

Newcastle-upon-Tyne Youth Hostels

Introduction

The city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne has had a series of YHA hostels since 1969. Up to and including 1977 youth hostels operated on a temporary seasonal basis in the summer months; YHA used three different locations in turn. A fourth one was considered but rejected.

The seasonals were successful enough to warrant the introduction from 1978 of a new full-time hostel on Jesmond Road. This lasted until 2011. YHA reluctantly closed that location, but were already actively looking for a replacement. Several sites in Newcastle and Gateshead received serious consideration before a new prospect was found and opened in a central position at Carliol Square in the summer of 2019, fifty years after the first opening.

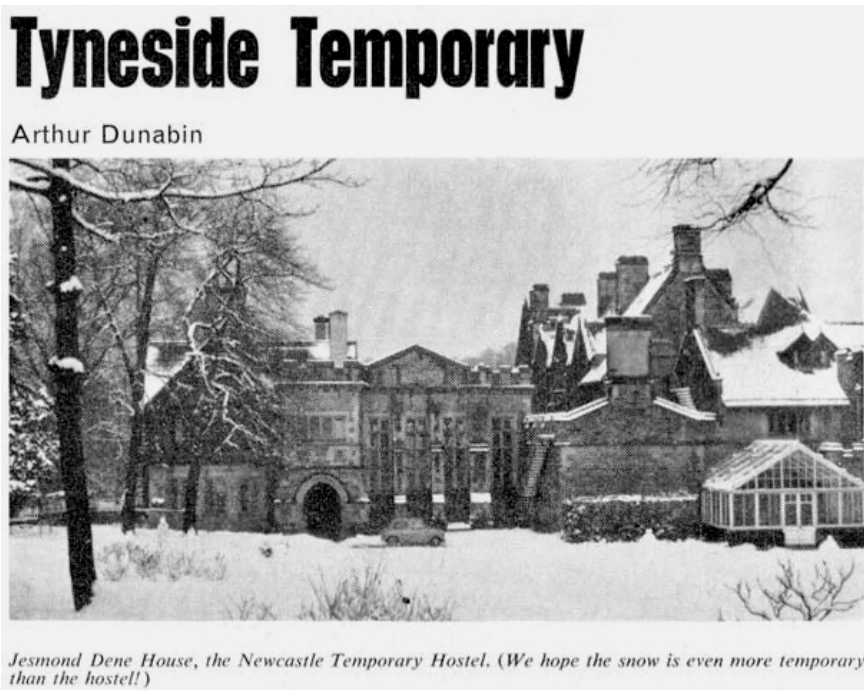
Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Temporary) [Jesmond Dene] Youth Hostel 1969 to 1972

Jesmond Dene House, Jesmond Dene Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 2

Historic County: Northumberland

YHA Region: Border & Dales

GR: NZ 254672



Arthur Dunabin has been an indefatigable volunteer for YHA in the northeast for many decades. He helped set up the Jesmond Dene facility in 1969, and wrote the first of two articles for Youth Hosteller in April of that year (YHA Archive)

YHA's first youth hostel in Newcastle-upon-Tyne was a summer seasonal hostel at Jesmond Dene House, in the north of the city. In the first year, 1969, it operated for five weeks from 21st July until 25th August. There were 44 beds and a members' kitchen, but no meals were provided. YHA paid rent to the Local Authority. The hostel operated in a similar way in 1970-72, though such was the delay between the printing of the annual handbooks and the successful re-renting of the property that the handbooks contained a simplified entry for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, with a hope to have a temporary hostel open again, but without further details. Supplementary notices and these magazine articles carried more information. By the final season there were 49 beds in operation.

The steady increase in holiday traffic to and from Scandinavia was only one of the reasons which persuaded last year's annual meeting of Border and Dales Region to press for a temporary hostel in or near Tyneside. Through the good offices of the Director of Education for Newcastle this project has been brought to early fruition and at the end of July, for a period of five weeks, a 44 bed hostel will be available at Jesmond Dene House, a local authority boarding school not two miles from the city centre. Meals will not be provided but there are excellent kitchen facilities.

