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.

The Harrison Road factory

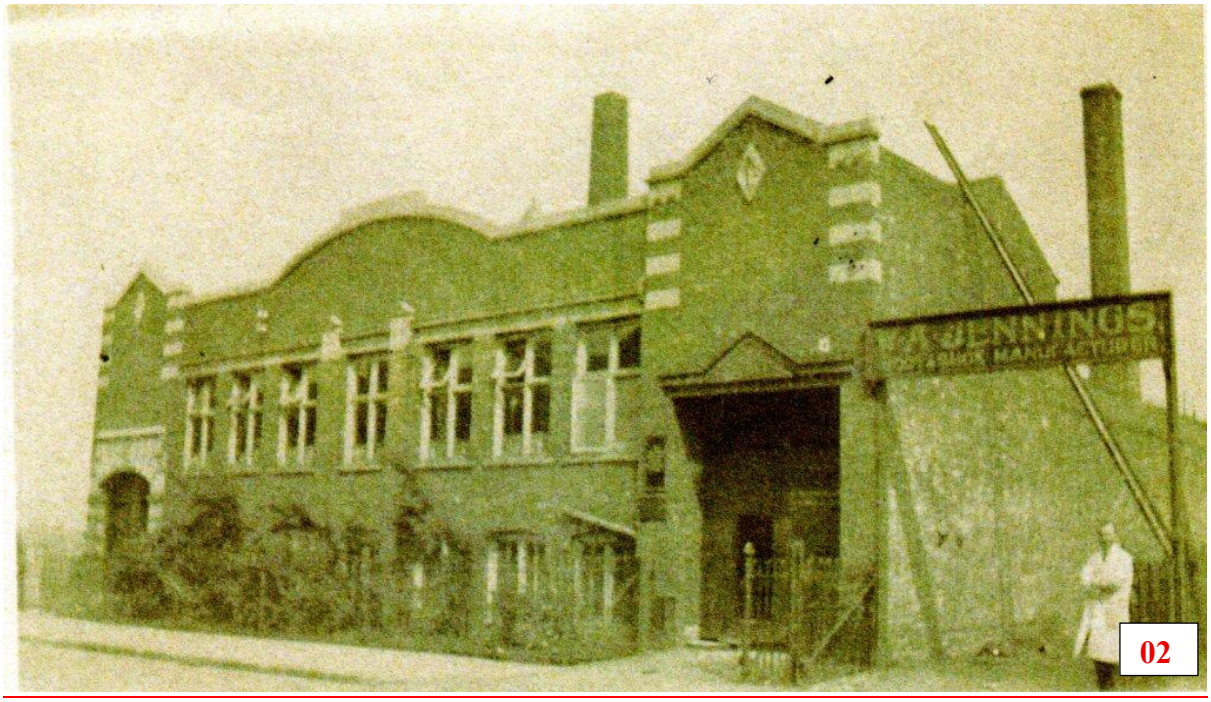
The state of a modest and totally unremarkable building **(Picture 01)** on Harrison Road gives no hint that, in its grander state, just over 100 years ago, **(Picture 02)** it was an absolutely central to the story of Leicester City Football Club.

This was because its owner, William Archibald Jennings, was one of the local industrialists who injected a considerable amount of cash to enable Leicester City Football Club to emerge, like a phoenix, from the ruins of Leicester Fosse in the summer of 1919.

Without this capital the football club which had been Leicester Fosse would not have survived in its reincarnation as Leicester City. The club would have disappeared.

