



YHA (England and Wales)

Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, 2022-12-27

Cirencester area Youth Hostels

at Ashton Keynes, Duntisbourne Abbots and Cirencester (Cotswolds Youth Hostel)

Introduction

This profile outlines three youth hostels in Cirencester and its neighbourhood. The first was Ashton Keynes, seven miles south of the town; the village lies just across the border from Gloucestershire, in Wiltshire. The second was Duntisbourne Abbots, 6 miles northwest of Cirencester. Much more recently, The Barrel Store hostel has opened in the town itself. Apart from a gap of 15 years late on, the three hostels span more than 80 years of YHA development.

Ashton Keynes Youth Hostel 1939 to 1965

Old Manor Farm, Ashton Keynes, Swindon, Wiltshire.

Historic County: Wiltshire

YHA Regions: Wiltshire; Midland

GR: SU 042946

Ashton Keynes

Ashton Keynes youth hostel was located at Old Manor Farm, a venerable stone property, parts of which were 600 years old, on the northern outskirts of the village. The farmhouse shows signs of continued development over the centuries, with a separately-roofed structure on the west side, towards the road, and a valley-roofed rear extension to the north. An annexe and lean-to are noted on youth hostel photographs.



A delightfully rustic early postcard of Ashton Keynes youth hostel. The photograph is taken from the northeast corner and shows the valley-roofed extension and associated annexes well (YHA Archive)

A History of the County of Wiltshire, Volume 18 (British History Online website) describes how the farm was formerly part of Cove House estate, and sold in 1914 to Mr Vizor. In the 1920s it was acquired by MJ Habgood, who was apparently still the owner in 1934. In 1939 it was sold by Francis Telling to the Cotswold Brüderhof, the body that owned Ashton Field Farm nearby, though Old Manor Farm seems to have passed to the YHA very soon afterwards.

The Brüderhof was a community of pacifist Christian folk who lived mainly by farming and held all goods in common. Teachings were based on 16th-century Hutterite principles. It was formed in 1920 in Germany as an answer to the

moral and physical chaos and deprivation following the First World War. In the mid-1930s, under the threat of Nazi intimidation and expulsion, the group moved to England; their first working farm was set up on good farming land in Ashton Keynes in 1936, though their base was the neglected and dilapidated Ashton Field farmhouse. The Brüderhof owned this until 1941. The BHO website confirms that they also owned the future youth hostel briefly.

Though avowedly secular, or at least non-denominational, the early YHA shared many of the social aims of the Brüderhof, and were no doubt inspired by its belief in simplicity and shared endeavour. Original YHA plans, as far back as 1937, were for a model hostel in close proximity to the Cotswold Brüderhof, and in 1939 the Association purchased Old Manor Farm freehold for £950, vesting it in the YHA Trust on 13th April. The youth hostel opened promptly at Whit, with the aid of donations of £1,000 from the King George V Jubilee Trust and £100 from the WA Cadbury Trust. There were beds for 25 men and 15 women. The first wardens were Chris and Nora Caine.

The Brüderhof's stay in Wiltshire did not last long; in 1941 they sold Ashton Field Farm to the London Police Court Mission, who intended to set up an approved school training establishment for young offenders. The religious community then move to Paraguay, and has since established in North America, Canada and Europe, with two centres in the UK.

The hostel's operating pattern in 1939-45 is uncertain as bednight figures have not been discovered. The hostel was reported as in use during 1939. A national notice was issued to state that the hostel would reopen on 26th June 1940. It was described as operating in 1941, though no overnight figures have been found. Wiltshire hostels were heavily requisitioned during hostilities, and after 1941 it may not have functioned at all; it was *still requisitioned* in 1945.

Ashton Keynes hostel was due to reopen after the war, at Easter 1946, but it was delayed to the summer, and possibly even to 1947. Wiltshire Regions' annual report of 1947 described the premises as very dilapidated.



Two images from the immediate post-war period (author's collection).

