



YHA (England and Wales)

Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, 2020-01-01

Lyonshall and Staunton Youth Hostels

Lyonshall Youth Hostel 1950 to 1961

Lynhales, Lyonshall, Kington, Herefordshire

Historic County: Herefordshire

YHA Region:

Birmingham & Mid-Wales

GR: SO 325552

LYONSHALL

Lynhales, near Lyonshall, is a manor house built about 1588 and extended in the Georgian Period. It had been a hospital during the Second World War.

Birmingham and Mid-Wales Region opened their youth hostel here on 1st April 1950. Miss G Young, the owner, offered it as an accommodation hostel, one not owned by the Association but run on their behalf by the owner. YHA occupied the rear portion of the house. At first there were 40 beds, expanding to 50 in 1954.



An unusual postcard view of Lyonshall youth hostel (author's collection)

The private ownership of the hostel did not deter the support of various volunteer working parties, who carried out a periodic internal decoration programme. In 1957 and 1958, it was the turn of Wolverhampton Group to help in the process, and almost the entire hostel was redecorated. Miss Young meanwhile saw to the decorating of the exterior. Additionally, the Birmingham Regional Council contributed to the cost of a new cooking stove.

Pat Packham visited the hostel in April 1957 as part of a tour of Central Wales, and has pleasant memories:

After supper most of the hostellers sat around the fire in the dining room. We talked about hostels and wardens, especially those of the Birmingham area. It was the very best evening I had spent on the tour.



- 1: a classic postcard view of Lyonshall youth hostel, showing the main entrance, north-east facing, and a small part of the capacious grounds and sweeping drive. Mary Jephcott remembers the abundance of attractive trees;
 2: a more unusual view showing part of the south-east face;
 3: Sylvia Errington is seen approaching the south-east elevation, with its attractive angled bays;
 4: a rare colour view of the main entrance. The house is constructed in the local mudstone.
 An idea of its size will be gained from these illustrations (YHA Archive)

The hostel lasted until 17th September 1961. At the end of its modest reign of a dozen years, the Youth Hosteller Magazine of November 1961 obliged by filling in the details of its period of operation:

Farewell to Lyonshall

The closing of Lyonshall at the end of the season has meant that the YHA must say 'farewell' to a hostel and a warden which have served us well over the past twelve years. Lyonshall first opened in 1950 when Miss G Young offered Birmingham Region the use of part of her house as a hostel. In its first full year (1951) it recorded an impressive 1,849 overnights and in all its years of service it has never had less than 1,500; it reached a peak in 1953 with 2,324. The wardening cannot have been an easy task for Miss Young, for she has many other duties including cultivating the land and maintaining a weather station for sending meteorological reports. Early this year she told Birmingham Region that she would have to give up at the end of the season. As yet, there is no replacement, but a search is being made in the Hereford-Leominster-Kington area.

Shortly after the closure of the hostel, Albert Winstanley wrote this valedictory response in the same magazine issue:

Quite often during my hostel wanderings, the opening of a door in a strange building has revealed to me treasured memories of a past and distant age.

Take, for instance, the hostel cycle shed – what strange places we sometimes find in which to place our machines. I have suspended my cycle by a hook from the roof, have pushed the front wheel in specially-built wooden supports, have placed it on the coal and coke, in cobbled cow stalls and horse stables. Indeed, my two wheels once rested by the side of an ancient hearse.

But to me the most interesting place where my cycle rested was Lyonshall, that out-of-the-way hostel in Herefordshire, now unfortunately closed. It was my first visit there, and in the early evening sunlight I cycled slowly down the rough lane towards the hostel, admiring the many varieties of trees which border it.

At the hostel, the good lady warden directed me to the 'cycle shed', and, on opening the door of a sturdy stone outbuilding, I stepped into the cool gloom of a scene unchanged in centuries.

Before me was a huge, circular, stone trough, its solid walls some three feet or more high. Resting just below the top was a large stone wheel, fitting snugly into a deep, well-worn groove at the verge. A stout wooden shaft pierced the millstone, to complete a perfect specimen of an old cider mill.

Despite its great age, it was still possible to move the millstone. Nearby was a large stone 'press' where the pulped apples had their juice extracted.

