



YHA (England and Wales)

Youth Hostel Profile

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

Kettlewell Youth Hostels

Kettlewell [Old School] Youth Hostel 1933 to 1944

The Old School, School Hill, Kettlewell, Skipton, Yorkshire

Historic County:

YHA Region: West Riding

GR: SD 972724

Yorkshire (West Riding)

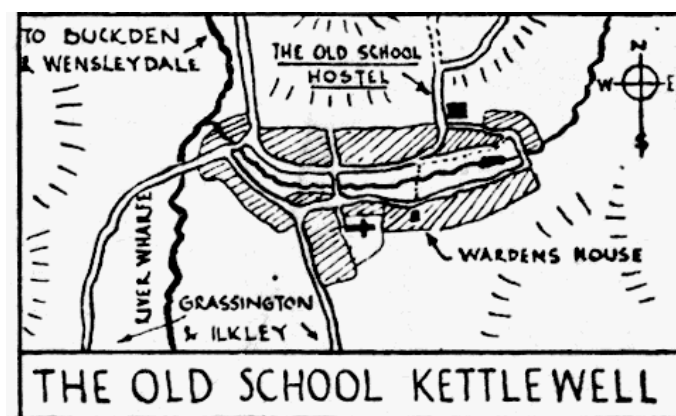
On 12th December 1933 the old West Riding Region of the Youth Hostels Association opened a medium-sized hostel in the redundant former Church of England school in Kettlewell. The typically Victorian building of 1895 featured a bell turret and high-pitched roof and was built on a hillside on the north edge of the village, at the side of steep School Hill. The building had a chequered history; a Friends' meeting house was built in this elevated spot in 1683, but fell into ruin. The school and schoolhouse incorporated its datestone into the building. Kettlewell was a stronghold of non-conformism, however, and its inhabitants did not support the Church of England school, which was quickly abandoned while another village school was built. It saw a period of neglect until YHA's tenancy.



1: a rare postcard of the Old School youth hostel, viewed from the steep School Hill, sometimes called Cam Gill Road;

2: photograph showing the typically tall schoolroom windows (author's collection)

The warden was Miss Maggie Jacques from almost the outset until her retirement in 1942; she lived in Wear's Cottage, a few minutes from the hostel to the south of the stream. After that date there were volunteer wardens. Miss Jacques died in 1949.



- 1: a lovely photograph of Miss Jacques taking delivery of the hostels' bread supplies. It was reported in 1942 that hostel meals were taken at her home; this may have been the pattern from the beginning (author's collection);
- 2: the entry in the YHA's 1936 Durham and Yorkshire Regional Guide included this useful sketch map and gave the following advice: beds for 16 men, 10 women. North-east end of village, on shoulder of hill leading to Park Rash. Warden, Miss Jacques. Wear's Cottage – across the stream (5 mins by the bridge, 3 mins by the stepping stones). Station: none. Bus 3 mins. Store 3 mins. Good rough tramping all round. Buckden Pike (2,302 ft), Great Whernside (2,310 ft).
 Hostel Distances: Horton 15 m., Askrigg 17 m., Dacre Banks 22 m.

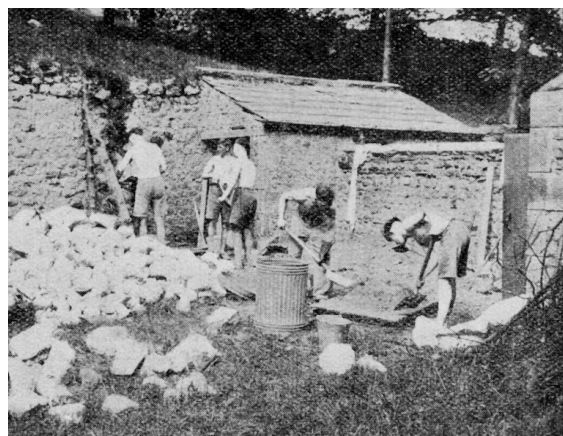
A timber hut was acquired in 1937 and placed in the garden at the east end of the building. It had 10 places for men, boosting the hostel's capacity from 26 to 38. In December 1938 the West Riding Region undertook a frank assessment of its hostels and reported that both the hut and the main building leaked.



