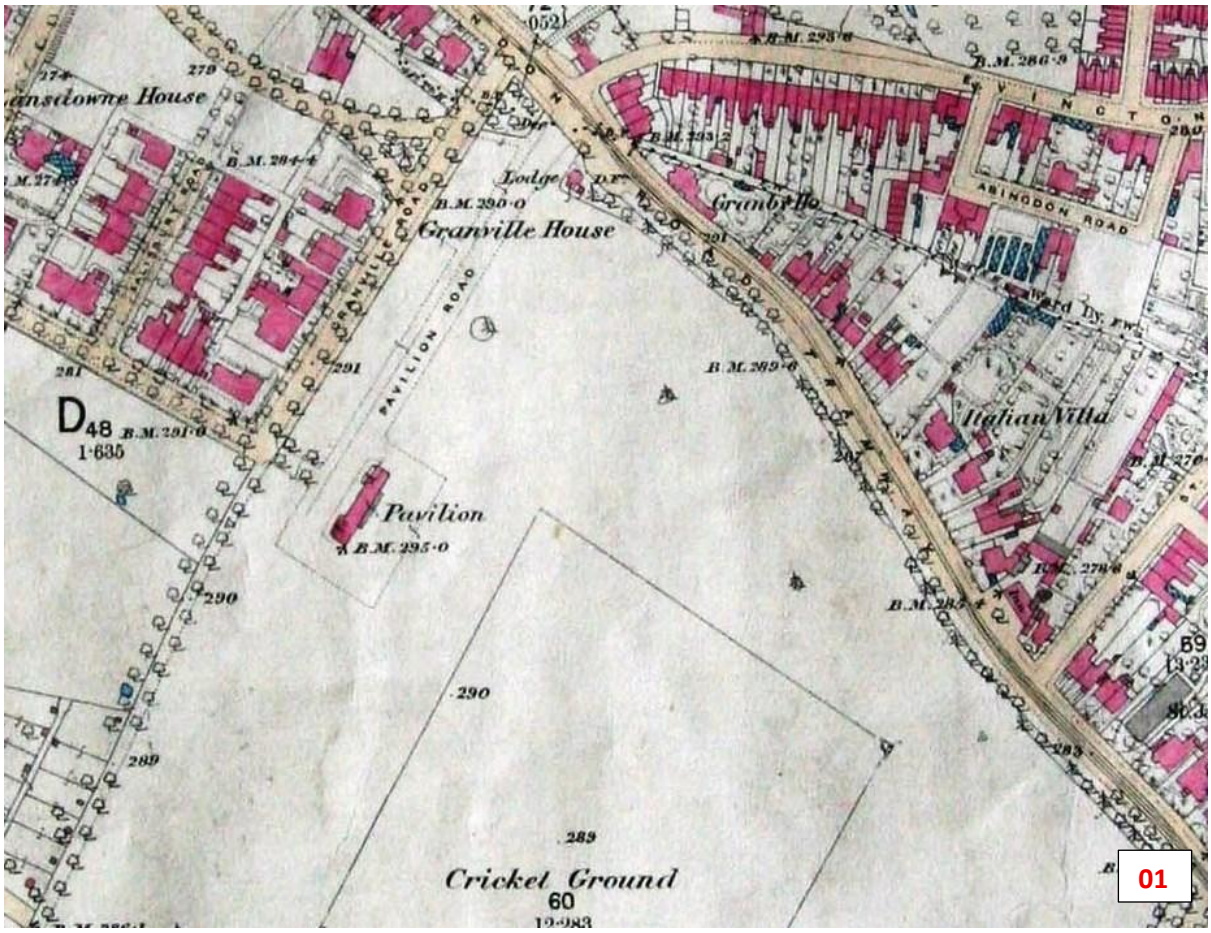
Leicester City Locations

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.

