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.

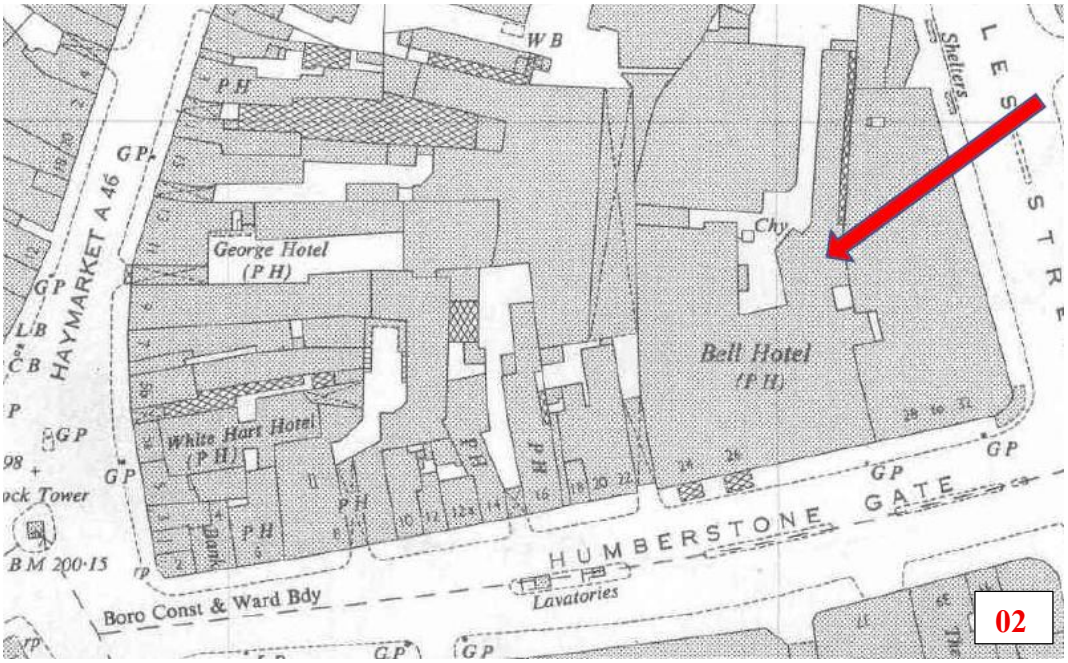
The Bell Hotel, Humberstone Gate

For many years, the Bell Hotel **(Picture 1)** had been a popular venue for dinner dances, parties and weddings. Built as a coaching inn in the 18th century, it was a masterpiece of Georgian architecture.

It was located in Humberstone Gate **(Picture 2),** pictured here in the 1940s **(Picture 3).** By that time, the Hotel was next door to Lea's department store, with its distinctive landmark clock, and opposite the original Lewis's department store building with its still existing Art Deco tower.

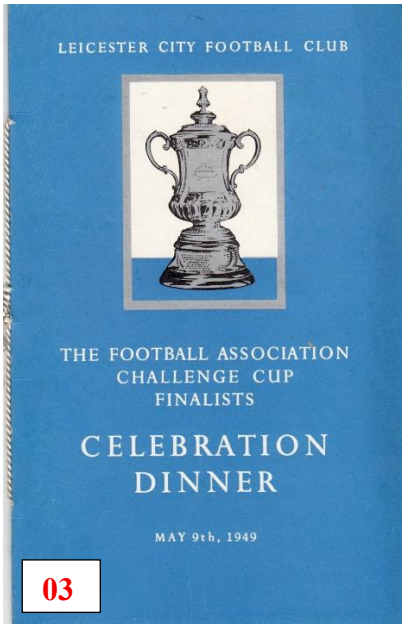
On 9 May 1949 a Celebration Dinner was held at the Bell Hotel to honour Leicester City's achievement in reaching their first ever FA Cup Final on 30 April 1949.

