



YHA (England and Wales)

Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, 2022-12-31

Llwyn-y-Celyn (Brecon Beacons) Youth Hostel

preceded by descriptions of former Llwyn-On and Storey Arms Hostels

Llwyn-On Youth Hostel 1931 to 1938

Llwyn-On House, Corporation Waterworks, Cwmtaff, Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan

Historic County: Brecknockshire

YHA Region: South Wales

GR (approximate): SO 013115

Several small youth hostels were established in the hills of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire and Brecknockshire from the outset of the Youth Hostels Association in 1931. One was quickly established at Llwyn-On, 6 miles south of Storey Arms summit on the Merthyr Tydfil – Brecon main road.

There is a long history of water catchment in the valley of the River On (or Onn) above Merthyr Tydfil to serve the heavily populated parts of South Wales. Cardiff Corporation built Beacons and Cantref reservoirs in the late 19th century, and by the early 20th century was designing the largest, near Llwyn-On village. Work started in 1911 and the accompanying image of 1922, courtesy of Merthyr Library, shows an inspection as the works adjacent to the village were nearing completion.



Cardiff Corporation Water Works inspection at the new Llwyn-On Reservoir, 1922

The youth hostel was located in the redundant Waterworks Department offices. It opened at the end of June 1931, according to the second edition of YHA's 1931 national handbook 1931. Mr Williams (Mrs Williams from 1933) was the warden; the hostel held eight beds for men and eight for women. Very little is known about the running of the hostel, and no illustration of it has come to light. The numbers staying here annually – about 200 – seem very small by today's standards, but were typical for the early 1930s in South Wales.

It is tempting to think that the hostel may have occupied the hut at the top of the photograph, but there must have been numerous temporary buildings of this sort on the site. After the works were completed, the workers' village was dismantled, the youth hostel building perhaps lasting the longest. The hostel closed on 1st March 1938 and was replaced after a delay by Storey Arms. It seems likely that YHA's dealings with Cardiff Corporation Waterworks at Llwyn-On helped in negotiating a foothold at their new establishment at Storey Arms. The Llwyn-On building was finally demolished to make way for improvements to the main road.

- 29. St. ATHAN'S HOLIDAY CAMP.** *Route*—SOUTH WALES.
III *Address*—St. ATHAN'S, *Nearest Town*—BARRY.
GLAMORGAN. *Station*—GILESTON G.W.R.
Warden—THE WARDEN, The Camp, St. Athan's.
P.O.—St. Athan's. *Bus route*—Barry-Llantwit-
Store—St. Athan's (1 mile). *Major*.
*10, †6. Meals provided (if necessary). Open all the year.
- 29a. MID RHONDDA COMMUNITY HOUSE.**
III *Address*—BRITHWEUNYDD ROAD, *Nearest T.*—TONYPANDY.
TREALAW, RHONDDA. *Station*—DINAS (RHONDDA).
Warden—Rev. R. J. BARKER, Redcroft, Trealew, Rhondda, Gla
P.O.—Lower Trealew. *Bus route*—Rhondda.
Store—100 yards. Meals provided by arrangement.
*6, †6. Open all the year.
- 29b. LLWYN-ON.** *Route*—MERTHYR-BRECON.
III *Address*—CORPORATION WATERWORKS, LLWYNON.
Warden—Mr. WILLIAMS, Corporation Waterworks,
Llwyn-on. *Nearest T.*—MERTHYR TYDFIL.
*8, †8. Meals provided by arrangement only.
Open from end of June to end of September.

	Men	Wo- men	Under 25	Over 25	Total Per- sons.	Bed- Nights
<i>Hostels open all the year :</i>						
St. Athan (Glamorgan Coast) ...	127	69	144	52	196	339
Trealaw (Rhondda) ...	22	13	25	10	35	36
Llwyn-on (Brecon Beacons) ...	92	91	100	83	183	246
Usk ...	203	137	228	112	340	371
Pantyrone (Abergavenny) ...	274	131	284	121	405	467
<i>Open since Easter :</i>						
Whitebrook (Wye Valley) ...	455	214	515	154	669	772
Tutshill (Wye Valley) ...	442	243	539	146	685	820
Kerne Bridge (Wye Valley) ...	424	163	430	157	587	661
Grosmont ...	192	85	203	74	277	313
Coedkernew (Monmouth Coast) ...	100	52	105	47	152	161
<i>Open since early July :</i>						
Llanhamlach (Brecon Beacons) ...	66	25	66	25	91	99
Forest Lodge (Brecon Beacons) ...	25	14	29	10	39	48
Pont Neath Vaughan (Vale of Neath) ...	24	9	25	8	33	38
Grand Total ...	2,446	1,246	2,693	999	3,692	4,371

Although there are naturally considerable variations between individual Hostels, as will be seen from the Financial Statement to be submitted in conjunction with this Report the over-night charges received from all our Hostels taken together, have so far been sufficient to cover our running expenses, as well as to provide a margin for depreciation.

Two rare records of Llwyn-On youth hostel. 1: an extract from the second edition of YHA's 1931 national handbook, showing details of three South Wales hostels. All were first-year pioneers; indeed, St Athan hostel may have been one of the very first youth hostels in Britain; 2: an abstract from the South Wales Region's 1933 annual report. The Region's hostels had now grown to 13 in number, with several new openings in that year (YHA Archive)

Storey Arms Youth Hostel 1939 to 1971

Libanus, Brecon

Historic County: Brecknockshire

YHA Region: South Wales

GR: SN 982203

As early as its 1937 annual report, YHA South Wales Region was indicating its interest in a part-stake at a new establishment to be built by Cardiff Corporation Waterworks at Storey Arms, at the summit of the main road from Merthyr to Brecon. One reason given for this generous act was to restrict the risk of contamination to the streams flowing into the reservoirs.



