

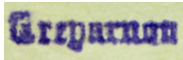
## Treyarnon Bay Youth Hostel 1947 to present

Tregonnan House, Treyarnon, Padstow, Cornwall PL28 8JR

Historic County: Cornwall

YHA Regions: Devon & Cornwall,  
South-West, South

GR: SW 858741



Tregonnan House is an early twentieth century Arts-and-Crafts stone house south of Trevoze Head on the North Cornish coast. It is of distinctive, massive design, a large bungalow with exaggerated tall roofs, block chimneys and a large mansion-garage in matching style. In the 1930s it was the summer residence of the Willis, or Wills family, but after that the fate of ownership changed and the house came under a national sphere of influence with the creation of the 1946 National Land Fund. This new policy of Clement Attlee's government and Hugh Dalton's chancellorship sought to take significant properties for the benefit of the nation, in lieu of death duties. The National Trust was the greatest beneficiary, though YHA gained Treyarnon Bay, Alfriston and the short-lived Higham Hall (Bassenthwaite Lake) youth hostels in the scheme's early years. The fund dwindled later and was subsequently swallowed up by the National Lottery.



*An attractive photograph of Tregonnan House, perhaps taken while it was still a private residence. The ground floor room extreme left seems to have French windows, soon infilled to create a more useful hostel space. The large garage on the right was quickly converted to one of YHA's commonest post-war uses – an outbuilding dormitory for men (YHA Archive)*

*Rucksack Magazine* of Easter 1947 heralded the new hostel:

Members will have heard with satisfaction the recent announcement that Tregonnan House, a valuable Cornish property accepted by the Treasury in payment of death duties, has been given to the YHA.

It will be remembered that in his Budget Speech last year Mr Hugh Dalton, Chancellor of the Exchequer, expressed his intention of accepting estates for the National Land Fund in payment of death duties, and of using the fund to help organisations, including our Association.

Tregonnan House is the first National Land Fund property to be given to the YHA, and both its condition and situation make it a valuable acquisition. Mr Dalton has expressed his hope that this is only a beginning – a hope that is shared by the YHA.

The house, built in 1930, is in very good order, and will need little alteration to make it suitable for hostel use. It contains fourteen rooms and stands in two and a half acres at the top of the cliffs of Treyarnon Cove, five miles south-west of Padstow. Together with Devon and Cornwall Regional Group's recent acquisitions at Phillack and Tintagel, it fills a considerable gap in the coastal chain which the Group is trying to establish.

It is possible that the hostel will be ready by early Summer, when it is hoped that the Chancellor may be able to perform the opening ceremony. The hostel will probably accommodate forty members and the Group estimate that 4,000 overnights will be recorded this year.

*The Scotsman* newspaper, always an enthusiastic advocate of youth hostelling, took up the story. In his budget speech of April 1947 the Chancellor, Mr Hugh Dalton, reflected on the first year's progress with the National Land Fund, introduced by him in 1946:

This Fund amounts to £50 millions, securely and properly invested, a large part of which, as I told the House last year, I regarded as a fixed sum for national parks and similar projects for the future...

... I am handing over to the Youth Hostels Association a modern seaside house with three acres of land on the North Cornish cliff near Padstow. This house is exceptionally well situated for a hostel and for the enjoyment of young people who have not much money to spend. Both England and Wales have made a very good start in the first year of this new institution. Scotland, I hope, is going to give us something in the second year (Laughter).

Treyarnon Bay hostel opened without delay, at Whitsun 1947. The freehold was vested in the YHA Trust on 17th September in that year, and grants came in from the Ministry of Education (£330) and Carnegie Trust (£195). A capacity of 39 or 40 beds was established immediately, and remained unchanged for over 40 years. The double garage was converted to a large men's dormitory; women slept in the house. Typically for this period, the new hostel was incomplete and working parties were kept busy preparing the hostel for the next summer season, 1948.

During those first two years the wardens were Mr and Mrs R Simpson. Mr and Mrs BF Saunter replaced them in 1949, and they too stayed for two years. 1950 was a bountiful year for YHA; the annual overnights here quickly doubled from 2,500 in 1947 to top 5,000 for the first time, a total that remained a record until the 1990s.



