



BETTING SHOPS 50 YEARS OF PROGRESS

William **HILL**

THE HOME OF BETTING

BETTING SHOPS CELEBRATE 50TH BIRTHDAY.

BETTING SHOPS CELEBRATE THEIR HALF-CENTURY

by Graham Sharpe, Media Relations Director, William Hill.

ON MAY 1, 1961, betting shops became legal in Britain. Fifty years later they are one of the most familiar components of every High Street and the gambling industry is one of the most recession-resilient businesses in the land. Fifty years ago horse racing, greyhound racing and the occasional football match, tennis tournament or cricket test match were the options available to customers of betting shops.

Today, every major sporting event comes with betting odds attached; Royal Weddings, Royal Ascot, and Reality TV are all available, along with 'Numbers' betting, Fixed Odds Betting Terminals, Virtual Racing and almost any custom-built gamble customers care to put forward will receive appropriate odds on request.

The huge majority of betting shops, once permitted only to take bets without in any way encouraging patrons to remain on the premises, are now inviting and welcoming establishments, offering comfortable seating, toilet facilities, refreshments, large screen terrestrial and satellite tv coverage of sporting events, and are open every day of the week and into the evenings.

The last time betting shops and the Royal Wedding coincidentally dovetailed was in 1973 when Princess Anne's marriage to Mark Phillips coincided with the 11/10 victory of Royal Mark on the day. This time William Hill offered 8/1 that Royal Wedding would win on Royal Wedding day and, inevitably, it did!

Millions of pounds were riding on what happened during and after the Royal Wedding and it is incredible to recall that in 1977 William Hill hit the headlines for turning down bets on the sex of Princess Anne's baby. The general feeling was that there would be adverse criticism for doing so but by 1981 Hill's were quoting a huge range of odds for Charles and Di's wedding.

William Hill currently operate 2350 betting shops, more than any other British company. 'Betting shops have enjoyed an eventful fifty year history, and there is little reason to believe that the name of William Hill and other betting shop companies will not still be a prominent part of the High Street on May 1, 2061' added Hill's spokesman Graham Sharpe.

GREAT BETTING SHOP STATS AND STORIES.

1815 saw the first betting shops appear in London. Soon there were an estimated 400.

CHARLES DICKENS had something to say about betting shops – the 1852 version – when he wrote, 'Whatever the betting shop be, it has only to be somewhere – and the rapid youth of England, with its slang intelligence perpetually broad awake and its weather eye continually open, will walk in and deliver up its money, like the helpless Innocent that it is.' Not a fan, then!

ON AUGUST 20, 1853 an 'Act for the Suppression of Betting Houses' put betting shops out of business – legally, at any rate – for almost 108 years. It did not prevent hundreds of illegal establishments flourishing for the next century, however.

THERESA BUTCHER was the first female betting shop owner – illegally taking bets from her premises – doubling as a greengrocer's – in Claendon Street, Hulme, in 1900.

AN ILLEGAL betting shop in Southampton which doubled up as a fish and chip shop in the late 1940s boasted the slogan 'The shop for a win or a plaice'.

MAY 1, 1961The day betting shops became legal in Britain – again – following legislation introduced by Home Secretary R A 'Rab' Butler. They'd been popular in the mid 19th century, and 400 were operating in London alone, but dodgy operators caused them to be banned by law in 1853, now they were legally back even though there had been plenty operating illegally for many years. The shops had to be by law, very Spartan places – no televisions, no refreshments, no comfortable seating.

THE EPONYMOUS WILLIAM HILL had to be persuaded to open betting shops- a strongly left leaning political animal he feared that betting shops would encourage working class absenteeism. He began buying into the business in the mid 60s. William Hill are now the biggest betting shop operators in Britain with over 2350 branches.

DAVID THRELFALL made a bet with William Hill shortly after the shops opened – that man would walk on the moon before the end of the 1960s. He was offered an astonishingly generous 1000/1, staked £10 (probably twice the average national

wage then), won £10,000 courtesy of Neil Armstrong in July 1969, bought flash sports car, died in car crash.

