



## YHA (England and Wales) Youth Hostel Profile

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

### Litton Cheney Youth Hostel 1937 to 1939, 1947 to present

White Cross, Litton Cheney, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9AT

Historic County: Dorset

YHA Regions:

South Coast, South West, South

GR: SY 548899

Litton Cheney youth hostel stands at a point at the south end of the village previously known as the Litton Sheep Wash, entirely appropriately, as a tributary of the River Bride runs in a fast flowing channel here. The hostel, an industrial building entirely transformed, was bought from United Dairies (Wholesale) Limited in the names of *LA Rossiter and Others*, representatives of the South Coast Regional Group. It opened in May 1937.

In a fascinating document held in the YHA Archive, another active servant of the Group, Michael F Tighe, reflected on the story of the hostel's acquisition and early years some ten years later, upon its reopening in 1947:

#### Litton Cheney Hostel – Early History

The building was originally erected in 1913 as a cheese factory. There are still those living in the village who worked in it then, and in these days of mouse-trap rationing they are only too eager to relate how the Men's Dormitory used to hold upwards of a thousand cheeses maturing, with another two thousand in Pitcher's outhouse across the road! It is of simple construction – a large concrete raft, with brick walls and an iron roof not unlike an outsize 'Nissen' hut suspended in mid-air. In its cheese factory days the building had only two rooms, the present Men's Dormitory and the rest of the Hostel; the floors are all designed with a fall from all sides to one point against the wall to facilitate swilling down, a useful tip for energetic hostellers who are thinking of cleaning up in the morning!

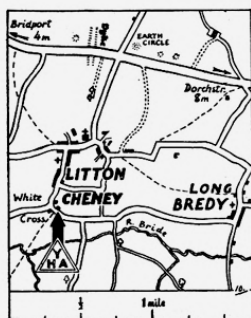
With the slump of 1930, the cheese factory closed down and the building was left completely derelict for some years. Then, about three years before the war, Ronald Pascall and Leslie Rossiter, of the South Coast Regional Group, came to the Bride Valley in search of a suitable building for a Youth Hostel. They parted in Long Bredy, one taking the upper and one the lower road; they met at the large heap of stinging nettles which masked the future hostel. Fortunately, its ruinous aspect did not unduly deter them, and after long drawn out negotiations, this eventually became South Coast's first freehold property at a quite reasonable figure.

This, however, was only the beginning of the story. Much work required to be done before the place could possibly be regarded as habitable. From the start, Litton Cheney has been a hostel owing its existence to the spare time work of the Association's own members. A little construction work was done by professional builders, but most of it, and all the decoration, was done by members of the West Dorset Sub-Group. Apart from a general clean-out and overhaul – itself no mean job after some years of neglect – the building required very little adaptation. A central chimney shaft was built, with an open hearth on one side and an 'Interoven' on the other. Plaster-board partitions were erected through the larger of the two rooms to provide rooms intended later for the use of a resident warden, and an outside lavatory was built. The whole building required repainting, and even now there are still members locally who have green paint on their clothing from the first opening of Litton Cheney!

When the hostel first opened, it was decided not to employ a resident warden. Instead, Mr Pitcher, who was then still running a carrier's service from the building opposite, acted as Warden; members could obtain meals in the village. The end room, now used as the cycle store, was then the Women's Dormitory. The Warden's quarters in the hostel itself were used as a kitchen and spare dormitory.

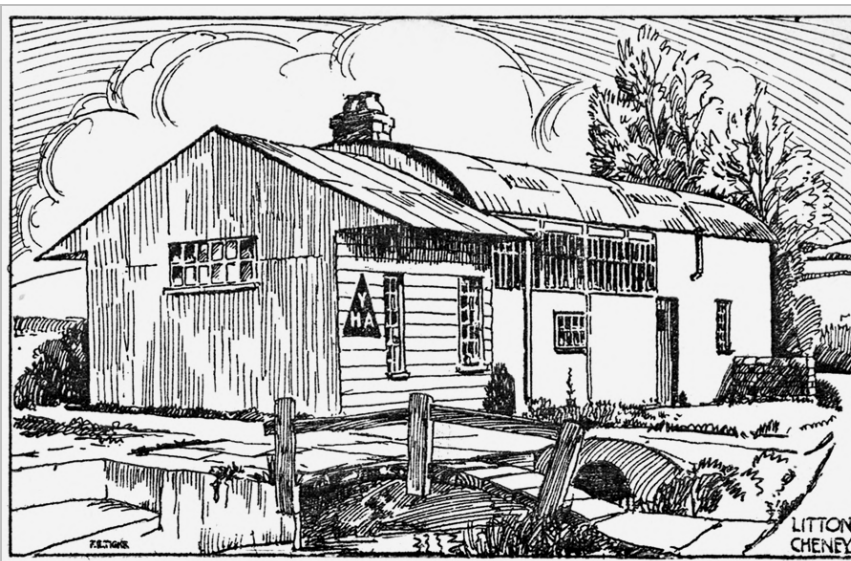
It is interesting that the warden's quarters, still in use some 75 years later, were designed, provided and perhaps even built at the outset, but apparently not used as such at first. In 1937 there were beds for 18 men and 15 women, but the hostel was immediately popular and had expanded by 1938, probably into the intended warden's space. The comment on meals taken is of interest. The postcard reproduced on the next page and posted in April 1950 is rare in the fact that it is of the warden's home, Mrs Moxom's, at 2 Grove Cottages. Unusually for such a building, it shows (stylised) a YHA triangle. That cottage is some 600 yards north of the hostel, just west of the village crossroads, and was apparently where hostellers could take meals before the war. A pencilled message on the postcard reads:

