



YHA (England and Wales) Youth Hostel Profile

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

Jordans Youth Hostel 1933 to present day

Welders Hostel, Welders Lane, Jordans, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire

Historic County: Buckinghamshire

YHA Regions: London, Eastern,
Central

GR: SU 975910

YHA is indebted to Kath and Trevor Key, long-time wardens up to 1995, for a great deal of historical information. Much is expressed here in their own words (boxed and marked 'K&TK'), written in 1993.

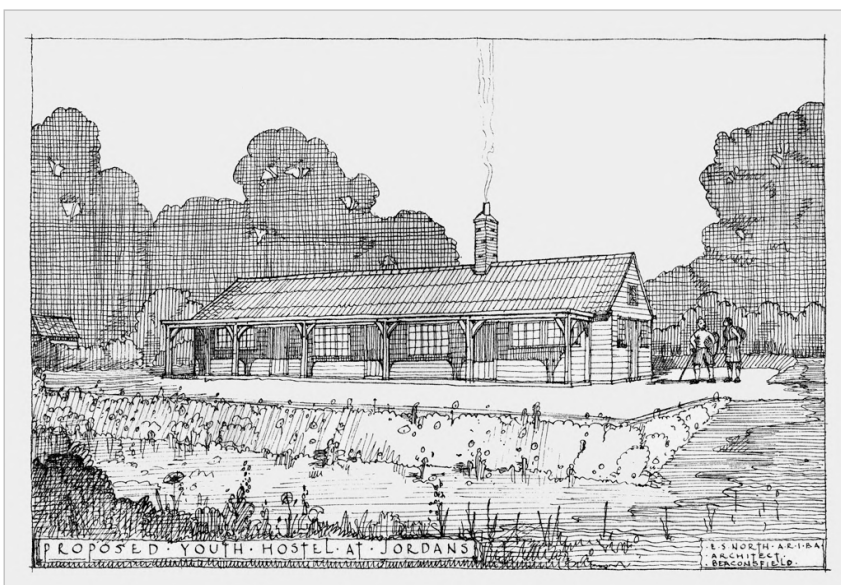
The connection between the Quakers and the YHA was particularly strong in the early years of the Youth Hostels Association. This will come as no surprise, as the Quaker self-improvement philosophy chimed with the growing thrust of support for the emancipation of the outdoors for ordinary folk at the end of the 1920s. The energy to start the Youth Hostel movement in this country about 1930 came from socialist and liberal politics, government bodies such as the National Council of Social Service and the British Youth Council and progressive charities such as Toc H. Then there were the egalitarian holiday societies such as the Workers' Travel Association, Co-operative Holidays Association and Holiday Fellowship and countless walking and cycling outdoor groups, clubs and individuals.

Among the first Quaker guiding lights in the YHA were Barclay Baron of TocH, Arthur Leonard (YHA pioneer and vice-president), Jack Catchpool (first general secretary) and JW Major (early YHA campaigner and national executive member). The Quaker 'chocolate barons' (the Cadburys in the Midlands and the Rowntrees in York) exercised a strong influence over the newly emerging Association.

Many of the first youth hostels owed their existence to Quaker or similar socially progressive bodies, and though some of these buildings were hastily procured and short-lived, with some their influence lasted for generations. Canterbury's brief first youth hostel (1931) was a TocH provision. At Wallington Hall, Northumberland, Sir Charles Trevelyan gave up the granary for a pioneer youth hostel (1931). In the same year, at St Athan in South Wales, part of a Rhondda miners' welfare holiday centre was made available to YHA, while a similar arrangement existed in chalets at Cober Hill, North Yorkshire, an experimental provision for the needy families of Durham miners, after the vision of John Wilhelm Rowntree. There were other youth hostels of similar origin.

Hardly before the Association had drawn breath, arrangements were being made for a youth hostel connected with the important Quaker establishment at Jordans, Buckinghamshire. One story was that the YHA would take over a

hut built on neighbouring land, a hostel provided for construction workers at the Quaker centre, but former warden Trevor Key is certain that the youth hostel was purpose-built, designed by Mr ES North, ARIBA, of Beaconsfield in 1932 and built in the same year with funds provided by the Society of Friends. The illustration shown left suggests that this was the case.



