

## Ilam Hall Youth Hostel 1932 for a solitary year; 1935 to present

Ilam Hall, Ilam, Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE6 2AZ

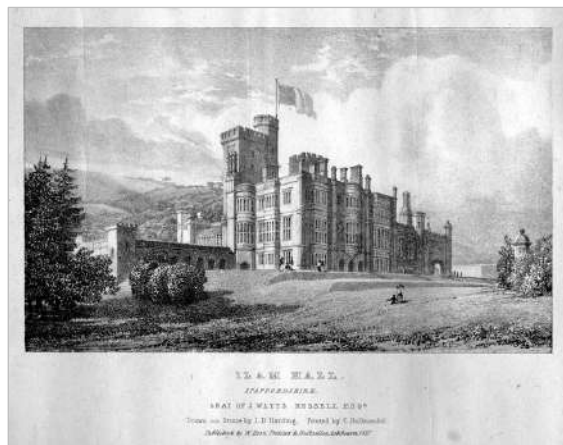
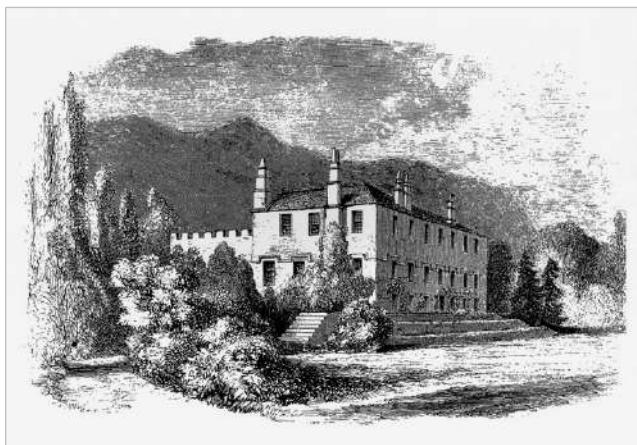
Historic County: Staffordshire

YHA Regions: North Midlands; Peak;  
Central

GR: SK 131506



Ilam Hall is the retained portion of an early-19th-century gothic stately home, Grade II\* listed, but the origins of a mansion in this location can be traced back to land, and possibly a mediaeval hall, connected with a Benedictine Abbey. Following the dissolution of the monasteries, land or property at Ilam was sold in 1547 to the Port family, who built the Tudor Hall in the mid 16th-century and maintained it for 250 years before it passed by a succession of moves to the family of a wealthy industrialist. This was on the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the district of Dovedale and Ilam was a regular feature of gentrified tours of England. The landscape was modified to parkland about this time, and Ilam Hall was rebuilt for the owner Jesse Watts Russell in the fashionable Gothic revival style between 1821 and 1826 to the design of John Trubshawe (or John Shaw), with high tower, revival-style windows and ornamental chimneys. The present National Trust tea-rooms are located in the stables, remnants of the Tudor mansion.



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*Ilam Hall in previous forms.*

*1: the Tudor mansion is shown as it stood for 250 years or so from the mid-16th century; 2&3: the Gothic revival-style reconstruction of Ilam Hall, dating from the 1820s and partly demolished in the 1930s (YHA Archive)*

Large country mansions such as Ilam Hall were under severe financial strain in the early twentieth century; many of them were unmanageable in the different social and economic circumstances of post-World War I Britain, and a considerable number were deliberately ruined, demolished or passed to humbler commerce. In 1910 Ilam Hall was sold, and again in 1927, when entrepreneur Edward Backhouse bought it for a doomed luxury hotel, golf course and restaurant scheme; within a few years he was bankrupt.

It seems that Backhouse was soon considering the emerging YHA as a new source of income. The opening of a youth hostel facility here had been suggested very early in YHA history: according to the British Youth Hostels Association minutes of 2nd July 1930, the required number of rooms could be rented from Mr Backhouse, though that hardly constituted a youth hostel in the established 1930s sense.

Ilam Hall certainly opened as a regular youth hostel for a solitary brief spell in 1932. It was advertised in the 1932 national handbook, with Mr Backhouse himself as warden; it was intended to operate all year, with meals provided only in the summer. The plan had been to open on the 1st February, but its first recorded date, according to Lindsey Porter, was 9th April 1932. The youth hostel was officially opened on that day by Sir Percy Jackson, a member of the West Riding Education Committee. He was described as the President of YHA, though what was possibly meant was president of one of the regions. He was also one of the trustees of the Carnegie Trust who had given YHA £10,000 towards developing the Head Office and four 'model' hostels. Of this sum, £2,000 was to be allocated to the Scottish Association. Money for YHA's four hostels was on the basis that the Association matched it pound for pound. One of the four hostels was to be in the Peak District, though Ilam Hall in this iteration was clearly not the model hostel planned.

The 1932 Ilam hostel only had 20 beds on the open day, although another 12 were to be added a week later. It was almost certainly an accommodation hostel. The Women's Institutes in the area had provided 'rugs and other comforts' for the opening.

On his Ilam Hall House and Heritage website, David Poole tells how, in that year, YHA's North Midlands Region rented the right wing of Ilam Hall:

The plan was for four dormitory bedrooms accommodating ten men and ten women. In addition there was a large common room, kitchen, cooking apparatus and shower baths for the residents. The intention was to attract hikers, ramblers and cyclists who regularly visited the beautiful countryside around Ilam and Dovedale.

This arrangement did not last and the hostel soon closed. It was not included in the October revised edition of the 1932 YHA handbook. A small new hostel at Parwich, eight miles distant, opened in mid-October 1932; a postcard sent from there the following year had a pencil message reading: *the opening of Parwich enabled the closure of Ilam.*

YHA's withdrawal from Ilam Hall was not for long, however. In a piece produced in 1999, Lindsey Porter wrote:

In the 1930s Robert McDougall, a Manchester industrialist, was buying land in Dovedale and giving it to the National Trust. He purchased Ilam Hall and the part of Dovedale that was offered with it. However the Trust did not want the elegant but overlarge building. In June 1934, he offered it to Stoke-on-Trent Corporation together with 20 acres of land, including the immediate grounds and woodlands. The suggestion had been made that the house and grounds be converted for a tuberculosis colony. Mr McDougall made a condition that such a use should not impede the use of the lower entrance to Dovedale.

In the event, the Corporation declined the offer on the grounds of the cost of conversion and subsequent maintenance. The building must have become something of a liability: the Ashbourne Telegraph of 27th September 1935 described how the Corporation demanded the demolition of the whole building.

