



YHA (England and Wales)
Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, 2023-11-18

Wilderhope Manor area Youth Hostels

Easthope Youth Hostel 1932 to 1934

Easthope Manor, Easthope, Wenlock Edge, Much Wenlock, Shropshire

Historic County: Shropshire

YHA Region: Birmingham

GR: SO 566952

An article in the *Birmingham Post*, Saturday 2nd April 1932, announced the good news of a new youth hostel very recently opened in a 16th-century manor farmhouse in rural Shropshire:

THE BIRMINGHAM POST, SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 1932.

ANCIENT MANOR AS YOUTH HOSTEL.



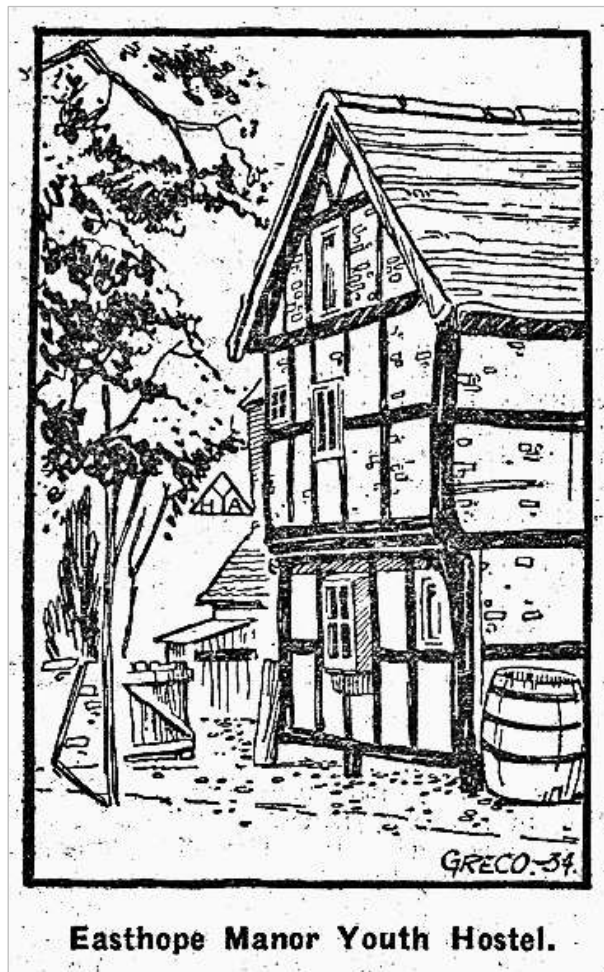
[Photo: D. D. Constable.]

This photograph shows the Manor Farm at Easthope, Shropshire, which has just been opened as a Youth Hostel. It fills what was previously a gap in the chain of hostels between Birmingham and Bala (North Wales). It dates from the sixteenth century, and is one of the most picturesque of the ninety-seven hostels in England and Wales. The house is said to be haunted by the ghosts of two monks from Wenlock Priory, who had a quarrel while staying here, as a result of which each received fatal injuries. They were buried under one of the neighbouring trees. The hostel has accommodation for eight men and eight women.

A 1932 pamphlet described the mess room and men's 8-bed dorm as in the farmstead wing of Manor House; the women's 8-bed dorm was in the Manor House itself.

The *Hiker and Camper Magazine* of October 1932 explained how Birmingham Region had developed rapidly during 1932; the chain to Wales has been practically completed by the establishment of hostels at Easthope, on Wenlock Edge, and Llanfyllin, beyond Kilkewydd, though it must be added that these were very small and in most cases short-lived.

Easthope hostel soon proved unsatisfactory, however, and the 1933 Birmingham Region annual report told how the regional council was looking for alternatives. A plan to close by October 1933 was withdrawn when no alternative could be found, and a modest number of bednights, 474, was registered in the 1934 statistical year (after the highest total of 653 in 1933). Closure came later in the year, though by now the seeds of desire to have a more substantial presence in the area were sown, and were soon flourishing.