*Left: ES North's 1932 design for Jordans hostel. Though modern comforts have been added over almost 90 years, little has changed externally
[T Key collection]*

At the beginning of 1933 the YHA Handbook advised that negotiations were proceeding. Jordans youth hostel opened to members in March 1933; an official ceremony followed on 12th August, Sir Selwyn Freemantle declaring the establishment open. This was a joint venture, open to YHA members, Quakers and adult school members, according to the 11th August 1933 edition of *The Friend*.

K&TK: the new hostel consisted of two dormitories, common room and member's kitchen. There was no electricity or water and cooking was done on primus stoves. Toilets were of the earth closet type situated at each end of the hostel. Members signed on at the meeting house and water was carried from there as well as coal for the fire. The warden at that time was Herbert Pickles, now deceased.

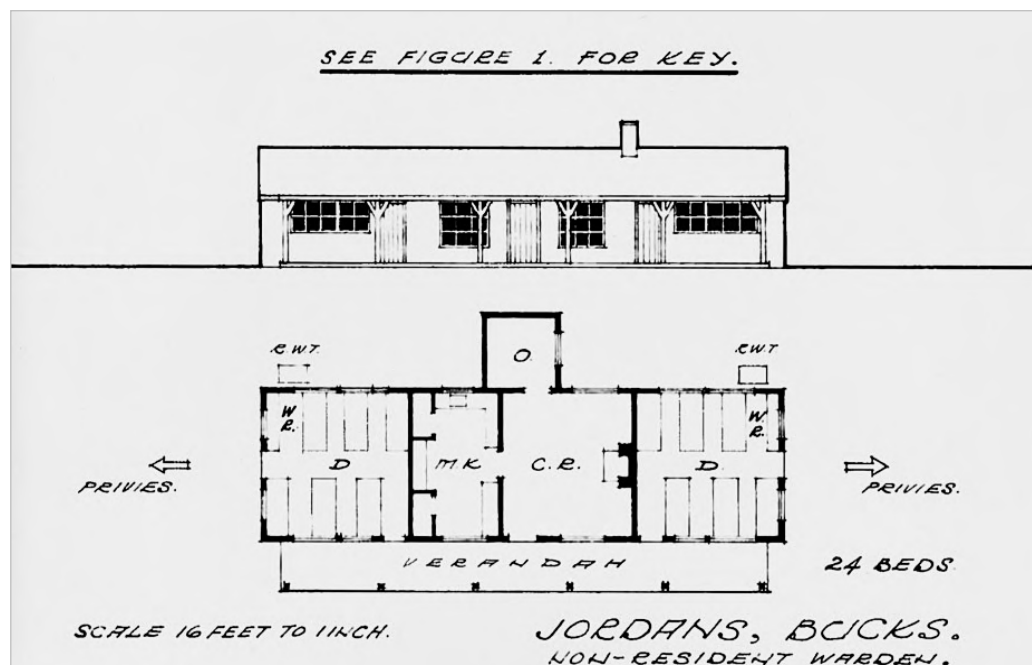
An anonymous holiday log of March 1939 described the facility:

In the same grounds as the Quaker Meeting House, with the same caretaker for both. The hostel is a sort of glorified wooden cabin, divided into men's and women's sleeping quarters with a common room and pantry in between. You wash in an enamel basin in the sleeping room, and you cook on a primus stove.

At the outset of war YHA was often required to give up premises for evacuation and military requisition, many hostels in the London Region especially operating with great uncertainty from day to day or having to close. Jordans managed to maintain its YHA status with good numbers in 1940. It certainly remained operational in 1941-42, an internal circular of 18th March 1941 stressing the need to keep it from requisition, as it was much used by young people from north-west London. Healthy bednights were recorded in the years 1943-45.

Writing in 2015, Len Clark remembered the wartime scene:

I can confirm that Jordans Hostel was very much in use in the war, as our local group (Hendon), formed July 1939, were great patrons. Towards the end of the war the warden was Eric Bartlett, a pacifist with several children, several goats, and one wife. On my way back from South Wales (hitch-hiking) I dropped in to see him and in effect persuaded him to move to Ty'n y Caeau Hostel (Brecon) as he was being asked to move on from Jordans. Jordans was a favourite hostel, sitting in the beech woods above the historic Quaker Meeting House, where the only meals were those members provided for themselves.