Bernard Edwards, from 1946 the first and only paid Regional Secretary of North Midlands Region stated that as conversion work started at Hartington Hall with working parties from Stoke-on-Trent in mid-1934, news came that YHA was to open Ilam Hall. [These statements are perhaps chronologically out of step]. Mr McDougall, with the assistance of Mr L Ramsbottom, Secretary of the Derbyshire Community Council and unpaid North Midlands Regional Secretary, obtained a month's grace in which to make the necessary arrangements. This was then extended by an extra month. However YHA did not need the formal portion of the Hall with its Tudor-Gothic style interiors and it was agreed with Mr McDougall that this part should be demolished.

During the demolition work, Mr John Cadbury, YHA's President, visited Ilam with his wife one Sunday. The latter said, upon entering the Inner Hall, now the common room, 'what a lovely room'. Bernard Edwards

responded by saying that it was due to be demolished the following day. Mr Cadbury donated a cheque of £500 there and then to ensure its preservation and to please his wife and many YHA members ever since.

The National Trust did have a role to play, however. At the time, YHA's North Midlands Region did not have a trust body of its own to hold the deeds of its properties. It was therefore agreed that the freehold be vested in the National Trust on condition that the building be dedicated to the Youth of the World as a youth hostel. Similarly, Ravenstor Youth Hostel at Miller's Dale was gifted to the National Trust because of the lack of a regional YHA Trust.

YHA applied to the local electricity company for a supply but was refused on the grounds that the proposal was uneconomic. Today, it is hard to imagine the building lit only by lamps and candles.



*This facsimile print shows the Gothic pile in a state of deconstruction, probably in 1934. The demolished stonework lay in saleable heaps, and more was to be knocked down before the demolition was complete. No doubt the immediate availability of building materials made the partial reconstruction easier for the YHA and the National Trust (YHA Archive)*

Throughout the summer of 1934, a great deal of correspondence (now fortunately in the YHA Archive) passed between Robert McDougall, the Manchester flour magnate and purchaser of Ilam Hall, Lawrence Ramsbottom, Secretary of YHA North Midlands Region, and the National Trust. The letters reveal the complex negotiations necessary to turn the offer of a considerable philanthropic gift into a balanced agreement of ownership and tenancy between the National Trust and YHA. Between 1931 and 1934 YHA had sparked into life with over a hundred hostels, but most were accommodation properties not owned by them. There were exceptions, such as the hostels of the pioneer Merseyside Region, that were owned or loaned by that semi-autonomous body from the outset, but when it came to other large prospects and how to handle their significant necessary grants and loans, YHA was still finding its feet.

Bodies such as the Carnegie Trust were uneasy about granting funds unless properties were properly regulated in Trust. Consequently, the YHA Trust was set up in 1934 to allow for such major transactions of ownership, and to oil the wheels of complex acquisitions such as Ilam Hall (Ilam was actually the twentieth entry in the YHA Trust Property Book, but not until 17th July 1936).

The 1934 letters are much too extensive, and in some cases too ambiguous, for inclusion here in full, but might be summarised as:

- 1) 19th July. Mr Ramsbottom, YHA, wrote to Mr Looms, salvage contractor, asking for an offer for the Hall as it stands, excepting an L-shaped wing of very ordinary building on the right as approached and also the archway in front of the Italian garden on the left. The Hall as it stands is much too extensive for any voluntary service for which we can find a use, and the donor is willing to allow us to dismantle and remove the Hall, or such portions of it as we deem fit, and use the proceeds for adapting a small remaining portion for Social

Service work. The Hall contains great quantities of lead, magnificent fireplaces to various design, including a famous carved oak fire-surround, and many other exquisite fittings. We should require the site clearing within twelve months of contract except such portions as are retained by agreement. We also require to retain all baths, wash-bowls, and lavatories and fittings.

2) 30th July. Mr McDougall (donor) wrote to Ramsbottom about an option with Mr Twigg (agent) due to expire a few days later

I need to know from the YHA by August 2nd by first post, whether they see their way to accept the offer I have given them of the Ilam Hall buildings and about five to six acres of the grounds, with liberty to part-demolish and use any monies they may receive for demolition rights in adapting and improving the remaining buildings for use as a hostel. If the YHA plans are not in a sufficiently forward state to justify acceptance, the desire on my part to give the opportunity to establish hostel remains intact. I am disposed to go ahead with acquiring the Hall and grounds from Mr Twigg.

Closer study has, however, shown me, as I believe, a better scheme than the one we discussed on the spot. Particularly, I want to preserve the old Manor House now used a shippon etc before it deteriorates further.

If you decide by Thursday morning to accept, I hope the YHA will not pin me down too closely to the outline we discussed on the top of Ilam Tower. That was hurried by a time-limit for purchasing from Mr Twigg, and I think that a scheme more in the public interest can be arrived at when we can deal with things not under the pressure of such a time-limit and discuss it together at leisure.

There was an understandable mix of hesitancy, caution and urgency with both parties and a remarkable patience and philanthropy on the part of Mr McDougall.

3) 1st August. Ramsbottom had replied to McDougall, who wrote back that he intended to make a deposit with Twigg in Buxton the next day. McDougall had concluded that instead of giving YHA five or six acres or thereabouts of the grounds, he much preferred to give the whole of the twenty-one acres to the National Trust with the condition attached that the Trust shall grant to the Youth Hostels Association a lease for, say, sixty years at a nominal rent, say, £1 per annum. The YHA would have the right to demolish *the pompous part* of the Hall, but not the old Manor House of the Ports (McDougall was keen on this), and to use the profits on demolition in repairing, adapting and renovating such portion of the Hall as is left standing for use as a hostel by the Youth Hostels Association.

4) 14th August. Ramsbottom responded to McDougall:

I have today seen Mr Looms and Mr Twigg. The former now offers £800 for the property that is to be demolished, as arranged by us on the site yesterday, and will leave a clear site within 18 months. Mr Twigg asks if he may have until Thursday to give us a firm offer but thought it would be in the neighbourhood of £750, both cash offers. As I go away on Saturday I should like, if at all possible, to reach a final decision on all these points before then so that a contract may be entered into.

5) 4th September. McDougall replied to Ramsbottom that he was aiming to acquire a further 30 acres of lands adjoining Ilam Hall, for inclusion in my offer to the National Trust. The offer of grounds to the YHA would be more compact and manageable and still includes the walled fruit garden. Negotiations to get Warrington's cows out of the Manor House are going on but slowly as he takes a long time to reply to letters. We are doing our best, however.

6) 11th September. The National Trust wrote to McDougall thanking him for his very generous gift and aiming to complete the agreement by 29th of that month. McDougall annotated the letter for the benefit of YHA:

So the lease to the YHA will have to be fixed up after the property has been conveyed to the Trust. The YHA and I have to trust to their fairness and goodwill. I feel we may safely do so.

