

Chester Youth Hostels

Chester (Girls' Friendly Society) Youth Hostel 1932 to 1933

The Girls' Friendly Society, 14 Stanley Place, Chester

Historic County: Cheshire

YHA Region: Merseyside

GR: SJ 401662

Amongst the great variety of very simple youth hostel buildings opened in YHA's first three operating years was a curious type of premises that defied the early general assumption that YHA was intended for countryside visitors only. The pioneer regions vacillated on town and city hostels. North Midland Region closed down hostels in Matlock and Matlock Bath within a year of opening: they were *unsuitably unrural*. Several other regions would have concurred at that time.

Merseyside, London and Plymouth regions begged to differ: they opened small experimental hostels in Liverpool, London, Canterbury and the outskirts of Plymouth. These were generally gifts or peppercorn arrangements from worthy educational or philanthropic bodies. Toc H helped provide premises in Liverpool, London and Canterbury, while Plymouth Education Offices set up Laira Camp. The hostels were tiny loaned-out arrangements, typically for six or eight, usually single-sex, and they invariably lasted only a year or two. The two separate-sex Liverpool premises were advertised in the 1932 national handbook *for members of other Groups and Overseas Visitors only* – presumably with an eye on visitors passing through to Ireland.

VII. LIVERPOOL.
(For members of other groups and Overseas visitors only.)
6 (By arrangement with Toc H.)
GLADSTONE HOUSE, RODNEY STREET, (Men).
CAMDEN LODGE, 299 EDGE LANE, (Women).
Bookings must be made in advance at Merseyside Regional Office.
Food at tariff charges will be supplied in all cases.
*10 18 S.B.H.
O.S. map no. 35., Liverpool District.

VII CHESTER.
6 The Girls Friendly Society, 14 Stanley Place, provides accommodation for 8 women and girls at 1/- per night if previous notice is given.

The hostels were tiny loaned-out arrangements, typically for six or eight, usually single-sex, and they invariably lasted only a year or two. The two separate-sex Liverpool premises were advertised in the 1932 national handbook *for members of other Groups and Overseas Visitors only* – presumably with an eye on visitors passing through to Ireland.

1932 handbook details of three early city hostels (YHA Archive)

A facility opened for female YHA members to use the Girls' Friendly Society premises in Chester in 1932 and 1933. There was accommodation for eight women only, *if previous notice given*. It was a handsome red-bricked building, now the library of the Queen's School. It is not clear how many women and girls would have taken advantage. Unusually, Merseyside Region published no overnight records. The arrangement came to an end after the 1933 season, after which the region could offer a more regular type of hostelling experience at Roodee House in Chester, just around the corner.



A postcard of the GFS building in Stanley Place, Chester. It probably predates the two years when YHA had an accommodation arrangement here (author's collection)

Chester (Roodee House) Youth Hostel 1934 to 1952

Roodee House, Watergate Square, Chester

Historic County: Cheshire

YHA Region: Merseyside

GR: SJ 401661

Merseyside's annual report for 1934 shows that Chester's second hostel opened in May of that year. It was a tall, narrow Georgian building, austere in appearance and dating from the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Berta Gough, the enthusiastic diarist for Merseyside Region, wrote in her journal for Sunday 3rd March 1934:

George and I went to inspect the proposed Chester hostel. We spent a long time measuring up all the rooms and making notes.

The intention was to open in time for Whit Saturday, on the 19th of that month. An official opening by the mayor followed a few weeks later on 27th June. It lay a very short distance from the Stanley Place building mentioned earlier.

In his invaluable *History of Merseyside Youth Hostels* Reg Taylor described the acquisition:

Our first Chester hostel, Roodee House, belonged to the Chester Racecourse Company, who used it to house jockeys during race meetings, which were infrequent. So it was as convenient to them for us to have the use of it between times as it was to us to have somewhere so near the centre of the city, situated as it was just below the Watergate.

Max Kirby, a lifelong volunteer for the region, confirmed that the hostel was not available to YHA members during race meetings, and added that this usually meant disinfecting the property before YHA could use it again.



Roodee House was the tall building in this westward view from the ancient, by now ungated, Watergate arch under the city walls. This low-lying area just outside the city and close to the River Dee was once the source of much prosperity from the docks and shipbuilding, before the Dee silted up and, as so often with formerly vibrant Georgian areas, the locality suffered from a long decline. Geoff Smith noted that the hostel was between two pubs, located where iron tyres on the cobbles disturbed the night. Additionally, the traffic lights had an unfortunate effect on hostellers, according to Max Kirby: they lit up uncurtained dormitory windows with an array of colours throughout the night (YHA Archive)

Merseyside Region set to work improving the facilities. In 1936 the hostel capacity increased from 36 to 40 and a Davey fire escape was fitted, while washing arrangements were improved the following year. In 1938 accommodation increased further from 40 to 56 beds. The era of bigger hostels had arrived. A modicum of luxury was to be allowed in Merseyside Region hostels to the extent that the number of blankets per bed was to be made up to three.

