

Youth Hostels at Once Brewed and the Sill

Once Brewed Youth Hostel (East Bog Farm) 1934 to 1968

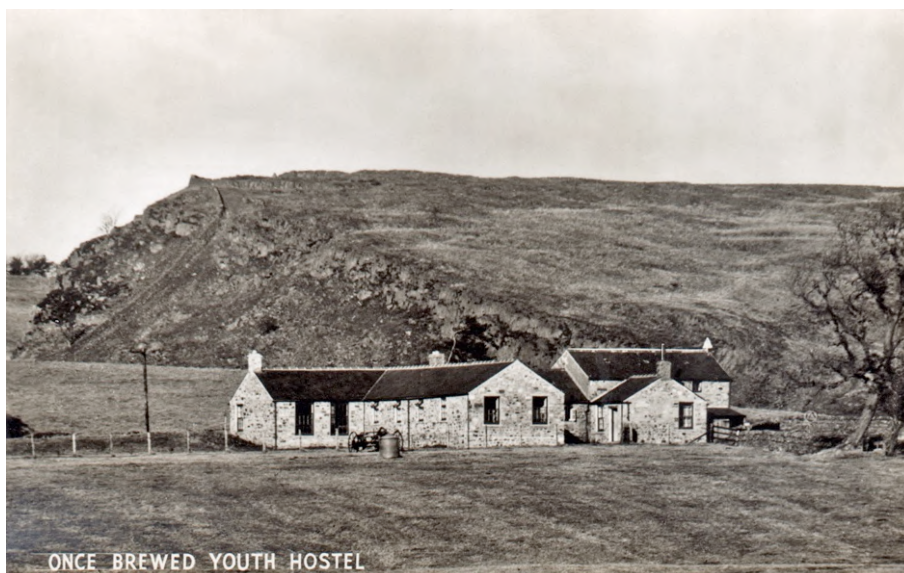
East Bog Farm, Military Road, Bardon Mill, Hexham, Northumberland

Historic County: Northumberland

YHA Regions: Northumberland &
Tyneside, Border & Dales, North

GR: NY 752668

ONCE BREWED The first indication of a potential YHA hostel to serve the central portion of Hadrian's Wall, west of Acomb hostel, was in National Executive Committee minutes of 16th November 1933, under the heading *Demonstration Hostels*. Plans for a cow byre about half a mile south of Borcovius (Vercovicium, or Housesteads) were mentioned. Dr GM Trevelyan would give £450 if the Executive Committee would do the same, with the balance to come from the Northumberland and Tyneside Region. The byre may have been a reference to East Bog Farm, though that was 2½ miles west of Housesteads. Old maps suggest that the farm with that name was on the north side of the Military Road; the hostel may have been an outlier farmstead.



2 3



Once Brewed youth hostel in the early days. 1: a postcard showing the premises from the usual viewpoint – south. The original farmhouse was the taller building, at the cross roads, with the line of the military road running from left to right behind the buildings and with the Great Whin Sill beyond. No doubt old outbuildings and extensions were adapted for the new hostel, but the L-shaped construction behind the farm implement seems newer. The hostel entrance lay between the two near extensions; 2 & 3: the homely common room in the western extension. The two photographs are similar, except for the notices or bookshelves on the left. Period furniture, lighting and that famous YHA poster add to the charm (YHA Archive)

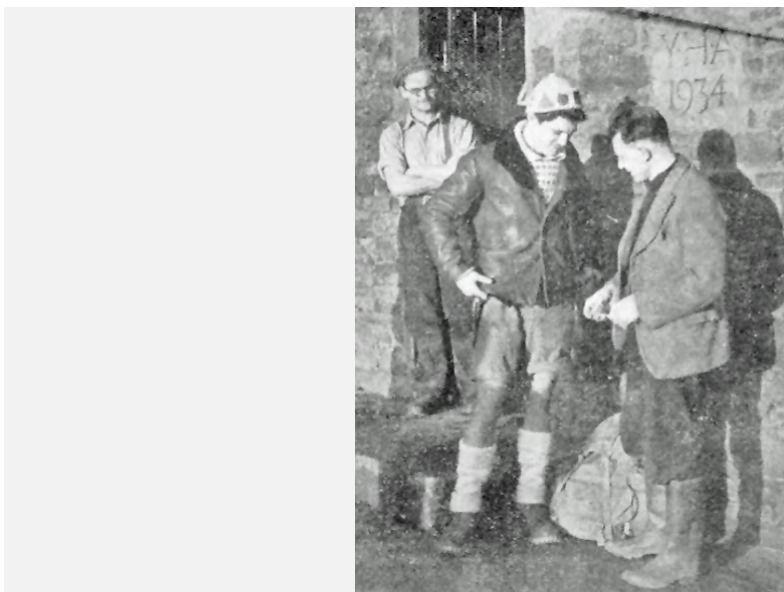
In the early to mid 1930s there was a vogue for demonstration hostels, YHA properties set up with some financial assistance from the national body to reveal best practices in design and running. The aim, never perfectly realised, was to establish one example per region of important hostels owned by the newly-formed YHA Trust to show that the Association could develop its own professional provision, rather than rely on the amateur adopted hostel principal that formed such a large part of the early network. Demonstration hostels were opened specifically at Grasmere Thorney How first, then Once Brewed, Holmbury St Mary, Oxford, Overton Hall and Hartington Hall. There was often an element of new building or extensive redesign in these premises, and it is thought that the larger portion of the first Once Brewed Hostel facing south and that facing west may have been of new YHA construction, or at least heavy reconstruction: the window pattern, squareness and neatness of the roof internally and externally and design of a typically 1930s brick fireplace in the western wing all add to the impression.

Once Brewed Demonstration Hostel was on part of East Bog Farm. The land was owned by Sir Charles Trevelyan, pioneer supporter of the Northumberland and Tyneside Group. Financial support came through his brother Dr GM Trevelyan and the Carnegie and Cadbury Trusts. The hostel was described as part-purchased in 1934 (passing to the YHA Trust on 5th October 1934); the other part was a later freehold purchase on 28th April 1947. The exact nature and timing of the gifts from the Trevelyans are unclear; the Northumberland and Tyneside annual report for 1959 described how it was Sir Charles Trevelyan who, in his will, was donating land of an unspecified nature at Once Brewed to YHA.