1: a 1934 illustration by Greco for the Birmingham Post article outlined above;
2: the author's photograph of the property in 2015, by kind permission of the owners.

Wilderhope Manor Youth Hostel 1937 to present

Wilderhope Manor, Longville in the Dale, Much Wenlock, Shropshire TF13 6EG

Historic County: Shropshire

YHA Regions: Birmingham & Mid-
Wales; Midland, Central

GR: SO 545928

Within three years of the closure of the small and inadequate Easthope hostel, YHA found quite a different replacement barely three miles to the south-west: Wilderhope Manor. It was originally the Elizabethan home, built in 1588 with local Aymestry limestone, of Francis Smallman. Six generations of the Smallmans occupied it.

It was later a farmhouse, and by the early twentieth century was unoccupied, in poor repair and being put to lowly agricultural use. John Cadbury (and perhaps Barclay Baron) discovered it; it was bought, renovated and presented to the National Trust in 1936 by the WA Cadbury Trust for use as a youth hostel. The property is Grade I listed.

A pamphlet on the history of Wilderhope manor, written by *J G-S* in 1978, includes the following section on how the property came to be a youth hostel:

In 1935 the WA Cadbury Trust began negotiations for the purchase of Wilderhope on behalf of the National Trust and these were completed in 1936 when repairs and renovations were started, with the aim of using the house as a Youth Hostel.

The building was then in very bad condition: of the five chimneys at the west end not one was intact, and the southern-most had fallen through the roof. Although the timbers of the roof had remained sound, there were several places which were badly leaking, the rain running through into the house and endangering the ceilings. At one time the stone tiles had been removed from a large part of the roof, and had been replaced by Broseley tiles. It was decided to re-roof with stone tiles, and these were obtained, partly from the adjoining farm buildings, where they were replaced with Broseley tiles, and partly by tiles from a building in Herefordshire which was being reroofed. It is perhaps interesting to note that it was necessary to obtain men from the Cotswolds to put back the tiles.

Two windows on the front of the house had been altered; of them one was bricked up. They have been replaced by windows to match the original ones. Some small extra lights were added to the side of the bay window on the north of the building, and also in the bedroom above. It was also necessary, owing to the few windows which opened, to replace the old metal frames with modern ones. A certain amount of the original glass had survived, and this was re-used as much as possible and supplemented by a few panes found in the attics. At some time a door had been inserted immediately under the kitchen window to give access from the kitchen to the outside of the house. This was removed, as also was the wall blocking the original entrance from the porch to the stairs, thus making them accessible to the rest of the house without going through the kitchen. A new range and hot water boiler were installed, but one of the old bread ovens still remains. The old pigsties detached from the house were converted into outbuildings.

