



YHA (England and Wales)

Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, 2023-10-22

Coalbrookdale Youth Hostels

Coalbrookdale [Ironbridge] Youth Hostel 1980 to present

Coalbrookdale Institute, Paradise, Coalbrookdale, Telford, Shropshire TF8 7NR

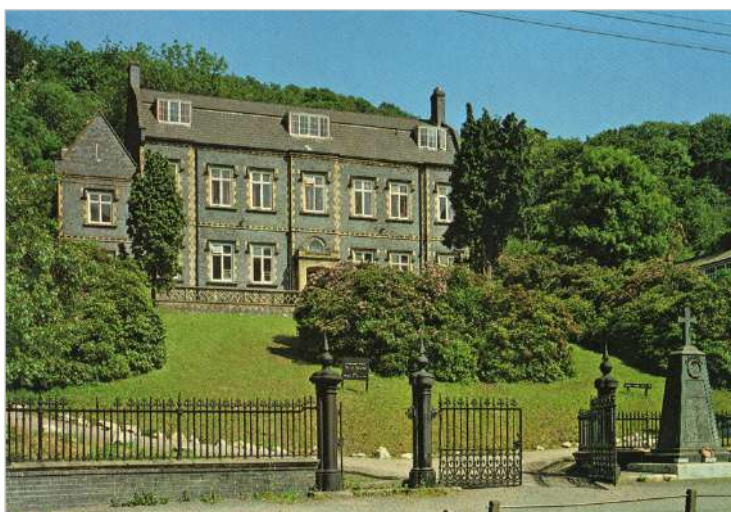
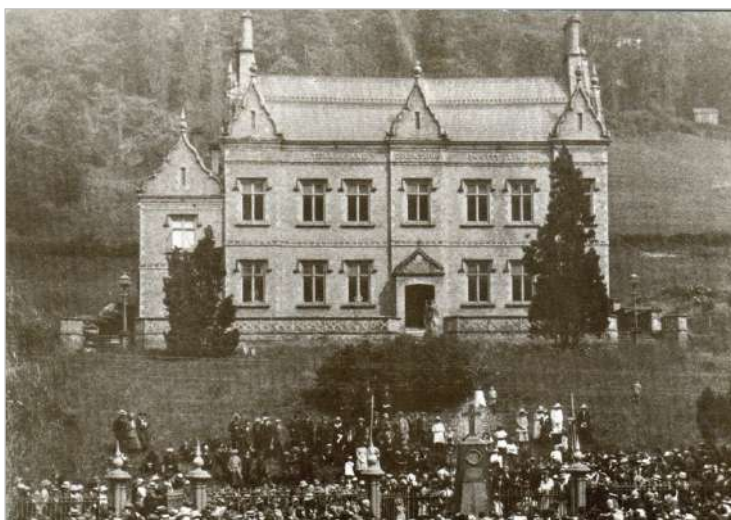
Historic County: Shropshire

YHA Region: Midland, Central

GR: SJ 670043

By 1785 the Coalbrookdale district had become the foremost industrial area in the world. It was particularly celebrated for its innovations: the first iron bridge, the first iron boat, the first iron rails and the first steam locomotive. Visitors came from far and wide to see the sights, and artists came to paint it all; furnaces lighting up the night sky were a favourite subject.

Coalbrookdale youth hostel is a product of that industrial enterprise, and was the first of two now operating in the vicinity of the Ironbridge Gorge, Shropshire. It is housed in the former Coalbrookdale Institute, built in the Victorian era as an educational centre by far-sighted local ironmasters.



Postcards of the Coalbrookdale Literary and Scientific Institute, reproduced by courtesy of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust.

1: a facsimile of a photograph of the Institute celebrating a gathering on 22nd May 1921 to unveil the war memorial.

2: a colour postcard from the early days of the youth hostel. Note the rebuilt roofline to a mansard design. The cast iron railings and memorial were provided by the Coalbrookdale Company. At first the hostel was called Ironbridge (YHA Archive)

A pamphlet published after the opening of the hostel by the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust, with text by Jessie McFall, detailed the history of the Coalbrookdale Literary and Scientific Institution and the development of its own educational centre. Extracts are provided here, reproduced by courtesy of the IGMT:

From the wooded hillside called Paradise the Coalbrookdale Institute overlooks a valley where iron has been made and worked for more than four hundred years. The Coalbrookdale Company paid for the building, which was opened on 30 May 1859. The bricks were provided from the Company's brickworks. The ironworks manager, Charles Crookes, was the architect. The Institute is one of the most distinguished buildings in Coalbrookdale, and its role in the history of the community has been equally distinguished.

Coalbrookdale in the nineteenth century was 'noted...for turning out smart intelligent men and hard thinkers and workers'. The Coalbrookdale Literary and Scientific Institution was formed by a group of local people in 1853 'to afford to the inhabitants of Coalbrookdale and the neighbourhood the means of acquiring useful knowledge in literary and scientific subjects'. Its aims were similar to those of Mechanics' Institutes... The officers of the Coalbrookdale Institution were mostly the senior managers of the ironworks, and included Charles Crookes (company manager 1850-66) and William Gregory Norris his successor, from 1866 to 1897... The Institution Library opened in the Coalbrookdale Boys' School in 1853, and its reading room in the Girls' School in 1855. The former took over the books from the defunct Ironbridge Mechanics' Institute which had been purchased by Alfred Darby before his death in 1849. Further gifts were made to the Library when it was transferred to the new building in 1859, and by 1890 it contained over 3,000 books...