The school, a pleasant stone building, is attractively situated at the head of Jesmond Dene, a wooded valley which is one of the "lungs" of this industrial city. Bus routes are close at hand giving direct access from the main bus and train termini and connecting with the Tyne Commission Quay and Denmark Quay for ships to Bergen, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Oslo and Esbjerg. Newcastle Airport, with summer services to Bergen, Stavanger and Kristiansand, is also within easy reach.

Visitors to Northumbria will find Newcastle an excellent starting point. Westward lies the Roman Wall set in wild moorland country with tiny loughs sheltering below rugged whinstone crags. The hostels at Acomb and Once Brewed lie close to the Wall and newly rebuilt, Once Brewed offers all that is best in modern comfortable

hostel facilities. North-west from Newcastle lies the romantic Chevy Chase country, Tynedale and Redesdale and the Cheviots. Here are the hostels of Bellingham, Rothbury and Wooler, and tiny Kielder in the heart of the Border Forest. Here too are castles and border peles to remind one of the region's turbulent history. Due north from Newcastle past the great fortress of Alnwick Castle one comes to Rock Hall Hostel and here one is within reach of the sweeping sandy beaches of Northumberland, the castles of Dunstanburgh and Bamburgh, the fishing villages of Craster (famous for its kippers) and Seahouses, the Farne Islands with their seals and sea birds, and the cradle of English Christianity, Holy Island or Lindisfarne with its castle and ruined priory.

South-west from Newcastle are the little-known dales of the Northern Pennines where Northumberland marches with Durham and Cumberland. Here is Edmundbyers Hostel in the Derwent Valley, graced now by a man-made lake; here too are the small and simple hostels of Ninebanks and Dirt Pot, the former nestling quietly in its secluded valley, the latter a hostel of peculiar distinction in a charming setting. Hostellers from the south crossing the border to Scotland will find Newcastle a useful staying point whether they go by the coast or over Carter Bar.

This temporary hostel in "Canny Newcassel" should meet a very real need during the peak holiday season.

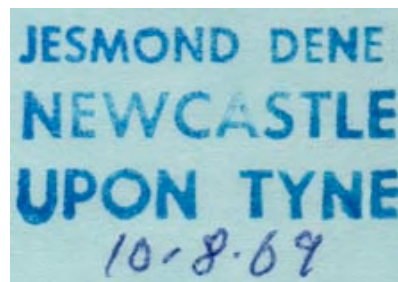
The remainder of Arthur Dunabin's introductory article on Newcastle's anticipated first hostel, Youth Hosteller, April 1969 (YHA Archive)

Jesmond Dene House is a Georgian mansion, designed by John Dobson, with Arts-and-Crafts period additions by Norman Shaw. In the 20th century it had been used as a college, Civil Defence establishment (with tunnels built under the house) and seminary; by the time YHA had temporary use of the property it had become a Local Authority Special Needs Boarding School, and reverted to its normal function after each youth hostel stint.

Freda and Ian Miller were local YHA stalwarts and were instrumental in setting up and wardening each of the Newcastle hostels in turn. Freda writes:

In 1970 I rang the local paper to say that we had had 2,000 overnights in 5 weeks, from umpteen countries and no vandalism or trouble of any kind. Response was 'Oh yes' as much as to say what news is that? In 1973 my mother rang me one evening to say that she didn't know we had thieves at the YH until she had read in the paper that two American girls staying at YH had been fined for shop-lifting! Now that was news worth printing!

The Jesmond Dene hostel had to be given up as hostellers continued to turn up out of season, disturbing the resident children and staff.



Clint Maitland's rare hostel stamp from the first year of operation (YHA Archive)

House full

Arthur Dunabin

Tyneside's temporary hostel at Jesmond Dene House in Newcastle closed its doors towards the end of August after registering a resounding success in its first short season. In the five weeks during which the hostel was in operation it worked virtually to capacity and recorded some 1,600 overnights, comfortably exceeding the most optimistic of forecasts and demonstrating convincingly the great potential usage awaiting hostels of this type.