The warden's house at Litton Cheney, where we collected the key. Warden's house 8.10am for breakfast.



**LITTON CHENEY.** *The Youth Hostel, Litton Cheney, nr. Dorchester, Dorset. Mr. A Pitcher, TEL. Longbrey 37.* This fully-controlled hostel is at the south end of the village, close to the White Horse Hotel. Litton Cheney is in the Bride Valley, just south of the main Dorchester—Bridport road. The country within the Dorchester—Weymouth—Bridport triangle is unusually full of interest. Along its seaboard runs the Chesil Bank, which is terminated on the south-east by the Isle of Portland. Abbotsbury, famous for its tithe barn and its swannery (which has been in the newspapers a good deal during the last year or two) is among the villages of this district (4½ miles from Litton Cheney) and others of great charm are the sister villages of the Upper Bride Valley, Little and Long Bredy. The awe-inspiring earthworks of Maiden Castle are a short distance south-west of Dorchester. The district is of equal interest to cyclists and walkers, the open heath and downland making it particularly attractive to the latter.

M24, W16 : **PROVISIONS** Store \*\*: E.C.D. Thursday : No M.P. at hostel, but can be obtained in village—B. 1/3, L. 6d., S. 1/3 : **STATION** S.R. Abbotsbury 4½m, Dorchester 10m : **BUS** Dorchester—Bridport 1m : **CAMPING** nearby (special permission necessary) : **BATHING** Sea : **DISTANCES** Bridport 7m, Cerne 13m, Organford 28m, Ottery St. Mary 30m.



- 1: extract from YHA Regional Guide, 1938. The hostel had already expanded to 40 beds (YHA Archive);  
 2: where meals were taken — the warden's cottage at the village cross-roads, complete with YHA triangle, 1950;  
 3: this early sketched postcard of Litton Cheney youth hostel by FE Tighe (perhaps related to MF Tighe) shows a rustic form of fencing over the river leat. It may well date from the 3-year period of pre-war operation.

A water colour hanging in the hostel is apparently based on this postcard

(2&3: postcards, author's collection)

Litton Cheney hostel was requisitioned by the army on the outbreak of war up to the end of hostilities. For some time after D-Day the premises were unoccupied, yet not de-requisitioned. When it was released in 1945 YHA were granted compensation of £120, though with the South Coast Regional Group being short of funds and the building being in a state of disrepair it was going to be difficult to resurrect.

## LITTON CHENEY

Working parties were gathered and the hostel reopened on 23rd August 1947. Shortly after this date, MF Tighe, who oversaw the considerable refurbishment, presented as a kind of dedication the following account of the neglect since 1939 and remedial work undertaken by his West Dorset Sub-Group team in 1947 to RFC Pascall, President of the South Coast Regional Group and one of the initial adventurers who discovered the site:

### A Report on the Redecoration and Reopening of Litton Cheney Youth Hostel, June-August 1947

When war broke out in 1939, the Hostel was immediately requisitioned for billeting troops. The equipment was removed to other Hostels, and after requisitioning of Bridport Hostel in 1940 we were left completely without Hostels in West Dorset. Judging by graffiti on the walls, there would seem to be very few units of the British Army (not to mention Americans) who were not represented at Litton Cheney at some time during the War! The Hostel was finally released from requisitioning during 1945.

