

## White City (London)

White City was the mecca of greyhound racing for nearly sixty years; it was the home of the Derby and whenever the name White City was mentioned people associated it with the dog racing.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a 140 acre site near Hammersmith was being converted into the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition; this exhibition/public fair would have been remarkable to witness with most of the buildings a brilliant white ferro-concrete, hence where the name for the area and stadium would come from. Included in the exhibition were two colonial villages and the 'Flip Flap' a machine/ride.

The Great Stadium was built in just ten months within the 140 acres next to the Flip Flap and in time for the 1908 London Olympics. The stadium was built on the former site of the county Brick Works, a trade that existed in the Hammersmith area for three centuries. The stadium itself was designed by JJ Webster and built by George Wimpey and was opened on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1908 by King Edward VII. It had cost £60,000 to construct with a running track and a cycle track around the centre which held a swimming & diving pool and a pitch. Most of the 1908 Olympic sports were held entirely within the stadium.

After the Olympics the White City area was used for further exhibitions but the stadium began to be underused. By 1922 attempts had been made to sell it following the lack of action and it is reputed to have become near-derelict by 1926.

So it was that in 1926 that the Greyhound Racing Association (GRA) purchased the Olympic/Great Stadium following the success of the first greyhound meetings in Manchester (Belle Vue). The GRA's second stadium was named White City and what was left of the old running and cycle tracks were grassed over. A new restaurant was built and covered terracing was constructed. The first race took place on 20<sup>th</sup> June and was won by a dog called Charlie Cranston. There was club house accommodation for 1,000 people and a capacity of 93,000 considerably more than the original seating capacity in 1908. Early visitors included the Prince of Wales and Prince George, later King George VI.

The track had a large 498 circumference with long straights of 120 yards with good sweeping turns suitable for strong galloping type dogs. The hare was an outside trolley type. The GRA's finances were helped with the use of a sophisticated automatic totalisator from which they retained a decent profit. GRA also moved its headquarters to the White City from Belle Vue.

Some of the sports premier events would be born here in 1927, the Greyhound Derby of course would become the ultimate test and joining the Derby would be the Champion Hurdle (renamed Grand National) the following year. The Oaks (for bitches only) would complete a famous trio of races. 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, Harringay and later other London tracks. The 140 acres of park and grassland would become famous within the industry.

It did not take long for the Derby to dominate the racing calendar with the competition remaining the major target for greyhounds even to this day. The first ever winner was Entry Badge who picked up a handsome £1,000 for his efforts, the dog was trained by local trainer Joe Harmon and had won a race on opening night. The following year all qualifying rounds would be held at White City which had not been the case in 1927.

It was in 1929 that Mick The Miller arrived for his first Derby from Ireland and duly captured the public's imagination arguably sending greyhound racing into every household in Britain and Ireland. His successful defence of the title one year later drew 50,000 and the controversial final of 1931 attracted 70,000. Major Percy Brown was installed as Racing Manager in 1931 arriving from sister track Belle Vue.

It was also during 1931 that a 440 yard running track was installed for the AAA Championships and further international athletics matches from then onwards as White City became a major athletics venue once again. Queens Park Rangers F.C completed a busy 1931 for the stadium when they played their home matches at the stadium. One year later major boxing events were introduced and in later years Rugby League, American Football and Speedway took place.

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The famous greyhounds to grace the turf before the war were numerous and of course winning the Derby promoted the greyhound to instant and lasting fame. The accounts of the Derby competitions can be found under each relevant year in the history section. White City won their second Derby in 1935 with Greta Ranee. In 1936 the stadium introduced the Wood Lane Stakes and the 'White City', the former would remain an important race throughout the years but the latter was a race that few recount today. The 'White City' offered superb rewards with only the Derby coming close to matching the prize money on offer. It was an invitation race that was like an early Select Stakes but sadly would only last until the war. In 1937 the Springbok and GRA Stakes was inaugurated for novice hurdlers and stayers respectively.