By the 1890s the membership of the Institution had declined, and often subscriptions were left unpaid. Local industry was no longer prosperous... In 1898 the Coalbrookdale Social Club was founded at the Institute, and the following year the Institution agreed to amalgamate with it. The Institution had pioneered post-school education in the locality, and had been highly praised by inspectors. Its legacy to the community was the thriving School of Art, the library, and the Institute building.

The Salop County Council bought the Institute building in 1924 for £1,400. A new committee of management was formed consisting of local authority representatives, and employers and employees of the iron, tile and china industries. Daytime engineering classes established in 1921 enabled students to qualify for national certificates in Mechanical Engineering. In 1928 the County Council converted an annexe formerly used for woodwork classes into a full-time Domestic Subjects Centre for senior girls from neighbouring elementary schools.

During the Second World War the Institute was used for various purposes, including temporary accommodation of evacuees from Liverpool. When evening classes were resumed in 1945 recreational as well as vocational classes were offered, and the part-time principal at Coalbrookdale also organised classes at Shifnal and Madeley... In 1966 the Coalbrookdale Evening Institute ceased to exist and classes were held at the Abraham Darby Comprehensive School in Madeley... In 1967, for the first time in its history, the Institute was no longer used for regular educational classes. The County Library Service occupied the building for a time pending the completion of the new library in Madeley in 1969. The County Council intended to use the building as the base for a county-wide Museum Service, but financial restrictions frustrated its plans.

In April 1977 the County Council leased the Institute to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.

The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was established in 1967 to conserve for posterity the industrial monuments of the district, and it was always the hope of the Trust to restore the Coalbrookdale Institute to some kind of educational use. After the building was leased to the Museum Trust it was extensively renovated, and converted to a youth hostel which opened in 1980... The Institute now enables students from all over the world to stay in the Ironbridge Gorge and to explore for themselves the unique landscape of the area where the Industrial Revolution in the iron trade began. There could be no more fitting use for a building with such a distinguished place in the history of education.

At the time of its construction the Institute was described as Tudor Gothic in style. It replicated that of several other noted buildings in the Ironbridge Gorge, such as the Church of England School, the police station and the Station Hotel, in its use of blue bricks. Jessie McFall's pamphlet describes the building in more detail:

The seven bays are separated by buff-coloured brick groins and the windows are protected by hood moulds. The mansard roof was built in 1926. A house for the librarian, later used for the caretaker, formed part of the frontage and still retains its ridged roof. A terrace with balcony runs the whole length of the front, and a flight of steps descends to the paths below. A palisading with ornamental iron gates surrounds the site, and incorporates the memorial.

Initially the ground floor comprised an entrance hall, library, reading room and art room, and the first floor the lecture room with its gallery. By the 1880s the School of Art had encroached on the accommodation previously available to the public. The annexe, now the Walker Study Centre, had been built by 1925 when it was fitted out as a laboratory for engineering classes.

The Institute was first listed as a Grade II* listed building in 1968. An initial meeting between the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and YHA about prospects for the hostel was held as early as May 1972. The planning progressed gradually through the 1970s. Writing in the *Hostelling News* issue of Winter 1976-77, Don Errington of YHA Midlands Region enthused:

Ironbridge Gorge, centre of the Industrial Revolution and famous for its environmental museum (which when completed will be the largest in Western Europe) is on the way to having its own youth hostel. Midland Region of the YHA is working with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust to establish a 60-70 bed hostel at Coalbrookdale Institute which will enable parties and individuals to stay overnight at this historic spot. It was here at Coalbrookdale in Shropshire in 1709 that Abraham Darby first smelted iron with coke: the famous iron bridge (the first ever built) was cast in 1779 and the actual furnace can be seen in the centre of a substantially complete 18th century ironworks.

Many of the houses, schools and furnaces where the ironmasters and their workers lived and toiled are preserved where they stand; in addition, at Blists Hill, buildings and machines rescued from areas of new development are being re-erected. Here may be seen the massive double beam blowing engines 'David and Sampson' a Reconstructed pithead, a print shop, a pottery and the spectacular 'Hay inclined plane' by which canal boats were raised and lowered a vertical height of 200 feet between the Shropshire Canal and the River Severn.

The Institute which it is planned to convert into a hostel is itself an historic building for it was one of the earliest successful experiments in adult education. It was planned as 'an institute for the acquirement of useful knowledge' and opened in 1859 with a library, reading rooms and lecture halls.

The building is to be leased to the IGMT. The cost of conversion and equipment is estimated at £65,000 and the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust are urgently seeking sponsors to provide this sum. The National Finance Committee YHA of the YHA have agreed to provide £12,000 for equipment and it is confidently hoped that many members will wish to help with this most exciting new development.

Those wishing to contribute should send donations to: Ironbridge Hostel Appeal, YHA, 116 Birmingham Road, Lichfield. It is confidently expected that the scheme will go forward and that all money received will be used to this end however, in the event of the scheme failing for any reason the money collected by YHA will be used for other hostel projects unless a specific request is made at the time of donation. Over £50,000 is still needed. Hopefully, some of it will come from outside sources. But the generous help of hostellers will also be needed if the Ironbridge Gorge Hostel is to become a reality.