Plan of Jordans hostel for 'the Design and Equipment of Youth Hostels, a thesis for the final examination of the Royal Institute of British Architects', submitted by Alexander J Horsfield, April 1940 – born Cowes, Isle of Wight, 28 February 1913; died 2 March 2013 (YHA Archive item gifted by Mr Horsfield's son Jonathan in 2014)

In June 1940 YHA's *London Region News* was busy giving timely wartime news for those anxious to maintain their hostelling against a background of uncertainty and privation. Mr Pickles, the warden, was keen to express certain important matters, easily overlooked, through its pages, and in so doing unwittingly added a fascinating glimpse of the day-to-day difficulties for posterity:

Reply Paid

Mr Pickles stresses the importance of members enclosing stamps for reply now that postage rates have been increased. This is a matter of the utmost importance as hostel finances cannot stand the strain of extra postal costs in replying to members who neglect to enclose reply postage. Another hint given by Mr Pickles is that deliveries and collections of letters, which are always less frequent in the country than in the towns, have been drastically curtailed during the war. It's no good posting a weekend booking to a London Region hostel late on Thursday; even if it gets there before you do yourself, the warden will not have time to reply. Incidentally London Regional headquarters are in the country [at Kemsing in Kent], and shortage of office staff combined with a curtailment of postal services make it difficult to return prompt replies to all the letters received. So please leave plenty of time as well as enclosing sufficient stamps for reply.

Later in the year, the October issue of the same magazine highlighted further the uncertainties of the times:

May Close for a Time

Jordans hostel is still open to members in spite of reports to the contrary. It was on the point of being used for evacuation purposes, but this proposal has not yet materialised. Temporary closure may later be necessary and may occur at short notice. The hostel will, however, be kept available for members if at all possible.

K&TK: the office was added in 1940 and the first resident warden, Harry Earwaker, slept there. He has now emigrated to New Zealand and his whereabouts are unknown. He was followed by Eric Bartlett in the spring of 1942. Soon after, the warden's accommodation became a separate building with the purchase of 'a large dog kennel' which was how the first part of the existing building was advertised. This we understand was purchased for the princely sum of £20 and a small kitchen stove with brick chimney was added. Eric married in 1943 and in the same year mains water was brought up to the hostel from the bottom of the drive.

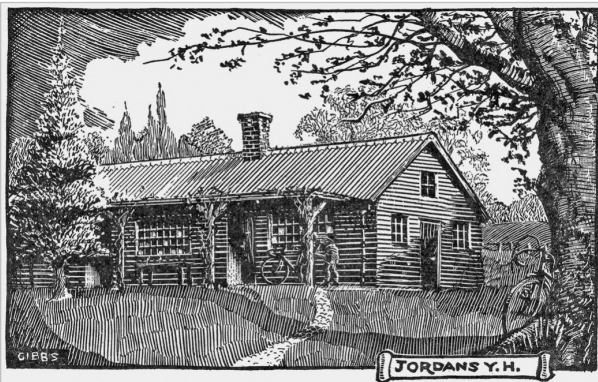
In 1945 plans were started for the addition to the one room bungalow of a further two rooms. A Miss Flood from the village of Jordans donated a sum of £100 for this purpose.

Nicola Lowe adds that the 1945 addition to the warden's house extended the kitchen and provided a new bathroom. As the original 'large dog kennel' lacked a bathroom, the tin bath was taken down to the hostel on closed nights.

Jordans hostel was temporarily closed towards the end of 1945 due to *administrative difficulties*, almost certainly the hiatus after the warden's move to Wales, but reopened on 8th March 1947 after about a year's closure.

K&TK: in February 1947 YHA became tenants and the additional rooms were completed. Eric Bartlett had left Jordans to become warden of Tyn-y-Caeau hostel in the Brecon Beacons, a position he held, along with being a member of the local mountain rescue team, until he retired in the early 1980s. He died in 1987. During his term at Jordans he was absent from the hostel from August 1942 until July 1943, when the wardenship was administered by a Kathleen Charles.

After Eric came Geoff and Barbara Haley, who arranged to have electricity installed at the hostel. This was done by the laying of a field cable during 1948. In those days coal lorries delivered at the hostel gate and it was then carried up to the hostel coal bunker, now the wood store. Geoff and Barbara were only at Jordans until September 1949.



Mabel Pratt toured YHA's hostels extensively after the war, and left a valuable log of her experiences. She visited the hostel in June 1949, and commented:

Jordans Youth Hostel is a small one, immediately behind the famous Friends' Meeting House, and a stone's throw from the equally famous Mayflower Barn. The hostel, army-hut shaped, is weatherboard, with a row of rooms all opening on to a large verandah, and with red rambler roses climbing over the very posts. The whole place, in common with Jordans, is set with trees.

left: woodcut type postcard, issued 1940. Note the absence at this stage of separate wardens' quarters behind, to the right

The Haleys were followed by Ruby and Max van Blockland who, during their stay of five years, oversaw the building of the cycle store and adjoining sheds.



