Leicester City Locations

There are many locations in Leicester and Leicestershire which have been very significant in the history of Leicester Fosse and Leicester City.

Some of the buildings have long gone, some have changed and some are still with us.

Club Historian John Hutchinson's new series revisits each of these sites and tells the story behind them.

12. The Freemen's Hotel

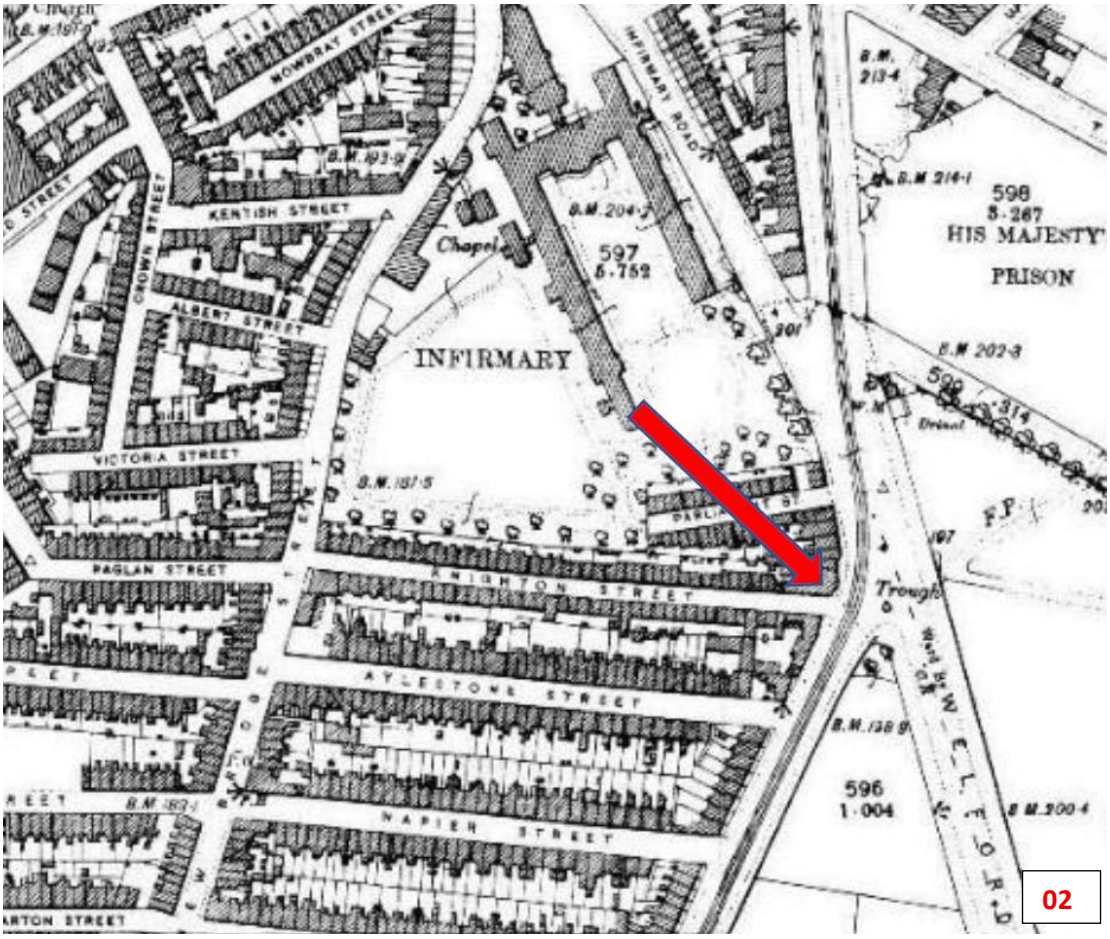
In 1892, Leicester Fosse moved their headquarters from the East Gate Coffee house to the Freemen's Hotel on Aylestone Road which was much nearer to their new ground at Filbert Street.

The Freemen's Hotel Picturetured here in 1893 **(Picture 01)** was built in 1883 to cater for 'farmers, cattle dealers and others' who frequented the nearby cattle market.

Now demolished, it stood for many years on the opposite side of Aylestone Road from the Tigers' ground. **(Pictures 02 & 03)**

Over the years this hotel has also been known as The Freemen's Arms, The Freemans, the Physio and Firkin and the Pride of Leicester **(Picture 04).** It was then auctioned in 2005 as a non-licensed premises and later demolished to make way for hospital parking.

