

Youth Hostels in South Pembrokeshire

Manorbier hostel, and its predecessors at Hodgeston Hill and Pentlepoir

Hodgeston Hill Youth Hostel 1950 to 1964

Hodgeston Hill, Tenby, Pembrokeshire

Historic County: Pembrokeshire

YHA Region: South Wales

GR: SN 033008



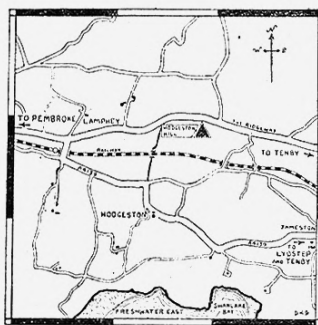
After the Second World War, YHA found a number of new hostels in redundant forces' buildings, prisoner of war camps and similar premises. Examples included Bradwell-juxta-Mare, Clifton-on-Teme, Greens Norton, Trevellas, West Hoathly and Wooler. Such hostels were ready-made for YHA's rapid post-war expansion, if rather basic and usually short-term. Hodgeston Hill was an ex-Women's Land Army hostel lying on the Ridgeway between Manorbier and Pembroke. Typically, it was a small complex of two adjoining timber huts with a central brick utilities tower. It was a freehold purchase for £650, Ministry of Education grant-aided. The land and buildings were vested in the YHA Trust on 12th July 1951.

The hostel opened partially on 29th July 1950, when there were just 20 beds, and fully at Easter 1951, by which time there were 46. The first wardens were Mr and Mrs A Sears. In the initial stages, as usual at this time, the hostel saw gradual improvements from slow beginnings; *Rucksack Magazine* of September-October 1953 stated that a major reconstruction was under way, though it brought the capacity down slightly to 44 for the remainder of the hostel's career. Meanwhile, Mr D and Mrs B Davies had replaced the Sears by 1952 and stayed until retirement in 1958.

HODGESTON HILL.

O.S. 151 ; G.R. 033009 ; Bart. 11.

Postal Address.—The Youth Hostel, Hodgeston Hill, Milton, via Tenby, Pembs.



A timber building on a hilltop 3½ miles East of Pembroke, and two miles from the coast. It has a wonderful view over a large part of South Pembrokeshire. 46 beds, meals provided, Members' kitchen. The hostel is 1¼m. from Lamphey, on the "Ridgeway," the direct hill road between Lamphey and Tenby. If approaching from Pembroke, keep straight on in Lamphey village when the main (A 4139) road turns sharp right. From Tenby take the Manorbier road, and turn right after 1m. In both cases the road is signposted "The Ridgeway." If approaching from the North via Milton, turn right when the Ridgeway is reached.



1: hostel badge; 2: informative entry and sketch map in the South Wales regional handbook, 1951; 3: a rare sketch from the same publication; 4: photograph by Pat Packham, regular explorer of YHA's more obscure South Wales hostels (YHA Archive)

Pat Packham noted in her diary – *Holiday in West Wales by Bicycle and Rail Runabout Ticket, 5th August 1953*:
When I did eventually reach the hostel the warden was nowhere to be seen but finally he appeared.

Some years later, in July 1960, she visited again and enjoyed some lively socialising:
Eventually *B* and I decided to go to the dance and finally 12 hostellers went; we outnumbered the villagers at first. We were all quite ready to finish at 1am. After such a late evening, breakfast was delayed.



Images of Hodgeston Hill youth hostel are rare, but here are two more –
1: a photograph by R Day, and 2: an anonymous image (author's collection)

Mrs E Hollicks wardened Hodgeston Hill from about the time of Pat's second visit, but closure was not far off. There were stirrings at the time for family hostels and a belated plea was made for conversion of the Pembrokeshire hostel; it might have suited well for a period, but closed at the end of the 1964 season and was finally sold on 11th August 1969. By the time of a visit in 2015 the camp has been mostly demolished, though foundations remained and the central brick water tower / chimney was clearly visible from the road, rising above dense vegetation.