Late in 1939 the Roodee hostel was the first in the region to be affected by the restrictions of war. Taylor's *Merseyside History* describes how it was invaded, albeit temporarily, by soldiers on call-up, but released again before the end of the year. In 1940 the hostel was in mixed use, for men members only and as an army billet, until withdrawn for YHA use by the 14th October. Thereafter it was unavailable to the Association during the hostilities.

MERSEYSIDE REGIONAL GROUP.

The Secretary, 7 Oxford Chambers, 71 Lord Street, Liverpool 2.

Meal Charges. Breakfast 1/-, Lunch packet 6d., Supper 1/-. (Tea is not supplied with Supper. It may be had later at a charge of 2d. per person.)

Regional Booklet. 'North Wales,' price 3d. (by post).

Juveniles. Reduced charge of 6d. applies at all times.

Steamships. Reduced fares are granted to members on the Liverpool and North Wales S.S. Co.'s Steamers. See pages 109-114.

Travel Vouchers and Introduction Permits are now available at Merseyside Office.

Sleeping Bags. Hire charge 4d.

B, C, D 98

DELAMERE FOREST.

"Fox Howl," Ashton Road, Norley, Cheshire. Warden: Mrs. Blain, The Old Cottage, Ashton Road, Norley, Cheshire (2 m. from Hostel).

Position and Map. Edge Delamere Forest, W side Spy Hill on Ashton Rd. 100 yds. from Rly. Bridge. 1½ m. from Mouldsworth Junction Stn. O.S. 44 or Liverpool special. Bart. 12.

Hostel Details. M. 19. W. 19. Store: Mouldsworth. P.O: Mouldsworth, Norley. E.C.D: Wed. No M.P. Camping. J.

Station. Mouldsworth Junct. 1½ m. **Bus.** Frodsham—Hatchmere.

Next Hostels. Chester 10 m. Shrewsbury 45 m. Llangollen 30 m.

B, D 99

CHESTER.

Mrs. E. F. Munro, "Roodee House," Watergate Square, Chester.

Position and Map. Watergate Square, just outside walls by Roodee. Via Watergate St. from centre of Chester. O.S. 43, Chester. Bart. 12.

Hostel Details. M. 28. W. 28. Open all year except April 24 to May 13. Store: Watergate St. P.O: Chester. E.C.D: Wed. J.

Station. Northgate 1 m. **Bus.** Birkenhead—Chester. Wrexham—Chester.

Next Hostels. Delamere 10 m. Maeshafn 16 m. Llangollen 25 m.

1939 handbook details of the Roodee hostel (YHA Archive)

In October 1945 Roodee House was released from requisitioning, allowing the hostel to reopen in time for Easter, 1946. The Chester Racecourse Company began to have other ideas for using the premises, however. Additionally, Taylor added in his *History* that the character of the area was going down and when the chance came of moving out the region took it.



'A corner of the dining room' (postcard by A Hutton, YHA Archive)

When the Hoole Bank property on the other side of the city became available in 1950, YHA wanted a quick transfer, by January 1951, but the operation was delayed, enough for a considerable overnights total at Roodee House of 8,188 in 1951. This probably represented an extra full season before the move was possible; in fact one newspaper report, shown later, suggested that it remained open into early 1952. The old property and others adjacent were in turn demolished when Chester Racecourse was redeveloped.



Don Errington's Roodee House hostel stamp of 1949



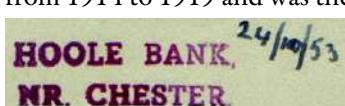
A fine portrait of Roodee House, Chester's first large youth hostel. It spanned the years either side of the war, but was requisitioned for much of the hostilities. In the background is the castellated railway viaduct of the London and North Western Railway main line to Holyhead (postcard by A Hutton, YHA Archive)

Chester (Hoole Bank) Youth Hostel 1952 to 1962

Hoole Bank, Mannings Lane, Hoole Village, Chester
 Historic County: Cheshire YHA Region: Merseyside

GR: SJ 429691

Roodee House's replacement was Hoole Bank, a large detached Georgian-style house in private grounds on the north-eastern outskirts of Chester. The house had been built and extended between 1840 and 1860, replacing an earlier house located by the road. Until World War One it remained a modern and fashionable family home, lived in by five different families, at the centre of a large private estate. The house was used as a Red Cross Convalescent Hospital from 1914 to 1919 and was then bequeathed to the National Institute of the Blind as a guest house in 1921, but sold in 1937 and apparently let out for a year or two before wartime requisitioning.