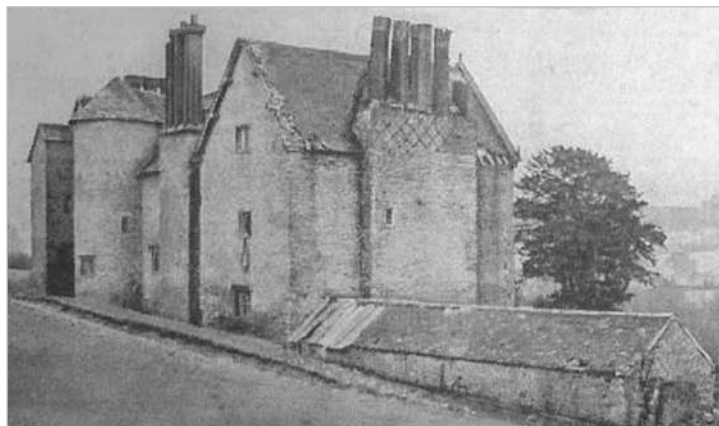
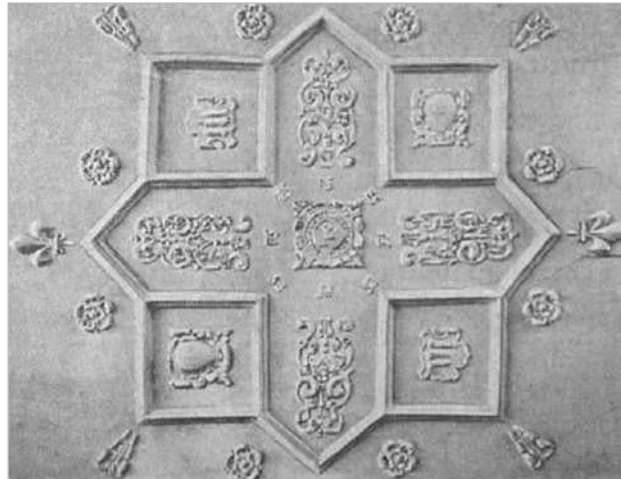
It was intended to put the house back to its original condition as far as possible, and its new use as a youth hostel was ideal since it involved no major structural alterations, beyond the addition of washrooms with showers and a water supply. The old well by the front door (now filled in) was not by any means adequate, so large tanks had to be installed in the cellar and rain water collected from the roof.

In 1975-6, a second major restoration programme was carried out, through the generosity of Mr John Cadbury. Extensive repairs were made to the fabric as well as modernisation of the hostel and its facilities. Once again these changes have been effected without altering the character of the house or dividing up any of the main rooms. The romantic appeal of this remote Elizabethan manor – the Undern Hall of Mary Webb's 'Gone to Earth' – is still as powerful as ever.

While the house remained virtually untouched in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nothing was left of the original garden, so in 1936 a terrace was made, the retaining walls rebuilt and extended, and most of the land immediately in front of the house laid out as a lawn and garden.

The new retaining wall gave more room for the two fine yew trees, which were previously standing on top of an old wall. The brick building now used as a field study centre may be as old as the main house. It had been used as a stable, and the remains of the stand-ins were formerly visible; at one time it had an upper storey, though it seems never to have been used as a dwelling.

It is perhaps possible that Major Smallman's horse stood here the night before his famous escape and leap over the edge.



‘WILDERHOPE MANOR. The announcement that Wilderhope Manor, a beautiful stone-built early seventeenth-century house on the south slope of Wenlock ridge, has been bought for the National Trust by the WA Cadbury Trust [has been made]. Wilderhope Manor will be repaired and used as a youth hostel. These pictures show the front and back of the manor, and a section of one of the fine ceilings which are probably of Italian workmanship’ [this claim is disputed elsewhere] (three illustrations and caption from an unknown magazine article of 1936. Note the very poor state of repair of the roof and chimneys at the rear of the house at the time of acquisition – YHA Archive)

The Birmingham and Mid-Wales Region’s 1937 annual report confirmed the opening as at Easter 1937, Easter Saturday being March 27th. The hostel was leased to the relatively new YHA Trust from the National Trust at a peppercorn rent of £1 per annum on 10th May, and an official opening followed on 29th May. Repeating leases were generally for a term of 21 years; further examples of renewals were in 1958 and 1979

At first there were 36 beds, for 20 men and 16 women. The capacity was considerably expanded in 1938 to 50 beds, for 30 men and 20 women, though before the war numbers staying were very modest. Until 1946 there is no record of wardens’ names.

WILDERHOPE MANOR

WILDERHOPE MANOR, Longville, near Much Wenlock, is a noteworthy addition to Y.H.A. hostels. This perfect example of a domestic manor of the late sixteenth century has been saved from dereliction by the public-spirited generosity of the W. A. Cadbury Trust. It has been given to the National Trust and has been completely restored by the donors as a youth hostel. While in use as a hostel the Wardens are to show visitors the lovely house which will constantly be open to the public.

