LEICESTER CITY LANDLORDS

Throughout the history of the professional game, players have faced the problem of what to do when they hang up their boots. Many Leicester Fosse and Leicester City players took over pubs, several of which have now disappeared. This season we will be rediscovering and revisiting these 'Players' Pubs' and uncovering the stories about them and about the landlords who ran them.

The Player. Billy Bannister

Before he signed for Leicester Fosse in 1904, Billy Bannister had played at centre-half for Burnley, Bolton Wanderers, Woolwich Arsenal and England. He was one of the Fossils best ever players. He hardly missed a game for the Fosse for five years, captaining the team to promotion to the top flight in 1908.

The 'Fosse Football Album' of 1906 described him as "one of the most popular players to have donned Fosse colours. The Club has never had a more earnest or loyal player. He is always a favourite with the crowd. The club will never have a more reliable or steady centre-half".

The Aston Villa programme notes for their game against Leicester Fosse in 1908 described Billy as a man who enjoyed "larking about" stating that he was "a practical joker, found guilty of many offences!"

The Club minutes indicate that Billy was granted a benefit match in 1909. With this money, and bearing in mind his personality, it perhaps is not surprising he became a publican when he finally retired in 1913.

The Pub: The Woolcombers Arms

Billy started in the licensed trade at 24/26 Welford Road in premises which later became the Royal Oak. By 1936 he was listed as landlord of the Woolcombers Arms at 54/56 Lower Churchgate.

Lower Churchgate was demolished in the 1960s to make way for St Margaret's Way. The site of the pub is on what is now St Margaret's Way, near to where it crosses the canal, on the opposite side of the road from St Margaret's Pastures.

Lower Churchgate was a thriving area with many small businesses. These included an insurance broker, a leather agent, a jewellers, a mattress manufacturer, a plumber, a draper, a grocer, a Castles Motor Garage, a wireless dealer and an upholsterer. There were also three undertakers and, usefully for Billy, there was an ale and stout bottle maker close by. There was also an Adult School nearby and some hosiery factories. Almost directly opposite the pub was a timber yard with a wharf alongside the canal.

All this was good for trade, as was the fact that people walking to St Margaret's Pastures and to the adjacent Abbey Park would have walked past Billy's pub, bringing in even more customers.

Billy was still landlord when he died in 1942, aged 63.