

Swanage Youth Hostels

Swanage [Dan y Graig] Youth Hostel 1939 to 1944

Dan-y-Graig [or Dan-y-Craig], St Vast's Road, Swanage, Dorset
Historic County: Dorset YHA Region: South Coast

GR: SZ 030784

On St Vast's (or St Vast) Road on hilly ground to the south of Swanage stands a detached house with a curious conical turret. The house was originally called *the Knowle*, and dates from about 1885, probably predating the adjacent *Cluny* by only a short period. According to an OS map dated 1885, but possibly amended two or three years later, these were the only two houses as yet built in this vicinity. The first occupier of *the Knowle* was Captain Dodington (or Doddington). It was shown as unoccupied in the Rate Book in November 1888 until November 1891, when a Lieut Calwell RN is listed as the occupier.

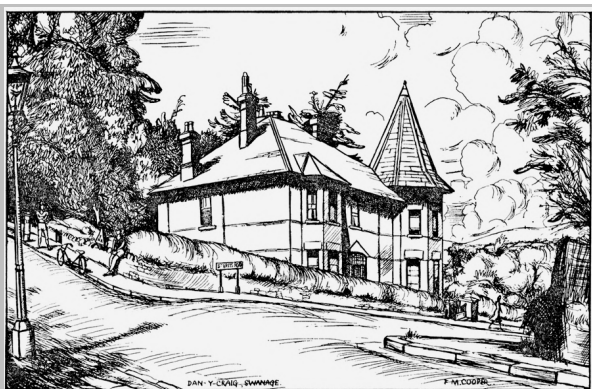
This was the first Swanage youth hostel, leased by YHA's South Coast Region and opened in 1939, warden Miss C Riley. Despite considerable disruption to YHA's south coast hostels during hostilities, the hostel operated each year of the war except 1945. Indeed, only this hostel and Graffham in the region were made available after the coastal ban of June 1940 until the removal of the restriction in 1941. Nevertheless, a national notice of 5th November 1940 advised that it was open only to local members. Nevertheless, the hostel did a fair trade in its few years.

SWANAGE. Dun-y-graig, St. Vast's Road, Swanage, Dorset. Closed from 18th December to 31st January. This new hostel is close to the town and promenade, part way up Durlston Hill. Swanage itself is not very interesting, but the coastal hills around and the Isle of Purbeck, with Corfe Castle and Lulworth are very fine. The Purbeck Hills—bare like the ridge of the South Down in East Sussex—are beautiful, and from the top one has unique views on both sides. The castles of Corfe and Lulworth—one ruined by the passing of ages and the other by a recent fire—should be visited; the former for its dramatic position and the latter for its spacious park, through which one may walk towards Wool, Studland and Kingston which are the most interesting of the other nearby villages.

*M15, W15: PROVISIONS Store ***: MEALS—B. 1/- and 1/3, L. 9d.: E.C.D. Thursday: STATION Swanage ½m: BUS Bournemouth—Swanage, Swanage—Wareham: BATHING Sea: DISTANCES Organford 14m, Burley (via ferry) 25m, Litton Cheney 37m.*

Extract from the YHA Regional Guide of 1939

The roof took a direct hit with an enemy device, possibly an incendiary, during the war. Hostel members were staying overnight, and though they were shocked, nobody was injured. The hostel closed in 1944. YHA's London Region News stated that it was in June, but the annual report for the South Coast Region claimed that closure came in September, on expiry of the lease.



1: early hostel postcard and 2: recent photograph of the house that ceased to be a youth hostel 70 years ago (YHA Archive)

Swanage [Cluny] Youth Hostel 1949 to present

Cluny, Cluny Crescent, Swanage, Dorset BH19 2BS

Historic County: Dorset

YHA Regions:

GR: SZ 030784

South Coast, Southern, South

The old Swanage names of St Vast (Wast) and Cluny relate to ancient French religious orders and their properties in the locality.

Swanage's second youth hostel, at Cluny, on Cluny Crescent, is a Victorian house in spacious grounds, dating back to about 1889. It appears to be first listed in the Rate Book for November of that year, with Sir James Anderson as occupier and owner. He was the captain of Brunel's famed Great Eastern, responsible for the laying of the transatlantic telegraph cable in 1865 and 1866. The oak panelling is believed to have come from the old London Law Courts, in keeping with the Swanage tradition of redundant heavy items from the capital shipped to Dorset as ballast but reused as valuable building material in the town. Until well into the YHA era the building sported a curious viewing platform above the roofline.