The author took these photographs of the remains of Hodgeston Hill youth hostel in September 2015. The central tower remained reasonably intact, and suggested some use since YHA's departure some 50 years before

Pentlepoir Youth Hostel 1972 to 1999

The Old School, Pentlepoir, Saundersfoot, Pembrokeshire SA69 9BJ

Historic County: Pembrokeshire

YHA Regions: South Wales, Wales

GR: SN 116059

The South and Mid Wales Regions of YHA, amalgamating in 1965 into a larger South Wales territory, were the masters within YHA for converting small redundant village schools into a number of simple, usefully placed youth hostels, often in beautiful remote locations. They included Ystumtuen, Corris, Newtown, Cefn-y-Coed, Blaencaron, Knighton, Glascwm and Trefin. Almost the last of them was at Pentlepoir, near Tenby on the South Pembrokeshire coast; only the current YHA Newport (Trefdraeth) opened after it, and all are gone from YHA now except for that latest example. They were perfect for their age and much loved, though often blighted by difficulties of maintenance, and because they were generally tall single-storey buildings with large classroom windows, difficult to heat.

Pentlepoir youth hostel opened on 1st July 1972. It occupied the recently-closed village school on the main street and a school house on its left flank. The building was leased, probably in seven-year stretches, as one agreement was drawn up between the newly-formed Dyfed County Council and the YHA Trust for seven years from 12th March 1979. The school house became the warden's quarters, one of the more generously proportioned such arrangements.

Before a year had elapsed, an internal regional hostel report gave a detailed description of the premises. The newly-introduced scheme of hostel grading had initially presented Pentlepoir as a Standard Grade hostel, but the inspector recommended it should be classed as Simple. The following is a précis of the findings:

This hostel is another school house of the sort that South Wales Region is so good at finding. This one has the additional advantage of an attached headmaster's house which converts neatly into warden's accommodation. These buildings are generally old and certain things must of necessity be worn out. This one has very bad floors throughout; old worn wooden floor boards where there isn't any concrete.

Again the Region has solved the washroom problem by putting washing facilities in each dormitory. This is OK if due allowance is made for the additional space those facilities take up. I found overcrowding in: Dorm 1 – 18sq ft per bed; Dorm 2 – 22sq ft per bed; Dorm 3 – 20sq ft per bed. This is not Standard accommodation.

The bunks are below [the standard] expected in a Standard hostel. Some mattresses are of the ship- mattress type and there are still some of the flock type with broken springs.

The old school hall is now the Common Room / Dining Room. A large bare room with sad looking wooden floors. An attempt has been made to brighten the room with curtains but it needs a total facelift with better heating, repainting and refurnishing, a pleasant floor covering (hardboard and vinyl tiles) and a fireside mat. I am not sure in this case if a dividing wall would give a better layout.

There is an excellent meals-provided wash-up with two new stainless steel sinks. Plenty of knives, forks and spoons and crockery. A pay phone is in the entrance way.

The WCs are in the yard at the far end of the old playground: two for men and a urinal; three for women. These are basic and rather uncomfortable on a windy, wet night. A sanitowel dispenser is required.

In the Members' Kitchen is a very useful little gadget, a Crownette, measuring a mere 8in by 4in in diameter, it gives instant hot water continuously direct from the mains. One mounted over each sink gives all the hot water needed without the need for long runs of piping. It serves the Members' Kitchen and the hand basins in three of the four dormitories. The Members' Kitchen has eight gas points and four grills. Another gas point is needed for a 40-bed hostel. One sink and one draining board are provided for self cooks. A roller hand towel would be useful.

I classify this hostel Simple because:

1. The bunks in three of the four dorms are very much below standard.
2. There is overcrowding in 3 dormitories.
3. The WC facilities are off the premises. No night facilities.
4. The floors and general decorations are in need of improvement.
5. One dorm light should be rigged up.
6. One dorm does not have hot water.
7. Footbaths or preferably showers should be installed.