*Two internal photographs from the early years. The condition suggests that they may date from YHA's taking possession of the property in 1947. The room later became a lounge and is now the main dining area; it is barely recognisable, though the fireplace and the picture windows with their view of Treyarnon Bay remain (YHA Archive photographs gifted by John Fairgrieve)*

Mr and Mrs W Page had a longer spell in charge, from 1951 to 1962. The hostel, still only medium-sized, settled to a steady performance each year, no doubt bursting at the seams in the summer holidays but picking up less trade out of the peak season. This was the time when long-distance cycle tours from the main centres of population in England and further afield were popular. Members often made huge distances between overnight stops; the YHA Archive has several holiday cycling logs where the greatest attraction was the North Cornish coast.





YHA leased an unnamed plot of land from Wadebridge UDC on 21 January 1961, for 21 years, and further renewed it in 1982. If this was the field to the north of the main house, it has served YHA extremely well, and now sports an array of camping accommodation choices.

The hostel's first 20 years concluded with short stays from wardens Mr and Mrs D Sharman, from 1962 to 1963, and from the well-known Mr and Mrs A Hann, from Ilam Hall, from 1963 to 1966.



Ernie Jones was one of the South-West region's characters. He started as warden of the cavernous Lostwithiel hostel in 1949, before taking on his own adopted YHA hostel in Cornwall's chief centre, Truro, in 1951. That had to close in 1965, after which he returned to mainstream wardening at Treyarnon Bay, staying until 1976. Martin Snow held the reins until 1980, after which another well-known figure, Ben Butler, arrived, to take the hostel through 15 years of steady growth. Over the period annual overnights increased from the mid-3,000s to the mid-5,000s. Bed capacity increased by half a dozen in 1990, but gradually reverted back to 39 for increased comfort. Improved fire precautions had been provided in 1985. Writing in 2019, Ben Butler remembers the layout of the mainly large dormitories during his wardenship:

There were never any extensions or increase in beds with a refurb at Treyarnon while I was in post. You had 3 bedrooms in the main house: 1x4 on the ground floor and upstairs a 1x8 and a 1x14 (perhaps originally only 12 beds). Outside in the two annexes you had 2 ten bed rooms; there could have been one or two more. It is also possible the 4 bed room in the main house had another use originally; it was next to the wash-up off the reception lobby.



1&2: two 1983 photographs of the hostel from the camera of the roving Miller family from Lincolnshire, whose numerous and invaluable hostelling images frequently add touches of everyday realism and animation to these historical profiles –

1: family fun by the original hostel entrance; 2: a stack of bikes lined up outside the men's dorm (author's collection)

3&4: these colour postcards predate and postdate the 2004 major works and extensions – 3: an earlier view, with excellent bathing and surfing attractions at hand; 4: a later view, with the new entrance and dining room to the front of the hostel and the new two-storey accommodation wing sitting neatly behind the main building (YHA Archive)