'Roman Wall' hostel, as it was called in its first year, was meant to open in late July 1934, with beds for 12 men and 12 women. It was certainly open by September of that year, now expanded to 20 men and 20 women, and building was completed by then. YHA Architect F Austin Child and Lady Mary Trevelyan prepared the plans. It was reportedly Lady Trevelyan, Sir Charles' wife, who coined the hostel's unusual and much-loved name, suggesting that once-brewed tea was a more acceptable drink than the stronger stuff found at the Twice Brewed Inn nearby. Wardens in the 1930s came and went; they included Mr R English, Thomas Hara, Mr Ridley and Miss M Gales.

In common with all other Northumberland and Tyneside hostels, Once Brewed was declared closed on the outbreak of war, but from 4th November 1939 to the end of March 1940 it was open at week-ends; thereafter the hostel was in use throughout hostilities, wardened by Mr Challingworth, Mr J Carlisle or Mr WN Pickthall.

The post-war *Northumberland and Tyneside News*, a well-produced regional YHA magazine, offered this miscellany of glimpses into hostel life over a ten year period at the old Once Brewed hostel, wardened mostly by 'Mac':



Pete Nicholson, a Northumberland and Tyneside hosteller, has only missed six week-ends in two years. He is seen with Billy Piggins, the Once Brewed warden who recently broadcast on the BBC's Country Magazine [*Tyneside Hosteller*, March 1947]

Meals at Once Brewed

Meals are now provided at Once Brewed if ordered and paid for in advance [*Tyneside Hosteller*, March 1947]

The tightening up on overcrowding has had such a drastic effect at Once Brewed that Mac visited the Tatler Café in Northumberland Street [Newcastle] the other Wednesday night with a view to persuading some of the hostellers who foregather there to come out to 'the Brewed' the following weekend
[*Tyneside Hosteller*, March 1951]

Wiring at Once Brewed and Dirt Pot hostels has been completed. Generating plant is not yet installed, but it is hoped one fine day to have electric light in these hostels. The working parties are to be congratulated on their fine efforts [*Tyneside Hosteller*, November 1951]

Eleven girls from Sheffield hostelling on horseback recently stayed at Once Brewed
[*Tyneside Hosteller*, January 1952]

The electric light system at Once Brewed put in by volunteers has now gone into action. The substitution of paraffin by electricity not only dispels the gloom but aids cleanliness. Although cycles are rendered temporarily homeless by the generator, George Hustwick and others have moved a large shed from South Shields to the hostel and this will be erected in the wood during the next few weeks to give cyclists their best accommodation at Once Brewed they have had [*Tyneside Hosteller*, March 1952]

More culture for Once Brewed

Having worn out an ordinary upright piano in a praiseworthy effort to soothe the savage breast of his winter clientele, our warden at Once Brewed has now acquired a grand piano, installed in the common room. Its predecessor has been relegated to the cycle shed where, with the aid of woodworm, it is eating out its heart. Mac has forcibly announced that the piano is to be used only for providing musical entertainment, and not as a receptacle or for any other purpose. Nevertheless, the wide boys have been whispering that it will be at least as comfortable as the common room tables when the dorm is full [*Tyneside Hosteller*, March 1953]

Once Brewed Warden's Quarters

Despite it being two and a half years since we decided that improvement to the warden's quarters was to be our first priority, another summer has gone and Mac is again facing the prospect of a winter in his small room without most of the facilities which the majority take for granted. By the time the original plans to build a detached bungalow had reached the stage when definite financial commitment would have to be entered into, the rise in costs and the need for retrenchment in YHA expenditure compelled the Regional Council to consider a less expensive scheme: an extension of the existing quarters instead of the separate building. Since this decision, about a year ago, the National Development Officer has had the matter in hand, but he has been held up other work and delays in obtaining consents, licenses and permits. It is now too late to start work of this kind, but everything should be ready for an early start next year [*Tyneside Hosteller*, November 1953]



1: the warden's quarters were in the low wing to the right (early 1950s photo, Max Kirby);
2: the extended warden's provision, with extra 'cat-swinging' space (August 1959 photo, Pat Packham,) (YHA Archive)

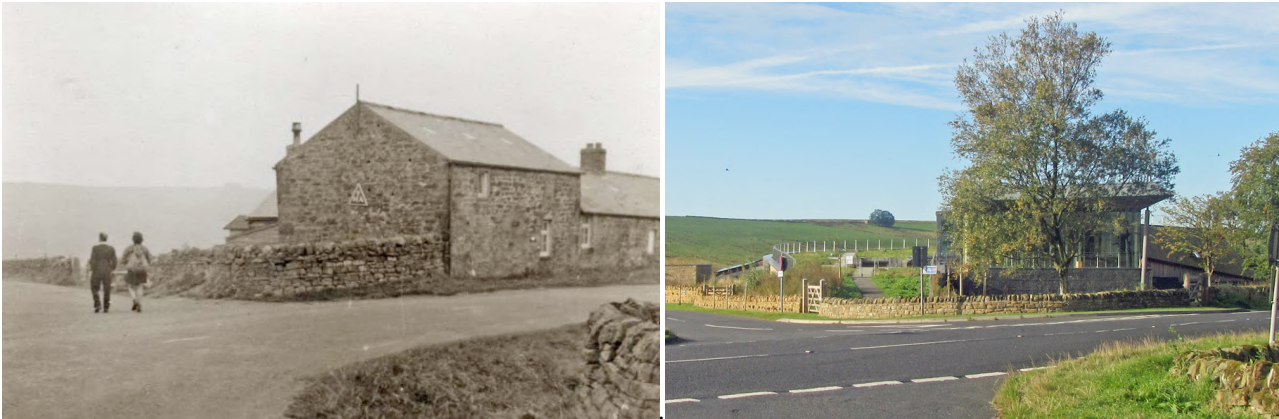
Mac now has more room in which to swing his cats. The cost of the work was over £900, of which over £500 has been provided by National Office. Unfortunately, mains electricity is not likely to become available in that area for a considerable time, which means that we shall have to provide a satisfactory generating plant in place of the present makeshift affair, requiring ingenuity and testing patience [*Tyneside Hosteller*, November 1954]