Left: Don Errington's 1953 hostel stamp



Hoole Bank, a fine Georgian or early Victorian property that nevertheless suffered from many problems of age and neglect before YHA adopted the place (DB Hutton postcard, YHA Archive)

The Liverpool Daily Post advised that an official opening was held on 3rd March 1952, by Tom Stevenson. *The Manchester Guardian* reported on 21st March 1952 that the hostel had first opened its doors to one member on the evening of the day on which Roodee House closed; possibly both occasions were the same, 3rd March. The reason for the long delay beyond 1951 was making good the theft of fittings from the house while it stood empty.

Hoole Bank was to have 120 beds, 46 in the house and the rest in Nissen huts in the grounds, but it actually held 100. *Rucksack Magazine* of May-June 1952 stated that the hostel was fully open by mid-1952. Hoole Bank was a freehold purchase, grant-aided as was commonplace at the time by the Ministry of Education. It was vested in the YHA Trust on 25th March 1952. Mrs Andersen was warden for at least part of the hostel's span of 10 years.

Merseyside Regional Group	
Registered Letters are accepted without responsibility by Wardens on behalf of members.	
Serial Advance Bookings.	To help members who wish to book at a series of Welsh hostels on consecutive nights, a scheme is in operation for all Merseyside hostels and hostels in Wales, whereby such bookings if addressed and stamped ready for posting to the individual hostels will be franked with a priority rubber stamp asking Wardens to give these first consideration. Such bookings should be sent in one package to the Merseyside, Birmingham or South Wales Regional Office for franking and may be sent not more than a fortnight prior to three months in advance of the date of the bookings. The date of the booking should be marked on the bottom left hand corner of the envelope. Wardens cannot accept such bookings until the due date, but will then give them priority. Six consecutive nights, covering at least three different hostels, is the qualification necessary. Responsibility cannot be accepted for safety of cash or P.O.s. enclosed, but every effort will be made to ensure prompt and careful handling.
Enquiry Bureau.	Members who wish to obtain advice about North Wales Hostels and cannot get into the Office may call at Harold House, 92 Chatham Street, Abercrombie Square, Liverpool, on Friday evenings.
DELAMERE FOREST (Welsh Border) (Closed Tues.)*	118
The Warden, "Fox Howl," Ashton Road, Norley, Warrington, Lancs.	
Position and Map. Edge Delamere Forest. W. side Spy Hill on Ashton Road. 100 yards from R.R. 129712. Bus. Chester.	
Hostel Details. M. 18. W. 18. Store: Ashton 3 m. P.O.: Norley 2½ m. E.C.D.: Wed. No Camping. Closed Christmas, 1952.	
Station. Mouldsworth Junction, ½ m. Bus. Chester—Northwich to Ashton Lane End (hostel Next). Maeshafn 25 m. Rudyard 30 m. Dymingsdale 47 m. Llangollen 30 m. Chester 10 m.	
CHESTER (Welsh Border) (Closed Wed.)*	119
The Warden, Hoole Bank, Hoole Village, Chester.	
Position and Map. Large country house with drive leading to Mannings Lane, Hoole, grounds bounded on W. side by Picton Gorse Lane, ½ m. NE. along the lane from Newton Bank on Chester-Warrington by-pass; ½ mile NW. of Royal Oak in Hoole; 2 m. NE. of centre of Chester.	
Hostel Details. M. 50. W. 50. Store & P.O.: Chester. E.C.D.: Wed. O.S. 109. G.R. 430692. Bart. 28.	
Station. Northgate or General Station 2 m. Bus. Chester—Hoole Circular at Newton Bank. Chester—Warrington or Chester—Runcorn (Royal Oak).	
Next Hostels. Delamere 8 m. Maeshafn 18 m. Llangollen 24 m.	

Reg Taylor described the mixed blessing of the Hoole Bank premises in his *History of Merseyside Youth Hostels*:

Apart from problems of maintenance the region had its bad buy, Bodlonfa Hall, on its hands and it was soon to acquire another one in the shape of Hoole Bank, a large house on the outskirts of Chester.

Hoole Bank had been occupied by American troops during the [Second] war and had since stood empty. It had spacious grounds in which the Americans had erected three large huts, and left them behind when they went. The place was surveyed and judged, alas, to be a reasonable proposition. It was acquired in 1951 and opened the following year, opened in fact by Tom Stephenson, of subsequent Pennine Way fame, who was our guest speaker at the AGM and threw in the opening as a kind of encore, though I have never seen anyone so surprised as he was to find his name engraved on the plaque as he drew the veiling curtain aside.

