

Meadowbank closing this weekend – but the memories remain

We visited the store where all the sports equipment was kept and then handed out just ahead of each event. It has that certain smell that you will recall from any school changing room of old. A mix of sweat and foostiness that is really quite hard to forget.

Earlier this week we visited Meadowbank Stadium just ahead of it closing for good this weekend. It will eventually be demolished and replaced with a new stadium which is due to open in 2020.



We were told that from here, with their javelins or whatever they needed for their chosen sport, the athletes would then proceed out the tunnel in front of us onto the athletics track and the grassy area in the middle.

We walked with former Olympic athlete Peter Hoffmann who had proceeded through this tunnel on a number of occasions and asked him to recall how it felt.



You can listen to our chat with him and with Chief Starter, Barry Craighead here :

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Peter told us about the tunnel onto the track : “We only used it for special occasions It might have been a UK Championship

or a Scottish Championship or if you were competing for Great Britain.

“It was very much like walking out to meet the executioner! Especially if you ran something like the 400 or 800 metres because that event hurts. So there was a double nervousness. You were nervous about the competition and appearing in front of the crowds but you were also nervous because of the fact that you knew that a few minutes later you were going to be in a bit of pain after the race.

“One of my best memories is in 1978 David Jenkins had won the Scottish title twice, Roger Jenkins had won it twice and I had won it twice. 1978 was the only time we raced each other and I was fortunate enough to win that race. So that was a big memory actually for me. It was a wonderful day.

“About a month after that Paul Forbes and myself fancied our chances of beating Seb Coe it still bugs me today. I ran a very negative race I got caught up in the back straight in a group of athletes and by the time I had extricated myself I chased him down the home straight. I got right up and was pretty close to actually beating him. So Coe won that I was second and Paul Forbes third so that was a good memory as well.

“But if I had a Tardis and could go back in time I would run a better tactical race!



Barry Craighead (79) started the first and the last race at Meadowbank. The last race took place on 5 November 2017 at the annual fireworks display. Barry entertained us with some snippets about his life in athletics, although contradicted himself surely when he said that he was not much of a runner, going on to explain that he actually used to take part in the steeplechase!

He explained the procedure for the official start of a race :
“The marksmen are important They get the athletes ready for the start line. Then when they were ready, he signalled me and I took over.

“The announcer introduces all the athletes in an international race, and then it is a case of saying ‘On your Marks Set and then Gun!’”

Although they are not any longer, Barry explained that ‘recalls’ were then very important. This is when an athlete moves or something happens to interrupt the race. Barry told us he was pretty good at these: “I could recall within 1/100th of a second. So that’s when there is a false start and you have to fire the gun twice to bring the athletes back. The BBC tested me to see how quickly I could do it!

“But now international athletes and senior athletes don’t have any chance there’s no false starts allowed at all I am not entirely in favour of that.”

Councillor Ian Campbell said :”This is a building much in use, but it has been used for a long time. It is in need of a major upgrade. This building was built for the Commonwealth Games and it served that purpose. After the Commonwealth Games the local communities benefited from being able to take it.”



Sir Elton John playing Meadowbank in June 2016

When the stadium was used as the venue for the Elton John concert for 18,000 people the many technicians had to work within the constraints of the site. There is a small bridge at one end and the Marathon Gate at the other, so there is no room for articulated lorries to come in. Everything had to be offloaded at the gate and brought in from there.

The new Meadowbank will be smaller, with only 500 seats for spectators rather than 7,000, the stand will be more compact

but may have room for Edinburgh Leisure to have its offices there, and some of the land will be sold off for housing to pay for the new sports facilities.

June Peebles CEO of Edinburgh Leisure who run the city's leisure centres was a bit sad when we met up with her, but happy to confirm they have done their best to find everyone who uses the centre a new, if temporary home.

Meadowbank closure – how much will it cost and what will the users do meantime? pic.twitter.com/LG9U7I45fC

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [December 1, 2017](#)

This will be a big change in the area, and as yet the new design is only a blueprint and not yet a planning reality. We began and ended the tour in Hall 6. We met Edith Swanson there whose late husband Jim was an architect with the council.

We met the lovely Edith Swanson the other day at Meadowbank. Her late husband Jim was one of the architects and they were at the opening... [@Ed_Leisure pic.twitter.com/kNowzsIPXv](https://pic.twitter.com/kNowzsIPXv)

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [December 1, 2017](#)

Of course we have been at a couple of election counts at Meadowbank so it is easy for us to say that we have our own memories too. We just hope they don't put orange lighting in the new sports halls, as any photos of winning politicians will be so much better!