Hostellers who remember the old conditions at Once Brewed will have wondered how wardens Bill Piggins and Mac and their predecessors managed to put up with the old combined kitchen-bedroom-living-room, without bath or private toilet [*Tyneside Hosteller*, November 1955]

Mac has now been relieved of the business of looking after the generator. The hostel is now couple up with the Electricity Board. This will save him a lot of work, for no-one but the regulars know anything of the bother he has had, particularly in bad weather [*Tyneside Hosteller*, May 1957]

Mains electricity at Once Brewed and Kielder hostels is proving a great boon. The generator from Once Brewed has relieved Mrs Little, our warden at Alnham, of the drudgery of attending to oil lamps
[*Tyneside Hosteller*, November / December 1957]

The common room has been laid with red linoleum. The effect of this with the lemon table tops and newly painted fireplace is very attractive [*Tyneside Hosteller*, July / August 1958]



Max Kirby from the Merseyside Region took this rare picture of the crossroads at the first Once Brewed hostel in the early 1950s. The couple have crossed the busy Military Road and are walking in a southward direction onto the lane to Vindolanda. The County Council deemed the crossroads and encroaching buildings too dangerous (YHA Archive); for comparison's sake, a colour image from September 2019 shows the new Sill Centre and YHA from an identical viewpoint (author's photograph)

After the war, Once Brewed hostel entered a period of settled wardenship, with Billy Piggins in place until 1950, and 'Mac' (Alan McFarlane) taking up duties from then right through to 1970, by which time his hostel was a very different place. In the early 1960s there was a thwarted plan to extend the old farm buildings to an ambitious degree. The 1961 annual report summarised the scheme:

The Once Brewed extension project is now moving ahead fast. The National YHA gave the scheme their encouragement. Mr Austin Child was engaged as our architect. Promise of financial help was won from the Ministry of Education. The extension will include extending west from the present common room and then running south and east to join up with the women's dormitory. The south and western sections will be largely small dormitories. There will be good drying facilities and facilities for warden's catering and for an assistant warden. There is, however, still a tremendous amount of work necessary before this improvement is achieved.

The scheme was overtaken by events. A constraint with this hostel was the proximity to a busy and dangerous road intersection on the Military Road. From about 1960 Northumberland County Council began planning for major road widening works, eventually entailing the demolition of East Bog Farm hostel and the construction of a new hostel and National Park centre on an alignment slightly further west and south from the road corner. The capacity remained at 40 until the demolition of the old hostel in 1968.

The two conflicting development plans took many years to unfold. The 1962 YHA regional annual report described how the hostel obstructed the view west approaching the T-junction, presumably off the lane from the south. It stated that Northumberland County Council killed the original extension scheme and threatened the existence of the hostel, though it had already attracted £4,000, half the extension budget, from the Local Education Authority. Fortunately YHA owned more land, that gifted by Sir Charles Trevelyan, though a rebuild on the new site would depend on compensation. The following year, the annual report did not mince its words: it blamed the bureaucratic laziness of the County Council and the Ministry of Transport for still frustrating YHA's efforts to improve Once Brewed Hostel. The 1964 report claimed that the plan for the new hostel was advanced and research showed that a new build was a better option. Building was to start in summer 1965, but the old hostel, on a footprint slightly to the east of the new, would remain open till ready. The changeover date was a long time coming. The 1967 report advised that the new hostel was almost ready and should open in May 1968. The old facility was still operating at the beginning of 1968, but was demolished as planned after the transfer.



Two postcards from the latter years of the original Once Brewed hostel frame a couple of the popular one-inch pin badges, sold in their thousands to young visitors, and a silk badge from the same era. The postcards show clearly the 1953 warden's extension and the stone plaque inscribed 'YHA 1934'. The stone has been saved and displayed at both of the subsequent youth hostels here. The author had the good fortune to stay here in February 1967, when the night was freezing but the welcome at its warmest (YHA Archive)

Once Brewed Youth Hostel (New Build) 1968 to 2015

Military Road, Bardon Mill, Hexham, Northumberland NE47 7AN

Historic County: Northumberland

YHA Region: Border & Dales, North

GR: NY 752668



The new hostel cost about £40,000, almost all from outside funding: the Ministry of Housing (via the National Park Commission), Northumberland CC and the Department of Education and Science. An architect's plan, dated 11th March 1965, was prepared by Austin Child and Donald Hall, Architects, Newcastle, the practice used by YHA since the first hostel here over thirty years previously.