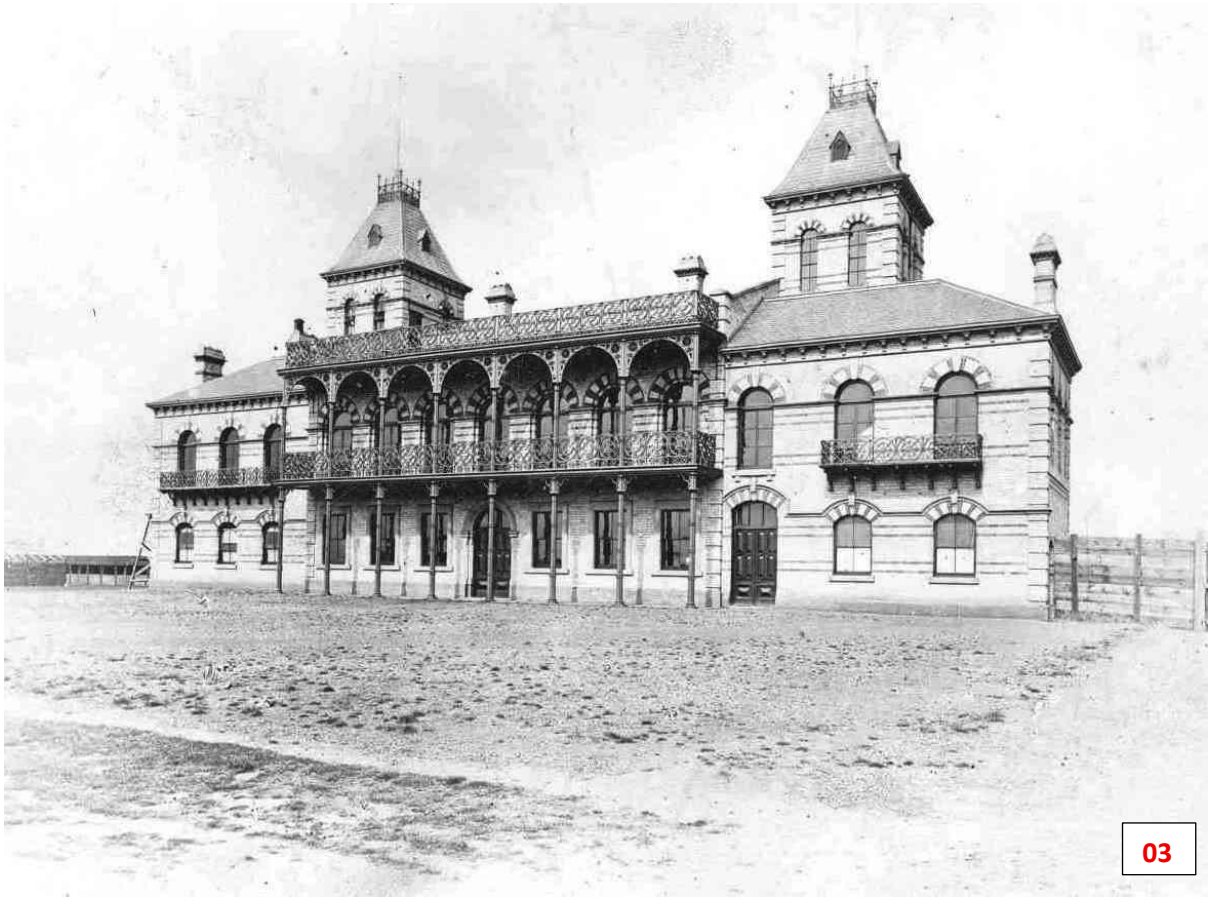
Club Historian John Hutchinson's new series revisits each of these sites and tells the story behind them.

07. Victoria Park



After playing their first ever game in a field off the Fosse Road on 1 November 1884, Leicester Fosse's home matches in the first three years of their existence, (1884/85, 1885/86 and 1886/87) were played on Victoria Park seen here on this 1888 map **(Picture 01)** . They also returned there for a fourth season (1888/89), after a year playing their home matches at the Belgrave Road Grounds.

Until 1883, Victoria Park had been Leicester's Racecourse before it moved to Oadby. Even today, large Victorian houses on London Road, adjacent to the park **(Picture 02),** still have viewing balconies on their upper floors which enabled the residents to watch the races.



From 1883 onwards Victoria Park's very impressive Italianate style Racecourse grandstand **(Picture 03),** which could hold 800 race-going spectators and which was sited near the top of Regent Road, became a changing pavilion for cricket, rugby union and football teams **(Picture 04)** including Leicester Fosse. It no longer stands as it was badly damaged in an air raid in November 1940. **(Picture 05)**

In 1884, there weren't many association football teams in Leicester. The most prominent were Leicester Town, Wyggeston School and Mill Hill House School.

In their first season, the Fossils played eight games on Victoria Park. They were all friendly fixtures against local opponents. However, very few people watched these matches, whilst up to 3,000 spectators, watching from behind ropes, would watch rugby union matches on adjacent pitches.

The Fossils' first game on the park was on 8 November 1884. It was against Wyggeston School where many of the Fosse side had been pupils. It was a 1-1 draw, played in a very strong wind.

The Fosse's home fixture list that first season was very limited. There were two matches against Wyggeston School, four games against Mill Hill House School, a game against the Melbourne Hall, (a church in Highfields which had been built in the shape of a lantern and which still stands today), two matches against St Mary's and a twelve-a-side game against Syston St Peters. The Fosse's home record in that first season was played 10, won 5, drew 3 and lost 2.

During their second season (1885/86) the Fossils' played nine fixtures on Victoria Park. They defeated Trinity Band of Hope 6-0 and Wyggeston School 4-1 in their first two matches. They lost their fourth match 1-0 against Mill Hill House School, whose side contained a 'sterling amateur' youngster called Ernest Nuttall **(Picture 06)** who later went on to become a star for Leicester Fosse, a solicitor in London and, in his late forties, a combatant in the First World War seeing service in the Far East and in Russia.

By now, soccer's popularity was increasing and at the end of the second season, a 2-0 victory over Leicester Town attracted a considerable crowd to Victoria Park.

By the start of the Fosse's third season on Victoria Park, (1886/87), the Club had 40 members and fielded a second team. New opponents like Coalville, Wigston, Barwell, Market Harborough and Loughborough were added to their fixture list, as was their first opponent from outside Leicestershire, Nottingham St. Saviours. The club also fielded its first player from outside the County, Lincoln-born Simon Sudbury. He is on record saying that the team regularly trained by running four times round Victoria Park after work.

The following season (1887/88), in addition to still playing some games at Victoria Park, Leicester Fosse played several of their home matches at the Belgrave Road Grounds. However, the team **(Picture 07)** reluctantly had to return for one more full season (1888/89) to Victoria Park because Leicester Tigers outbid them for the use of Belgrave Road.

By this time the Fossils were fielding field three teams and were competing in the Senior Cup of the recently formed Leicestershire FA. Their fixture list was becoming more prestigious with Kettering, Wellingborough, and Notts County Reserves, amongst others, all playing at Victoria Park.

This season also saw a major milestone in the history of the Club when they signed their first ever professional player. Considered to be a 'fast and clever forward,' his name was Harry Webb from Strafford Rangers. He was paid 2/6d (12 ½p) per week plus travel expenses.

At the end of the season, Leicester Fosse left Victoria Park for good for a new home at Mill Lane.