Newcastle welcomed hostellers from 35 countries and four-fifths of the usage was by overseas visitors. Surprisingly perhaps, France topped the list, pushing England and Wales into second place.

Normally a boarding school, the hostel provided the luxuries of hot baths, attractive dormitories with single beds, bedside lockers and chairs, and a general degree of comfort particularly appreciated by those far from home. Many of the school's facilities were readily adaptable to hostel use: the domestic science room made a first-rate members' kitchen and the school tuck shop was a ready-made warden's office and shop. In the grounds were swings and a slide for the younger element.

Quietly situated in a suburban area yet only two miles from the city centre, with the woods, stream and waterfalls of Jesmond Dene on the doorstep, the hostel surprised many visitors by its delightful seclusion in the midst of industrial Tyneside.

Scandinavian visitors, as had been hoped, came in appreciable numbers, which may well increase next summer when the service to Norway is augmented with an additional ship. Border and Dales Region is very hopeful that, with the continued assistance of Newcastle Education Committee, a temporary hostel will again be available in 1970.

This photograph, taken the day before the hostel closed, includes hostellers from England, Canada, France, Switzerland and Israel.



Arthur Dunabin's second article on the Jesmond Dene hostel followed after its first season. It was published in the November 1969 Youth Hosteller (YHA Archive)

After the 1972 season *Hostelling News* announced that Jesmond Dene House would not be available in 1973.

The Newcastle temporary hostel concept had been a success, and the first plans for a summer replacement in 1973 were for a large building not far from the Jesmond Dene property, at Ashleigh Hall, Elmfield Park, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (grid reference NZ 237673). They came to nothing, as Freda and Ian Miller described with rueful humour in later years:

Ashleigh House, Elmfield Road residents were naturally horrified learning that a 'hostel' was to be in their midst and a public meeting was called. The private dentist next door asked what time hostellers left (10am) and when they got in (5pm). 'So between these hours you have no control over them?' I replied yes and even during the stated hours I only have control INSIDE the building. 'That's even worse than I thought' and he got his brother who happened to be director of education to give us the top three floors of Claude Gibb halls of residence.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Temporary) [Claude Gibb Hall] Youth Hostel 1973 only

Claude Gibb Hall of Residence, Newcastle Polytechnic, Sandyford Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1

Historic County: Northumberland

YHA Region: Border & Dales

GR: NZ 252650

The Director of Education's hurried offering at Claude Gibb Hall ensured continuation of temporary hostel provision in Newcastle. The full school summer holiday period of six and a half weeks was available, from 14th June to 1st September 1973. As before, YHA paid rent to the Local Authority. There were 40 beds. The accommodation block is now part of the extensive University of Northumbria campus.

The Millers again were the wardens. They delighted in this claim to fame for the Claude Gibb facility:

We took it over for one summer; it was the hostel with *the highest bicycle shed in the country*.



The 1973 temporary hostel, in student accommodation vacated for the summer months (author's collection)

Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Temporary) [St Dominic's School] Youth Hostel 1974 to 1977

St Dominic's School, Crawhall Road, New Bridge Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1

Historic County: Northumberland

YHA Region: Border & Dales

GR: NZ 259644

St Dominic's School, a Victorian building, lay on the *east* side of town, near the A193 road to Tynemouth. Notices incorrectly described it as on the *west* side, and the grid reference of NZ 274638 given in a contemporary *Hostelling News* was incorrect. The temporary arrangement operated for four summer seasons, the dates in the first year being 15th July to 14th September. YHA's previous tenancy with Newcastle Polytechnic's Claude Gibb Hall probably proved useful: the educational body had already absorbed these school premises, and so YHA paid rent to them. The hostel provided 50 beds but no meals.

Over 30 years later, Freda Miller recalled:

The Poly had taken over a disused Victorian school, St Dominic's in Newcastle. It wasn't the standard we were used to but in spite of that it was a happy temporary hostel. I will never forget that we had a 16-year old Italian lad from between Naples and Sorrento, who stayed with us for about 3 nights, then went home. Imagine our surprise when we received a postcard from Italy to say that he had enjoyed his stay at Newcastle best of all, even though it wasn't such a touristy place. Cards like that make you feel that it is worth all the upheaval that came with the unpacking at beginning of summer venue, then packing up again at end of summer.