Three years later, the YHA Midland Region annual report for 1979 announced that the greater part of the cost of conversion was to be met by grants from the Department of Education, the Countryside Commission and various gifts. The Coalbrookdale Institute was to be YHA's 26th Field Study Hostel. Details of the new Ironbridge Hostel were given in the 1980 Handbook.

As so often the case, the opening of the hostel was delayed. *Hostelling News* of Summer 1980 outlined the details:

After two deferments, because of delays with the building work, Ironbridge Gorge Hostel opened its doors as a superior grade field study hostel for the first time on Saturday May 3rd. Those members determined to sleep there



on the first night, and who had already re-booked must have heaved a sigh of relief to find that they really could stay. Even more relieved were the working parties from YHA and the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, who toiled all day Friday and Saturday (including well into Friday night) to have the hostel clean and equipment in place. Special thanks go to the staff of GMT, the hostel wardens, the Region's maintenance team, Telford Local Group and many other willing volunteers.

As 5pm struck, the hostel door opened to admit the members, and the back door released the willing workers with their task only just completed – it had been touch and go.

All services are now available (including meals). Wardens Ian and Val Ingram, fresh from their successful five years at Slimbridge, are all set to repeat their achievements in a new setting. With the wonderful spirit of cooperation between the workers of the IGMT and the YHA the success of the venture seems assured.

An official opening followed in September 1980. As was so often the case, it took time for the YHA Trust to ratify their tenancy with the Ironbridge Gorge Trust; that followed on 30 April 1981. Ian and Val Ingram presided over their 66-bed hostel until at least 1986, records being incomplete for 1987-89. In their first season numbers staying

were modest, at 4,000, but by the second, the hostel was already popular, and from that year 10,000 or more have stayed annually at the Institute hostel.

Volunteer Helen Race made a hostel inspection in 1987 and referred to the hostel reception being on the left of the entrance. Her dormitory was Room 7, which had two wooden bunks and a washbasin. She referred to the females' washroom on the same floor, where there were three sinks with shower curtains around them for greater privacy, two WCs and two showers, though fairly typically for the time this was fitted with just a single curtain. At the time the dining room doubled as the common room.

Helen enjoyed her booked meal of minestrone soup, two lamb chops, mixed vegetables, potatoes and gravy. Dessert was half a peach and ice cream, followed by tea supplied in a cup and saucer. With breakfast, it cost £7.45. There were teachers checking out the hostel for a future school visit. They had used hotels before and liked the youth hostel, though they thought the large boys' dormitory might lead to control difficulties. They were aware of impending changes to hostel rules that would see teachers sleeping apart from their charges.

There was a large games area with a juke box, two pool tables and three electronic games. Local information was well displayed. Helen enjoyed her stay.

It seems that the large boys' dormitory referred to in 1987 was soon replaced; a 1990 YHA publication for schools showed that the hostel capacity amounted to 68 beds in 15 bedrooms, mostly small. Those staying would be accommodated in one 2-bedded room, nine 4-bedded, one 5-bedded, three 6-bedded and one 7-bedded.

Diane and Arthur Hayward were wardens in 1990 (perhaps earlier) and 1991. There was a significant change in both managers and management structure the following year, when the Central Region 1992 annual report described how accommodation was increased in that year by leasing other accommodation for the new wardens, Adrian and Sally Dyde. Adrian remembers their first residence, overlooking the Iron Bridge, then moving into Rose Cottage, one of the oldest buildings in the area. Adrian had wardened at Sandown on the Isle of Wight, then Hunstanton and Brandon in Eastern Region before his Shropshire move.

Duncan Simpson, 1990s operations manager for the Region, recalled recently how during their time at Ironbridge the Dydes were involved in a huge scheme to create a second hostel at Coalport, to run alongside the Coalbrookdale Institute facility. They saw this project to completion in 1997, before moving back to East Anglia to manage Sheringham youth hostel in December 1999. The YHA Coalport story from that point is told in the following chapter, though from the outset, the two hostels, three miles apart, have been run as one, under a single management. A flexible team finds enterprising ways to promote the twin facilities. In 1999, for example, *YHA News* published an article *Summertime Specials* listing the benefits of a family break in the area:

YHA has come up with three ideas for families seeking a budget summer break in an area where there's plenty for all ages to see and do. For example, for just £200 a family of four can spend three nights at Ironbridge Gorge YH in Shropshire including breakfasts and evening meals which equates to less than £17 per person, per night for half-board. However, making the break even better value is the fact that families will also receive a free 'Passport to the Gorge' giving entry to all the nine museum sites at Ironbridge, including the recreated Victorian working town at Blists Hill, the China Museum and the Iron Bridge itself.

To keep pace with the new partner hostel, improvements were to accelerate over the next decade at the Institute hostel, starting with work on the washrooms at the end of 1999, with a more modern arrangement of toilets and showers.

A *Shropshire Star* article in May 2004 told how the two Ironbridge youth hostels, led by manager Amelia Grant, had scooped a prestigious gold Healthy Eating award from Telford and Wrekin Council in its campaign towards healthy living. YHA was praised for the quality of its 65,000 meals provided in the previous year.

As the two hostels developed in tandem after 1997, Coalbrookdale hostel was to specialise increasingly in the provision of accommodation for school and similar parties, while Coalport could develop a more varied role. Alongside Coalbrookdale's established schools trade, for which Heritage and Victorian life were the most common subjects of study, YHA was developing its *DoIt4Real* Summer Camp strategy to a high level in the first decade of the new century; successful Camps were based at the Institute hostel during summer holidays from 2005-10 and also in 2014.

