

## Bennetston Hall Youth Hostel 1935 to 1946

Bennetston Hall, Dove Holes, Stockport, Cheshire

Historic County:  
Derbyshire

YHA Region:  
Manchester

GR: SK 083797



The grand stone-built nineteenth century mansion Bennetston Hall was built on rising ground to the east of Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire, on the instruction of local doctor Robert Ottiwell Gifford Bennett, though he may never have resided there. Photographs after the turn of the century suggest a life of privilege and Edwardian splendour in the house, with its ballroom and extensive grounds. It would be typical of the fate of many similar houses in the twenties and thirties however if the Hall fell on harder times; at any rate it was ready to serve a humbler use by the mid-1930s.

*Left: the Hall in its early days – photo courtesy I Southworth*

The youth hostel opened here on 8th June 1935. It was an adopted property, that is, one not owned or staffed by YHA. The Association paid a rent, possibly to the wardens, Mrs and Miss Hannam. The couple had moved from a similar role at one of YHA's very first establishments, the Goyt Valley hostel at Errwood Farm, 7 miles further west, before that was lost to the Fernilee Reservoir scheme. Bennetston Hall hostel soon established itself as a large establishment with 50 beds (30 men, 20 women), rising to 40 men, 20 women in the 1940s.

Two brothers from the West Riding set out for a cycling holiday early in 1939. It seems they were new to hostelling. Here is an account by Geoffrey Baldwin of their progress and stay at Bennetston Hall, gifted to the YHA Archive:

### A VISIT TO STRATFORD-ON-AVON

My brother and I set off on our bicycles one Tuesday morning in the Easter holidays of 1939 with the intention of travelling to Stratford-on-Avon in two days...

At a small shop on the further side of Holmfirth we bought a bottle of lemonade each and as we drank it we noticed the line of Peaks we had to cross. Once out of Holmfirth the road immediately steepened and it soon became necessary to dismount and push our cycles. The long walk up to the highest point was well repaid by the wonderful view and the equally long ride, down the other side.

From this side of the Peak which we had just passed over, it was more or less flat to Glossop, the next town we passed through. By this time it was after four o'clock, so we looked in the Handbook for the most appropriate Hostel. Bennetston Hall was only a few miles distant, so we made for it and got there just before five.

Wednesday dawned brightly. When, after breakfast we asked the warden for our cards we found to our surprise that we were expected to do 15 minutes 'duty'. We were asked to drag up some branches from the bottom of the garden. On the morning of Wednesday our route was composed of switch-backs. For the first twenty miles the country was covered with lime quarries.

Bennetston Hall was allowed to operate each year of the war, an internal YHA circular of 18th March 1941 stressing the need to keep it from requisition, as it was important to members from the South Lancashire towns, the Potteries and the West Riding. For some reason usage was limited to weekend opening from April to September 1944, though this restriction does not seem to be reflected much in the healthy overnight figures in the later stages of the war.

During this period schoolteacher Mary Jephcott paid a visit with her pupils. She was not impressed, whether because of wartime exigencies or Peak District weather, as she wrote in her holiday log:

Bennetston Hall YH, 28th October 1944

Sodden. Dripped to Bennetston Hall. A terrible place. No lights in dormitory. Supper 40 minutes late.  
Went to bed with most of clothes on. What a night. Glad to leave it.



Above: three postcards, published by HW Plant of Whaley Bridge. Though they do not specify 'YHA' in the captions, two of them have hostelling messages on the reverse (author's collection)

The hostel closed on 10th January 1946 because the tenancy was terminated.