*The Times* of Wednesday 31st October 1934 predicted a bright future for Ilam Hall, and provided extra useful detail of the acquisition:

#### Gift To Nation – Ilam Hall to be Youth Hostel – A Manchester Donor

The following statement is issued by the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty: Not many months ago Mr McDougall of Manchester presented to the National Trust the Fishpond Plantation and land near Lode Mill in Dovedale. In 1933 he had already given Hurts Wood and Hall Dale lower down the Dove. Now he has added to those splendid gifts Ilam Hall, near the bottom of the Dale.

The new gift includes some 50 acres of land beside the Manifold river, just where it rises from its underground course before joining the Dove. The grounds have charms of many kinds, and are beautifully situated, with views to wooded hills on the south and to the bare heights of Bunster and Thorpe Cloud on the north.

The Manifold boils up in the grounds, to become a placid, shaded stream, where kingfishers and waterfowl are plentiful and trout and grayling are to be caught. The view up the river from St Bertram's Bridge, which was restored about 100 years ago, is particularly fine.

### Model Hostel

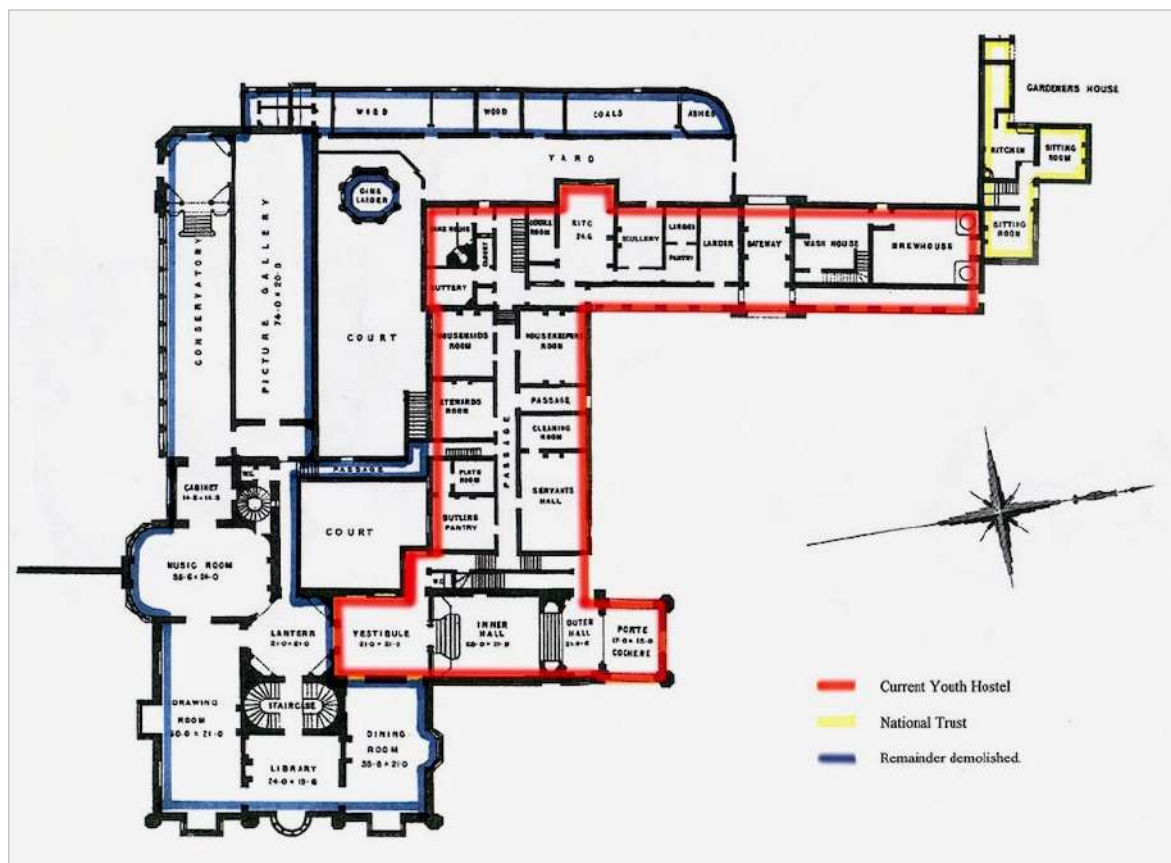
Arrangements were made by the donor for the greater part of the nineteenth-century hall to be pulled down. The part of the hall which will be left standing will be let to the Youth Hostels Association, who will also keep up the kitchen garden, and probably run a tea house for the benefit of the general public. The Association plans to make Ilam the principal model hostel of Central England. Aided by grants from various trust funds and a generous gift from Mr McDougall, they hope to provide the finest youth hostel yet established in England. The international value of this hostel will be stressed, and special plans are in hand for attracting large numbers of oversea visitors. Existing Derbyshire hostels have accommodated nearly 20,000 visitors this year, and Ilam Hall will help to complete a chain of large hostels covering all parts of the Peak District.

7) Further correspondence followed. Jack Catchpool, YHA's ubiquitous general secretary, remained cautious about developments. As late as 7th November 1934 he wrote to DM Matheson of the National Trust:

You ask me to give you the terms on which the YHA is prepared to accept the property at Ilam Hall as a Youth Hostel. I understand you need this information for your Committee on Thursday, and I will do what I can to put the matter as clearly as possible, though what I now say must only be taken as tentative proposals, which are subject to final decision when we have received all the estimates that we require from our Architect for the alteration of the buildings, to make them suitable for youth hostel purposes.

As I understand it, the proposal is as follows:

That Mr McDougall should give Ilam Hall and the surrounding land to the National Trust, but that it should be one of the conditions of that gift that the buildings and five acres of land should be leased to the YHA for sixty years at £1 a year, and that if at any time during this period of sixty years the National Trust wishes to regain possession of the buildings and the five acres of ground, it is entitled to do so provided it pays to the YHA a sum equal to that expended by the YHA over and above the sum of money obtained from the contract for demolition referred to in the next paragraph.



Jack Catchpool's shaded version of the demolition and retention plan referred to below (YHA Archive)



Mr McDougall has approved the demolition of the main part of the Hall which I have shaded blue on the accompanying plan. The part shaded red, which includes the old manor house, the kitchen block, the rooms over the entrance gate and the entrance staircase and porch would be retained. The contract price for demolition of the portion shaded blue is £775. Mr McDougall has offered a further gift of £225 to make this sum up to £1,000. Our Architect estimates, though as yet we have no firm offer, a further sum of between £1,500 and £2,000 will be required to modernise the building to adapt and equip the kitchen, to add baths and make the necessary sanitary arrangements, making a total expenditure of between £2,500 and £3,000 in all.

