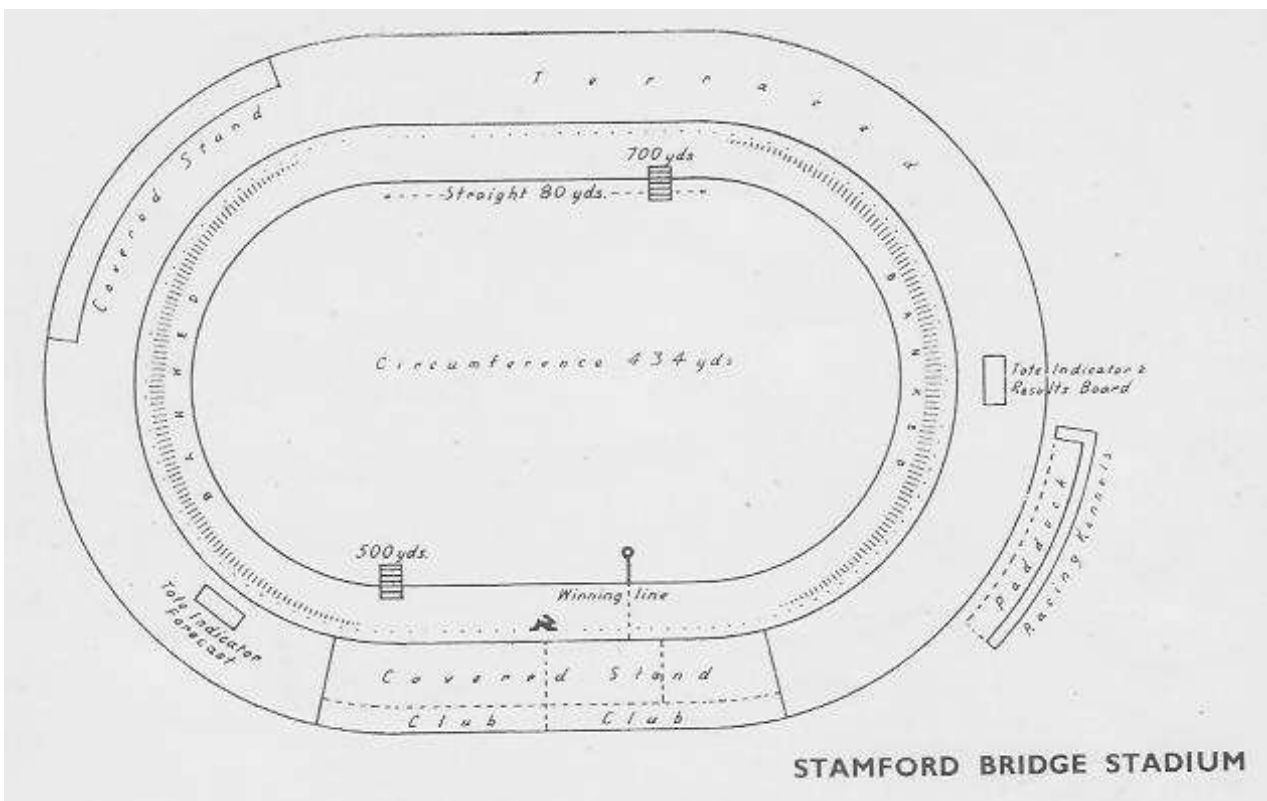
Everybody thinks of Chelsea F.C when Stamford Bridge is mentioned, but not too many people know about its original use and the time that greyhound racing was more popular than the football there.

In 1889 the London Athletic Club (LAC) was responsible for the LAC Cricket and Athletic Grounds construction off the Fulham Road and adjacent to the West London Junction Railway and the large West London cemetery. The LAC had purchased the six and half acres so that they could move from their Lillie Bridge Stadium nearby. By the turn of the century it had been renamed the Stamford Bridge Athletic Grounds and then the Stamford Bridge Sports Grounds. In 1905 Chelsea F.C was founded and they came to an agreement to play at Stamford Bridge which underwent a redesign by famous architect Archibald Leitch and would have a maximum capacity of 100,000.