1 2



4 5



*Early post-war images of Jordans youth hostel [YHA Archive & T Key collection].
1: in 1947 or 1948 a work party of Eastcote lads was preparing to dig a trench for the first electrical cable;
2: rare rear view of the hostel. On the right is the women's dormitory and at the centre the 1940-built warden's office;
3: Don Errington's hostel stamp of 1951; 4: a crowd of bikes parked under the canopy, before (5:) the building
of the dedicated bike shed in 1950 by the Eastcote Group work party*

K&TK: In the autumn of 1954, the wardens changed again. This time Mrs Marjorie Castles together with her husband Alfredo and son Christopher took over the reins. Alfredo has always been known as 'Cas' and to this day there are very few people who know his real name. They stayed at the hostel for a period of nearly 24 years, during which time many improvements and changes were made, the following being a few of the most notable. In 1956 the electricity field cable proved to be unsafe and was renewed one week-end by a 35 strong working party. The electricity board delivered the drum of cable on the Friday and were requested to call again on the Sunday in order to sanction filling the trench and connecting. They said that it would never be done, and in fact the final part was delayed by the Electricity Board officials' failure to turn up at the appointed time.

This saved the YHA a considerable sum of money and rumblings began as to how it would be a good idea to put the money saved towards proper toilet and washing facilities. Unfortunately, nothing came of this idea until the arrival of main drainage in 1964 and a 'Pull the Chain' fund was started by a member and over £100 was raised, a donation even arriving from as far away as Australia. In March of 1966 we 'Flushed' for the first time. This of course saw an end to our 'International Grow-more' compost. 'Cas' used to spread it over the vegetable garden and the tomatoes grew like oak trees. Some said they could almost have been felled.

An addition was also made to the warden's quarters giving them a second bedroom and most importantly, a bathroom, previous ablutions having been carried out in a tin bath in front of the common room fire, Thursday nights only, as this is when the hostel is closed. This bathroom together with a separate WC made life a lot easier for Marjorie and Cas. Following these alterations, the layout of the garden was altered and improved to make it more manageable. All the grass was still being cut by sickle, shears and hand mower, the first method quite often being a duty. It was not until the arrival of a petrol driven rotary mower that the garden could be called under control. The 'Oggin' from the excavation of the wardens' quarters was moved, by barrow, to the area which is now used as a small camping space. This was then very sloping and it can be seen just how much earth was moved by working parties, truly a boon in those days.



1



2



3



4

Images of Jordans youth hostel, later 1950s [YHA Archive & T Key collection].

1: hostel shop, 1956, with warden Marjorie Castles and a young hosteller (photo Pat Packham);

2: Jordans hostel common room record evening with Arthur Petty, former chair, Eastcote Group, Dec 1956;

3: warden Marjorie Castles and her husband 'Cas' chat around the common room fireside with five young hostellers;

4: common room celebration party, with sandwiches, tea, fruit salad and cake, 1957

In July 1978 Marjorie and 'Cas' retired to the local village of Jordans, after nearly a quarter of a century as wardens of Jordans youth hostel.

For three months the hostel was in the hands of a temporary warden, then on October 1st 1978 Kath and Trevor Key took over the wardenship and are now in their fifteenth year. Again, a number of changes and improvements have been made. One of the first was the partitioning of the dormitories into smaller units, making the hostel warmer in the winter season together with providing accommodation for families if and when required. The garden has again been altered slightly, giving more lawn space, and with the later provision of a patio and picnic tables and assorted chairs, it has enabled visitors to have meals in the garden, weather permitting. Most of these alterations took place during 1981 and 1982 and the overnights had slowly climbed from an average of 2500 to nearly 3000 per year. What was lacking was proper washing facilities. Up until that time everyone had to wash in their dormitories carrying water from the members kitchen in a jug to plastic bowls (we'd got rid of the tin ones with the single wooden handle). Those who were a little robust in their washing habits used to shower those who happened to be still in bed.

It was certain that a washroom was desperately needed, but as usual, the YHA coffers were empty. Over the past 20 years a request had been made to the Association for funds to build and equip a washroom. Each time an application was made it was turned down on the grounds of insufficient funds available.

