

Romford

Archer Leggett and his brother-in-law rented a small piece of land near the Crown Hotel just off the London Road in Romford in 1929. They put down £400 to equip the land ready for greyhound racing and opened for business on 21st June and invited privately owned greyhounds to chase a hare driven by an old Ford car engine. This venture lasted just one year because the landlord hiked up the rent doubling it to £4 a week resulting in a decision to move the greyhound operation.

£600 was raised and Leggett which enabled him to build a new track with a stand in a field within Belle Vue Meadow adjacent to the London & North Eastern Railway line. The new site was on the south side of the London Road opposite the original venue north of the London Road. Housing also sprung up very quickly around the immediate area. It included a hand-operated totalisator and electrically operated hare. The first meeting took place on 20th September 1931 with regular attendances in excess of 1,000 frequenting each meeting.

In 1935 four new directors including Fred Leaney & Michael Pohl joined the original directors and an extra £17,000 investment followed allowing the track to turn into a stadium. Extra stands and kennels were constructed by the new company called Romford Stadium Ltd who then turned their attention to the nearby Dagenham track. Dagenham was purchased by the company and plans for a rebuild were soon initiated.

The greyhound industry boom allowed companies such as Romford Stadium Ltd to thrive and greyhound racing itself was big business and national news. Before work got underway at Dagenham Arthur Leggett decided that he was going to bring Cheetah Racing to the UK. The wild idea actually turned into reality when twelve cheetahs arrived from Kenya in December 1936 courtesy of explorer Kenneth Gandar-Dower. After six months of quarantine the cheetahs were given time to acclimatise before Romford, Harringay and Staines were earmarked for the experiment with the cheetahs running for the first time on Saturday 11th December 1937 at Romford. The experiment failed with just one further race held, it is not fully known as to why the racing was stopped because the cheetahs were reported to have beaten the greyhounds. It is believed that complaints from local residents and pressure generated by other track owners brought it to an end. There is other speculation that the cheetahs actually became disinterested and stopped or failed chase the hare.

With the new Dagenham opening in 1938 Leggett next introduced a new event to Romford in 1939 and called it the Essex Vase. The stadium offered the main grandstand on the home straight that featured the Seniors Club and on the back straight was another stand and the Junior Club within. The paddock was on the third bend with the racing kennels and the Racing Managers office. Between the first two bends sat the totalisator and general office, the press office was on the first bend and there was a very unusual Racing Managers box in the middle of the centre green. The track was 380 yards in circumference with distances of 460 & 650 yards and an 'Inside Sumner' hare. The resident kennels were situated in Heaton Grange, 24 acres of ground off Straight Road to the north-east of Romford.

After the 1949 event the Essex Cup was discontinued until fifteen years later and most Romford trainers steered clear of the open race circuit dominated by the central London trainers. The Racing Manager in the fifties was Les Cox and the Director of Racing was Michael Pohl who passed away in 1959, his son Michael J Pohl Jr. was the assistant to Cox. The first significant win by a Romford greyhound came in 1955 when the Peter Hawkesley trained Roguish Shaggy won the Wimbledon Gold Cup and five years later Chamois lifted the Silver Salver at Southend for Bill Riley. Trainers attached to the track at this time were Hawkesley & Riley along with Bob Thomson and Hubert Gray. Thomson would be responsible for training a greyhound called Bedford when they lifted the prestigious TV Trophy in 1966; this event was hosted by the track two year later in 1968.

George 'Bunny' Gough former Racing Manager of Powderhall & Harringay joined the track and replaced Cox as Racing Manager in the early sixties and Peter Hawkesley left the track for West Ham in 1966 with John Brown joining the training ranks

The fallout from the infamous 'Dagenham Coup' was felt by Romford Stadium Ltd in 1965 with the legal costs incurred by Romford Stadium Ltd finally being paid by the off course bookmakers. It was of course the end for Dagenham as the company sold the track for £185,000 to a packaging business.

.....continued

There were a couple of noteworthy training appointments towards the end of the decade and start of the new decade as John Coleman and Terry Duggan arrived. Coleman soon established himself as a leading trainer scoring many open race victories including the Scurry in 1969 with Ace of Trumps. Coleman's was soon noticed and landed a job at Wembley in 1973. Terry Duggan replaced Coleman as Romford's leading trainer thereafter. In January 1974 Westpark Mustard graced the track as the bitch won a race that would form part of her record and Duggan lifted his home event the Essex Vase with Cowpark Yank. A second feature event was added to the tracks portfolio when they introduced the Romford Puppy Cup.