Volunteers were soon at work improving the place; they helped redecorate and provide a better members' kitchen and common room in 1974. The warden carried out extensive remodelling of the hostel in 1976.

The first warden was Mrs L Pettican, replaced in 1974 Robert Hemming and Mrs KE Hemming. Cyclist Chris Downs was forgiving of any imperfections in the building, and grateful for its simple comforts, when he stayed here in 1975. He wrote in his holiday log:

When I went to bed I noticed that the condensation formed on the walls had frozen. I much preferred the simple hostels and this was the simplest I had been in for a long time.

The inspector's suggestion that the hostel be regraded to Simple was followed up in 1975, and beds reduced to 34. In 1976 the hostel entered into a period of more settled custodianship with Jim Lockwood, who stayed for 13 years.



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1: Pentlepoir youth hostel. The white house to the left was the former school house, by now the warden's accommodation;
 2: this 1982 view of the hostel and improvised car park in the playground was taken by regular hosteller George Miller;
 3&4: undated and anonymous photographs of two young hostellers in the kitchen / common room area; 5: hostel badge;
 6: 1980 photograph by cyclist Ron Sant; 7: hostel stamp (images 1, 3&4: YHA Archive, images 2&5-7: author's collection)

Bed numbers were further reduced to 26 in 1983, though 34 were in use again by 1995. The last 15 years or so saw the opening period reduced to April to October, with group bookings possible outside those months. Meals were generally provided at Pentlepoir, though in the 1980s the service was shrunk to cater just for pre-notified groups of 10 or more. The full service was restored by 1990, while a note in the 1995 handbook stated that meals could be provided privately by the warden. Mandy Griffiths followed Jim Lockwood as warden in 1988, and Joyce Liddle was in post from 1991 to the final year.

Pentlepoir hostel closed during 1999. Annual overnights had reached almost 4,000 in its early years but had been fading noticeably through the 1990s, to half that number. It was noted that the building had become dangerous, and it could not really compete with newer, smarter hostels opened at Manorbier in 1988 and Trefdraeth in 1995.

Manorbier Youth Hostel 1988 to present

Manorbier, Tenby, Pembrokeshire SA70 7TT

Historic County: Pembrokeshire

YHA Region: Wales

GR: SS 080976

YHA's *Triangle Magazine* of February 1986 described how a new hostel at Manorbier was being negotiated but could still materialise in the late summer. The property might have seemed unpromising to many: a discarded Ministry of Defence former lecture theatre and office block, ugly and squat. It was one of five large and functional buildings – the other four soon to be demolished – forming part of the Heavy Wing Guided Missile Complex at Shrinkle which the National Park acquired from the Secretary of State for Defence in 1983, following many years of negotiation. The acquisition included 42 acres of cliffland. It took considerable foresight by South Wales region, the national YHA and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, working in harmony, to imagine the potential for an attractive and successful hostel so close to the coastal path and shoreline, from its stark origins.



1: imagination required! A view of the unpromising abandoned Ministry of Defence buildings in the mid-1980s.

They included a REME workshop, two administration blocks and a missile drill shed (YHA Archive);

2: the repurposed premises, designed by YHA and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park in collaboration, viewed from a similar viewpoint at the north-west corner of the property (author's photograph, September 2015)



