



YHA (England and Wales) Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, rev2020-01-01

Note: much of the detail in this Profile is compiled from material and historical accounts displayed throughout the hostel

Berwick Youth Hostel 2011 to present

Dewar's Lane Granary, Berwick TD15 1HJ

Historic County: Northumberland

GR: NT 998527



The Dewar's Lane Granary site ready for YHA operation (author's photograph, 17th February 2011)

Berwick youth hostel is one of YHA's most recently-acquired premises, opening early in 2011. For some years the Association had been interested in operating at this key location, though the desire may have been tempered somewhat by existing hostels at Rock Hall (1949-91), Wooler (1954-present day), and the Scottish YHA's property just 14 miles to the north at Coldingham Sands (1941-2008).

The hostel occupies the historic Dewar's Lane Granary, formerly known as John Dewar's Granary, a six-storey building with a long and eventful past. The facility was built just inside the fortified town walls, outside which runs the River Tweed. It contained facilities for storing and conditioning grain and seed. The building was completed in 1769 but on 20th December 1815 it suffered from a serious fire, which resulted in its considerable lean – one that is greater than that of the Tower of Pisa.

The following is an extract from a document entitled *Historical Register of Remarkable Events which have occurred in Northumberland, Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Berwick-upon-Tweed*:

1815 (Dec 20). A most dreadful fire broke out in the extensive granaries of Messrs Johnson, Carr, & Co, John Dewar, John Waugh, John Forster, and George Sligh, in Berwick. The fire originated from the kiln used for drying grain being overheated, and was discovered about six o'clock in the evening, but did not burst into a flame till near seven, when it raged with such fury, that, in a short time, the granaries (about 200 feet in length) were reduced to ashes. The whole of Bridge-street was at one time threatened with destruction, and several of the inhabitants there removed their furniture, &c, and the whole of Mr Reid's valuable stock of books were taken out of the house for safety. The damage was estimated at £5,000. At twelve o'clock the fire bell was rung a second time, the flames having broke out in a hay loft belonging to William Bell, the old Hen and Chickens inn. Had the wind blown as strong from the west as it did from the north-east no exertions could have saved the whole of Bridge-street from being burnt down. No lives were lost. Few of the sufferers were insured.

The damage was equivalent to about £3,500,000 in modern terms and not far short of the cost of the reconstruction work carried out at the Granary between 2008 and 2010. Had the owners of the buildings been insured at the time of the fire then the building would probably have been demolished rather than reused; after the fire the Granary functioned for a further 170 years.

The principal use of Dewar's Lane Granary was for storing grain brought in from farms in the area, conditioning and cleaning it prior to its being shipped out for use. The grain was transported to the site largely by road, in sacks on horse-drawn carts. Around eight people worked in the Granary; this provided a steady employment level for Berwick, especially because around 1800 there were 15 granaries, 30 public houses and two breweries within a 200-metre radius of Dewar's Lane. The whole area surrounding Bridge Street and the Quayside contained a dense fabric of buildings varying from granaries to slaughterhouses.

Berwick was a thriving commercial centre and one of Britain's busiest ports in the mid 18th century. The port of Berwick was ideally placed as a shipping point for grain bound for commercial use across the country. The Granary remained in constant use right up until the mid 1980s. By the 1780s Berwick was the third most important grain port in Britain, after Hull and Boston, handling 1,000 tons of grain per month, most of which was destined for London.

At the beginning of the 18th century, more than half the population worked either on the land or in an agricultural-related trade. Most of the land was owned by aristocracy and the gentry and it was rented to farmers and smallholders; Northumberland was no different. The land surrounding Berwick was very fertile and therefore a great cereal growing area, as there was the Valley of the Till, which was the last major tributary of the River Tweed, and the land in the Scottish Borders was better known as 'Merse', meaning Marsh in Anglo-Saxon.