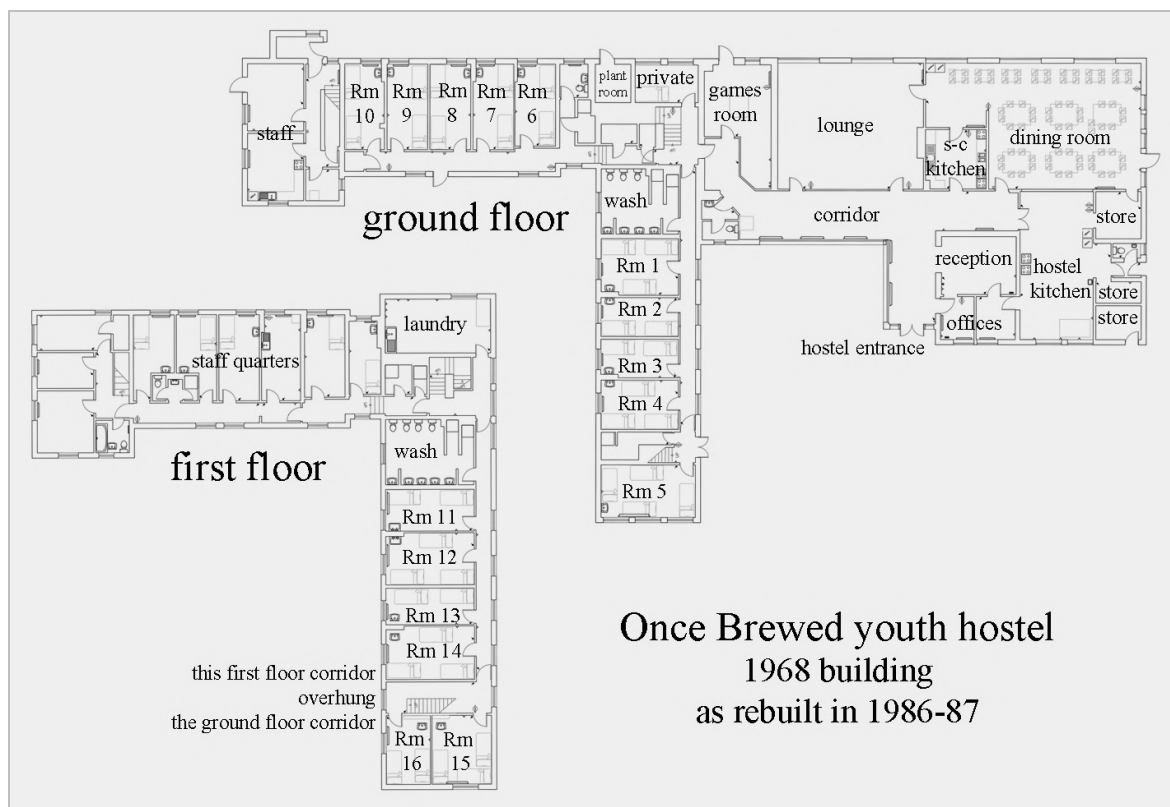
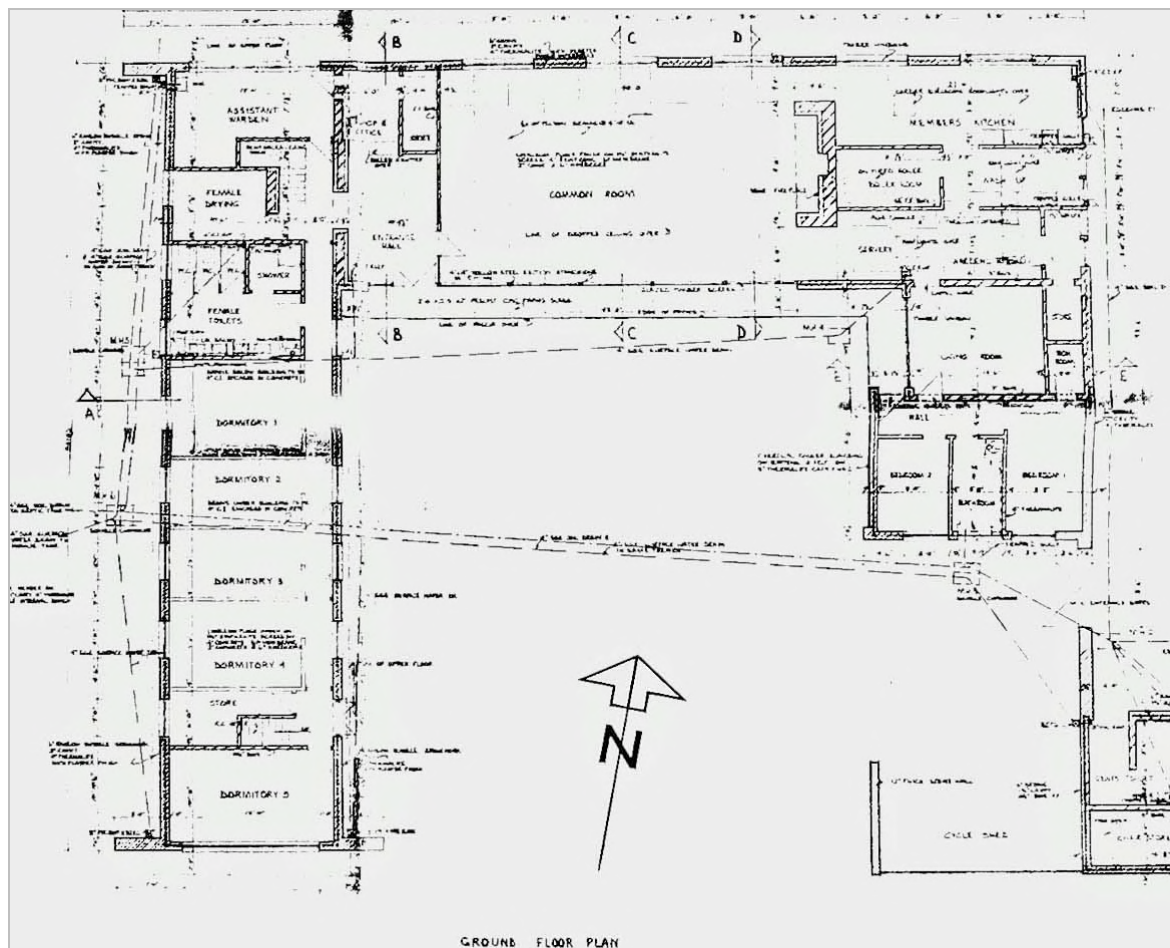
The significant boost in overnights in 1968 suggests that the new 56-bed premises were in use for the majority of the year. The Duke of Northumberland attended the official opening on 28th September 1968. The 1967 annual report proudly announced that it would be one of the finest hostels in the country with this glowing account:

Here we have seen the passing of the old era. The new hostel is bright and spacious, centrally heated, provides excellent meals, has 16 more beds [boosted from 40 to 56], and 11 dormitories instead of two. The National Parks Information Centre on adjacent land, leased to the County Council by YHA, should also be valuable to all, and especially school parties.



- 1: postcard showing the original entrance arrangement in 1968, before the major reconstruction almost 20 years later. Note the original pleasingly designed chimney leading from the common room fireplace, later made redundant and removed;
- 2: Mac's assistants in the late 1960s were June and Eddie Cruddas. They left in 1970 to take up successive wardenships at Helvellyn, Rock Hall and Thorney How hostels. Here June is serving in the smart new hostel shop (YHA Archive)

The new hostel was in the form of two and a half sides of an incomplete quadrangle, shown as a ground floor plan below, with the separate National Park Centre to the south-east of it. Dormitories were placed in the two-storey west wing, females on the ground floor and males on the first; all other construction was single storey.