1: hostellers pose on the roadside to the south of the hostel. Laundry is hanging from upstairs windows to dry, an old tradition;

2: Fred Blampied from Bristol snapped hostellers at the hostel entrance from the northwest corner in October 1948

Mabel Pratt from Oxford took cycling tours of hostels with her son and recorded a fascinating series of observations in her beautifully written and illustrated hostelling diary, now held at the Bodleian Museum. When she visited Ashton Keynes for the first time in April 1948, her observations were typical of the hardships of the time:

Food is scarcer than it was at hostels last year, and unless one has booked ahead, wardens are apt to register dismay when asked for supper and breakfast by the unexpected hosteller. We therefore carry, beside lunch for the road, enough to be self-cookers if required.

The hostel was once a farmhouse. It can take about 50 all told, but tonight it houses only five birds of passage... We cooked our supper on oil stoves, read by lamplight and were warmed by a log fire.

YHA's annual report for 1949 announced that the hostel was shortly to be equipped with electric light.

ASHTON KEYNES.

The Wardens (Mr. and Mrs. T. L. Judson), Old Manor Farm, Ashton Keynes, Swindon, Wilts.


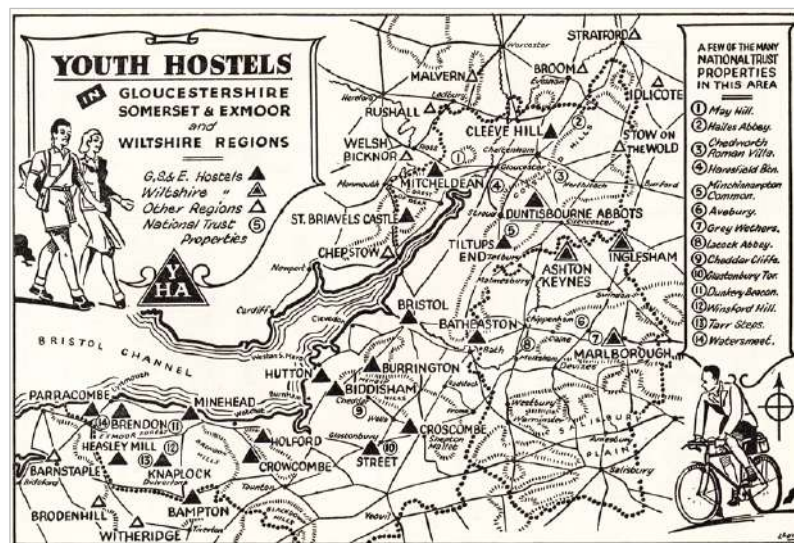
Position and Map:—On the outskirts of Ashton Keynes, 100 yds. down lane running S.W. from North End. Close to church. O.S. 157. G.R. 042946. Bart. 13.

Hostel Details:—M. & W. 50. Store & P.O. $\frac{1}{4}$ m. E.C.D.: Wed. H.C.N.: Tues.

Stations:—Minety 3 m. Cricklade $3\frac{1}{2}$ m.

Bus:—Swindon—Cirencester—Cheltenham.

Next Hostels:—Duntisbourne Abbots 11 m. Inglesham 17 m. Stow-on-the-Wold 25 m. Marlborough 26 m. Batheaston 28 m. Cleeve Hill 25 m. Charlbury 31 m.

For the first 50 years or so of YHA's existence, annual YHA handbooks were supplemented by the publication of more detailed regional handbooks, such as this West Country example of 1949. 1: the standard of location sketch maps improved significantly in most regional guides in the early postwar period, aided further by the inclusion of grid references; 2: there was a glorious spread of hostels across this part of the Southwest, as this attractive map testifies, though in 1949 the tiny Wiltshire region could boast only three examples; 3: hostel pin badge from the 1950s (YHA Archive)

On reopening, the hostel's capacity expanded to 50, with beds for 25 men and 25 women, and stayed at that level until the final year. Mr and Mrs H Carradice were the first post-war wardens, followed by Mr and Mrs TL Judson in 1948.

They stayed until at least 1952. Records are missing for the next few years, but it is known that Miss L Lowcock resigned from the post in 1958. Mr and Mrs SS Evans followed on and Mr and Mrs Rand were the final wardens.