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MANORBIER YOUTH HOSTEL, HOSTEL IEUENCTID MAENORBŶR

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1&2: Manorbier hostel under reconstruction early in 1988. The hostel was leased to YHA by the National Park Authority. 1: the new block being built at the west end of the hostel was managers' quarters, now Guest Room 1. The original building lay behind. Corrugated cladding was being applied to the hostel entrance; 2: the hostel dining room and eastern entrance; 3: this postcard of Manorbier hostel was issued in the opening years. It shows the striking design by architect Cedric Mitchell of white walls and yellow edging. New grey, curved metal additions arch to break the monotony of the original block. There are four such structures: a large lobby entrance near the west end, extended to cover a conservatory / quiet room area behind, one at the eastern corner, a third at the north east side, accessing the large lawn and camping area, and a fourth centrally placed, at the rear. This final feature allowed a loft space where YHA inserted three two-storey self-contained flats (YHA Archive)

The 1987 handbook included a premature entry for the new facility, now intended to start in the summer of that year. The opening finally came on 30th July 1988. In the first weeks the wardens were temporary and could offer only self-catering. French-Canadians Eric and Julie Audige-Soutter arrived to manage Manorbier after its first few weeks and

established the new hostel firmly over nine years before moving to Conwy, another new facility, in 1996. Disabled athlete Chris Haslam officially opened the £450,000 Centre on June 21st 1989.



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YHA Manorbier in its early years. 1: the reception window; 2: manager Julie Audige-Soutter prepares to serve from the well-equipped kitchen; 3: dining room from the opposing angle; 4: the unusual internal conservatory (YHA Archive)

5: Julie and Eric Audige-Soutter ready to welcome guests. The photograph is thought to date from 1989;

6: an extra facility at Manorbier is this outbuilding on the east side of the hostel. Dating from the military era, it had appropriately been given YHA's more decorative treatment. In 1989 it provided toilet and shower block facilities for campers, but was soon taken for staff accommodation (YHA Archive)

After the first year when the hostel was limited to 56 beds, 68 were soon established. An educational group booklet of 1990 described the bedrooms available as six 6-bedded and two 10-bedded. These took up the northwest corner of the hostel, in the rooms (now nine) labelled 6 to 14. The booklet also referred to three 2+2-bedded facilities, designed as self-contained flats of two storeys towards the middle rear of the premises and used until 1999 as separate family accommodation units. One was withdrawn in 2000, perhaps for staff accommodation, and the other two lasted until major changes in 2005. Each unit could take four adults and children, and a cot for baby. *YHA News* of August 1993 advertised this special winter package:

Family Unit Offer at Manorbier YH

Take advantage of a superb offer available to all *YHA News* readers. Discover the spectacular coastal scenery of the Pembrokeshire National Park by staying at the Manorbier YH. For only £75.00 per week you can stay in one of Manorbier's Family Units during the months of November 1994 to March 1995 (excluding the Christmas and New Year period). The Family Units are self-contained and comprise two bedrooms, a bathroom, small well-

equipped kitchen, dining and lounge area and your own key to come and go as you please. There are three such units so why not come with friends.



Interior shots at Manorbier in the 1990s.

1: downstairs at one of the self contained family flats; 2: a corner of the main self catering kitchen (YHA Archive)

New managers in 1997 were Matt and Deb Roberts, who stayed until 2006. Numbers using YHA Manorbier had been rising quickly in its first decade, with 10,000 stays achieved in 1997. A curiosity in registering the capacity of the hostel arose in 1997, when the family accommodation guests, nominally 12, ceased to be numbered in the annual handbook. The apparent reduction from 68 to 56 beds was in reality no reduction at all. There was a dip in overnights in the final two years of the old century, before a steady reversion in the new.



Close up of the two curved structures at the eastern end (YHA Archive)

A feature of the modern YHA that developed particularly in the 1990s was the potential for exclusive private hire at hostels. The scheme was initially labelled Rent-a-Hostel, and is now Exclusive Hire. An example of the offering was this RaH brochure information for the winter of 1999-2000:

Manorbier

A modern high-tech style building set in its own grounds 300 yards from the cliffs. Communal areas are modern, light and very spacious and there is a small conservatory within the Youth Hostel.

All rooms are on the ground floor. Games room with pool table and table tennis.

WTB Disability Access Category 2.