We found in time that Hoole Bank had an abundance of Achilles' heels, of which the most disabling were the sewage system, the poor roof and recurrent dry rot. The roof responded to treatment. The trouble with the sewage system was that the outflow was below the level of the public system. I imagine that it had originally led into a private cesspool, and it had to be pumped up to the required level. Pumps that were installed either could not deal with the load, or kept breaking down under it. I remember the constant trouble we had. I do not recall that we ever overcame it satisfactorily.

Dry rot was the major problem, though, and the one that finally broke our determination to make a go of it. It was insidious. No sooner had it been dealt with in one spot than it broke out in another, until it seemed to Max Kirby and I, sitting rather on the sidelines of maintenance matters, that piecemeal treatment was not the answer, and we proposed an all-out attack. We were innocents. Either the contractors were incompetent (it was before the days of 20-year guarantees) or the dry rot was of a peculiarly persistent nature, and when it struck yet again, council decided that enough was enough. That was in 1961.

The hostel had been popular enough with members, registering between 8,000 and 10,000 overnights a year, and that in a way justified the expense required to maintain it. But then we heard of another place, Hough Green House, seemingly more desirable, and within walking distance of the city centre. We opted for it and disposed of Hoole Bank at a knockdown price to a vet who wanted to set up a kennels, an activity we presume whose profits could better justify the costs of maintenance. That was in May 1962.



The *Youth Hosteller Magazine* of March 1957 described how, over the winter of 1956-57, contractors were busy giving a much-needed face-lift to the hostel. The outside was repaired and painted and the inside redecorated. The garage was turned into a men's dormitory, a second dining room was installed and the members' kitchen improved.

Left: one of the popular one-inch YHA pin badges from the mid-1950s (author's collection)

After ten years as a youth hostel Hoole Bank was closed 1962 and replaced by Chester (Hough Green House) Hostel. The property sold on 2nd August 1962. In 1969 the house was bought by the Hammond school (a vocational performing arts school) where it housed the education unit. By 1994 the entire school was now housed at Hoole Bank. The original house still exists, much extended. The grounds have been extensively built on to accommodate the growing school. (Information on the Hammond School is from Caroline Hamilton, house archivist, with permission).



Another postcard by DB Hutton of Hoole Bank. This example shows the west side of the house. Beyond are some of the wartime leftover huts used by YHA as dormitory accommodation (author's collection)

Chester (Hough Green) Youth Hostel 1962 to 2009

Hough Green House, 40 Hough Green, Chester CH4 8JD

Historic County: Cheshire

YHA Regions: Merseyside,
North Wales, Wales

GR: SJ 396650



Chester's new youth hostel, Hough Green House, photographed very soon after opening in 1962.
A welcoming YHA triangle sits above the entrance door (YHA Archive)

In 1855, according to a document preserved in the YHA Archive, John Royle, builder, erected a large and elegant house of an annual value of not less than £36 which he named Hough Green House, wherein he settled himself and his family. The house consisted of three main floors and a substantial basement. There was an ornamental trellised verandah at the front, and to the rear a substantial garden. Despite being roughly contemporary with Hoole Bank, the house was markedly more modern in appearance.

Hough Green House was handed down to two more generations of John Royle's descendants before the death about 1925 of Sarah Elizabeth Royle *when it was relinquished to others*. It became in turn the Hough Green Hotel and a workers' hostel for the petroleum company Shell-Mex, from whom YHA obtained the property in 1962.

The acquisition was a close-run thing. Tom Fairclough, Merseyside Region's canny secretary, had written on 21st February 1962 to HW Armstrong, YHA National Accountant at St Albans:

It's the devil's own job to secure property of value in a popular site such as this, and it is so right for YHA use, that a few risks must be taken; the Shell-Mex agents have a firm offer round about the asking price for the house to be converted into flats and we have been given up to 11am on Thursday to make up our minds.

The following day he wrote to the selling agent with a firm offer, crucially dependent upon the Ministry of Education providing grant-aid. Shell-Mex had offered to put the roof in order after gale damage. Fairclough added:

We would like, if possible, to have the existing gas ranges in the basement and any curtains that remain in the property to be left for our consideration. We are not interested in the furniture.

By the end of March, however, Fairclough found that he was in an interdependent loop of delays and counter offers. There was a hold-up in the £4,600 proceeds from Hoole Bank, on which the finances for Hough Green so heavily depended; an offer had been received for it, though payment would be frustratingly delayed until the end of May. He wrote again to HW Armstrong pleading for urgent tide-over help, to hear by reply that there were many calls on central YHA funding and that the axe would fall on some of them.

