



THE PROPERTY OF A SELF-MADE MILLIONAIRE AND WOULD-BE SAVIOUR OF LEICESTER CITY IS TO BE SOLD AT AUCTION. **LEE MARLOW** WRITES THE FINAL CHAPTER OF A TALE OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

A life under the hammer

They say you can't take it with you, and here it is – the remnants of one man's life, spread out across the concrete floor of Leicester's last auction house.

There's a drawing room set, hand-made in lurid lime green, worth more than £9,000. A huge bespoke walnut dining table. A selection of Bang and Olufsen televisions and stereos.

There is Beatles memorabilia. Royal Doulton figurines. A Rolex watch. A portrait of the then-Lady Diana Spencer by noted Leicestershire artist Bryan Organ.

And another by the same painter of the man who once owned it all.

Trevor Bennett died in February last year, aged 85. A genial, self-made millionaire, Mr Bennett was the son of a Welsh coal miner who came to Leicester with his large family in 1934 to escape the dismal poverty of the South Wales coalfields.

At the age of 12, Trevor first visited the pre-war terraces of Leicester City's Filbert Street.

It was there – watching the likes of Danny Liddle, Septimus Smith and George Dewis – that this adopted son of Leicester fell in love.

Filbert Street – and later Grace Road, the home of Leicestershire County Cricket Club – became his second home.

At his funeral, in his home village of Newtown Linford, the Rev Richard Worsfold paid tribute to a decent man who did a lot to boost Leicestershire sport.

The teams and clubs he had helped, he said, had lost a dear friend.

Bennett was the first man to hold the title of president at Leicester City Football Club. In 1987, he personally guaranteed the £350,000 fee for then-record signing Mike Newell.

He invested more than £200,000 into Leicestershire Cricket Club, helping to pay for an indoor cricket school, car park and stand, which was named in his honour.

But Trevor Bennett wanted to do more. His story is not a tale of what he did, but rather of what he wanted to do, the unpublished chapter of what could have been.

In 1989, he sold his window manufacturing business – TL Bennett – for close to £6 million.

Retired with a fat cheque burning a hole in his pocket, Bennett turned to his first love – Leicester City.

City – in debt, regularly forced to sell its best players and with an average attendance of about 15,000 – turned him away.

Former manager David Pleat watched from the sidelines.

He says he can't help but wonder what might have happened at City if Mr Bennett had been allowed to invest.



TOP END OF THE MARKET: Clockwise, from main picture, Bryan Organ's picture of Trevor Bennett, held by Dickon Dearman; decorated table; designer bar stools; a Royal Doulton figurine; part of a lime green lounge set; handmade burr walnut dining table and chairs, worth about £15,000

"I wasn't involved in these boardroom discussions, but I think there was a conflict of interest between some of the existing board members, who were fearful that Bennett would come in and get all the plaudits."

So it never happened. City continued to struggle and a wounded Bennett took his money and enthusiasm where it was more appreciated. He headed north to Newcastle.

At St James' Park, Newcastle owner Sir John Hall was planning a footballing revolution on Tyneside.

Bennett – and his £6 million cheque – were made to feel very welcome. The former Leicester City president became the president of Newcastle United.

By 1993, Newcastle had gone from Second Division relegation fodder to a Kevin Keegan-

inspired side of free-scoring footballing entertainers.

"I would take teams to Newcastle," says David Pleat, "and I could see how the club had been transformed."

"Trevor would always stop and say hello. My word, it made me think – what could have happened to Leicester City if Trevor had been able to invest in the late 1980s?"

Paul Bennett, Trevor's nephew, would frequently accompany his uncle to St James' Park.

He doesn't know how much he can say and how much he should say, but he knows the episode which his uncle.

"It was an exciting time to be at Newcastle and I know he genuinely enjoyed it but, despite that, I know he never stopped loving Leicester City," says Paul, 48.

Bennett retired from the Newcastle board in 2001. He was made a life patron of the club.

A suite was named in his honour.

After a modest investment in

Kettering Town, he turned once more to City.

After the club had pulled itself out of administration and a new board of directors took over, Bennett handed them a cheque for £500,000, in November 2004.

"I have found this new regime to be extremely purposeful and workmanlike," he said, pointedly.

After his death, in February 2007, his estate passed to his wife of more than 60 years, Beryl, who died this year. The couple had no children.

The Bennetts' picturesque house in Newtown Linford has been sold. Keepsakes have been passed on to family members. What's left will be sold at auction tomorrow.

There's an auction every Saturday at Churchgate Auctions, in Scudamore Road.

It sells all sorts of things here – from industrial machines to old sofas, fur coats to porcelain knick-knacks gleaned from house clearances all over Leicestershire.

On Saturday, Mr Bennett's belongings – 53 lots – will go under the hammer at 9.30am.

Inside the Churchgate Auctions office, it looks like the most expensive bric-a-brac store you've ever seen.

There is no reserve on any item. Auctioneer Dickon Dearman, 33, says it will all go.

A decade ago, there was a plethora of auctioneers in Leicester: Churchgate Auctions – which relocated from Churchgate in the city three years ago – is the last one.

On Saturday morning, there will be anywhere between 80 and 120 people crammed in as the bidding begins.

"Mr Bennett's belongings are at the top end of the market. We don't always get stuff like this, so it should be good."

"Some of these things – I don't know – they've been made, and made well, too, to his tastes."

"Not everyone, for example, will want a lime green drawing room set but, if you do, you might get a bargain."



LOYALTIES: Trevor Bennett, right, opens a car park at Leicestershire County Cricket Club. With him are Newcastle United manager Bobby Robson and chairman Sir Terry Hall