

14/02/2024 Jonathan Buckley

Pip Barry

*Interviewed by Arvo for the WiSH / Digital Works Going to the Dogs Oral History Project
22nd January 2024 at the AFC Wimbledon's Cherry Records Stadium, Plough Lane, London SW17.*

Born 1967 in Tooting. Mum worked in youth service and Dad for the Gas Board

Start: Gambling family – some compulsively and one a professional gambler – card player. Came to the dog track as a child, given money to bet, quite good at it. First experience: probably birthday or family function or go to the dogs at the weekend. Used to go to restaurant, eat and bet from the table. Done semi secretly. They weren't supposed to take from kids but did. Didn't bet big sums but always came home with more. Happens forever. Don't bet on anything else.

Later bought house in Clapham and rebuilt it with mate (partner went and stayed with parent). Used to live in the house but no kitchen so we used to go to the dogs for dinner. For two years didn't miss a meet at the dog track. Never went home with less money than I arrived with; paid for dinners. Mate wasn't as lucky. Didn't bet on which dog came first ... which was most unusual with best odds. E.g. Dog called David Beckham everyone would bet on it whatever so odds were short. Bet on best dog against Tote. Used to bet against the people like the bookies did.

Later brought kids. Dad prior to it shutting came down with him and my daughters ... came down after wake to get over it. Brought kids here and family and friends.

Gambling: Can still remember some of the dogs – favourites Westmead ... Ruby. Always used to bet on them ... with a Tricast first 3 dogs in any order. You get to learn The Ligan – always terrible on the first lap. But everyone knew it would win. And it would come from the back. You got to know regular dogs and people. The Irish would come over ... and they would say it was going to win. Probably in the wrong group. Used to bet a lot. Rush to tote at the last minute. Wanted a bet that no one else wanted £1.20 bet won £360. Sometimes I would miss it because someone would be slow at the Tote counter.

Gimmicks: girl dressed as a bunny girl and chased by group of guys looking like the Village People. Bookies took bets on it. Not the Tote. Used to do maintenance on the PA system there.

Atmosphere: you had to go down and put bet on with the bookmakers. Screaming when dogs went around or a dog got barged. Hen nights and stag dos. Lot of families. Very loud back in the 80s when it was popular. This was my main track. Drinking and shouting. Irish bet very big and loud when they won and depressed when they lost. Some would lose but not tell the others. Always betting on the nose to win big. Great night out. Safe place to take kids and grandmother.

Uncle awful gambler, gambled his life away but very generous. Big win and spent it on everyone. Similar vibe at football match but constant waves of sound and emotion with each race.

Stadium looked a bit dark and dreary. Middle of the track the boards and all the odds rolling on the middle. Fence going around and dogs come out from under the stand and paraded round. That dogs had a good poo so I will bet on that. Sometimes dogs would fight or run away or the hare would break down. Lights went down before the race. Tote board at end of the stand. Later on, it was just one side of the stadium but before it had real atmosphere. Lot of people falling over falling over because drinking. The light would always change. Lights come one and people milling around placing bets. Lights dimmed and got really raucous.

People: regular punters that went week in and week out. Tended to be not that sociable. Groups of men from Ireland – very loud and great fun. Night out couple of friends. Lots of families. Older would invite everyone that I knew. Hen and stag parties. Remember Afghans racing over hurdles ... like a Harmony hair advert!

Typical night: car park and directed to furthest corner. Always near or back of car park that did seafood (prawns). Used to get takeaway pie and mash and liquor and bring with them. Queue with racing card and programme with adverts for local Indian takeaway. Used to study the form of the dogs. Used to know some of the dogs. Go in and buy beer, long wait for the race.

Staircase up the back of the stand. Either find a good standing position if you haven't booked a table. Always dominate your space and see the finishing line. Mad panic for the first race bet because not paying attention. After that get into a rhythm of beer and betting. Downstairs lots of jostling around the book makers ... odds constantly changing! You have to queue. If you come down to the front you need to get back to see the race. People scrabbling around looking for their winning ticket. Always someone in front of you who didn't know how to bet.

Westmead stable of dogs ... always winning. Betting rates / units changed 20p and 50p. Mum's birthday and won quite a lot. 14 years old. Aunts and Uncles there and Dad said you are paying for everything.

People: Ladies looking after the dogs – young or middle aged. Ladies behind the Tote desk were not young. Ladies on the Tote: impatient but some were really lovely. Guy sitting same place next to column in a white suit and sun glasses and always betting a lot of money. Never talked to anyone. Bookmakers were Arthur Dale characters in black suits standing on boxes.

Kept coming because it was great fun. Went to different tracks. People would dress up. And always a cheap night out. Alternatives were more expensive or less accessible. Used to come stock car racing too. Lot of people gambled to have a good time and an escape and hope. Only tote. Would on cards but stopped because I knew I could lose a lot. Good card players in the family.

People would come out back in the day because there weren't the distractions of TV and computers. Used to spend whole night at the dogs because that was where the world was. As we have got modern the age demographic started getting younger and then less of grandparents etc. It became younger thing.

Stadium had a bit of a facelift ... the whole area has changed and it is difficult to remember what it was like. Remember going to Wimbledon Southampton football match and the dogs afterwards having had a heavy night before. Mate passed out at the football ... then went to the dogs. The area was really decrepit and so was the greyhound stadium. Toilets in a terrible state. Grim. Not like that when I was a kid. Popularity and money made it change.

Media: today it is all about the money for big corporates and some of the spirit of adventure has been lost. Everyone has constant adverts sent to your phones. Used to be newspapers with reports rather than having it constantly pushed to you. Cuddly Ted used to gamble all the time. Lose every day. One day put a bet on the dogs and won.

Greyhound welfare: bought Mum one for her. Max is really Princess. Didn't get to see what happened to the dogs. Greyhound was definitely nobbled ... Irish dog ... it had two racing names, tattoos over tattoos. They are pampered and expects to be. Very lazy. Run and that's it. Tall, long nose and always felt they looked down their nose at you. Must keep them better than they used to. My Mum's dog has its bowl on a stand so it doesn't have to bend down. And various beds to sleep

in. Wont bark at front door. Maybe raise an eye. They have no recall. Run they just run. Bit aloof. There would have been a time when there were lots of greyhounds and no homes for them. When you went to the stadium Greyhound Trust was always there.

Decline due to television, phones, and that sort of stuff. Race across the channel in mid-winter by team of men and women went unnoticed. It would be on TV in the papers. Nowadays the money is being steered by televisual stuff. Not as popular because people were not making enough money out of it. Gambling is a big industry and people gamble on different things. In Korean they bet on cycle racing. Dogs can't say I am the special one. No people involved: horse racing you have jockeys. You have so much being thrust at you and no characters in dogs.

Fight to keep the stadium open. Meal deals etc. Things in papers etc. Don't follow stuff ... physical stuff is what I do. Used to get emails etc. Love to see more greyhound racing in years to come but believe we won't. Shame that football stadium has no track around it. It would be possible but want spectators near to pitch. NEC has a track built in to it. It would have to take a greyhound fan with lots of money to make it happen. Lot of things lend themselves to an oval track – athletics, greyhounds, speedway but it needs to be someone with imagination.

In the country people do whippet racing. The rugby club does and some do hare-coursing. The two stadiums were always alongside. Shame that development didn't incorporate both. Could have got double use. Multipurpose stadium. Would capture audience for longer.