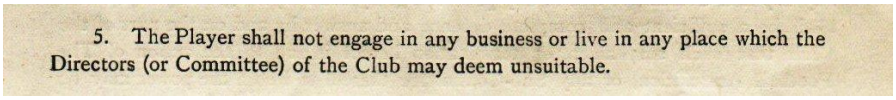
Leicester City Landlords

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: Johnny Duncan

Scottish international Johnny Duncan captained Leicester City to the 1925 Second Division title. He was also captain when the Club came to within a point of winning the League Title in 1929. In 1930 he took over the Turk's Head, opposite the main gates of Leicester prison, even though Leicester City refused him permission to do this. It quickly became Leicester's main sports pub. This effectively ended his playing career as the Club refused him permission to play anywhere else. He returned as Leicester City's manager from 1946-49, taking them to their first ever FA Cup Final in 1949. He remained as landlord of the pub until his death in 1966.

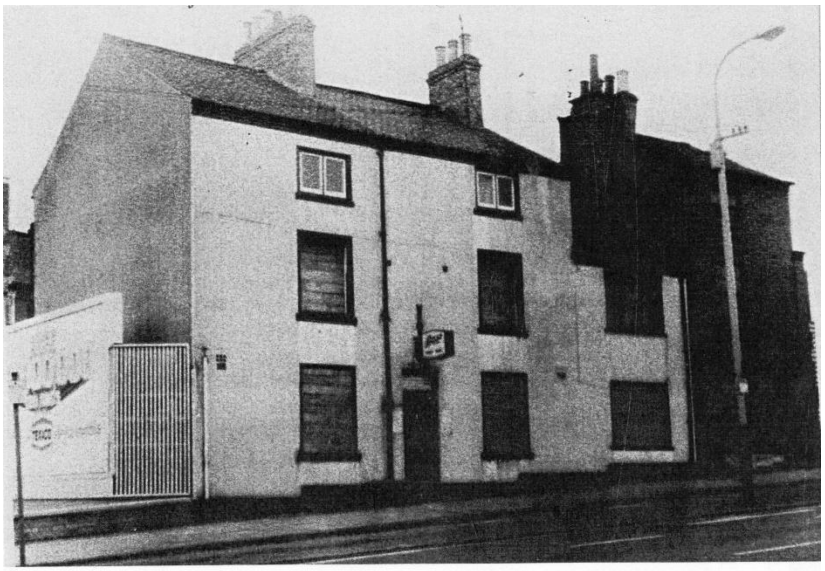


5. The Player shall not engage in any business or live in any place which the Directors (or Committee) of the Club may deem unsuitable.

The clause in Johnny's contract which the Club invoked in an attempt to prevent him from taking over the Turk's Head.

The Pub: The Turk's Head

When Johnny was the landlord of this 18th century pub, it had a central bar, two smoke rooms and a tap room.



For years, framed pictures of Johnny's football career were displayed in the tap room and front smoke room. Johnny's daughter Jenny Blackhurst, who lived at the pub and helped out in many capacities, remembered serving City, Tigers and County players, local bookies, and media people such as John Arlott, David Coleman and Jimmy Hill. She also remembered the Arsenal legend Alex James, (who made his Scottish international debut alongside his good friend Johnny) and Matt Busby drinking there. City directors, like Sid Needham and ex-players such as Arthur Chandler were also customers.

The tenancy was tied to Bass. Regulars had their own tankards and seats. The yard at the back had steps down to Infirmary Road. To the left of these steps were double doors through which barrels were rolled into the cellar along a passageway under the yard. Just inside the double doors was a space, originally for stagecoaches, where Johnny parked his car. During the war, the cellar had been used as an air raid shelter for customers during the nights when Leicester was bombed.

Sadly, Johnny died in May 1966 just before the Duncan family were due to leave the pub.

The pub itself was demolished in the 1970s. A multistorey carpark connected to Leicester Royal Infirmary now stands on the site.

Footnote.
Johnny Duncan's niece Elsie married Don Revie, a regular visitor to the pub, who was one of Leicester City's star players in the 1940s. Revie famously went on to manage Leeds United between 1961-1974 before going on to manage England between 1974 and 1977.