

YHA Archive News, November 2018  
by John Martin

The hazards of archiving... and a rare find

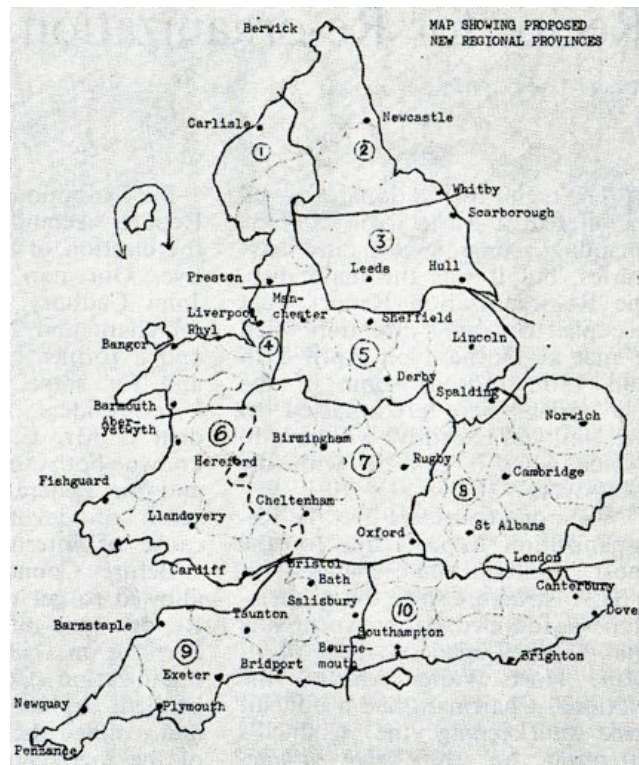
Over the years YHA has been pretty good with its retention of important archival material. The prime objective of a company's or charity's archive is of course to retain its governance records for consultation, comparison or research. YHA's archive at the Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, goes much deeper than that of course, with its very large collection of photographs, postcards, members' recollections, logbooks, ephemera, publications and even historic films.

Nevertheless, YHA's history has been studded with reorganisations, and it is when such alterations to its structure have taken place that the safeguarding of its archive has been most at risk; offices close, move or merge and staff with the greatest knowledge and experience move on or retire.

Three of the largest reorganisations came in 1965, 1986 and 2001. Before 1965, YHA was effectively a federation of 19 regions, each generally based on one or maybe a few counties. The map reflected more the way YHA had evolved piecemeal than an equal or fair division of the spoils, so there was huge variation in the way the regions operated, some with a small professional executive, but most run entirely voluntarily on a shoestring.

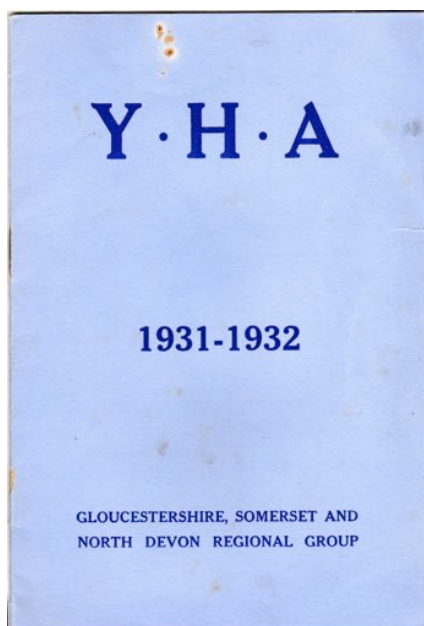


*For the first 35 years the map of YHA's regions remained almost unchanged; this illustration is from a YHA publication of 1947. Cambridge, East Anglia, South Wales and Wear Tees and Eskdale region were then the poorest, with fewest money-spinning hostels. Lakeland was best off, of course and Merseyside, West Riding, North Midlands, Gloucester Somerset and Exmoor and Devon and Cornwall not far behind.*