The White City trainers were naturally competing and winning regular major open races, in 1938 the GRA moved Harry Buck from Belle Vue to join the current White City trainers Leslie Reynolds, William Dixon, Arthur Jonas and Les Parry.

A record 92,000 people attended the 1939 Derby final and the tote turnover set new records of £14,341 for a single race and £114,780 for a meeting. With the unrest in Europe the public clearly saw greyhound racing as a way to forget the troubles. Turnover remained high even during the war and hit an astonishing £17,576,190 in 1946, in today's terms this would be the equivalent of £661 million.

However many major competitions were badly hit during the war and postponed until 1945, two classic races the Scurry Gold Cup and St Leger were the biggest casualties. Even the Greyhound Derby was affected in 1940 after the first round had started at White City on June 15th; with the GRA then announcing a ban on fixtures at the stadium. Left in limbo a decision was made to move the race to Harringay, a move that did not go down well with many.

In 1945 some normality returned and White City always at the forefront of developments became the first track to install a photo finish camera. The Derby returned and was won by the great Ballyhennessy Seal. One year later the remarkable Bahs Choice went undefeated through the Wood Lane Stakes and then on 6 June 1946 in a Derby trial, he clocked a then astonishing 28.99sec to become the first dog in the world to break 29sec over the 525yds trip. Quare Times then smashed the track record twice during the 1946 event which led to Major Percy Brown, racing manager at White City, contacted the owners of the two greyhounds to arrange a return match between them at White City on August Bank Holiday Monday. It created tremendous interest. Greyhound lovers turned up from all parts of Britain to watch the two champions, Quare Times, always first from the traps, made no mistakes and set a new world record for the 550yds course.

The track also introduced a new event called the Longcross Cup in 1946 to attract the open race hounds and general public at the beginning of the year.

The fame of White City and greyhound racing was evident when the stadium was featured in numerous films including the 1950 movie 'The Blue Lamp'. One year later Racing Manager Major Percy Brown was left with a considerable problem of having to select 48 greyhounds for the Derby from a record 140 entries.

In December 1955 the legendary Irish hound Spanish Battleship travelled to England for the first time where White City was his destination for a special match race with Duet leader and Hi There. Age had caught up with him and home track advantage to his rivals proved too much as he trailed in last. Tom Lynch and Tim O'Connor retired him to stud as a superstar.

Following remarkable performances from Pigalle Wonder and Mile Bush Pride during the fabulous fifties there were changes in the racing management, G Morgan was brought in as Racing Manager to allow Major Percy Brown to help the GRA in the capacity of Director of Racing, Morgan was soon replaced by M Le Sueur and then in turn by Charlie Birch followed by R F Lee and finally Sidney Wood all within a couple of years, it seemed that the premier position was difficult to handle.

The Gimcrack race was also introduced in 1959 a race similar in nature to the White City many years previous. It would soon be renamed the Challenge. As a result of the extra competition it was decided to move the Oaks to sister track Harringay.

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Queens Park Rangers FC had another spell playing at White City from 1962-1963 and in 1964 trainer Randolph Singleton was transferred to White City from Belle Vue before a whole host of GRA changes in 1965. The GRA extended its board by adding Major Percy Brown, John Cearns (son of WJ) and Charles Chandler Jnr to the directors. The respected Arthur Aldridge former RM of Powderhall and Belle Vue was brought in as the new White City Racing Manager. The breeding establishment at Naas, near Dublin was auctioned and sold. Two advertising executives and five trainers from the Northaw kennels. Harry Buck, Dick Clarke, Albert Jonas, Eric Hiscock and Jack Cooper were all released whilst the remaining ten trainers had to cover the three tracks of White City, Harringay and Stamford Bridge.

During the 1966 World Cup the stadium hosted the match between Uruguay and France as a result of the famous moment of stubbornness from Wembley stadium. They had refused to cancel their greyhound racing to accommodate the fixture.