IN 1964 50year old 'Jumbo' Howard opened a betting shop – on his Lowestoft-based North Sea fishing trawler. Another shop, opened, in 1963, operated from a former police cell and the Hyperion in Fairford, Gloucester, was the first – perhaps only – inn to boast its own betting shop.

WHEN GOLDIE, an African golden eagle, escaped from London Zoo in December 1965, betting shops began taking bets on whether it would be recaptured before Christmas Day, quoting 12/1 – it was captured before then, costing the bookies £14,000.

IN 1967 CORONATION STREET 'battle-axe', the hair-netted Ena Sharples launched a petition to have the Street's betting shop shut down – she failed, and two years later the plot saw her side-kick Minnie Caldwell become a secret gambler.

BETTING SHOP NUMBERS peaked in 1973, with 14,750 licences in force in Great Britain.

THE WIMBLEDON tennis tournament hosted a betting shop for the only time in 1974 when William Hill operated a marquee near the strawberry lawn – it proved so popular that tournament bosses demanded a huge increase for the facility which Hills declined to pay. There has been no betting facility there ever since.

WELCOMING hugely popular triple Grand National winning horse Red Rum who was officially opening a new William Hill branch in Birmingham in 1979 a local lady handed me a large cake she had made for the horse, together with an autograph book in which she asked me to get 'Rummy's autograph' for her.

BETTING ON the outcome of TV programmes was introduced for the first time in 1980 when William Hill let betting shop punters gamble on 'Who Shot JR?' in the immensely popular Dallas series.

LINCOLN betting shop owner Willie White's decision to close his business in Monks Road in autumn, 1984, was a threat to the marriage of one of his punters – who, the previous year had bet £1000 at 6/4 that his marriage would survive for seven years. It is not recorded whether the punter decided he might as well get a divorce as he'd lost his stake without a run for his money.



WHEN Aldershot punter George Rhodes beat world record odds of 1,670,000/1 to win £86,056.42 for his 5p stake on a 7-horse accumulator in 1985, I asked him what he would be doing with the cash 'I'll invest it in a new Rolls Royce, my old one is 18 years old' he told me.

'DISCRIMINATION against ordinary people in betting shops is one of the biggest class distinctions in the country' complained News of the World commentator, Lord Woodrow Wyatt in 1984 referring to the ease with which 'upper class' punters could gamble via a telephone credit account from the comfort of their own homes while 'ordinary' folk had to 'slink furtively' into a betting shop.

BOOKIE John Lovell was so upset when long standing customer Jimmy Peters passed away in 1985 that he held a wake in his Cardiff betting shop for him.

BERNARD MURPHY printed posters advising people to vote for him in the 1985 Cork council elections at which he was standing – and to put money on him at odds of 33/1 to win. He won and local betting shops lost over £20,000.

ON MARCH 10 1986, punters were for the first time permitted to watch live and recorded sport on televisions in betting shops – and soft drinks and refreshments could be provided for customers.

DEEP TROUBLE was the name of the horse being backed by a punter in a Stockton-on-Tees betting shop in March 1986 – just as a car crashed into the building.

IN JULY 1986 the 'Licensed Bookmaker and Betting Office' magazine reported that 'in the last ten years 5000 betting shops have gone out of business.'

IN 1986 the Bayview Hotel in Brora, Scotland, applied for permission to open a betting shop in their car park.

MARADONA'S 'Hand of God' goal for Argentina, knocking England out of the 1986 World Cup, so outraged William Hill that they became the first bookmaker ever to refund stakes to betting shop clients when they did so to everyone who had bet the game would end 1-1 as well as to those who backed the 'official' 2-1 to Argentina outcome.

SATELLITE INFORMATION SERVICES (SIS) launched the UK's first live satellite coverage into betting shops on May 1, 1987, beaming horse and dog racing into the branches.