A three-storeyed gabled building, looking down the Wenlock valley standing on the south slope of Wenlock Ridge. Time has dealt kindly and made the yellow stone mellow and worn.

To-day the house stands much as it did after Francis Smallman rebuilt it in about 1683. It was Francis and his wife, Eleanor, who were responsible for what is perhaps the greatest treasure of Wilderhope. The plastered ceilings, the great hall and parlour are almost intact and here is shown the initials of Francis and Eleanor together with various heraldic and religious devices. It was once considered the craftsmanship was Italian, but this theory fails to make good. Without doubt the ceilings were the work of the fine school of Herefordshire craftsmen, further examples of whose work can be seen in the neighbourhood and the adjoining county. Wilderhope survives the centuries as witness of the native artistry of those men.

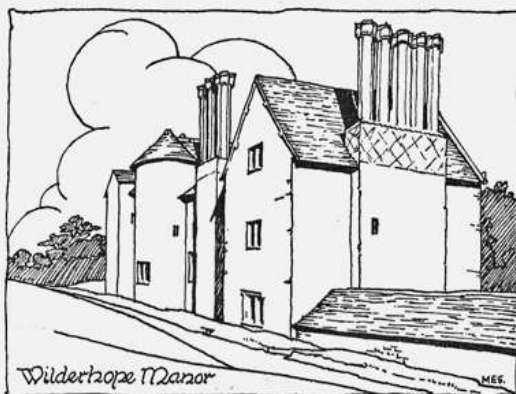
Another feature that is hard to find elsewhere is the turret staircase made of solid oak blocks, as good to-day as when it was first built and the staircase is identified by the conical roofed turret which gives such an

attractive appearance to the near side of the Manor.

A fine plate and fine casket of about 1672 are still in use and the hinges of the massive doors are of contemporary workmanship. The mullioned windows contain much of the early glass and generally the house must be seen to be believed.

The Smallman family held the property for many years, and served in several

public offices in the county and in Wenlock. Perhaps the most romantic figure was Major Thomas Smallman, a great Royalist soldier, who was imprisoned in the house by Cromwellian soldiers, and who, after a cunning escape, fled on horseback pursued by the irate captors. His horse failed him, so with gallant courage he turned from



the road and riding to a broad flat topped rock on the extreme verge of Wenlock Edge, he leapt below. At this place the escarpment is a sheer precipice but covered with trees, to one of the trees the Major clung, and saved his life. Not only that, but he carried his despatches on foot to Shrewsbury. Even to-day the scene of his exploit is known as Major's Leap, and still the tradition holds in Wenlock.

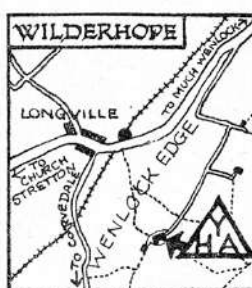
Wilderhope is but ten miles from Ludlow and Wheathill and the Housman country can be well explored.

May 29th will be the date of the formal opening when the National Trust and Y.H.A. will seek to express the gratitude of the Movement to the W. A. Cadbury Trust for such an inspired and inspiring gift to all who love our countryside and its fast disappearing historical homes. May all of us who are privileged to stay there prove worthy of our heritage!

R. L. B.



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WILDERHOPE. — Wilderhope Manor, Longville, near Much Wenlock, Salop. O.S. 71 (B.1), Bart. 17.

Wilderhope Manor is 1 m. from Longville station, from which there is a footpath. Cyclists should leave the main road at the top of the hill above Longville.

Time appears to have stood still in Hope Dale, a fold of Wenlock Edge in which Wilderhope nestles, and this lovely XVI Cent. manor is in complete harmony with its surroundings. The interior of the hostel is even more beautiful, and its panelled walls and spacious fireplaces, its window recesses and moulded ceilings, speak of bygone days.