It had been hoped that the new premises would be ready by the end of summer 1937, but Cardiff Corporation had been held up and the construction was reset to start the following March. YHA was allowed to carry on at Llwyn-On meanwhile. There was an agreement with YHA that space would be given over to the association for its members.

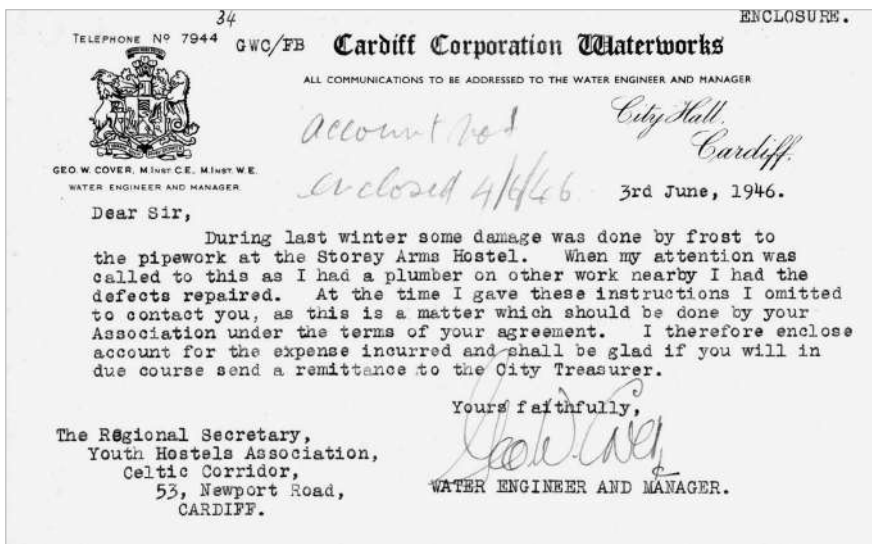
The 1938 annual report brought seemingly bad news that the Storey Arms project had to be postponed because of prohibitive cost, but everything resumed in time for a target opening date of Good Friday, 6th April 1939. At 1,453 feet above sea level, it held the mantle of the highest youth hostel in England and Wales for many years.

Storey Arms was an early example of a joint venture between YHA and a city corporation. Dave Matthews, regional secretary of South Wales Region for many years, has offered his invaluable recollections:

The [Cardiff] Water Authority owned Storey Arms, and in replacement for Llwyn-On they offered YHA a lease of the first floor. This offer was taken up by YHA, and a new lease was agreed.

Downstairs was a transport café and toilets, plus accommodation for a Waterworks employee. The employee's wife became the hostel warden.

YHA leased their part property from 25th March 1939; curiously, the YHA Trust entry of 11th September 1940 gave the location as the short-lived public café. It appointed its own warden, at least at first, and undertook a measure of upkeep. There were generally 22 reserved beds within the building, 14 for men and 8 for women, though in the final years YHA sought to diminish the staffing costs here and reduce the number of beds.



- 1: wartime statistics are largely missing for South Wales hostels, so it is helpful that hosteller Frank Williams recorded his stay here in July 1941 to show that Storey Arms was not the victim of requisition at that time;
2: a 1946 letter from Cardiff Corporation to YHA outlining the terms of agreement for repairs at Storey Arms.
It is a reminder of the harsh conditions often encountered here (YHA Archive)

YHA's *Rucksack Magazine* of April 1940 described Storey Arms' first season as particularly successful. It had enjoyed more winter usage than any other South Wales hostel. It is not certain that the hostel here operated unhindered through the war years, though there is proof positive of usage in 1940, 1941, 1944 and 1945, and the other years seem likely. Mrs Jones was the first warden, and stayed in post until her retirement in 1953. There was a short hiatus in 1953 while a replacement warden was sought, and a disturbing press report in that year that Storey Arms was to be destroyed with the building of a new reservoir, perhaps to preserve the purity of the catchment below.

Thereafter, the remote and exposed Storey Arms hostel became more difficult to staff, and there was a succession of wardens – Mrs Newbury, Mrs Cheshire, Mrs Owens, Mrs Woolgrove, Mrs B Davies, Mrs K Davies and Mrs Corcoran – some or all were wives of the Cardiff staff, some stayed for only a short time, perhaps because the isolation was difficult. Sometimes there were tensions between the two operations in the same premises, especially later on. Mrs M Griffin offered a measure of stability in the hostel’s difficult final years, from 1965 to 1971.



STOREY ARMS

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The Warden, Storey Arms, near Brecon.

Position and Map. 8½ m. from Brecon on Brecon-Merthyr road. 9½ m. from Merthyr. O.S. 141. Bart. 12. G.R. 982204.

Hostel Details. M. 14. W. 8. Store & P.O. : Libanus 4 m. E.C.D. : Brecon, Wed. ; Merthyr, Thurs. K.F.S. * Tues.

Stations. Brecon 8½ m. Cefn Coed 8 m. Bus. Merthyr—Brecon.

Next Hostels. Heol Senni 7 m. (by footpath over ridge 4½ m.). Tyn-y-Cae 11½ m. Crickhowell 22 m.

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[Photo—C. Cooper.

