Farewell to the Park

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1890-2010

The harness racing industry says goodbye to the iconic Sydney metropolitan track... Harold Park
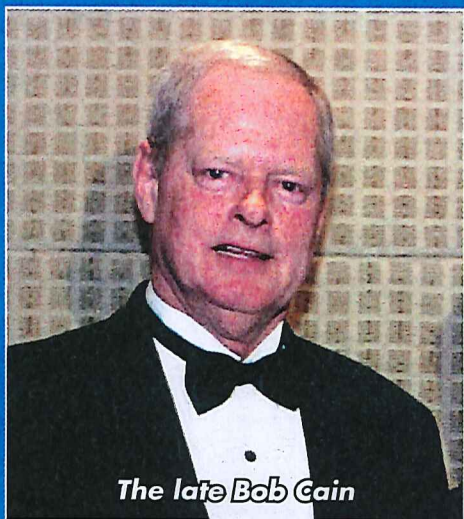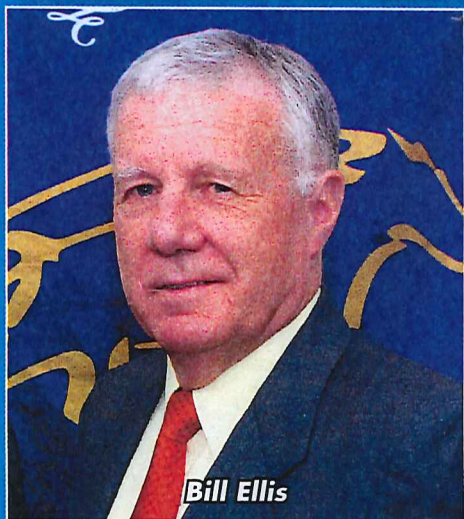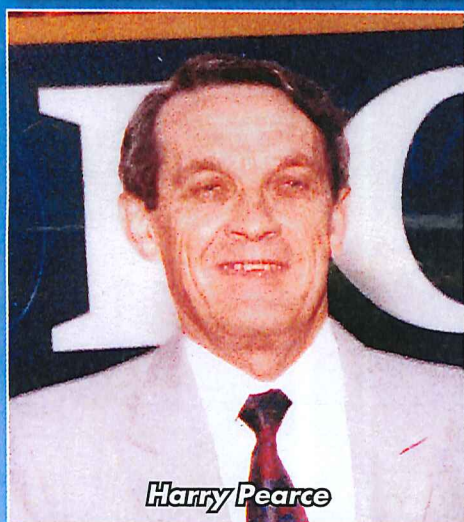
The Romance of Racing

By MARSHALL DOBSON

THE expression 'The Romance of Racing' could well have been coined for the history of Harold Park Paceway, in Glebe, a sleepy hollow deep in the heart of inner-city Sydney.

For almost a century-and-a-quarter, the iconic complex has played its part in Sydney's history, and has been a place where princes, paupers and priests gladly rubbed shoulders, as did criminals and their nemesis, Consorting Squad members.

Harold Park, which first saw the light of day in virtual obscurity as Lillie Bridge, in 1890 - it was later changed to Epping - has become a 'brand name' for harness racing, in much the same way as Coca-Cola, Mercedes-Benz and Rolls Royce signify excellence in their chosen fields.

The track in 1929 was re-named - because of confusion with the Sydney suburb, Epping - in honour of the imported trotter, Childe Harold, Kentucky-bred, who was imported from Glasgow in Scotland.

At its zenith, particularly in the 1950s and '60s, Harold Park played host to tens of thousands of punters and hundreds of bookmakers on the same nights in the Paddock and St Leger reserves, and was once the playground to Sydney's elite, looking for a place to meet old friends and make new ones.

You name them, they were there: Sydney society, dressed to the nines, ladies in evening gowns and gentlemen in three-piece suits with hats, as per the order of the day.

It was once a multi-purpose facility, with greyhounds racing there from 1936 until 1987, with the New South Wales Harness Racing Club being forced by State Government legislation in 1948 to turn its control of the longtail sport to the Greyhouund Breeders, Owners, Trainers Association, which administered it from then on, with nearby Wentworth Park taking over as the lone metropolitan track after greyhound racing concluded at Harold Park on Monday, September 21 1987.

From humble beginnings, harness racing - or trotting as it was known until about two decades ago - grew in stature, with the advent of night racing on October 1 1949 being the catalyst for its quantum leap in popularity.

All parties in State Parliament voted in favour of legislation which supported the introduction of racing under lights, and so, Sydney flocked to see the stars race under the stars.

It wasn't long before interstate and overseas fraternity members wanted to see what all the fuss was about, and like their New South Wales country friends, converged under a ribbon of light.

There was often one constant after the last - the adjacent Harold Park Hotel, which for many years was the local watering hole.

Harold Park was more than just a racetrack; in its day it also played host to a number of horses trained locally, stabled nearby in Hereford Street, and others, home to the likes of Sutton McMillan, Herb and Les Chant, Frank Culbert, Sam Aggett and many more, with their stables, in the main part now home units, being a home away from home to visiting trainers, from country NSW, to interstate - mainly Victoria - and even New Zealand.

The urban sprawl subsequently saw this dwindle to an ebb, from a flow, in the 1980s, and now, seeing a horse worked at Harold Park is a rarity.

The all-time greats - man and beast - have strutted their stuff on the intimate half-mile track, and everybody's individual favourite is anyone's guess.

Thrills and spills - that was Harold Park in its halcyon days, where no quarter was asked, and none given, with superb horsemen, and later, horsewomen, charging their brave steeds sometimes maniacally into the turn out of the home straight, directly into the ambulance room, with a drop of some 11 feet from the top of the straight to that turn: talk about fortune favouring the brave!

The Inter Dominion series - for pacers and trotters - was last held at 'headquarters' in 2002, the year of Smooth Satin, with the track taking its turn to host the Australasian title, but it has been the Miracle Mile, which first took centre stage in 1967, when won by Robin Dundee, that has been known as the track's signature event.

Over the years, with all its charm, mainly brought about by the participants close proximity to the punters, the track has seen many changes, none moreso than the transition to mobile racing, and the advent of totalisator betting.

For those of us old enough to remember, who can forget the stirring struggles - 'Hondo' and 'Paleface,' Pure Steel and Gammalite, Caduceus and Apmat - the list is endless - and the radio broadcasts, pre-SKY Channel days, with Ken Howard and Ray Conroy bringing the trots to your lounge room, and even your car radio, years before a croaky-voiced Andy Vincent on Channel 2 television handing back the telecast to Ron Davies "in the warmth of the ABC studios at Gore Hill, as the crowd wends its weary way home from Harold Park," complete to scenes of the one on-course camera being trained on the exit from the grandstand across to the car park, where the occasional straggler could be seen calling it a night.

So Harold Park, where millions of dollars have been turned over for more than a hundred years, is about to be retired, enjoy our reflection on the great track's history and take time to remember your own special memories.
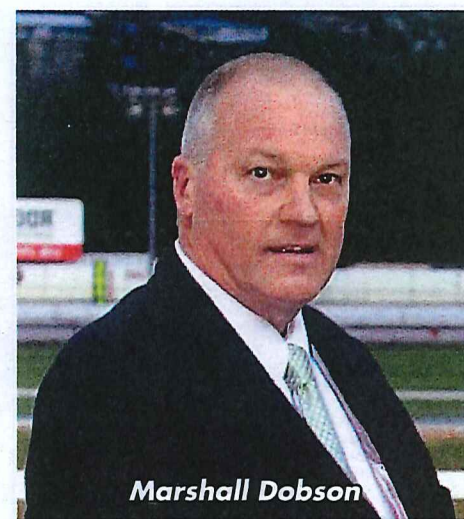
Marshall Dobson

The Park

Through the Ages

1890 TO 2010

By BOB CAIN & BILL ELLIS

IN its formative years, many thousands of new fans flocked to Glebe to support this ever growing popular sport. The New South Wales Trotting Club was the controlling body for the sport in the State, but few knew of the history of the club, its struggle through the lean years, or its progressive outlook when night trotting started.

Trotting races were first held at Lillie Bridge after George Edgar leased an oval in the George Allen Estate at Glebe and set up a small circuit on which he conducted proprietary pony trotting and racing. Small by today's standards, the track measured only two furlongs and 30 yards, or close to 450 metres in circumference.

The track was originally formed around the rectangle of the football field, but was later changed to a triangular cinders track. It remained that way until December 18, 1948, when the track was closed and converted for the introduction of night trotting in October the following year.

Advertisement placed in december 1889 for the inaugural meeting at Lillie Bridge on the 16th February 1890

Lillie Bridge, named after a professional running ground in Fulham, England, opened on New Year's Night, 1890, under electric lights with foot running the chief attraction. There was no trotting. It was not until February 6, 1890, that trotting made its debut at Lillie Bridge.

The first meeting was a best of three heats affair, which was won by Frank Hill's pony trotter, Ivo Bligh - prizemoney was ten sovereigns - while the first winner at that historic meeting was Fairplay (F. Alexander).

It was the first trotting meeting held under

electric lights in Australia, and 24 years before Perth hosted its first trotting meeting under lights at the WACA ground. The all acetylene electric lighting at Lillie Bridge was primitive by today's standards. After only several meetings under lights at Lillie Bridge, the bold experiment of avoiding clashing with the Saturday afternoon galloping meetings was scraped.

The depression of the 1890s forced a decline in trotting fortunes and by 1892 the Sydney Driving Park had closed. Lillie Bridge Racecourse survived until 1901 when racing ceased at that track.

In the meantime, trotting races were held at Lady Robinsons Beach and Brighton-Le-Sands on the shores of Botany Bay, and various other tracks of land, parks and roads. The most important races, however, were not contested on any recognised track, but were usually held on highways adjacent to the city.

The popular stretch of road frequented by the `flash boys with fast horses' was from

Advertisement published in June 1891 for racing by electric lights at Lillie Bridge

the old Captain Cook Hotel in Moore Park, across Cleveland Street junction to the toll-gate that stood near the present intersection of Anzac Parade and Alison Road, Randwick.