Traces of more ancient history are to be found near at hand, The Ditches being a fine earthwork, while from the ridge above the hostel the view extends to Caer Caradoc—the fort of Caractacus—the last refuge of the Britons. At the N.E. end of Wenlock Edge is Much Wenlock, with its fine abbey ruins, rich in Roman architecture. Not far distant is Acton Burnell Castle, a XIII Cent. fortified mansion, which was the meeting place of one of the earliest English Parliaments.

1: YHA's Rucksack Magazine of Spring 1937 celebrated the new hostel with this informative article about the building; 2: 1939 anonymous image showing the 1936 terrace and some garden work; 3: 1939 details from a regional guide (YHA Archive)

The hostel was requisitioned during 1940 and not used by YHA in that year or the next. Circumstances relaxed sufficiently for it to be released in time for an Easter opening in 1942. Thereafter the hostel operated during each year of the war. It was hoped at this time to increase accommodation from 50 beds, especially for larger groups of schoolchildren, though that would have to wait until peace time: 70 beds were provided from 1945, and became the norm right through to 1962. For the years 1946-48 (at least) Mr and Mrs R Watkins were the wardens.

In January 1948 Birmingham's *Regional Roundabout* recorded the very dangerous state of the Common Room ceiling, necessitating the closure of this room and the dormitory above it. The National Trust hoped to get repairs done.

The Rev G Greenhough was a keen hosteller in the early post-war period. He described his 1949 trip to Wilderhope:

We sought the warden – an elderly gentleman who was as pleasant and agreeable as anyone can ever hope to come across. [Mr and Mrs Richards had taken over the wardenship in 1948. It may still have been Mr Richards in charge when the visit was made the following year – records for 1949 are missing]. The men's washroom was again the open air, but the water supply was not quite as primitive as at Delamere, for there was a pump. This, however, was not always in perfect working order, and, although it was doing well that night, I had to pour a bucket of water down it in the morning to make it work! [The washroom referred to is thought to have been located in the former piggeries at the south-west end of the Manor House, though the location of all earlier washrooms is not yet clear].

It was not uncommon for wardens at YHA's hostels to change rapidly in the post-war years, as the national and personal chaos of British wartime life settled into a new order. Between 1945 and 1957 there were at least seven sets of wardens, usually married couples, quite often after a background of membership and volunteering in local YHA groups. Such new wardens were in place in 1950, according to the *Birmingham Regional Roundabout*, August 1950:

Welcome to Mr and Mrs TV Underwood. Our new wardens of Wilderhope hostel are due to move in at the end of August. Mr and Mrs Underwood have been keen workers for YHA in the Northants Group, and are looking forward to carrying on their good work for countryside preservation within YHA.



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1: Norman O'Reilly was a YHA Northern Ireland member who hostelled much in the early post-war period. Here, his photograph shows the newness of the terrace and the somewhat dilapidated piggeries outbuilding (author's collection); 2-4 the entrance. 2: a lone female surveys the rolling Shropshire scene; 3: school boys consider their next adventure; 4: Mary Jephcott took this photograph of friends on the threshold, about 1959 (2-4: early photographs, YHA Archive)

Norman and Marjorie Coxon were wardens at the neighbouring Shrewsbury youth hostel, *Woodlands*, from 1946 to 1966. Amongst their considerable collection of YHA papers gathered during their career was an unnamed 'County'-style magazine article of about 1950, with good descriptions of Wilderhope Manor and other local hostels at Bridges, Clun, Ludlow and Shrewsbury. Their daughter Rosemary Berrington donated these to the YHA Archive on her father's death. The passage on Wilderhope offers much insight into the building's history, the hostel and its users:

You see them everywhere in Shropshire. Yes, even in the winter you see the hardy ones on our high roads and our valley lanes. They are the youth hostellers enjoying the best of holidays hiking, rambling, climbing and cycling.

I went first to Wilderhope Manor, originally the Elizabethan home of the Smallman family, six generations of which occupied it.