STOREY ARMS—THE HIGHEST HOSTEL IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

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1: Ron Day recorded this early post-war scene. The youth hostel part of the building was at the far right-hand side, indicated by the very early pattern of cut-out style YHA triangle secured at right angles above the entrance;

2: Handbook information, 1948; 3: an early post-war postcard (YHA Archive)

The numbers of YHA members’ overnights here peaked in 1948 with just over 1,400, and again in 1962, when a record of almost 1,700 was recorded, but in most years usage hovered about the 1,000 mark. Despite the 1962 record, it was decided then to close Storey Arms hostel during the winter months except for advance week-end bookings in order to save costs.

Modest improvements came to the hostel from time to time. In 1958 six new Calor gas rings were installed; gas lighting in the members' kitchen and common room followed in 1961.

Harry Willey stayed here as part of his cycle tour in May 1961 and wryly observed – perhaps referring to use of the other part of the premises by a Cardiff school party, perhaps as an ironic comment on the silence here:

Only two of us at the hostel. Hostel too noisy.

Dave Matthews continues his recollection of the hostel:

I first stayed there in 1961, and on five occasions. It would have been with Newport YHA Group. At a later date we organised a 'Grand Autumn Dance' in a dance hall in Newport to raise funds to instal a drying room there. The dance was a great success, though I can't recall how successful the drying room was. My last stay was a solo one on 1st January 1963, where my card is marked 'SNOW'. The group had been at Llanddeusant the previous two nights just when the hard winter of 1963 had just started.

I walked from Brecon to Storey Arms via Cwm Gwdi, skirting just below the summits in the dark. The warden's husband, who I now knew quite well, was amazed to see me as he hadn't seen anyone for two days. It took me quite a time to walk to Merthyr the following day.

As a consequence of taking mains electricity to Capel-y-ffin hostel it was planned to transfer the electric generating plant from there to Storey Arms hostel early in 1962. Working parties, especially from the ever-ready Newport Group, improved the drying room at Storey Arms in 1964.



JD Thomas has provided the YHA Archive with a remarkable collection of hostelling logs. He was a long-distance cyclist, but in 1966 stayed at Storey Arms, close to his Valleys home. It seems remarkable that these three images share the same date – 14th April 1966. 1: this image is full of interesting detail – the new YHA triangle at the YHA entrance, the array of stylish British vehicles and the AA motorbike. An AA roadside telephone was located at the summit and advertised in the hostel; 2&3: only the brave! (YHA Archive)

By 1967 the Region was negotiating with representatives of Cardiff Corporation on the future of the vacant Storey Arms café with a view to improving the hostel. Thereafter, YHA hoped to limit their costs and establish a degree of co-operation with the Education Committee by sharing of some facilities in a projected Adventure Centre at Storey Arms, but it proved impractical and was time for change. Mrs Griffin was moving out at the beginning of July 1970 and the Education Department taking over with their own warden at the beginning of September. It was proposed to appoint a temporary warden for two months. YHA's regional council agreed to the suggestion that 12 beds should be assigned to the Association, beds and bedding lent by Cilibion hostel in Gower. The kitchen was now fully equipped, but in September Cardiff was proving reluctant to allocate the bed space and a members' kitchen to YHA.

Dave Matthews casts further light on the final couple of years at Storey Arms:

It must have been around 1970 that the Water Authority approached us to say that they were going to sell Storey Arms, and would we be interested in buying it, to which we said 'yes', though it would have needed us to organise a rather large dance to get anywhere near an asking price! They went on to say that they were obliged to offer the property to other City departments before being able to enter any discussions with us. The Education Department expressed a serious interest in establishing an Outdoor Activity Centre there. The Water Authority were obliged to follow through with this, though they did request that the Education Department enter discussions with ourselves to see if there was a way that we could be jointly involved. These discussions did take place.

Conveniently the property at Llwyn-y-Celyn came on the market at about the same time that problems were looming with Storey Arms. Eric Bartlett, warden of Ty'n-y-caeau hostel, became very involved in discussions with the owner about YHA purchasing it. In the event, joint usage of Storey Arms wasn't seen as practical, and we moved down the road towards Brecon, after gaining a grant from the Small Hostels Fund of £4,000 or thereabouts.

The YHA presence lasted here into 1971, though probably without any measure of self-governance at that late stage. It closed on 30th September 1971. The annual report at the end of that year advised:

The year saw the end of our hostel at Storey Arms after thirty years of service to members. The whole building was taken over by the Cardiff Corporation Education Committee and now functions as an adventure centre. However, we have been fortunate in acquiring a nearby property at Llwyn-y-Celyn. Plans have been prepared for developing this as a major hostel in the Beacons area but it is being temporarily adapted as a simple hostel by working parties and it is hoped to open it in 1972.

Since YHA's departure, the Adventure Centre at Storey Arms has been run by the same Cardiff authority, with additional buildings and 46 beds, though its future was under review about 2015. It has remained secure in the same hands, however, and its services to all educational authorities are still advertised in 2022.



This 1960s postcard is a rare early colour image of Storey Arms. The British Road Services tanker drivers were no doubt glad to make it up the hill (author's collection)

Llwyn-y-Celyn (Brecon Beacons) Youth Hostel 1972 to present

Llwyn-y-Celyn, Libanus, Brecon, Powys LD3 8NH

Historic County: Brecknockshire

YHA Region: South Wales, Wales

GR: SN 973224

YHA's new prospect was an 18th-century long Welsh farmhouse, empty for at least 12 years before YHA use, set in 15 acres of ancient woodland. YHA purchased the property freehold for £4,000 on 28th May 1971 and it was vested in the YHA Trust.

All the preparations were carried out over a number of years by volunteer working parties under the distinguished and enthusiastic guidance of Newport YHA Local Group leader Chris Barber. Chris had already set the scene with an impressive volunteer-party conversion to a youth hostel of a similar empty farmhouse at Nantllanerch, on the other side of Penylan, sadly short-lived as YHA lost the tenancy there.