The constant sale of assets by the GRA was a worry so when a new superstar arrived it provided a much needed boost. The boost was in the form of two greyhounds in 1968; Camira Flash owned by the Duke of Edinburgh who went on to win the Derby for White City for only the third time and Yellow Printer who astonished onlookers with his powerful victories.

A story broke in 1969 that the GRA had granted an option to Stock Conversion and Investment Ltd to purchase greyhound racing's premier track White City for redevelopment. The official line was that a new modern White City stadium would be built in the remaining four acres from the existing sixteen. Reporter Neil Martin stated "this move must spell death to all sport there in time – and in my opinion greyhound racing too" Fellow reporter John Bower had a different view that it would create a wonderful new stadium, a view seemingly given substance by GRA announcing that the architects plans were already drawn up. The full extent of the purpose of the GRA property trust was beginning to look ominous.

Amongst all of the Derby greats such as Pigalle Wonder, Mile Bush Pride, Dolores Rocket and Patricias Hope other competitions were capable of producing super stars. One such star was three times Grand National champion Sherrys Prince who collected his third consecutive victory in 1972 over the jumps, an added bonus for White City was the fact that his trainer Colin West had recently joined the track. West and the Cambridgeshire competition had both arrived from the recently closed West Ham.

In 1972 GRA Director of racing Major Percy Brown retired after 40 years in the sport, his replacement was the current Racing Manager Arthur Aldridge.

The Derby final was still capable of attracting large crowds with 33,000 turning up in 1974 to witness the unsuccessful attempt by Patricias Hope to win a third Derby. The same year the Totalisators and Greyhound Holdings (T.G.H) persuaded Arthur Aldridge to leave GRA and take over as Racing Director for them.

In 1975 the track switched to metres and in 1977 former Manchester United footballer Charlie Mitten was appointed Assistant Racing Manager to Bob Rowe. During 1982 Bob Rowe relinquished his position as White City Racing Manager to take up the role of chief racing manager of the GRA, the previous year Hugh Richardson had vacated that job after retiring. John Collins was brought in to replace Bob Rowe.

The great Joe Pickering retired in 1982 as did Colin West leaving White City two trainers short. They appointed Graham Mann (son of Sid Mann) as one replacement and Frank Melville arrived from Harringay. Pickering had won six classic races since joining the track in 1956. Another trainer Randy Singleton would retire shortly after. It was as though they knew trouble was around the corner.

1984 signified one of the lowest moments in the history of greyhound racing. Way back in 1969 GRA had granted an option to Stock Conversion and Investment Ltd to purchase White City for redevelopment. The racing public had been lulled into a false sense of security as the years passed because there had been no news of the redevelopment for the next 15 years. Then the dreaded announcement arrived that the home of the Derby and the sports premier track would shut its doors and no new stadium would be built.

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There would be one final sentimental Derby in late June before the final meeting on 22nd September. Hastings Girl trained by Tommy Foster was the very last winner and before the month had finished demolition teams were busy and racing's most historic stadium was gone. The 1969 prophecy of racing correspondent Neil Martin came to pass, he had said 'this move must spell death to all sport there in time – and in my opinion the greyhound racing too'

The GRA, the company who introduced greyhound racing to Britain had slowly damaged their reputation through the seventies and they would come under severe criticism after this latest move. The site was eventually turned into a collection of BBC buildings.