CABBIE George Elliot was impressed by the young politician he picked up in the late 1980s – and after dropping him off he headed for his local betting shop in Sedgefield, Yorkshire, and staked £10 at odds of 500/1 that the young man would eventually become Prime Minister. George collected £5000 in 1997 when Tony Blair duly reached Number 10.

ORKNEY RESIDENTS had to wait a quarter of a century-plus before they finally got their own betting shop, Rails Bookmakers Limited, managed by Lena Rendall, in mid 1987.

ODDBALL rock star turned politician, Screaming Lord Sutch, founder and late leader of the Monster Raving Loony Party stood to win the biggest betting shop payout of all time of £15million from William Hill when he backed himself at odds of 15,000,000/1 ever to become Prime Minister – he wasn't, but did get the 1980s bet into the Guinness Book of Records.

MOUNTAINEER Chris Bonington popped into a William Hill betting shop to place a bet that his forthcoming 1988 Himalayan expedition would return with proof of the existence of the Yeti. He came back with evidence he was convinced would prove the case – but it was confiscated and burnt by Dept of Agriculture officials.

JOHN W RICHARDSON, a Londoner now living in California, will win £500,000 if he fathers a child in the year 2040. Doesn't sound too difficult, yet William Hill gave him odds of 10,000/1 when he turned up in one of their branches – in 1995, when he was 55 years of age – in 2040 he will be 100, if he makes it.

BIGGEST BET staked on Elvis Presley, officially dead since 1977, still being alive, struck in Hill's branch in Hammersmith in the mid 1990s - £250 at 500/1 by fan Ciara Parkes who stood to win £125,000. It is now 5000/1 that he is still alive.

'LUCKY CHOICE' betting started in 1995. Offering clients the chance of £100,000 payouts for selecting Irish Lottery numbers was the bookies' response to the threat from the National Lottery.

TWO FRUIT MACHINES with maximum £10 payouts could be installed in betting shops from June 1996.

FRANKIE DAY Frankie Dettori created racing and betting history when he rode all seven winners at Ascot on September 28, 1996, at odds of 25,095/1 – almost decimating an entire industry single-handed. Frankie's betting shop fans won almost £50million backing all of his mounts in almost every possible combination.

A LIFE SIZED STUFFED RAM was the most unusual visitor 1997 Betting Shop Manager of the Year Ellen Killen ever discovered in her shop. It was brought in by an actor en route to the theatre – 'He asked me to keep an eye on him while he placed his bet, and assured me the ram was over 18 years old.'

WILLIAM HILL became the first major bookmaker to accept bets over the internet in 1998.

WHEN KEEN PUNTER DEREK PLUNTON died in April 1998 his family placed a death notice in the local Winchester newspaper, which included Derek's tip for a forthcoming big race – King Of Kings. The horse won the race and local betting shops took a caning.

A £500 JACKPOT payout for Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) was implemented on 31st March 2004.

THE GAMBLING ACT of 2005 made it possible from September 2007 for betting shop customers to take grievances and disputes over bets to court.

FIRST BETTING SHOP MILLIONAIRE Yorkshireman Fred Craggs, who lived just outside Thirsk, celebrated his 60th birthday on the day he discovered that he had landed the biggest ever betting shop accumulator bet, beating odds of 2,000,000/1. He placed his record breaking wager in a William Hill shop in Thirsk, Yorkshire in February 2008. He selected eight horses running at various courses - starting with one called Isn't That Lucky and finishing with A Dream Come True - and duly placed his 50p bet, which required all eight to win to entitle him to a payout. They all won. But Mr Craggs had no idea that they had until he visited another Hill's shop, nearby in Bedale and was told that the betting slip he thought was worthless had actually made him a millionaire.

THE HISTORY OF THE BETTING SHOP.

You bet these shops are here to stay. After much lobbying and persuasion, betting shops were finally legalised in 1961. But it may come as something of a surprise to learn that in 1850 there were some 400 betting shops operating quite legally in London. It wasn't until 1853 that such shops were banned and that was the way it stayed for over a century.