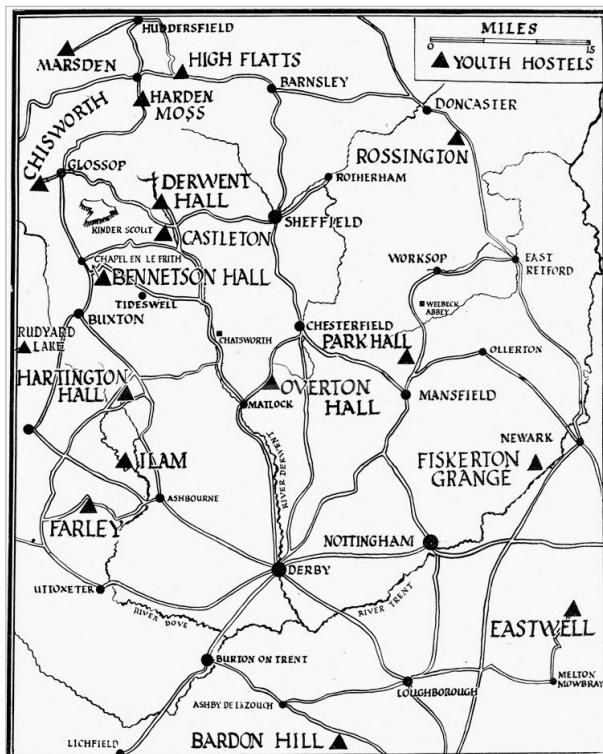
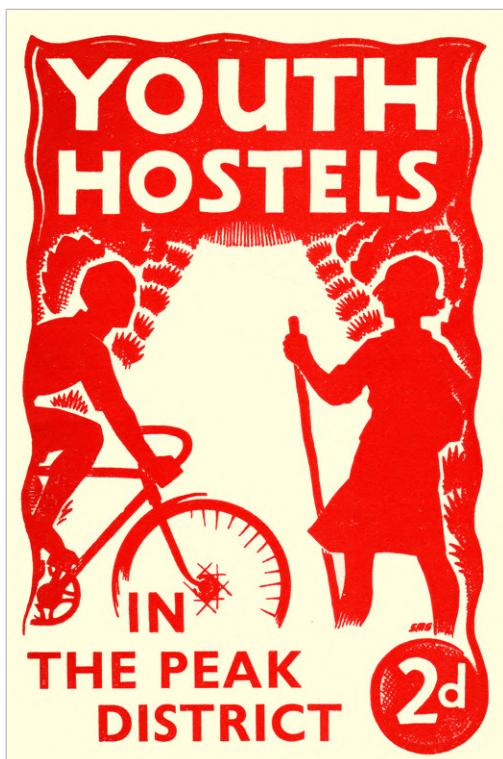
*Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows*

1935-1946: previous Oct to Sept

†: 377 bednights in the 1946 statistical year, beginning 1st October 1945

...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	...	...	...	536	2735	2964	3310	2864
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
2126	2849	3326	4283	3862	4252	377†	...	...	...

Subsequently Bennetston Hall has been used as a hotel, night-club and restaurant. There was a significant fire at the end of the twentieth-century, and the future of the Hall looked bleak. However, under new ownership there is an intention to renovate the building, preserving its original style and appearance.



#### BENNETSTON HALL (Manchester Group) —

*Wardens:* Mrs. and Miss J. Hannam.  
*Address:* Bennetston Hall, Doveholes, via Stockport.  
*Position:*  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from Sparrowpit on Sparrowpit—Chapel-en-le-Frith Road. O.S. "Peak," Sq. H.4.  
*Station:* Chapel-en-le-Frith (Central), 2 miles; Doveholes, 2 m.  
*Bus Route:* Manchester to Buxton via Chapel; alight at Barmoor Clough ( $\frac{1}{4}$  mile).  
*Accommodation:* 30 men, 20 women.  
*Distances:* Chisworth 16 miles, Derwent Hall 12 miles, Hartington Hall 18 miles, Rudyard Lake 20 miles, Castleton 6 miles.  
*P.O.:* Chapel-en-le-Frith and Doveholes.  
*Store:* At Hostel.  
*Places of Interest:* Ebbing and Flowing Well, Eldon Hole, Castleton Caves, Winnats.  
*General:* A large Central Heated Hall in the centre of the Peak District.

*Pages from Youth Hostels in the Peak District, 1937.*

*The attractive silhouette cover was typical of YHA's artwork in the 1930s.*

*The youth hostel network map is much changed 75 years later – Hartington Hall and Ilam remain, while there is a new YHA centre at Castleton.*

*The rest of the hostels on this map were mostly short-lived; several have been replaced (YHA Archive)*