Nevertheless, the Hoole Bank and additional funds from the sale of the unsuccessful Bodlonfa Hall hostel in North Wales (£540.10s.6d) were paid into the Merseyside account for the purchase to go ahead just in time. As usual in this era, grant-aid was requested from the Department of Education, though its award would be delayed until 1963 by the other uncertainties and in the first year the hostel existed in an uncertain state of promises. The property passed immediately to the YHA Trust. Remarkably, Merseyside Region intended to open its new Chester hostel as early as June 1962.

Merseyside Regions' annual report for 1962 was enthusiastic about the transaction and outlined delayed plans:

Your Council is following a policy of re-siting unsatisfactory hostels and improving standards of all hostels within the region, using funds accumulated and invested during the past few years. In pursuance of this policy, Hough Green House, Chester, has been purchased as a replacement for Hoole Bank House. This fine new hostel was purchased in May 1962 for £9,000 and was opened for members in the summer months. Money from the sale of Hoole Bank was set against this, the balance coming from funds held by the region, since no grant aid was available from the Ministry of Education or National YHA funds at the time of purchase. Council considers this purchase well justified by the excellent quality and situation of the property. It is hoped that further adaptations and improvements will be carried out when financial help is again available from the Ministry of Education.

The accommodation arranged so hurriedly in summer 1962 must have been fairly basic. The June 1962 edition of *the Youth Hosteller* issued a supplement stating that Hough Green would replace the previous hostel sometime in that month and that bookings would be transferred automatically. As at Hoole Bank, there were beds for 50 men and 50 women. School parties were welcome, and there would be a small shop.

Quotes were invited for adaptations later in 1962, principally for £400 worth of improvements to bedrooms, plumbing, electrical fittings and stairwells on the first and second floor of the house. Twice that estimate would be required to convert, over stages, a garage at the rear of the property into a mixed one- and two-storey annexe for hostellers and staff. The plans included a men's dorm on the upper floor of this annexe, and there was to be a substantial sanitary block. Shortly afterwards, there was a scheme to convert back to its original state a trio of rooms in the basement that had once been one very large room. This may not have been realised.

MERSEYSIDE REGIONAL GROUP

Covering Hostels in North Wales, the Cheshire Border and Isle of Man.

The Secretary. Merseyside Youth Hostels Limited, 93a Scotland Road, Liverpool 3. T. North 2391. Open for Sales Service, 9 a.m. - 5.30 p.m. daily; Sat. 9 a.m. - 12.45 p.m.

Availability of Hostels. Attention is drawn to the dates hostels are open as during the winter months some of the hostels are not available except for special party bookings, and the others will be closed one night per week under Closing Scheme 2 (see page 9). Closing nights do not operate during additional period December 22nd to January 5th. Contrary to popular belief, North Wales hostels are not fully booked in advance for July and August, and Wardens will advise where bookings can be accepted.

Evening Meal. 7.30 p.m. prompt. Hostels on Isle of Man, 7 p.m.

Regional Booklet. "North Wales and Isle of Man", 1s. (1s. 3d. by post). "Cambrian Journey" illustrated guide to hostelling in Wales, 1s. 4d. by post.

Sleeping Bags. On hire at all hostels. National Hiring Scheme operated from Office. (See page 14).

Camping. Camping will be permitted (except during August) where the facilities at the hostel allow this to be done. Apply to the Warden except in the case of hostels marked "No Camping".

School Journey Parties. Some hostels are not available for School Parties in July and August or Bank Holidays. Apply to Regional Office for details.

Enquiry Bureau. Members who wish to obtain advice about North Wales hostels and cannot get in to the Office, may call at Sefton House, Leecce Street, Liverpool, on Friday evenings.

DELAMERE FOREST (Thurs. Closing Scheme 2.)

97

Postal Address. The Warden, Fox Howl, Ashton Road, Norley, Warrington, Lancs.

Position and Map. 15 m. from Warrington. From bottom of hill at Mouldsworth Station, 1½ m. E. along the road to Hatchmere. Hostel just beyond railway bridge. O.S. 109. G.R. 529713. Bart. 28

Hostel Details. M. & W. 36. Small store at hostel. P.O. Norley 2½ m. E.C.D., Wed. Closed Tues., Wed., Thurs. from Oct. 1st - Mar. 31st. Also closed Dec. 24th - 26th, 1962; Jan. 12th, 1963.

Station. Mouldsworth 1½ m. **Bus.** Chester-Delamere St. (C76 - 9) to Ashton Lane End, K30 to Hatchmere Lane. Also Frodsham to Hatchmere.