Since our conversation with Mr McDougall, the proposal that the Old Manor House should be used as a tea room has been introduced, and I understand that Mr McDougall has offered a further sum of £400 for its adaptation for the use of the public. I also understand Mr McDougall will wish the Youth Hostels Association to take charge of the tea room in conjunction with its responsibilities for the supervision of the hostel and this to me would seem to be the best arrangements, though at the moment I am not able to say whether this could be done or as to what rental we would be prepared to pay for the tea room. There are difficulties – though not insuperable about this from our point of view.

This letter is not as complete as I should wish it to be, but at this stage of the negotiations I don't quite see how I can say anything more satisfactory.

8) On 14th November Catchpool wrote to Ramsbottom, with misgivings about the lease:

I think there is a very great deal to be said for asking Mr McDougall to give Ilam Hall and five acres of ground direct to the YHA. It would enable you to carry out numerous little alterations and additions that you will desire from time to time without reference to the National Trust. The difficulty would, I expect, be that the National Trust would not accept the larger estate outside the five acres unless they had a possible source of income from the tea-house receipts. I strongly approve of the proposal that you should become owners of the estate, if you see your way to do it.

I think it is probable that the Carnegie Trustees would agree to let us have the money to spend on property which does not belong to us, if some such arrangement could be made as was made in the case of Heath Charnock, that the money should be repaid over a period of ten years.

9) Possibly because of Catchpool's thoughts, Ramsbottom wrote to McDougall on 15th November, 1934:

Your original plan, as I understand it, was that the National Trust should give the YHA a lease for at least 60 years. Later you told me that the National Trust could not, by their own restrictions, give a longer lease than 21 years. I saw no harm in this shorter period, but now the National Trust have taken up the matter with the YHA Trust, and difficulties seem to be arising in this way: we have provisional promises of grants of £500 each from the Carnegie Trust and the Cadburys towards the scheme. The Carnegie Trust never like putting money in any scheme that is not assured in perpetuity. They make this a rigid condition in Playing Fields, but are prepared to accept land that has a tenure of 99 years or similar.

Mr Catchpool is wondering now whether we are proceeding on the best lines by vesting the property in the National Trust with a 21 years' lease to the YHA and he raises the question as to whether it would not be better (if this now possible at all) to discuss with you and the National Trust the question of making over the buildings and the five acres to the YHA direct on such conditions as may be acceptable to all.

I do want to seek your kind advice on all these important issues. I have a perfectly open mind on the subject, but if a lease of only 21 years is likely to prejudice grant-aid from other sources then of course the problem assumes changed proportions.

(10) McDougall's reply is not recorded, but Ramsbottom wrote again to him on 19th November:

Very many thanks. In view of what you say I am advising Mr Catchpool not to pursue the matter of the suggestion that the land and buildings should be given outright to the Youth Hostels Association, but to make the best arrangements possible both with the National Trust and the Carnegie Trustees. I think we ought to be able to persuade the Carnegie Trustees that although this is a lease of only 21 years it is in effect a lease in perpetuity.

The position about grants to the youth hostel at Ilam is that the National Executive of the YHA have undertaken to provide the sum of £1,000 and it is proposed that this would be £500 from the Cadburys and £500 from the Carnegie Trust. YHA headquarters has now money of its own and can make grants only by means of recommendations to other bodies and individuals interested in helping Youth Hostels. I make this explanation so that you may understand clearly what money is at our disposal. We are trying to interest other groups and individuals and we are seeking to raise money among our own members so as to increase the present £2,000 which seems likely to be available. We now only await Mr Eaton's estimates before going full speed ahead with the work

on the hostel. I was delighted to read in the Derby Telegraph on Saturday that you had been able to complete the Ilam National Trust scheme by securing Church Lodge and the remaining land. It is very good indeed of you.

11) On 20th November, 1934 Ramsbottom wrote to Mr Matheson of the National Trust that all was now in order for the lease between YHA and the National Trust to be drawn up. The lease period would remain at 21 years. If circumstances arose at any time where the National Trust wished to take over the hostel buildings, it would reimburse YHA for capital outlay on buildings, less the sum of £775 already received by them for the sale to demolition contractors of the main building.

YHA would be responsible for the maintenance of its buildings in good condition and was proposing to spend at least £2,000 on reconstruction and adaptation for hostel purposes. The YHA would have for its exclusive use about five acres of land, including the building site, the kitchen garden and certain other lands shown on the plan drawn up by Mr McDougall, but not the Italian Garden.

McDougall's plan for YHA to operate a purpose-built tea room adjacent to the Italian Garden was rejected, for YHA had no wish to use the Manor House, but rather preferred to be self-contained:

We have suggested, therefore, that it will better suit the amenities of the district if no new building is erected but that the Manor House should be included in the National Trust public reservation and that this building be adapted as a tea room. For this we understand Mr McDougall has offered the National Trust the sum of £300.

Mr McDougall has also given to the YHA the sum of £225 (thus making up to £1,000 the sum received) on condition that the present main entrance hall is retained and incorporated in the hostel scheme. This latter condition has been accepted and has been incorporated in the hostel plans, copy of which I enclose herewith for your consideration and comment.

There is no real sanitation at Ilam Hall, and we propose to provide septic tanks at a suitable point in the ground of Ilam Hall (on National Trust land) to be chosen by the Architect, in consultation with Mr McDougall.

Water supply will need improvement both for the hostel and the tea rooms, and as water supply and sanitation (and possibly electricity) will concern both hostel and tea rooms we suggested to Mr McDougall that it would simplify matters and avoid dual control if the YHA could have first option on the control of (services for) the tea rooms. Meantime, we are negotiating with the Derby and Notts Power Company (whose present supply is about one mile away) to ascertain if a fringe order can be secured by them so as to supply electricity to Ilam. Alternatively a local domestic generating plant may be desirable.

I do not know what decision (if any) has been reached by the National Trust as to charge for admission to Ilam Hall grounds, and for the appointment of a caretaker, but we should like it to be clear that YHA members visiting the hostel for the night shall be admitted free; and it may be to mutual advantage if we can consult over any appointments. The cottage on the extreme end of hostel wing is reserved to the National Trust.

I think this letter explains all the points as I understand them, and you may count, of course, upon our warm-hearted co-operation in achieving the success desired and deserved by Mr McDougall in this work.

12) The letters conclude with a final correspondence from the National Trust on November 21st, acknowledging that the agreement could be drawn up.



