



▲ As architects and engineers became more confident in their use of reinforced concrete, a new wave of grandstands appeared at British sportsgrounds during the 1930s.

This one, at the **Polytechnic Stadium** on **Hartington Road, Chiswick**, was designed by Joseph Addison, Head of the Polytechnic's School of Architecture, and opened in 1938 for the use of the **Polytechnic Harriers** and other clubs associated with the Regent Street institution.

Listed Grade II, the stand's roof is supported by a beam 78 feet long by 7 feet deep, supported by two octagonal pillars. The roof's front section then projects 30 feet over the lower seating deck, which itself acts as a load bearing element within the overall structure.

Seating 658 and looking out over a cinder athletics track, the stand offered substantial accommodation underneath – offices, club rooms and dressing rooms for up to 500 athletes – which made it ideal for hosting meetings and events, including, until 1972, the finishing stages of the annual Polytechnic Marathon (the precursor of the modern London Marathon).

Fulham Rugby League Club were also based there from 1885-90.

Thereafter the stand and its track fell into steady decline, before the **University of Westminster** (as the Poly was renamed in 1992) gave it a complete makeover. The price of this upgrade was, however, that a fitness centre and health club now flank the stand somewhat awkwardly (*top right*), while the stand's main use is as a nursery.



At the same time, while all the other pitches at the sports ground appear to be in regular use, the one in front of the stand is currently unused, which means the seating area is unused also, a great shame. But not a unique situation.

Seen above is the stand built for the **University College School Old Boys RFC** (the 'Old Gowers') on **MacFarlane Lane, Isleworth**.

Opened in 1935, it was designed by club members Brian Sutcliffe (architect also of Imperial College's

boathouse, *see page 51*), and HC Farmer, who would die in action during the Second World War.

After the Old Gowers departed in 1979 (they now play in West Hampstead), the stand served Centaurs RFC before they too left and the stand fell into disrepair.

Listed Grade II in 2001, two years later it was placed on the Heritage at Risk Register.

Finally in 2005 the five-a-side company **Goals Soccer Centres** took over the ground, and after a

£1.5 million refurbishment carried out by Aedeas architects, the stand and its pavilion at the rear (*below left*) re-opened in 2010.

Alas, however, as at Chiswick, there is little action to watch from its seats. This is because, in order to preserve the stand's setting, the new five-a-side pitches (each enclosed and floodlit) were sited elsewhere, leaving the turf in front of the stand for occasional football use only, or as a picnic area.

That said, it must be conceded that viewing from the upper tier was never ideal, particularly from the back rows, because of the roof's overhang, while its column-free design was from its earliest days compromised by the necessity for down pipes in each corner.

The building has been beautifully restored nevertheless, Crittall windows and all, and if only as a surviving curio from a period of bold experimentation, is great to look at, if not from.



▲ Another 1930s grandstand to have enjoyed a recent makeover is this one at **Motspur Park**, south west London (directly opposite the former sports ground of the BBC).

Laid out by the **University of London** in 1931, Motspur Park's athletics track was, until the 1970s, arguably the finest in London, graced by the likes of Sydney Wooderson, who set a world record for the mile on it in 1937 (*see page 309*), and Roger Bannister. Other notable uses have been as the venue for the annual 'Laundry Sports', staged for the capital's laundry workers during the 1930s, and as the backdrop for three films, *The Games* (1970), *Chariots of Fire* (1981), and *The Four Minute Mile* (1988).

The grandstand is not listed, but is of interest nevertheless.

Designed by Thompson & Walford, architects also of the University of London's boathouse on Hartington Road (*page 57*), it originally accommodated 500 spectators, and is characterised by its prominent roof vents, servicing the changing rooms at the rear.

In 1996 the athletics track was grassed over. Then three years later the ground was sold to its current owners, whose logo is just about visible in the centre of the stand.

Not content with owning one historic stand, Motspur Park is now the training ground of **Fulham FC**.

As may be seen, the stand – used today during youth and training matches, and still with 250 or so of its original wooden tip-up seats – is flanked by two pavilions. The one on the right was built by the University, the one on the left has since been added by Fulham,



who have also sympathetically modernised the interior, while also restoring the building's façade, including its Art Deco clocktower.

If footballers signing for Fulham might balk at their cramped quarters at The Cottage, by comparison Motspur Park has the air of a suburban country club.

Our final example from the 1930s is another illustration of a grandstand that might equally be described as a pavilion, and which almost certainly would

have been demolished had it not been listed Grade II in 2003.

Accessed from **Carterhatch Lane, Enfield**, the **Queen Elizabeth Stadium** was actually designed in 1939, but because of the war was not completed and opened until, as its name suggests, 1953 (the year of the Coronation).

A long, narrow brick construction with curved ends and a prominent glazed bar area and staircase tower on the roof, the viewing area at the west end seats just 105.

For years the building and track were in a desperate state until in 2010 a £2.3 million refurbishment took place. Seb Coe, who had trained on the original track in the 1980s, cut the ribbon.

Apart from athletics the stadium's main use is now as home to **Enfield Town FC**.

Also on the site, serving the adjoining **Enfield Playing Fields** – second in extent only to Hackney Marshes – is a 1938 pavilion housing dressing rooms.



Three cantilevered grandstands were built in London in the late 1950s; the **Warner Stand** at **Lord's**, **London Welsh's** stand at the **Old Deer Park** (*page 262*) and this elegant one at the **Richmond Athletic Ground**. Seating 960 and costing £30,000, it was designed by architects **Manning & Clamp**, with engineers **Jenkins & Potter**, and formed using in-situ concrete. For a pitchside view see *page 263*.