Next Hostels. Maeshafn 25 m. Rudyard Lake 30 m. Dimmingsdale 47 m. Llangollen 30 m. Chester 10 m.

CHESTER (Mon. Closing Scheme 2.)

98

Postal Address. The Warden, Hough Green House Y.H., 40 Hough Green, Chester. T. Chester 22231.

Position and Map. Just outside Chester on SW. side, 300 yds. from Wrexham Roundabout on right side of Saltney Road, the main road to Mold and North Wales. O.S. 109. G.R. 430692. Bart. 28

Hostel Details. M. 50. W. 50. S.J.P. Small store. P.O. Chester. E.C.D., Wed. Closed Jan. 12th - Feb. 2nd, 1963.

Station. General 1½ m. **Bus.** 5 or 6 from Bollands Café, alight at Howe Road.

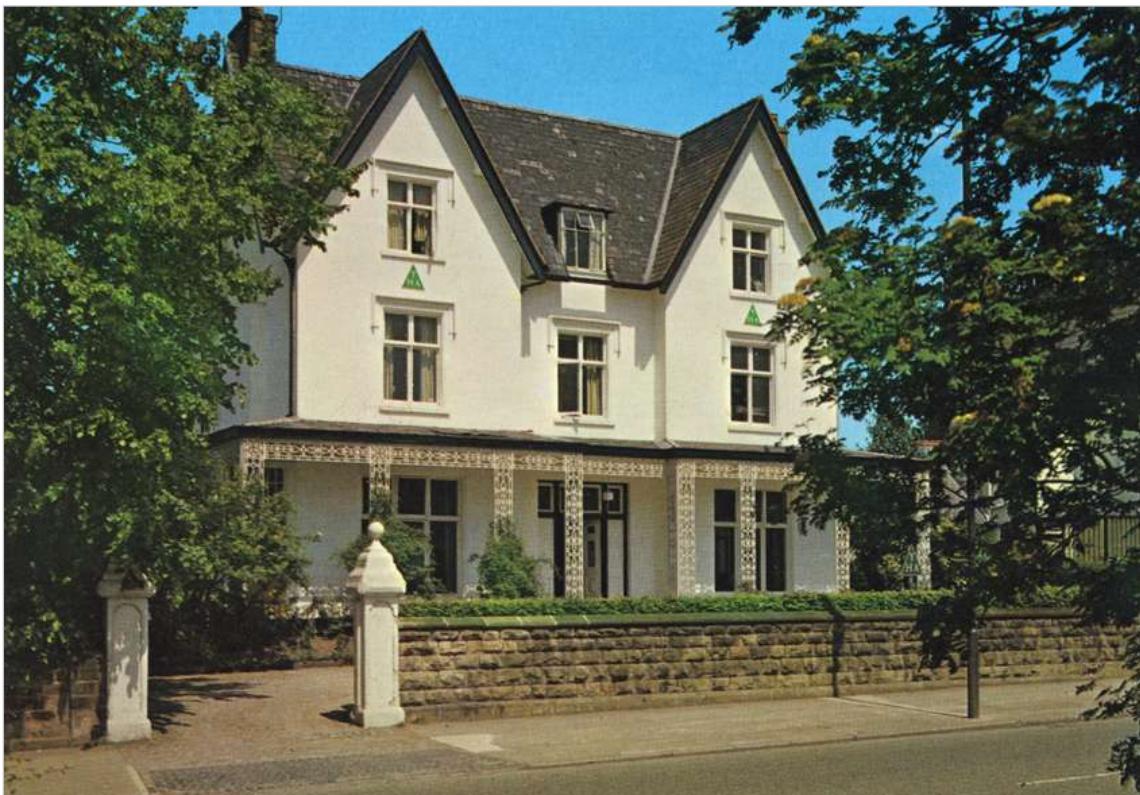
Next Hostels. Delamere 10 m. Maeshafn 16 m. Shrewsbury 40 m. Llangollen 22 m.

1963 handbook details of Hough Green hostel (YHA Archive)

The last wardens at Hoole Bank and the first here are not recorded, though they may well have been the same and have overseen the transfer, a common practice at this time. Mr and Mrs Harold Davies and Mr and Mrs A Evans had short spells here in the mid 1960s, but the appointment of the experienced Mr and Mrs D Adams for ten years in 1969 was a settling influence. During their stay annual overnights increased from roughly 10,000 to a record 16,000.