In March of 1984, three YHA members got together and formed an unofficial team to raise funds for the building of a washroom. A donation of £50 was placed into the fund on 1st April (All Fools' Day) and a nationwide appeal launched through the media of the YHA publications. In a matter of 6 months nearly £4,000 had been raised and a decision was made to start building. Luckily enough a contractor had been found who would erect a building with just the walls, roof, plastering, cladding and plumbing, leaving the smaller tasks to willing volunteers. By March 1985 most of the major work had been completed. A delay was caused through adverse weather during January and February and now all that remained was the tiling. Electrics, wood panelling, painting and decorating – this as stated was performed by a small dedicated band of volunteers, paid only in tea and biscuits, but using their individual skills to bring to fruition an achievement that a lot of people said was an impossible task.



1 2



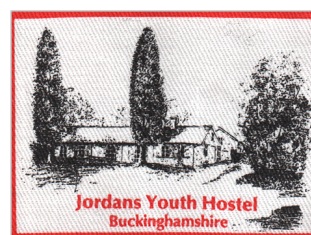
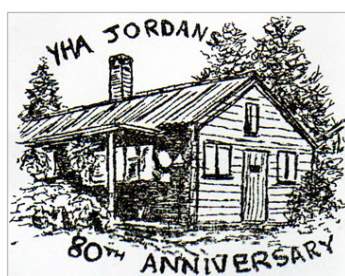
Jordans, early 1960s. 1: Eastcote Group work party, 1960; 2: 15th anniversary Eastcote Group, warden Marjorie Castle (on left in dress), son Christopher (next, in glasses), husband Arthur Castles ('Cassie') (next, in sunglasses), 1961 (YHA Archive)

K&TK: Understandably, the provision of washing facilities improved the status of the hostel. Overnights shot up and average figures now stand at 4,000 per year, half of them from visitors from overseas. The character of the hostel did not change and still tries to retain its simple features even though in 1988 a new roof was fitted, the old one getting somewhat porous. The modern convenience (for Jordans hostel) of central heating was added.

In 1989 the member's kitchen was revamped to bring it up to date with health and safety requirements.

All these changes have, as has been said, improved the overnight figures for the hostel but even after 60 years it still remains a small friendly hostel, ideal for the individual cyclist or walker, as well as the small group or families that want to spend a day or days around the area or as a convenient base for visiting London, Windsor or Oxford.

In 1993 Kath and Trevor Key concluded their summary of the history of Jordans youth hostel: The first 60 years at Jordans hostel have seen changes that were never dreamed of when the hostel was built. The hostel was refurbished in the mid 1980s. At the end of June [1985] the washroom was finished and arrangements were made to have it officially declared open. This was performed by TV Celebrity, weatherman Ian McCaskill. Over £10,000 had been raised through various means from selling horse manure, walking across England, even pulling a 50-ton barge for 15 miles along part of the Grand Union Canal. No matter what was done to raise the funds, thanks were due to every person involved, whether member, group, individual or friend, for without them it could still be washing in plastic bowls. Prior to this it was earth closet type WCs, and washing was done in plastic buckets in the dormitory after water had been collected from the stand pipe! Warden Kath Key was now basking in previously unknown warmth in her recently repaired and heated bungalow. We wonder what the next sixty years will bring.



Jordans hostel badges and stamps, and a rare photograph by George Miller showing the manager's bungalow



1 2



3 4



5 6



Later images of Jordans youth hostel (YHA Archive & T Key collection).

- 1: Eastcote Group cyclists on the path outside the hostel, 1973;
- 2: Hostel reception after refurbishment, with wardens Kath and Trevor Key, mid-1980s;
- 3: hostel office and a well-stocked provisions store, with hosteller P Spencer, 1987;
- 4: YH common room and original fireplace, early 1990s;
- 5: refurbished dormitory, 1987; 6: scouts making their beds, September 1989

YHA's *Regional Council Bulletin* of 7th August 2013 described progress with recent developments in YHA's 'Alternative Accommodation' programme – its updated approach to outdoor sleeping and camping, which did so much to bring success and growth to hostels throughout the network, including enhanced camping provision at Jordans:

A further four pods have gone in at Hawkshead taking their tally up to eight. Both Borrowdale and South Downs are now offering these as part of their accommodation portfolio and the first customers arrived at the beginning of July. The roll out of alternative accommodation will continue and subject to planning approval, early next year we will launch arctic cabins and mega pods at Jordans and New Forest, with further analysis of other sites and a 'group' product being considered for investment as part of this exciting project.