*This plaque is on display at Ilam Hall youth hostel. It is thought to make the first reference to a British youth hostel serving as an International example (YHA Archive)*

*YHA Rucksack* magazine of March 1935 proudly heralded the opening of the new hostel:

Ilam Hall, Dovedale, has now been added to the nation's possessions, and the Hall is being converted into a hostel at an expenditure of about £4,000. It is hoped to have part of it ready for Whitsuntide, and thus with Hartington Hall (100 beds) at one end of Dovedale and Ilam Hall (100 beds) at the other, this glorious country is fully available to YHA members.

Just before the formal opening, the Scotsman newspaper of 24th April had reported:

#### Mansion as Youth Hostel

Ilam Hall, a stately Staffordshire mansion at the lower entrance to Dovedale, will be opened as a youth hostel on 25th May. The hall is being adapted to accommodate 100 people.



Ilam Hall, Britain's largest Youth Hostel, received a further formal opening some four months later on 22nd September 1935. This appears to have been a regional affair, in the presence of a large gathering representing the youth movement throughout the Midlands. This framed group photograph of the ceremony, displayed at YHA Ilam, includes Mr L Ramsbottom (Divisional Secretary for the North Midlands), Mr Robert McDougall of Manchester (the donor), Mr Cadbury (who performed the opening ceremony and gave a cheque of £500 to support the venture), Mr EH Bailey, of Matlock (President of the North Midlands Youth Hostels Association), Mr FA Holmes and the Bishop of Lichfield (framed photograph at YHA Ilam). Also present (possibly) are the wardens Mr and Mrs JC Potts, and (second from the right) Staffordshire YHA stalwart volunteer Laurie Landon (YHA Archive)

The Fourth Annual Report of YHA North Midlands Region, presented on October 1st 1935, projected a likely debt of about £500 on the Ilam scheme. It praised the magnificent voluntary service rendered by hundreds of members in decorating and equipping the hostels and in tending the gardens.

The Winter 1935 edition of *YHA Rucksack* magazine called the hostel the greatest achievement yet of the North Midlands Region. It was furnished with 150 beds and capable of expansion when required to over 200. The decorations had been carried out voluntarily by enthusiastic members who, under the guidance of Derby Art School students, used nearly half a ton of paint and distemper. Included were a large common-room, theatre, writing-room, shower baths, footbaths, etc. It was an ideal hostel for School Journey parties (a concept barely seen in print before this), of which many were booked already for 1936.

The first wardens were Mr and Mrs JC Potts. According to yearly handbooks, the capacity of the hostel rose from 50 men and 50 women in 1935 to 90 / 60 in 1936, and an astonishing 100 / 85 the following year.



The Potts were followed in 1936-38 by Mr and Mrs HV Holland. Early in their tenure, electricity was made available for light and cooking.



*An early postcard of the hostel. 1930s YHA publications often showed more than a hint of period art deco, as with this angular design. The huge common room, dining room, reading room and single iron-framed beds will be noted (author's collection)*

YHA's Sheffield Area Spring 1939 Bulletin described how male Czech refugees from Nazi oppression were housed at Ilam Hall youth hostel early in that year, a pattern that repeated across the YHA before the onset of war. Lindsey Porter tells how some refugees scratched their names into the lead flashing on the east section of the front wing roof, beyond the wall which is at roof level.

In the early war period Ilam Hall hostel was closed between 1940 and 1942, to accommodate a party of blind people evacuated from Derby. They stayed at Ilam Hall until 1943 and then returned to Derby.

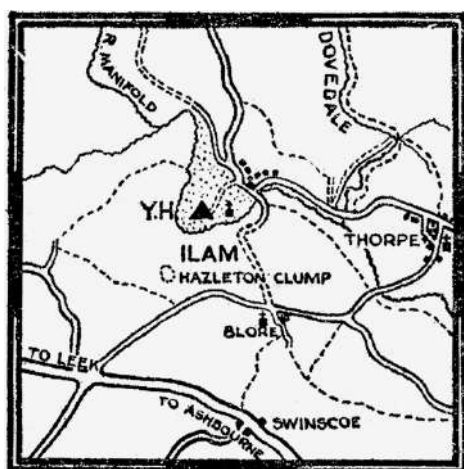
The hostel reopened at or shortly after Easter 1943, and operated thereafter through the war years. Mr and Mrs Russell were wardens from about 1939 to 1945, having come from Derwent Hall hostel. They stayed on as caretakers through the closure, and later went on to run local adopted hostels at Whitemeadows and Yoxall. Their son, Bryan Hawksworth, remembers the Coach House in wartime: it was used by local firm Nestlé to store vast quantities of tempting tinned evaporated milk. Rene Wild, a regional volunteer, remembered that in 1944 people regularly came up from London to escape the noise and the mess caused by the V-2 rockets.



*A delightful wide-shot postcard, probably of the 1940s, to judge by the old black and white enamel YHA triangle sign and the half-cab single-decker coach. The porte-cochère and brewhouse block are clearly shown, as is the squat tower-like retained vestibule (left), originally an internal part of the Hall, but reconstructed by YHA in more modest style (author's collection)*



*An aerial view postcard of the youth hostel era (author's collection)*



In 1946 and 1947 the wardens were Mr and Mrs Pratt, followed by Mr and Mrs Manley and Ed and Lou Martin for short periods up to 1950. They would have had to deal with uncertainties of provision, supplies and repair after hostilities, borne of a rising tide of demand, and reflected in the annual capacities for six years from 1946: 80 beds, then 90, 120, 90, 90 and 140. These figures suggest considerable upheaval, alteration to and relocation of the facilities in a short space of time.

*Left: the Peak District Hostels Regional Guide of early 1946 included a useful sketch map, and gave these details:*

*Closed on Thursday. Campsite in field behind hostel. Meals provided. Tel: Thorpe Cloud 212. A favourite excursion after supper is an ascent of Bunster (stile past Post Office) from which a fine aerial view of the two dales can be seen (YHA Archive)*

Mr and Mrs Hann took over the management in 1951, staying until 1955. They achieved a 16-year record as well-travelled wardens, moving on to Salcombe, Lostwithiel, Exeter and Treyarnon Bay before retiring from Lincoln in 1966. By contrast, their daughter Margaret, brought up at the hostel, continued at Ilam Hall; she and her husband Edgar Smith were appointed as wardens in 1956, and would have been pleased to welcome the installation of mains water and the renewal of a roof in 1959. Margaret retired in March 1991 after a remarkable 36 years at one site. In 2011 she accepted the Trevelyan medal on behalf of her husband for longstanding service to YHA.