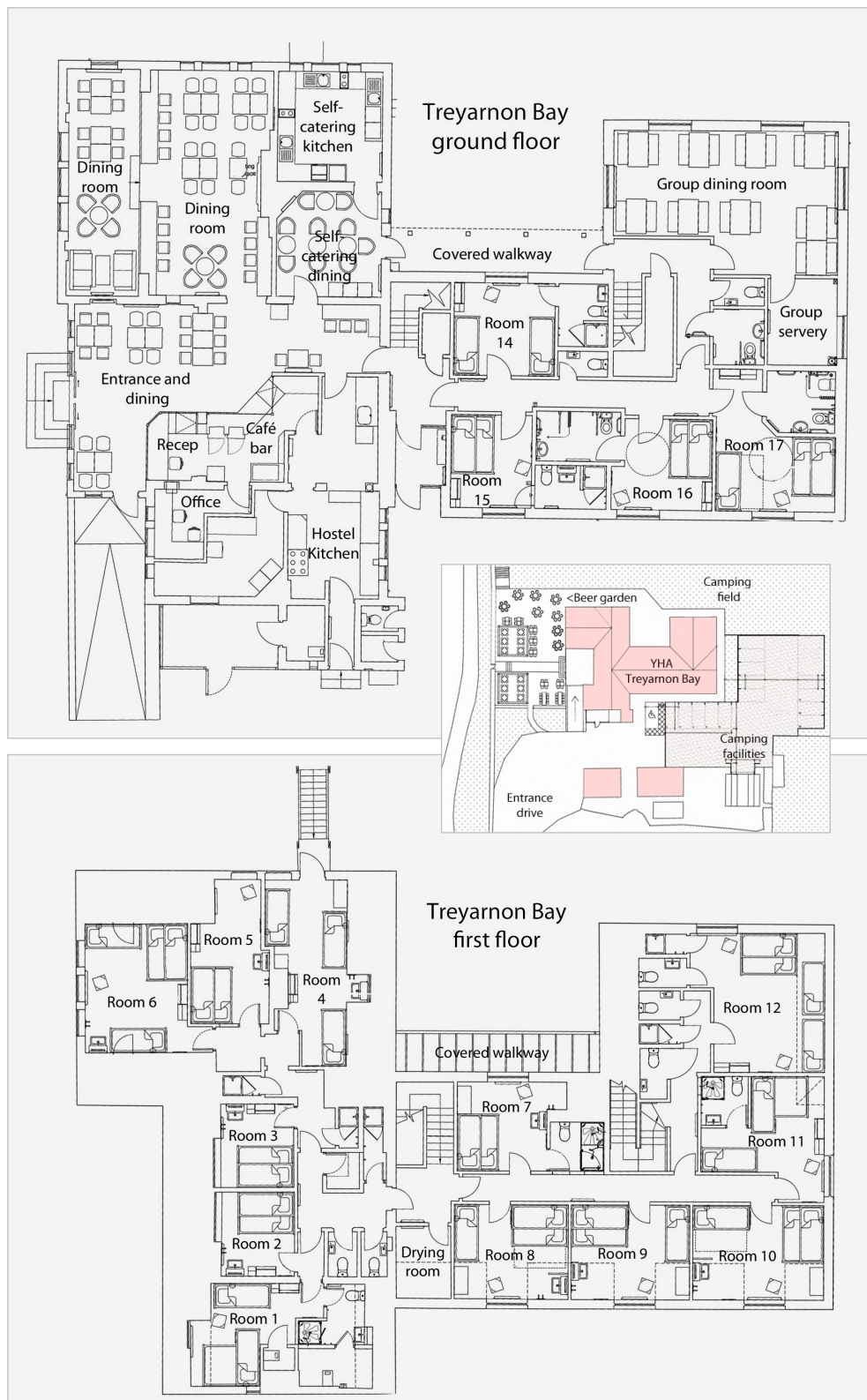
Adrian Richards was the new manager in 1997, staying until 2008. During his time, he saw the hostel through the first of its two most significant expansions. Though YHA's extensive Product Development Marketing Plan of the 1990s seems to have passed Treyarnon Bay hostel by, it received due attention in 2004, reopening on 18th June after significant refurbishment and enlargement. The seven bedrooms with 39 beds were increased to 16 bedrooms with 68 beds. A public café or bistro with new entrance and a training facility were added. The conversion of the original large garage, later men's dormitory, to manager's accommodation possibly dated from these changes. Investment in the hostel was being repaid in full; in 2006 the hostel reached a then-record overnights total of almost 14,000.



The rain is forgotten. Now we are suffering from sunburn. The hostel at Treynarnon is like a hotel. It is all whitewashed and spotless. Lots of people do surfing on the waves – a child's postcard comment.