Betting shops emerged during the first half of the 19th century, when popular interest in horse racing was beginning to flourish. On-course and credit bookmakers, were already well-established, but the latter, in particular, were too concerned with 'gentlemen' clients to worry about lesser fry. However, as always, there were those who were quite happy to provide a home for the pennies, tanners and two-bobs smaller punters wished to stake. These pioneer betting shop operators began by setting up business in tobacconists, barber shops and so on. Gradually, the proprietors began to encourage their customers to indulge in a small wager or two.

NEW LOOK

Soon, there was precious little tobacco being sold while hordes flocked in solely to gamble. The walls were hung with lists of runners and prices. The shops soon became known as 'list shops' or listers'.

As the shops became more profitable, the small men were pushed out of ownership as shady characters from the criminal world muscled in and took over. As the less scrupulous types appeared, so the reputation of the shops began to slump. One estimate, at the beginning of the 1850's, put the number of properly-run, fully-solvent betting businesses at a mere 4 per cent. The incident which brought the matter of betting shops to a head occurred when one of the best known, Dwyer's in St. Martin's Lane,

London, vanished overnight. It owed winning punters no less than £25,000. The authorities turned a closer eye on the phenomenon as a whole. Shops were becoming increasingly disorderly, so much so that it was said at the time that 'it was about as unfavourable a description as a man could give himself, short of admitting he was an outright criminal' to own up to working in a betting shop.

STREET-CORNER RUNNERS

Towards the end of 1853 legislation was introduced, to close down the betting shops. As a consequence, an illegal cash betting industry sprang up with bookies' runners much in evidence.

Monty Court, a former Editor of *The Sporting Life*, whose memory doesn't stretch back quite as far as the 1850's, nonetheless remembers bookies' runners: 'when I was but a lad in shorts I can remember watching open-mouthed and amazed as two helmeted policeman raced down our street hard on the heels of a man who appeared to be a panic-stricken window cleaner, complete with bucket, cloth and ladder. He was, I later discovered, a street-corner bookies' runner. Such scenes were a regular part of inner-city life as a diligent police force carried out its non-stop skirmishing with runners who were always handicapped by pockets full of coins and betting slips signed with unlikely names. Several houses in the street never locked their front doors so that the runners could bolt straight through the house and over the garden wall.'

A *Daily Mirror* article of 1958 revealed, in a story entitled 'In Punters' Paradise', how easy it was to have a cash bet, even though it was still strictly illegal. Reporter Jack Stonely was in Redcar: 'I stopped a policeman and asked, "Please can you direct me to the nearest place where I can put a bet on a horse?". "Certainly sir", he smiled, "straight along the road - you will see little doorway, just go right in."

GOLD-DIGGERS' RUSH

In September 1960, the Home Office announced that betting shops would be allowed to open from 1 May 1961. Newspapers reported a 'gold-diggers' rush to grab Britain's High Street shops in readiness for a gambling boom.' Not

everyone was that enthusiastic, *The Daily Mail* reported that 'Mr William Hill, Britain's biggest bookmaker thinks that only a third of the shops that open will still be in business after a year.' Even in *The Sporting Life* doubts were expressed. J. T. Chenery, a solicitor and author of 'Betting and Bookmaking', warned: 'I predict that the "To Let" sign will be hanging over many a betting shop before long. Who is going to leave his armchair to go out, perhaps in the rain, to do what he can do in comfort simply by lifting the telephone? No one in his right mind.'

On May Day 1961, the Rt. Hon. R. A. Butler, Home Secretary and the Minister responsible for the new legislation, greeted the first day of betting shops with some far-sighed words: 'If the new laws are to work well, the co-operation of everyone concerned will be required. I am convinced that.... the new social experiment will be successful.'

Although there were some failures, often due to the wrong choice of site or to downright inefficiency, the infant business began to flourish. In May 1964, with betting shops then fully-established, John Morgan of the *New Statement* cast an eye on them, concluding 'their saddest feature is their discomfort'. He wrote, 'With a delicate hypocrisy the government has encouraged gambling by making the shops easily available, but salved its conscience by insisting that they are graceless, utilitarian places without coffee or soft drinks, and even without television to watch the horses.'

