

# Hoppers Heritage Trail

**Welcome to 'Hoppers', East London's hosted space in Kent.**

- Hoppers started life as Bennetts Farm, a wooden Tudor building looking out across the flood plain to the River Medway.
- The railway, in 1840, separated the house from the river. It was converted into a Victorian beer-house, the Rose and Crown. Those were the peak days of hop growing in Kent.
- Redundant as a 'pub' it was purchased in 1910 by a charitable company, The Red House, Stepney. Modified to be The Little Hoppers Hospital, it was staffed by nurses, with day surgery and children's ward, during 'hopping' in September and used as a holiday home for East Londoners at other times.
- Renovated in 1980, with its name shortened to Hoppers, it is now a comfortable small self-catering conference centre, sleeping up to 20 people.

This 1870 picture of the Rose and Crown was sent to the trustees earlier this year. The census that year confirms that the innkeeper was William Clinch. The photo was discovered by his great, great, great grandson Nigel Shenton. The grave of William Clinch (1836-1905) and his wife Mary, nee King (1832-1895) is in the churchyard of St Thomas a Becket, Capel.



The heritage trail is a tour of the buildings – Courtyard, Chapel, Hall, Meeting room, Dining room, Cottage & garden. To experience the original building climb the wooden staircases to the bedrooms and attic to examine the timber roof structure.

## The Front Courtyard:

This area is one of the unique features of Hoppers. It was designed in 1922 as a war memorial and to be a shelter and social centre for the Hop-pickers.

"The memorial was constructed from designs of Gordon Hake ARIBA and reflects in colour and form the gaiety of a Continental café" Reported The Kent Courier reported on 1<sup>st</sup> September



The distinctive gateway, now shown in charity's logo, gives an emotional reminder of the cost of the First World War and the close community that hop-picking created.

Between the symbols of the Rose & Crown gold lettering reads *"In happy memory of old friends, who loved hopping and who loved this place very dearly and who gave their lives for Old England and us, 1914-18."*

The names of the mission workers, who gave their lives, are on a board above the fireplace.

"The construction of the front courtyard" wrote Farley, in Pull no more Poles, "was dedicated by the Bishop of Stepney, at the beginning of hopping in 1925, was paved with bricks and a loggia built on three of its sides, including an entrance from the road. The roofs were tiled to match that of the old building\*. The brick pillars were painted white. Its arcades had a severely practical purpose of affording shelter in bad weather. In one of these was an open fireplace so comforting on cold evenings."

This was a place of entertainment on autumn evenings, during hopping in September. There was singing round the fire and films were projected from the bellcote over the entrance onto the white pub sign which had been painted on the tiled roof of the building.

There is a bell in the bellcote which was rung by the Bishop of Stepney at the Celebration in 2012. Mr Moon aged 90 declared that it had never been rung and there was no clapper. Resourceful watchers threw a rope over the beam and raised a cast-iron saucepan that could be pulled up and dropped against the bell.

There are also memorials to Helen Chalk (died 1938) "who for very many years did a devoted and wonderful work among the hop-pickers" and Alexander Forsyth Asher (died 1946) who was Father Wilson's successor. In Father's Asher's memory there was an electric clock which served the village for a generation.

A plate by the door announced that Hoppers was the Registered Office of The Red House, Stepney Incorporated.

The house is far back from the road. This is because it was a 'drove' road along which pigs were driven to feed on acorns in the woods, in the autumn. Also, cattle would have been driven to the weekly market in Tonbridge.

## The Chapel

Hopper's has been described as a place with a history and a heart.

The space, now called The Chapel, has always been at the heart of the building; the hub of successive communities.

In farmhouse days, for 200 years from about 1600-1800 the fireplace was the 'hearth' of the family.

The original wooden staircase leads up to the bedrooms and on up to the attic. The design of the staircase doors is an interesting original feature. The 1876 plan shows the whole of this end of the building as 'beer house'. There is no second staircase and the end bedroom can only be accessed from the other.