The school has since been demolished and replaced by housing.



St Dominic's School, in use for four summers in the mid-1970s. The nearer building, somewhat more modern than those behind, is proudly sporting the YHA triangle (photograph by Ron Sant, author's collection)

Newcastle-upon-Tyne [Jesmond Road] Youth Hostel 1978 to 2011

107 Jesmond Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE2 1NJ

Historic County: Northumberland

YHA Regions: Border & Dales, North

GR: NZ 256655

YHA's new full-time hostel was the right-hand portion of the defunct Sanderson Hotel, originally a Victorian town house, situated on Jesmond Road, one of the city's main thoroughfares.

Ian Miller, so closely involved with the running of the Newcastle hostels, recalled in 2010:

We have been involved with all Newcastle YHs from 1969. Rents were paid to the local authority by the region [Border and Dales] for all but St Dominics, which we rented from the Polytechnic.

Violet Hart was warden in 1978 – I had known her from her being a GVC cadet when I was their chairman and when I, as Hon Treasurer [of Border and Dales region] had bought the YH she was fed up with her current job so took it on during the week and Freda and I gave her time off at weekends to go to her home in South Shields. I managed to get redundancy in 1980 and Violet didn't want to face another summer and we took over in May 1981 with her giving us time off during the week so she was at home with her husband at weekends.

Violet's husband had access to a van and I sold the hotel's divan beds at £5 each delivered with his aid so we had room for the bunks. He and I sawed up sheets of 8' x 4' ply to put on the beds while Freda bought the mattresses etc. and I paid the bills (sounds familiar?) I got the keys on 17th December 1977 and we opened by February 1978.

I wasn't on the regional council when in 1986 the regions surrendered their hard saved money to National to run up massive debt. I used to lend Bert Armstrong national accountant a few thousand to get him over a bleak winter and get it back in spring as memberships came in.



Two hostel stamps given out to hostellers at the Jesmond Road site in 1983. The second relates to three of the Northumberland hostels spaced along Hadrian's Wall (author's collection)



*An early postcard of Newcastle youth hostel, located within the right-hand two-thirds of the building.
The flat-roofed full extension was added before YHA's time (YHA Archive)*

A postcard sent in 1983 bore the comment:

Another 'new' hostel and very nice too. Highly recommended, close to Metro and Theatre. All small rooms and very chatty wardens.

Lawrence and Gill Hislop took on the wardenship in 1984, and stayed for over 25 years, until closure.

In 1994 YHA greatly improved the washrooms and fitted storage heaters in the corridors. *YHA News* of June 1994 quipped:

After the improvements to the washrooms in 1994, one lady staying at the hostel in February was heard to remark that she felt like moving her bed in there.