In 1973, the number of betting office licences in force in Great Britain peaked at 14,750. After their introduction in 1961, nothing happened to change the laws governing betting shops for a quarter of a century until 10 March 1986, when the regulations were relaxed slightly, allowing punters to watch live and recorded sport on televisions in the shops.

Shops were also allowed to provide soft drinks and refreshments for customers. Then on 1 May 1987, Satellite Information Services Ltd (SIS) launched the UK's first live satellite coverage of non-televised race meetings, beaming horse and greyhound races into betting shops.



After initially deciding not to get involved in high-street bookmaking, William Hill finally buys into betting shops and starts acquiring existing businesses. Acquisition becomes a major driver for the growth of the business over the next decades.



Grand Metropolitan, owners of Mecca Bookmakers, acquire William Hill and merge the two companies under the William Hill name.



The number of betting shops in the UK peaks at 14,750.



1988

It becomes legal to accept football pools coupons in betting shops. The National Lottery is introduced, to be followed by the introduction of scratchcards in 1995



William Hill is acquired by Nomura for £700m. It becomes legal for the location of betting shops to be advertised in newspapers/telephone directories.

1997



An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease prevents the movement of horses and horseracing is severely hit. The bookmakers respond by developing virtual betting and gaming-style products such as Rapido

2001



William Hill purchases Stanley Leisure PLC's retail bookmaking operations, adding around 500 shops to the estate and, as a result, becoming the UK's number one bookmaker

2005



2008

William Hill combines its existing online business with assets purchased from software company Playtech to create William Hill Online, one of Europe's leading online sports-betting and gaming businesses.

1966

1973

1994

1997

2001

2005

2008

1961



Betting shops become legal on 1st May

1971



Mr William Hill, the company's original founder, dies, having retired from the business in 1970. The company becomes part of the Sears Holdings Group

1986



Betting shops are allowed to be fitted with TV screens.

1989

Brent Walker purchases William Hill, which has 1,800 betting shops and the largest credit betting operation in the world.

1995



Sunday opening becomes legal. There is no longer any limit imposed on the size of TV screens in shops.

1996

Black Saturday - 28th September: Frankie Dettori rides all seven winners at Ascot resulting in a total payout of £70 million from the betting industry.

2000

Advertising of off-shore betting facilities on Teletext, etc., is banned.

2002

William Hill floats on the London Stock Exchange on 20 June. The offer is more than 10 times oversubscribed

2007

The 2005 Gambling Act is effected. The industry becomes regulated by the newly created Gambling Commission and licensed companies are allowed to advertise, including on television, for the first time

2011

William Hill combines its existing online business with assets purchased from software company Playtech to create William Hill Online, one of Europe's leading online sports-betting and gaming businesses.

THROUGH THE YEARS.

- 1903:** William Hill born (July 16th) in Birmingham
- 1920:** William Hill began taking bets from pubs in the Midlands which he visited on a bicycle.
- 1925:** William Hill set up as a course bookmaker in the Midlands but as an inexperienced, novice operator, he soon lost his initial capital.
- 1929:** William Hill moved to London, betting at greyhound tracks before extending activities to Northolt Park racecourse where he soon became an owner.
- 1934:** William Hill opened a London office for his credit clients
- 1939:** Business was good enough to warrant expansion to Park Lane. In the spring of this year his business became a company, WILLIAM HILL (PARK LANE) LTD.
- 1947:** WILLIAM HILL moved to offices at Picadilly Circus.
- 1949:** Nimbus, bred by William Hill won the Derby.
- 1952:** WILLIAM HILL (FOOTBALL) LTD. moved to larger premises just off the City Road.
- 1953:** William Hill boasted that he had over 400,000 clients.
- 1961:** Betting shops became legal on May 1st. William Hill himself declined initially to enter this market.
- 1966:** William Hill finally bought into betting shops.
- 1969:** William Hill paid out £10,000 to David Threlfall who had bet £10 at 1000/1 that Man would walk on the moon before 1970.
- 1970:** William Hill retired.
- 1971:** William Hill died on October 16th. The William Hill Organization became part of the Sears Holdings Group.