Working parties started to restore the building in April 1971, even before purchase was formalised; the cottage at the left-hand side was restored for immediate use and opened as a basic 20-bed facility in July 1972. The women's provision may have been overlooked here: one source gave the original hostel 34 beds, 20 for men and 14 for women.



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1 & 2: volunteers attend to the frontage stonework and distempering; 3: ...and to the roof. It is thought that the small No. 1 dormitory alluded to below was immediately beneath the figure standing precariously on the rooftop, and is now Room 3; 4: the interior of the barn, at this stage open to the rafters. The first large dormitory was positioned here; the next project was to create a loft space above the beams for the second large dormitory; 5: Chris Barber and friends stand at the original farmhouse entrance – under the window to the right is new plumbing. The entrance and window positions were later swapped (from the collage of photographs and information relating to Llwyn-y-Celyn's rescue, displayed in the hostel's lounge)

In April 1973 South Wales Region requested the following report on how the partial hostel had performed in its first few months in 1972:

Presently Simple Grade – Recommended Simple. Approximately 1,200 bednights July, August, September 1972.

Llwyn-y-Celyn is a simple self-cookers' hostel with potential. That potential has still to be realised because it has only been in YHA possession for a year. Nevertheless, it is ideally situated to become a mountain hostel of the very

best sort. One finds an old hill farmhouse with large rooms and attached barn, all in the process of being converted by voluntary labour under the guidance of a dedicated member, Chris Barber, and the necessary assistance.

Things are very much at the planning stage and it would be incorrect to condemn the hostel because certain facilities are not available. Still, I was surprised to find the necessary portable equipment neglected. Broken bed springs, old worn blankets, undersized flock mattresses; all these things are easily replaced.

No.1 dormitory holds 4 single beds. This is overcrowded. It has a low sloping roof and the distance between beds is but 2 or 3 inches. No.2 dorm has 8 beds; curtains and decorations are fair. No.3 dormitory holds 8 beds and is similar to No.2. This is the total dorm space and makes for a count of 20 beds: the handbook says 23.

The Members' Kitchen is large but lacks hot water. Calor gas is available (there is access down from the road for supplies) and an instant hot water heater is needed. There are 2 sinks, 2 draining boards, sufficient kitchen equipment but a shortage of crockery and knives, forks and spoons. The tea towels and hand towels are available but needed changing when I was there.

The lavatories are Elsan, one for each sex. The women's loo is in their wash, a bright clean room with 2 hand basins but no hot water. The men are not so lucky with an outside loo and although the wash is inside, it has plastic bowls and no water tap. The men's wash also needs a few hooks and shelves. The wooden floors are large boarded. With a good sanding off and hard varnishing, their appearance would be improved.

This is slightly worse than a Simple hostel being converted into a reasonably Simple hostel with potential to become Standard and perhaps eventually Superior hostel. That day is a long way and a lot of labour and expense off. Meanwhile the Region should provide this year the furniture to make it a little less uncomfortable and members will have to wait for further improvements in future years.

The No.1 low-roofed dormitory alluded to above was presumably the current Sycamore bedroom, No.3, upstairs and immediately to the right of the farmhouse.



JD Thomas, a dedicated hosteller and YHA diarist for many years, lived locally. He gave his support to the Llwyn-y-Celyn project and photographed the pipe-laying building site that was the long barn in May 1973. The existing simple hostel, the white cottage on the left in the first photograph, was established in July 1972 as a very basic facility. All the dark entrance doors into the long barn except that furthest right have since been reduced to windows or walled up, and there is one new upper window (YHA Archive)

The 70-foot-long cowshed barn, planned for 50 beds, was a much longer-term project, requiring vast volunteering resources. Work started here in 1972. It would first contain, on the ground floor, an 18-bed dormitory, mens' washroom, members' kitchen and a dining room. The huge cowshed attic would be next for conversion. Overall costs amounted to £12,000. A South Wales Region form outlining the details and terms of employment mentioned the initial necessity to house the warden in a caravan. A further brusque comment for proposed school party provision noted the following 'defects': *Elsan toilets. No meals provided.*

The layout and number of dormitories continued to vary in the hostel's first few years, as the basic farmhouse hostel gradually expanded into the barn. At one early stage, there were five dormitories, providing 8, 4, 19, 4 and 11 beds, but the first two of these rooms, presumably within the farmhouse, would soon be needed for wardens' quarters, and another small room was soon lost to staff. In 1983 the hostel was still in the Simple category, and as late as 1986 the hostel had just two large dormitories, for 30 men and 20 women; there were no showers.

The Winter 1973-74 issue of *Hostelling News Magazine* carried this description of progress, plans and an appeal for more volunteers, by overseer Chris Barber (YHA Archive):

Sign on for work at Llwyn-y-Celyn, says Chris Barber

Llwyn-y-Celyn is an old Welsh farmhouse in the Brecon Beacons National Park which was purchased recently as a replacement for Storey Arms Hostel. Work started on restoration in April 1971 and the first part of the hostel was opened to members in July 1972. The entire work programme has been carried out by voluntary labour, at week-ends only, and those who have been involved may justly feel pleased with their achievements.

A thousand overnights were recorded in the first four months after the hostel opened. Stories are spreading of the warm welcome – the fireplace is an outstanding feature – and unique atmosphere that the warden, Reg Murray, has created. He is a keen naturalist and a talented artist. Members also find him an interesting and humorous raconteur.

It is now our aim to extend the accommodation and improve the facilities. Work has already started on the restoration of the adjoining 70ft long cowshed. This will eventually contain a 20-bed men's dormitory, a 10-bed men's dormitory, a new members' kitchen, a dining room, a warden's kitchen and bathroom, a men's washroom and a cycle shed.