During 1976 Arthur Leggett the Managing Director on behalf of the company agreed the sale of Romford to Coral's. It was an end of an era for Leggett and Romford after a 45 year association. The new owners invested heavily into the track building a new grandstand which included a state of the art glass fronted restaurant, the tote and hare systems were also replaced. The investment reaped rewards as the track became extremely popular with public and the industry alike. John Sutton was brought in as the Managing Director, Gough was promoted to General Manager and Sidney Wood was Racing Manager. Coral's signalled their intent by buying Brighton & Hove to double their track assets and preventing Ladbrokes from increasing their group, the latter had been a serious bidder for the two tracks at the same time.

In 1977 local bitch 'Go Ahead Girl' recorded a sensational 17 consecutive wins for Duggan and the following year Bermudas Fun trained by local handler Ken Usher won the Essex Vase in a new track record time of 35.15 secs.

With Corals and Ladbrokes now owning seven tracks the payments for BAGS racing to the NGRC ended. Instead the tracks would tender for the contracts. Only Hackney, Bristol & Watford along with five bookmaker-owned tracks (one of them being Romford) had BAGS contracts at this time. Also in 1978 Jim Simpson moved from Crayford to become Racing Manager at Romford.

Lauries Panther a black and white dog whelped in April 1980 was owned by Laurie James and was put with Terry Duggan in late 1981 performing well in the end of year puppy competitions. Duggan had recently won the Golden Jacket with Just It and as 1982 started he had high hopes for the new pup. The dog then famously went on to win the Derby and Laurels and provide Romford with their greatest moment in the history of greyhound racing. In addition Duggan won the Puppy Derby the same year with Mountleader Mint.

The glorious eighties continued with appearances from both Ballyregan Bob and Scurlogue Champ, the former won the 1985 Essex Vase going through unbeaten and breaking the track record in the final. The Coronation Cup became Romford's third major trophy in 1986 following the closure of Southend.

The Peter Payne trained Sullane Princess claimed the Oaks crown in 1987 and the same year in the midst of boom period Romford inaugurated a fourth competition called the Golden Sprint. In addition Linda Mullins wife of the late Pat Mullins became the tracks latest trainer. One year later yet another major event was introduced, this time it was the resurrected Champion Stakes, an event once held by Wimbledon.

Romford was now becoming a regular player in major open race competitions and Mullins was about to rattle up a long list of success. One outstanding performer was Gizmo Pasha the 1990 English & Scottish Grand National champion. Maggie Lucas joined the track in 1991 but Mullins was recruited by Walthamstow, a move that saw Kenny Linzell switch to Romford as a result. A further boost to the training ranks came when Linda Jones joined in 1994. Peter Payne reminded the new trainers that he was still around when his charge Demesne Bear lifted both the Laurels and Scurry trophies in 1995.

Within two years David Mullins and Peter Rich were attached to Romford and in 1996 former Bolton boss Peter O'Dowd became Racing Manager taking over from Steve Daniel who had himself only recently replaced Ray Spalding. Linda Jones became prominent on the open race circuit and just like Linda Mullins before her would become trainer of the year after a move to Walthamstow. Romford boasted two Derby finalists in 1999 in Secret Crystal (Jones) and Pottos Storm (David Mullins), the latter actually dead heated for the Grand National crown the same year.

.....continued

El Tenor recorded his magical 100th open race win here in 2000 and in one year later Romford's most recent trainer addition Paul Young claimed a Derby final place with Droopys Honcho. Young would surpass the achievements of all Romford trainers before him including Linda Mullins because most of her rewards came as a Walthamstow trainer. Young would seal a Golden Jacket win in 2002 followed by a Reading Masters crown, two Juveniles, three TV Trophies (two with Ericas Equity), a puppy derby and Laurels all by 2005. In between Peter Rich finished third in the Greyhound Derby final in 2004 and won the Pall Mall undefeated with Tims Crow who became Romford's second ever greyhound of the year.

Further triumphs by Jim Reynolds in the 2004 Grand National and Alison Ingram in the 2005 Regency were providing the track with a conveyor belt of silverware. Reynolds was trainer of Horseshoe Ping a sprinter that lit up the tracks for the best part of three years from 2006-2008.

After a couple of quieter years Peter Payne retired after ill health in 2011 before Paul Young bounced back to prominence. Swabys Princess won the William Hill Grand Prix and Bubbly Phoenix took the Derby Invitation in 2012. Airlie Impact finished Derby runner up in 2013 and Bubbly Beauty claimed the Puppy Derby.