In the meantime, however, Litton, which had had two very successful years of life as a Hostel before the War, seemed to have been forgotten. The South Coast Regional Group had become fully committed with other projects elsewhere, and there seemed to be little prospect of Litton reopening. As might be expected, the Army had left the premises in a most unsatisfactory condition, and there were many who thought that the expense of rehabilitating the Hostel would outweigh its use, especially owing to the short distance from Bridport, which was being developed as a large fully-controlled Hostel.

However, the West Dorset Sub-Group considered that it would be worthwhile going ahead with Litton, and in July 1946 prepared a report on the condition of the building. This report, signed by Mr J Bridle as Chairman, Miss C Flay as Secretary and Mr L Shrimpton as Council Representative, envisaged a 30-bed hostel with a resident Warden, at an estimated cost of £625 on constructional and redecorating work, and there can be little doubt that, if it had been practicable, a very fine hostel would have resulted. The Regional Council, however, after much discussion, found itself unable to incur the extra expense. There for the time being the matter lay.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Sub-Group, in January 1947, a resolution was passed unanimously, calling on the South Coast Region to endeavour to reopen Litton Cheney and make further recommendations. This Sub-Committee, consisting of the Regional Secretary, Miss M Bray, and Messrs P le Breton, L Shrimpton, MF Tighe and E Wilkins, met at Bridport on April 20th 1947, visiting Litton the following morning. It was at this meeting that the lines upon which the Hostel finally reopened were decided. The general plan was for a 30-bed Hostel, for self-cookers only, without a resident Warden, relying on the possibility of obtaining the services of someone in the village to act as Warden. It was thought that Mrs Moxon would possibly be able to take the job on. A schedule of repair work was prepared, and the Committee reported to the Regional Council, who then called for estimates.

The matter came up before the Regional Council once more at its meeting at Cranborne on June 7th 1947. It was decided that the reopening of the Hostel be approved, and the details were left in the hands of the West Dorset Committee, subject to a maximum expenditure of £200, certain objections on the grounds of sanitation and dilapidation having been answered satisfactorily. From this point the time for argument had ended, and the responsibility lay in the local members to set the Hostel on its feet once more.

### Working Party – 1947

The West Dorset Committee lost no time in getting down to the job. The week after the Council meeting they settled the question of Wardenship with Mrs Moon, arranged for Mr Fry of Litton Cheney to carry out the necessary building work and appointed the present author as Foreman of the Working Parties.

At first sight the job struck us all as almost more than we had bargained for. The plasterboard was nearly all broken down, paint was peeling, the outside lavatories were in ruins, and the whole building gave an impression of dirt and decay. The present cycle-shed had been left untouched apart from being cleaned out, and is a very fair example of the state of the whole building in June 1947. In addition, the outside was overgrown with weeds, the ditch was choked, and the hedge reaching over the walls. Obviously, the structural repairs were the first to be put in hand, and Mr Fry started work immediately. This entailed the repair of the outside lavatories, and installation of Elsan closets, the repair of a crack in the south-east wall, the replacement of over half the plasterboarding of the interior walls, the reglazing of several windows and the cutting of two new ones, the entire rewiring of the electrical system (the Army had left the old wiring hanging in festoons from the ceiling) and the installation of two new sinks, with the necessary plumbing.

At this point tribute must be paid to Mr Fry for the manner in which this work was done. It was most refreshing, after experience of other Hostels where building work had been held up for months, to find that here the job was done within three weeks with no headaches of any kind. At the outset I prepared a programme of work, in which I made allowance for both bad weather and delays on the part of the builder; thanks to Mr Fry and the Clerk of the Weather, this plan was never referred to again.

For the first three weeks after work had started, there was little the Working Party could do, until the professional builders had finished making their mess. A few of us busied ourselves clearing ditches, lopping hedges, and shifting the mountains of rubbish lying around the place. The Interoven alone yielded a large bin full of sticks, rubble and soot. By the end of June, matters had reached the stage where it was possible to bring over some spare bedding from Bridport Hostel, and from then on, at least one member, usually more, spent Saturday night at the Hostel. Jack Bridle brought over paint and distemper, together with step-ladders, planks and the remaining paraphernalia of his trade. Mr Fry stepped into the breach with the loan of more brushes and of his ladders, and work started in earnest.

That first week-end we distempered the Men's Dormitory and started the Women's. The following weekend the distemping was getting so well advanced that we even began to talk of an opening date – rather rashly, some of us thought, when we looked at the shambles still prevailing, and the paint peeling off the roof, which still hadn't been touched. However, we said we would have it all done for August 23rd.