Despite the nature of the `track', supporters of the sport wagered considerable sums on the outcome of these early events. Many were the result of challenges between tradesmen, vocal in their claims about their respective horses. One of the hazards of these races of more than a century ago, was the favour with which they were looked upon by the Constabulary of the day.

Police, perturbed with the danger to other traffic, as well as the heavy wagering on the events, realised something drastic had to be done before the dashing young bloods caused injury to pedestrians with their fiery and well-trained horses being driven along main thoroughfares at break-neck speed. To that end, a further move was taken to form a club that would provide proper racing facilities.
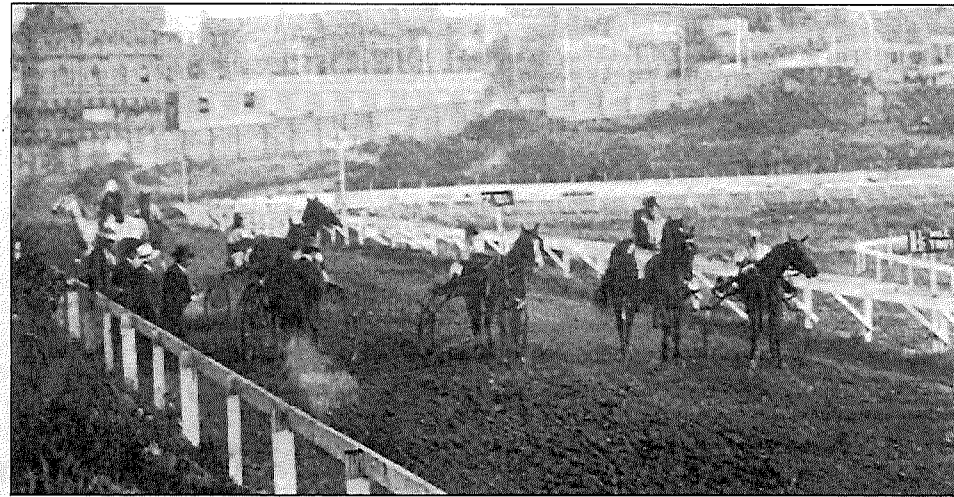
Following some preliminary discussions, 33 of the sport's keenest supporters met on June 4, 1902, in the saddlery shop of Jim

McGrath, a well-known harness maker of the day. McGrath's grandson, Richard McGrath, was later to become Registrar of the NSW Trotting Club before joining the NSW Trotting Authority as Registration Officer when that body took over control of the sport in January 1978.

The gathering mainly consisted of businessmen, gentlemen of leisure and members of Sydney's sporting fraternity, who came to bet on horses mainly used for trade purposes. At that time, trotting was confined primarily to match races between enthusiasts without any serious attempt at organisation.

At that meeting, the princely sum of nineteen pounds, seven shillings and nine pence, or close enough to $38.80, was pledged to launch the proposed trotting club. The general contribution was two shillings and six pence (25 cents), while the maximum donation was ten guineas ($21) by John Buckland, the owner of Australian champion Fritz. A week later, the club was constituted formally with 22 members paying a subscription of two guineas ($4.20) each.

A working committee of 14 was formed under the presidency of John Moriarty, a popular and respected member of Tattersalls and City Tatts Club. He was also a member of the AJC and the RAS. Moriarty presided over the NSWTC for the next 12 years.

Thomas Bryan, the early acting secretary, was replaced in October 1902, by experienced New Zealand administrator, Richard Collin Hungerford, who had been secretary of the Greymouth Trotting Club. Hungerford was also handicapper, starter and time-keeper, not only for the NSWTC, but also to many country clubs and Agricultural Societies.

He was also judge at pony race meetings at Kensington and Rosebery. Hungerford's word was law and he brooked no interference. Trotting characters with sinister intentions were well advised to give him a very wide berth.

That first working party, which became the first committee of the NSWTC comprised - President - John Moriarty; Vice-presidents -

A. D. Playfair, H. Cohen, J. McKechnie and A. S. Boulton; Committee - H. Beckett, W. Grant, W. McMillan, G. Bowra, A. Pointing, G. D. Wood, R. Skuthorp, Thomas Bryan and Dr. Syme.

Realising a committee of 14 was too unwieldy and unworkable, it was reduced in February 1903 to a president, vice-president and seven committeemen. That criteria is still in use today.

Despite opposition from a Kensington Pony meeting, a good crowd turned out on a fine warm day for the inaugural meeting of the second New South Wales Trotting Club on November 19, 1902, on a course, renamed Forest Lodge after being known as Lillie Bridge for many years.

Five events were conducted for prize-money of 99 sovereigns. Handicapping was on a time basis, with the top performers of the day giving some of their rivals up to 60 seconds start.

The first event, run over a mile, was won by King Harold, a chestnut horse by imported Childe Harold from imported Sylph. Owned by J. T. Llewelyn and driven by T. W. Price, King Harold (2-1) started from three seconds behind and won by 50 yards from Young Irvington and Juliette in 2:43. Prizemoney was 20 sovereigns, with two sovereigns for second from the purse.

The second race, a maiden trot over two miles, was won by the 1-2 favourite, Vivandiere, driven by John Buckland. The winner received 10 sovereigns for her 50-length victory over Black Tess and Emily F. and ran the trip in 5:58 1/2.

Main event at that meeting, the Pine Ridge Handicap of 30 sovereigns, with five sovereigns for second and five sovereigns for third, was won by E. J. Miller's Greygown, ridden in saddle by T. W. Price, giving him a double for the meeting. From 10 seconds behind, Greygown started second favourite at 3-1 and covered the two miles in 5:22 1/4 to win by four lengths from Jersey and Cast Off.

In the Pony Handicap for horses 14.2 hands and under, the back marker, Recruit,

The field is assembled for the very first race conducted by the NSWTC at Forest Lodge on the 19th November 1902.

The champion Fritz trotted an exhibition mile in 2:16 1/2 at the first meeting conducted by the NSWHRC.

owned by Bob Beckett and ridden in saddle by A. Millsom, gave the front markers a start of 20 seconds. Favourite at 4-6, Recruit earned 10 sovereigns when he won by four lengths from Austral Boy and Little Tim, running the mile in 2:51 4/5.

The Trotting Club Handicap over 12 furlongs, went to Cast Off, ridden in saddle by W. Martin. Favourite at 5-4, Cast Off started from the scratch mark and beat Yellow Jack and Jersey by a neck in 4:15 1/5.

Another highlight of that inaugural meeting was the attempt by Fritz to lower his Australian trotting record of 2:13 2/5, set at the Bathurst Showgrounds in 1902. To the disappointment of the crowd, the best he could do on that occasion was 2:16 1/2, but his time of 2:13 2/5 remained an Australian record for 37 years until Lord Daley trotted 2:11 at the Melbourne Showgrounds in 1939.

Early supporters of Sydney trotting were butchers, bakers and milkmen, and at every Butchers' Picnic an event named the Tradesmens' Trot was staged. One of the conditions was that the horse be driven in an iron-tyred sulky. When they were not racing, the horses had to earn their living in other ways.

Most of them spent the weeks pulling vehicles belonging to their tradesmen masters. One winner, known as Rock Of Ages, pulled a hearse during the week, and was a fair performer for those days. His stablemate, named Cleft For Me, was not so successful.

The next meeting at Forest Lodge was on December 10, 1902, when another five races were decided. Following only two meetings at Forest Lodge, the club switched venues to the seven-furlong Kensington Pony track. The reason for the move is unclear, but Kensington became the headquarters of trotting where 26 meetings were held between January 15, 1903 and June 28, 1904.

Racing resumed at Forest Lodge on July 19, 1904, which in the interim had its name changed to Epping. The opening Handicap, for a stake of 20 sovereigns was won by Julian, which started from six seconds behind, driven by A. Millsom. Five races were held that day, and the other winners were Havelock, Stewart, Milly B. and Clyedo.

From that date, the NSWTC moved from racecourse to racecourse. Under the Gaming and Betting Act of 1906, racing and betting could only take place on a registered racecourse with a minimum circumference of six furlongs. As Epping was only a half-mile circuit, the club was forced to race at Ascot from February to November 1907. Following intense lobbying, the Act was amended to allow trotting with betting on four-furlong tracks.

The year 1911 was an eventful one in the history of trotting in New South Wales. It marked the recognition by the Colonial Secretary of the day of the NSW Trotting Club as the controlling authority of the sport in the State. Successive Governments from that year onwards continued to give that recognition. It was not until 1977 that a separate controlling body was formed by the NSW Government with the NSW Trotting Authority taking control of administrating the sport on January 1, 1978.

The NSWTC suffered by not having a raceway of its own, but in 1911, the club eventually bought the Glebe course for 10,400 pounds ($20,800).

During 1913, illness brought an end to the splendid leadership of John Moriarty. He died in 1914 and was replaced as NSWTC President by successful Sydney businessman James Barnes, who was also a member of the Royal Agricultural Society and Tattersalls Club.

R. C. Hungerford served as NSWTC secretary until ill-health saw him resign the position on October 29, 1923, after being secretary for 21 years. After a meeting at Epping on November 17, 1923, William McKell, an ex-Minister for Justice and later an Australian Governor General, made a presentation to Hungerford and read messages of sympathy from presidents and secretaries of trotting clubs throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Race programme for Forest lodge in 1902
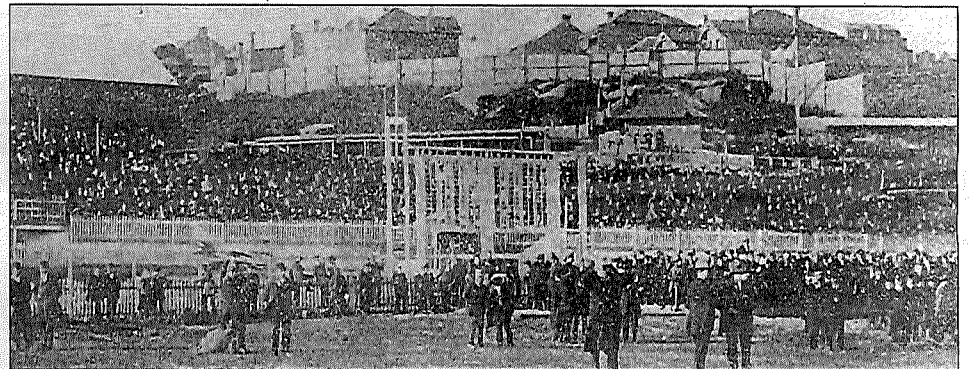
The infield at Epping in 1914.