*Hostellers congregate by Ilam's distinctive porte-cochère entrance – 1948 and 1958 snapshots by courtesy of Sylvia Errington and Pat Packham (YHA Archive)*

Roy Frost remembers a trip to Ilam in the 1960s:

My girlfriend and I went to Ashbourne on the bus from Derby, and walked to Ilam youth hostel for the night. Later on in the evening, the cubs that were camping nearby came in, as it was raining hard and the tents were leaking. We all sat around a big fire in the lounge and sang songs that they had learned. Also, in those days, at about 9pm we used to have a cup of cocoa as a nightcap at 3d a cup, brought in by the staff.

In 1972 an interesting retrospective insight into the leasing of the various parts of the building was provided in typical drole style by Bernard Edwards, earlier regional secretary, to his successor, Dave Allison. He wrote:

Ilam was given to YHA North Midlands in 1933 by McDougall, the flour man, but the then honorary Regional Secretary thought it would be safer held by the National Trust and so it was handed to them, and they promised a 60-year lease. After the property had been vested in the Trust they withdrew the offer of 60-year lease and instead offered one of twenty years. This came up for renewal in 1955 at a time when relations were not too good between YHA and NT, and they were negotiating with a school for an expensive lease but I found some old letters and our YHA National President of that time, John Clarke, was also a member of the National Trust Estate Committee and he obtained a renewal of the lease for £1 a year. This again comes up for renewal in 1976 and John Clarke is dead.

When we were given the property YHA arranged the demolition of most of the hall, keeping up only the servants quarters. The common room was kept by accident of Mrs Cadbury looking through one of the windows during demolition, and she persuaded her husband to give a further £500 to keep it.

For some years we had another wing of the hall containing the laundry and the use of the much older building at the rear, called the Manor House, except for a tearoom held by the Trust. Then about 1955 we were afraid of the maintenance implications of all these unused or half used rooms and we gave up one wing and the outside rooms. At that time we made an assistant's flat in the outbuildings (called the Manor House) but after making it gave it to the National Trust who paid us the cost, and we used this to make an assistant's house in a wing of the main hostel building, at the same time concentrating the hostel in a much smaller space to make cheaper running.

The wheel has run almost full circle and I have recently been persuading the National Trust to let us have a large room back again for a Field Study room, and have also been trying to make more space for beds in the main building.



The need for renovations was becoming apparent to YHA's Peak Region, successors to the North Midlands, in the early 1970s. The 1972 annual report announced that Ilam Hall was being brought up to the new classification standard, Superior. A new field study centre in two well-equipped classrooms housed in a wing of the old Manor House at the rear of the hostel, was opened on 26th October 1975 by the Chairman of the National Trust's Dovedale Committee. The ceremony was attended by more than 100 people.

*Left: an interior view of the new Field Study Centre [photograph in Hostelling News, courtesy of Derby Evening Telegraph].*

YHA invested much money and energy in a national refurbishment programme at the end of the 1980s, named the Product Development Marketing Plan, PDMP. The essence of this was to use funds from borrowing, assisted by the sale of properties, some of relatively high value, to overhaul properties essential to the Association but worn out. The plan was applied to Ilam Hall in 1989-91, and the photographs on the next page show the scale of the works. Ilam Hall was extensively renovated and remodelled, at a total cost of £472,000. Phase 1 over the winter of 1989-90 included the complete redevelopment of all the public areas to create an enhanced entrance, reception and shop area, first class dining facilities and greatly improved facilities for self-catering. Care was taken to complement the historic nature of the Hall rather than impose on it. New electrical and plumbing installations, dormitories and washrooms will be brought up to a high standard, over 2 years (though there was still no water to the top floor dormitories).

Phase 2 during the winter of 1990-91 included improvements to all the sleeping accommodation, new showers, toilets and wash-rooms and the development of the north wing of the building, which after years of neglect was leased to YHA by the National Trust. The wing was to provide high quality family rooms, already popular at Hartington. Ilam Hall reopened at an open day hosted by Dr David Bellamy on 13th July 1991.





1 2



3 4



5 6



Ilam Hall's major rebuilding and refurbishment under the PDMP programme are shown just before or during 1989-91. 1&2: the extent of the works can be seen in these pictures of the original vestibule and inner hall. The vestibule, once a lofty internal room, was transformed by YHA in 1935 into a roomy public space. The window inserted in the end of the common room had been the main window of the Drawing Room on the south front. It was carefully removed in 1935 and placed here. At some stage, however, YHA had found it necessary to create a false ceiling, the remnants of which can be seen in image 1. It was removed in the PDMP work; 3: the old Steward's Room being stripped out; 4: the main corridor, looking east towards the entrance. A room on the right was used up to 1990 as the members' kitchen, and is now the reception and bar; 5: the members' kitchen pre-1990, in the former Butler's Room. The gas grills are typical of YHA self-catering at the time; 6: the same room being converted to the new reception area. Note that the original reception was in the former Stewards Room to the right of this, with the counter aligned south-north down the middle. A door at the right side looking west went through to the warden's kitchen, in the former Housemaid's room. In 1991 the members' kitchen was moved to the basement. The reception was further modified in the 2009 refurbishment (YHA Archive)





1 2



3

1: as part of the PDMP improvements in the early 1990s, the dining room and kitchen were opened up, necessitating the installation of a new rolled steel joist beam by the building team, and the self-catering kitchen was moved to the basement;

2&3: a great publicity coup – a huge crowd of 2,000 gathered at Ilam for an Open Day on July 13th 1991 to celebrate the reopening of the youth hostel after renovations costing almost half a million pounds.

Standing at the centre of the lower image are YHA's future Treasurer and Chairman Chris Darmon, Chairman John Patten, President Dr David Bellamy and Chief Executive Andrew Chinneck (YHA Archive)

Margaret and Edgar Smith achieved a record to that time of over 21,000 overnights in 1989. They were soon to retire after more than 30 years at the helm at Ilam Hall, Margaret in 1991 and Edgard the following year. Ken Rome and Ann Evans took over as wardens in 1992 in their newly refurbished hostel, and usage rose even higher during their six-year stay, to 28,000 in 1996. Bev and Sue Bamber followed in 1998, having managed with distinction at YHA Llangollen for over a dozen years previously. They would have enjoyed the major refurbishment heralded in *YHA News*, August 2005, to take place over the coming winter.

Ilam Hall was further extensively remodelled and modernised over the winter 2008-09 in a £2.2 million refurbishment programme, with a focus on the highest standard of accommodation for families, individuals and school groups. School group and activity provision was enhanced, with three secure zones enabling different groups to stay at the same time, while families and individual hostellers continued to be welcome in the wide-ranging accommodation. Weddings, functions, conferences and classroom activities were all now within YHA Ilam Hall's offering.