The transportation of grain and goods from producers to consumers became an industry itself in the early 18th-century. Due to this, major road networks needed to be put in place and a carrier services was adopted between many Border and North Northumberland towns and Berwick. The road network that was so vital in the 18th century for cereal-carrying traffic can still be seen today. In the mid 19th-century a railway was built with lines on both the north and south sides of the Tweed. The minor railway that was introduced to the Granary in the mid 19th-century is the shortest minor railway in North Northumberland and it is also the most northerly industrial railway in England for which evidence survives. However there is no evidence of the type of wagon used, but it is thought that they were made of wood with a flat bed for carrying the sacks.

After World War II, many grain companies and facilities disappeared, with the Dewar's Lane Granary being the last to close. After this, a grain merchanting business was established in Berwick in the 1980s and grew to be the largest such business in the UK. The town is also now home to the UK's largest totally independent, family-owned malting company.

The hostel has on display this intriguing information about how the Granary was used in industrial times:



It is believed that when the Granary was first built, the present 'tunnel' through the Quay Wall between the Granary and the Quayside had not been constructed, so material would be taken down Dewar's Lane, where you can still see the ruts made by cart wheels along the road surface, and transferred into the Granary through a doorway at first-floor level. Later, however, around the middle of the 19th century, the construction of the tunnel through the Quay Wall, and the laying of the narrow-gauge rail line through it and into the Granary yard, permitted the handling of grain in bulk. A conveyor system was installed that hoisted the material up to the top of the Granary from where it was gravity-fed by a chute to the appropriate floor.

It is said that, when grain was dropped onto a floor from a chute, the entire building would shake!

Around eight people worked in the Granary, spreading the grain across a floor, cleaning out dirt and impurities, and monitoring its condition. When ready for use, it would be loaded, either bagged or in bulk, onto wagons in the yard which would then be pushed by hand through the tunnel and out onto the Quayside. Some shipments would be loaded onto vessels moored by the Quayside, but mostly the material would

be transferred onto carts and taken round by Bridge Street and across Berwick Bridge to Tweedmouth dock. A certain amount of grain was used locally, to manufacture animal feedstuffs – this was done in a building across Dewar's Lane, where the landscaped area and the car park are now.

In the 20th century the Granary was in the ownership of John Prentice & Co. and handled linseed meal, as well as storing and mixing grass seed. Linseed meal was shipped up from Hull in the form of slabs, and was treated in a drying and crushing plant situated where the Granary annexe is now, beside Sally Port. It was then used in the manufacture of animal feedstuffs. The Granary was originally built with a pantiled roof. However, by the 20th century it was proving almost impossible to get any large new items of plant and machinery along the narrow alleyways and into the building. Some time after World War II the tiles were replaced by asbestos sheeting which could be easily removed. When new pieces of machinery were to be installed, off came the roof, and the items were hoisted over using a crane set up in the Bridge Street car park, and the roof replaced. As part of the restoration of the Granary, a pantiled roof has been reinstated.

After abandonment in 1985, Dewar's Lane Granary stood derelict for more than 20 years. Gradually the building and the site became a more and more dilapidated and weed-infested eyesore. The Berwick Preservation Trust had long expressed an interest in trying to secure a future of some kind for the Granary. In 1997 the structure gained Grade II Listed Building status, providing a safeguard against demolition, but that did not offer any clear prospect for its future.

In 2001 a grant package involving the Council, English Heritage and the Architectural Heritage Fund was put together to organise a feasibility study. In the early stages of the project it was funded by the above. Picking up the thread, the summer 2003 edition of *YHA News* ran an article with a wish-list of hostel developments in the North-East. This included a substantial new youth hostel at Berwick-upon-Tweed, serving the town and Northumberland coast for domestic groups, families and individual travellers. YHA had recently co-funded a study to assess the range of buildings likely to be available for a new hostel; the Granary was the site subsequently used. The Preservation Trust had tried to put in place an action plan for the building, but it wasn't until the YHA became involved that the decision was made in 2004 to go ahead and restore the building into a youth hostel.