Leading horseman Peter Riddle riding Bowler leads Nasty Bill in the Flying Handicap at Epping in 1918.
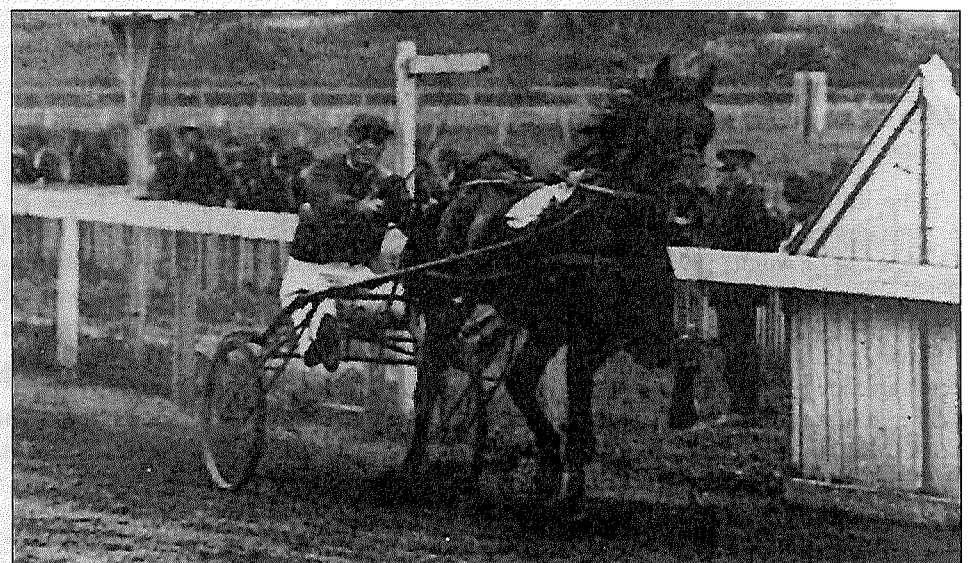
Dixie's Chance (Jack Eddie) creating a new Australian two mile unhoppled record if 4:34 1/2 at Epping in 1920.
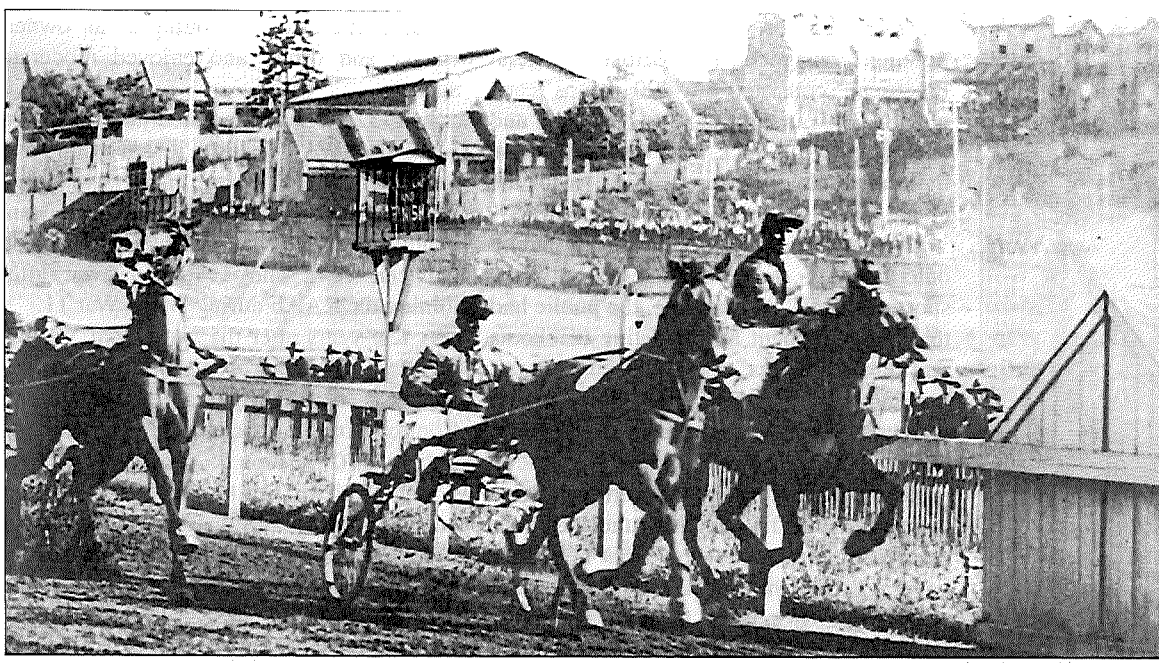
The Trotting Club Handicap with sulkies and riders competing at Epping in 1922.   *Horse stalls at Epping in 1923.*

"The success of trotting generally in this State, and that of the New South Wales Trotting Club particularly during the 21 years you have held the position of secretary, is a living tribute to your zeal and loyalty to duty," McKell said.

"Though ill-health compels you to tender your resignation from active interest in the club's affairs, your name and work will go down in the annals of trotting history as the hallmark of achievements.

"We trust that you will be long spared to witness further prosperity, both socially and financially to the New South Wales Trotting Club, which you helped so unselfishly and honourably to successfully establish."

Following Hungerford's resignation, applications were invited for the vacant position of secretary at a salary of 400 pounds ($800) per annum. There were 130 applicants for the position, which was subsequently reduced to twelve, from which the final decision was made.

On November 27, 1923, the NSWTC appointed Frank Howell, 42, as secretary. Cootamundra Trotting Club secretary for several years, Howell's appointment proved popular among Sydney's trotting owners and trainers. Howell was so popular, 152 owners and trainers had signed a petition for favourable consideration for his application for secretary. Howell started his duties with the NSWTC on December 3, 1923.

The main track for Sydney trotting continued to be known as Epping until March 21, 1929, when it once again had a name change. That followed a deputation from residents of the Sydney suburb of Epping with complaints to the Chief Secretary's Department.

They claimed that calling a racecourse within the city boundaries, Epping, caused confusion. The track was renamed Harold Park, in recognition of imported stallion Childe Harold, one of the great foundation sires of the early days of trotting in this country.

Sydney briefly had another night trotting venue in 1927, when a club known as Night Trots Ltd. was founded. It was first proposed to include an event worth 1000 pounds (entries had been received) at the initial meeting, but rain caused several postponements and the idea was abandoned. A meeting was ultimately held at Ascot on December 14, 1927. The track was four-and-a-half furlongs (900 metres), with two long straights.

The winners were Wedew, Bonnie Lassie, Delavan's Quest, Arizona, Native Prince and Auto Machine. In the first race, the three-year-old Robert Derby started favourite, but the colt, later to become famous as a sire, was beaten by a head in 3:34 for a mile-and-a-half.

The second meeting was held on December 19 when Robert Derby, Arizona, Trust Me, Tallimba and Silver Heel were successful, while the third meeting on December 21 resulted in wins for Arizona, Auto Machine, Delavan Girl, Dalavan's Quest and Tallimba.

When betting on night meetings was declared illegal by the NSW Government after the end of 1927, Night Trots Ltd. faded out of existence.

From the 1930s until night trotting was legalised, the NSWTC went through some lean years. During that period, New South Wales became the 'Cinderella' State of Harness Racing. Leading horses, bred from the numerous stud farms dotted throughout the State were sold privately and raced in those States where night trotting offered greater prizemoney.

A report in the Sydney Sportsman of 1936 reported: "The trotting game is on its way to doom. Slowly but surely the game is sinking".

In Western Australia, the WA Trotting Association held its first meeting (daylight) at the Belmont Park course on December 24, 1910. It was hardly a success, however, as the club reported a loss of about 80 pounds.

Introducing trotting under electric lights to Perth at the WA Cricket Association's oval on January 24, 1914, the WATA's initial night meeting attracted 2000 people. When night trotting was first mooted for Sydney, Perth could already boast two fine courses at Gloucester Park and Richmond Raceway, Fremantle - a wonderful asset - paid for out of the profits of night racing.

Night trotting was introduced to Adelaide by the SA Trotting Club on November 6, 1920, on the Jubilee Oval. Nearly 10,000 turned out to see the novelty, despite the fact betting was not allowed. The Lottery and Gaming Act was amended late in 1933 and bookmakers were allowed to ply their calling legally at the trots.

On January 27, 1934, 20 years after Perth, Adelaide fans attended their first electric light meeting with legalised betting. The Gaming Act was further amended, and on December 22, 1934, the club held its first meeting with the totalisator as well as legal bookmakers.

After 26 years as president of the NSWTC, James Barnes died at his Strathfield residence at the age of 83 on Wednesday, May 1, 1940. Barnes was a foundation member of the club and had been on the committee since the 1902-03 season.

Following the death of James Barnes, an election was held later that month that resulted in Joe Davis, a member of the club for 30 years, and a committeeman for many years, including a period as treasurer, being elected president, with Ernie Ireland vice-president. Davis died early on Tuesday, July 2, 1940, after being in office for less than two months, however.

At a meeting later that month, Ernie Ireland was elected president. M. Dorahy, who had acted as treasurer, was appointed vice-president, with A. J. Wainwright as treasurer.