After operating for more than 25 years, the original Ironbridge hostel was ready for wholesale modernisation in the early years of the new century. *YHA News*, August 2005, described a major refurbishment to take place over the coming winter. The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was to lead the work, including renovations to bedrooms, toilets, showers and disabled facilities. Coalbrookdale hostel laid on an official reopening on 17th October 2007 after a considerable upgrade, though combined overnight figures for the two sites suggest that operations had continued with some normality in 2006 and 2007.

A pamphlet produced for the occasion described the strengthening policy of specialised accommodation at Coalbrookdale, concentrating particularly on Schools and the emerging *Learn4Real* strategy, Youth and Community Groups, Scouts and Guides, activity holiday groups using local activity providers, special event accommodation for groups such as orchestras, and Exclusive Hire. Nevertheless, family and individual bookings continued here on a limited basis in high holiday periods for a number of years.



1 2



3 4



5 6



Ready for re-opening: YHA Coalbrookdale immediately after its considerable upgrade in 2007.

1: On Wednesday 17th October 2007 Chris Darmon (YHA Vice Chairman), Cath Young (YHA manager of the two Ironbridge sites), and Barrie Williams (Chair of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust) exchange keys at the reopening ceremony;

2: Duncan Simpson, YHA's Head of Communications, enjoys the occasion;

3-5: the lofty and attractive position of the former Institute shows up well; 6: heavenly spot (YHA Archive images)

In readiness, manager Cath Young was developing activity packages for young people's learning, especially planned to link with National Key Stages via the three-way provision of accommodation with YHA, expertise through the Ironbridge Gorge Trust and the rich local environment of the Industrial Revolution and its museum sites.



1



2



3



4 5



6 7

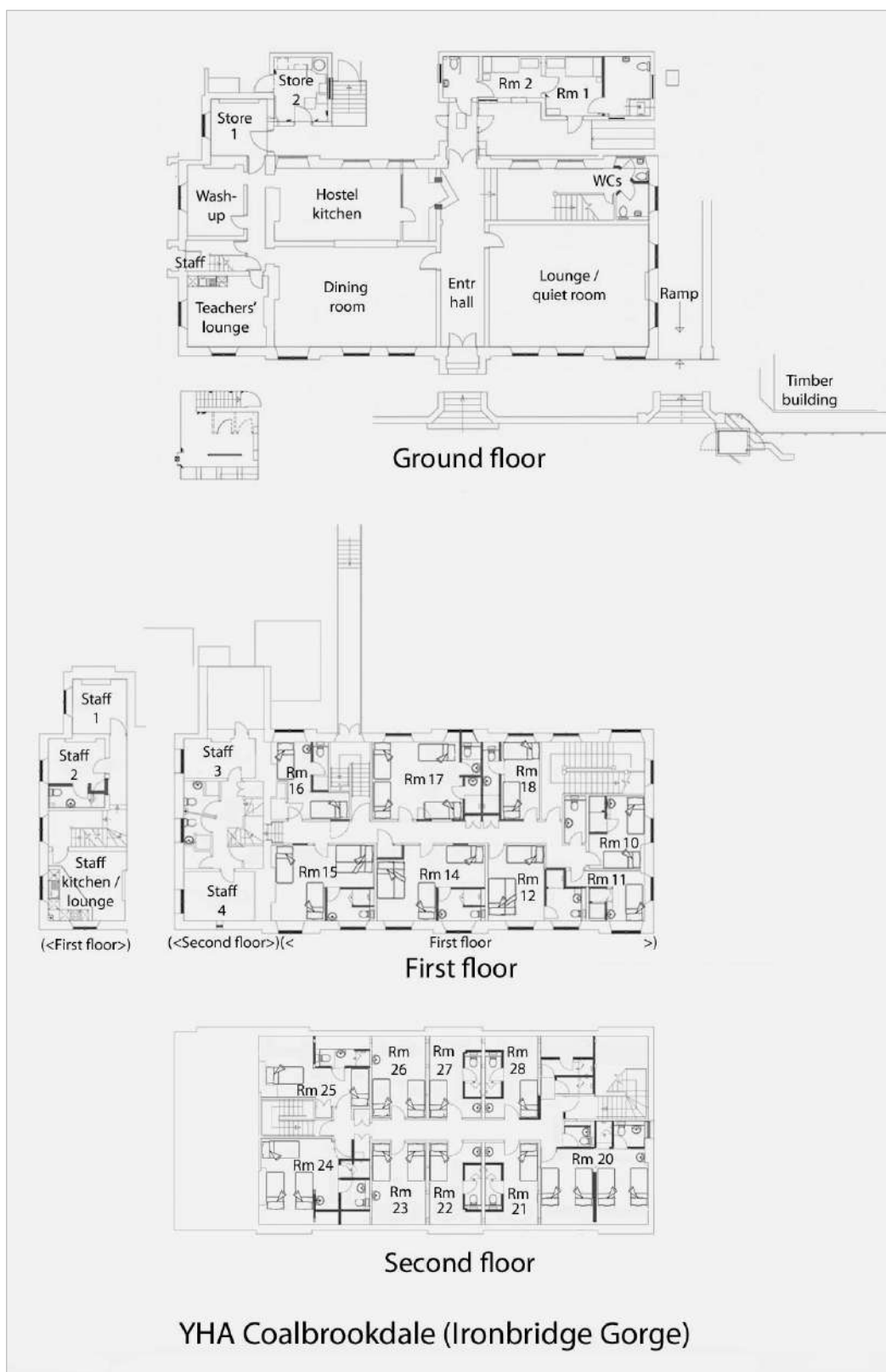


Further images connected with the 2007 refurbishment of YHA Coalbrookdale.