Speedway had started in 1928 and the aptly named Chelsea Pensioners rode there until 1932 before greyhound racing and the Greyhound Racing Association (GRA) arrived. This forced the LAC to leave the stadium in 1933. The greyhounds had arrived in 1933 when oval racing was growing at a terrific rate. The track was 434 yards in circumference and was described as a fast, average sized course with short 80-yard straights and banked bends of wide radius. Railers showed a slight advantage and the hounds were supplied by the famous GRA Hook Estate.

Early success came the way of some of the tracks trainers, Charlie Ashley's wonderful hound Shove Halfpenny won the 1935 Pall Mall and Joe Harmon won the 1938 running of the same competition with Roeside Creamery. Events at Stamford Bridge included the Chelsea Cup won by Creamery Border in 1936 who set a then a new world record of 28.01sec for 500yds. In addition to the Chelsea Cup would be the tracks premier event the Stamford Bridge Produce Stakes that was inaugurated in 1936.

As the Second World War approached Arthur Jonas trained Return Fare II to Berkeley Cup success and the same trainer steered Roving Youth to the 1940 Greyhound Derby final. In 1944 Stamford Bridge maintained its reputation for being an extremely fast track when new star Ballyhennessy Seal clocked 27.64sec for the 500yds course, another world and national record.



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Greyhound racing was flourishing with the 1946 Stamford Bridge totalisator turnover over £5 million, to put this in perspective to football and Chelsea at the time, the British transfer record at the same time in 1946 was £14,500. A staggering statistic!

Jonas continued to train big race winners, this time taking the Springbok with Kids Delight in 1947, a year when the greyhound public was offered two members clubs and six refreshment buffets around the terracing. During the fifties K Obee was Racing Manager before switching to sister track Harringay replaced by F A Branscombe. Assistant Racing Managers at this time included Sidney Wood and Jeff Jeffcoate, both in their fledgling greyhound careers.

The resident trainers in 1965 consisted of Hancox, Morse, Forster, Sid Mann, Dick Clark and Jim Singleton but cutbacks by the GRA resulted in former trainer Arthur Jonas and Dick Clark having to leave the Northaw kennels. A coup was stopped one year after the infamous Dagenham incident when a similar attempt was made with strange combination betting patterns but track officials foiled the plan by stating that there was a problem with the tote before announcing that positive drug samples had been obtained from some of the greyhounds due to race.

With the formation of the BAGS service in 1967 the NGRS named Stamford Bridge as one of the tracks to host the service. This meant racing was changed to Thursday afternoons at 2.30pm with just one evening meeting remaining on Saturday at 6.15pm. Oddly of the four tracks named on the service in 1967 only Oxford survived beyond 1969.

In 1968 the GRA Property Trust in their track cull at the time closed Stamford Bridge to greyhound racing on 1st August. Owned by the Mears Trust the GRA lease was not renewed with the one of the main reasons quoted as being the fact that Stamford Bridge had to race on the same days as the White City.

The stadium once capable of holding 100,000 spectators was soon due to undergo gigantic changes by Chelsea F.C and work would start on modernisation but run into financial trouble. Today the stadium holds just 42,000 but Chelsea remains one of the top clubs in the world with most unaware that it was once a prime greyhound location (0° 11' 27.111"W 51° 28' 54.324"N).

Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
500y	Creamery Border	28.01	1936+	World & National Record
	Ballyhennessy Seal	27.64	20.05.1944	World & National Record
	Mighty Hassan	27.24	04.07.1959	
	Oregon Prince	27.15	27.07.1961	
700y	Kampion Sailor	39.96	09.05.1946	
	Dunmore Rocco	39.25	16.05.1959	
	Ballymurn Prince	39.08	11.08.1962	
880y	Maddalena	51.05	05.11.1959	
	Strolling Girl	50.28	15.09.1960	
934y	Magic Brooklyn	54.21	30.05.1959	
	Hard Pressed Again	53.81	11.08.1962	
500yH	Bealtaine	28.27	15.09.1938	National Record
	Bus Stop	28.18	30.05.1959	
	Crimson Wave	28.13	27.08.1964	
700yH	Speedway Rebel	41.30	29.06.1939	National Record
	Olly's Playboy	40.46	13.06.1959	
	All Alone	40.42	11.06.1960	
500 Chase	Change That	28.44	13.06.1961	

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