During the beer-house days from 1850-1900 it was the 'snug', where drinkers sat before the huge log fire.

The hospital days 1910-1953 were the days of the hop-picking mission, where temperance was applauded. Bryan and Janet Fulcher, the present caretakers, remember, as teenagers in the 50's, that it was used as the magazine room.

Nowadays its name and furnishing indicate that it is a place of calm. Different groups find a variety of ways for using it. In this multi-racial society, it gives space for difference expressions of people's relationship with the creator God.

The Icon:

The copy of the 6th century icon of Christ Pantocrator (All-powerful) was presented by Richard Chartres, the current Bishop of London, who was previously Bishop of Stepney and a frequent visitor to Hoppers

*"The strange symmetry of the face presents a most complex image. At one moment we perceive the serene majesty of Divine authority, at the next a sense of unspeakable compassion. Yet the sense of stillness seals the whole. To concentrate on any one aspect is to preclude another but when taken in its complex totality the impression of imminent life is haunting."*

The original would have been painted using the encaustic (hot wax) technique.

The Surgery:

A wall separates the Chapel from the ground floor bedroom that is normally used by group leaders. The bricks are of modern construction and most likely replaced the lathe and plaster wall in 1910.

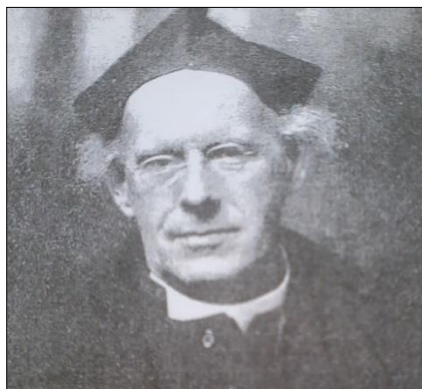
The Kent Courier reported on 4th June "the Rose & Crown has been acquired by the Rev Richard Wilson, vicar of St Augustine's Stepney for the purpose of a temporary hospital to be used for the benefit of the hoppers during the picking season. *The premises have been put into thorough repair. A new ward has been built and other improvements made.* During the hopping season trained nurses will be in residence day and night."

## The Hall

This extension dates from the John Bowles' conversion from farm to beer-house sometime after he acquired Hoppers in 1824. It was a simple way to build by continuing the roof down towards the ground. The shaped beam would have been salvaged from ships being broken up in the docks at Rochester.

This would have been the only place within the building where there was running water. The toilets were outside. Nowadays it serves as a meeting area and the visitors' books make interesting reading.

The noticeboard has a list of all the people who have owned Hoppers since 1600.



The large portrait is The Hoppers Parson, Richard Wilson (1856-1927) was the Vicar of St Augustine's church Stepney.

He went 'hopping' with his parishioners and was dearly loved by the people of East London.

He incorporated The Red House Stepney (incorporated) which is the charity that owns Hoppers. A picture is on the noticeboard.

The picture of the house is dated about 1900 before acquisition by The Red House for conversion from a pub to the children's hospital.

### The Blocked Door

A staircase now blocks the door that was the entry to what became the health-care centre in the 1910 renovation. (Now the washroom area)

Nurses from London attended outpatients during 'hopping' in September. The records of The Little Hoppers Hospital from 1921-1953 have been digitally scanned and can be viewed on request. An average of 405.3 people annually attended the surgery, each making an average of 1.8 visits.

After 'hopping' finished the nurses no longer came but Doctor James MacDonald, from Paddock Wood, continued holding a surgery there until 1970 when the occupants of the new housing estate complained about waiting outside in the cold.



The disused surgery became the washroom area during the 1980 conversion to a self-catering retreat. A door was opened to the dining room when it was opened in 1996. Access to the children's ward had been from the rear courtyard.

The aerial Photograph shows Hoppers in the late 1970's, after the memorial building was burnt down and before the dormer windows were removed during re-roofing

A picture tells the story of The Mary Edmonds Bath Chair Fund. As well as bath chairs the fund could give grants for those needing a change of air. When closed the assets were donated to Hoppers and were used to pay for the oak flooring in 2009.