The first stage of this work has already been completed. A 10-bed dormitory has been set up to provide accommodation for working parties so that they can be kept separate from the hostel building. Stage 2: complete drainage and septic tank to provide flush toilets. Stage 3: concrete floor of barn and build new members' kitchen. Stage 4: build warden's kitchen and bathroom. Stage 5: build dining room. Stage 6: build 20-bed men's dormitory. It is our intention to complete this work within two years. Anyone who is interested in helping, please write to Mr C Barber.

Reg Murray was appointed as the first warden in 1972 and steered the hostel through its first phase of resuscitation. By the time of his retirement in 1982 the hostel was usually achieving annual overnights of over 3,000, more than double the usual Storey Arms total.

Extensive reflooring and replastering and the introduction of a water supply were required. The provision of electricity was approved in 1973 and the huge attic dorm was completed in 1975.

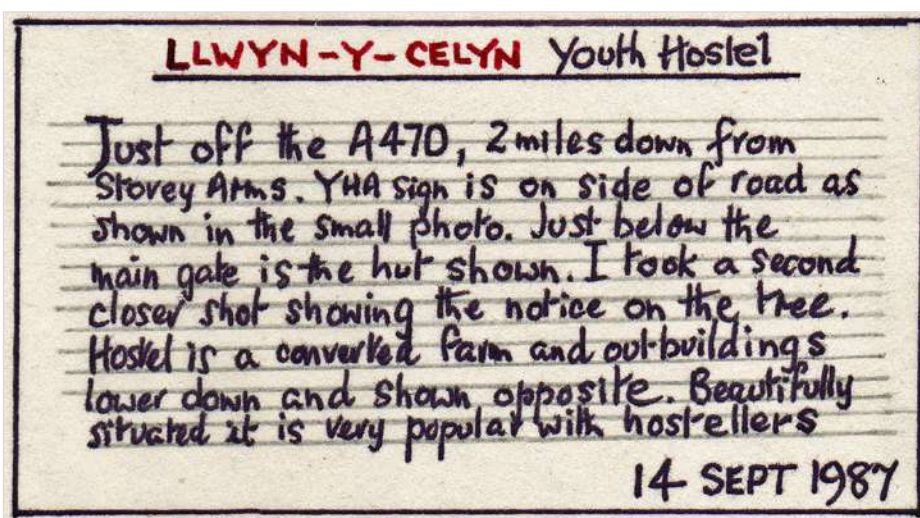
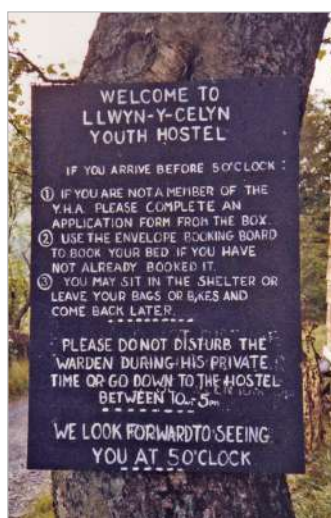
The voluntary work under Chris Barber continued in 1977 with the construction of a rear passageway to give direct connection between the barn dormitory and the farmhouse.

Another regional Standards report of July 1978 painted a different picture from the 1973 version. It described a remarkable transformation since acquisition: oil lamps replaced by electricity, chemical toilets by flush units, the small members' kitchen now became a common room and a large kitchen with spacious common room was provided – all by voluntary workers, mainly with no previous building experience. The new upstairs dormitory was about to come into use, though delayed by the roof being lifted during a winter gale.



Left: hostel stamp of 1977 (YHA Archive)

Charlie Carter succeeded Reg Murray as warden in January 1983 and stayed until 1991. Under his care, and with more than a decade of significant improvements, the hostel hit then-record figures of almost 7,000 overnights in 1989.



JD Thomas visited again in 1987 and recorded these scenes along with his usual useful caption. The first image shows the gated entrance from the A470, and an unusual YHA sign; the second and third were taken at the car park. Note the wet-weather shelter. The restrictive notice is a reminder of times when wardens often worked solo (YHA Archive)

When Charlie Carter left in 1991, Kevin Launders was appointed acting warden for the rest of that year, taking the full post from 1992 to 1994.

YHA News of April 1992 carried this good news:

Bulging walls and slipping roofs at Llwyn-y-Celyn have meant a major rebuild of the main front wall and reroofing this winter and spring. Apologies to anyone who hoped to have an early visit, but we still think we can manage an Easter finish.

We are very pleased to let everyone know that Kevin Launders, who took over from Charlie Carter in the middle of the summer last year, has now been appointed warden of Llwyn-y-Celyn. He made many friends with hostellers last year and his interest in countryside matters and his artistic touch will, we are sure, be appreciated by many this coming year. He already has a nature trail in place and several other interesting ideas for both the hostel and the grounds. Make the effort to go and see the 'new' Llwyn-y-Celyn; you'll find a warm welcome from Kevin.

The effects of these considerable improvements in 1992 may be seen in the before-and-after photographs below. One significant change not highlighted in contemporary accounts is that the hostel's main entrance door was moved to a position further to the right, by enlarging the adjacent window, so as to create more direct and convenient access to the hostel reception. The original front door, that opened directly into the lounge, was converted to a window, no doubt making that room cosier.