W.H. Dumesny's Electrician winning at Epping in 1929 for trainer WS Mazoudier.
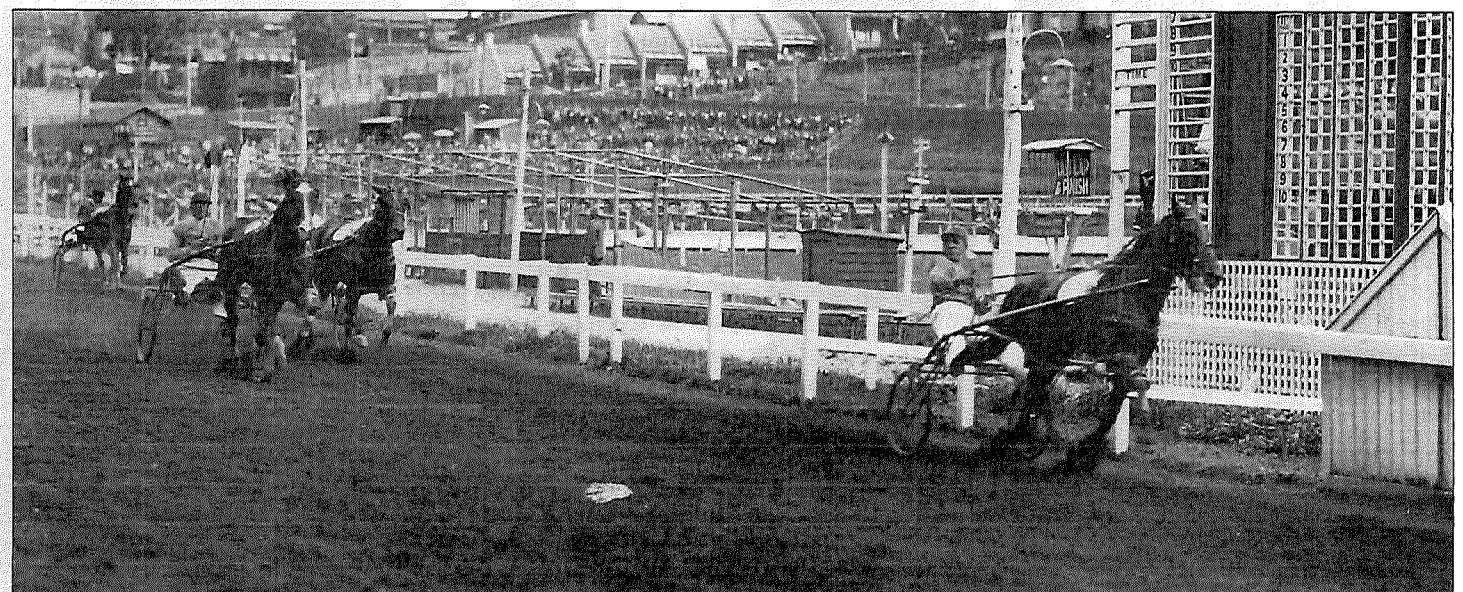
W.H Dumesny's Electrician winning at Harold Park in 1931 for trainer HB Chant.
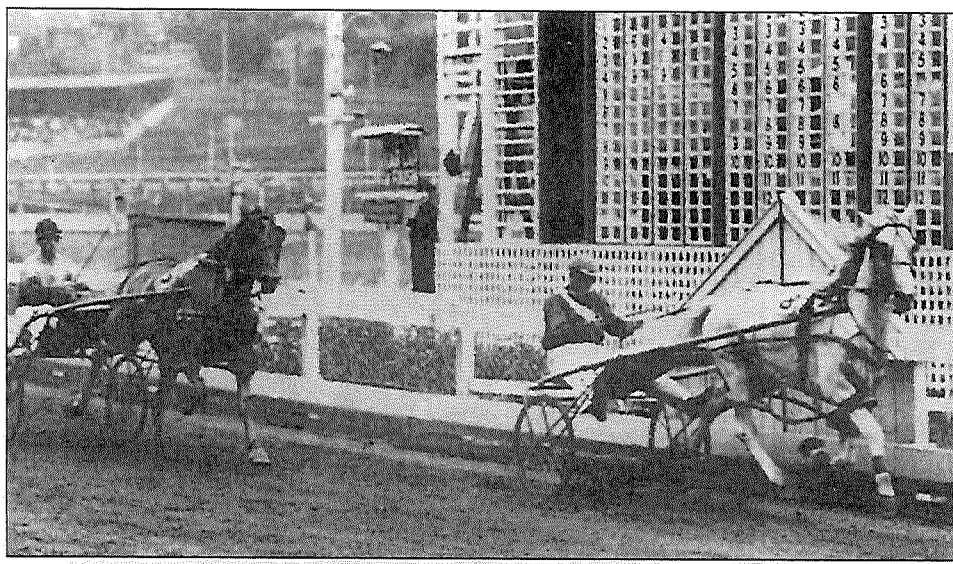
C.J. McCarthy's Royal Van winning the 1930 N.S.W.T.C. Pacers Derby at Harold Park.

The club also lost its secretary of 18 years when Frank Howell retired through ill-health in March 1941. Within several months, the NSWTC underwent a major change in leadership with a new president, Ernie Ireland, only the fourth president in its almost 40-year history, and a new secretary, Norm Hollier, who started commercial life in 1918 as an office boy with the NSWTC at the princely sum of 25 shillings ($2.50) per week.

Hollier had been acting secretary for some time while Frank Howell was on the sick list. His permanent appointment was popular with all trotting enthusiasts. Hollier learnt the trotting business in a hard school. The late James Barnes was then president, with R. C. Hungerford as secretary. Both of those gentlemen acquired their knowledge the hard way.

Hollier, who had been steadily climbing the ladder, took over in a period that saw the sport in New South Wales make many changes, the NSWTC eventually rising to become the leading trotting body in Australia, and probably in the Southern Hemisphere.

Soon after the cessation of hostilities in World War 11, it became obvious survival of the sport in New South Wales depended upon the introduction of night racing.

In Victoria, metropolitan trotting under proprietary control was organised in 1906 and meetings were held regularly at Richmond and Ascot until World War 11. Following the change to a new Government-controlled body known as the Trotting Control Board of Victoria, trotting under lights was introduced at the Melbourne Showgrounds on November 15, 1947. The inaugural Melbourne night trotting meeting attracted a crowd of 21,000.

In 1946, Sydney trotting supporters opened a fighting fund, and newspaper reports soon carried optimistic stories the Labor Government of the day would "legalise night trotting early in the New Year (1946)". It was not illegal to conduct trotting meetings at night in Sydney. It was only illegal to bet on them.

After two years of campaigning, they were successful, but New South Wales was one of the last of Australia's major States to race under lights. That was the result of much political in-fighting, which saw a bill to permit legalised trotting races with betting after sunset pass both Houses of State Parliament in late December 1948.

It was not going to be easy, however, as the Labor Government was committed to a heavy housing program to accommodate discharged servicemen and house-hungry civilians. Night trotting would require a major face-lift for Harold Park, and this in turn would involve the use of desperately needed scarce building materials and skilled manpower.

After the bill passed both Houses, the Minister for Building Supplies provided a further obstacle by imposing a ban on Harold Park renovations on the grounds the material and tradesmen were required for more essential work. This was eventually lifted when the NSWTC assured the Minister only second hand, or war disposal materials, and voluntary labor would be used.

The last day meeting at Harold Park was on Saturday, December 18, 1948, when seven events were decided for 655 pounds ($1310) in prizemoney. Held under warm conditions with a strong wind blowing, the temperature reached 94.1 degrees during the afternoon.

Admission to the grandstand and paddock was seven shillings for gentlemen, including one shilling and ten pence entertainment tax, and three shillings and eleven pence for ladies, which included eleven pence entertainment tax. Children were admitted for two shillings and six pence, including seven pence in tax. Admission to the Leger was two shillings and six pence, including seven pence tax. The price of a racebook was one shilling.

At that final Harold Park day meeting, 44 bookmakers were registered to operate in the Saddling Paddock and 13 in the Leger Enclosure, but not one favourite was successful. The final race on that memorable program - the Harold Park Handicap of 115 pounds ($230) for 2:22 class horses - was won by Robert Don (Alan Thompson).

Robert Don (7-1), an aged bay gelding by Robert Derby from Polly Donis, ran the mile-and-a-half in 3:24 4/5, a mile rate of 2:16 1/2, to win by a neck from Maher's Last (36yds.) and Gold Step (12yds.).

Other winners at that memorable meeting were, Alanem (8-1, Jack Davenport), Red General (10-1, E. F. Luke), Red River (12-1, George Perry), King Child (3-1, Harry Palmer), Star Parade (4-1, Perc Hall) and Kula Derby (7-l Norm Bismire).

In an official memorandum to representatives of the media at that historic meeting, the NSWTC committee issued the following press release:

"The committee of the New South Wales Trotting Club decided to suspend meetings at Harold Park to carry out alterations to the course, and it is hoped that when meetings are resumed they will be held at night."

After that meeting in December 1948, the following 10 months were extremely busy for officials who had to plan the reconstruction of the course for night meetings. The original half-mile cinders track was shortened slightly. It was resurfaced with a foundation of three feet of clay then covered with several inches of crushed quarry dust as a top surface for binding and reflection of track lighting.

Win and place totes were installed, grandstands extended, and betting rings reconstructed for the opening night. The lighting, designed by British General Electrical, consisted of 400 lamps each of 1000 watts stretching across and overhanging the track. The question of the lighting resulted in more frustration for the club.

Another crisis surfaced with a public outcry about the use of electricity for sporting events. At that time, the public had to endure frequent and irritating blackouts and power failures, due to the inability of existing power stations to cope with the increased loads demanded by expanding domestic and industrial users.

Neon lights and external advertising lights were also banned. When the authorities were assured night trotting would not affect the general public, the way was clear at last.

With the switch to night trotting, the NSWTC declared all racing positions open and advertised for applications for stewards, handicapper, starter, judge, clerk of course, veterinary surgeon etc.

The combined office of Chairman of stewards and handicapper carried an annual salary of 1500 pounds ($3000); Assistant steward and starter (combined office) was 12 guineas per meeting ($25.20); Assistant steward eight guineas ($16.80); Judge eight guineas; while the positions of Assistant Judge and Clerk of Scales; Clerk of Course and Veterinary Surgeon was four guineas ($8.40) per meeting.

Despite the holiday period, alterations at Harold Park rapidly took shape and a great deal of progress was made in the formation of the grounds in January and February of 1949. Continued quick work was expected to see the course ready in Easter (April) to start the night trotting revival in New South Wales.

At the end of March 1949, however, it was reported recent rains had proved too big an obstacle in the race against time to stage the opening meeting at Harold Park on Easter Saturday. Owing to the sodden state of the ground, the initial meeting was expected to be held in the middle of May.

The following month, the NSWTC appointed H. E. (Bert) Creagh chairman of stewards and handicapper. Charlie O'Brien was appointed assistant steward and starter, with Jack Walsh, Matt Nolan and Jack Marx as assistant stewards. Jack Dorahy was appointed as judge.