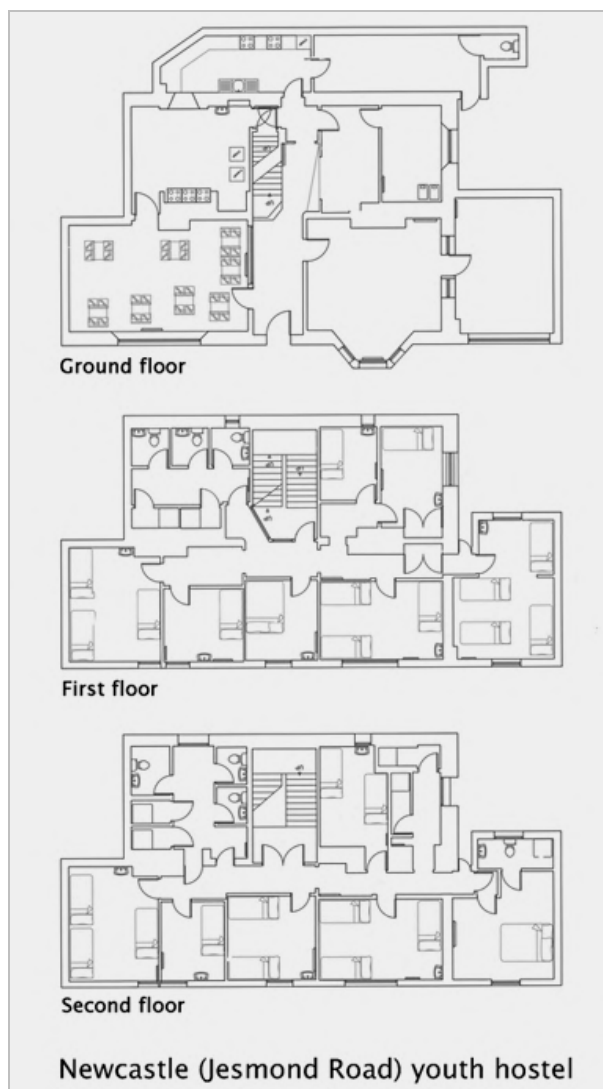
The following winter the dormitories were improved with new décor. There was improved security, better cycle provision, an enhanced entrance hall and further heating.

Though this wasn't a large city hostel, with just 60 beds, usage increased steadily from 6,000 or so in 1980 to 10,000 by 1990 and a then-record 11,568 in 1999. In that year extra accommodation was considered: 21 single bedrooms behind the Metro could be taken at £15 per room. 62% occupancy was needed to break even, and one week's notice was needed to cancel. It is not known if this was taken up.



YHA Newcastle's frontage in June 2003 (author's photograph)

Despite remedial work in 2009 under YHA's 'fit for purpose' scheme, it was soon decided that the Newcastle property with its limited size and adaptability was unsuited to the type of major investment that would match the hostel to the modern tourism needs in the city. Tyneside has been much enhanced in recent years by new buildings and bridges along the River Tyne and a revival of the city's spirited cultural life. YHA tracked various alternatives, including a large municipal building in Gateshead, but YHA Newcastle closed on 31st October 2011 and the city had to wait another eight years before its replacement opened at Newcastle Central.



- 1: a later view of the Jesmond Road site, displaying a variety of YHA and Hostelling International signage;
2: floorplans of the penultimate youth hostel in Newcastle, dated about 2007 (YHA Archive)

Freda Miller summed up her thoughts in an email sent to the author in 2010:

Ian and I have set up and looked after all Newcastle temps. and the present day permanent [Jesmond Road]. Ian would appear to hostellers in the morning smartly dressed in suit and collar and tie, and after a short time in the hostel shop, he went off to work coming back at teatime, getting changed, then sitting down and signing our guests in. I was free to run the hostel all day. After about 7 years Ian realised that there was definitely potential for a full time hostel in Newcastle, saw the Sanderson Hotel up for sale and managed to get the other members of council to think that it was a good idea, and eventually the Sanderson became the present day hostel. We took it over and, with the help of some good volunteer friends converted it to a hostel.

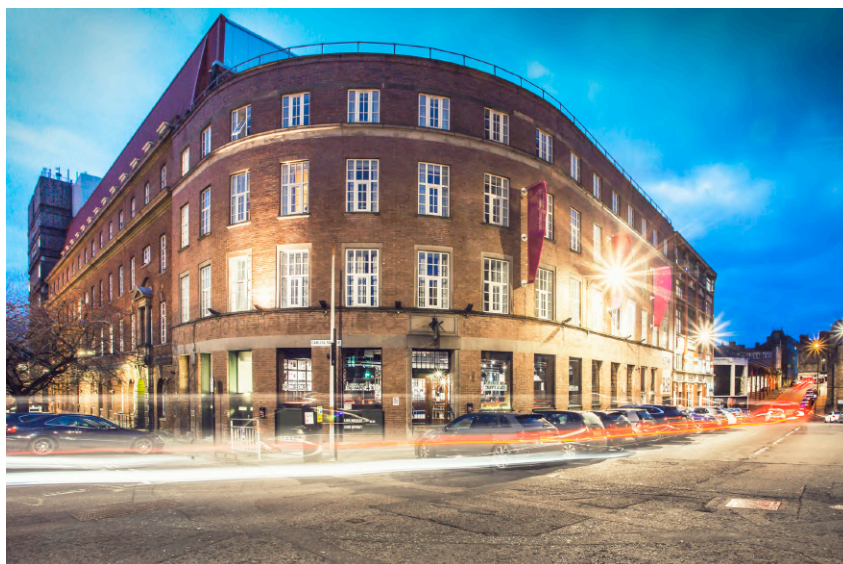
In 2019 Sanderson House, the new name for the former hostel, is made up of 10 apartments for letting to students and professionals.