Reg Taylor had already provided personal insight into the two previous large Chester hostels in his *History of Merseyside Youth Hostels* when he wrote in the late 1970s:

Hough Green House had its own problems (in time it had to have most of its roof replaced) but they were non-recurrent and over the years the house has been steadily improved, and its usage has equally steadily increased. Here again an important part has been played by the warden, Don Adams. Don had previously been at Ty'n Dwr Hall [Llangollen], a hostel of at least equal potential, but somehow the set-up there did not suit him and he transferred to Chester. Now usage at Chester bears little similarity to that at all other hostels in the region, for Chester is a historic city, and members who use the hostel are for the most part doing the grand tour of such places and flit, like Time the old gypsy man, lightly over long distances. The character of usage has suited Don and stimulated him to help build up usage to its currently high and still rising standard.



An attractive postcard of Chester's Hough Green hostel by J Arthur Dixon, dating from about 1970.
The property had been spruced up considerably since its acquisition (YHA Archive)

Over the winter of 1972-73 central heating was installed. Enhancements continued. YHA benefited considerably in 1978 from the government's Job Creation scheme. Over a dozen men on the programme brought improvements with the rehabilitation of the garage annexe, providing new dormitories and toilets and assistant's accommodation. The hostel also gained a new members' kitchen and dining room in the house. Enabling seven-day operation was a major theme in YHA at this time, tying YHA to improved conditions for hostel staff with more efficient use of resources.



Badges and hostel stamps from the later years of the twentieth century, the first being Bernard Selwyn's stamp from 1968 (YHA Archive and author's collection)

Mike and Joy Procter followed on from Don and Doreen Adams in 1980, and like their predecessors, they enjoyed a lengthy stay at Chester hostel, remaining right up to the new millennium.

Dedicated YHA volunteer Lionel Creek made an official inspection of the hostel in September 1981 and noted:

Dormitories – 1: 10 beds; 2: 10 beds; 3: 4 beds; 4: 10 beds; 5: 8 beds; 6: 10 beds; 7: 4 beds; 8: 10 beds; 9: 6 beds; 10: 4 beds; 11: 4 beds; annexe 1: 24 beds; annexe 2: 14 beds. Total 118 beds

Two years later, *Hostelling News* of Summer 1983 was in celebratory mood:

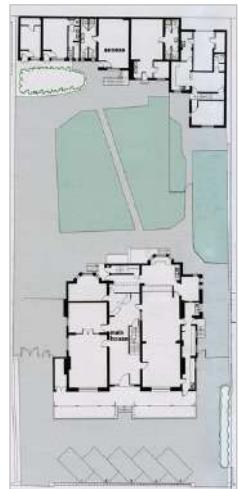
Chester hostel comes of age this year. The handsome Victorian house has been used for 21 years and has the facilities the modern hosteller has come to expect. We aren't sure what the Victorians would have thought of the café in the elegant dining room, or the pool table in their drawing room, but these are certainly proving popular with our minors. The building has been totally redecorated in the last year – brightening the hostel yet recapturing the charm of the larger rooms.



1 2



3 4



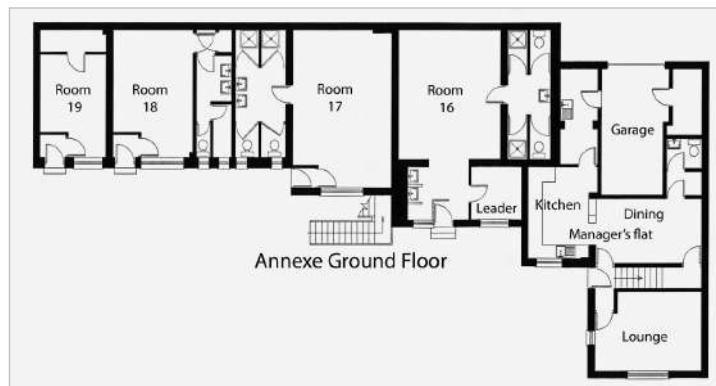
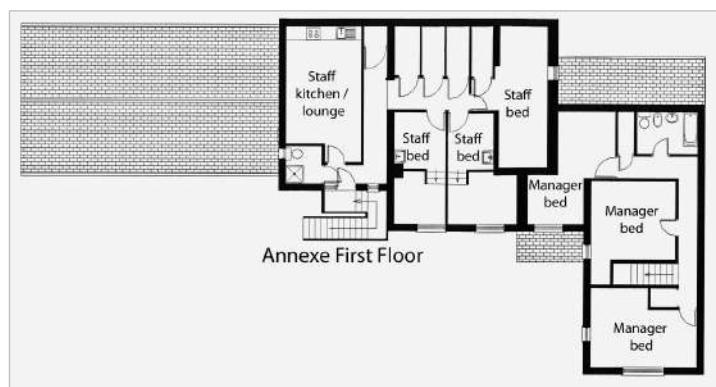
1: Erik from Tasmania toured England in August 1991 and thought Chester the best hostel. He writes: It was a magnificent Victorian building, with beautiful bedroom, lobby and TV room. The best hostel I stayed at on the trip;

2: a photograph by Dutch hosteller Marjan Roskes of her family bunkroom in July 1992.