Today Romford is regarded as one of the premier tracks and just needs another Derby victory to add to the one in 1982. In 2014 Paul Young made yet another final and was unlucky not to win it finishing runner up again with Droopys Ward.

.....continued

Selected Track Records (Pre-Metric)

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
460y	Beau Coup	26.54	27.08.1938	National Record
	Tan Gent	26.08	1946+	
	Yellow Dew	25.51	11.05.1963	
	Ace of Trumps	25.18	13.05.1969	
500y	Jimmy Pallet	27.69	11.05.1971	
550y	Pastorale Passe-partout	32.58	1941+	
650y	Pearls Choice	37.66	1947+	
	Vals Parachute	36.43	07.08.1965	
	Shamrock Clipper	36.42	1967+	
	Tarrys Gay Lady	36.19	1970+	
	Dolores Rocket	36.06	06.07.1971	Essex Vase Final
840y	Carmen Star	48.38	20.08.1963	
	Breachs Blizzard	48.23	1967+	
	Hat Band	48.02	1970+	
880y	Bedford	50.35	1967+	
	The Marchioness	50.28	18.03.1972	

1030y	Walking Champ	60.85	14.04.1964	
	Ashley Park Mystery	60.87	1967+	
	Castle Satoo	60.42	1970+	
	Curraheen Lady	60.00	11.05.1971	
460yH	Cheerful Chairman	27.60	09.05.1939	National Record
	Vintners Cup	26.19	1958+	
	Derry Palm	26.14	02.06.1970	
650yH	Neds Bay	37.61	1967+	
	Gipsy Jerry	37.47	19.03.1968	

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

.....continued

Selected Track Records (Post-Metric)

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
225m	Troy Tempest	13.42	13.09.2002	
	Louisville	13.37	09.01.2004	
	Rotar Wing	13.37	23.10.2009	
	Tearaway John	13.28	12.03.2010	
400m	Just Clear	24.21	10.08.1978	
	Blue Style	24.02	1983+	Romford Puppy Cup Final
	Sados Choice	23.87	06.12.1986	
	Right Move	23.78	08.05.1992	
	Sandwichsunshine	23.58	27.09.1996	
	Fifis Rocket	=23.58	16.04.2010	Golden Sprint semi-final

	Ardbeg Mentor	23.56	23.04.2010	Golden Sprint Final
	Eden Star	23.34	16.09.2011	Romford Puppy Cup semi-final
575m	Bermudas Fun	35.15	11.07.1978	Essex Vase Final
	Ballyregan Bob	=35.15	09.07.1985	Essex Vase Final
	Sard	35.09	21.09.1988	
	Elderberry Chick	34.86	18.07.1997	Champion Stakes Final
	Palace Issue	34.81	09.07.1999	
	Sportsman	34.94	07.07.2003	Champion Stakes heats
	Solid Money	34.78	09.07.2004	Champion Stakes second rd
	Airport Captain	34.67	13.08.2013	Champion Stakes Final
715m	Scurlogue Champ	44.18	16.04.1985	
750m	Scurlogue Champ	46.80	02.03.1985	
	Keem Rocket	46.70	02.03.1985	
	Bubbly Prince	46.68	07.01.2000	
	Killeacle Phoebe	46.64	19.06.2001	
	Avit On Bertha	46.37	12.12.2012	
925m	Langford Dacoit	59.56	27.07.1978	
	Salina	59.13	07.04.1981	
	Aero Rebel	58.62	12.12.2012	
1100m	Cregagh Prince	72.59	10.03.1987	
400mH	Barrymoss Queen	24.50	08.08.1985	
	Emers Flight	24.49	18.09.1989	
	Pantile	24.49	04.05.1990	
	Run With Billy	24.41	18.02.1994	
	Rossa Ranger	24.17	05.07.2002	
	Sizzlers Bossman	24.15	18.07.2005	
	Freedom Man	24.12	08.05.2009	
	Glenwood Dream	24.07	12.03.2010	

575mH	Champagne Glory	36.22	16.10.1984	
	Shanavulin Jacko	36.20	10.04.1993	
	El Tenor	35.53	19.02.1999	

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

.....continued

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
-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------	------------	-----------	-----------

Selected Totalisator Turnover (£) for London & Greater London

Track	1947	1948	1949	1950	1952	1953	1954
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