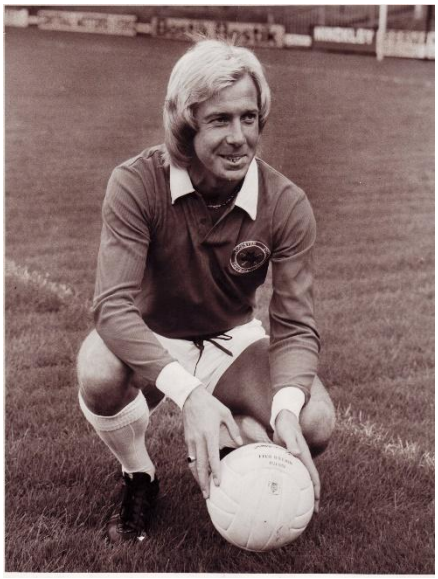
LEICESTER CITY LANDLORDS

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: Alan Birchenall



Birch needs little introduction to Leicester City fans. Along with Arsenal's Jon Sammels and Chelsea's Keith Weller he was one of a trio of high profile transfers brought to the Club by Jimmy Bloomfield when he was signed from Crystal Palace in September 1971.

An England Under-23 international, Birch arrived at Leicester with a big reputation having already played at the top level for Sheffield United, Chelsea and Crystal Palace. Between 1971 and 1977, he was central to the entertaining sides of the Bloomfield era which contained such players as Jon Sammels, Lenny Glover and England internationals Keith Weller, Peter Shilton, Frank Worthington and Steve Whitworth.

When his playing career ended, Birch became famous for his annual charity runs which raised over £850000 and which inspired the Foxes Foundation which has now passed the million pound mark in raising money for Charity. He was awarded the MBE for his charity work in 2003. He became an Honorary Freeman of Leicester in 2009 and was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Law at Leicester University in 2011. He is currently the Club Ambassador-for- Life.

The Pub: The Griffin, Swithland

When the opportunity came up to take over Griffin at Swithland, Birch was attracted to the idea of being 'mine host' despite being advised against this. He therefore became the landlord of what was a quintessential country pub in a beautiful part of Leicestershire near Swithland Reservoir and on the edge of Charnwood Forest.

At the time, Birch was already the director of a footwear company and doing a lot of PR work for Leicester City FC, and in retrospect, he feels taking over the Griffin was a mistake as there were not enough hours in the day to do these three jobs.

At the official opening of Birch's pub, Martin O'Neill pulled the first pint. This was during his first few weeks as manager at Filbert Street, when the team was doing badly. This led Martin to observe on the evening that pulling the first pint would probably be his last task as Leicester's manager! Fortunately, this wasn't the case!

Birch's Wednesday Quiz Nights at the Griffin were legendary. They would always attract a full house. The banter flowed as well as the drink and Birch developed the habit of red-carding the clientele, and sending them outside for five minutes, whatever the weather!

Eventually, after seven years Birch gave up the Griffin and concentrated on his work at the Football Club.