Meals may be available to groups over 25, except Christmas and the New Year.

Please book meals direct with the Rent-a-Hostel Booking Office at least four weeks in advance.

Accommodation: 6 bedrooms with 40 beds in bunk beds (5 x 6, 1 x 10). All have bunk lights and wash hand basins. An additional 16 beds (1 x 6, 1 x 10) are available (prices on request).

Lounge: small TV lounge adjacent to the reception area seats 20, quiet room in the covered conservatory seats 10.

Meeting/classroom seating 40 leads off the dining room.

Dining room: seats 56. Self-catering facilities: large and modern kitchen off the dining room.

Parking: large car park opposite the youth hostel with capacity for 40 cars.

Two self-contained family apartments are available each with lounge/diner-kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms. Adjacent to the main building (prices on request).

Rent-a-Hostel Dates: November 5th 1999 - February 29th 2000

Prices: 2 night break: £315 Extra night(s): £ 140 Four night Christmas break: £690 Extra night(s): £150

A YHA internal review of June 2001 noted that there had been a recovery after two declining years, with good development plans from the hostel managers. Further work was needed to break up the larger rooms and provide sufficient leader rooms. By 2003 the hostel capacity stood at 59, but by 2005 it reached 69, a number maintained to the present. A then-record figure of 12,000 overnights was achieved in that year. The greater bed numbers were made possible through the alteration of the managers' and staff quarters into current Guest Rooms 1 to 5, five small en suite rooms. Matt and Deb Roberts had relocated to the village and assistant staff moved by degrees into the three flats originally designated as family accommodation. This enabled the layout to concentrate indoor accommodation at the western end of the hostel. The adjacent staff kitchen became a useful secondary self-catering room.

In October 2006 Martin Allen came from Lake District hostels to follow on as manager from the Roberts, and has been in post ever since. The hostel gained a new roof about the year 2008.

The value of the Pembrokeshire chain of youth hostels was brought into sharp focus when the 870-mile Wales Coastal Path was officially opened on 5th May 2012. YHA's Council Bulletin a few weeks later told how all ten Welsh coastal hostels held successful events with cream teas, tree plantings and well-presented stands at the three official launch events in Cardiff, Aberystwyth and Flint, manned by willing volunteers. At Manorbier YHA unveiled a 40ft outline of the whole Welsh coast, constructed from local stone and wood, by a land artist, with some assistance from the hostel staff. Children could now walk the Welsh coast in 30 seconds, rather than the 2 months it would take to walk the real thing. A promotion allowed a fourth night free for hostels exclusively on the Welsh coast.

YHA Manorbier was at the centre of a different focus in August of that year, explained in another 2012 Bulletin:

Mosaic at Manorbier

The weekend of 7-8th July saw a group of eleven parents and children from Cardiff involved in the Mosaic Project stay at YHA Manorbier, and enjoy a range of the activities available in the nearby areas of Pembrokeshire.

YHA is a partner in the Mosaic Project which aims, over the next three years, to build long term links between people from urban Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in Wales and the three Welsh National Parks: Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia.

The project aims to recruit Community Champions who are actively involved in their communities. They will then be able to promote National Parks and the hostels within them, arrange visits and keep people informed.

This first formal visit of Mosaic Champions to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park involved people from a wide range of communities who took part in activities locally including coasteering, rockpooling and crabbing, walking and visiting local historic sites.

None of the Community Champions had stayed in a youth hostel before. Most of them had no idea of their existence and were very interested to hear of the historic role of youth hostels in making beautiful places accessible to ordinary people. Everyone enjoyed the food and facilities, and had lots of questions about booking and capacity. They particularly remarked on how much they appreciated the friendliness of the YHA staff and how welcome they felt.

Further Council Bulletins gave more insight into the workings and purpose of the modern youth hostel at Manorbier. The January 2013 issue described how a group of disabled children and young adults were brought for a week's holiday each year, organised by St Johns Ambulance, to give their usual carers a break, while in March 2014 the long tradition of voluntary maintenance at youth hostels was extended when a group of volunteers redecorated corridors and public rooms.