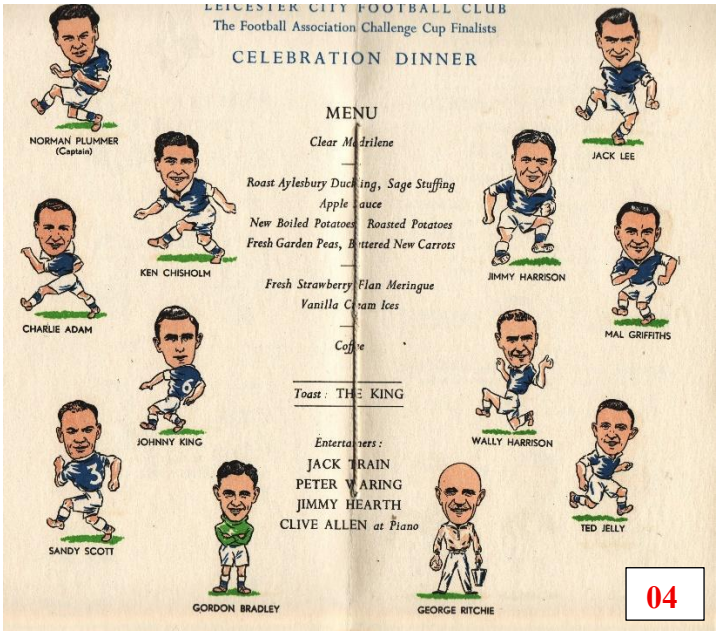
The nine days between the Final and the dinner at the Bell Hotel had been frenetic.



The Cup final defeat was followed by a banquet in London that Saturday evening. Two days later there was an open top bus tour and a civic reception in Leicester. This was followed by three vital games in five days to fight off relegation to the Third Division. These were on Tuesday at Bury, on Wednesday at home against West Bromwich Albion and on Saturday at Cardiff City. It was only a late equalizer at Cardiff in the last game of the season at that prevented relegation.

The Club's archives contain a copy of the menu booklet for this dinner **(Picture 3)**.





The items on the menu reflected the austerity of the post war years. Clear madrilene soup consisted of chicken and beef broth, canned tomatoes, carrots and onions. This preceded the main course of roast duck, apple sauce, potatoes and peas. The dessert was strawberry flan meringue, ice cream and coffee.

The entertainment was opened by Jack Train, who was a comic actor who had appeared on Tommy Handley's iconic wartime and post-war radio comic show, 'It's that Man Again.' (more commonly known as ITMA). The pianist was Clive Allen, a well-known entertainer who had worked with the music hall legend Max Miller.

Surrounding the menu are caricatures of the Cup Final team and their trainer, the ex-Leicester City star George Ritchie who had made over 250 appearances for the Club and who had been a teammate of the Cup Final manager Johnny Duncan twenty years earlier in the side which finished runners-up in the old First Division.

These caricatures had also appeared on the headscarves gifted to the Players' and Directors' wives for the Cup Final, several examples of which we also have in the Club's heritage collection.

Elsewhere in the menu booklet are some other caricatures, in the same style. These are of the directors and back room staff together with Don Revie and Ian McGraw who both missed the final through injury, and long serving players Willie Frame and Sep Smith.

The only known photograph of the Celebration Dinner at the Bell Hotel shows the 225 guests, all of whom were male **(Picture 5).** Close examination of the Picture reveals that the players are on Tables E and F. The top table runs along the wall on the left of the Picture. Manager Johnny Duncan (whose daughter Jenny provided us with this photo) is fifth from the right on this top table.

Despite widespread public opposition, the Bell Hotel was demolished in August 1970 (**Picture 6)** to make way for the second phase of the new Haymarket Shopping Centre.

Today, Humberstone Gate is pedestrianised. Modern shops stand on the site of the Bell Hotel **(Picture 7),** which had been one of Leicester's architectural gems as well as being the venue for a landmark event in the Club's history 73 years ago this month.