Another photograph from Fred Blampied is this example from July 1948 (author's collection)

Mable Pratt visited again in 1950, three times, and commented:

[April 1950] Warden and wife here at Ashton Keynes have plenty of room and will stretch the allotted [3-night] span... We are only two here tonight, and fresh veg from the garden lured me to pay for supper...
...Chores were pleasant this morning, helping to scrape potatoes from the garden, in readiness for tonight's invasion. Broad beans from the same source being the other veg, I ordered supper.

[June 1950] Cost [for a 32-day cycle touring holiday with her son] £9.12s.0d [£9.60], or 6s [30p] a day.

[October 1950] Roger and I did ourselves well over supper. Roger managed the Beatrice stoves and between us we produced cream of tomato soup, grilled chops with fried onions and potato crisps, a doughnut each, cheese and sundries, and a pot of tea. A warm fire in the common room glowed for our sole benefit. This was, we felt, hostelling of a high order.

In the 1950s YHA's monthly *Bulletin* published details of special entertainments bookable through its network. The January 1954 issue had some typical good news:

Ashton Keynes. At 8pm on Saturday 6th Feb there will be a square dance in the village hall. Admission 1s.6d. Supper will be served promptly at 7pm. Please send your bookings early to the warden. The profits will be spent on hostel improvements.



Postcard view of the front elevation of Ashton Keynes youth hostel. If true to type, the attractive front porch would have been reserved as the wardens' private entrance (YHA Archive)

Further occasional hostel improvements followed. *Youth Hosteller* magazine of February 1962 announced a new hot water system and an improved shower for men. However, the hostel was running at a loss and major work was needed. It closed on 22nd September 1965. The property was sold three months later, for £3,250, on 14th December 1965.

Duntisbourne Abbots Youth Hostel 1945 to 2000

Duntisbourne Abbots, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 7JN.

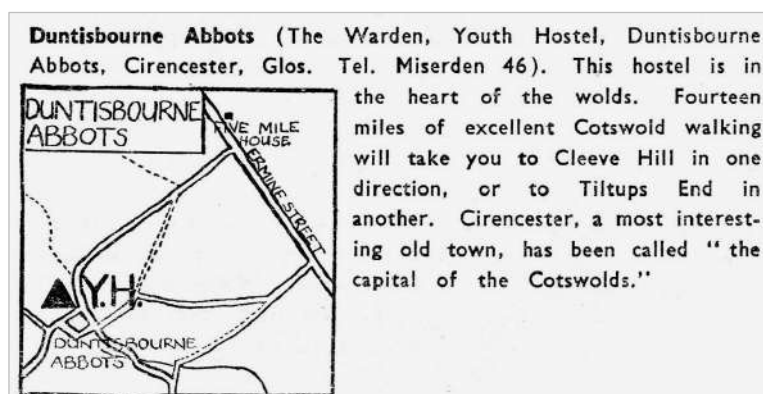
Historic County: Gloucestershire

YHA Regions: Gloucester, Somerset &
Exmoor; Midland; Central

GR: SO 969080

The loss of Ashton Keynes hostel in 1965 was mitigated to a degree by the existence of its partner hostel, Duntisbourne Abbots, 6 miles northwest of Cirencester. The two had run side by side for almost 20 years, Duntisbourne having opened late in the 1945 season. YHA had purchased the property freehold for £3,000 in the final stages of the war; it passed to the YHA Trust on 19th April 1945, and received grant-aid from the Ministry of Education.

The hostel was an impressive former rectory, built in local stone circa 1860 and so typical of what had become by the mid-20th century an overprovision for the clergy of a small village in the English countryside. There was a snaking drive and impressive grounds of over 2 acres. A recent glitzy sales brochure described it in feigned disbelief as *an impossibly beautiful – and enormous – house in the Cotswolds whose former use [YHA] is hard to believe*. As so frequently happened with what had become run-down buildings unwanted by anybody except the likes of YHA before, during and after the war, it is quite possible that the Association's acquisition saved the building from a much worse fate, for others to enjoy in later years.