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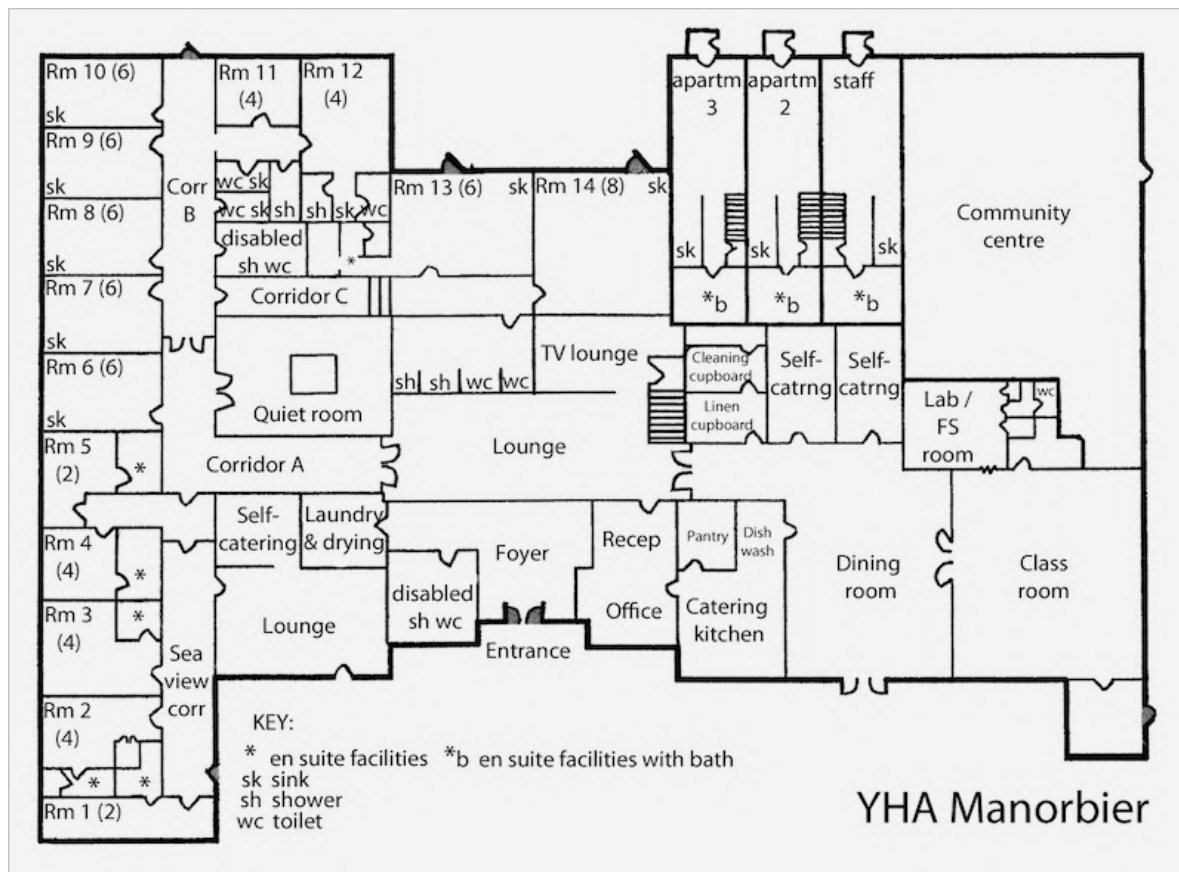
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These author's photographs of YHA Manorbier in September 2015 show how the staff maintain the hostel immaculately.