- 1: a poor copy of the architects' ground floor plan of the 1968 hostel at Once Brewed in its first, smaller, form. The separate National Park Centre, bottom right, has been lopped here to show more of the hostel arrangements;
- 2: a plan of the larger hostel as introduced in 1987 after extensive rebuilding. Expansion westward over two floors created more room for guests and staff, while the old warden's flat was adapted to be the new reception and offices. Cooking and dining facilities were considerably recast (YHA Archive)

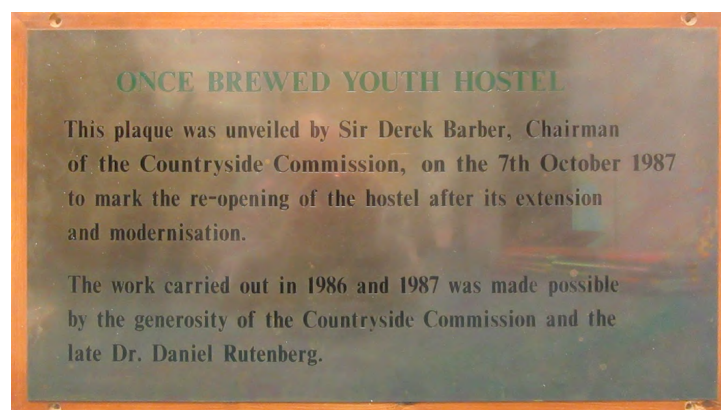
In 1968, along the north portion from west to east, were an assistant warden's room, hostel shop (reception), office and store, a large common room with stone fireplace, members' kitchen, wash-up and warden's kitchen. The southern part of the eastern block was the warden's quarters, with two bedrooms separated by a private hall from the lounge. Initially the main hostel entrance and nearby hostel reception were at the western side of the courtyard. It was reached via a diagonal path from the corner of the warden's building, as shown in the postcard on page 6.

New wardens in 1971 were Barry and Ann Hudson, and in 1974 Jim and Mary Richardson. Brian and Pauline Keen had a much longer tenure, from 1977 to 2001.

Between 1968 and 1970, annual overnights registered a rise from 6,000 to 9,000. Soon the provision of 56 beds was proving inadequate; in 1972, for instance, Once Brewed had to turn many hostellers away. Improvements were necessary in the meals kitchen in 1975. By 1976 the annual bednight figure had risen to 11,000. In 1978 YHA opened a new hostel at Greenhead, further west along the Wall, partly to alleviate pressure at peak times.

YHA added an extension to the warden's quarters in 1979, in line with similar improvements across the network at this time. In the 1980s there was a step back from the records of the previous decade.

A major remodelling plan was instigated in 1986 to provide more accommodation for members and staff. This provided a two-storey dormitory extension to the west, parallel with the road and in line with the previous common room wing. At the end of this block was a new manager's house, later altered to staff accommodation. The old staff quarters on the eastern side were converted to the new hostel reception and office, and there was a general reorganisation of the old kitchen spaces to create a new and spacious dining room. A new hostel entrance was located next to the eastern spur of the building.



1: postcard showing the new entrance arrangement after the major reconstruction of 1986-87;
2: brass plaque to mark the development and its sponsors

There was a formal reopening on 10th October 1987. Once Brewed Hostel could now accommodate 75 guests, and the number rose still further to 86 by the turn of the century with a further reorganisation of staff facilities.

In the new century, YHA Once Brewed managers were Hilary Rowell and Phil Pogson, Damian and Penny Parker (from 2003 to 2011), Mick Blood, Laura Watson and in the final year, Keith Webster. By 2014 the capacity had reduced slightly to 79, in line with modern YHA thinking on the advantages of greater breathing space for members.



YHA publicity images from about 2010 show that the rooms and public and outdoor spaces were still attractive and welcoming



A variety of photographs taken by the author in July 2012. Remarkably, the hostel had retained and displayed the wrought iron hanging YHA sign and the rectangular stone tablet that dated back to the 1934 opening. Both were rescued when the 1968 hostel was closed for demolition in 2015 and have been retained in the 2017 hostel, the Sill at Hadrian's Wall

Plans were developing for a third development of the Once Brewed site, and like the second, it was to combine youth hostel provision with the National Park visitor centre. The *Hexham Courant* summed up the plans on 8th October 2014:

Once Brewed: Sill Project clears another hurdle

Another major stumbling block in the way of the £11.2m Sill visitor centre project has been surmounted. Environment Secretary Eric Pickles has decided against calling in the scheme for personal determination, clearing the way for the next phase of the ambitious development. But while the final planning hurdle has been cleared, developers the Northumberland National Park Authority and the Youth Hostels Association are still working on the financial package.

They need to achieve £3m in match funding to progress the scheme, and are sweating on the outcome of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the remaining £6.9m, with a verdict expected early next year. The park authority claims that the visitor centre project, which includes offices and shops, is needed to replace the dilapidated Once Brewed national park visitor centre.

There will also be a new 86-bed youth hostel to replace the existing YHA facilities on the site.

Park authority chairman Coun. John Riddle, of Bellingham, said: 'This is great news for the project. It backs up the decision taken at local level and demonstrates that the Secretary of State is content for the project to go ahead.'

Chief executive of YHA (England and Wales), Caroline White, said: 'Without investment in the Sill, the current youth hostel at Once Brewed would be forced to close in just a couple of years, meaning many young people would miss out on the amazing life and educational experiences that YHA is able to provide.'

The second version of Once Brewed hostel thus closed on 11th September 2015 for demolition. Unlike the first closure 50 years before, the footprints of both the abandoned and the new premises would coincide. There was no possibility of running the old 1968 hostel alongside new building work. With no alternative YHA accommodation nearby after the closures of Acomb and Greenhead hostels some years before, YHA had no provision on Hadrian's Wall in 2016, though a brief Enterprise arrangement with Herding Hill holiday park may have softened the blow.

The Sill at Hadrian's Wall Youth Hostel 2017 to present

The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre, Military Road, Bardon Mill, Hexham NE47 7AN

Historic County: Northumberland

GR: NY 752668



The remarkable new combined youth hostel and National Park Centre at the Sill, a few weeks after opening (author's photograph, September 2017)

The Sill at Hadrian's Wall, the reincarnation on the same site as earlier Once Brewed hostels, opened on 29th July 2017, a little earlier than previously projected dates. Like its 1968 predecessor, the hostel was built in partnership with the Northumberland National Park. It was incorporated within a site now styled *the Sill – Landscape Discovery Centre*, the NNP's own public attraction. What was different now was that the earlier historical ownership of the site by YHA had shifted towards the National Park. An indication of this change is that the youth hostel and indeed many local references have relinquished YHA's historical name *Once Brewed* in favour of *the Sill*.