1 2



3 4



5 6

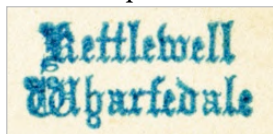


- 1: a lively common room scene at the Old School hostel, with a collecting tin being passed around (author's collection);
 2: the newly built men's dormitory hut; 3: constructing a new bed here; 4: the school-room used as common room and self-caterers' dining room – photographs 2-4 by 1930s Lakeland warden J Maden (YHA Archive);
 5: an illustration from Rucksack Magazine, Spring 1936, of a working party at the outdoor members' kitchen (YHA Archive);
 6: ready for some rough weather: members of a local YHA group stand at the entrance door (author's collection)

The Old School was able to operate during the war, though no doubt plagued by short-term requisitions. A new three-year tenancy arrangement with the Trustees of Kettlewell School had been established on 30th September 1939, at £14pa, and on 20th January 1941 this seems to have passed to the YHA Trust, presumably from the

regional group. There are no extant records of bednight figures for summer 1940, but a national notice of 8th October 1940 advised that the hostel was operating. Hostel usage continued in 1941-42.

Over the previous four or five years the hostel had been attracting increasing numbers, in line with YHA's widespread success. When the chance of owning a larger property presented itself with a substantial house in the village, YHA was keen to take up the offer. Whernside House was negotiated in 1942 and opened the following year, though the committee thought it would be wise to keep the old school available on a quarterly tenancy to help with overflows at peak times, an arrangement that lasted through 1943 and 1944, by which time organisational complexities were proving too troublesome.



This two-property solution to overcrowding was also used in Derbyshire for a couple of seasons in the early 1930s at Hartington and in the 1940s at Castleton. Confusingly, a YHA newsletter of July 1942 described how the Parish Hall was set up as an overflow. Perhaps this meant the Old School, though the Village Hall was certainly used later.

After YHA left, the property carried on as a private outdoor activities hostel mainly catering for church groups. In recent years it has become two separate private dwellings, somewhat altered externally.

Kettlewell [Whernside House] Youth Hostel 1943 to present

Whernside House, Kettlewell, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 5QU

Historic County:
Yorkshire (West Riding)

YHA Regions: West Riding, Yorkshire,
North

GR: SD 970723

The new hostel, Whernside House, was purchased late in 1942 for £1,850, with the deeds passing to the YHA Trust on 20th February 1943. Colin Hare's book *A Walk around Kettlewell* describes how the property had been specially built about 1915 (another source has 1903) as a guest house, run by Mrs Carradice, wife of the schoolmaster. In the early 1940s it was Mrs Heseltine's guest house, baker's shop and café. It consisted of the main house of two floors with further attic rooms above, an L-shaped extension to the rear left, served by a lane, and a steep rear garden on three levels. A shop display window bay to the left of the central entrance is seen in hostel pictures for 30 years or so.



Left: Whernside House in 1938 [photo Graham Chamberlain]

YHA's *West Riding Newsletter* of December 1942 gave this account of the region's latest acquisition:

New Kettlewell – Another first class hostel for West Riding

Kettlewell, that charming village in Upper Wharfedale, which has been frequently described as the key to the Yorkshire Dales, is to have a new hostel. The WR Group have acquired Whernside House, a building in the centre of the village well known to hostellers, which it is hoped will be open early in the New Year. The new hostel will have a capacity and amenities comparable with Ingleton and Malham and it is expected it will prove just as popular. Further details of the date of opening will probably be available at the Annual General Meeting, and will appear on hostel notice boards.

For the benefit of the many lovers of the present Kettlewell hostel, to provide extra accommodation at holiday periods and for School Journey parties, etc, it is anticipated that the Old School Hostel will be kept open during the summer months as a self cookers' hostel.

The acquisition of Whernside House has been made possible by a substantial grant, and a loan obtained through National Office, but there is a considerable balance to be met out of WR funds, and we venture to appeal to you for a donation towards this balance. Any donation, however large, however small, will be gratefully received by the Hon Treasurer.