*1: welcome to YHA Manorbier. The nearest rooms had been the manager's quarters in the early years of the hostel;
2: a shot of the extensive grassed area, ideal for the variety of camping offerings seen here, including pods and bell tents;
3: the former family accommodation flats, with their distinctive porches and roof lights, and now occupied by hostel staff*



An undated plan of Manorbier youth hostel, from about the time of changes in 2005. Over about five years the family flats had been in the process of transferring to staff (one had already made the change) and Rooms 1 to 5 to guests. These alterations enabled greater flexibility; Rooms 1 to 5 and 6 to 14 could operate with independent security if desired (YHA Archive).

In recent years YHA has made great efforts to maximise the great potential of the attractive grounds and gardens adjoining many of its youth hostels. Its Alternative Accommodation offering has brought to life possibilities that were once only partially recognised. Originally this was limited to own-tent camping, and at Manorbier seems to have been offered only intermittently; it was advertised as a feature upon opening, but was not mentioned in annual handbooks between 1988 and 2002, except for one reference in 1999. From 2003 there has been more regular mention, but the big changes came in the mid 2010s with camping pods and seasonally-available fixed large tents. In 2019, for instance, the hostel offered extra outdoor places in its three 4-bedded pods, four 5-bedded bell tents in summer and a large personal-tent campsite for 25, partially with hook-up, all in a delightful position with sea views to the northeast of the main building and close to essential facilities in the hostel. Vans and caravans use this space too. Camping in its many forms has helped YHA Manorbier to break all its previous records with over 15,000 overnights in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

In 2015 it was Manorbier's turn for YHA's Springboard programme of refurbishment. The hostel's Community Centre was set up in the original plans to be a focal point between the YHA, the National Park and the local community, and has remained so ever since. With careful design, however, it was possible also to establish on the eastern side of the building a new camping services corridor on which are toilets, showers and a small self-catering kitchen. An ordinary WC unit adjacent to Room 13 made way for an en suite facility attached to that room.

In 2019, the hostel building's capacity remained at 69, with 14 rooms (one 2-bedded, one 3-bedded, five 4-bedded, six 6-bedded and one 8-bedded). Half the rooms are en suite. Bedrooms 6 to 12 have wheelchair access and there are two wheelchair-accessible washrooms; in fact the building has featured wide doors and corridors and ramps from the start. The hostel can feed up to 80 in one sitting. The classroom seats up to 60 in its lecture configuration, while the dining room can be used for overspill. There are two small lounges with televisions. YHA Manorbier is surely unique in having three separate self-catering kitchens.

The sizeable car park opposite the hostel accommodates about 30 vehicles and can take a bus or coach.



Sunny spot. YHA Manorbier's camping ground and vista across Skrinkle Haven and out to sea (author's photographs, 2019)

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									
§: Hodgston Hill hostel; ¶: Pentlepoir hostel; Δ: Manorbier hostel									
*: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire and/or camping									
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
292§	1067§	1475§	1531§	1623§	1771§	2264§	1782§	2192§	1883§
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
1869§	1825§	1852§	1849§	1436§	...	...	...	...	...
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
...	...	906¶	2217¶	2632¶	3110¶	3343¶	3585¶	3372¶	3511¶
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
3863¶	2759¶	2212¶	1928¶	2261¶	1972¶	1836¶	2180¶	1606¶	2208¶
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1791Δ	6977Δ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
2605¶	2435¶	2737¶*	2245¶	2461¶	2319¶	1931¶	1943¶	1971¶	1514¶
8339Δ	8571Δ	11269Δ*	9953Δ	10834Δ	10089Δ	9235Δ	10400Δ	8678Δ	8254Δ
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
8743Δ	9138Δ	9692Δ	11130Δ	11725Δ	12210Δ	10731Δ	11478Δ	10201Δ	9212Δ
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
8998Δ	10276+Δ	10252+Δ	9859+Δ	13131+Δ	12295+Δ	14695+Δ	15932+Δ	15878+Δ	15522+Δ
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
openΔ	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...