Towards the end of July the painting of the roof began. This was probably the most ambitious portion of the whole operation; lines were passed across one side to the other, and the majority of the roof tackled from them – the lower portions, where the camber was too steep to provide a foothold even with this help, were attacked from ladders, which often rested in peculiarly unstable positions. On one occasion the attentions of a bull in the next field threatened to prove embarrassing to the peace of mind of the painter whose ladder was resting in the hedge. We consider that this bull should be adopted as the Hostel mascot, in preference to the dogs across the road.

By August Bank Holiday, we were beginning to see daylight. The working party turned out in force that weekend, and at one time we were almost held up because we had more workers than we had tools or paint.

However, everyone seemed to find something to do somewhere. Equipment was now becoming the chief headache. Some beds and bedding were surplus at Bridport, and others were sent from Southampton, but even now we still have not our full complement of blankets and pillows. Furniture was almost unobtainable, until Mr Wilkinson managed to find a few chairs and a table. A week or so later we were able to get more chairs and tables, together with a very large dresser, at an auction in Bridport; with these, and crockery and so on bought locally, the Hostel rapidly began to look a real home from home.

By this time members were beginning to drop in, Bridport was still not fully open, owing to various holdups, and surplus travellers began to come to us. To their credit, they entered into the spirit of the game and wielded paint brushes, brooms and pails with the best.

On Sunday, August 17th, the last of the painting was done, apart from one token piece to be left for the opening weekend. This was the eighth consecutive weekend when members of the Working Party had been at Litton – in addition a bit of midweek work had been done, and some of us had been over on odd days before. On a conservative estimate, something like 450 manhours were given voluntarily by members of the Party – and Production per Man Hour was very high for amateur labour. The next weekend, the Hostel was officially reopened by the President of the South Coast Region, Mr RFG Pascall, and a very successful opening party was held, at which the Hostel was filled for the first time since the war.

Even now there is still work to be done, but we hope to have everything completed for next season. Even now, we have all been struck by the enthusiastic reception the Hostel has had from members since its reopening. May the YHA soon have many more like it.

#### The Working Party

Margaret Bray (Secretary, West Dorset Committee)	Ted Kestin (Chairman, West Dorset Committee)
Eric Bray	Peter le Breton
Neville Bray	Leslie Shrimpton
Jack Bridle (Technical Adviser)	(Rambling Sec, West Dorset Committee)
Stella Bridle	Michael Tighe (Foreman)
Connie Flay	Marion West
Ivy Greenaway	Edward Wilkins
Gus Challen	and several members who helped us while they were on their travels.
Bunny Kinsett	



Mr Tighe concluded with an expression of thanks to:

Mr Fry, of Litton Cheney, for his help throughout.

Mrs Moxom, the Warden.

Mr Shave, of the 'White Horse' for his unfailing hospitality to the Working Party.

Jack Bridle, who obtained, mixed and transported a phenomenal amount of paint and distemper.

The inhabitants of the village of Litton Cheney, for the interest and courtesy they have extended to their new, and slightly deranged, neighbours.