- 1973:** The number of betting office licences in force in Great Britain peaked at 14,750. Boxing promoter and bookmaker Sam Burns became M.D. of William Hill.
- 1974:** William Hill became the first (and only) bookmakers to ever be represented at Wimbledon Tennis Championships.
- 1977:** Sporting Yankee, owned by William Hill Ltd finished unplaced in the Derby.
- 1980:** William Hill attracted worldwide headlines by opening a book on 'Who Shot J.R.' in TV programme Dallas.
- 1981:** Len Cowburn succeeds Sam Burns as William Hill M.D. William Hill sponsored a race in America, The William Hill Trophy at New York's Belmont Park.
- 1986:** Betting shops allowed to be fitted with television screens. William Hill were so incensed at Maradona's 'Hand of God' World Cup goal 'scored' against England that they refunded stakes to all punters who had bet on the match ending in 1-1 draw, whilst also paying out on the official 2-1 result.
- 1987:** William Hill introduced its own HILLSPORT service, an audio and text communications system to all shops. S.I.S. begin broadcasting daily racing action into betting shops.
- 1988:** Grand Metropolitan, owner of Mecca Bookmakers acquired William Hill, merging the two companies under the William Hill name.
- 1989:** Brent Walker purchased William Hill. The company also boasts the largest credit betting operation in the world.
- 1990:** In April, William Hill achieved a breakthrough when they offered Access and Visa card betting facilities on the Grand National for the first time.

- 1991:** William Hill report overall profits of £45 million. William Hill were the first major bookmakers to introduce Switch/Delta debit card telephone betting facilities for customers.
- 1992:** William Hill open betting shops at Wembley Stadium and are appointed Official Bookmakers to the Rugby Union World Cup.
- 1993:** The evening opening of betting shops became legal and William Hill were the first and only company to open ALL their branches for evening trade.
- 1994:** World Cup becomes biggest betting event of all time. It became legal to accept football pools coupons in betting shops.
- 1995:** January 1st: It became legal to open betting shops on a Sunday. A wider range of refreshments, including sandwiches and snacks were permitted. There was no longer any limit imposed the size
- 1996:** Frankie Dettori rides all seven winners at Ascot's Festival of British Racing. The accumulative odds were 25,095/1 and cost the betting industry a payout of over £50m
- 1997:** It became legal for the location of betting shops to be advertised in newspapers/telephone directories.
- 1998:** May: William Hill (Isle of Man) opened. Company commenced accepting bets on the internet for non-UK residents. World Cup produced record turnover of £40m.
- 1999:** February: William Hill's proposed stock market float was abandoned when the company was sold to Cinven and CVC Partners for a reported £825 million.
- 2000:** January: William Hill launch off-shore telephone betting service. A call centre in Athlone, Republic of Ireland takes calls from punters and passes them on for

- acceptance to the William Hill International bookmaking company in Antigua. Deductions of just 3% are levied.
- 2001:** March: Chancellor Gordon Brown announced abolition of betting duty from January 1st, 2002. Imposing instead, Gross Profits Tax on bookmakers. Hills remove deductions from off-shore telephone bets and make a 'killing' by betting on 'Who Shot Phil Mitchell' - a character from popular TV soap, Eastenders.
- 2002:** William Hill floats on the London Stock Exchange on 20 June. The offer is more than 10 times oversubscribed
- 2004:** A £500 JACKPOT payout for Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) was implemented on 31st March
- 2005:** William Hill purchases Stanley Leisure PLC's retail bookmaking operations, adding around 500 shops to the estate and, as a result, becoming the UK's number one bookmaker
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- 2008:** William Hill combines its existing online business with assets purchased from software company Playtech to create William Hill Online, one of Europe's leading online sports-betting and gaming businesses.
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