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.

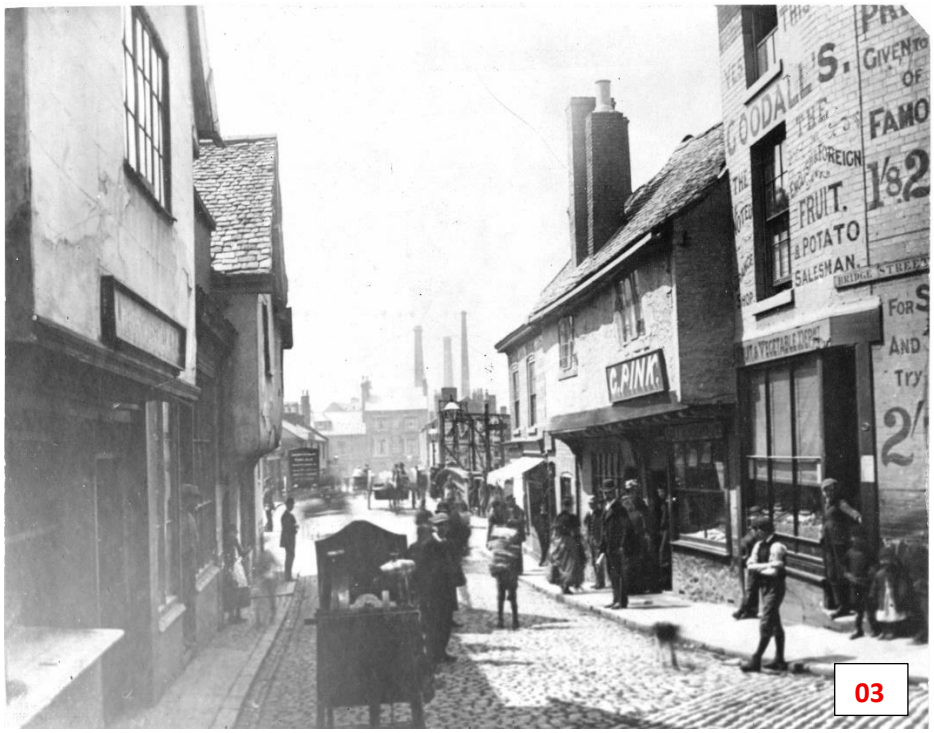
10. The West Bridge and East Gate Coffee Houses

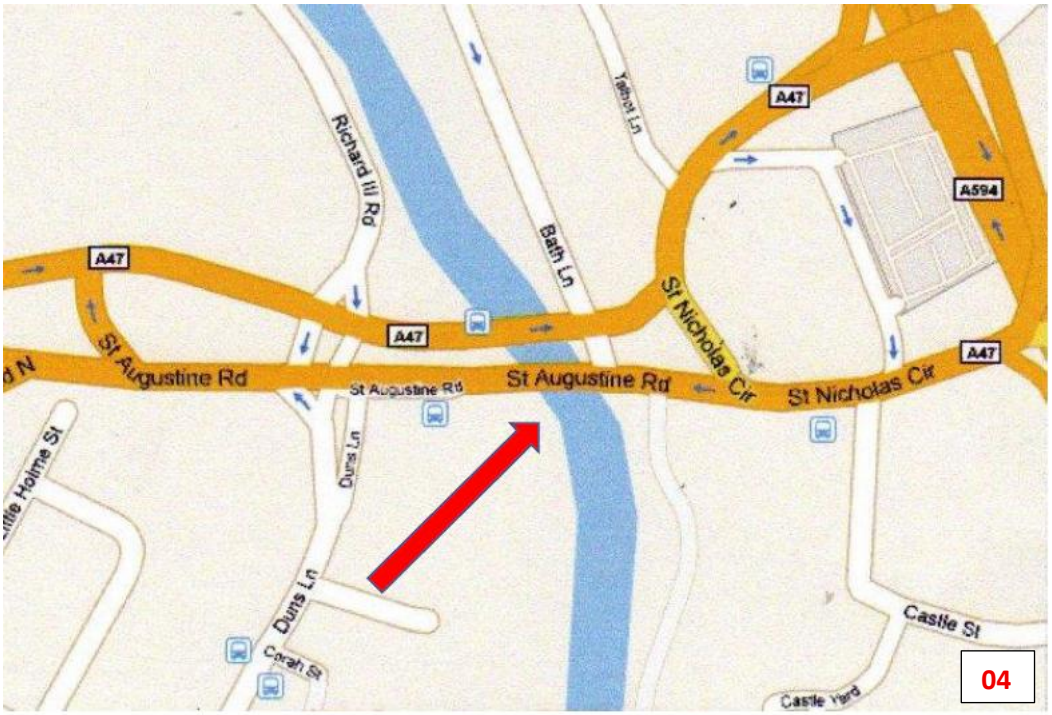
For their first three seasons, (1884/85, 1885/86 and 1886/87) whilst still playing their home matches on Victoria Park, Leicester Fosse's headquarters were at the West Bridge Coffee House.