The hostel opened in 1943. The first wardens were the much-travelled and respected Robert and Doris Gummerson. The Gummersons had started their YHA careers in 1936 at lonely Swinklebank, Longsleddale, north of Kendal, before moving lock, stock and barrel to Jerusalem Farm hostel, high on the Lancashire Pennines near Colne, in a blizzard in January 1941. Their next move took them to Kettlewell, also in a blizzard, to make ready for the hostel's opening in January 1943. They stayed for three years, before moving on to another new, though short-lived, hostel at nearby Bishopdale in 1946. Further Yorkshire Dales YHA moves took them to Aysgarth (again, new) in 1951, Stainforth in 1954 and back to Aysgarth by 1957, before Robert died in 1958. Doris continued to warden in the area until her death in 1964.



Left: Robert Gummerson (centre), always photographed with beret and pipe, with his two dogs Punch and Midge and Kettlewell regulars Arthur Rushton and Freddie Lund at a game of dominoes at the King's Head, Kettlewell (photo courtesy Graham Chamberlain)

WHERNSIDE KETTLEWELL

The Gummersons' lasting legacy was a rich fund of hostel anecdotes by Robert, roughly typed up by him and now a treasure in the YHA Archive. Not least was owning a succession of bitch collies whose mathematical prowess made headlines in newspapers and on the radio. They had a reputation for playing card games and dominoes, counting the numbers of guests staying, and even offering some kind of conversation. Robert wrote of further experiences at Whernside House:

By 1942 YHA membership had reached a record figure and it was necessary to open new hostels. The West Riding, about this time, opened Kettlewell, Linton, Scar Top and Pateley Bridge. There had been a self-cookers' hostel at the Old School for many years, but usage was so great at this time that it was incapable of supplying the necessary accommodation. Whernside House came on the market, and we were fortunate enough to be given the wardenship... It was our dog Punch who became friendly with one of the farmers and broke the ice for us...

Our previous hostels had depended on oil for illumination. Here we had electric, which we thought a great improvement. It was not long before we had second thoughts. The plant was very small and depended for most part on water from the local beck for power, and the light would frequently fail at the most inconvenient times. There would be a hurried search for the 'Engineer', a local who looked after it, and the explanation was usually that a trout had got into the pipe.

Membership had grown enormously; on the other hand rationing was making itself felt. The traditional English breakfast of bacon and eggs was becoming a memory, and we were introducing baked beans. If beans are omitted from the menu breakfast today the youngsters feel they are being defrauded; baked beans have become the staple diet of self-cookers.

The excitement of spending a first night in a hostel is understandable and some school parties can be very trying. One such, a party of girls, was at Kettlewell and long after lights out were scampering about on the landing. After due warning, Mrs Gummerson went upstairs armed with a stick. When they heard her coming, they rushed about like rabbits to their respective rooms. She caught the last one and applied the stick in the appropriate place, after which all was silent. The following morning there was an unusual liveliness and whispering among the children, and Mrs Gummerson was told: 'You hit the teacher last night when you came up with the stick.'

During the winter of 1944-45 an Aga cooker was installed here, and thanks to the perseverance of several members the hut was moved from the Old School and re-erected at the back of Whernside House for use as a cycle shed. All the equipment was moved from the Old School when YHA's tenancy there ended.



This attractive postcard of Whernside House probably dates from the YHA's first years here. The bay front, later removed, indicated former use as a shop, and the YHA triangle appeared to be temporarily perched by the step (author's collection)

In the late war years the West Riding was witnessing unprecedented usage of its youth hostels. Over 7,000 stays were recorded in 1944, a figure not matched until over 30 years later, though the capacity of 60 beds stayed constant.

Norman and Vi Young took over from the Gummersons in 1946 and stayed for at least a decade. They and the steady stream of hostellers at that time would have appreciated the new drying room, due in 1948.

Mr and Mrs Sutcliffe were the next wardens, at the tail-end of the 1950s. They were in charge during December 1957, when, according to *Youth Hosteller*, February 1958:

the attention of the whole country was concentrated on six YHA members trapped underground at Kettlewell and the efforts made by a host of volunteers in the successful rescue. Kettlewell hostel became the operation 'command post' and grateful thanks are due to the wardens, Molly and Albert Sutcliffe, who coped so magnificently with the unprecedented circumstances.