It was at this hotel that the Fosse Committee (**Picture 05)** made the key decisions which resulted in the Club's elevation from the Midland League to the Football League in 1894.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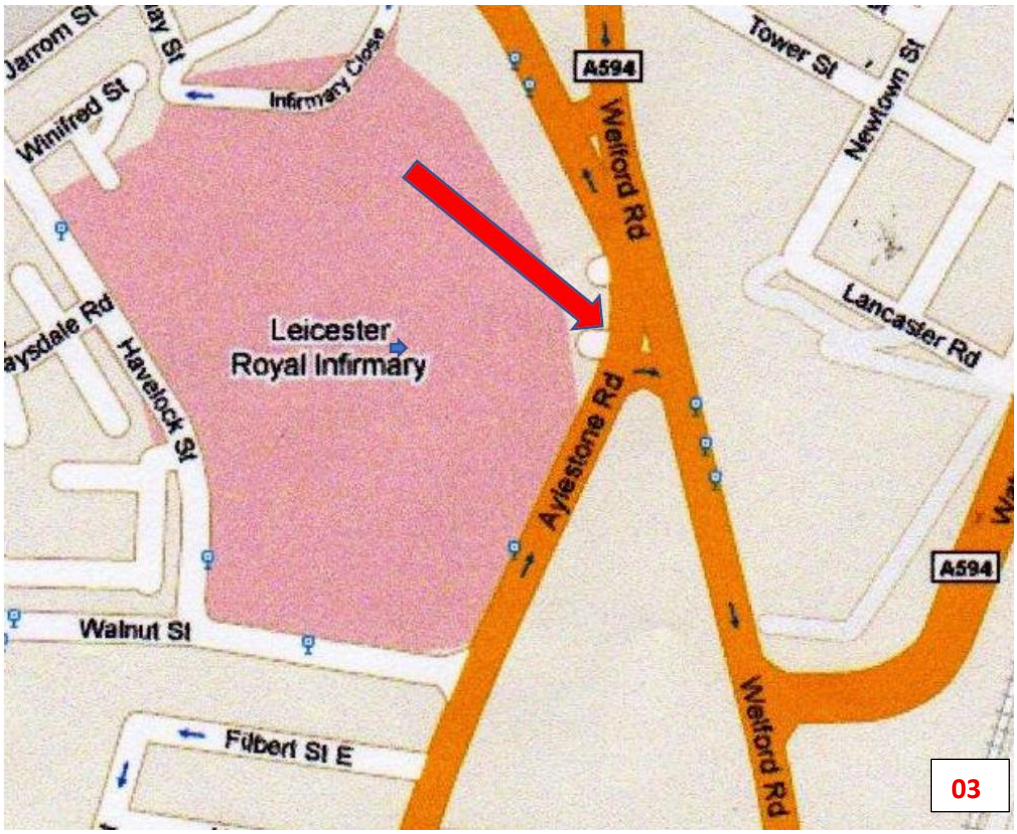
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Filbert St E
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Welford Rd
03

04

LEICESTER FOSSE F.C. SPORTS COMMITTEE, 1894.

THIS PHOTOGRAPH WAS TAKEN AT THE OLD COUNTY GROUND, AYLESTONE.

05

Amongst those included in the Group are (left to right)—Messrs. J. A. Hartopp, G. H. Geeson, F. W. Green, A. W. Staines, H. Chitham, A. T. Porter J. J. Curtis, J. Lee, W. J. Brierley, W. G. Jones, W. A. Wilbourne and H. Simpson.

The immediate problem facing the Committee in their meetings at Freemen's Hotel in 1892/93 was to elect a new secretary and a new treasurer to replace Club stalwarts Joseph Johnson and Frank Gardner. One of the first tasks of the new secretary, E.Marsden, was to draw up the season's fixture list. One of his priorities was to ensure that the Fosse fixtures didn't clash with those of Leicester Tigers.

Another issue was to attract some better players to the Club. The previous season, their first in the Midland League, Leicester Fosse had finished bottom of the table.

Consequently, in the summer of 1892, the Club made two key signings to add to the ten professionals then on the books. These were goalkeeper Jimmy Thraves who had been Notts County's goalkeeper in the 1891 FA Cup Final and left winger Billy Dorrell who was signed from Coventry Singers, the forerunners of Coventry City.

The Committee's third issue was to compete for support with Leicester Tigers, whose impressive new ground had just opened and was directly opposite the Freemen's Hotel.

Improved results between 1892 and 1894 did see the Fosse's gates increasing to an average of between 3,000-5,000. In 1892/93, despite Leicester being in the grip of a smallpox epidemic and with the population also suffering from outbreaks of scarlet fever and typhoid, a Filbert Street crowd of 13,000 watched the match against Loughborough Town. In 1893/94 a Filbert Street gate of 12,000 watched an FA Cup tie against Derby County. In view of these increased gates, a decision was also taken at Freemen's Hotel to extend Filbert Street's covered Main Stand, to accommodate 1,500 spectators.

Leicester Fosse finished 4th in the Midland League at the end of the Club's first season at their new headquarters.

In the 1893 close season, the Committee received a late and unexpected invitation to join the recently established Second Division of the Football League to replace Bootle who had just dropped out. After much deliberation at Freemen's Hotel, the Committee reluctantly declined the invitation because of the commitments they had already made to the Midland League for the following season.

Despite this decision, the Committee's aim was to be elected to the Football League at the end of the 1893/94 season. To this end, fixtures were arranged against some of Britain's best sides, namely West Bromwich Albion, Sheffield United, Notts County and Glasgow Rangers. The idea was to raise playing standards and to increase the national profile of the Club.

Towards the end of the 1893/94 season, when the Fosse team Pictured here with the Committee **(Picture 06)** finished runners-up in the Midland League, a Committee meeting at Freemen's Hotel took the momentous and historic decision to apply for membership of the Second Division of the Football League.

There were five vacancies. Three teams had dropped out, one had to be re-elected and the Division was one side short as the Fosse had refused to join the division during the previous close season.

Leicester Fosse's application was successful. The Club entered the Football League along with Manchester City, Burton Wanderers, Bury and the re-elected Rotherham Town.

The Club has been a member of the Football League and its successor the Premier League ever since. It is doubtful whether the thousands of people who passed the old Freemen's Hotel on their

way to Filbert Street ever realised what an important part this location had played in Leicester City's history.

.....J.A.Hartop. J.Lee. J.Curtis.
W.G.Jones. W.Cooper. W.Brown. Geo.Smith. J.Thraves. Hy.Bailey. ?..... F..shwell. ..rter. T.Seddon
C.W.Kilby. E.A.Marson.(Hon.Sec).J.Hughes.J.Brown.W.McArthur.A.Henrys.J.Lord. F.Gardner.
J.Hill. ..... W.Miller. W.Dorrell.
LEICESTER FOSSE 1st Team and COMMITTEE. 1895-6.