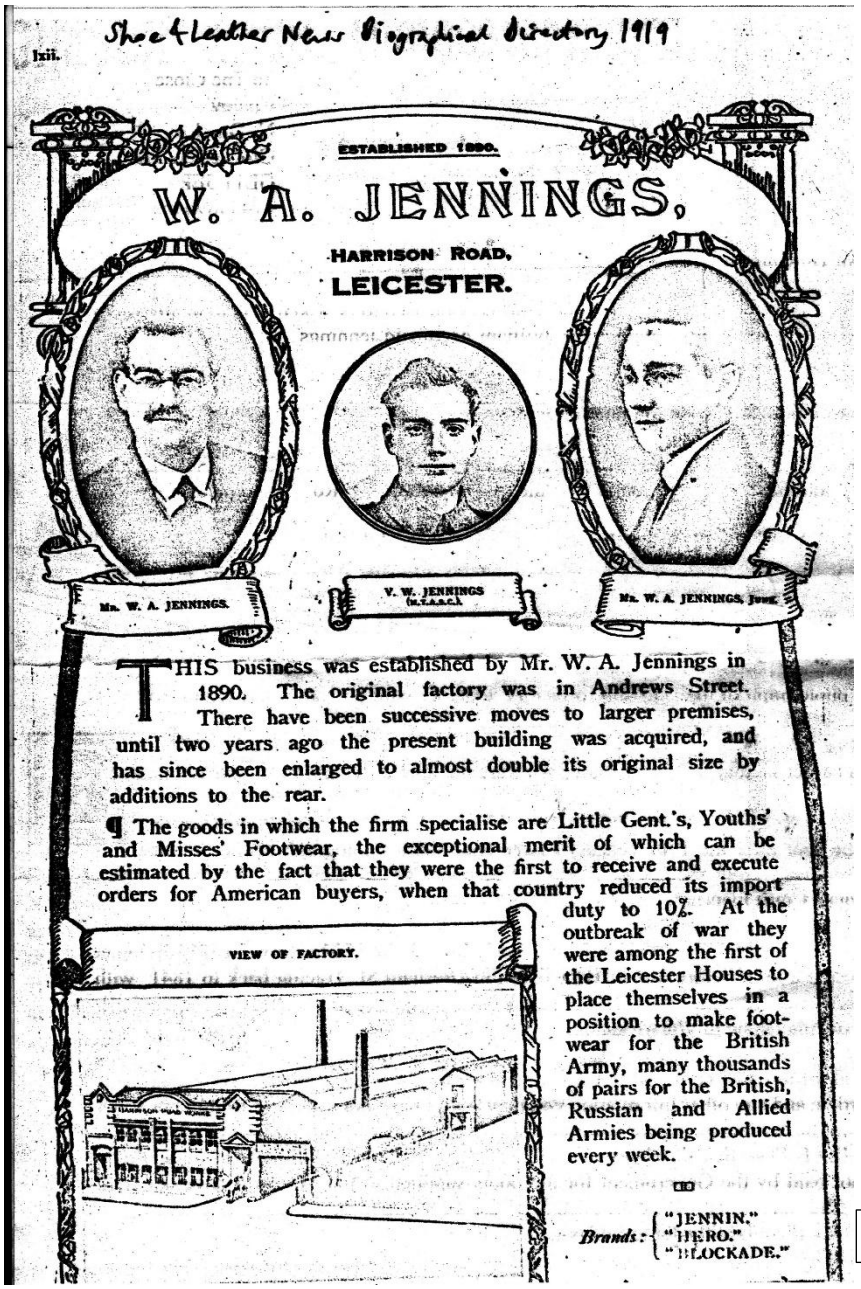
It is regrettable that his absolutely central role in establishing Leicester City Football Club a century ago has, until comparatively recently, been almost completely forgotten.

William Jennings made his money in the boot and shoe industry which was massive in Leicester in the early 20th century, employing over 25,000 workers.



Based in the Belgrave area of Leicester, Jennings was only 18 when he established his original factory in 1890. As his business expanded he moved to a factory in Birstall Street (near Dysart Way) in 1894 and then to Moores Road**, (Picture 03),** off Melton Road, before the First World War.

On the outbreak of war in 1914, Jennings' factory was one of the first in Leicester to make footwear for the British Army, and later for the Russian and other Allied armies, developing brands such as 'Jennin' 'Hero' and 'Blockade'.



Shoe & Leather News Biographical Directory 1919

lxii.

ESTABLISHED 1890.

W. A. JENNINGS,

HARRISON ROAD,
LEICESTER.

Mr. W. A. JENNINGS.

W. W. JENNINGS (M.F.A.A.C.).

Mr. W. A. JENNINGS, Junr.

THIS business was established by Mr. W. A. Jennings in 1890. The original factory was in Andrews Street. There have been successive moves to larger premises, until two years ago the present building was acquired, and has since been enlarged to almost double its original size by additions to the rear.