1-3: smartly renovated entrance hall and staircase;

4: renovated dining room; 5: lounge; 6: games room;

7: dormered bedroom on the upper floor (YHA Archive)



YHA Coalbrookdale (Ironbridge Gorge)

This simplified floorplan represents a document in the YHA Archive labelled 'Coalbrookdale Youth Hostel, proposed alterations'. The originals are dated in stages between July 2005 and February 2007. Alterations are represented by the thick grey lines and indicate especially a modernisation of toilet and shower facilities at that time. Duncan Simpson recalls the considerable refurbishment and official reopening in 2007; the project was probably aided by Foot and Mouth recovery finance.

The plan above is updated to 2022 and shows the room renumberings of recent years – on the first and second floor bedrooms were numbered differently up to about the time of the alterations of 2005-2007;

On the ground floor disabled Rooms 1 and 2 have kept the same numbers throughout. They are served by a small lift. On that floor, the present teachers' lounge was in 2007 the hostellers' self-catering kitchen, and Store 2 was the bakery (digital map redrawn by author)



Youngsters enjoying varied activities at Coalbrookdale hostel in 2010 (YHA Archive images)

An idea of the breadth of these educational arrangements might be gauged by a brief calendar of some of those offered at the hostel:

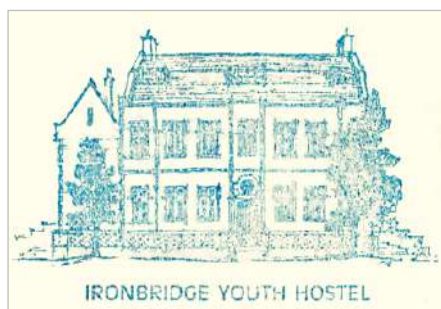
2011 – YHA's Business Development team, working in partnership with First Travel Solutions, developed an all-inclusive package for National Curriculum History. Both local sites were audited and passed the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) accreditation with distinction. For the first time, YHA Coalbrookdale hosted young people from Spain for an English Language programme;

2012 – Duke of Edinburgh Award Gold Residential schemes were developed;

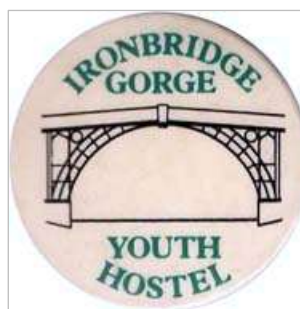
2014 – the YHA Summer Camps used Coalbrookdale as one of its venues to run a Go eXtreme course. To keep the programme accessible, prices were frozen and a monthly payment plan helped spread the cost of camp. Bursary places were once again available for families on receipt of a free school meal, benefiting from a 50% discount.



1 2



3 4



1&2: less common views of the Coalbrookdale Institute (author's images, 2017)

1: the former librarian's house (now mainly staff accommodation) sits at right angles to the Institute at the north end;

2: the rear of the Institute, showing clearly the fire escape from the first floor and the mansard roof;

3: the author's hostel stamp from 1992; 4: a large pin badge from about the same era



A delightful distant view of the Coalbrookdale Institute in its wooded setting (YHA Archive)

Coalport Youth Hostel 1997 to present

John Rose Building, High Street, Coalport, Telford, Shropshire TF8 7HT

Historic County: Shropshire

GR: SJ 695024

The second Ironbridge Gorge youth hostel was opened in the former Coalport China Works, founded in 1796 by John Rose, one of the founder members of the Coalport China Company. It is a Grade II* listed building of great significance in the emergence of the industrial revolution in this part of Shropshire. Some parts date from 1904.

At the end of 18th century, Coalport was a small settlement on the banks of the River Severn, an area noted for producing ceramics since Roman times. It was called Coalport after the coal that was transferred from canal to river vessels at the junction of watercourses. The most important industry to be attracted to the new town was the china manufacturing enterprise of John Rose, who had initially moved into a different factory at Coalport, in 1779.

YHA News of Spring 1996 announced that a second Ironbridge Gorge youth hostel at Coalport was likely to be completed by June. It took longer than expected. A later edition of the *News*, for Spring 1997, gave an account by Men Lawes, the Chief Executive of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, describing how the Museum had recognised the success of their earlier joint venture with the YHA at nearby Coalbrookdale. The hostel there had become very heavily used by school parties on their study trips and the need for additional accommodation had become clear. The availability of the historic John Rose china warehouse at Coalport had been an opportunity to create a second hostel within the Museum. Glen described the complexities of converting a grade II* listed building for use as hostel accommodation and explained how funding had been obtained for the conversion work, largely through the European Regional Development Fund, with YHA meeting the fitting out costs. The new youth hostel opened for business on 1st February 1997 and was enthusiastically received by its customers. Conversion work was very extensive, as the buildings had been run down for many years. They had been empty and almost derelict for some time.