*The plan for the proposed 1965 rationalisation of the 19 regions into 10, as shown in the May 1964 issue of Youth Hosteller. The new regions were to be – 1: Lakes (almost unchanged), 2: Border and Dales; 3: Yorkshire (but Whitby hostel and others curiously were in region 2); 4: Merseyside, N Wales and the Isle of Man (unchanged); 5: Peak; 6: South Wales; 7: Midlands; 8: Eastern (the two earlier regions having merged in 1961); 9: South-West; 10: Southern. South Wales and Midlands were intended at first to be one huge region stretching from Aberystwyth to Oxford. London was rather awkwardly made the joint responsibility of 8 and 10. It's possible that many archival treasures were lost in the merging of regions and the closure of offices, though rather a miracle that so much survived.*

In 1965 YHA merged the 19 regions into ten so as to work more efficiently and ostensibly create greater parity between the new regions, on a more equally professional basis.



The greatest legacy for our Archive was threefold at the end of that first period: governance records of the national YHA from the early years were almost all kept safe, the 19 regions' printed annual reports were almost all retained, but the regions' governance records were patchily retained – possibly some mislaid as late as 2001. This last factor has created one of the most fascinating challenges for your archive team: searching to find the missing links in our story.

*Left: the cover of the 1931-32 annual report for the Gloucester, Somerset and North Devon (later Exmoor) region, one of the pioneers of the 19 regions, as it incorporated Street hostel. These reports, numbering over 650 between 1931 and 1965 alone, are happily almost complete in the Archive, and a mine of information. A few pages of this issue are shown following.*

## Youth Hostels Association

Gloucestershire, Somerset and North Devon Regional Group

### NATIONAL OFFICERS:

**President:**  
Professor G. M. TREVELYAN, O.M.  
**Vice-Presidents:**  
THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK, G. M. GATLEY,  
Professor L. P. ARBUTHNOTT and T. ARTHUR LEONARD.  
**Treasurer:**  
Sir PERCY JACKSON, J.P.  
**Hon. Secretary:**  
E. ST. J. CATCHPOOL.

### LOCAL OFFICERS:

**President:**  
H. NORMAN MATTHEWS, M.A.  
**Vice-Presidents:**  
Mrs. ARTHUR HOBBS, Mrs. F. G. ROBINSON, J.P.  
**Hon. Treasurer:** ERNEST J. TAYLOR  
**Hon. Secretary:** PAUL D. STURGE, B.A.  
**Hon. Financial Secretary:**  
J. H. HAYNES, R.Sc.  
**Hon. Auditor:**  
E. NEVILL HERON, A.C.A.  
**Hon. Equipment Secretary:**  
Miss N. E. FRAR  
**Hon. Secretary North Gloucestershire Committee:**  
E. COURTNEY GARDNER  
**Hon. Secretary Street Committee:**  
STEPHEN B. DALTON  
**Hon. Secretary Barnstaple Committee:**  
HAROLD C. TILLEY  
**Hon. Membership Secretary:**  
FRANK H. WILLIAMS

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## AIM

*To help all, but especially young people to a greater knowledge, care and love of the countryside, especially by providing Hostels and other simple accommodation for them in their travels.*

## Report on the Season

1931-1932

The report on the second year's work of the Association may well be introduced by a short statement on the origin of the work. The Youth Hostels Association was set on foot in the spring of 1930; the local work in the West began at a meeting in September, 1930, and in the spring of the following year the first Council meeting was held in Bristol. In October, 1931, the first report on the work in the West showed that nine Hostels had been opened, and some 2,500 nights had been spent in them by members. This was a clear indication that the Hostels were meeting a real need; the same experience had been met with in other parts of the country, and the national figures for 1931 were eighty Hostels and about 10,000 nights spent in them.

With this encouraging start, the Association began the work of the past year; its aim has been to provide in the simplest and most economical way possible accommodation for its members who have by means of the Hostels experienced the joys of the road, healthy exercise and comradeship, the beauties of the countryside, and the pleasure of "roughing it."

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## Membership and Organisation of the Regional Group.