Most cyclists would have just left their machines and hastened to the hostel with perhaps a cursory glance at the mill, but I must confess to being something of a romantic. Standing there, I could not help but picture in my mind's eye this cider mill in its heyday. I could see smock-clad farm labourers leading the horse round and round, turning that heavy millstone. There would be the creak of harness, the rattle of a chain and, most certainly, the operation would be carried out to the lilting accompaniment of an old English refrain or folk song. I could hear the satisfying crunch of apples being pounded by that great wheel. Did not that aromatic, sweet tang still linger in the cob-webbed roof above?

The good lady warden, perhaps a little alarmed at my delay, came to see what had happened to me, and noting my interest in the mill, told me many things about the building, the grounds and the house itself. I was shown a cellar where the cider barrels had been stored, and, 'Did I not know that during my ride up the drive, I had passed over a portion of Offa's Dyke?'

Only one item marred what had been a most unusual experience. On looking over the entrance porch of the hostel, I could see a huge man-trap with wicked closed jaws. Was this, perhaps, used to catch some unlucky nocturnal prowler intent on sampling the cider barrels in the cellar?

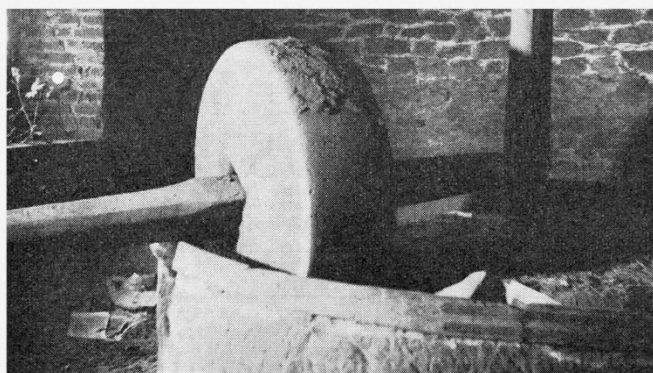


PHOTO:

AUTHOR

The house is now the Lyonshall Nursing Home. Mr Winstanley's cycle shed has become very well appointed staff quarters at the rear of the house.

Staunton-on-Wye Youth Hostel 1963 to 1982, 1987 to 1990

World's End Lodge, Staunton-on-Wye, Herefordshire HR4 7NF

Historic County: Herefordshire

YHA Regions: Birmingham & Mid-
Wales, Midland, Central

GR: SO 364450

Staunton-on-Wye youth hostel, like Wheathill and Osmotherley, was one of a select few with the distinction of operating in two quite separate periods. In the first instance, 1963 to 1982, it was leased, but in the second, 1987 to 1990, was offered as a private accommodation hostel under the mantle of YHA.

World's End Lodge was and is a remarkable property, built in 1860 as an extravagant country charity school by an educational fund vested in the Jarvis Trust but undersubscribed as such and subsequently a more than generous location for the local village school and, for 24 years, a youth hostel. During World War II it had been used by the British Army, and later, the American, and left in the usual dilapidated condition. It is Grade II listed, though for most of its years maintenance has been challenging.

The youth hostel was intended as a replacement for Lyonshall, ten miles to the north. The 1962 Birmingham Region annual report described the search for an alternative, and the successful conclusion to negotiations for Staunton-on-Wye. The total cost of establishing the hostel was £695, an amount much kept in check by the considerable contribution of skilled volunteers.

Writing in the Youth Hosteller Magazine of May 1963, RS and RFT added Staunton-on-Wye to the venerable tradition of 'Hostel Close-Up' articles by contributing number 96 in the series:

Last month's Youth Hosteller reported briefly on Birmingham and Mid-Wales Region's achievement in opening four new hostels within twelve months. The latest, a long-sought replacement for Lyonshall, opened on March 1st at Staunton-on-Wye.

The hostel serves a dual purpose: it is a valuable link for hostellers travelling down the Wye Valley and also a gateway to Wales for people from the Midlands and further afield. It is conveniently situated 100 yards off the main Hereford to Hay-on-Wye Road, about nine miles from Hereford.

The building, erected over a hundred years ago, is dominated by a large clock tower. It was originally a school built out of funds made available by the Jarvis Trust. The school now caters only for the younger children of the village, and the YHA has been able to lease part of the building.

The Jarvis Trust was founded in 1793 out of money left by George Jarvis, a leather dresser at Snow Hill in London. The dividends from the money were to be distributed to the poorer parishioners of Bredwardine, Staunton and Letton in the form of money, food, physic and clothing. However, the Trust was modified by Chancery decree in 1852, an Educational Foundation was started and, as a result, the school was erected.