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The crooked straight: the 1992 work at Llwyn-y-Celyn remedied severe wall bulges and a defective roof. 1&2: the original structures, as photographed in the 1970s – looking south and north respectively (YHA Archive); 3&4: by contrast, the same buildings about 20 years later. Note the swapped positions of the entrance door and adjacent window in the farmhouse, the infilling of arch-topped barn entrances and the blanking off of another door. The later staff and guest accommodation known as the Annexe is nearest in image 4 (author's images, September 2015)

In the July 1992 edition of *YHA News*, Marjorie Ide, South Wales Area Panel Member, described the aftermath to the urgent rebuilding work at Llwyn-y-Celyn:

Getting it together at Llwyn-y-Celyn

It came the weekend before Easter – as many hands as possible to be at Llwyn-y-Celyn to help ‘put it back together again, please’. As many members of the Area Panel as could make it (20) arrived at Llwyn-y-Celyn on Saturday morning to restore the hostel to its former welcoming self. It was the most beautiful sunny, warm and dry day, which was just as well in view of the task ahead. The list of jobs looked deceptively short and simple, Kevin (the warden) and Dan (his assistant) already having made a good start after the builder had finished the bulk of his work. What remained was work of an essentially housekeeping nature – beds to be made, washing up to be done, floors to be cleaned – that sort of thing! But what not everyone had appreciated was that the beds had literally to be ‘made up’ from their separate frames and base springs etc after being brought back from Chepstow hostel where the contents of Llwyn-y-Celyn were stored during the rebuilding. Not to mention all the mattresses, duvets and pillows to be covered and blankets to be folded.

But, first of all, everything had to be carried in from the removal van and this is where the fine weather proved such a blessing. The path from the van to the front door was long and unmade and strewn, in parts, with builder’s debris. But at least it wasn’t wet and muddy. Once through the front door, some beds had to be carried up the stairs and this was made more exciting by the fact that new carpet had been laid and everyone had to take their shoes off at

the top of the stairs before proceeding any further. Anyone who knows Llwyn-y-Celyn will appreciate that this was not easy whilst balancing a bed frame in the confined space at the top of the stairs, not to mention the low beams to be negotiated on the way up – then the boxes of crockery, cutlery and equipment started coming off the van – this was the ‘washing up’. A veritable mountain of it, enough to equip six hostels, never mind Llwyn-y-Celyn!

It took most of the morning and half the afternoon to complete and resulted in several pairs of white and wrinkly hands. Elsewhere the housework progressed steadily on pounds of plaster and cement dust hoovered and swept up, the members’ kitchen washed down and cleansed of dust and paint, windows washed and polished, chairs and tables washed down, the fridge rendered hygienic, paint spots cleaned off the toilets, showers and washbasins, and so on. At regular and welcome intervals, the workers were fortified by refreshment prepared by Irene and Tony Burleton. They fulfil this role at most, if not all, of our working weekends, and you’d be amazed at the gastronomic miracles Irene can work on a standard two-ringed hostel kitchen gas cooker. However, this time she had the run of the warden’s kitchen and made the most of the facilities, which was just as well as we were all starving by lunch time and readily demolished all the soup, rolls, hot cross buns, cakes and pots of tea that she could muster. Not to mention elevenses, and afternoon tea, a huge supper when the day’s work was done, and a fine breakfast and lunch on Sunday for those that stayed over to carry on next day.

Kevin managed to find plenty to be done on Sunday. When we thought we’d finished inside, he started us on the outside, chasing sheep out of the grounds, mending fences, and generally clearing up debris and litter – even one solitary piece of paper which had wrapped itself round the topmost branches of a tree in a winter gale was eventually removed by determined (and younger) members of the team! So, by mid-afternoon on Sunday, it was quite a relief when he finally decided that we couldn’t usefully do any more.

There was great satisfaction in knowing that Llwyn-y-Celyn would be fully operational in time for Easter – it just remained for the hostellers to return, and then it really would be ‘back together again’. We hope that Llwyn-y-Celyn will enjoy many more years of welcoming hostellers within its (now safely restored) walls.

In 1993 Swindon Local Group designed and built a bike shed and a gravel path was laid around the hostel.

Suzanne Hall was appointed as the next manager, from 1995 to 1998. Full central heating was introduced in 1995. In 1996 grants from the National Lottery Charity Fund and Wales Tourist Board were secured for the useful conversion of the separate small barn at the north end of the complex, previously empty, to hostel use. *YHA News* of Summer 1997 reported on progress with the project:

A barn conversion is currently taking place at Llwyn-y-Celyn youth hostel. It will include two small seminar rooms and an improved day shelter for all visitors, to be completed by the end of July 1997. New murals have been painted on the hostel walls by the assistant, Helen Anthill. Those who have stayed at Llwyn-y-Celyn before may have experienced some water shortages. However, a borehole has been sunk and should eliminate any water shortages.

In 1998 the driveway from the main road to the hostel was surfaced in tarmac to make the final approach safer. An additional shower for the downstairs dormitory at Llwyn-y-Celyn would be appreciated by visitors.

Gaynor Roberts followed Suzanne as manager in 1999 and remained in post until about 2005; she had to contend with the hardships of the Foot and Mouth epidemic in 2001, when much of the countryside and its associated businesses was closed or restricted. Like many rural hostels, Llwyn-y-Celyn hostel. The hostel recovered quickly, however, in 2002.

The quest to provide more flexibility at the hostel was to receive various boosts into the new century; in 1998, for instance, the YHA Handbook described the available dormitories as one 7-bedded room, one with 16 beds and one with 19, much as 20 years before. The following year’s publication included three smaller rooms, though the 19-bed dormitory (all single beds) remained. By 2003 much subdivision in the modern manner had taken place and the hostel could now offer five 2-bedded rooms, three with 4 beds, one with 5, one with 6 and one with 8: 41 beds in total.