Creagh first became interested in trotting and thoroughbred racing almost two decades earlier when he became a member of the committee of the Northam Race Club in his home State of Western Australia. He also became interested in trotting as an owner, trainer and driver and enjoyed moderate success.

In 1932, he was appointed junior steward with the WA Trotting Association and remained in that position until 1948, when he was appointed steward and assistant handicapper. He was absent from his job between 1942 and 1945, however, after joining the RAAF during World War 11.

A few years after the war ended, Creagh left the WATA to accept a position as steward and assistant handicapper with the Trotting Control Board of Victoria before accepting the NSWTC position in April 1949.

One of his first tasks was to re-assess all horses in New South Wales for racing under lights at Harold Park. It was due to his ability of classifying horses into even fields that provided thrilling finishes to the majority of races in the early years of Sydney night trotting.

In early May, it was again reported there was a hold up in construction work at Harold Park, which would further delay the opening meeting. Once again Government action in regard to building materials was the cause.

With the proposed Easter opening now past, it appeared highly unlikely night trotting would take place in Sydney before the following spring.

August 1949, ushered in a new trotting season with news work was nearing completion at Harold Park. The erection of lighting was almost complete, and the outside rails were in position on the turns. There was still some distance of railing to be completed, but the new track was open for fast work.

There appeared every chance of night trotting starting in early spring. Needless to say, all connected with the sport were anxiously awaiting the much delayed opening to mark the successful culmination of a long struggle to get night trotting legalised.

The first official trials under lights at Harold Park were held on Monday, September 5. Although advertised as not being open to the public, soon after the first trial (won by Sid Ball behind Blue Orchid), the gates were opened and a bigger attendance than that at day meetings watched the remaining trials, which were won by Retac (Bert Alley), Bold Robert (Harry Cohen), Miss Maroo (Jim Caffyn), Recovered (Horrie Mazoudier) and Gay Lawn (Sid Ball).

All was in readiness for the opening meeting on Saturday, September 17, 1949, but once again the club was dogged by bad luck. The opening meeting was postponed for a week, following heavy rains in Sydney.

Ted's Pick winning the Tramway Handicap at Harold Park in 1937.

The weather was also against the club when the September 24 meeting, already postponed for a week, also had to be postponed until October 1. Heavy rain washed out practically all sporting fixtures that weekend and the galloping meeting was also postponed.

The eagerly awaited first night meeting at Harold Park on October 1, 1949, was a huge success. The NSWTC introduced many innovations for the benefit of the sport, including increased prizemoney, new grandstands and tote buildings to meet the steadily increasing number of patrons.

During the first Inter-Dominion carnival conducted by the NSWTC at Harold Park in 1952, record attendance and totalisator turnover figures were established. A record crowd of 38,090 turned out to see Avian Derby win the Inter-Dominion Final on March 1. Eight years later, the popular Glebe circuit was packed to the rafters as a world record crowd of 50,346 crammed every vantage point to witness the New Zealand champion, Caduceus, survive a protest to win the 1960 Inter-Dominion Final.

The list of champions that have raced at the famous Glebe circuit over the years reads like a "Who's Who" of Harness Racing. Champion standardbreds from all parts of Australia, New Zealand, and even America, have achieved great feats on the track and re-written record books at meetings conducted by a club that can claim to be the longest continuing trotting club in existence still racing on its original ground.

Strikes, building restrictions and excessive rain combined to continually delay the opening of night trotting at Harold Park, but Sydney's first night trotting meeting was eventually held on Saturday, October 1, 1949. The long delayed opening was eagerly awaited by all connected with the sport throughout Australia, Sydney in particular.

That first night program consisted of seven races. The main event on the program was the E. A. Ireland Handicap, an event for 2:20 or better horses over 13 furlongs (2600 metres) for a stake of 750 pounds ($1500). Darby Globe was the only horse on scratch, or the front mark, while the back marker on 48 yards was the unhoppled Leila Pauline, a noted performer at the Melbourne Showgrounds.

The opening meeting proved very successful with the crowd estimated at 15,500. NSW Trotting Club President at that time was Ernie Ireland, with Joe Graham vice-president. The treasurer was Jim Reeves, while Norm Hollier was secretary.

After many months of frustration, it was finally time for action on the new Harold Park circuit. The win and place totalisator operated on a five shilling (50 cents) unit. No person under the age of 21 years was permitted to bet on the tote.

The bookmakers turned up in strength to cater for the big crowd. Incredibly 193 bookmakers fielded on opening night in the Paddock, Leger and Flat enclosures, including prominent Randwick fielders Les Tidmarsh, Jack Muir, Jack Large, Arthur Paradine, Jack Pick, Sam Peters, Fred Vockler and Jack Waterhouse.

Harold Park was divided into three sections and admission charges had risen since the final day meeting in December 1948. Admission to the Paddock was 10 shillings for gents and five shillings for ladies; the Leger was five shillings and three shillings, while admission to the Flat was two shillings and six pence for both sexes. All prices included entertainment tax.

No person under the age of 18 was allowed admission on opening night, but this was quickly reduced to 14 years within weeks.

According to that first night racebook, bookmakers calling the odds to any horse straight out must, on demand, lay the odds quoted to an amount not less than five pounds in the Saddling Paddock; four pounds in the Leger Reserve and two pounds in the Flat.

Another notice in that racebook stated that if a horse did not finish within the Distance Post in its race, the entry of such horse may be rejected for the next two meetings at Harold Park, unless a satisfactory explanation was given by the driver.

Another interesting notice stated that: "During the running of a race, no driver shall pull out to allow a competitor through to the disadvantage of the others. For so doing, he may be disqualified or subject to a fine, not exceeding 50 pounds".

Strange as it may seem, half a century down the track clubs in other Australian States are encouraging just that by the installation of 'Passing Lanes'.

The new look Harold Park circuit measured 807 3/4 yards (taken three feet out from the inside running rail), was 48 feet wide with a home straight of 168 yards. Eight horses were off the front row for races started in the home straight and seven for races in the back straight.

The first race on the program, the Initial Qualifying Stakes over a mile-and-a-half (2400 metres), was for approved horses which had not won a race in the metropolitan area, or at any metropolitan club in any State, or any race in New Zealand, Sapling Stakes and Derbys excepted.

The honour of being the first horse to step on to the Harold Park track under lights in the first race was the polemarker, Royal Minton, driven by Peter Duffy.

Bookmakers had the better of punters with only one favourite successful on the seven event program.

Sutton McMillan, the leading Sydney reinsman for several previous day trotting seasons, won the first race with Altivolo, which was owned by Harry Williams. Altivolo started at 3-1, with the Perc Hall-driven Retine favourite at 5-4.

Altivolo took charge in the last lap and maintained his advantage to the line to beat the fast-finishing Retine by a neck. Swanee Dixie (Les Chant) was three lengths away third.

Bred in Tasmania by Edgar Tatlow, Altivolo was a four-year-old bay entire by Raider from Attain, a daughter of imported Grattan Loyal and Swift Pointer. Altivolo ran the 12 furlongs in 3:17 2/5, a mile rate of 2:11 3/5, the fastest time of the night.

During that first season of racing under lights in 1949-50, the NSW Trotting Club allocated the equivalent of $268,000 for the 38 meetings which, despite a run of shocking bad weather attracted an average 14,342 punters per meeting.

Altivolo driven by the legendary Sutton McMillan winner of the first race under lights at Harold Park in 1949.

With its registered offices then being situated in the Manchester Unity Building at 160 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, the club was still chaired by Ernie Ireland who was a member of a family famous in Sydney at the time for its pastries and pies.

The first dead-heat to be posted at a Harold Park night meeting, occurred at the second meeting on October 8, 1949 when the judge was unable to separate Retine ($1.45 favourite driven by Perc Hall) and Retac ($11, Bert Alley).

Significant milestones in the history of night racing continued in quick succession as a week after that dead-heat, six-year-old gelding Phoenix Dixie became the first trotter to win and renowned Riverina trainer-driver Sylvester Bray posted the first winning double under lights at Harold Park.

Just over a year after presiding over the introduction of night racing at Harold Park, Ernie Ireland died suddenly on October 9, 1950 and was replaced by W J (Bill) Dunlop.

Widely known as a prominent and successful businessman, Bill Dunlop was one of the most popular figures in sport administration in NSW and was held in high esteem by people from all walks of life.

Like his predecessors, John Moriarty and James Barnes, Dunlop raced both standardbreds and thoroughbreds with success but refrained from racing trotters and pacers after he became NSW Trotting Club president.

A committeeman of the Sydney Turf Club, he also owned the West Point Stud at Molong in the state's west where he stood the successful thoroughbred sire Persia but spared no effort improving and publicising the sport he administered.

The NSW Trotting Club conducted only 34 meetings in the second season of night racing but the average attendance increased by 1452 after a total of 537,000 passed through the turnstiles to see horses compete for a total of $260,000.

Perc Hall, who was a runaway winner in the Drivers' premiership with 24 victories, etched his name in the record books as the first to drive four winners at a Harold Park night meeting.

As was the case with Jim Caffyn the previous year, Hall's success in the gig also enabled him to win the Trainers' premiership for the 1950-51 season and he maintained his domination winning both premiership the following season.

This was the season in which Harold Park was the scene of the first of the nine Inter Dominion Championship carnivals Sydney hosted before the latest edition was transferred to Menangle Park this year.

The club rose to the occasion allocating $68,000 in stakes for the four-night carnival, including $20,000 for the series final on March 1, 1952 for which a record 38,090 patrons crowded all vantage points to see $1.60 favourite Avian Derby overcome a 24 yards handicap.