Newcastle Central Youth Hostel 2019 to present

17 Carliol Square, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 6UF

Historic County: Northumberland

GR: NZ 251643



YHA publicity photograph, 2019

YHA has been developing its portfolio of large modern youth hostels in principal cities of England and Wales. Notable new hostels in the past 30 years have been Bristol (1989), London Thameside (1991), Manchester (1995), London St Pancras (1997), Liverpool (1998), Oxford (2001), London Central (2008), Brighton (2014) and Cardiff (2015), each with over 100 beds. While four of these were newly built and others conversions of existing offices and industrial buildings, another pattern recently emerged when YHA successfully purchased established hotels at Brighton and Cardiff. The two have provided almost-ready-made hostels of 180 and 320 beds respectively and allowed YHA to expand into more varied markets for each site, thus giving financial support to its charitable aims.

A new double-development took place in 2019 with the acquisition of two large well-established city hostels relinquished by the Euro Hostels Group. YHA Liverpool Central is, remarkably, a second youth hostel for the city and provides a further 240 beds to the Albert Dock hostel's 160. The new Newcastle Central has a vibrant city-centre location and provides 236 beds. Both hostels have en suite rooms throughout, suitable for a variety of group sizes. They have the kinds of facilities – bar, bistro, wi-fi connectivity, modern décor – that are already recognised features in YHA hostels and will suit customers well, especially those of a youthful disposition.

YHA acquired both hostels simultaneously. They opened on 23rd July 2019, connecting almost seamlessly with the previous operation. In the case of the north-eastern property, YHA announced:

The new hostel will give YHA a much-needed presence in Newcastle. We have not had a presence here since 2011 following the closure of our smaller Jesmond site. The hostel, which is based in Carliol Square, offers 236 beds across 52 rooms, including doubles, twins and family rooms.

James Blake, YHA Chief Executive added:

With the addition of Newcastle, we now have a strong portfolio of affordable, high quality accommodation which allows everyone access to heritage, urban culture and the arts. Together the two hostels will increase the number of young people staying with us every year by 7%. Both sites will ensure that thousands more young people will be able to learn, meet new people and improve their wellbeing and life skills as part of our operations in Liverpool and Newcastle. It's a very exciting time for YHA as we enter our 90th year.

Paul Smith is the manager at Newcastle, continuing the role he started here in 2011, when the Euro Hostel brand took over the northeastern corner of a large rectangular industrial and commercial block known as Carliol Square. The business had sounded out the city with temporary summer hostels in student lodgings in 2007 and 2008, before moving to purchase the Carliol Square site in 2009.

The Square is of great historical significance, being adjacent to the ancient town walls of the 13th and 14th centuries. Plummer Tower, across the road, is all that remains of these walls in the immediate vicinity. For a hundred years Carliol Square was infamous as the site of HM Newcastle Gaol and House of Correction, a place of harsh and summary justice newly built in 1827 to incarcerate criminals from Newcastle's teeming populace. The city was rife with poverty, slum housing, illness, deprivation and gang criminality cheek by jowl with burgeoning industry, trade and the well-to-do bourgeoisie. Those who strayed from the straight path were dealt with ruthlessly. Author Barry Redfern and Newcastle City Library have uncovered the histories of numerous such internees, many in their teens or those desperate for the means of survival, and Paul Smith has made their stark Victorian photographs and case-notes into a fascinating display in the hostel's dining room and bar. Under the Euro Hostel banner the bar and bistro emerged as *the Ware Rooms*, a reference to the shady warehouse kept full of stash by villainous gang-leader Henry Cunningham, Newcastle's own true-life Bill Sykes.