## The Meeting Room

This is where groups have their main sessions.

The furniture is designed so that groups can move it easily for their convenience.

This half of the building was originally two separate cottages.

The low beam is the support that was installed when the connecting wall was removed in 1980.

Here you get an impression of the size of the original fireplace.

In the cupboard on the right the original Tudor structure can be seen.

There is a testimony of the Jewish community in East London to Father Wilson.

The tiny shoes were found in the courtyard chimney indicate that in 1922 ancient customs or superstitions were still commonplace.

*"Although we don't know the exact date of these shoes, the custom itself dates from medieval times. Our shoes were put into the west chimney; the 'caches' as they were called were a common hidden item put there by a previous occupant to bring good luck and fertility to the home. Little is known about the widely practiced folk custom, except that chimneys and fireplaces were probably chosen as hiding places because they served as the main focal point in most homes. Shoes were also hidden under floorboards, around doorways and below staircases, where it was considered that evil spirits and witches would enter and the shoes would then trap or corner any potential evil.*

*Why shoes? Well they are known to be symbols of authority, as in the Old Testament. (Psalm 108:9) They are linked with fertility: we still tie them on the back of wedding cars, and they are generally associated with good luck (consider all the holiday souvenirs in the shape of shoes). But most of all they stand in for the person: it has been a common practice from at least the sixteenth century to at least 1966 to throw an old shoe after people 'for luck'!"*

## Bedrooms & Attic

Visitors ascending the wooden staircase to the first-floor bedrooms find the wood beams, lathe and plaster walls of two original cottages.

The cast iron fireplace is Victorian dating from the pub conversion in the 1840's.

The staircase of the end cottage was moved outside the lounge in 1980.

The bathroom was created during the improvements in 1996.

An adventure to the second floor (ducking the water tank) leads to the attic.

The flooring may indicate that it was originally a grain store.

The original dormer windows were removed when the building was re-roofed in 1979.

The structure of the chimney stack can be seen.

The change in floor level indicates that the two cottages were built at different times.

This area is left for visiting children to find, which adds to the mystery of Hoppers.

## The Dining room:

This is called the McCurry Room in memory of Norry McCurry, who was Rector of St Dunstan's church Stepney. As a trustee of the Red House he was responsible for the renovation in 1980. His vision was to make Hoppers a self-catering facility for groups of up to 20 people from churches and charities of East London.

The first building on this site was a wooden bowling alley for use by patrons of the Rose & Crown. This was rebuilt in 1910, when it became a ward for children during the hop picking season in September.

It was rebuilt again in 1927 after the death of Richard Wilson, as part of a memorial to The Hoppers Parson, as he was called

This photograph is about 1930

The hospital records show that an average of 9.4 children per year were in-patients.

The busiest year was 1950 with 23 in-patients.



After the hospital closed it was little used and treated as a games room in the 80's. It was fitted out in 1996 to be the kitchen/diner it is now. The Kitchen was further updated in 2010, when the wooden flooring was laid and the night store heaters installed.

As the eating place this is the heart of Hoppers. Part of the ministry is that visitors are encouraged to linger over meals and talk. This activity has diminished in many homes, since the arrival of mobile communications.

Keeley Wynn's picture after Sieger Koder's *The Last Supper* was painted on site. Keeley is a lifelong Islington resident, a mother of three and runs Guerilla Galleries providing a platform for emerging artists.

*"In the picture we see the disciples, who had gathered with Jesus for the Passover, Christ himself is not painted in the picture; he is seen by his reflection in the cup, thus indicating the mystery that he stands with us in the space of viewing, affirming his position as being with us always yesterday, today and tomorrow. On the table, the bread is divided into pieces and is seen in the symbol of the Chi Rho, this is one of the earliest cruciform symbols used by Christians. It is formed by superimposing the first two letters of the word "Christ" in Greek, chi - ch and rho - r, and is symbolic of the total surrender of Jesus. Koder's Chi Rho lays a shadow of a cross made up of eleven pieces of bread. At the top right of the picture we perceive the dark figure of Judas leaving the room, taking his piece of bread with him."*

## The Cottage

The modern house, called the Cottage, was built in 1985 to provide extra accommodation but also to be able to be used as a self-contained 3-bedroom house.