Negotiations to lease part of the building as a hostel were successfully concluded last summer, the National Finance Committee approved a grant for adaptations and equipment, and working parties began in the autumn.

This is the biggest working party project tackled by the Region for many years (bigger even than the Dinas Mawddwy-Corris marathon); the fact that the project coincided with the worst winter in the history of YHA simply provided an additional challenge. Working parties from Birmingham and Wolverhampton led by Bob Powell and Keith Christie braved snow, ice, fog and bitter cold in order to keep the work moving. Work was carried out on almost every weekend until the opening: in all, the working parties recorded 1,620 overnights!

Work included fitting out the warden's kitchen, constructing the shop, fitting the men's washroom and toilets (including all plumbing), installing the members' kitchen, partitioning dormitories, electrical installation and interior decoration. The Region are grateful to Major J Waring and the Jarvis Educational Foundation for their friendly co-operation and to the local people for the welcome they have given the hostel.

The area surrounding the hostel is full of historical interest. The Roman Fort of Kenchester is close by, and Offa's Dyke can be seen two miles from the hostel. The historic city of Hereford with its magnificent Cathedral is within cycling or walking distance. The river Wye is less than a mile from the hostel, which makes it an excellent starting point for canoeists to travel to the sea via Welsh Bicknor, St Briavels and Chepstow. Walkers will find this a convenient stop when travelling across the hills from Capel-y-ffin to Glascwm.

We all hope that the confidence which the Region has shown by opening four new hostels will be justified by still more members exploring this little known but very rewarding area of Wild Wales and the Border.

The hostel opened on 1st March 1963 and was given an official opening on the 23rd of that month.

There were 35 beds initially, and the first warden was Ron Shoesmith, formerly assistant at Houghton Mill hostel.



Shortly after the opening, the Regional Council was thinking positive: the hostel had proved popular for Adventure Holiday Canoe courses, a rack for canoes had been built, and the warden had been busy decorating several rooms, with a quiet room constructed on the top floor, while there was a change to the room layout in 1965. Pony trekking was also popular in the initial years, in collaboration with the Mills Brothers from the Hay-on-Wye area. The Jarvis Trust had carried out exterior decoration, roof work, relaying the drive and treating of dry rot.



1: This photograph of Staunton-on-Wye youth hostel from the very early days by Birmingham Regional Secretary Don Errington. Sylvia Errington is seen braving the worst winter for almost 20 years, a reminder of the conditions in which the tradesmen and volunteers worked to open the hostel;

2: a cheerful photograph of World's End, Staunton-on-Wye, showing the Victorian pomp and splendour of the school design. The local primary school took up the part of the building to the left of the main entrance. YHA occupied the right side, plus the central tower rooms and the two top rooms to the left of centre. The large hall on the right was the common room, and the members' kitchen was located in various parts over the years, latterly at the rear of the property. The caretaker's house extreme right was privately occupied. The warden had the use of several rooms over the complex course of the YHA's tenure. Almshouses provided by the Jarvis Trust were positioned to the left and right of the photographer. All buildings have survived, though the future of the main school building is unclear, as it is with developers in 2015 (YHA Archive)

Even with all this effort, it was difficult to show positive financial results in such a large building, and the new Midland Region Council suggested it for closure as early as 1966, as it had been running at a considerable loss, and improvements were deferred. The decision was reversed after a small surplus of £20 and a large petition of 700 names in 1965, the lease was renewed and Ron Shoesmith worked hard to turn the results around. He stayed for a dozen years, building the hostel up into a recognised canoeing centre.

Weekly summer courses were organised along a string of Wye Valley hostels, including Staunton-on-Wye, Rushall and Welsh Bicknor. Hostel capacity rose to 45 in 1967 and to 60 in 1970, following the provision of an extra dormitory as well as a new entrance and wash-up. In that year the warden guided the hostel to 5,559 overnights, a significant growth from the early days. In 1968 the hostel became the information centre for the proposed Offa's Dyke Long Distance Footpath, before it moved to the new base at Knighton. Further improvements were effected when hot water was brought to the members' kitchen in 1974. A new indoor washroom for men and improved heating arrived in 1976.



1: a 1975 tradesman's entrance view of the rear of the property, recorded by YHA stalwart George Miller.