Writing in *YHA Connect* on 2nd August 2017, Simon Ainley, YHA's Head of Capital Fundraising and Partners, gave an account of the detailed processes involved in the development of the joint scheme:

Six years to the Sill!

Friday evening [28th July 2017] marked the end of what has been a long journey and the start of a new one.

Along with Margaret Hart, our Vice Chair, James Blake, CEO, and Jake Chalmers, Property Director, I had the privilege of representing YHA at the official opening of the Sill and wanted to share with you the excitement generated and some of the moments along the way to get to this point.

It all started six years ago, when Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) and YHA in discussion both came to the same conclusion that neither organisation offered facilities at Once Brewed that we could be proud of, or be described as world class. We were operating from dated buildings and not offering what people wanted, visitors spoke with their feet and the comments on TripAdvisor were there for all to see.

We needed to act and after an initial discussion with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), it became apparent collaboration was the way forward. And so the work began, first on the concept – it started from a workshop where someone came up with mud huts! We quickly moved on to more practical suggestions around the opportunities that were out there and how we could provide a visitor attraction with accommodation, that capitalised on the amazing location and yet didn't just focus on the Romans which many others locally do really well. The landscape was key, the need to provide an opportunity for people to explore it, understand it and nurture it and for visitors to connect with the people, the heritage, farming and wildlife that have shaped it.

HLF loved the hub idea, a base and a conduit through which to explore the upland areas of the North of England, and they gave us a £400,000 grant to work up the proposal in more detail. A project team was assembled and the ideas began to crystalise around it not just being about a building, but also the activities and events that would be delivered at and from the site. The next hurdle was obtaining planning permission for what was to be the biggest building created in the National Park. The quality of the development shone through our plans, and we cleared that one. Finally, the biggest hurdle of them all, our request for funding of £7.8million for the Sill was considered by the HLF National Board of Trustees alongside other major national projects. You know the outcome as here we are today.

Within an hour of the doors opening on Saturday morning [29th July] the car park was packed (200 spaces) as people thronged to experience this new attraction and the YHA team spent the day constantly showing our world-class facilities to the crowds who poured in through the doors. Everyone, to a person, was extremely complementary; 'you've come a long way in a short time', 'fantastic', 'amazing facilities', 'how do I book' were heard over and over again.

Everything we talked about when developing those funding bids has been delivered – the iconic building design, the activities and events – Saturday saw an eclectic mix of choirs performing, pipers playing, wood turning, star gazing, storytelling, nature talks and guided walks. The whole site exudes quality and has been thought about in great detail, such as the views from each window, the finishes and practical things, like the sound insulation and adjacencies which makes operating the hostel easier and more efficient. All this you get from having a big budget and the benefit of designing something from scratch.

The Sill is unique and as one YHA guest said, a project of this quality doesn't come without a lot of hard work. Everyone at YHA should be proud of their efforts as it's very special. Many people across YHA have played their part in ensuring we hit the ground running, it was fantastic to see the place alive with children and young families really enjoying themselves and the hospitality delivered by Richard and the team.

YHA's website added more specific detail:

This 86-bed hostel has all the facilities you'd expect from YHA including a self-catering kitchen, classroom for group and school residential use, and relaxing social areas. Our 26 bedrooms are split evenly across two floors and consist of either two or four beds. Eighteen of the rooms are en suite and two are fully DDA en suite compliant. All bedrooms have free Wi-Fi and Salto key card access, making this a really secure place to stay.

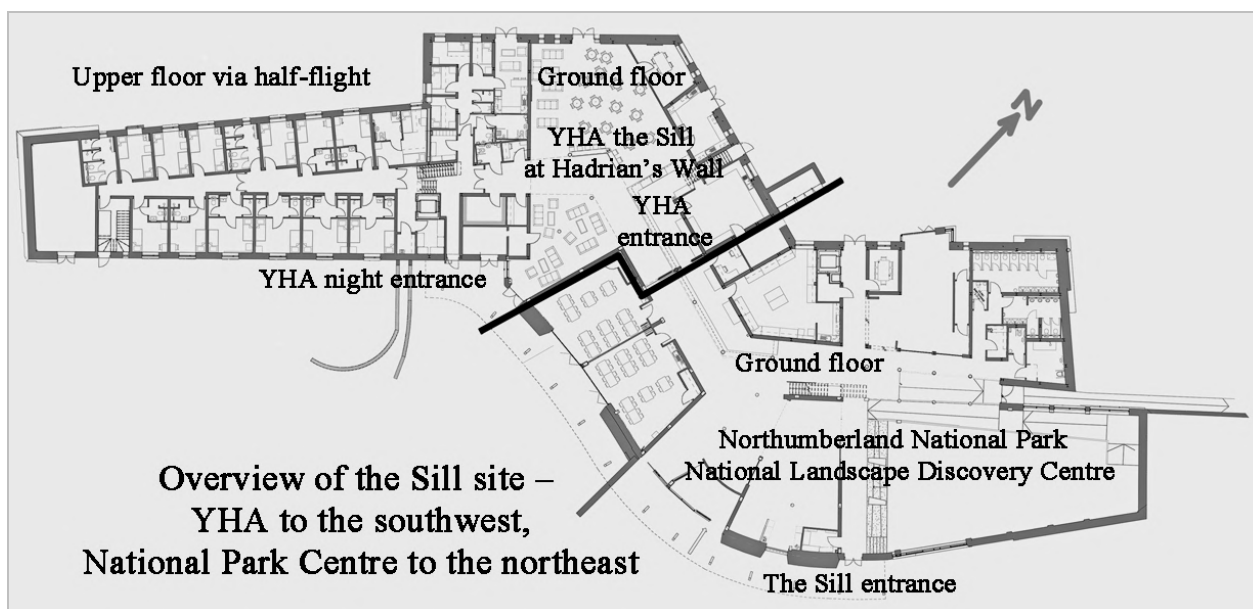
Room breakdown is as follows:

8 x 2 bed en suite, 2 x 3 bed en suite with double bed, 8 x 4 bed, 8 x 4 bed en-suite

The hostel's facilities include a retail shop, meeting rooms, an open plan bar/dining room, a self-catering kitchen and extensive landscaped areas in which to sit, play and learn.