The roof of the Cottage was designed to be in keeping with the main building.

The picture window in the lounge looking onto the garden was designed as a place for peaceful study.



There had previously been a house here built in memory of Father Wilson who died in 1927 and called the Memorial building with a chapel in it.

That building was destroyed by fire on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> November 1971, tragically killing Mrs Granger who was acting a resident caretaker.

## The Back yard & Garden

The yard with its garden furniture is used as an extension to the dining room for talking, playing games and eating when the weather is right.

The photo, taken long before the 1980 modernisation, shows the covered ways on each side. "Washday" is written on the back.

The centre of the yard is the best place to get a feel for the size of the premises. Also, an overview of the development of the building over the centuries is apparent.



The large central chimney was the core of the original Tudor building.

The back extension and the wing chimneys, made of redder 19<sup>th</sup> century brickwork, were added at the time of conversion to a Victorian Beer house.

## The Website

These notes should be read with the charity's website [www.hopperskent.org](http://www.hopperskent.org). The photo gallery shows the buildings inside and outside as they are today. By clicking on "layout inside" the rooms can be views individually.

How to book Hoppers and discover more of the history click "availability"

## Stories



### The Charity

The Red House, Stepney (Incorporated) is a company Limited by Guarantee formed in 1909. The Minute book of the company is in the Tower Hamlets archives in Whitechapel. A photograph and history of the Red House is on the noticeboard in the hall. It can be seen at 119 Commercial Road, London E1. The photo is dated 1990.

The Red House was built as a part of a complex of buildings belonging to St Augustine's Church. It backed onto a large red clergy house, which has a parish room and gymnasium below. There was also a house for lady workers, a clubhouse and a mortuary. There were first, second- and third-class dining rooms and bed-sitters for working men. Blue and White houses were contemplated but never built. Factory girls from Kensitas and Johnny Walker, came to make their pots of tea, cook their dinners and use the hall at midday.



The building was erected 20 years after the church was built in 1879. The Vicar was Harry Wilson who, under the influence of Bishop William Waltham Howe, exchanged the family living of The Worton's in Oxfordshire for Stepney in 1884. An article in the Church Review 4 May 1899 quotes his account of what he meant the Red House to do and be.

### The Book

The story of the Hopping Missions and the Little Hoppers Hospital is told in a book 'Pull no more Poles' written by JGW Farley in 1962. He had joined 'the Hoppers Parson' in 1906. At the time of writing he was vicar of St Columba's Church, Hoxton and chairman of The Red House, Stepney the charity that owns the building. There is a photo copy of the book at Hoppers.

"Hopping" the introduction says "in the old style is on the way out." The book recounts vivid pictures of the hop-pickers and those who went on missions to offer help and friendship to them during the annual 'holiday' to the hop-gardens of Kent. "The construction of the front courtyard as a war memorial" wrote John Farley "came about because Charles Saunders, who was killed in the 1st World War left money to the Mission. The building, dedicated by the Bishop of Stepney, at the beginning of hopping in 1925, was designed by an Architect Mr Hake. The whole courtyard was paved with bricks and a loggia built on three of its sides, including an entrance from the road. The roofs were tiled to match that of the old building\*. The brick pillars were painted white. Its arcades had a severely practical purpose of affording shelter in bad weather. In one of these was an open fireplace so comforting on cold evenings."

*\*pantile is a type of fired roof tile, normally made from clay. It is S-shaped in appearance and is single lap, meaning that the end of the tile laps only the course immediately below. Flat tiles normally lap two courses. A pantile-covered roof is considerably lighter than a flat-tiled equivalent and can be laid to a lower pitch.*