The membership of this group has more than doubled, the figures being:—

	Under 25	Over 25	Total
Men	321	135	456
Women	220	120	340
Total	541	255	796

Twenty-five societies have affiliated to the Group, as follows:—

National Union of Teachers, Bristol Branch.	Bristol Federation of Old Boys' Societies.
Co-operative Holidays' Association, Rambling Club.	Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, Wansley Guild.
Tot. H., Bristol Branch.	Folk House Ramblers and Campers.
West Rambling Club, Bristol.	University Settlement, Bristol.
Cyclists Touring Club, Bristol D.A.	Youth Cycling Club.
Somerset Girl Guides' Association.	New Education Fellowship, Bristol Branch.
Bristol School Masters' Association.	Holiday Fellowship, Cotswold Group.
Radstock Teachers' Association.	Boys Brigade, Bristol Battalion.
Young Theosophists, Bristol.	Tot. H., Dursley.
Georgian Hiking Society.	Tot. H., Gloucester.
National Union of Women Teachers, Bristol Branch.	Association of Assistant Mistresses.
University of Bristol Union.	Tot. H., Stroud.

The Council of the Regional Group, which consists of representatives of the above societies, together with ten representatives of the members, has met twice during the year.

The Executive Committee which was appointed at the Council Meeting in January, 1931, has met six times, and consists of the following:—

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The Chairman, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary and Hon. Financial Secretary.

Mrs. Clothier (Stroud).	Mr. F. G. Baker (Bristol).
Mr. F. J. Bond (Bristol).	Capt. Norman (Bristol).
Miss Fox (Bristol).	Mr. J. E. Simon (Bristol).
Mr. C. W. Hawkes (Stroud).	Mr. F. T. Jennings (Bristol).
Mr. F. H. Williams (Bristol).	Mr. E. Courtney Gardner
Mr. R. Edwards (Cheltenham).	(Cheltenham)
(Resigned July).	Miss C. L. Pearson (Worcester).
Mr. S. B. Dalton (Stroud).	

The Executive has had general supervision of the Hostels, and of the working of the Group. The North Gloucestershire Committee has continued to look after the Hostels in that district. The Street Committee takes full responsibility for the management and finance of the Street Hostel. A new committee was formed during the Spring at Barnstaple, and has been actively at work, taking responsibility for the Hostels and further developments for the area from Western Exmoor to the Cornish boundary. Only by this localisation of the work is it possible to deal adequately with our large district.

### Work of the Season.

The aim of the Group to provide a complete chain of Hostels along the Cotswolds, Mendips, Quantocks and Exmoor, has been carried a step further this season.

The analysis of members using the Hostels is as follows:—

	Over 25	Under 25	Total
Men	1,276	4,638	5,914
Women	1,082	2,373	3,455
Total	2,358	7,011	9,369

Thus 9,369 members spent 11,429 nights in our Hostels in the period from Easter to September 30th, 1932.

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List of Hostels provided by this Group.					Number of overnights Easter-Sept. 1934
Hostel	Opened	Warden	Premises		
<b>COTSWOLDS—</b>					
†Mickleton ...	July, 1931 ...	Mrs. Baylis ...	Shed and Room at Ninewah Farm ...	...	891
*Notgrove ...	March, 1932 ...	Mr. and Mrs. Harris...	Rooms at Westfield Farm...	...	705
†Stroud ...	June, 1931 ...	Miss Ritter ...	Rooms and Loft at Downfield House...	...	602
*Radminton ...	March, 1932 ...	Mr. and Mrs. Round...	Rooms at Old Portcullis ...	...	537
†Bath ...	March, 1931 ...	Miss Tollemache ...	Rooms and Huts at Bathaston Villa ...	...	739
<b>MENDIPS—</b>					
*Wookey Hole ...	March, 1931 ...	Mrs. Masters ...	Rooms and Barn at Elbor Farm ...	...	1,258
*Doulting ...	March, 1932 ...	Mrs. Reskies ...	Rooms at Temple House Farm ...	...	325
Street ...	March, 1931 ...	Mr. and Mrs. Cozens ...	The Chalet ...	...	935
<b>SALISBURY PLAIN—</b>					
*Britton ...	May, 1932 ...	Mrs. Wheeler ...	Rooms and Barn at Southdown Farm...	...	224
<b>QUANTOCKS—</b>					
*St. Audries ...	April, 1931 ...	Mr. and Mrs. Proot ...	Rooms and Barn at Perry Farm ...	...	839
<b>EXMOOR—</b>					
*Minchhead ...	June, 1931 ...	Mr. and Mrs. David ...	Lofts at Hopcott Private Hotel ...	...	1,161
†Brendon ...	May, 1931 ...	Mrs. Wilson ...	Rockford Lodge ...	...	1,990
†Hampton ...	March, 1932 ...	Miss Rogers ...	Old Malthouse ...	...	633
*North Molton ...	June, 1932 ...	Mrs. Huxtable ...	Rooms at West Yarde Farm ...	...	210
*Barnstaple ...	June, 1932 ...	Mr. Rodland ...	V.M.C.A. ...	...	340
Total Overnights					11,429
At the Hostels marked * the Association pays rent. At those marked † the Wardens receive members payments.					
At Street the Hostel is provided and maintained by a local committee.					