An improved hostel shop for the convenience of members was fitted in 1957. Less welcome was a string of bad luck incidents two years later, when Albert Sutcliffe was involved in a car crash and then fell through a roof while fighting a fire in the village. In the manner of the day, he was soon back at YHA work.



Further enhancement came to the hostel in the early 1960s. It was completely re-equipped with new bedding. Mr and Mrs Devitt, who were by 1963 firmly established at Kettlewell, enjoyed a refurnished common room, dedicated to regional worker Arthur Hammonds. In this year the old cycle shed was demolished and replaced; this was presumably the old hut from the former hostel.



Another step forward in 1965 was the considerable improvement to the toilet facilities at Kettlewell.

Left: an unusual postcard view of Whernside House youth hostel, taken from the field to the rear of the property. The hut seen immediately behind the stone wall was probably the cycle shed, formerly the Old School's men's dormitory. It would thus date the postcard to before 1964 (author's collection).



1: this undated transparency from the camera of George Miller is the earliest colour image found of the hostel, with steps still in place to the shop entrance. Members' mealtime paraphernalia can be seen through the plate-glass windows. The fire escape is of much simpler construction than that fitted later. Warden Graham Chamberlain replaced both features (author's collection);
 2: a later photograph revealing the removal of the shop bay. In both shots the YHA triangle was now more permanently fixed to the left of the front door, with the cast rectangular plate showing the Association's objectives to the right (YHA Archive)

Like all the larger Dales hostels: Malham, Linton, Ingleton, Stainforth, Dentdale, Aysgarth, Grinton Lodge and later Haworth and Hawes, Kettlewell owed much of its success from the mid-twentieth century to reliable regular bookings by school parties especially, though not exclusively, from the northern towns. Kettlewell also benefited from an extended period of wardenship, by Graham and Lesley Chamberlain, who arrived in 1970 and steered the hostel through considerable growth and change for some thirty years until the year 2000.

In 1975 Simon Smith, aged 14, from Chinnor, entered a YHA essay competition based on his school trip experiences:

The hostel was luxurious. A footbath in the washroom, modern looking beds in nice small dormitories... The meal, however, was not impressive.

8,000 and 9,000 annual overnights became commonplace in the 1970s and 1980s. The 10,000 figure was breached in 1989.

Graham assumed sole warden responsibility from about 1985. He introduced many improvements at Kettlewell. The front of the hostel was tidied up by the removal of the shop bay and steps, and the fire escape was rebuilt with flighted steps rather than the precarious ladder system. Showers were created at the back of the ground floor, and later moved to the upper floors.

From 1973 to 1993 YHA literature advised that Kettlewell Village Hall could be used by appointment as overflow accommodation for educational groups. Twenty years into Graham's stay, the demands of school parties were still great, *YHA News* of November 1992 reporting:

Rearrangement of the staff accommodation at Kettlewell last winter has resulted in the provision of a quiet room. This is welcome news to those who have stayed there when a school party seemed to be occupying all available public space.

The rearrangement came about mainly through the sacrifice of one large dormitory to the right rear of the first floor to create a much-needed lounge space, at the expense of 10 beds.

During the 1990s the hostel experienced a gradual reduction in the numbers staying, along with most of the neighbouring Dales hostels, as markets changed and family hostelling and smaller groups took on greater significance compared with schools use. Hostels were modernising and individual comfort, privacy and the loosening of traditional YHA rules, seen as stiff by some, were now of prime importance. The loosening of YHA's internal strictures on wardens living in the hostel was also being tested at this time; the Chamberlains