Aerial view of White City  
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### Selected Track Records (Pre-Metric)

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
500y	Outside Left	27.55	12.07.1958	
525y	Mick The Miller	29.82	16.07.1929	Derby heats, world record
	Ryland R	29.69	16.07.1931	Derby heats
	Future Cutlet	29.62	07.1932	Derby heats
	Shove Halfpenny	29.47?	1936+	
	Fine Jubilee	29.47?	1936+	
	Wattle Bark	29.36	06.1937	Derby heats
	Shove Halfpenny	29.36	19.06.1937	Derby semi-finals
	Wattle Bark	29.26	26.06.1937	Derby final
	??	29.21	1938?	
	Quare Times	28.95	06.1946	Derby heats, world record
	Quare Times	28.82	29.06.1946	Derby consolation, world record
	Priceless Border	28.??	1947/48+	
	Priceless Border	28.64	06.1948	Derby heats
	Pauls Fun	28.64*	19.06.1954	* ray timing, Derby semi-finals
	Kilcaskin Kern	28.63	06.1958	Derby heats
	Mile Bush Pride	28.60	06.1958	Derby semi finals
	Pigalle Wonder	28.44	21.06.1958	Derby semi finals
	Yellow Printer	28.30	03.06.1968	Derby heats, world record
	Super Rory	28.26	17.06.1972	Derby semi-finals
550y	Quare Times	30.38	05.08.1946	Match v Bahs Choice
	Ballymac Ball	30.30	10.12.1949	
	Ballymac Ball	30.27	26.12.1949	
	Fearless Mac	29.93	03.08.1959	
	Monalee Champion	29.82	07.01.1967	
725y	Shaggy Lass	41.43	06.05.1946	
	Murray Grant	40.63	27.07.1963	
	Cash For Dan	40.16	28.06.1969	
800y	Ryans Rose	45.69	1950+	
	Western Stream	??	1954+	
	Bella Bambino	45.15	31.10.1964	
	Poor Mick	44.90	1970+	
	Lively Mandy	44.89	02.10.1971	
880y	The Cherry Tree	49.99	17.03.1962	
	Cash For Dan	49.44	16.10.1969	
1025y	Yason	60.88	21.08.1954	
	Rozels Blue Girl	59.52	27.06.1964	
	Greenville Fauna	58.60	18.07.1968	
525yH	Barrowside	29.43	07.05.1955	Grand National final
	Lucky Orange	29.34	1970+	
	Sherrys Prince	29.10	8.05.1971	
550yH	Indoor Sport	31.16	28.07.1962	
	Sherrys Prince	30.62	16.10.1969	
725yH	Gypsy Boy	41.84	27.06.1959	
550y Chase	Fodda Champion	31.18	1957+	

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

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### Selected Track Records (Post-Metric)

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
268m	Mutts Silver	15.70	1976+	
500m	Sallys Cobbler	29.31	06.1975	Derby heats
	Slippery Slave	29.26	06.1975	Derby Heats
	Myrtown	29.23	21.06.1975	Derby semi finals
	Ballybeg Prim	29.23	1976+	
	Shamrock Point	29.18	06.1976	
	Glen Rock	29.16	1977+	World record
	Balliniska Band	29.16	25.06.1977	Derby final
	Parkdown Jet	29.09	20.06.1981	Derby semi-finals
	Hay Maker Mack	28.95	25.06.1983	
680m	Sallys Cobbler	40.85	1975+	
730m	Glin Bridge	44.03	1980+	
962m	Westown Adam	59.81	1980+	
	Portland Dusty	59.81	1980+	
500mH	Moon View	30.09	1980+	
680mH	Topofthetide	42.56	1979+	