The outcome at Jordans was the seasonal provision of two four-berth bell tents for use by different custom bases.



On Sunday 11th August 2013 YHA Jordans marked its 80th Anniversary with a day of special celebrations. Guests enjoyed afternoon tea, a camp fire and shared memories of times gone by. Nick Hoyle, Operations Manager, thanked the Quakers for their continued support of the hostel, volunteers for their enthusiasm and managers both current and previous who have created the unique atmosphere at Jordans. Kath and Trevor Key and Nicola Lowe (pictured left) then unveiled a commemorative plaque. They summarised the success of the hostel in this way:

YHA Jordans come into being in 1933 when the Quakers offered some land to YHA and the purpose-built hostel was created. It is probably fair to say that little has changed over the years, although electricity was added in 1948, and washrooms were only added in 1985 following fund raising of £4,000. Prior to this it was an earth closet type WC and washing was done in plastic buckets in the dormitory after water had been collected from the stand pipe!

Jordans hostel recently received major improvements. In 2016 the main hostel building gained a new roof, and a log stove in the lounge. In 2017, under the Springboard scheme, there were new metal beds and new flooring. Walls and ceilings were painted throughout. There were completely new kitchen units, work surfaces, dining room tables, benches and curtains. A male shower and entrance and bedroom doors were replaced. There was an upgrade to security systems. Additionally, the bottom half of the driveway was relaid and new outside storage units replaced old garages.

Marjorie and 'Cas' Castles are now both deceased. Marjorie died in 2012 and her son scattered her ashes in the hostel grounds. Kath and Trevor Key retired in 1995. The next warden was Eric Lane, from 1995 to 2000. On 1st March 2000, the present manager, Nicola Lowe, took over the running of the hostel.

| <i>Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows</i> | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <i>1933-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| *: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire and/or camping | | | | | | | | | |
| ... | 1931 | 1932 | 1933 | 1934 | 1935 | 1936 | 1937 | 1938 | 1939 |
| ... | ... | ... | open | open | 1196 | 1439 | 1523 | 1563 | 1869 |
| 1940 | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1946 | 1947 | 1948 | 1949 |
| 2640 | 3039 | 2702 | 2549 | 3234 | 3601 | 252 | 1593 | 2955 | 2765 |
| 1950 | 1951 | 1952 | 1953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 | 1958 | 1959 |
| 3041 | 2840 | 2601 | 2495 | 2242 | 2625 | 2660 | 2783 | 2649 | 2581 |
| 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 |
| 2452 | 2501 | 2480 | 2227 | 2267 | 2180 | 2195 | 2201 | 2147 | 2275 |
| 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 |
| 2203 | 2120 | 2076 | 2559 | 2340 | 2476 | 2671 | 2670 | 2615 | 2953 |
| 1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 |
| 2865 | 2095 | 2218 | 2346 | 2644 | 3235 | 3478 | 4039 | 3920 | 4272 |
| 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| 4220 | 3713 | 5811* | 3800 | 3864 | 3915 | 4448 | 4833 | 4518 | 4438 |
| 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
| 4454 | 4853 | 5091 | 5150 | 5306 | 4796 | 5082 | 3784 | 2774 | 2791 |
| 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
| 3202 | 4800+ | 4860+ | 4698+ | 4955+ | 4935+ | 4806+ | 4514+ | 4864+ | 4492+ |



1 2



3 4



5 6



7 8



Modern images of YHA Jordans, almost 90 years a youth hostel.

- 1: firepit in the grounds. The washblock, subject of so much fundraising, can be seen to the left of the main building;
 2: a pleasant rural environment; 3: the cheerful and well-tended hostel entrance; 4: picnic spot in a shady corner;
 5: once the common room, scene of music evenings and birthday teas, this area is still a smart homely social space for the traditional hostel activities of eating, mixing and relaxation. Note the recently introduced uPVC double glazing;
 6: well-equipped self-catering facilities; 7&8: the bedrooms were subdivided some years ago to create smaller, cosier sleeping spaces, more flexible for today's needs. The beds are of the latest pattern and extra touches include built-in reading lights and power sockets for digital devices (YHA photographs)*

© John Martin, 2020. YHA Profiles are intended to be adaptable in the light of new materials gained by YHA Archive.