Andrew Clarkson was briefly the next manager at Llwyn-y-Celyn. He came from North Wales to South, from Bryn Gwynant in Snowdonia, and held the post in the Beacons in 2005 and perhaps 2006. During his time kitchen facilities were revamped at the hostel. He then left YHA for a while before taking on the new YHA Enterprise hostel at Alnwick in Northumberland in 2011. Francis Lawson was the new manager in 2007, a much respected and well-travelled manager from hostels at Pendennis Castle and Crowcombe Heathfield before retirement beckoned. In 2012, under his care, the Bolsover Woodland Enterprise Group repaired dry stone walling, rebuilt a bridge, opened a nature trail, put up bench seats, laid a hazel hedge to open up the view and built a story telling circle. Richard Morgan, from YHA Liverpool, replaced Francis in January 2014.



Two hostel stamps from recent years

Some of the most significant changes to the fortunes and expansion of Llwyn-y-Celyn hostel came with the opening of YHA Danywenallt in 2004 and the closure of the large Ty'n-y-Caeau hostel east of Brecon in 2014. It had often been observed that Ty'n-y-Caeau was badly positioned for exploring the highest part of the Brecon Beacons on foot; from 2014 Llwyn-y-Celyn and Danywenallt could between them provide well-located hostels to the west and east of Pen-y-Fan, and would benefit from further investment. Their names were changed to include 'YHA Brecon Beacons' and online bookings increased significantly as a consequence.

Over the past few years, the annexe has been redesigned to allow greater use by guests. This has coincided with plans to improve the grounds behind the hostel for outdoor accommodation. Accordingly, in 2016, two camping pods were placed in a central position in the grounds. The next year, they were moved to an attractive location in a clearing in the trees at the western end, behind the farmhouse. From 2019, four of the latest landpods were provided, with extra facilities to serve the growing needs of those staying outdoors by replacing the staff common room at the back of the annexe first floor with a second self-catering kitchen, with new shower and toilet facilities for campers next door. An outdoor wash-up station has also been provided in the space between the long barn and the annexe.



1 2

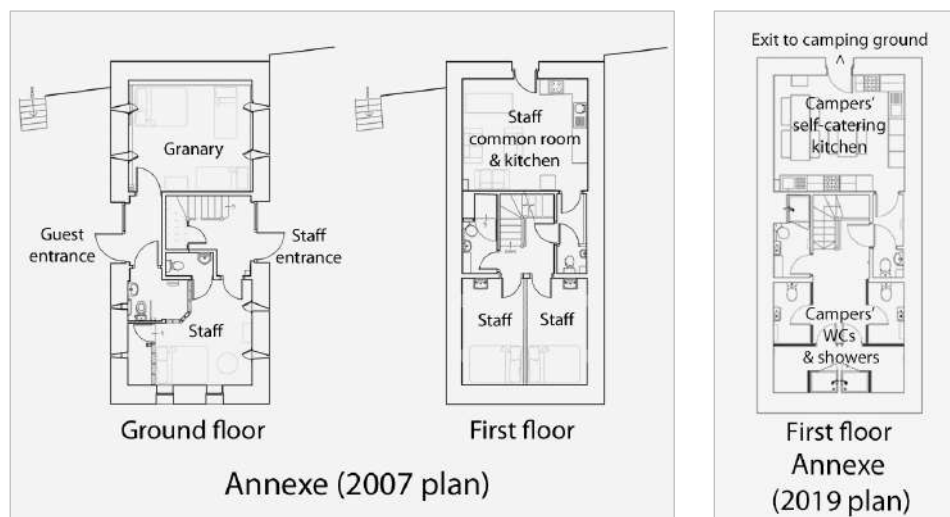
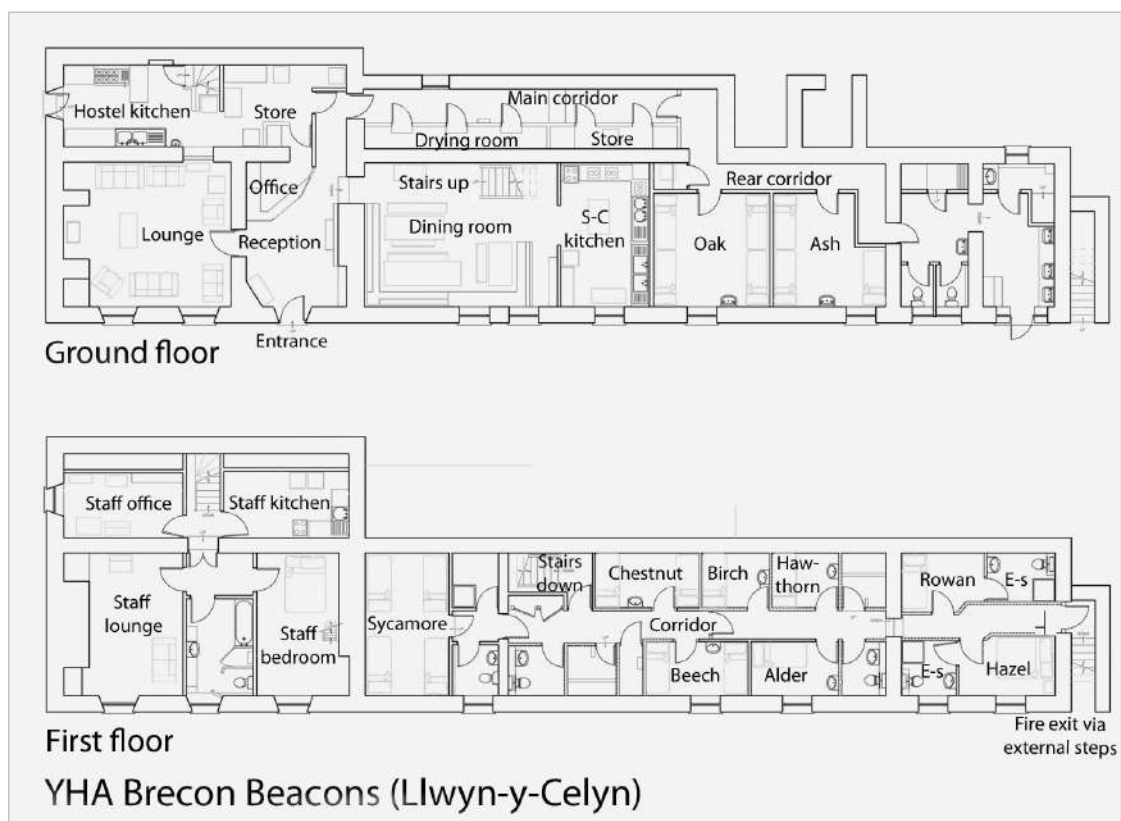