The early days. 1: Sketch map of Duntisbourne Abbots youth hostel's location, from the regional guide of 1947 (YHA Archive); 2: cyclists mill around the hostel entrance, the northwest face of the building, about 1948. Duncan Simpson remembers that the ground floor was given over to common areas – an entrance hall, classroom, dining room, lounge, self-catering and catering kitchens. On the first floor were bedrooms and washrooms, plus the main staff flat, and up another flight of stairs to further bedrooms, at least one shower room and, I think, staff bedrooms (from a negative, author's collection)

The first wardens were Mr and Mrs McDonald. They presided over the gradual establishment of full capacity at a new hostel, common in this era; in 1946 there were 40 beds, *more later*. By the following year there were 70, a maximum that remained until 1962. Between 1947 and 1953 Mr and Mrs Bill Ormondroyd held the wardenship.

Pat Packham enjoyed staying here, as she recounted in her *A Holiday in the Cotswolds by Bicycle*, 10 April 1955:

The dining room was full at supper time and we had an excellent meal, consisting of ham, potatoes, salad. The new warden organised a competition in which all the hostellers had to guess the two main ingredients in the pudding. Many curious things were inserted (including air and water from one wit) but the answer was carrots and potatoes.

Pat stayed again in 1957. Her recollection underlines the lengths that individuals would go to in order to enjoy a sociable hostelling weekend in the 1950s. This trip took place in 1957:

The hostel warden arranged folk dances on some summer weekends. I went to several of those as I could reach the hostel from Cardiff by two buses on a Friday night.

In the next decade Duntisbourne Abbots hostel underwent major building works, reported as complete, with big improvement, in *Youth Hosteller*, June 1962. Mr and Mrs SL Gould were in charge at that time, and retired in 1963. A couple of short-term appointments followed, with Mr and Mrs Lewis and Mr and Mrs Worton, and hostel capacity was eased somewhat to 59 beds. In 1964 Geoff and Jean Hearn took up the post and provided a more settled period, staying until they retired in 1977. With school parties in mind, Field Study facilities were provided in 1969. Hostel overnights increased significantly during their spell in charge, from below 5,000 per year to a record 9,166 in 1975.

About this time we hear of visits to Duntisbourne Abbots hostel for business meetings by Ken Tyler, initially regional secretary for the Gloucester, Somerset and Exmoor region and after 1965 newly appointed to an expanded post covering the entire South West region of YHA. His son Stephen has recounted some of the adventures he experienced as a teenager, shadowing his father's work:

He was provided with a vehicle by the Association to undertake his duties, first an Austin A40 pick-up with canvas 'tilt' body (THT 592), then two or three Morris 1000 Travellers (they with the exposed wooden framework). It was a school holiday treat to accompany him on his day-long tours of hostels in his region, typically St Briavels (Wye Valley) and Mitcheldean (Forest of Dean), Cleeve Hill (Cheltenham), North Nibley (near Dursley) and Duntisbourne Abbots (Cirencester), or Holford and Crowcombe (either side of the Quantock Hills), the latter being my favourites for their tranquil rural settings.



1: A celebratory cake is cut at a meeting of regional and neighbouring YHA staff and volunteers at Duntisbourne Abbots hostel. 1: two dedicated and influential regional secretaries over a significant period were Don Errington (left, Birmingham and Mid Wales and later YHA Field Officer) and Ken Tyler (right, Gloucester, Somerset and Exmoor and later South West Region); 2: a line-up of hostel wardens, office staff and volunteers on the same occasion. Also in the picture are long-serving volunteers Sylvia Errington (second right, front row), Dan Hayman from Bristol (second right, back row, and his wife Margaret (extreme right, second row). It would be good to identify any others from this image, as well as a likely date (YHA Archive, images kindly donated by Stephen Tyler and his sister Frances Hilson)



