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 Shrubbery, Stoneygate

In 1919, William Archibald Jennings **(Picture 01)** became the first Chairman of Leicester City Football Club. which he had helped create from the old Leicester Fosse club. His money and expertise were crucial factors in this process.

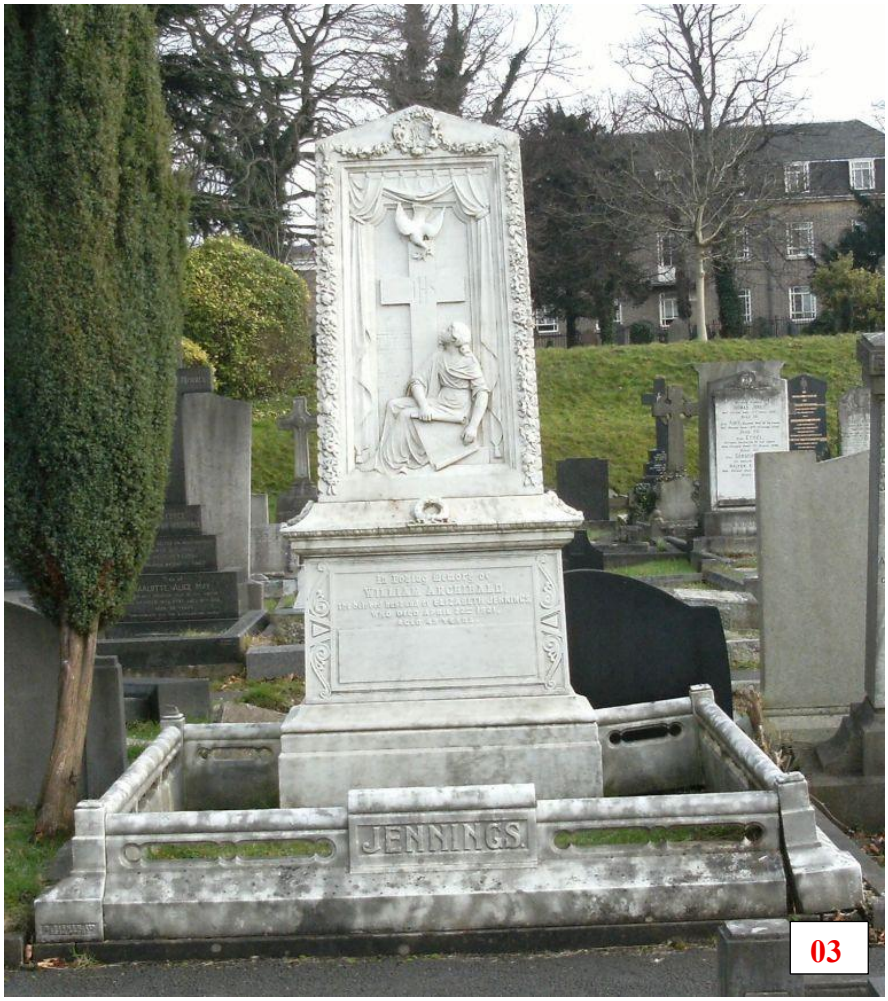
In the same year, he moved into The Shrubbery **(Picture 02)**, a magnificent house with extensive grounds in Stoneygate, on London Road, near to its junction with Clarendon Park Road.

Jennings had made a fortune in the Boot and Shoe industry. As a boy, the son of a factory worker, he had lived in modest terrace houses off the Belgrave Road, in Gresham Street (now demolished) and Westbourne Street.

Once he was established in business, he graduated to a large house on Loughborough Road He then moved to an even larger house on Stoneygate Avenue called Ivanhoe.

Finally in 1919 he took possession of The Shrubbery. Built in 1846, this house stood in over ten acres of grounds. The drive was lined by horse chestnut trees. The gardens were designed by Joseph Paxton who had created the stunning Crystal Palace for the 1851 Great Exhibition.

The highlight of Jennings' time as Leicester City's Chairman was probably on 21 February 1920, when he met King George V at Stamford Bridge for Leicester City's third round FA Cup tie against Chelsea. The King's visit was totally unexpected. He arrived in a motor car with his equerry just before the game began.

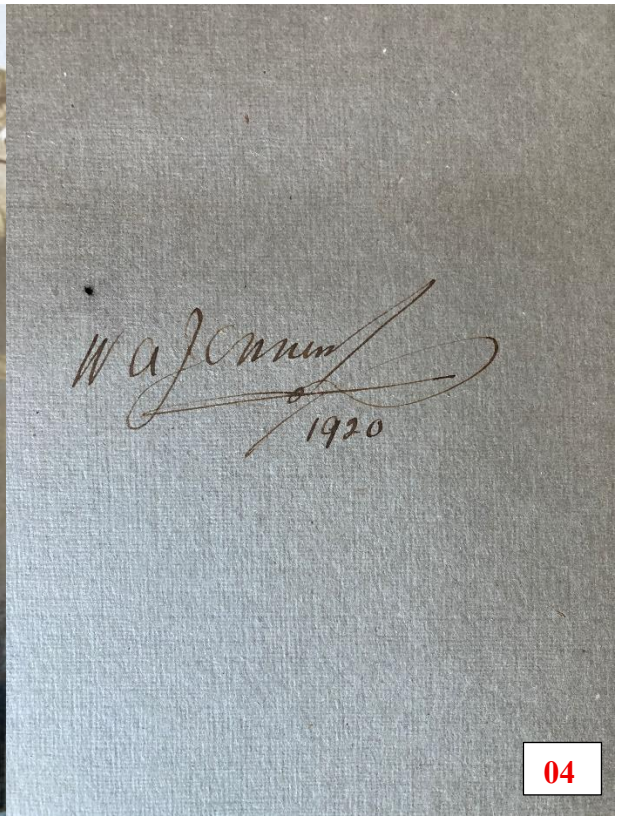


A year later, William died at the early age of 49. Six Leicester City players carried his coffin to Welford Road Cemetery. King Power Stadium is now within sight of his grave **(Picture 03).**

Over the years, the Club has been fortunate enough to have contact with some of William's descendants.