Two areas of the hostel less rarely photographed were captured here by the author on a raw September day in 2015.
1: the rear of the long barn and farmhouse. The back corridor that volunteers brought into use in 1977 is at the centre of the image. The bike shed is the tin-roofed hut. The higher ground to the right of this is where camping has been developed;
2: annexe side entrance that leads to the guest bedroom 'Hayloft' on the ground floor and to the former staff quarters above

In 2022 bedrooms were allocated as follows:

Main building: *Oak* (Room 1) 6-bedded (originally 8) traditional male dorm, used again as a dormitory from May 2022; *Ash* (Room 2) 6-bedded traditional female dorm, dormitory again from May 2022; *Sycamore* (Room 3) 4 single beds; *Chestnut* (Room 4) 2/3 beds; *Beech* (Room 5) 4 beds; *Birch* (Room 6) 2 beds; *Alder* (Room 7) 2 beds; *Hawthorn* (Room 8) 2 beds; *Hazel* (Room 9) double bed en suite; *Rowan* (Room 10) 2 beds en suite.

Annexe: *Granary* (Room 11) double and two single beds (4); *Hayloft* (Room 12) double and two bunk beds (6).



YHA produced digital floorplans of the hostel in 2007. They have been redrawn here by the author. From 2007 to the present there have been few changes to the internal layout of the long Welsh farmhouse main building, principally that the door from the lounge into the hostel kitchen is now closed off and the layout of the ground floor washroom facilities at the right-hand end of the long barn have been modified. The staff lounge upstairs in the farmhouse is now a second staff bedroom.

There have been rather more changes to the Annexe that was brought into use in 1997. The 2007 plan shows a ground floor staff bedroom. This is now guest bedroom 12, 'Haystack', accessed from the previous staff entrance, though it is not clear when the change was made. In 2019 an important new facility replaced all the staff facilities on the first floor, to provide a new set of WCs and showers at the front and a second self-catering kitchen at the back. They are principally to serve the growing needs and comforts of those staying in the pods and tents to the rear. As the camping area is at first floor height, a level walkway leads directly to it from this kitchen

In 2020 the hostel could be little used, but in 2021 was busier, though still exceptionally challenging with constantly changing advice and huge operational difficulties, the hostel bookable only by the room or pod, along with the new demands of the 'Staycations' craze. Manager Richard Morgan resigned after the height of the Covid restrictions, in summer 2021. Mel Cook then became acting manager.

Jenny Cusick was appointed new manager at YHA Brecon Beacons from 1st March 2022.



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1: sturdy and homely – YHA Brecon Beacons. Note the annexe at the right hand extreme;
 2: the hostel lounge; 3: one of the four landpods, to a new design, and the pair of camping pods in a shady clearing;
 4-6: catering facilities – 4: the dining room and stairs to bedrooms. Beyond, a Dutch guest uses the self-catering kitchen;
 5: the new self-catering kitchen in the annexe. It exits directly onto the camping ground; 6: campers' wash-up facilities
 (author's photographs, July 2022)

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
1932-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
§: Llwyn-On Hostel; ¶: Storey Arms Hostel; Δ: Llwyn-y-Celyn (Brecon Beacons) Hostel									
*: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire									
...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	open§	open§	246§	141§	144§	197§	168§	39§	open¶
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
open¶	open¶	probable¶	probable¶	874¶	727¶	1156¶	1131¶	1407¶	1302¶
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
1365¶	1141¶	1150¶	884¶	765¶	1041¶	825¶	1297¶	1249¶	1083¶
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
844¶	1243¶	1674¶	1174¶	1154¶	1070¶	1236¶	875¶	859¶	664¶
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
790¶	...	971Δ	2300Δ	2746Δ	3083Δ	3255Δ	3565Δ	3467Δ	3363Δ
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
3235Δ	2841Δ	2567Δ	2569Δ	3268Δ	4189Δ	4216Δ	5123Δ	5660Δ	6913Δ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
6180Δ	5754Δ	5631*Δ	6027Δ	5790Δ	5130Δ	5663Δ	5844Δ	5721Δ	5447Δ
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
5100Δ	2126Δ	5025Δ	5584Δ	5146Δ	4137Δ	6049Δ	5925Δ	5452Δ	5896Δ
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
5468Δ	5317Δ	5844Δ	6013Δ	7951Δ	9016Δ	10982+Δ	11564+Δ	11733+Δ	12498+Δ
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2028
openΔ	openΔ	openΔ



Hostel manager Jenny Cusick welcomes guests in July 2022