

20 ARCHIVE SPECIAL GREYHOUNDS AND SOCCER FANS, 1960 & 1961

Markets Field Mecca

Thousands thronged the Markets Field for the opening of the new Tote betting facility and these marvellous archive pictures bring that 1961 night back to life. **Grainne Keays** reports

TOTE betting was introduced at the Markets Field with considerable fanfare on June 1, 1961. As usual when anything significant was happening in Limerick, the Leader's photographer Donal MacMonagle, was on hand with his trusty cameras to capture the moment for posterity. Most of these photographs have never been published previously and it is our privilege to bring them to you today.

Interestingly, Tote betting had been in operation at UK greyhound tracks for decades before it was introduced in Ireland in the 1960s, although the first Tote at an Irish horse racing track was installed at Fairyhouse in 1930. It was not until May 1960 that the first Tote was installed at an Irish greyhound track at Harold's Cross in Dublin. Shelbourne Park was next, closely followed by Limerick and then Cork.

The former CEO of Bórd na gCon, Sean Collins, explains that track owners had been pushing to operate the Tote in Ireland but the government would not agree to grant them a licence. When Tote betting was eventually introduced, privately-owned tracks were not allowed to operate it. The running of the Tote was granted to the semi-state body governing greyhound racing, Bórd na gCon, and all the profits which accrued went into its coffers, to be used to fund the devel-

with the Tote or with the bookies.

The Markets Field track had seen something of a facelift in the run up to the installation of the Tote. According to the late Des Hanrahan, then sports editor of the Limerick Leader, the first three bends had been widened and "improved out of all recognition". The track surface had been improved and spectators were afforded a much better view by the removal of several posts from the viewing areas and the replacement of old wire fencing with much wider wire mesh. Also, a huge results board measuring 41 feet wide by 21 feet high was installed. Two Tote buildings were erected with 27 machines installed in total. The purchase and installation of these machines cost a whopping £21,000.

The works on the track were completed by John Silke & Son Ltd under the watchful eye of general foreman William Wallace.

Sixty-four staff, 27 of them women, were employed to operate the Tote. For most, this was a second job in addition to their normal day jobs. Many were shop assistants, office workers and civil servants.

Sean Collins says that from the very start Tote betting at Irish greyhound tracks "took off like a house on fire".

"It attracted," Sean tells us, "a new type of racegoer in their thousands



Faces in the crowd: the first day of June in 1961 saw a huge attendance at the Markets Field for the opening of the new Tote betting facilities. We're sure many a local face will be recognised! Many thanks to the readers who contacted us after seeing another photograph from the Tote opening in last week's Leader (inset, above). Pictured were Nuala Mangan (O'Carroll) left, her mother Margaret O'Carroll, centre, and Nuala's sister Therese Hurley (O'Carroll)

O'Connor and the late Patricia Griffin (Ballykeefe). The magnificent success of the Totes at Irish greyhound tracks was due to this trio and, of course, Limerick track's own Tote manager, the late Larry Cosgrave, who



tion of tracks and the introduction of increased prize money.

In the UK, the Tote had been running for many years but it was the track owners who ran it and kept the profits. Unsurprisingly, the owners of the Irish greyhound tracks were bitterly disappointed to be denied the same opportunity.

Equally unsurprising was the reaction of the Irish bookmakers, who initially saw the introduction of the Tote as a threat to their on-track betting business. Greyhound racegoers now had the option of betting

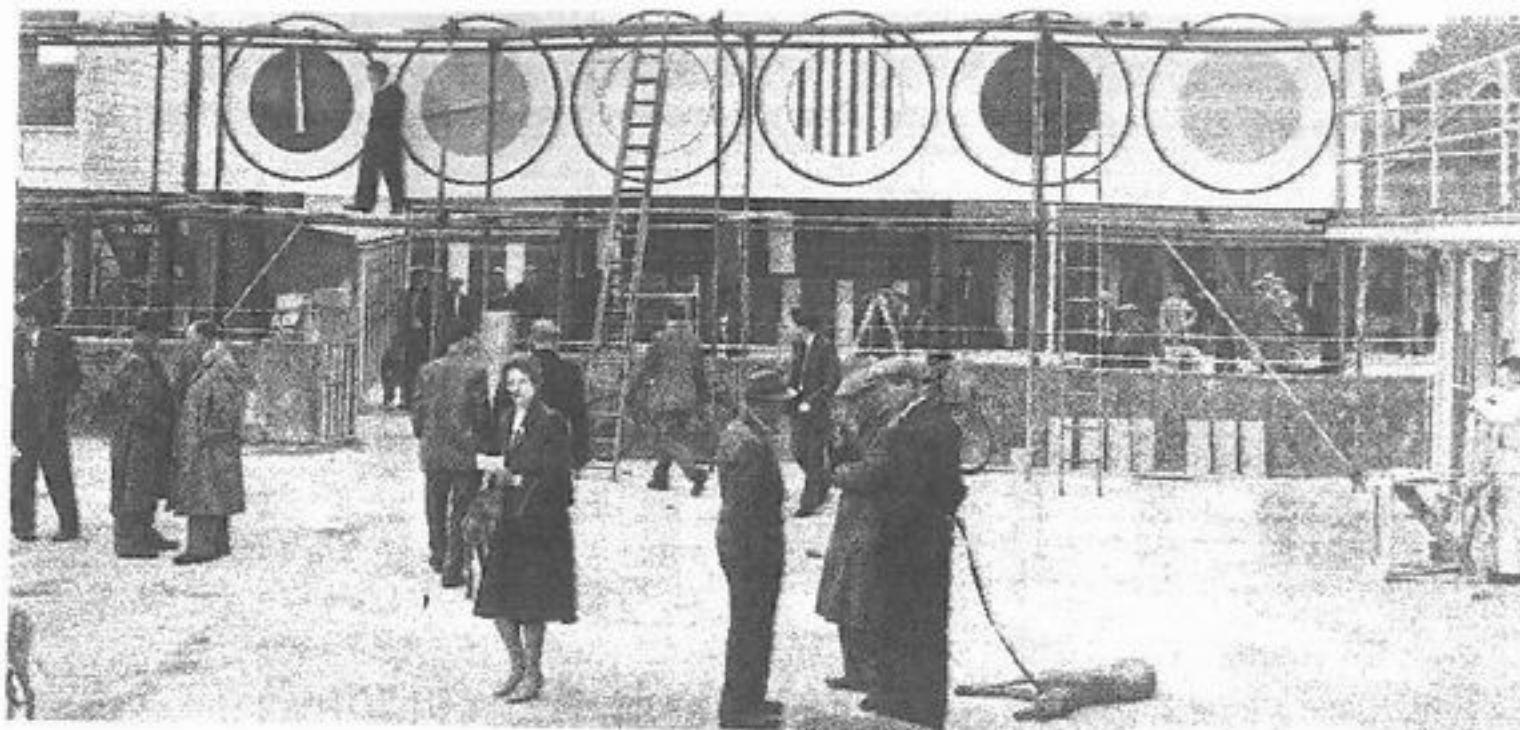
with its win and place pools, jackpots and twin doubles, to name a few, captured the imagination. Allied to this were the huge potential winning dividends for small ticket costs."