In their fourth season, when the Fossils played their home games at the Belgrave Road Grounds they switched their headquarters to the East Gate Coffee house near the clock tower in the centre of the town. The West Bridge and East Gate Coffee Houses were just two of fifteen coffee houses in Leicester at the time. Eight of these establishments belonged to the 'Leicester Coffee and Cocoa House Company.'

Founded in 1877, seven years before the foundation of Leicester Fosse, the Company's aim was to promote temperance and to counter 'dissipation and wickedness' by providing 'a place where the working man could meet with friends, talk, smoke, play games, with good coffee and tea taking the place of beer and gin.' One of the founders of the coffee house movement, which was a significant feature in late Victorian Leicester, was Edward Shipley Ellis who had done much to promote the educational system at Wyggeston School where several of the young men who founded Leicester Fosse had been pupils.

The West Bridge Coffee House was situated on West Bridge Street (**Picture 01).** This was on the west side of the old West Bridge which was replaced by the existing West Bridge over the canal in 1893 **(Picture 02).** In this photograph taken in the 1880s, **(Picture 03)** the location of the Fosse's first headquarters is on the left hand side in the distance. West Bridge Street has long since gone. On the site today **(Picture 04)** stands the old Pex factory which has been converted into West Bridge Place and which now houses the Land Registry. **(Picture 05)**





In 1887, Leicester Fosse moved to their second headquarters. This was at the East Gate Coffee House in the centre of Leicester at the junction between Churchgate and Eastgates.

This was one of the jewels in the crown of the Leicester Coffee and Cocoa House Company. Opened by the Duchess of Rutland in 1885, it was renowned for its 'airiness, brightness and comfort' and admired for its internal and external architecture. The records show that the Fosse's AGM that year was held at this establishment. Recently renovated, the building, after several other uses, has now reverted to something close to its original purpose of selling coffee **(Picture 06).**

In 1887, it was recorded that because there were no changing facilities at their new home ground on Belgrave Road, 'the teams had to dress at the White Hart over a mile away.' At that time, there were two White Harts located about a mile from the ground. One was on the old Wharf Street near the present Kamloops Crescent on St Matthews Estate.

The other one was the much larger White Hart Hotel in Belgrave Gate Pictured here in the 1960s **(Picture 07)** shortly before it was demolished to make way for the Haymarket Shopping Centre

(Picture 08). As this was on the opposite side of the road from the East Gate Coffee House, it is highly likely that this is the White Hart used by the Fossils to get changed during their one season at the Belgrave Road Grounds in 1887/88.

Leicester Fosse didn't stay long at the East Gate Coffee House. By 1891, they had moved their headquarters again, this time to the Victoria Hotel on London Road (now Granby Street).