Back in 2005, I was delighted to find that the complete early records of the Birmingham and Mid-Wales region, the Warwick and Northants region and the London region had been sent up from the old national office in St Albans to Matlock about five years earlier. These consisted of complete runs of leather-bound tomes of detailed committee and council meetings at a local level – and the informative content tended to be much greater than the national minute books. These records are treasures, and formed the basis, for instance, of the all-hostel file that is to be found on the intranet.

In time, through the kindness and forethought of various YHA officers and well-wishers – more turned up. The entire records of the Border and Dales region in the North-East (the merged Northumberland and Tyneside and the Wear Tees and Eskdale region right from 1931 to 1986) had been kept safe by Arthur Dunabin in his home in Durham when offices merged. Graham Bolton in Hull similarly kept safe the same 55 years of records for almost all of Yorkshire when the Bingley office near Bradford was to close. Ian Shaw, Chairman of the Merseyside region in the 1980s, thought it wise to save the priceless Merseyside records from as early as 1929, when there was an office hiatus – they went to Liverpool Central Library for safe-keeping. The late Brian McKenna somehow was the proud possessor of the uniquely beautiful copper-plate written minutes (in school exercise books) of the tiny East Anglia and Cambridge regions from their outset, while the Lakeland region offered much valuable early material from a variety of sources – Bob Barnby, Ray Milner and a treasure trove at YHA Langdale. All of these records were passed to YHA's Archive.

Yet some geographical areas are poorly represented – we have no official minute books of the early Manchester, North Midlands, South Wales, Devon and Cornwall, Gloucester Somerset and Exmoor, Wiltshire, Oxford or South Coast regions, though many individual treasures have been acquired. Generally, the south is much less well represented than the north. It seems certain that many records there will have been disposed of in 1986 or 2001, though a few special items have trickled through, such as good bodies of work from former South-West regional secretaries Charles Allen and Ken Tyler. More may turn up in time.

And so to the rare find of my title...

Graham Bolton of Hull made sure about ten years ago that his find of Yorkshire treasures was made available to our Archive. He got in touch a few weeks ago to say he had unearthed some more, and the new pile is awaiting transfer to Birmingham. It is rare nowadays to find a first-ever illustration of any of our 1,150 all-time hostels, but amongst Graham's items rescued from Bingley in the 1980s was a large display card with 15 tiny (but good

quality) photos attached from pre-war days. My eyes lit up on seeing images of early hostels at Askrigg, near Hawes, and Horton-in Ribblesdale – both killed off by the war, and for which I had seen only a single illustration of each previously. But there at the top of the card was the small Grassington hostel, a grey outbuilding parked somewhere round the back of the village's manor house and again closed in 1939 and devoid of any illustration in our Archive until 2018. Linton hostel opened in 1943 to replace it.



*A rare – possibly unique – photograph.*

*The West Yorkshire annual report for 1933 described the accommodation at Grassington as: two lofts approached by the outside stone staircase, the small room to the right of the stair, the coachhouse under the first loft, the wash kitchen (part use) and the two bedrooms above the wash kitchen, approached from a door on ground level, with all access thereto and the use of water facilities in the yard... and use of lavatory accommodation in two places, one on each side of the wall of the kitchen garden, and access thereto. This property is now known as Manor House Mews.*