In keeping with its progressive policy, the club introduced in the 1952-53 season two new racing carnivals (the Spring Carnival in September and the Summer
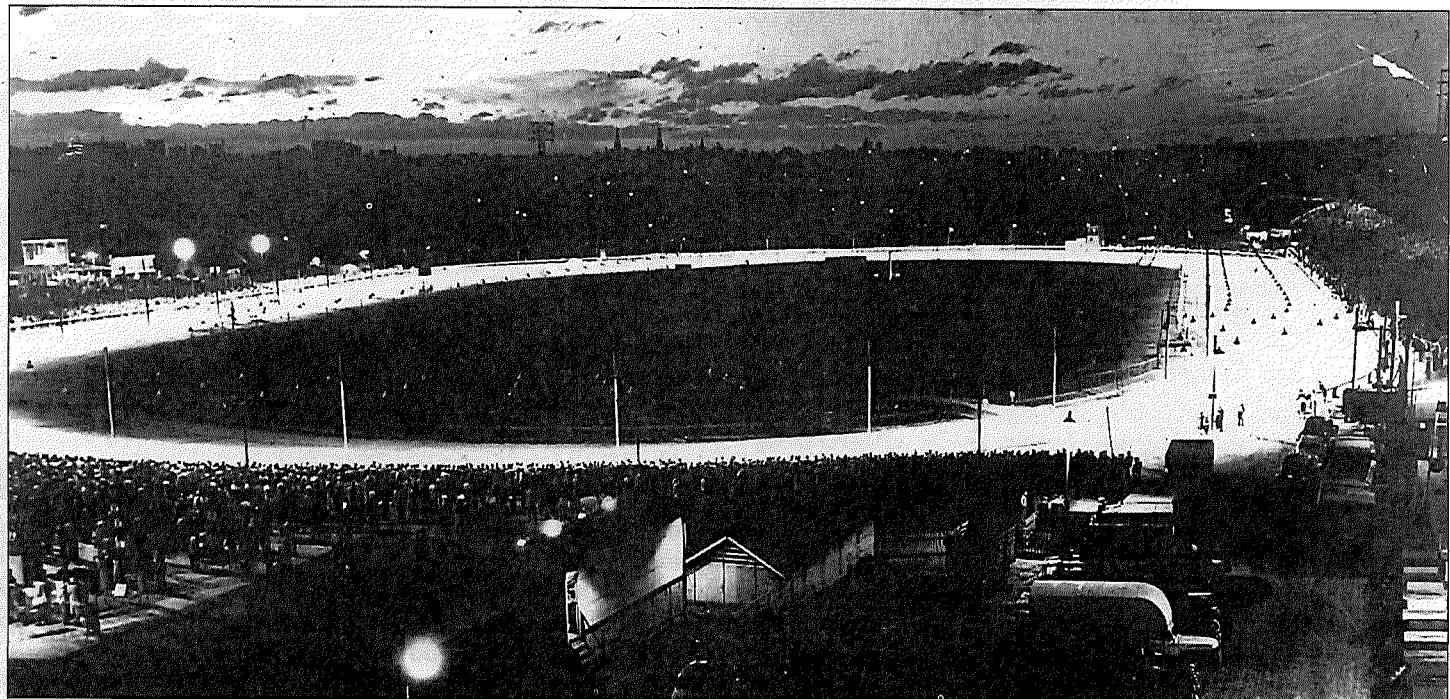
Harold Park in 1952 when the flat was still in operation and horse floats were parked off Ross Street and horses were walked down the home straight to the stables.

Carnival in January) both of which proved extremely successful and club officials were encouraged by the response of owners of two and three-year-old horses.

Winning the Two-Year-Old Stakes (1 mile) in 2:10.6 on February 14, 1953, during the Summer Carnival, Van Hall established an Australian record for his age.

The committee in November that year terminated the employment of the judges after deciding the officials had been negligent when they failed to observe Ron's Return had finished in a place in the Trotters Handicap on November 19.

They resolved to pay the relevant dividend to backers on the place totalisator which resulted in a total payment of the equivalent of $2160.

The following month, Len Smith, a former Australian Rugby Union and Rugby League representative before being a sporting journalist for the Sun (an afternoon daily newspaper in Sydney) was appointed deputy handicapper and assistant to the chairman of stewards.

Smith established a News and Information Bureau and initiated the collection of statistics and records from his Harold Park office and in 1953 recommended the committee publish a register of all NSW results.

With Smith as editor, a monthly journal named "Trotting Life" containing all NSW results, official news and promotional stories was introduced and produced until the InterDominion Council decided in 1960 to publish a national register of all Australian results.

Members at the Bi-Annual General Meeting of the club on March 26, 1953 learned the club had purchased Menangle Park Racecourse and its appurtenances.

President, Bill Dunlop declared: "This beautiful property on the banks of the Nepean River is the ideal venue for picnic meetings and your committee feels confident it will appeal strongly to followers of trotting."

Jim Caffyn and Perc Hall again figured prominently in the Trainers' and Drivers' Premierships with the result of the Drivers' title not being decided until the last race at the last meeting of the season on July 25, 1953.

By steering the winner of that race, Caffyn ended the season with 19 wins, one ahead of Hall while his 18 training successes was two more than Hall's.

Bill Picken became only the second reinsman to drive four winners at a Harold Park meeting when, on September 30, 1953, he scored with Single Raider, Lady Joss, Cabby Rix and Mecca Chief.

A month later the club was rocked by the resignation of its chairman of stewards and chief handicapper, Bert Creagh (thought at the time to be the highest paid racing official in the country) after a disagreement with the committee.

With fractions of 28.5, 29.5, 30.0 and 30.7 at Harold Park on January 27, 1954, Ribands made history and put Australian harness racing on the map.

His 1:58.7 time trial witnessed by almost 23,000 made him the only horse in Australia to beat the two minutes barrier and put him in world class as his time was only .1 of a second slower than the then fastest time posted on a half-mile track in the US.

A large number of trainers were alarmed in July, 1954 when told of a proposed ban on trotters and pacers being prepared on a track inside the galloping track at Canterbury Racecourse.

Representatives of the NSWTC supported the trainers arguing to have the proposal rescinded at a meeting with the Sydney Turf Club during which it was stated the thoroughbred trainers would support any move to keep the trotters and pacers at Canterbury as the trainers of those horses often assisted them to quieten young gallopers by working them among the standardbreds.

President Bill Dunlop had steered the NSWTC through some stormy periods in the early years of night racing at Harold Park but, as a result of the conflict leading to the committee being divided over Bert Creagh's decision to resign in the previous December, he felt he had lost his support and did not seek re-election at the Annual General Meeting on September 30, 1954.

He was replaced by Alton Cusick, who had previously been vice president, and Jim Reeves was elected un-opposed as his deputy.

Cusick was a well known and extremely successful owner for more than 20 years with the most outstanding of his many high quality animals being Linda Steel, one of the best of her day and the winner of 17 races at Harold Park.

The introduction of late closing for hotels

combined with shocking weather for three months (only 38 hours of sunlight was registered in Sydney during February, 1955), inhibited attendances during the 1954-55 season.

For the first time since the lights had gone on at Harold Park, the average nightly attendance of 17,899 was down slightly on the previous season's to 18,599.

Early into the 1955-56 season, the NSWTC proudly announced it had budgeted for the highest prizemoney in the history of harness racing in Australia allocating $73,000 for the 1956 InterDominion carnival which was nearly $6000 more than in 1952 when the series was last run in Sydney.

Marred by bad weather, the series was prolonged an extra nine days after four postponements but the disruptions failed to deter punters with an aggregate 110,708 flocking to the four nights with the largest crowd being the 34,020 who saw the Victorian, Gentleman John score a last-stride win from the local, Mineral Spring.

After overseeing that carnival, long term secretary Norm Hollier resigned to take up a position as secretary of the InterDominion Trotting Conference and Central Registrar.

Hollier had been "part of the furniture" with the NSW Trotting Club after joining the organisation as an office boy earning the princely sum of five shillings (50c) in 1918 and, even after taking up his new role, he maintained a relationship with the club with his services being retained in an advisory capacity for the next 12 months.

After Hollier vacated the office, long term employee B.L (Geoff) Stanger was Acting Secretary until confirmed as Secretary six months later.

In a rare occurrence, Victorian filly Argent staked her claim to being the best three-year-old in the nation when she won that season's Victoria Derby and Victoria Oaks and also completed the rare double at Harold Park.

It's the most frequently used form of starting races these days but until the main event – the Harold Park Invitation – on November 2, 1956, the mobile barrier had never been used at a registered meeting in Australia.

Winning the race narrowly from Van Hall, Mineral Spring covered the journey in 2:01.2 which was the fastest mile ever recorded in a race in Australia and more than three seconds faster than Uncle Joe's track record from a standing start.

At its meeting in April 1957, the committee decided to increase prizemoney and change the name of the feature at the following season's Summer Carnival from Summer Cup to Harold Park Cup.

The $12,000 made it the second richest race in Australia behind the final of the InterDominion with the $15,000 New Zealand Cup being the only other race in the southern hemisphere worth more.

Jim Caffyn, who was to close out the 1958-59 season with a second successive Harold Park Drivers' Premiership and his fourth overall, on November 14, 1958 became the third reinsman to land four winners at a single meeting.

Imagine the excitement in June, 1959 when the NSWTC announced prizemoney for the InterDominion at Harold Park in January-February would make it the richest carnival ever in Australasia.

With $81,000 on offer for the four night series, it was an increase of $8000 on the 1956 carnival and $14,000 more than the 1952 series.

And consider this if you will. The $30,000 plus Gold Cup for the final on February 13, 1960 was the same as for that season's Melbourne Cup.

Attendance figures for that season, which included a three-night carnival to mark the 10th anniversary of night racing at Harold Park, were enhanced considerably by the world record 50,346 which turned out to see connections of Caduceus take possession of the InterDominion trophy.

The season was marred by the untimely death of club president Alton Cusick a few months after that InterDominion carnival.

Vice President, Jim Reeves took over as acting president until September, 1960 when he was elected President in one of the most keenly contested elections for years and Eddie Birch was elected unopposed as Vice President.

Birch, a member of the club for more than 20 years who had served with distinction on the committee for 15 years, was a sportsman of the highest calibre with a deep and life long interest in harness racing.

Unfortunately, those attributes were lost to the club when he died only halfway through his term as Vice President.