¶ The goods in which the firm specialise are Little Gent.'s, Youths' and Misses' Footwear, the exceptional merit of which can be estimated by the fact that they were the first to receive and execute orders for American buyers, when that country reduced its import duty to 10%. At the outbreak of war they were among the first of the Leicester Houses to place themselves in a position to make footwear for the British Army, many thousands of pairs for the British, Russian and Allied Armies being produced every week.

VIEW OF FACTORY.

Brands: "JENNIN." "HERO." "BLOCKADE."

In 1917 he moved to a new purpose-built large factory in Harrison Road, which is also in the Melton Road area. The size of his factory can be seen in this pen drawing which appeared on a page of 'The Shoe and Leather News' published in 1919 **(Picture 04).** He had a large work force **(Picture 05**). Jennings is in the centre-right of the Picture, on the front row, wearing a white coat.

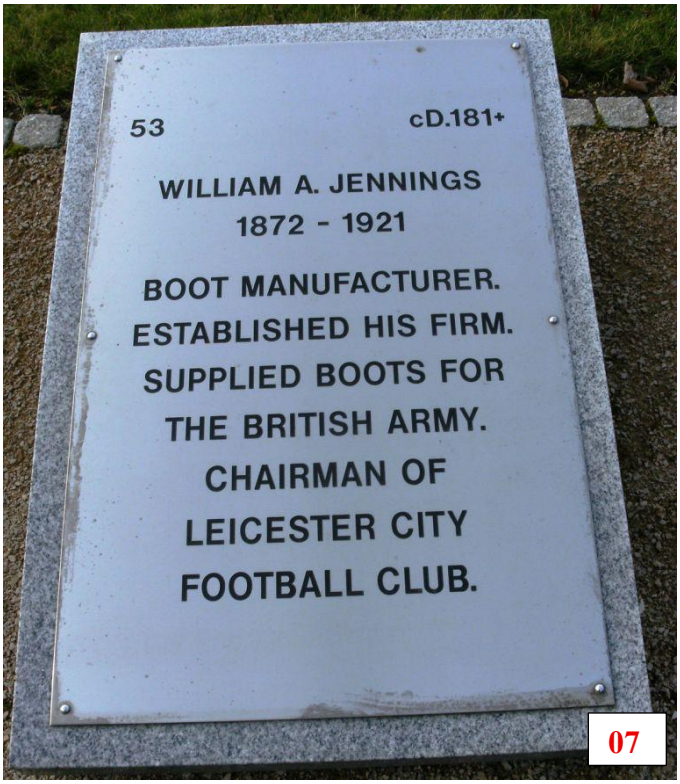
By the end of the War, Jennings was an extremely wealthy man. He went on to specialize in children's shoes, developing brands named 'Little Gents', 'Youths' and 'Misses' Footwear'. When the USA reduced its import duty to 10% he made big inroads into the American market.

05

06

His homes in Leicester reflected his growing wealth and status. As a boy, the son of a factory worker, he had lived in modest terraced houses on streets off the Belgrave Road such as 46 Westbourne Street. Once he was established in business he graduated to a very large house at 27, Loughborough Road before moving to an even larger house on Stoneygate Avenue called Ivanhoe **(Picture 06).** In 1919, at the time he was helping to recreate Leicester City Football Club, he purchased a magnificent house in Stoneygate called The Shrubbery which was featured in the CITY edition for the Brighton and Hove Albion game.

Jennings' crucial role in establishing Leicester City Football Club was recognized when he became the Club's first Chairman in August 1919. Jennings was at the height of his wealth, power and influence, but he died the following year at the age of 49. Six Leicester City players carried his coffin to his grave at Welford Road cemetery.



In 2005, William Jennings was chosen as one of the 100 most notable citizens of Leicester to be buried at the cemetery. Memorial plaques have been erected in a specially designated area in their memory. William's plaque is number 53. **(Picture 07)**

The role played by William Jennings in the re-creation and survival of Leicester City Football Club was crucial.

The ex-Fosse directors who joined the new board also played their part. They were William Squires, Louis Burridge, Henry Collins, Carter Crossland, Harry Linney and Montague John Rice. (Rice, who became Chairman after the death of William Jennings, is the man behind the locally famous Rice Bowl trophy which was donated to the Leicestershire Schools FA and which has been competed for by local Primary Schools annually ever since). In addition, there were some other new investors. These included Arthur Needham, William Tompkins, and Dick Pudan an ex-player. Research is currently underway uncovering the stories of these men.