1



2

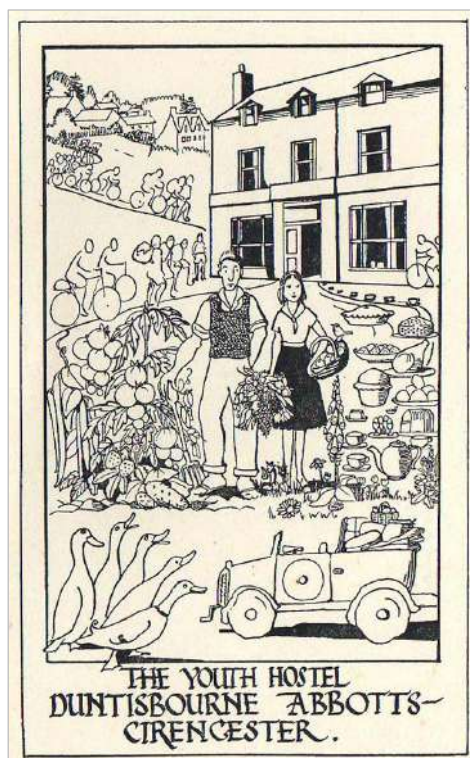


3

1&2: Duntisbourne Abbots youth hostel from the northwest and southeast sides, at some time in the 1970s. The two images were taken by the late George Miller, stalwart YHA volunteer, who has provided a huge library of colour slides of the YHA network in that period. The caravan in the first image may be accommodation provided for seasonal staff (author's collection); 3: this aerial photograph is captioned 'bought at YH, 21st December 1985'. It shows the extent of the building, the extensive grounds and vegetable plots. The private drive snakes around the building from a gated entrance hidden at the top of the image (YHA Archive)

Mike and Lorna Lane were new wardens from the late 1970s. Like the Hearn, they stayed for a significant spell, until 1992. They were followed by Zed and Heather Booles. Early in 1993 the Booles organised a typical biannual working party for the South England Task Force, composed of the regional management team and office staff, in this case to get neighbouring Cleeve Hill hostel, a former golf clubhouse, ready for its spring opening on 1st April. *YHA News* outlined the work, typical of the behind-the-scenes responsibilities of hostel wardens / managers:

Tasks included clearing out the very old iron bunk beds and installing a more modern version (which were once used at Street YH), replacing the mattresses, mattress covers, bedding etc, clearing and re-working the gardens and grounds, sweeping, hoovering, mopping and wiping the interior throughout, plus the many other tasks that go into completing this kind of project.



A delightful stylised cartoon drawing on a postcard of Duntisbourne Abbots hostel. The two figures represent the wardens, perhaps Mike and Lorna Lane, who were avid kitchen gardeners, in their verdant and productive garden (author's collection)

Despite the attractiveness of Duntisbourne Rectory and its South Cotswolds location, however, the problems and outlays associated with maintaining YHA's significant portfolio of rambling, old and expensive buildings were mounting, and costly refits could be only thinly spread. Despite the best efforts of staff, numbers staying at Duntisbourne Abbots had dwindled since the heady days of the 1970s. Duncan Simpson, who was YHA's Wessex area manager in the 1990s, sums up the situation here:

A rambling Victorian rectory with beautiful grounds, pristine lawns of sharp green on spring days, a marvellous hedge, a walled garden and vast space, much of it poorly used, one of those properties YHA walked into and didn't change much because it couldn't afford to change anything and couldn't afford even the upkeep of all that roof, all those corridors, those empty rooms and flagged stone floors.

The hostel had some very good wardens over the years, including Anne who was manager there when the hostel first came into my patch as a regional manager but, like too many hostels, running the place, freezing cold in winter with little heating, with a long walk from the kitchen to the dining room, with too many empty rooms to equip and clean, where too few people stayed, was a constant strain on their good-natured good intentions and they all struggled to make the venture worthwhile in such an expensive piece of property.

Dreams brought plans but never enough money and nothing changed until finally YHA ended those struggles and decided to sell. The old rambling building, with its complex roofs and gutters, was an ongoing maintenance problem, and those issues in the end led to the closure of the hostel.

The traumas of closing were hard for the warden and those who ran it, while YHA tried to sell the hostel without spending money on the place, prolonging its slow decay. Local people were outraged when they heard YHA intended to close and demanded a night time meeting in the parish rooms on a foul wet night when it

became clear that most were worried that the hostel might become a homeless shelter, and only a few would be sorry to see the loss of the hostel for the visitors it brought to a quiet corner of the Cotswolds.

In the end it sold as a private home, had the money it needed spent on it and now, it seems from sale details, is the beautiful well-maintained house it should always have been but for lack of funds.