The back of the property was the normal hostellers' approach (author's collection);

2: one of two or three postcards of the hostel produced by YHA, photograph by John C Munday (YHA Archive)

Ron Shoesmith left Staunton in 1974, the canoeing courses were now centred on Welsh Bicknor hostel, and new wardens Geoff and Margaret McGladdery took the helm. They stayed until May 1979, building to a peak of 5,701 overnights in 1978. Glyn and Jennifer Mason held the fort over that summer, but in 1980 until the closure of the hostel a young newly married couple were in charge: Malcolm and Olga Earnscliff. They were to stay with YHA for over 30 years, at Stow, Hawkshead, York and Swanage.

Trading results remained difficult for YHA's Midland Region in the early 1980s, and as a result of various meetings and consultations it was decided to close Staunton-on-Wye hostel. The Region's 1982 annual report, artistically produced by Nick Rutter, gave the following explanation, and the hostel closed on 23rd November of that year:

Staunton-on-Wye

One of the recommendations of the Hostel Results Working Party was that the building at Staunton-on-Wye is large and in poor structural condition which requires considerable sums of capital from either the YHA or the Jarvis Trust to keep it habitable. Therefore to prevent these non-recoverable costs and eliminate the large, and continued losses, the hostel be closed. "As a result of further investigation of the financial and legal implications it was finally decided to terminate the lease of the hostel and the wardens' flat on 31st December 1982.

Staunton-on-Wye hostel first opened in March 1963 in which year it recorded 2,000 overnights. It eventually became a popular canoe centre with over 5,000 overnights in 1970 and again in the years 1976 to 1979. However as a rented property in an old building, running costs were high and it was rarely able to break-even financially. For the past four years the annual deficit has averaged at about £2000. The particular problems of the hostel, coupled with a generally difficult financial situation, gave the region little alternative but to close. The many members who have stayed at Staunton, and in particular, the Wye canoeists, will regret the passing of this hostel after almost twenty years of useful life.

The loss of Staunton as a fully-provided leased hostel was regretted by many. It was taken on by canoe instructor Chris Charters in 1987, with the intention of reopening under an accommodation hostel arrangement. Triangle Magazine of Spring 1987 ran this piece:

Staunton-on-Wye Youth Hostel reopened this year, thanks to the enterprise of Chris Charters and his wife Katherine. Chris used to be a canoe instructor at the hostel. Now he and Katherine are the owners and wardens of Worlds End Lodge.

They have restored the Victorian Gothic style former charity school into a well-appointed activity centre and hostel. Worlds End can accommodate up to 60 people in comfortable dormitories ranging in size from two to eleven beds. Family rooms are possible; there is a servery and dining room, TV lounge, drying room and fully-equipped field study room. There is even a licensed bar.

Both Chris and Katherine are qualified canoe instructors and both share a passionate interest in outdoor pursuits. The hostel is an ideal centre for canoeing, climbing, walking, pony trekking or bird-watching.



John Watts photographed the rear of the new accommodation hostel on a misty day in October 1987

It was advertised in the 1987 YHA Handbook, with 54 beds. John Watts hosted there in October 1987, but the following year's edition recommended checking opening dates because of building work. Chris Charters' assistant, Tom Rayner, remembers that the premises were not fully ready until early 1989. Staunton-on-Wye hostel's established theme of canoeing courses and special provision was to be the main business. It operated like this for four seasons, closing at the end of 1990, and is understood to have continued until 1993 outside the YHA network.

The Staunton-on-Wye Primary School continued to be based here, but under increasingly testing circumstances; the Jarvis Trust was keen to improve the school's accommodation and a new village school was erected close by ready for November 2010. World's End Lodge was sold by the Trust early in 2015.

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows 1950-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb ¶: Lyonshall Hostel; Δ: Staunton-on-Wye Hostel									
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
896¶	1849¶	2026¶	2324¶	1719¶	1904¶	2201¶	1901¶	1832¶	1895¶
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
1523¶	1567¶	...	2048Δ	2705Δ	2606Δ	3012Δ	3965Δ	4359Δ	4401Δ
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
5559Δ	4308Δ	4237Δ	3624Δ	2786Δ	4906Δ	5561Δ	5631Δ	5701Δ	5255Δ
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
4948Δ	4540Δ	4077Δ	<458Δ	...	...	...	openΔ	openΔ	openΔ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
3085Δ	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...



World's End Lodge, as photographed by the author in August 2015, 15 years after it ceased operating as a YHA hostel

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