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

### Selected Totalisator Turnover (£) for London & Greater London

Track	1938	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
Catford	1,090,357	875,598	1,181,455	1,395,772	1,608,090	3,617,372	5,397,432
Charlton	312,690	567,159	495,073	502,270	620,065	1,279,410	2,038,891
Clapton	1,297,462	1,376,230	1,603,789	1,785,125	1,882,284	3,918,648	5,802,609
Crayford & B	354,734	X	552,625	645,496	671,499	1,307,377	2,148,611
Dagenham	31,541+	444,138	273,327+	160,010+	675,273	1,295,066	776,990
Hackney	810,869	643,244	741,855	700,983	848,306	1,968,866	3,081,734
Harlington C*	X	X	X	X	X	X	206,468
Harringay	3,033,931	2,594,889	2,557,417	3,263,328	4,282,064	7,935,367	11,046,994
Hendon	493,766	616,796	717,011	809,462	961,672	1,695,935	2,302,255
New Cross	715,021	761,660	1,017,753	1,241,682	1,363,863	2,468,997	3,095,736
Park Royal	933,827	1,034,674	840,206	742,552	809,305	2,534,168	4,310,543
Romford	283,486	487,433	553,110	670,631	765,907	951,011	1,406,909
Southall *	34,405	23,443	49,307	81,696	123,631	219,994	300,049
Stamford B	1,475,624	1,819,708	1,220,680	980,738	1,271,822	3,680,966	5,749,592
Stratford *	61,503	99,662	87,450	81,334	95,642	200,194	X
Walthamstow	1,380,475	1,649,474	2,018,317	2,406,489	2,789,450	5,366,513	7,355,147
Wandsworth	862,614	1,046,055	1,171,904	1,230,310	1,481,021	3,286,551	4,650,421
Wembley	1,617,278	2,013,914	2,289,400	3,224,759	3,965,179	7,976,384	10,905,145
West Ham	1,590,106	1,167,673	780,577+	1,098,213+	238,959+	454,336+	5,362,519
White City	4,003,332	3,727,310	4,585,310	5,579,036	7,124,888	13,479,412	17,576,190
Wimbledon	2,210,504	1,927,815	1,713,542	2,109,446	1,761,748+	5,815,527	9,086,557

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**Selected Totalisator Turnover (£) for London & Greater London**

<b>Track</b>	<b>1947</b>	<b>1948</b>	<b>1949</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1952</b>	<b>1953</b>	<b>1954</b>
Catford	3,785,312	2,897,074	2,249,197	1,738,666	1,603,783	1,558,116	1,467,000
Charlton	1,579,299	1,282,880	1,084,287	872,693	870,316	826,000	843,000
Clapton	3,747,953	2,658,628	2,241,426	1,927,747	1,741,183	1,695,177	1,681,000
Crayford & B	1,269,077	1,135,768	885,460	786,300	722,900	681,533	640,000
Dagenham	854,225	602,262	658,364	714,323	703,200	644,000	633,000
Hackney	1,951,506	1,568,791	1,560,901	1,379,992	1,280,383	1,297,000	1,231,000
Harlington C*	176,331	127,624	140,780	93,946	100,217	64,000	X
Harringay	7,370,257	5,658,313	4,773,625	3,809,428	3,352,649	3,336,000	2,967,000
Hendon	2,115,518	1,809,806	1,494,735	1,164,566	1,073,466	1,042,000	1,000,000
New Cross	2,490,490	2,040,786	1,650,623	1,353,021	1,259,516	1,145,000	1,083,000
Park Royal	2,402,978	1,944,490	2,037,949	1,599,124	1,717,716	1,729,033	1,641,000
Romford	1,076,099	991,055	980,467	853,562	857,950	847,000	837,000
Southall *	223,926	196,683	157,477	129,972	126,117	119,000	X
Stamford B	3,787,382	2,688,310	2,373,263	2,015,525	1,750,349	1,577,000	1,561,000
Stratford *	219,931	131,979	118,899	X	X	X	X
Walthamstow	4,520,380	3,242,896	3,043,055	2,742,584	2,543,822	2,397,000	2,298,000
Wandsworth	3,316,001	2,516,682	2,254,342	1,948,350	1,836,266	1,796,783	1,748,000
Wembley	6,940,413	4,160,092	4,324,443	3,465,254	2,918,149	2,616,000	2,429,000
West Ham	2,451,233	1,729,260	1,829,569	1,691,874	1,675,649	1,693,000	1,583,000
White City	10,769,353	7,872,357	6,748,051	5,402,244	4,955,981	4,799,000	4,367,000
Wimbledon	3,888,379	2,868,844	3,096,750	2,979,574	2,752,199	2,422,000	2,464,000

+ only part of year only due to war \* independent