Carliol Square Gaol was demolished in 1925, its inmates moving to Durham Prison. In the Gaol's place an industrial block sprang up quickly. On the eastern flank Telephone House with its fine edifice emerged in 1932; BT still operates here today. About the same time the rest of the building arose, with large-windowed factory units reminiscent of Chicago or New York on four floors. The units were of reasonably unified external appearance, though the businesses using them varied greatly in size and importance. In the period between the mid-1930s and the mid-1970s, Kelly's directories show a range of engineering works, cable works (BICC), plumbers' merchants, Siemens Electrical, Shanks Vitreous and several tailoring and gown manufacturing works. Tru-Knit House sat on the northwest corner, while on the northeast corner, almost a permanent fixture, was Thomson and Brown Brothers, a large motorcar accessory manufactory. This is now the site of YHA Newcastle Central. A shuttered vehicle ramp from the north of the Square served the basement, and is still in place. While many of the businesses' tenures changed rapidly, Thomson and Brown Bros were in place for over 40 years. Recently, a former employee of the firm visited the hostel and explained to staff:

I worked for Brown Bros. The ground floor (the present day bar / bistro) was a large open space for spray-painting. In the centre of the floor was a long conveyor belt.

After this firm left, these corner premises became a variety of commercial trades. Before 2011 a photography business was using the ground floor space. Apart from Telephone House and the youth hostel, Carliol Square is now a mix of offices, gym, café and nightclub.

Under Euro Hostel the premises built a reputation for hospitality and good value, especially for the larger groups who would enjoy the city's nightlife before turning in. There are two self-contained 14-bed suites to suit this trade, one the only accommodation within the basement and imaginatively titled 'the Bunkalow' and the other to the rear of the first floor. In the early years of the Euro Hostel staff made use of accommodation in the basement, while guests rather than hostel staff used the kitchen on that level.

YHA plans to augment the meals service to its full menu by developing the basement kitchen, with its dumbwaiter service to the bar and bistro area, now labelled the Carliol Square Café. Other ground floor facilities include the reception, a mezzanine area for relaxation, toilets and staff offices. YHA introduced its signage and branding quickly, including the first updated example of its celebrated public plaque, reintroduced after several years. Other developments are likely to follow. Paul Smith was keen to keep his loyal staff under the new arrangements and the transfer has worked well.

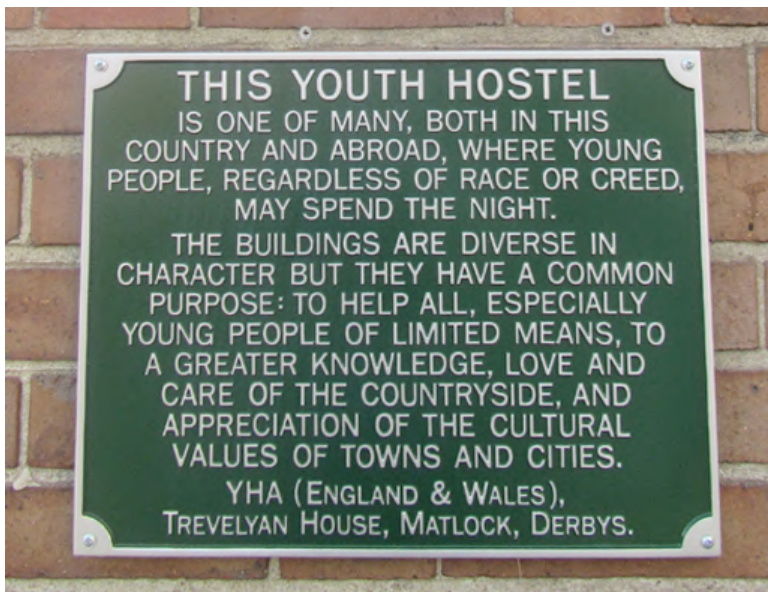
Floor 1 includes a greater mix of room sizes than the higher floors. The plan on floor 2 of mainly 2- and 4-bedded rooms is almost exactly replicated on floor 3, except that a small staff room is located on floor 2. The building has DDA compliant rooms 101, 201 and 301 on floors 1 to 3, at the western end, next to the lift. All rooms have en suite facilities and TVs.