About the same time, Jack Marx (who took over from Bert Creagh as chairman of

The mobile barrier was invented and perfected by Doug McMillan assisted by his brother Gordon but always under the watchful eye of their father the legendary Sutton McMillan. In this never before published photograph from the family albums of Kerrie McMillan, Sutton McMillan drives the horse second from the outside whilst Doug (right) sits alongside the NSWHRC stipendiary steward as the barrier passes approval before the first ever mobile start race in Australasia was to take place at Harold Park. Gordon McMillan is driving the 1952 FJ Holden. The first mobile race in 1956 was won by Mineral Spring under the driving of master trainer Merv Adams in a time of 2:01.4 over the former champion juvenile Van Hall by a head margin. In this trial Merv Adams is driving the horse on the outside whilst Frank Culbert is behind the horse in the centre. There was little wonder that the McMillan family were intrinsically involved with the development of the mobile barrier as the patriarch, Sutton, had invented and patented the rubber strand barrier used for standing starts since 1928. Sutton McMillan had few if any peers winning the Harold Park Premiership on several occasions before the introduction of night trotting in 1949. On one occasion he drove 18 consecutive winners during a visit to Queensland. The great horseman was compulsorily retired however landed Jubilee Sky the victor at his very last drive.
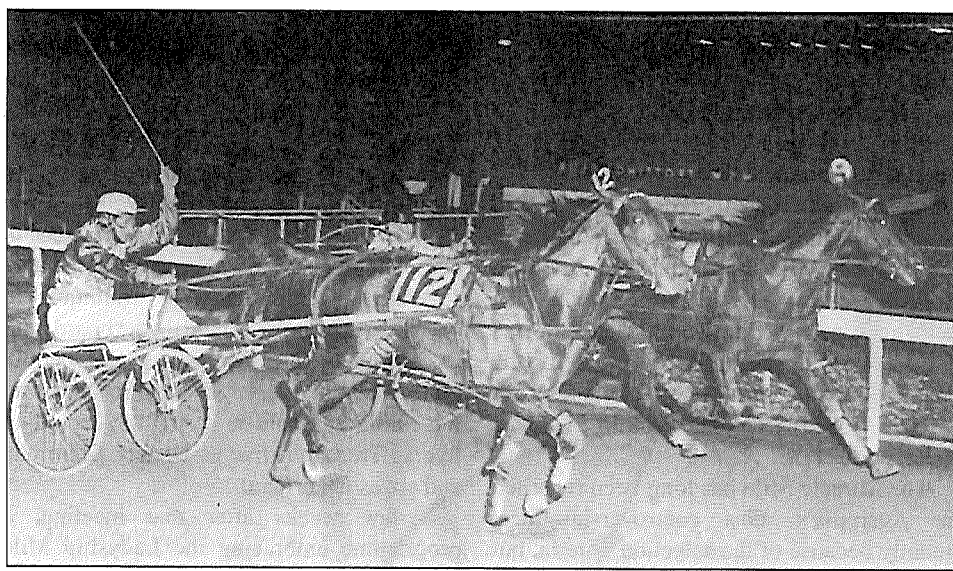
Cocky Raider (outside) Jack McWilliams ends Luckys Creed's (Vic Frost) incredible 24 successive winning streak in the 1970 Australia Day Cup.

Len Smith was amongst the most revered administrators in the sport during his sixteen year tenure with the NSWTC. Accredited with creating the Miracle Mile Smith's contribution to the Club brought about the honour of having a Group One race being named after him in recognition of his achievements.

stewards and Chief Handicapper) resigned from the NSW Trotting Club.

Marx had been a prominent greyhound racing official with the National Coursing Association before joining the NSWTC's stewards panel when night racing commenced. He died in Sydney on February 24, 1962.

The end of the 1963-64 season saw the beginning of a $450,000 project aimed at making Harold Park one of the most modern facilities in the world with extensions and other improvements to the public grandstand including dining rooms, refreshment bars and betting facilities with air conditioning of all enclosed areas.

All alterations and additions were expected to be completed by well before February 1966, when the InterDominion Championship carnival was due to return to Sydney for the fourth time and the first since the introduction of decimal currency.

B L (Geoff) Stanger, in June 1966 resigned as secretary of the club on medical advice. An employee of the club for 33 years, he was made accountant and retained that position until completing 41 years of service with his retirement in 1974.
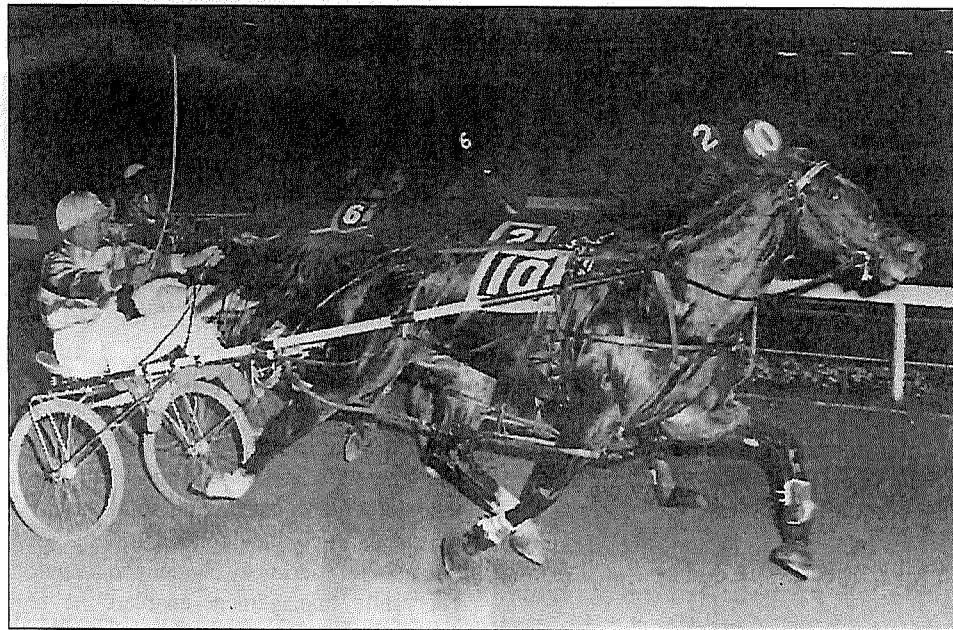
Halwes (Kevin Newman) winning the 1968 Easter Cup.

Other major changes to the administration in 1966 saw Len Smith promoted to the new position of Chief Executive and Administrative Officer and Ted Bone appointed Acting Secretary before assuming the role of Secretary the following season.

That was the season in which the club introduced the Miracle Mile, the race which was to attract international attention and stand as the club's signature event.

The industry lost one of its most able administrators, when NSWTC vice president C S (Stewart) McCallum died in January 1967.

McCallum had a long association with the industry firstly as an owner and breeder and had been elected to the committee in 1960

a year before becoming vice president, a position he retained until his death.

An amendment to the rules in January 1967 removed an anomaly in existence since night racing was introduced which prevented females from training horses for Harold Park meetings even though some had been licensed for other meetings.

One of the most memorable clashes in the history of night racing up to that time occurred in the 1970 Australia Day Cup (renamed from Summer Cup in conjuncton with the Bi-Centenary celebrations of Captain James Cook's landing).

After dominating the headlines with an amazing 24 successive wins (an Australasian record for either standardbred or thoroughbred horses), Queensland pacer Lucky Creed's winning spree came to an end when caught in the last stride by Cocky Raider who came off a 24yards handicap.

The Miracle Mile the following year also lingers in the memory of enthusiasts who witnessed the outstanding performance of WA four-year-old Mount Eden beating a top class field in 1:58.8 (the second fastest race mile in Australian history) after conceding a conservative 30m start.

Mount Eden was back at Harold Park a week later to post an Australian mile record against time with his 1:56.7 bettering the standard Tasmanian pacer Halwes set at 1:57.3 in November, 1968.

The 1971-72 season was the term in which Kevin Newman on July 14, 1972 (driving Mitchell Victory, Mitchell Win, Bifino and Sahtina) joined Perc Hall, Bill Picken and Jim Caffyn as the only reinsmen to drive four winners at a Harold Park meeting.

It was also the season in which several country-trained horses featured, not the least of them being the two-year-old Paleface Adios and the three-year-old Hondo Grattan hinting when opening their Harold Park accounts that season of what was to come.

With Harold Park the venue, the Bathurst-trained Hondo Grattan completed a clean sweep of the 1973 InterDominion Championship as well as snaring that season's Lord Mayor's Cup and the Four-Year-Old Futurity Stakes.

Paleface Adios became the fastest three-year-old in the Southern Hemisphere with his all-the-way R C Simpson Sprint win in 1:59 a week after snaring the NSW Pacers Derby.

Prolonged ill health influenced Jim Reeves not to seek re-election at the Club's Annual General Meeting on September 26, 1973 and he was replaced by Bill Rynan.

Reeves, the only member of the present executive who was also on the committee when night racing commenced, had been president of the club since 1960.

Already in elite company as one of only four drivers to win four races on a single Harold Park programme, Kevin Newman repeated the achievement when on January 1, 1975 he steered Manray, Ray O'Fury, Bright Circle and Mitchell Victory.

Committee members had mixed feelings in the 1976-77 season as they were facing being left the single role of programming and promoting meetings at Harold Park and Menangle Park and relinquishing the very important function of administering the industry to the Trotting Authority of NSW after its formation which was projected for January 1978.

The NSW Trotting Club had carried the reins unselfishly ever since it was formed back in 1902 and in the intervening years had been mainly responsible for the progress and development of harness racing in this state.

On February 11, 1977, the five-times premier reinsman, Perc Hall became the first to notch 500 winners at Harold Park when Ronrobin (which actually took his tally to 500½ wins) ... only a few months before he was forced to relinquish his driving licence after attaining the compulsory retiring age of 65.

Hall's record stood until Kevin Newman equalled his tally winning the first race with Another Ricki on October 19, 1979 then set the bar higher winning the second race with Radical.

Harold Park broke new ground in 1977-78 when it became the first harness racing track in Australia or New Zealand to generate turnover of more than $100 million.

Average turnover of more than $2 million per meeting put it among the top circuits in the world with combined turnover of $109,416,307 being $15,938,546, or 17 per cent higher than the previous season.

Margaret Frost, the wife of leading trainer-driver Vic Frost, entered the history books as the first female to drive a winner at

Harold Park after winning the C H O'Brien Memorial Stakes with outsider Pretty Tough on August 11, 1978.

Teenager Kim Moore, later to become Kim Waugh and gain recognition as an accomplished trainer of thoroughbreds, went one better than Frost when she was the first reinswoman to land a Harold Park double, winning with Nipper Corazon and Real Bird on November 23, 1979.