*From the roadside – the Coalport China Works, viewed from east and west in the youth hostel's earlier years
(photographs YHA Archive and by courtesy John Elliott)*

Coalport China Works was converted to the current youth hostel thanks to the foresight of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust and to the initiative and hard work of hostel managers Adrian and Sally Dyde. It was designed to take 85 guests, and cater to the wider public: Adrian describes how the Slip Room café was very popular, often with coach parties turning up to visit the China works & stopping for lunch or coffee. Facilities for those with physical disabilities were provided from the outset, as were two good sized classrooms also equipped for conference use.

Further details of the new hostel and its surroundings emerged in the final *News* edition of 1997, after an official opening in the autumn:

Minister opens new youth hostel in Ironbridge

Tom Clarke, Minister for Film and Tourism, officially opened the new Coalport youth hostel on 30th October 1997. Over 100 people attended the ceremony and enjoyed guided tours of the hostel, the Coalport China Museum, and the workshops where people with learning difficulties make and sell gifts. The event was rounded off with an excellent buffet lunch.

Coalport Youth Hostel, situated on the banks of the River Severn among the original bottle ovens of the famous Coalport China Works, is in a very popular tourist area, a designated World Heritage Site. The China Museum alone attracts approximately 10,000 visitors a year and the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, as a whole, was this year also designated as one of the most pre-eminent museums in the country.

One of the first National Heritage Lottery grants was awarded to the Museum Trust to secure the future of this historic building in which John Rose first successfully produced the famous Coalport China in 1796. The 'John Rose Building' was constructed with large cast-iron window frames and long galleries, where the local potters worked and artists painted china by the natural light, features which have been retained successfully in this sympathetic conversion, undertaken as a joint project between the Trust and the YHA.

The new hostel has 85 beds in a variety of rooms, some en-suite and some for special needs, ideal for groups of all ages. A [short-height] stairlift is currently being installed, this will give wheelchair users access to rooms on the ground and first floor. There are two meeting rooms, a very comfortable and well-equipped leaders' lounge, another lounge and a games room and plenty of room for coach and car parking. The Slip Room Café on the [lower] ground floor of the hostel is large enough for groups, provides excellent value meals, and is open to day visitors as well. The hostel is managed by Adrian and Sally Dyde who helped plan the project whilst also running the busy youth hostel at Coalbrookdale. Between opening the doors in February and the official ceremony at the end of October their team have managed over 9,000 overnights and served over 25,000 meals at Coalport.

The two hostels are very different in style, but it is hoped that between the two there will be something to satisfy all requirements from those of the individual self-catering hosteller, to families and larger groups. Many visitors have already taken the opportunity of this good value budget accommodation to take part in the pottery workshops at Coalport, to visit the six other museums and to enjoy the space and beauty of the Ironbridge Gorge. Another part of the building is occupied by Shropshire County Council Social Services; their project, which was also financed through European funding, aims to give people with learning disabilities the opportunity to gain experience and learn skills in retailing. The Gift House sells products which are manufactured on site. The minister was particularly pleased to see how hostel standards and comforts had been raised over the years.

Besides Tom Clark, Derek Hanson (Chair, YHA) and Mike Lowe (Chair, Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust) also spoke at the official celebration.

Running the two hostels together may have posed organisational challenges for staff and the occasional confusion for hostel guests as the arrangement found its feet. In the early joint years the hostels were most frequently referred to collectively as Ironbridge, though the annual handbook street-map sketch only showed the position of YHA Coalport. *YHA News*, Autumn 2000, felt obliged to publicise the following:

These hostels are being run as one. They are three miles apart – the map in the 1998 Guide showed both; the 2000 Guide shows the Coalport site only. Staff will advise visitors which site they have been allocated to. If travelling by public transport please clarify before arriving which site you need – the bus services in the area are poor, especially in the evening.