Inspired by The Great Whin Sill, a nearby geographical feature, the building complements and reflects the landscape with dry-stone walls, glass and timber. You can even walk on the green roof. Renewable energy is used throughout the facility in keeping with YHA's green ethos.

The Landscape Discovery Centre attached to the hostel includes inspiring exhibition space plus a shop and café with a large terrace which is perfect for admiring the spectacular views. Outside there are innovative spaces designed specifically for outdoor learning, music and theatre, or relaxation.



Plan of the Sill, resembling a leg-of-mutton shape that runs from northeast to southwest. The National Park Discovery Centre covers the site of the first Once Brewed hostel, adjacent to the cross roads. The Centre leads to the YHA premises at the southwestern end. The division between the two is shown by the heavy black line; the daytime entrance to the YHA is located here. The site falls gradually to the southwest, so that the youth hostel's public spaces are a continuation of the Centre's ground floor level, but the bedroom accommodation splits into two floors, above and below, each served by half-flight stairs and a lift

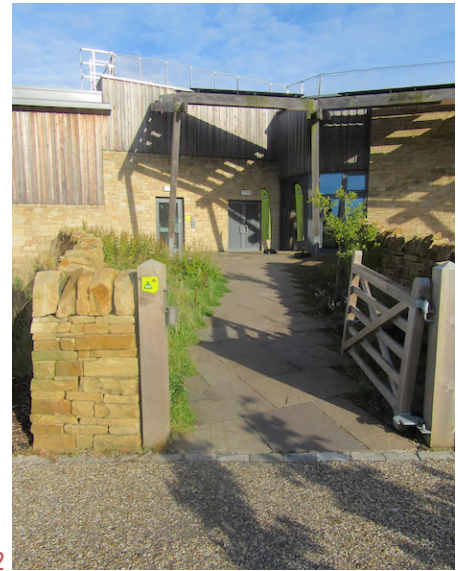
A £7.8m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund made possible the £14.8m state-of-the art visitor centre on Hadrian's Wall, the UK's first National Landscape Discovery Centre. The Centre's own website added;

It's a hub for the rural economy, a laboratory, centre and base for education from primary to tertiary level, a driver for the Northumberland economy, a celebration and a reminder of the importance of landscape in understanding who we are as a nation, and a place to emphasise the importance of its care.

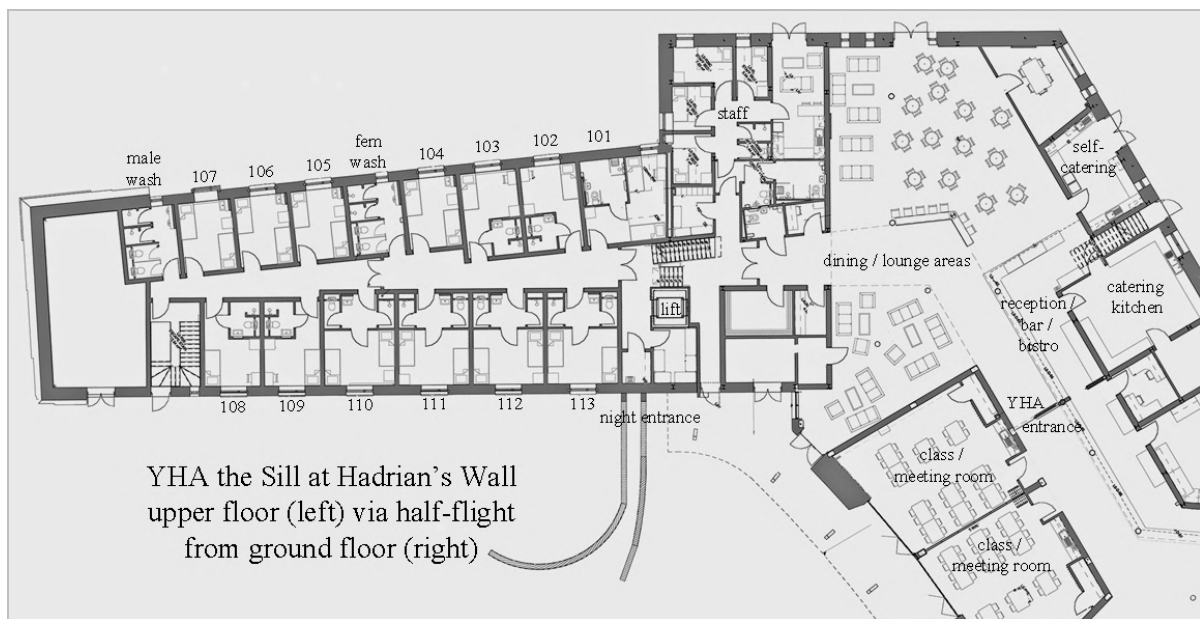
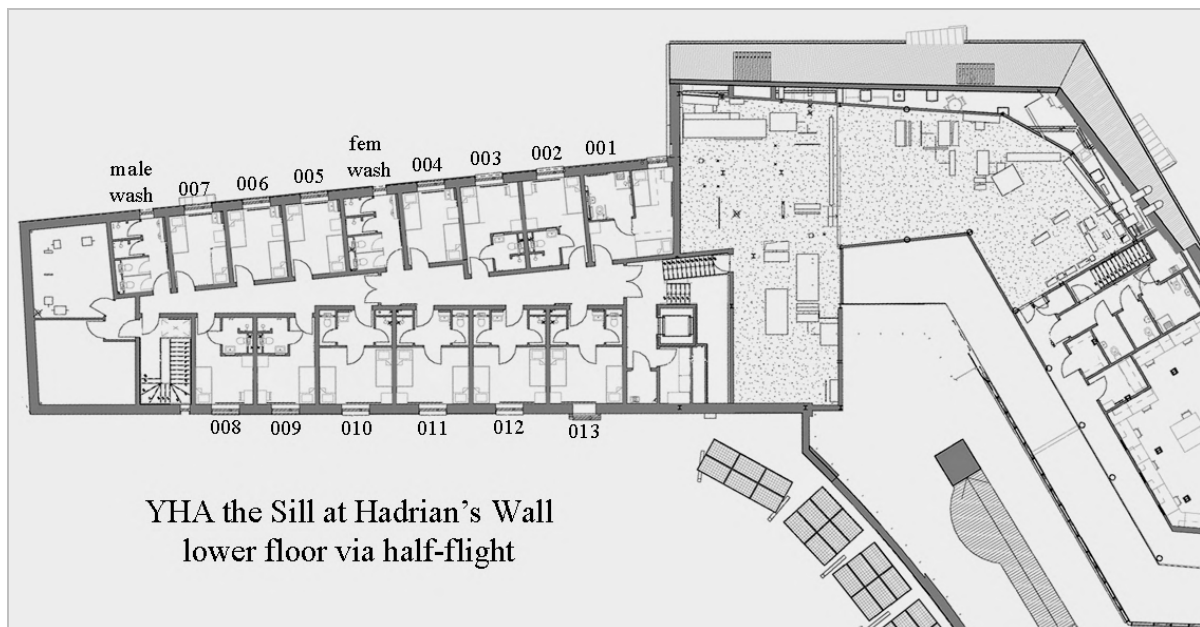
We hope to attract 100,000 visitors and 50,000 overnight stays on and off site with over 30,000 individual activity days to connect people with the landscape in one of the region's two World Heritage Sites and the region's only National Park.