1 2



3 4



5 6



*Ilam Hall in 2015.*

*1: the YHA-retained structure, now a useful games room. It has the largest dormitory above.*

*The curved stone balustrade seen atop the steps in images 1 and 3 was formerly part of the Music Room;*

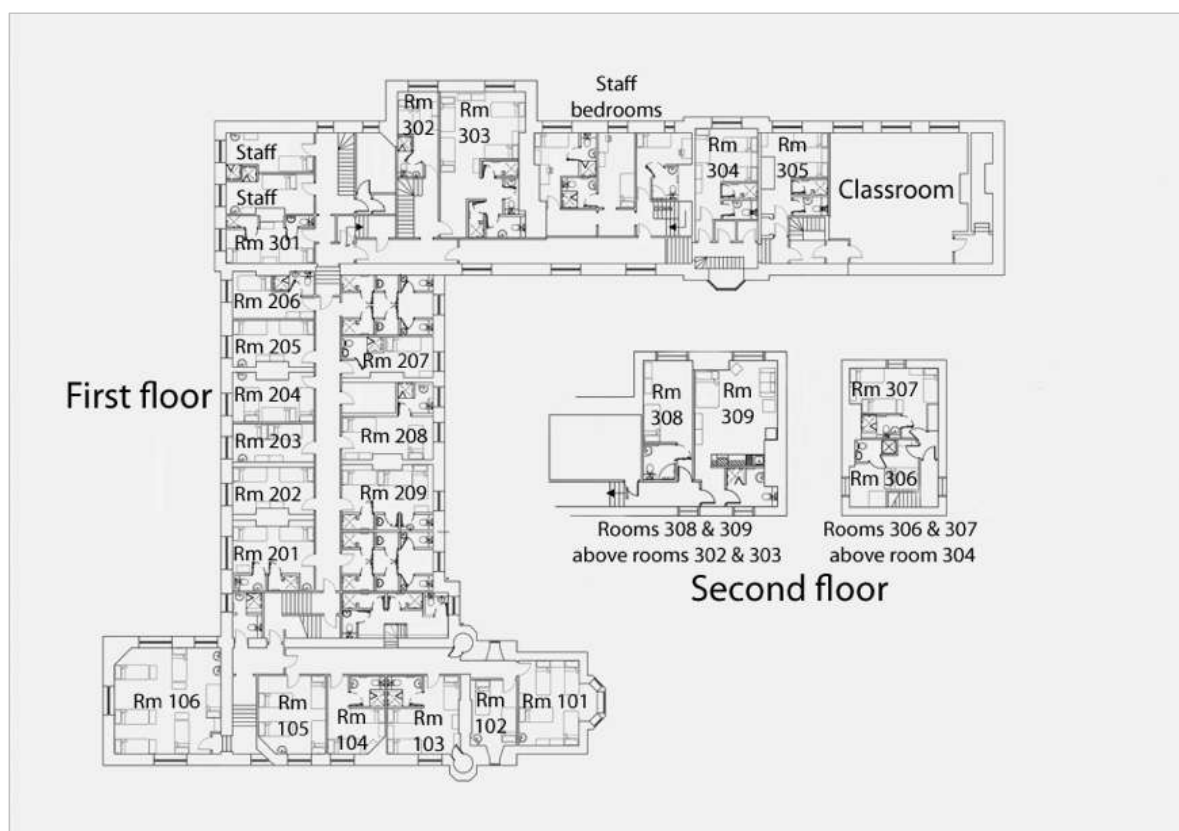
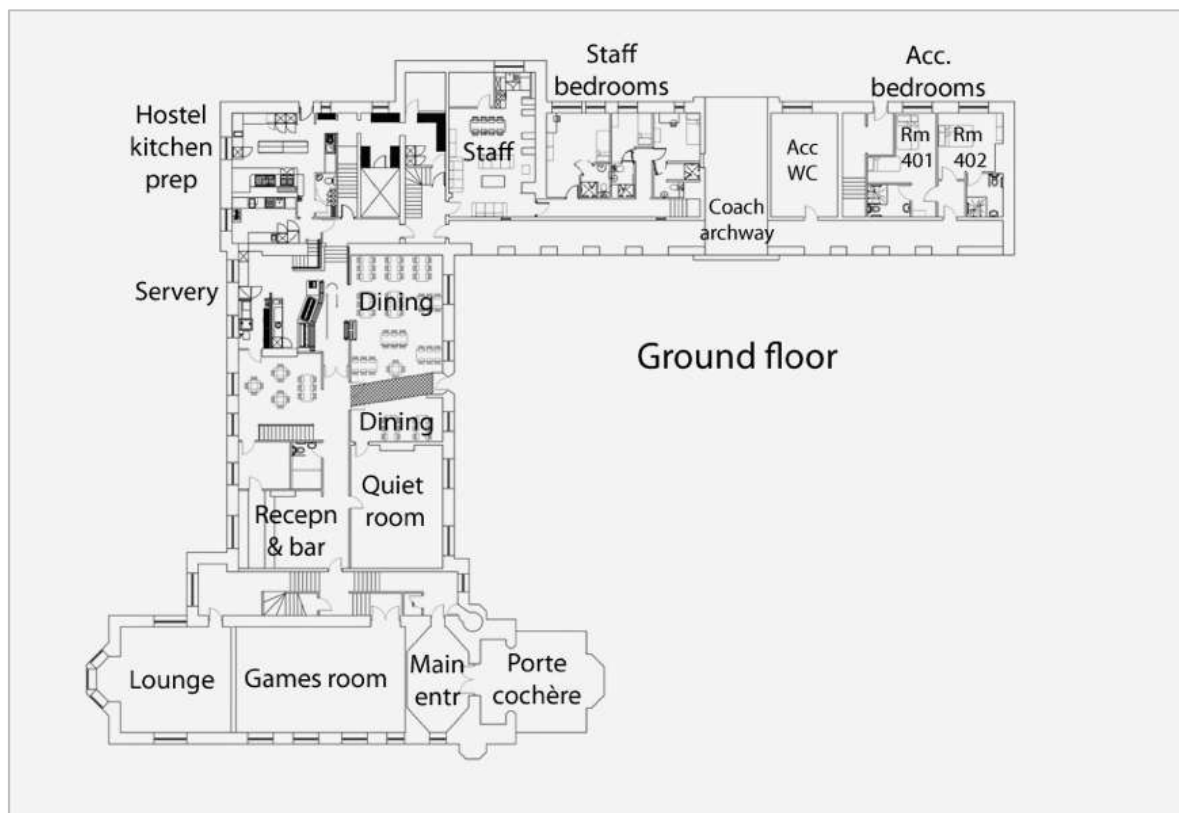
*2&3: views from the south-west, overlooking the pleasant gardens. Image 3 gives a wider view of the locality and Thorpe Cloud;*