Sean recalls some names associated with this success. Heading the senior management list were the late Noel Drumgoole, one of the co-founders of Na Piar-saigh Club and noted Dublin hurling intercounty stalwart. "Noel was ably assisted by two Limerick-born Dublin Tote general managers, Ardagh's John

On Raddy Keny, then Mayor of Limerick, had the honour of placing the first Tote bet. The rest is history.

Only seven weeks after the Tote was launched, Christopher Moloney, of 6 Burke Avenue, Limerick, won £61 on a two shilling bet having made the correct forecast on the first race on July 17. It was a record at the time — and the Tote was very much on its way.

Note: Jim Frost was incorrectly identified as a member of Bórd na gCon in part one of this feature. Jim was in fact a member of Limerick track's directorate.



The new Tote results board, more than 40 feet wide, was an eye-catching sight at the Markets Field



Two immaculately dressed local ladies on the opening night in May 1961. This lovely picture is published for the first time this week, 55 years later



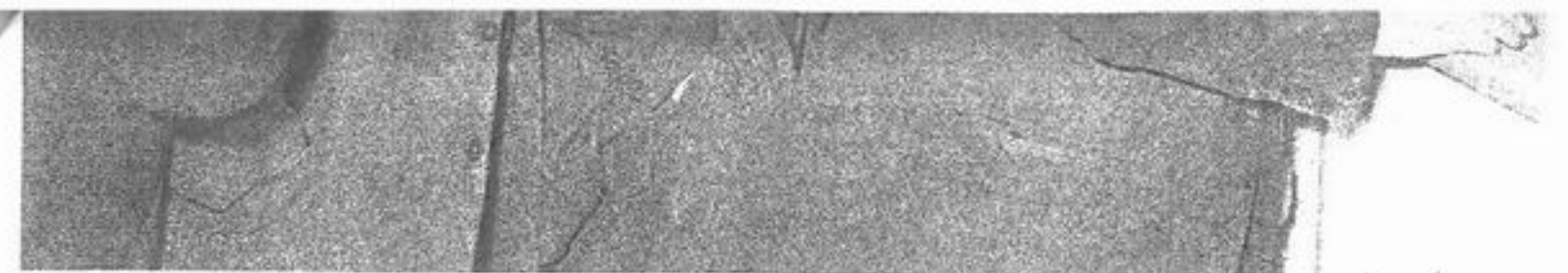
In Donal MacMonagle's terrific picture, most eyes were on the action at the Markets Field 55 years ago, with many of those in the big crowd clutching docket from the newly opened Tote betting facility, which transformed the greyhound racing scene

pulled in the crowds



As this picture was never published by the Leader, like most of the photographs also featured here, we don't have the names of the distinguished looking gentleman in this group, as the new Tote facilities at the Markets Field were official opened in June 1961





Lining up for a flutter on the dogs: the new Tote facilities at the Markets Field cost the sizeable sum of £21,000



Some of the newly-recruited Tote staff at the Markets Field in June 1961. After a three-day training course, they were issuing docketts

From greyhounds to golden goals: Fans out in force to cheer on Limerick's soccer heroes



The joy felt by many in recent times at the reopening of the Markets Field, where a resurgent Limerick FC are entertaining crowds, is in large part an acknowledgement that the historic ground was once packed to the rafters when the Limerick soccer team was at the height of its popularity. These pictures, from the Leader archive show the vast attendance at the Limerick vs Waterford match on February 7, 1960. Not only is the stand full, but the terracing is also packed with Limerick fans. Recognise anyone?