William's grand-daughter, Patricia Currin, from Gloucestershire, told us that on her first visit to the grave it was a match day and she could hear the muffled roar of the crowd drifting towards her.

In 2019, we were contacted by William's great grand-daughter Christine Grosse. She and her mother Ann had recently found a picture of William, which they then kindly donated to the Club. **(Picture 04)** Signed by William it depicted the famous occasion when he introduced King George V to the Leicester City team at Chelsea in 1920.



Christine and Ann also provided some pictures of the Shrubbery when William lived there. The external images indicate what a splendid building it was, surrounded by its own grounds with the horse chestnut trees lining the drive.

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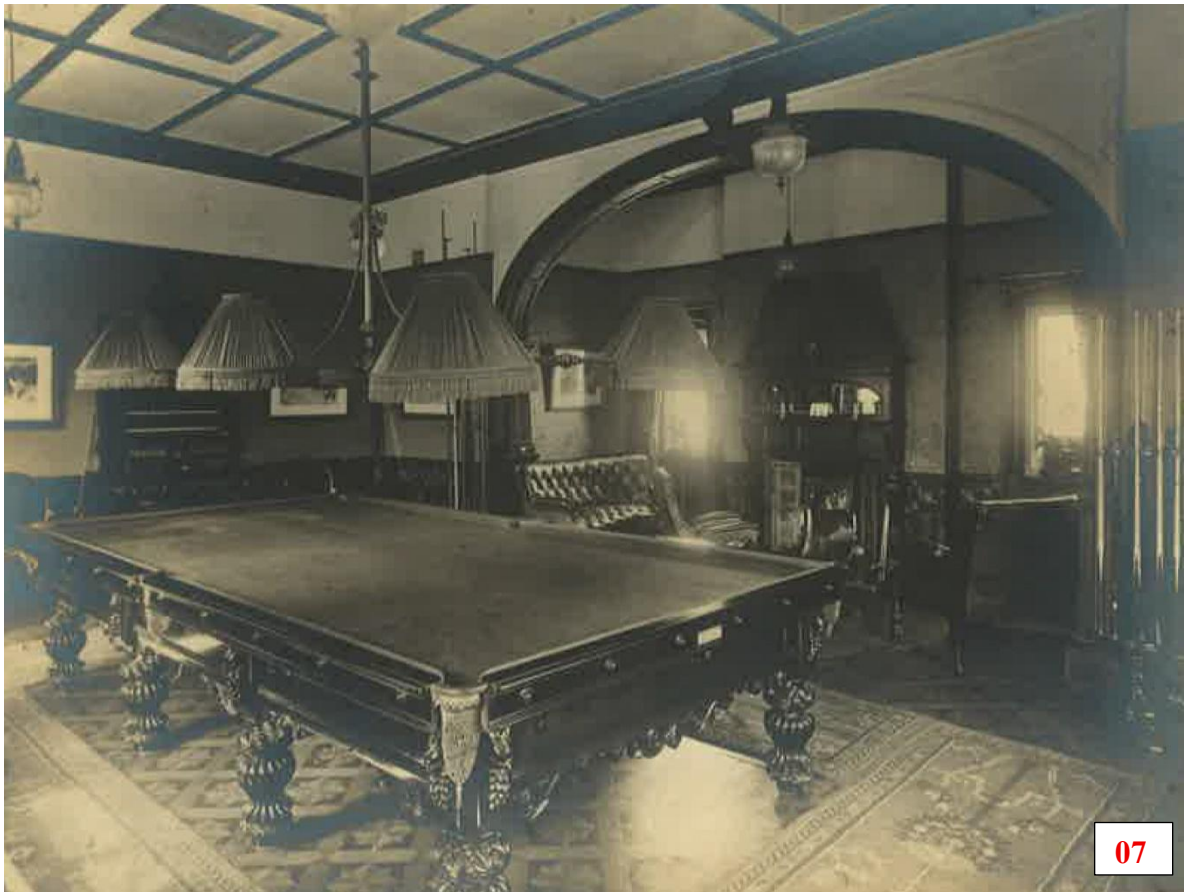

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These pictures provide a unique glimpse into the home life of Leicester City's Chairman just over one hundred years ago. The internal views include a magnificent dining room, **(Picture 05),** a well-appointed drawing room **(Picture 06)** and an impressive billiard room. **(Picture 07)**

Despite its magnificence, the Shrubbery was demolished in the mid 1930s, to make way for Stoneygate Court **(Picture 08)**, Leicester's first mansion block of superior self-contained flats built for people with high incomes. The development, which is still there today, was advertised as offering 'luxurious living with central heating, constant hot water, lifts, refrigerators fitted cupboards, labour saving devices, porters, and room for a domestic help.'

Few people who pass these flats today are aware that they stand on the site of the spectacularly impressive and sumptuous home of Leicester City's first Chairman, William Jennings who did so much to ease the transition from Leicester Fosse to Leicester City Football Club in 1919.