This was the period when NSWTC officials negotiated the acquisition of the adjoining land on the northern end of the Harold Park complex formerly used as a tramway depot but sitting idle for many years.

In a period when the industry was facing serious economic problems, the NSW Trotting Club in 1981-82 was able to complete important track reconstruction, including improvement to both turns and widening to a minimum 13 metres, in order to increase speed and improve safety to horses and drivers.

The benefit of that development was flaunted when on October 31, 1981, Margaret Frost (driving All Humour) became the first Australian woman to drive a sub two-minute mile winner and champion Victorian pacer Popular Alm a week later astounded veteran enthusiasts with his Australian record 1:55.9 winning the City Tattersalls Golden Mile.

Victorian pacer Gammalite entered rare territory with his City Tattersall's Golden Mile win on October 28, 1983 taking his stakes earnings to $1,005,926 and making him the first pacing millionaire in Australia.

Only two other Australian equines (the thoroughbreds Kingston Town with $1,605,790 and Manikato, $1,154,210) had previously topped the seven figure sum.

Another historic milestone maintained the steady manifestation of a strong female influence in the industry when Fran Donohue closed out that season as Harold Park's premier trainer, the first woman in Australia to win a metropolitan trainer's premiership.

Yet another instance of the emergence of females as major players came on March 22, 1985 when Ballarat reinswoman Anne Frawley accompanied Vanderport to victory in the NSW Pacers Derby, the only one of her gender to win the blue riband classic.

After experiencing a few seasons with some adverse economic conditions, Harold Park enjoyed a healthy season in 1985-86 with record TAB turnover, on-course totalisator turnover, bookmakers turnover, prizemoney distribution and a satisfactory 8.75 per cent increase in attendances.

Turnover of $160.7 million was 16.39 per cent higher than the previous season and the highest of any harness racing track in Australia or New Zealand and the record $3.72 million prizemoney distribution was $500,000 more than the previous season and

80 per cent more than was distributed five seasons earlier.

Records continued to fall with the now NSW Harness Racing Club in 1986-87 reporting higher TAB Turnover, higher prizemoney an increase in the record for a number of wins for a driver during one season but a decrease in the time it took for a two-year-old to produce a world record on a half-mile track.

Bathurst-trained Rowleyalla set the world record scorching around the 743m Harold Park circuit in an astonishing 1:55 time trial on May 22, 1987 prompted by two galloping pacemakers, one of which was handled by Brian Hancock whose 55 wins that season was three more than the previous record shared by Vic Frost and Kevin Newman, who incidentally drove the other pacemaker.

Thanks to the Fosters InterDominion carnival in 1988, the club received for the first time live national exposure through SKY TV coverage.

This was the season in which greyhound racing ceased at Harold Park with all city greyhound meetings after September, 1987 being run at nearby Wentworh Park.

Greyhound racing had been conducted at Harold Park since 1927 and had been run under lights there five years before the first night harness racing meeting.

Half-way through that season, three members of the Frost family – Vic, Margaret and Glenn – clashed in the Autumn Stakes.

The first husband, wife and son to line up in the same event at Sydney's headquarters, they trifectaed the race albeit back to front with Glenn (driving Robber John) finishing last, Speed Partner (Margaret) second last and Vic (Area Code) third last, a result hardly likely to feature in the family album.

History was made in the 1989-90 Miracle Mile when Tess Gleeson, partnering Koala Sunrise became the first woman to drive on the premier sprint. Her dream turned into a nightmare as Koala Sunrise finished last after contacting a sulky wheel and breaking soon after the start.

Harness racing in NSW continued its resurgence on the national scene with significant increases in prizemoney across the board with stakemoney at Harold Park in the 1990-91 season showing a 20 per cent increase over the previous season to reach an all-time high of $6,014,201.

At the end of May, the NSW Harness Racing Club announced it was poised to embark on a massive upgrading of Harold Park over the next three years with a $10million facelift for the famous Glebe amphitheatre.

It is unlikely the feat Victorian horseman Andrew Peace performed to claim both the training and driver premierships at Moonee Valley as well as the same two titles at Harold Park during the 1991-92 season will ever be matched.

At the beginning of the season, Peace's father Ron set up stables at Condell Park in Sydney with Andrew as the stable driver.

The venture met with immediate success with Ron Peace going to an early lead in the Harold Park Trainers' Premiership but disaster struck when, after a positive swabs inquiry, he was disqualified for a year and his horses were disqualified from 10 races when meant Andrew's tally of winners was also reduced by that number.

After gaining a trainer's licence, Andrew took over the team in Sydney and was able to accumulate more winners in two states than his rivals could in a full year.

Stealing a march on the racing industry in Australia, Harold Park in 1994 became the first racing club of any code to gain a club licence which, by giving members access to more than 100 poker machines, was expected to help offset a predicted drop in TAB figures when the Star City Casino, less than three kilometres away, was launched.

In June 1995, the NSW Harness Racing Club announced a $20 million redevelopment of Harold Park would cause the club to postpone the running of Australasia's most famous sprint race – the Miracle Mile – for seven months.

The race, scheduled for December, was not run in 1995, but there were two Miracle Miles in the calendar year of 1996.

With Harold Park closed from January, Directors were concerned the lack of public facilities meant the course would not be fit to host a Miracle Mile meeting in December so the 1996 Miracle Mile was programmed for the last week in June , 1996.

Nostalgia was the order of the night on January 12, 1996 when another glorious chapter of harness racing at Harold Park was written with the final meeting on the famous 743m circuit.

Less than 10 hours after Greg Lewis secured a place in history winning the last race on the circuit with Stormbro, the track which had hosted eight InterDominion carnivals was ripped up by heavy earthmoving implements in order to increase the circumference to 804.5 metres (or an exact half mile) and increase the width from 13m to 17m.

The confident forecast the new track would be the equal of any in the world was confirmed with track records set and a world standard achieved despite intermittent rain on Miracle Mile night in December with Iraklis winning the feature race in race and track record time of 2:04.9 (mile rate 1:54.2) despite dragging a flat tyre for the last 800mm and Our Sir Vancelot taking the 2160m Bohemia Crystal Pace in 2:34.8, a mile rate of 1:55.

The Miracle Mile has long been regarded as Australia's most controversial race, mainly because of the selection criteria, but on December 5, 1997 it attracted plenty of attention for other reasons.

Community dissidents and the Leichhardt Municipal Council planned a blockade of the precinct on Miracle Mile night before being severely reprimanded in the Supreme Court where they were described as "urban terrorists" who totally abused their power.

The biggest bombshell though, came literally minutes before the advertised starting time of the rich sprint when stewards ordered the scratching of brilliant New Zealand three-year-old Christian Cullen after a pre-race swab revealed traces of a prohibited substance.

A breakthrough in negotiations between the Racing Industry and the NSW Government in November, 1997 paved the way for a financial injection for which the NSW Harness Racing Industry was desperate.

NSW Harness Racing Club directors Tony McGrath and Robert Marshall, supported by CEO Peter V'landys, played a prominent role in the process to privatise the NSW TAB which was seen as an avenue to not only correct the unfair taxation on wagering in NSW but also an opportunity to rectify the inequitable distribution between the three codes of racing.

They not only assisted the Racing Industry in negotiations both with the Government and the TAB but also with the other two codes on the distribution method after privatisation.

Club chairman Keith Adams, who had presided over those negotiations and the redevelopment of the facility, stood down at the Annual General Meeting on October 28, 1999 after serving the maximum term in the chair permitted under the club's Articles of Association.

The club's working capital received a significant boost in the 2000 – 2001 season with a multi-milllion dollar settlement of a long running dispute with Walkers Civil Engineering, the company contracted to complete the Harold Park redevelopment.

While Keith Adams relinquished chairmanship, he remained on the board until the Annual General Meeting on October 30, 2002 when his decision to retire ended an incredible 28 years as a director, including five as Treasurer, five as Deputy Chairman and six as Chairman.

A few weeks after that meeting, a programme embracing the Ladyship Mile and the traditional sprints in the lead-up to the Miracle Mile a week later was a feature of the celebrations acknowledging the centenary of the club's first race meeting on November 19, 1902.

Directors, for some time engaged in consultation and discussion with various bodies regarding development proposals for the Ross Street carpark area and the Rozelle Tramsheds at the other end of the property, continued to modify their plans through the 2002-2003 season in order to maximise prizemoney and ensure the long term viability of metropolitan harness racing in Sydney.

Discussions continued the following year and directors were also in the early stages of investigating various options for construction of a larger racetrack at Menangle Park with Dan Coon (the US engineer responsible for the Harold Park upgrade) commissioned to develop plans for possible 1400m and 1600m circuits.

Midway through that year the club's long standing CEO Peter V'landys, the youngest chief executive to head a major harness racing club in Australasia, resigned after succumbing to a lucrative offer to be CEO of the NSW Thoroughbred Racing Board.

Formerly Racing Administrator, John Dumesny was promoted to CEO supported by a new management structure and was immediately embroiled in the fluctuating progression of development applications relating to Harold Park, Menangle Park and relocating and upgrading the registered club.

While plans for Harold Park and the registered club stalled, the club was committed to construction of a 1400m track at Menangle Park as the first stage of a master plan including refurbishing existing grandstands, and establishing permanent stables and a training centre.

Expenses incurred seeking development approvals, a lengthy dispute between the two Pay TV channels and the incursion of equine influenza causing the total shutdown of racing in Sydney for six months from August 2007 seriously challenged resources but astute management enabled the club to return profits from the turn of the century until this year when extraordinary circumstances upset the budget.

Meanwhile, responding to results of an independent consultancy's comprehensive review of the club's property options, directors decided to work towards lifting the profile of Menangle Park . . . a strategy so successful that the outer suburban racecourse usurped the club's principal track.

When the lights are extinguished for the last time at Harold Park this week, the club can no longer claim to be the longest continuing harness racing club in existence still racing on its original ground.

But, with its key performance indicators so superior to the club's hitherto principal course, the portents for Menangle Park and the club could not be more robust.

Harold Park in 1976 when greyhound racing was still in operation and the centre filed car park was accessed from Ross Street.