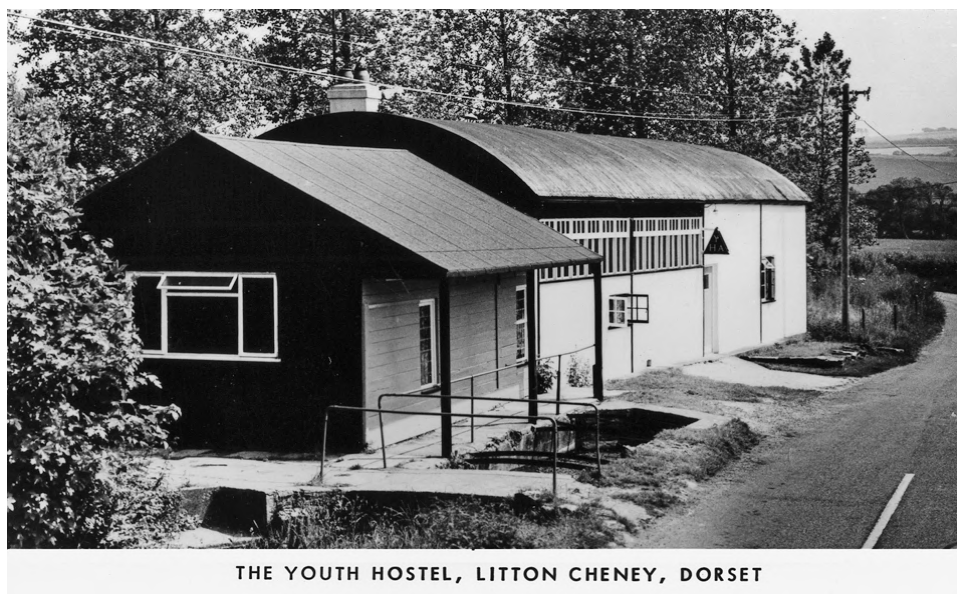


1: Mr MF Tighe's Working Party, photographed outside the newly refurbished hostel in August 1947, and suitably close to the White Horse Inn for celebration. A list of the names of some of those present accompanies the photograph in the YHA Archive; 2: this photograph by stalwart volunteer work-party member from Bristol, Fred Blampied, on 1st August 1949, shows a party of young women to the rear of the hostel. No safety railings are in place, and the wooden-planked bridge over the leat seems precarious. The end wall of the hostel is still clad in corrugated iron, and the exaggerated overhang is apparently buttressed by only one support (nowadays there are three). YHA Volunteer David Greengrow has detected a hollow at the side of the leat where an axle may have been journalled as part of a small apparatus to power dairy machinery in the nearer building in its former life. The low wall to the right of the main building has since been demolished, (author's collection)

On 29 February 1952 the hostel came into the full ownership of the National YHA when the freehold of *Land and Buildings at Litton Cheney* was transferred from *LA Rossiter and Others* to the Youth Hostels Trust.



Pat Packham was on a cycling tour in April 1964 when she encountered a crowded Litton Cheney hostel:  
 I had to sleep on a camp-bed as the rest of the women's beds were occupied by a school journey party.



1: this postcard is a little later than previous pictures. Safety railings have been provided, and an early post-war form of green enamel triangle is on display; 2: a later postcard, showing the enlarged end window, timber end wall and other refinements; 3: a 1983 image of Litton Cheney hostel from a transparency by YHA volunteer George Miller. The age of motor vehicle touring had arrived at Litton Cheney, though not yet the car park (1-3: author's collection); 4: a more traditional mode of hostelling, photographed by Ian Shaw about the same time as the previous image. At the time of writing, over 200,000 overnights have been spent at this cheerful hostel (YHA Archive)

As for wardens, Mr Pitcher and Mrs Moxom of the early days have been mentioned; the meals arrangement with Mrs Moxom lasted until 1951. From 1952 wardens were providing meals from the hostel, and a little camping was allowed for a time. By 1961, Mr D Sharman was in charge. Pete Chubb took the reigns the following year, and held them for a very long time – he was still warden in the mid 1990s. Duncan Simpson writes of him:

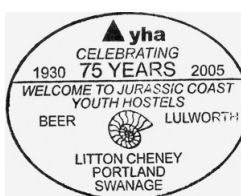
Pete Chubb was the manager there for many years. He operated a short order menu, long before anyone else dreamed of doing so, on his own, with local foods, fish, lamb etc. He was a brilliant warden / manager. Pete lived in a room off the kitchen, and had an outside toilet and bathroom.

Many also remember Pete for his relaxed dress sense. Philip Stacey recalls:

We only remember those wardens like the one at Litton Cheney who always wore tight leather shorts.

In 1996 Litton Cheney became a self-caterers' hostel, reconfigured with smaller bedrooms, two at the north end (formerly the female dorm) and four at the south (male), all with wash hand basins. The kitchen was modernised. The capacity was reduced to 24, later 22, though the overnights doubled. There was refurbishment at this time and most of the windows were replaced with uPVC double glazing, replicating the original unusual fenestration pattern in the main section. The refurbishment may have been spurred on by the closure of Bridport hostel. The warden's quarters remained and are now put to use for volunteer managers, controlled from YHA Lulworth.

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
1937-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
W: wartime closure									
*: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire									
...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1017	1814	open
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
W	W	W	W	W	W	...	297	2056	2365
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
2056	2171	2248	2238	2024	2260	2065	1856	1873	2091
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
2093	1906	2260	2384	2064	2199	1903	2231	2564	2761
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
3700	3359	3224	3824	4066	4155	open	4534	3875	4494
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
4048	3969	3089	3206	3500	3547	2858	3423	3401	3317
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
2969	2769	2687*	1792	1779	1962	1977	4398	4869	4270
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
4073	3112	3979	4252	4828	4497	4294	2908	2433	2052
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1906	3139+	3044+	3103+	3369+	3541+	3642+	3924+	3269+	3958+







1 2



3 4



5 6



7

Foot of previous page: hostel stamps and the one-inch pin badge. This page: modern images of Litton Cheney youth hostel. 1-2: the lounge, dining area and reception. Note the firebreast and chimney, specially constructed by YHA members in 1937; 3-6: roadside views; 7: across the fields to the hostel, pub and chalk uplands (author's photographs, September 2014)