1 2



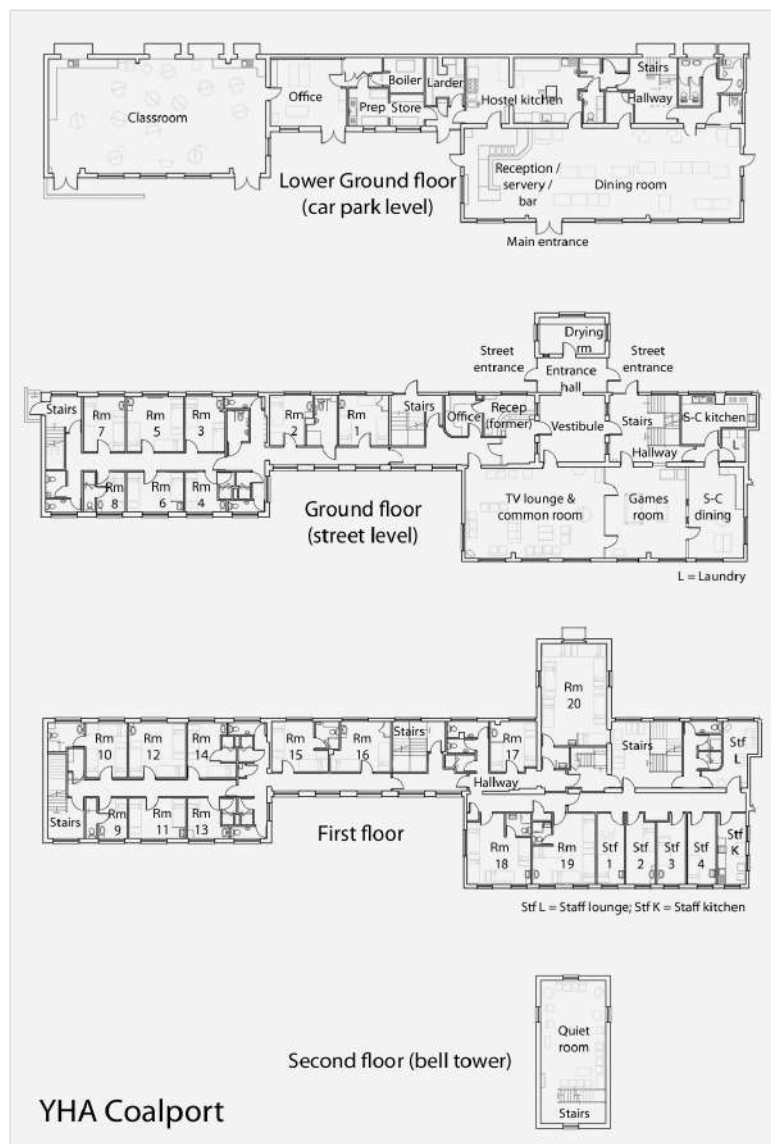
3



4 5



1: rear of the hostel complex, east end. Here, in the original 1796 building, is the cheerful entrance to reception, café and bar;
 2: the west end. In the foreground are the remnants of the original canal, long since drained. The hostel classroom is on the lower ground floor nearest the camera. A huge hoist here once served the canal, and survived until at least 1975;
 3: a vista of the china clay factory from the extensive car park. In 1800 John Rose's brother Thomas, along with William Reynolds, set up a separate china works on the opposite side of the canal to the 1796 building. In 1814 John Rose took over his brother's business and premises. His works empire now extended over both sides of the canal. The building on the left, much rebuilt, now forms the China Museum and Headquarters of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust; 4: close-up of the Museum and Trust Headquarters; 5: from a hostel window – the old canal and two surviving bottle kilns
 (author's photographs, July 2022)



This floorplan dates from about summer 2007 and is substantially accurate in 2022. The few changes are noted below. The plan has been redrawn from the original digital files by the author.

The original Coalport China factory of 1796 is the deeper building on the right of the plan, while the shallower building on the left, the link building in the centre and the top floor bell tower are from the early twentieth century.

Lower ground floor (car park level) – on the right was the original factory slip room, converted to hostel dining room in 1997.

In a change typical of many hostels in recent years, and especially with regard to guest convenience and the practicality of staffing, the space has been made more adaptable by taking on the mixed roles of reception, public café and bar and dining room. The main entrance therefore now leads from the car park, and is brightly advertised with signage and a sandwich board. The rest of the hostel lower ground floor is taken up with the hostel kitchen, utility rooms and a large classroom / meeting room.

Ground floor (street level) – on the right was the original factory store, now used as the self-catering kitchen and dining room, lounge and games room, while on the left are bedrooms 1 to 8. Rooms 1 and 2 are disabled access rooms, with dedicated bathroom between. Room 3 has 4 beds; Room 4, 2 beds and a shower; Room 5, 5 beds; Rooms 6 and 7, 4 beds and Room 8, 2 beds, en suite. The original curved reception by the street entrance is now redundant and now augments secure office space.

The small laundry extreme right is now removed.

First floor – on the right was the original factory painting room, now used both for staff (kitchen, lounge, toilet / showers and four small bedrooms) and for guests. Guest Room 17 has 4 beds; Room 18, 5 or 6 beds, en suite, and Room 19, 6 beds en suite. Additionally, the large protruding Room 20 has been altered over the years. When the hostel opened, it was the manager's office. At some stage after 2011 it was converted into the guest dormitory room as shown, but is now further subdivided into Room 20 (5 beds) and Room 21 (4 beds). On the left are bedrooms 9 to 16. Room 9 has 2 beds, en suite; Room 10, 5 beds en suite; Room 11, 4 beds; Room 12, 6 beds; Room 13, 2 beds and a shower; Room 14, 4 beds and a shower; Room 15, 4 beds en suite and Room 16, 4 beds.

Extending up to a further floor from the central stairs area is a single self-contained room under the bell tower. It is airy and well-lit and may have been used for product finishing or as a board room. YHA converted it into a second meeting room, but it more usually serves as a quiet lounge.



1 2



3 4



5 6



7 8



YHA publicity images of the Coalport hostel interior, 2015.