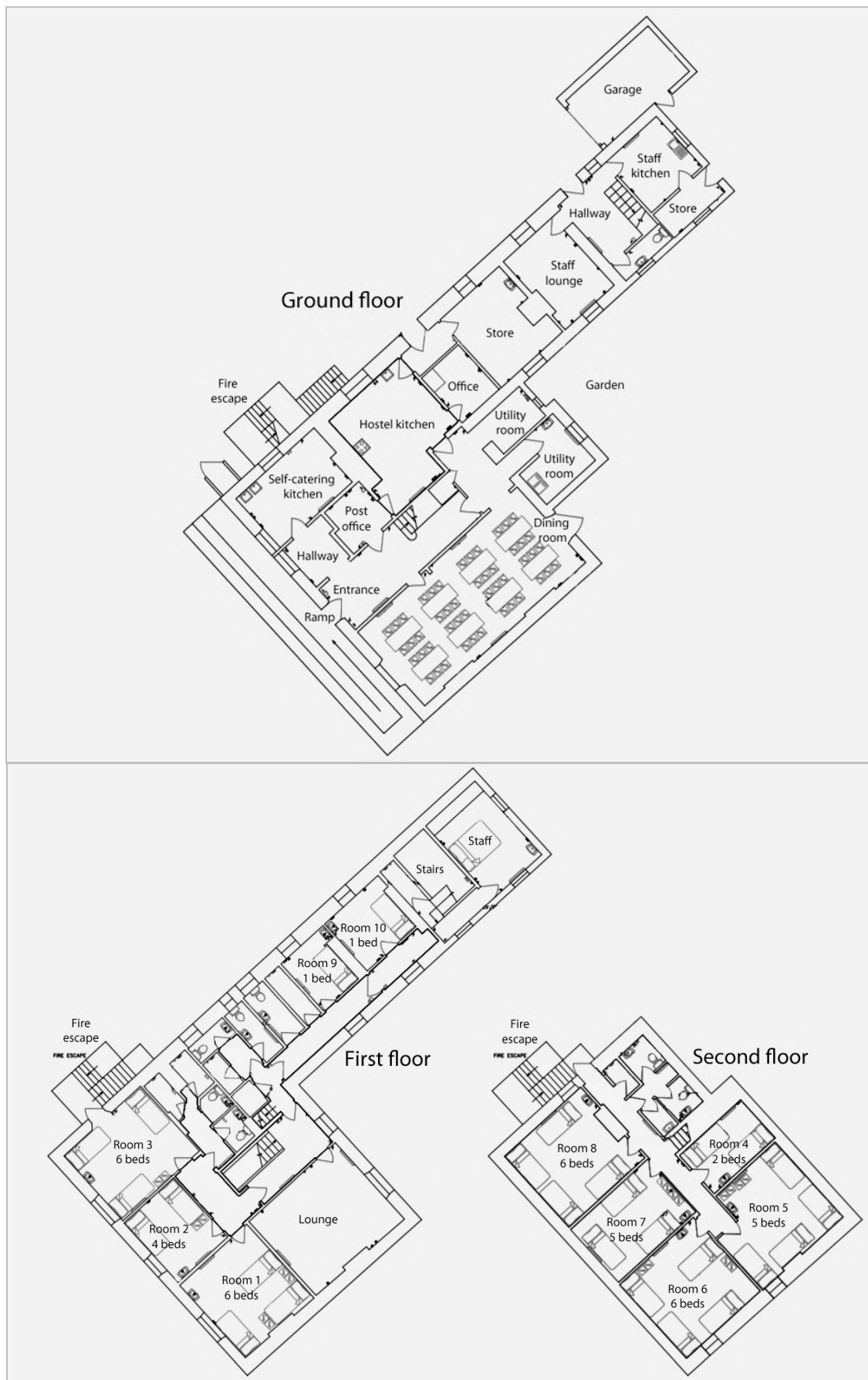
were able to move out of their own hostel quarters, an extended cottage on the lane to the left of Whernside House, thus creating new space for use by families and smaller groups. This extra accommodation, for 10, was in use from 1992 to 1998. Several other initiatives were introduced at this time by Graham, including proactive visits to schools and opening the hostel to conferences, both to encourage patronage. This kind of pioneering thinking led to many developments that are taken for granted in today's YHA.