The Spring 1997 issue of *YHA News* described how the YHA Board considered a detailed report on the condition, shortcomings and performance of four hostels described as sub-standard. Of these, it was concluded that three should close, including Duntisbourne Abbots. The final custodians were in turn Anne Harvey, Keith and Amanda Bradshaw (who moved on to Borth hostel), Jonathan Stray, Guy Holdsworth and finally caretakers in Rachel Baker and Richard Farrell. The prospect of closure was somewhat drawn-out, being advised in the 1998 and 2000/01 Handbooks. As there were only 2,678 bednights in the statistical year up to 28th February 2001, the hostel almost certainly closed in 2000.



A selection of hostel stamps and badges from the 1950s to the 1980s (author's collection)

Cotswolds Youth Hostel 2016 to present

New Brewery Arts, Brewery Court, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 1JH

Historic County: Gloucestershire

GR: SW 782181

YHA is indebted to New Brewery Arts and to historical information displayed in the hostel for much of this information



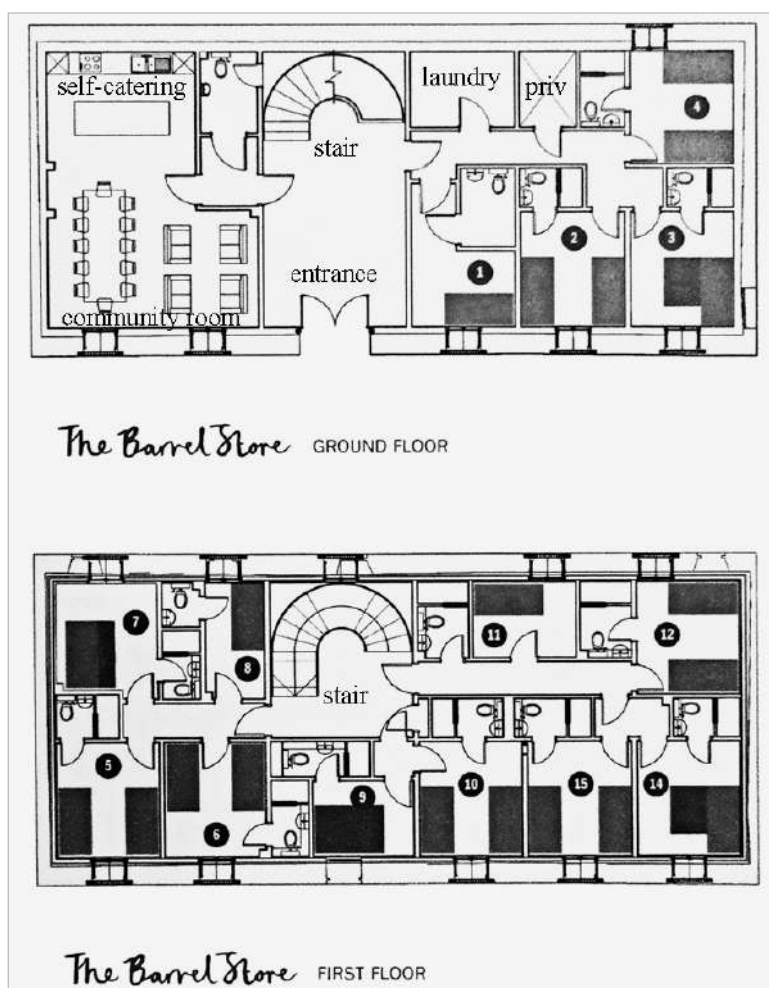
The courtyard and entrance to Cotswolds youth hostel at the Barrel Store in the centre of Cirencester. Between 1984 and 2005 a small arts theatre was located to the left of the entrance (author's photograph, June 2019)

On 23rd April 2014 the *Wilts and Glos Standard* announced via its website that plans were in place to transform the Cirencester art group's New Brewery Arts building and workshop, located at its Niccol Centre on Cricklade Street, into a youth hostel. It would accommodate up to 49 persons with communal cooking and dining areas.