1 2



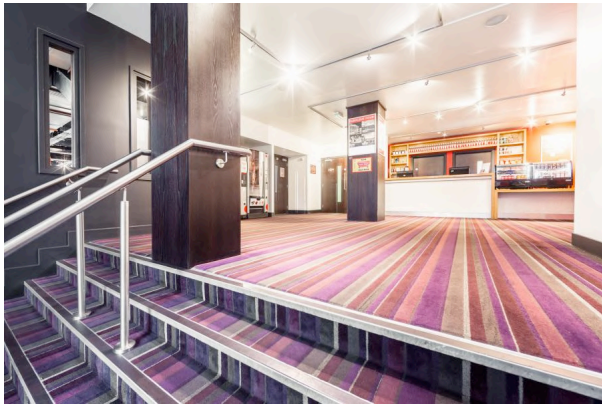
3 4



5 6



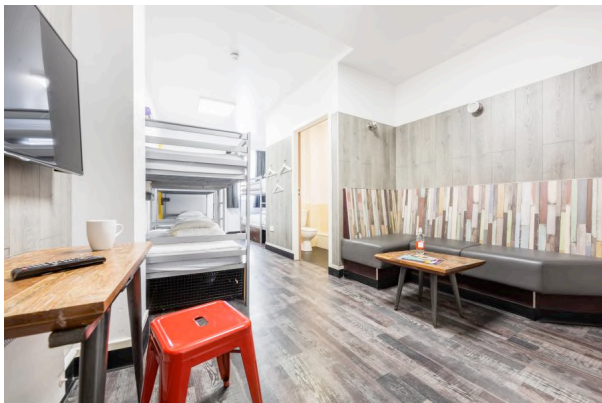
YHA's new Newcastle youth hostel. 1: the curved northeastern corner of Carliol Square, with public café and bar on the ground floor. To the left is the towering Telephone House. The road leading straight on up the hill to the city centre is Worswick Street; 2: the front face of the hostel – containing 3: the second public entrance leading to reception; 4&5: YHA's modern branding strongly recognises the value of its historical and charitable roots; 6: corner entrance, hanging sign and banner (author's photographs, September 2019)



1 2



3 4



5 6



7

1-6: interior views of Newcastle Central youth hostel, reflecting the transitional stage between Euro Hostel and YHA.

1: the entrance to the spacious reception area, with the café area to the left and the mezzanine to the right;

2: the former Ware Rooms Bar, now developed by YHA as the Carlol Square Café;

3&4: a cheerful and spacious 4- or 5-bed en suite bedroom ideal for group or family use; 5: a 6-bed room with seating area;

6: the 14-bed room on the ground floor suited to school or friendship groups; 7: new hostel stamp



Layout of two of the five floors at YHA Newcastle Central, on the ground and second levels

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
1969-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
†: Jesmond Dene temporary hostel; ∞: Claude Gibb temporary hostel;									
§: St Dominic's School temporary hostel; ¶: Jesmond Road hostel; Δ: Newcastle Central hostel									
*: 17 month period									
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1599†
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
2000†	1224†	890†	1314∞	1132§	1146§	1797§	1803§	4867¶	6732¶
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
6715¶	5625¶	5975¶	6176¶	5747¶	6944¶	open¶	8003¶	9813¶	10584Δ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
11119¶	10287¶	10959*¶	10182¶	9473¶	9950¶	11326¶	11229¶	10674¶	11568¶
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
11643¶	10546¶	11919¶	12441¶	12796¶	12015¶	10429¶	9952¶	9023¶	8984¶
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
8348¶	7141¶	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	19706Δ