Above: cloth badge; left: a smart coloured postcard published by YHA, dating from the later twentieth century (author's collection)

The bed capacity at Kettlewell was 58 in 1992, including the bonus of the 10-bedded annexe, and then 54 by the end of the century. Some larger dormitories were split into smaller rooms during 1993. In 1997 there was further refurbishment and a general reorganisation of the ground floor, by removing the wall between common room in the right hand corner and the small dining room behind it, to create a more flexible space.

Judith Mallams took over the managership of the hostel in the new millennium, and beds were further reduced to 43 in 2001 and 40 in 2007. YHA was hit very significantly by the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001, especially in the Lake District and the Pennines. The financial repercussions were very marked over a long period, and the provision of so many large hostels in the small area of the Yorkshire Dales was questioned. Linton and Kettlewell, barely 7 miles apart, were compared for viability and in 2002 the closure of both simultaneously was considered.

However, YHA was open to some imaginative suggestions at that time for maintaining hostel presence while reducing financial burden; Kettlewell hostel was reprieved under a widely-praised scheme to integrate the village post office within the hostel. Kettlewell Post Office was officially opened in its new form in July 2004. Thus two rural facilities were saved in one move.



Hostel plans, dated February 2007. By this time the family annexe at the top of the plan had reverted to staff quarters. The Post Office counter has also served as hostel reception, the earlier hostel office arrangement being a space to the rear of the hallway. Rooms 9 and 10 seen here have since become part of the managers' block. On floor 2 there are now 8 small rooms (YHA Archive)

After the 2002 reprieve, Whernside House remained under full YHA management for a further dozen years, and the opportunity was taken to invite funding donations from members to assist with hostel improvements. The card shown below was part of the successful campaign.



Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
1931-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
♣: Kettlewell Old School hostel; Δ: Kettlewell Whernside House hostel									
*: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire and/or camping									
...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	...	...	1117♣	1465♣	1706♣	2240♣	2349♣	1402♣
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
open? ♣	2101♣	2400♣	overflow♣	overflow♣	...	...	...	...	...
...	...	...	5823Δ	7078Δ	6035Δ	5513Δ	5024Δ	5866Δ	5513Δ
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
5636Δ	4998Δ	5259Δ	4912Δ	4639Δ	5423Δ	4992Δ	5143Δ	5325Δ	5407Δ
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
5698Δ	5884Δ	4921Δ	5690Δ	6411Δ	7004Δ	6319Δ	5025Δ	4507Δ	4478Δ
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
4143Δ	6222Δ	6376Δ	5777Δ	6664Δ	8489Δ	9598Δ	8030Δ	8004Δ	8666Δ
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
9715Δ	9595Δ	8417Δ	9248Δ	9518Δ	openΔ	openΔ	9665Δ	8757	Δ10302Δ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
9699Δ	9156Δ	10239*Δ	8850Δ	7157Δ	7957Δ	7302Δ	6535Δ	6618Δ	6936Δ
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
5557Δ	2155Δ	4397Δ	4714Δ	4293Δ	4740Δ	5416Δ	4635Δ	3797Δ	3821Δ
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
3801Δ	4741+Δ	4315+Δ	4379+Δ	4779+Δ	openΔ	openΔ	openΔ	openΔ	openΔ

In 2014 the hostel was placed on the closure list, but would survive in its original form into early 2015. The final managers under YHA full ownership were Peter Ingle followed by Ellie Parkinson.

The sale was completed on 16th January 2015 to Saul and Floss Ward, who wished to continue seamlessly with a YHA Enterprise hostel and to keep running the village's Post Office facility. The Post Office closed late in 2018, but a new one-day-opening arrangement was planned for 2019.

Whernside House hostel was extensively refurbished by the new owners in 2017-18. There are now 42 beds in eleven bedrooms, with former Rooms 5, 6 and 8 on the second floor each divided into two to create eight small rooms on that level, now numbered 4-11. Further enhancement came with modernised toilets and showers, new rooflights to the upper bedrooms and a much friendlier slope to the rear garden space.



1 2



3 4



5 6

1&2: Kettlewell youth hostel reborn. 1: dining room and lounge, ground floor; 2: cosy lounge, first floor (owners' photographs); 3-6: the rear of Whernside House. 3: from the steeply raked garden, 2008; 4-6: a safer space, 2019 (author's photographs)