She may have noticed that her bedroom décor was the same as in the lounge;

3: author's photograph of 2007 of the spacious hall, corner reception and period staircase;

4: general layout showing the positions of the hostel (bottom) and annexe (top) in 2005. Note the limited parking (YHA Archive)



Room plans for Hough Green House youth hostel about 2005 (YHA Archive)

More improvements for hostellers and staff continued. In 1989 YHA's Product Development Marketing Plan, the Association's strategy for network-wide hostel improvements, called for a new staff accommodation wing, general repairs, smaller dormitories, new showers and toilets, refreshed kitchen and dining room and additional public rooms, over 2 years and costed at £403,000. Work started in January 1990 on the annexe in phase 1 of the total refurbishment. The provision of separate staff accommodation over the winter of 1990-91 would allow more flexible hostel space and improved catering, dormitory, shower and toilet provision. The hostel was now offering 130 beds; overnight figures reached the record number of almost 20,000 in 1996.

Despite all these achievements, usage at Hough Green declined considerably in the twentieth-first century. Reasons cited were that the hostel was in need of major building work, was badly sited too far from the city, had limited parking, and that the opening of YHA Liverpool in 1998 had abstracted customers. YHA announced closure of YHA Chester during 2008, but this was delayed until the end of summer 2009 because of a slump in housing values. Its sale was completed on 5th October 2009. Ian Powell and Simon Scott were managers in the final decade.

After YHA's closure the property was acquired for £700,000 by the University of Chester for student accommodation, and renamed De Bunsen Hall.

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows

1932-1991: previous Oct to Sept; **1992:** Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; **1993-2023:** Mar to following Feb

†: Chester GFS youth hostel (women); §: Chester Roodee youth hostel;

¶: Chester Hoole Bank youth hostel; Δ: Chester Hough Green House youth hostel;

#: Chester Trafford Hall youth hostel

W: Wartime closure; *: 17 month period; ø: operation affected by Covid

...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	open†	open†	2118§	3559§	4211§	4842§	5455§	4853§
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
open§	W§	W§	W§	W§	W§	4207§	6013§	7460§	7661§
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
7924§	8188§	10053¶	10020¶	9289¶	9566¶	9807¶	9579¶	8733¶	9290¶
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
8275¶	8468¶	8475¶Δ	8827Δ	8439Δ	8343Δ	8410Δ	9093Δ	8972Δ	10037Δ
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
10063Δ	10383Δ	11154Δ	11494Δ	12112Δ	13178Δ	13809Δ	15335Δ	16331Δ	15372Δ
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
16240Δ	14418Δ	12761Δ	14263Δ	17037Δ	18266Δ	15541Δ	17217Δ	17495Δ	18009Δ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
16660Δ	12374Δ	21388*Δ	16511Δ	17254Δ	17789Δ	19523Δ	18920Δ	18506Δ	16052Δ
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
16011Δ	14082Δ	14116Δ	13071Δ	11859Δ	10735Δ	7278Δ	12018Δ	10041Δ	6698Δ
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
...	6364ø#	26187ø#	open#

Chester (Trafford Hall) Youth Hostel 2021 to present

Trafford Hall, Ince Lane, Wimbolds Trafford, Chester CH2 4JP

Historic County: Cheshire

GR: SJ 447723

Note: this part of the profile will be updated as soon as the opportunity arises.

It was an astonishing achievement and show of faith when, in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, and with so many uncertainties facing accommodation providers worldwide, YHA was able to finalise its plans to open a new hostel on the outskirts of Chester at Trafford Hall, Wimbolds Trafford. It had been appointed to run and manage the hostel and training centre by the Regenda Group, in partnership with them. The hostel opened for families and individuals in August 2021. YHA's Chief Executive, James Blake, welcomed the new opportunity:

It is without doubt one of the most difficult times in YHA's 90-year history. We are delighted, however, to be in a position to move forward with the opening of YHA Chester Trafford Hall. What the pandemic has shown us all is the importance of time together in the outdoors. YHA Chester Trafford Hall's strategic location in the North West at the gateway to Chester, will play a significant role in our charity's aim to welcome five million people to stay in a youth hostel in England and Wales over the next five years.

In addition to 53 en suite bedrooms, which sleep between two and five people, YHA Chester Trafford Hall also has extensive conference and meeting facilities which will be available for day and residential hire.



The new YHA Chester, a 1756 Georgian mansion in spacious grounds, with its 1990s accommodation units (YHA images)

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