Cluny was used as a Red Cross centre during the First World War and again as overflow from a nearby hospice during the second; between those times it was owned by a Harley Street physician.



This sketch postcard by FE Tighe almost certainly dates from the opening of Cluny hostel in 1949. He designed a number of hostel postcards in the district at the time (YHA Archive)

Cluny was purchased freehold early in June 1949, and vested in the YHA Trust. The hostel opened on 15th July 1949 and received a more formal official opening on 22nd October of that year. As with almost all large hostel acquisitions in the period after the war, the new premises received generous Ministry of Education grant-aid. The first wardens were Mr and Mrs Bland, who stayed until 1953.



VIEW FROM THE GARDEN, YOUTH HOSTEL, SWANAGE



1 & 2: two further postcards of the popular Cluny youth hostel date from the earlier years;
3: The Harrow and Wembley Local Group enjoyed Christmas festivities at Cluny hostel in December 1958
(YHA Archive)



Above: Norman O'Reilly of YHA (Northern Ireland) was visiting Swanage hostel in the early 1950s when he took this shot from the luxuriant garden. The scene is much changed nowadays, after two extensive rebuilds; foot of page: two one-inch pin badges from the 1960s and the recent hostel stamp (author's collection)

For the 15 year period after the Blands, up to 1968, wardens included Mr and Mrs S Cooper, Mr and Mrs Bettridge and Mr and Mrs J Halfpenny.

Field Study facilities were added in 1967; six years later these amenities were considerably expanded, at a cost of £75,000, to provide two classrooms. The new classrooms were in a large timber structure behind the hostel, on the old tennis courts. The work necessitated lengthy and periodic closures from 1970. Indeed, overnight figures were restricted to just 659 in the 1971 statistical year, but almost certainly relating to late 1970, leaving 1971 clear for a major reconstruction and 1972 for full availability.

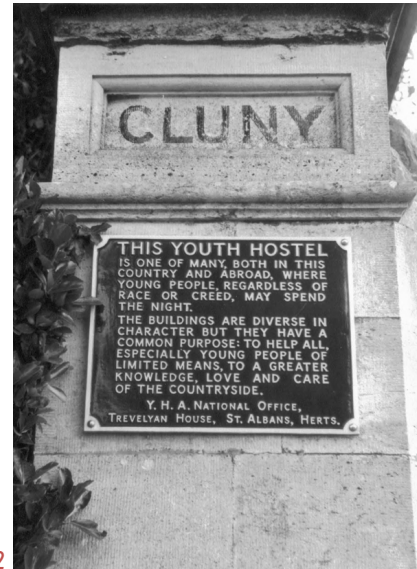
During this period, the house was extended rearwards on the ground and first floors, creating a new dining room, with accommodation above and a large balcony above that, as part of the fire precaution exit route from the attic floor. There was to be a formal reopening on 7th April 1973. Overseeing these improvements up to 1978 were wardens Mr and Mrs Fred Christian.

Hostelling News of Summer 1972 detailed the work that had been carried out:

Swanage hostel has been increasingly popular with holidaymakers and field study parties. This has worked out very well, for field studies take place largely in term time, whereas most of the tourists come in school holiday periods. In 1970, the last full year it was open, 12,598 bednights were recorded, although the standard of accommodation left a good deal to be desired.

Now, however, a year and a half later and after the expenditure of approximately £70,000, Swanage has a hostel of which it can be proud. The YHA's own surveyor, Mr JH Parkes, designed and supervised this transformation. The existing building has been adapted to produce a much more satisfactory layout and better facilities, with additions to provide a large warden's kitchen, members' kitchen with dining space and warden's flat above. A very large annexe, on the former tennis court, houses dormitories, leaders' rooms, washrooms and two field study workrooms. There is central heating throughout. The coachhouse, which formerly housed the workroom, and a plot of land across the road have been sold.

Considerable further expansion took place in 1988-89, when the top floor also was extended rearwards onto most of the balcony area. Staff accommodation was considerably remodelled at this time, with plans for a combined manager's / assistants' house abandoned in favour of a smaller manager's dwelling, with assistants moving into part of the 1970s classroom building. A plan to site the staff house to the right of the hostel was shelved in favour of to the left of it. Further improvements to showers and toilets and remodelling of the top floor were drawn up in 2003, some of which was completed.