YHA made a further announcement of the new venture through its eNews website in December 2006, though three years later plans for its partial use of the Granary were still emerging: the youth hostel and the bistro were to be the responsibility of the YHA, the Berwick Preservation Trust having entered into an agreement with the Association to formalise details. YHA agreed a long-term fully-repairing lease for the entire site and would assume total responsibility for the maintenance of the fabric of the building once completed. After many years of dereliction the building was restored by the Preservation Trust. It now houses a bistro, conference rooms and exhibition gallery and the youth hostel.



1 2



Early stages of the Dewar's Lane Granary site development, from images displayed at the hostel. The battered nature of the building, the invasive vegetation and the outside dereliction have been swept away



3 4

Taking shape – author's photographs recorded during a 'hard-hat' visit in May 2010



The project cost £5 million, funded by 50 organisations and 50 individual donations. 80 per cent of the total was spent on the reconstruction. The original building had not been designed for human habitation and the footfall that would bring, so an all-new steel frame had to be inserted in order to give the building the strength it needed. There was a substantial facelift; there were four new glass pavilions added to the exterior of the building, a new roof was laid complete with dormer windows, and new windows and internal walls were installed. A delicate balance was achieved between attractive modern cosmetic alteration and the deliberate retention of features such as bare stone walls, authentic mortar and original timber shutters.

Post-industrial décor in the stairwell at the youth hostel, a mixture of lime-mortared stone walls, brick and modern steel structures (author's photograph, late 2010)

YHA created the 13 bedroom en suite 55-bed youth hostel (variable between 55 and 59 beds) on budget and on schedule. The ground floor contains YHA's reception and bistro and breakfast facilities, popular with both guests and local people. Outside, to the rear, are an outdoor courtyard seating area and a separate accommodation block provides two spacious fully accessible bedrooms with four beds in each, above which are private rooms for a member of staff and for volunteers. The courtyard has been the subject of much creative design and development in recent years.

Within the Dewar's Lane Granary are a bistro, gallery, meeting and conference rooms.

On the third floor, rooms 301 to 305 have beds for six, five, five, six and three respectively. On the fourth, rooms 401-406 accommodate two, six, five, five, five and three guests.

The top floor, under the eaves, houses a lounge-cum-TV room and dining room, with a well-equipped self-catering kitchen in between. All floors are connected by stairs and a lift.



Berwick's youth hostel stamps

Siôn Gates was the manager at the outset. Berwick hostel opened on 18th February 2011, though it was brought into use the previous evening and overnight by a party of schoolchildren from the local middle school. They enjoyed an afternoon of painting pottery at the hostel before tucking into a delicious home cooked meal. One of the children said:

I had such a fun time... my favourite bit was sleeping in a room full of my friends and the big breakfast in the morning...

YHA's website described more of the hostel's main features and functions:

The hostel will introduce young people to heritage education in a fun inclusive way and keep the 200 year old building alive, ensuring its long term viable future. It is a 4 star Youth Hostel which boasts a fantastic blend of original features with a state-of-the-art hostelling experience. It is located on the quay-side, right in the town centre. The former granary building is unmistakable due to its lean, similar to the famous Tower of Pisa!

The ground floor has a modern bistro which will serve food and drinks to YHA customers and the general public. The first floor has a comfortable mezzanine area with a balcony looking down to the ground floor and conference facilities to accommodate up to 50 people. The second floor has an art gallery which adds a new aspect to what is currently on offer in Berwick. It is capable of staging top quality exhibitions including items borrowed from national galleries and museums.

On the third and fourth floors are the comfortable en suite bedrooms and on the fifth floor is the impressive self-catering kitchen.