*4: the brewhouse block is now renovated to create staff and guest rooms. This is the reverse side;*

*5&6: self-catering provision in the basement (author's photographs)*

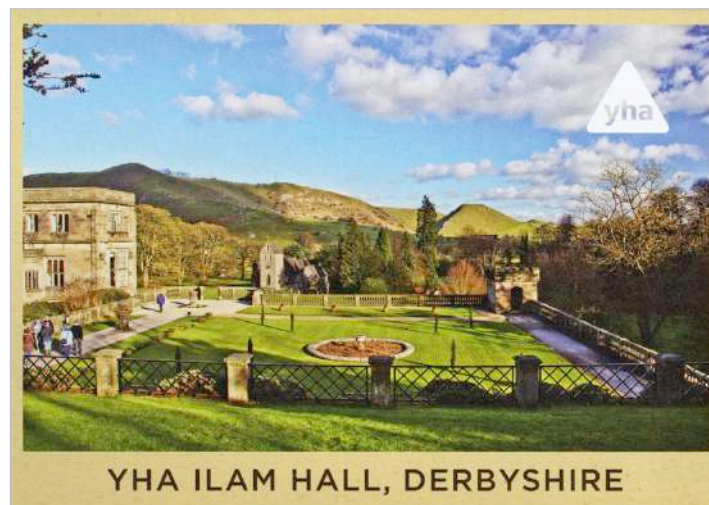
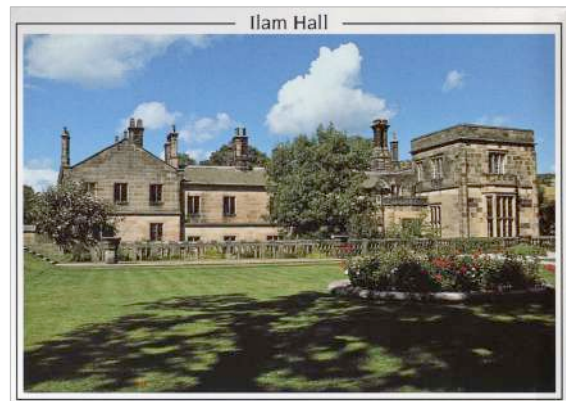
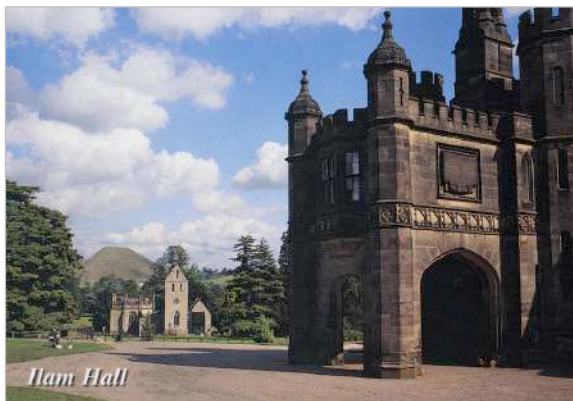
While the manager for the years 2007 to 2010 is not recorded, the hostel was used extensively as a *Do It 4 Real* Summer Camp Site at that time. Samantha Clamp was in post during 2011 and was by now also responsible for the small satellite hostel at YHA Dimmingsdale. Emma Chalmers had four successful years from 2013 to 2017, raising the usage again to 25,000 annually, as did Stuart Chaplin from 2017 until 2022. YHA Ilam Hall suffered enormous hardship and difficulties during the Covid struggles but managed some use in 2020, and more in 2021. The hostel was much busier in 2022, with deputy Georgia Day-Davies standing in for new manager Kelly Whelan during a fully-booked summer. Kelly returned to Ilam Hall in October 2022, having been activities manager, then deputy here, some years before.

There are now 126 beds. The majority of bedrooms offer en suite accommodation with a mixture of double, four and six bedded rooms. There are two ground floor bedrooms with en suite disabled facilities.

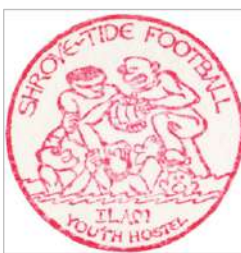
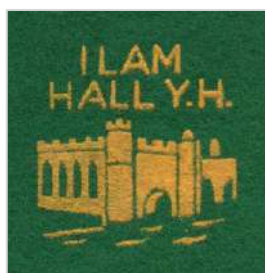


Before the extensive alterations about 1990, Ilam Hall's sleeping accommodation was arranged in a mix of room sizes, some very large: one with 18 beds, one of 14, one of 12, four of 8, three of 6, five of 4 and two of 3. The floorplans of YHA Ilam Hall above reflect the changes, and date from October 2008. They are still substantially accurate in 2023, though some of the bedrooms in the 300 range have changed from staff to guest accommodation, and are shown in their new layouts (redrawn by the author from original digital plans)

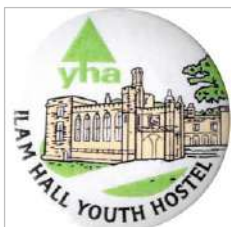




*Then and now. A delightful early study of Ilam Hall youth hostel, looking towards the church in the grounds, photographer unknown, and three recent postcards of YHA Ilam Hall (author's collection)*



### ILAM HALL, DOVEDALE



A miscellany of Ilam Hall hostel stamps and cloth and pin badges. The Shrovetide football reference is to the unique ancient game played annually in the nearby town of Ashbourne (author's collection)

#### 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  
 †: also recorded as 2812 overnights, possibly a mistake, in 1935 annual report; W: wartime closure;  
 e: estimate; ●: partial closure for PDMP; ø: affected by Covid; \*: 17 month period

...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	open	...	...	8915†	7077	8901	7841	open
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
W	W	W	4612	10884	12024	9166	9687	11616	open
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
8128	8548	9374	9849	9394	8571	9792	9323	8732	10418
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
9201	10345	10269	10895	10416	11443	10931	10623	9653	10483
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
12237	11744	13073	13040	14686	16472	17007e	19145	18789	18237
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
18741	18332	16303	17091	17348	19841	19611	19033	20161	21178
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
18814●	21753●	22755*	27700	25503	26258	28079	26420	25973	25508
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
23208	18418	22260	23187	22045	21400	23199	22778	16446	19322
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
21883	20455	24655	23021	25122	25850	25887	26941	25676	25611
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
7248ø	14492ø	21142ø	open	...	...	...	...	...	...