1: the hostel reception and café / bar servery on the lower ground floor. Note the attractive paved floor and glazing and the supporting beams and old metal tie-rod. The hostel kitchen is located through the door in the centre of the picture; 2: the dining area; 3: classroom / meeting room, which has retained similar excellent large windows to the earlier factory; 4&5: self-catering dining room and kitchen on the ground floor of the original factory building. A handbook description of Coalport hostel from the late 1990s describes the self-catering kitchen as small. Manager Penny Ellis expanded it by removing a small laundry room; 6: comfortable hostel lounge / TV room; 7: games room; 8: 2-bedded room



1 2



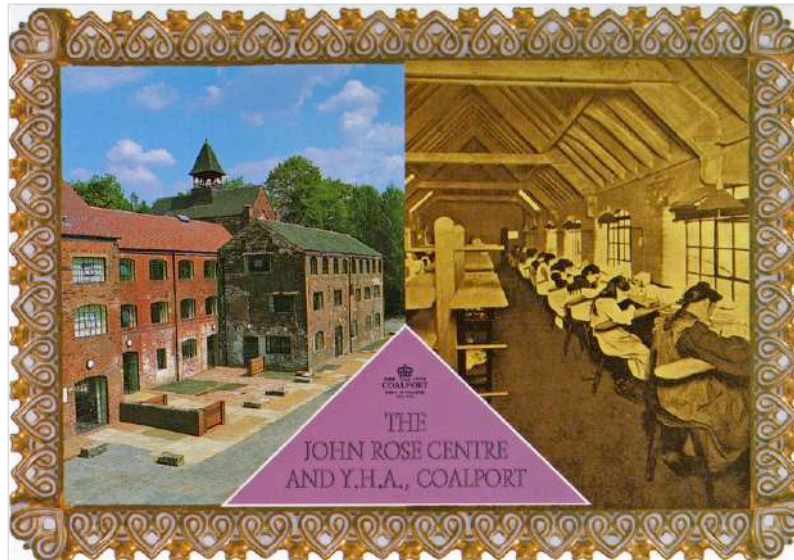
3



4



5



6



7



8



9

1: this tile by local manufacturers was specially commissioned for the hostel's opening in 1997. Other decorative features near the former hostel entrance include rare examples of the tile maker's art exhibited as flooring; 2: commemorative plaque; 3: pin badge; 4: the original ground floor reception, with the road visible beyond; 5: the attractive bell tower room, now a quiet lounge; 6: commemorative postcard, reproduced by courtesy of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust; 7&8: views from the bell tower room; 9: Penny Ellis, hostels manager from 2012 to 2021 (YHA and author's photographs)

21st century managers of both sites have been Jenny Cooper, following on from the Dydes in December 1999, having effected a job swap with them from Sheringham hostel. Andy and Amelia Grant followed from 2002 to 2006 and Cath Young from 2007 to 2011. When the Institute youth hostel was operating on its own, annual overnights were generally between 12,000 and 16,000, but the dual operation enabled some of the pressure to be taken off that establishment after 1997. Yet the combined operation could still account for about 20,000-22,000 overnights in most years up to 2010.

Penny Ellis was the new manager of the sites in 2012, and guided the twin hostels through an exceptionally successful period, with combined overnights climbing above 26,000 in most years. 30,565 stayed at the two sites in 2017.

Numbers settled a little in 2018-2019, but the Covid pandemic had serious repercussions for the whole of the YHA network in 2020, when repeated hopes to restart operations were constantly frustrated by national uncertainties, rising case levels, lock-downs, high-stakes distancing measures, occasional openings and emergency closures on a very restricted basis and very difficult conditions for staff. It was especially difficult for those hostels that relied heavily on the schools and youth group trade. Penny left for the vacant managers' post at YHA Whitby early in 2021, and her place was taken temporarily by Mat Lawrence, who had managed at Treynon Bay. He soon moved on to Hartington Hall. The Coalport and Coalbrookdale posts were then managed by deputy Andrew Philipson before Ben Platt from YHA London St Paul's was appointed as manager in July. 2021, while still a difficult year for YHA, at least saw a measure of the return of school groups, families and individuals (mainly at week-ends) and exclusive hire at Coalport, while Coalbrookdale was more particularly used for exclusive hire and groups.



2022 has been something more like a normal year for operating patterns. The two hostels at Ironbridge temporarily took on additional responsibility for YHA Wilderhope, with Andrew Philipson acting as site manager, though in May 2023 that hostel again had its own manager, Laura Williams.

Left: hostel stamp, as issued at YHA Coalport hostel to the author in 2015

<i>Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows</i>									
1980-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
♣: Coalbrookdale (Ironbridge) Hostel; Δ: Coalbrookdale (Coalport) Hostel									
♣Δ: combined figures from 1999 to 2014; *: 17 month period;									
+: notional figure included for exclusive hire and/or camping; ø: operation affected by Covid									
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
4369♣	10847♣	10344♣	11548♣	12152♣	12795♣	open♣	11879♣	12792♣	13259♣
1990	1991	1992*	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
14007♣	12784♣	13730♣	16242♣	15728♣	17578♣	15935♣	10403♣	8900♣	22296♣Δ
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	10889Δ	12812Δ	combined
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
19698♣Δ	19800♣Δ	18935♣Δ	22476♣Δ	21638♣Δ	20375♣Δ	19190♣Δ	20371♣Δ	18424♣Δ	16923♣Δ
combined	combined	combined	combined	combined	combined	combined	combined	combined	combined
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
19909♣Δ	27267♣Δ+	26488♣Δ+	28070♣Δ+	28287♣Δ+	12939♣+	13517♣+	15720♣+	13173♣+	13985♣+
combined	combined	combined	combined	combined	14638Δ+	14841Δ+	14845Δ+	14218Δ+	13774Δ+
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
2352♣ø+	6678♣ø+	12660♣ø+	open	...	...	...	...	...	...
2661Δ+	6110Δø+	10652Δø+	open	...	...	...	...	...	...

© John Martin, 2023. YHA Profiles are intended to be adaptable in the light of new materials gained by YHA Archive.