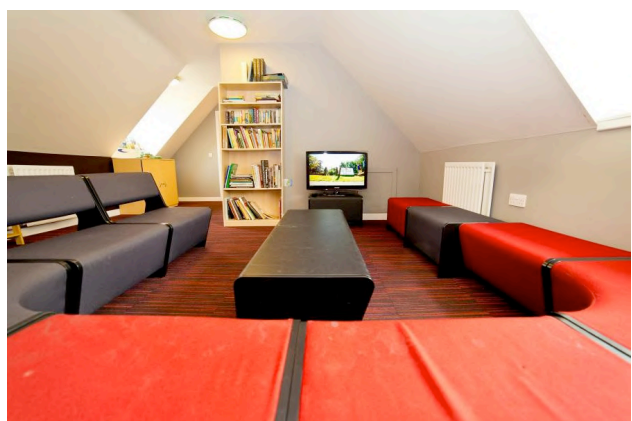
Four months later there was an official opening, led by the Lord-Lieutenant of Northumberland (the Duchess of Northumberland) on Friday 3rd June. A plaque in the building lists 16 donor organisations including the YHA (England and Wales), Berwick Borough Council, Northumberland County Council, One NorthEast, the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage. Also listed are over 30 individual donors to the project.



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Youth hostel interior views.

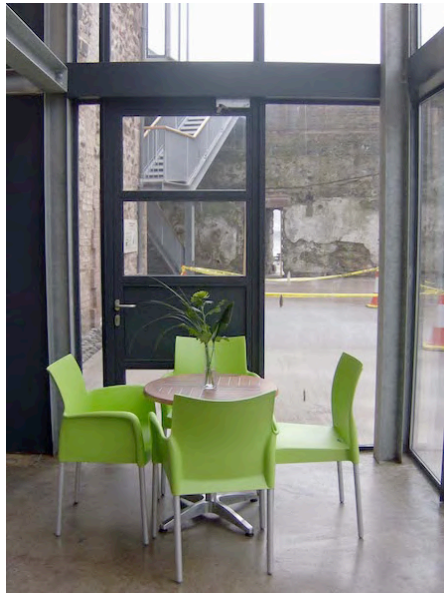
1: attractive bistro, bar and reception; 2: first floor lounge area;
3&4: the self-catering kitchen and quiet lounge, both located on the top floor
(YHA publicity images early in the life of the youth hostel)



1 2



3 4



5 6



- 1: the pronounced lean in the hostel walls is most noticeable from this Dewar's Lane viewpoint on the east side;
 2: on the west side, massive buttresses shore up the Granary. The combination of old and new architectural styles is especially enhanced by the visible mixture of stone, steel, glass, timber and modern replacement pantiles;
 3: an original granary shutter, now restored; 4: the photographs on this page were taken by the author during the Open Day on 17th February 2011, the day before the hostel's introduction into service;
 5: overlooking the courtyard at the rear of the hostel is this attractive extension of the hostel's bistro dining space. The small chink of light pierced in the town wall was the narrow gateway built in Victorian times to accept the tiny industrial wagon railway – one of the shortest ever in Britain – that linked the granary to the River Tweed beyond;
 6: across the courtyard on the ground floor are two fully compliant rooms for the disabled.
 The upper floor houses separate accommodation for a member of staff and for visiting volunteers

Keith Webster took on the manager’s role in 2017 and has developed strongly the hostel’s role in the community, so that the Dewar’s Lane site buzzes with local activity during the day. There is an emphasis on facilities for the young and families. Special attractions such as the JMW Turner Exhibition from May to October 2019 bring a wide audience to the YHA and there is considerable input from volunteers in the presentation of the garden and green environment. There are plans to give the bin enclosure a sedum roof to enhance the view and the environment.



Recent developments. 1: the hostel’s front entrance has received new signage, including an imaginative new chiselled font emphasising the Granary’s lean; 2: the café and bar have gained a new look; 3: a new children’s play area sits in the corner of the café-bar space; 4: in 2019 the Youth Hostel received the Floral Cup for the best Garden and Floral display in the town. This was fitting recognition for the impact volunteers have had on the green spaces, especially in the last few years (author’s photographs, September 2019)

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
2011-present: Mar to following Feb									
+: notional figure included for exclusive hire									
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
...	7829+	7838+	8671	10083	10522	10327	9948	9782	9785