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1&2: two early photographs of Cluny by Ron Day;
3: this 1960s postcard view confirms the attractiveness of the stone-built house on Cluny Crescent (1-3 YHA Archive);
4: 1983 photograph by Lincoln member George Miller. The viewing platform had by now been removed (author's collection)



Expanding youth hostel facilities.

- 1: an early YHA-issue postcard, probably to celebrate the opening of the hostel in 1949. For comparison's sake, this shows the rear of the house as acquired. It was more or less rectangular in shape, but in extensive grounds (author's collection);*
- 2: A sketch recently unearthed at the hostel is dated February 1973, after the major works of 1971. It shows the partial extension to the rear, with enhanced fire precaution work making full use of the flat top. The viewing platform of the earlier image has now gone, and a new field studies centre and car park have appeared on the original tennis courts (YHA Archive);*
- 3: the same view in September 2014, showing the 1990 developments at the rear of the hostel. The twin valley roofs have been extended backwards onto most of the balcony, necessitating considerable rebuilding of the roofs and the stone-faced walls. Inside the hostel the top floor steps down considerably half-way back to accommodate the changes (author's photograph)*

New warden David Pearson enjoyed a long stint at Swanage, from 1986 towards the new century, and perhaps into it. Malcolm and Olga Earnscliff then took the reigns until Garry Hayman moved from YHA Believer in 2013.

YHA Swanage enjoyed an extensive £1.5m refurbishment and remodelling over the winter of 2017-18 to improve its facilities and accommodation. There are 93 beds. Eleven of the rooms are en-suite, including one fully accessible room. The rooms have two to six beds and some of the rooms contain a double bed. The hostel also has a brand new self-catering kitchen as well as open plan social areas with an oak panelled lounge and dining room with soft chairs.



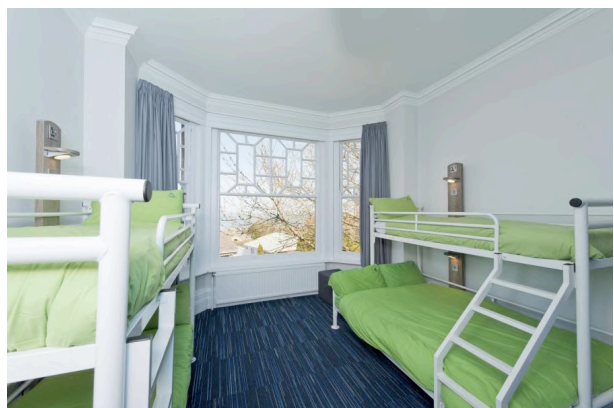
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YHA Swanage after the latest improvements.

1: refurbished historic features in the main corridor; 2: distinguished panelled lounge;

3: hostel dining room; 4: attractive light and spacious modern self-catering kitchen;

5: newly equipped classroom; 6: bedroom with extensive views over Swanage Bay;

7: recent hostel stamp, framed by one-inch celluloid badges from the 1950-1970 period (YHA publicity images)

<p><i>Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows</i></p> <p>1939-1991: <i>previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb</i></p> <p>☞: Swanage Dan-y-Graig Hostel; Δ: Swanage Cluny Hostel</p> <p>●: major rebuilding work, 1971 and 2017-2018</p> <p>*: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire and/or camping</p>									
...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	open☞
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
945☞	2000☞	2733☞	2539☞	1202☞	...	...	...	...	1375Δ
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
4985Δ	6056Δ	5879Δ	5832Δ	5988Δ	5956Δ	5775Δ	6125Δ	6530Δ	7977Δ
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
8292Δ	8480Δ	8584Δ	8807Δ	9574Δ	8564Δ	8935Δ	9369Δ	9993Δ	10569Δ
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
12598Δ	659Δ●	10727Δ	16924Δ	17671Δ	17849Δ	openΔ	17496Δ	16807Δ	17952Δ
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
18332Δ	17660Δ	17165Δ	16638Δ	16588Δ	17959Δ	16865Δ	16448Δ	17652Δ	17022Δ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
14611Δ	18810Δ	24792*Δ	19073Δ	18529Δ	17924Δ	19121Δ	18454Δ	19431Δ	19103Δ
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
18168Δ	17481Δ	18950Δ	17754Δ	17839Δ	17453Δ	17667Δ	17717Δ	16028Δ	15783Δ
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
15126Δ	19207+Δ	19972+Δ	20711+Δ	21127+Δ	20803+Δ	21236+Δ	14275+Δ●	18436+Δ●	20202+Δ



Author's photograph of Swanage hostel, September 2013