*YHA Treynarnon Bay in September 2009. The upper and lower images show how the building had grown and developed to keep pace with modern hostel ideas, though there was still a place for the little museum of YHA curiosities, featuring a delightful pre-war silhouette sign, in the later self-caterers' dining room. The surrounding grounds were attractive but remained commercially relatively undeveloped until the second decade of the century (author's photographs)*



*Treyarnon Bay rooming plan, post-2015, with site plan inset. There have been minor alterations since (YHA Archive)*

Adrian Lamb managed Treyarnon Bay between 2009 and 2011. He was followed by Matthew Lawrence, in 2012, who witnessed a second major expansion of and investment in the property, summarised in 2016 his own words:

I arrived January 2012 with my partner and young daughter. I think they may have to carry me out – I absolutely love it here. In the last 4 years we have seen some good investment into the building and layout:

- \* An effluent pumping station – circa £100k investment to eliminate the use and cost of emptying the septic tank (2013)
- \* Redevelopment of Catering Kitchen equipment (2014)
- \* The installation of our very own Ice Cream Shack which doubles up as a local artists painting gallery with commission paid to our Breaks for Kids Charity (2014)
- \* Refurbishment of our Bar/Reception and the building of a new servery for our Café Bar (2014)

\* The refurbishment of a common room which now is a Group Breakfast Dining room and Classroom (2014)  
 \* New signage throughout the hostel and externally – including a complete external redecoration (2015)  
 \* £15k of remote controlled automated sunshades in our beer garden (2015) – we may look to add sides and heating to these at a later date  
 \* Complete refurbishment and enlargement of the self-catering kitchen by including the exhibition room (2015)  
 \* The installation of eight bell tents – two of which are on elevated platforms complete with log burning stoves and views to die for (2015/2016) 2017: 68 +BT (10 tents) +15 to 50C  
 \* An external shower block for the users of our bell tents – £43k (2015)  
 \* Alongside the above, we are currently planning a £500,000 investment in the bedrooms / toilets / showers in November 2016, with a closure of 6 weeks  
 \* We have also developed a live music offering which is proving very popular. Bands play from March through till October and this year we produced a double CD of acts that have performed here (usually as the sun dips behind the horizon); the proceeds of this CD went to our Breaks for Kids charity

YHA Treynon Bay now has 71 beds with a mixture of traditional, en suite and double-bedded rooms. The *Trey Bay* café and bar cater not only for residents but also for many who come to eat at the hostel from surrounding accommodation providers. The self-catering kitchen is available to YHA's campers too. In the winter, there is a fire blazing most nights. Since the latest refurbishment the hostel has broken all records for guest numbers – three or four times the numbers of a generation ago.

The field to the north has been utilised to provide one of YHA's best-sited alternative accommodation sites. Two modern landpods for four people, four standard tipi-like bell tents for five, and six premium bell tents complete with log-burning stove for four, and traditional camping for 12, are serviced by a newly-constructed outdoor toilet and wash block to the south side of the camping field. In 2019 YHA took on the continued provision and maintenance of the public toilets just outside the hostel entrance, as these assets were in jeopardy.

After eight years in charge, Matthew Lawrence left the hostel in 2019. The new manager is Paul Temple.

<i>Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows</i>									
<b>1947-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb</b>									
*: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire and/or camping									
<i>1940</i>	<i>1941</i>	<i>1942</i>	<i>1943</i>	<i>1944</i>	<i>1945</i>	<i>1946</i>	1947	1948	1949
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2502	4489	5036
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
4698	4311	4422	3956	3771	3780	3492	3591	3471	3377
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
3163	3283	3849	3434	3406	3835	4011	3808	4150	4157
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
4120	4123	4200	4326	4235	4064	open	4093	4555	4737
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
3851	3816	3723	4053	4728	4218	3821	4440	4782	4702
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
4848	4572	5621*	4981	4728	4879	5484	5570	5835	6496
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
5546	6107	6604	6765	10958	11716	13976	12907	12720	12348
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
11460	12380	12653	12892	14674	15553+	11675	16211+	16984+	17872+





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YHA Treyarnon Bay in April 2016 (author's photographs).  
1: one of the two new shower and toilet blocks; 2&3: Atlantic spring; 4: modern YHA; 5: latest hostel stamp





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YHA Treynon Bay in 2019.

1: hostel entrance, beer garden and mechanical sunscreens; 2: café / bar; 3: self-catering kitchen;  
4: quiet corner; 5: landpod; 6: the cliff-top hostel and its breathtaking setting (YHA publicity photographs)

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