The hostel building dates from the 19th century, a barrel warehouse constructed in stone for the adjoining Cirencester Brewery. The business closed in 1937. The building was then used to manufacture World War II aircraft parts before becoming a town council store. After a period of disuse, remaining Cirencester Brewery buildings were earmarked for demolition. However, a local group proposed repair and conversion of two of the remaining buildings into craft studios, and Cirencester Workshops opened in 1978. In that year the Niccol Centre opened in the former barrel store. Some of the space was imaginatively converted to a 70-seat theatre and workshop, opened in 1984. Though very small and limited in terms of access for the disabled, the theatre staged many ambitious programmes.

In 1990 the Niccol Centre and Cirencester Workshops merged to become Brewery Arts. After extensive redesign in 2008, the gallery, café, artists' studios and shop emerged as New Brewery Arts, bringing the three remaining brewery buildings together as a creative hub in the town. As a day visitor destination, New Brewery Arts now get over 150,000 visitors every year. It is one of the most visited free venues in the South West.

The new hostel opened in April 2016, a collaboration between New Brewery Arts and YHA within the association's Enterprise scheme of private ownership under common objectives. An official opening followed later that month. Design was by Gloucester and London architects Potter and Holmes, experts in the green 'Passivhaus' style of building, with excellent thermal performance gained through high levels of insulation, air tightness and controlled ventilation to minimise heat loss; the application of this concept to a youth hostel presented challenges, such as the number of rooms that need a water supply and ventilation. Furnishings and fittings were to be designed and made by craftspeople, using good quality materials and made to be simple but stylish. Funding of £400,000 came from Arts Council England.



Floor plans of the Barrel Store, kindly provided by the hostel management (YHA Archive)

The Barrel Store describes itself as a stylish boutique hostel in the centre of the Cotswolds. It has 14 rooms, 12 en suite, over two floors, the original plan for 49 beds being modified to 43. The modern bedroom layout allows for great flexibility for groups, families and individuals in single, bunk, family and double bedrooms. Groups can take a whole floor or wing, or be booked into adjacent rooms.

Bedroom 1 on the ground floor has been designed especially for guests with special access needs. It is suitable for wheelchair users and has an accessible shower-room. Adjacent rooms are available for carers.



*1: the youth hostel's courtyard. The associated café and craft workshops are to the right of the passageway;
2: the dining room, with comfortable lounge to the left and 3: the small but well-appointed kitchen;
4: the attractive curved staircase with bespoke timbers and iron banister*

Other amenities include, to the left of the entrance, a community room combining a small but well-equipped communal self-catering kitchen, dining for 20 and a lounge. These are available to hire for meetings and events. There are laundry facilities and lockers for five bikes. Additionally, across the courtyard lies the associated New Brewery Arts café, open from 9.00am for breakfasts, lunches, drinks and snacks. It is open to the public as well as hostel guests. There are art galleries and studios and a range of offered heritage and contemporary craft workshop courses.



Comfortable hostel bedrooms at the Barrel Store (images above and previous page by courtesy of Cotswolds youth hostel)

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows 1939-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb †: Ashton Keynes youth hostel; ¶: Duntisbourne Abbots youth hostel; ΔE: Cotswolds youth hostel (YHA Enterprise) *: 17 month period									
...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	open†
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
probably in use†	open†	possibly not in use†	possibly not in use†	possibly not in use†	...	possibly not in use†	1409†	2341†	2210†
...	...	...	...	...	348¶	2872¶	3539¶	4232¶	4308¶
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
2487†	2402†	2389†	2316†	2383†	1932†	1981†	1964†	1927†	2042†
4450¶	3951¶	4426¶	4432¶	3649¶	3389¶	3818¶	3717¶	3496¶	4587¶
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
1859†	2095†	1883†	2318†	1974†	1878†	...	...	...	...
3447¶	3982¶	4081¶	4664¶	4176¶	4954¶	4248¶	5546¶	5732¶	6434¶
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
6133¶	7440¶	7856¶	7298¶	7799¶	9166¶	8447¶	9086¶	7767¶	8200¶
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
7909¶	7004¶	6827¶	6941¶	7293¶	7077¶	6227¶	6173¶	6915¶	6601¶
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
6065¶	6032¶	7448*¶	6228¶	7017¶	7261¶	7258¶	6210¶	2891¶	3136¶
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
2678¶	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
...	openΔE	openΔE	openΔE	openΔE
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
openΔE	openΔE	openΔE

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