1: HRH Prince Charles attended an official opening of the Sill National Discovery Centre and YHA the Sill at Hadrian's Wall on 12 September 2018, some 14 months after the original opening. Accompanying Prince Charles was the Duchess of Northumberland (dressed in Northumberland Tartan to celebrate the occasion). The opening plaque (a Whin Sill Stone) was revealed by HRH at the rooftop viewpoint followed by a cup Earl Grey tea. Representatives for the YHA included Jerry Robinson and William Howarth (National Office Heads), Richard Dykes (hostel manager), Olivia Wright (hostel team member) and Darcy Russell (hostel team member); 2: the newly created stamp for the latest youth hostel at this location



YHA the Sill at Hadrian's Wall. 1: ecological considerations featured heavily in the planning of the Sill. Not least was the service of a seasonal bus, route AD122, that connects local towns with Hadrian's Wall. The site also provides for bike maintenance and storage and electric vehicle charging; 2: the hostel 'night entrance', with reduced signage; 3: YHA welcome banner; 4: a view of the accommodation block, with its two floors of comfortable small rooms, mainly en suite. Since opening, the timber cladding has softened to a pleasant silvery shade. The Grassland Roof is a largely untried pioneering feature using local plants suited to the thin poor soils and planted to mimic the shapes and geology of the Great Whin Sill; 5: screening by trees purposely limits both the visual impact of the building within the environment and the effect of a busy road upon the youth hostel; 6: the green spaces around the Sill feature attractive sculptures of local fauna (author's photographs, September 2019)



The plans above show the general layout of the YHA section of the Sill centre.

The lower floor consists of 13 bedrooms and associated service rooms, as follows: 001 – 3 bedded DDA en suite bedroom; 002 and 003 – 2-bedded en suite leader rooms; 004 – 4-bedded room; female shower, wash and WC facility; 005 to 007 – 4-bedded rooms; two service and store rooms at the southwestern end; escape stairs; 008 and 009 – 2-bedded en suite leader rooms; 010 to 013 – 4-bedded en suite rooms; cleaner and linen stores; lift and main stairs.



The accommodation on the upper floor replicates the lower, with identical arrangements for rooms 101 to 113. The service space at the southwestern end is the main plant room.

One of the 4-bedded en suite rooms (YHA image)



1: the hostel's self-catering kitchen; 2: one of the joint-use classrooms (YHA images)

Shallow stairs lead from the upper accommodation block down to the ground floor level, initially to the staff living and sleeping quarters and luggage, drying and office rooms. These lead in turn to the hostel's main public spaces in a large single-floor plan aligned east-west. Enclosed on the north side are a meeting room, the well-appointed self-catering kitchen, hostel meals kitchen, store and office. Various distinct dining and relaxed-seating areas fill the spacious and airy main body, while the servery, reception and bar are located close to the automatic door linking the YHA section with the National Park Discovery Centre. Two joint-use classrooms, convertible into one larger, are to be found just outside this connecting door.



1: a variety of attractive soft and dining furniture fills the main space of the hostel. Minor alterations have since been made;
2: the hostel entrance from the Discovery Centre, with reception and servery on the left (YHA images)



1



2



3

The Sill Discovery Centre within its landscape.

1: view of the Great Whin Sill and Hadrian's Wall from the sharply contoured viewing platform;

2: the new building is remarkably unobtrusive in its setting;

*3: one of the most spectacular sections of Hadrian's Wall is a few minutes' walk away;
next page: roadside view and grassland roof vegetation (author's photographs, September 2019)*



Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
1934-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
§: Once Brewed, farmhouse hostel; ¶: Once Brewed, rebuilt hostel; Δ: the Sill at Hadrian's Wall hostel									
*: 17 month period									
...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	...	...	172§	1341§	1294§	1472§	1481§	1555§
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
1769§	1738§	1889§	1873§	2672§	2649§	3283§	4278§	5027§	4149§
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
4775§	4438§	4833§	4740§	4552§	4123§	4459§	4483§	4107§	4858§
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
4018§	4932§	4718§	3935§	4080§	4714§	4115§	4544§	6009§¶	7725¶
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
9002¶	9439¶	10299¶	9972¶	10813¶	10882¶	11267¶	9497¶	9983¶	10223¶
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
9597¶	8695¶	7749¶	8953¶	9095¶	8783¶	open¶	9428¶	13061¶	14341¶
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
14092¶	11609¶	14044*¶	12305¶	12241¶	12084¶	13101¶	12377¶	11550¶	11788¶
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
11308¶	4201¶	9315¶	10355¶	11356¶	9486¶	9832¶	10174¶	9834¶	10711¶
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
10697¶	10947¶	9874¶	9265 ¶	10687¶	8521¶	...	7871Δ	16200Δ	openΔ

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