This out of the way hostel has been open since 1937. Cyclists come to Wilderhope by the new road from Much Wenlock or the Corvedale end. Walkers frequently arrive by one of the many footpaths over 'the Edge.' They come to a fascinating old manor house which, structurally, is almost unaltered since it was built by Francis Smallman in the latter part of the sixteenth century. The Smallman family-owned land hereabouts as early as the thirteenth century.

A descendant was the Major Thomas Smallman who was captured by Roundheads while taking dispatches from Bridgnorth to Shrewsbury. From Wilderhope he escaped by lowering himself down the garderobe tower and, being chased, he leapt his horse over the steepest point of Wenlock Edge, still known as the 'The Major's Leap.' A tree broke his fall and he eventually arrived at Shrewsbury safely on foot.

Wilderhope is isolated but is worth seeing. Its four pale-stoned gables contrasting with the richer Tudor brickwork of its stately chimneys provide an exciting initial spectacle for the youth hosteller. The back of the house has a castellated appearance with a turret bulging out of the wall. The turret houses one of the two spiral staircases, of solid oak block treads.

There is a great quantity of old timber in the Manor. Many of the doors are of stout oak and quite recently the great oak beams in some of the rooms have been exposed. The timbers in the attics are also interesting. Stone Tudor arches and wide fireplaces are a feature and another beauty of Wilderhope is the plasterwork on several of the ceilings. The ceiling in what is now the common room is a particularly fine one. The initials FS – presumably Francis Smallman – and ES for Ellen, his wife, are moulded in the design.

Wilderhope was never 'modernised,' in the unfortunate sense of that word. After its era as the Smallman home, it was used as a farmhouse. Mr John Cadbury, one of the pioneers of Youth Hostelling, discovered it and restored it and it is now leased to the Association by the National trust. It was necessary to make some alterations. A modern cooking range was installed where there had been an enormous fireplace in the kitchen. Some of the mullioned windows had to be reconstructed to open. This was done particularly carefully to avoid spoiling the appearance. Very simple washing facilities were incorporated: there is still no electric light.

On arrival, hostellers book in at the warden's cosy little office which has oak panelling added in 1672 by Thomas Smallman and the initials TS and JS are to be seen. Smallman's wife was the daughter of Sir Richard Prince, a Justice of the Peace in Shrewsbury. They then go up and make their beds in one of the dormitories which run along the top of the house. Wilderhope can sleep thirty-six men and thirty-four women, in its bunk-lined rooms. They are then free to explore the house or do what they will until supper time. Usually, the place is full during the summer months.

Wilderhope is open during the winter and a good number use it then, particularly walkers. People do not usually bother to book in advance during the winter and a rap at the great oak door when dusk has fallen on a winter's evening is always a matter for speculation. Quite often, it is a foreign voice which asks for a bed, for Wilderhope gets its full share of people from other countries, in spite of its position off the beaten track. The place is a favourite, too, with Americans, who will climb the oak block stairs with many a low whistle of admiration.

Wilderhope is well known for its parties and social occasions. Many a youth hosteller in other parts of England has colourful memories of a Guy Fawkes night, when the wardens made a guy in the traditional shorts and shirt of a hiker, carrying a billy-can. It was hoisted high on a giant pile of felling collected by the hostellers, who also brought the fireworks. The hostel staff turned up trumps at the end of the evening with cocoa and roast potatoes for the revellers.

Christmas parties are other events which the hostellers come a long way to attend. Last year the large dining room was decorated with a Christmas tree and a huge log fire was lit in the stone grate. The flames provided the only light in the room save for candles on the tables, which were ranged in a horseshoe. There are seasonal sing-songs.

The wardening pattern of a change every few years continued through the 1960s This was partly down to the ambitions of good married teams who would start at Wilderhope, then go on to manage much busier hostels

elsewhere. One such couple was Les and Brenda Hughes, who came to Wilderhope in 1957 and stayed until 1962, when they switched to Stow-on-the-Wold hostel. In 1968 they moved on to Stainforth hostel, which had a bustling schools trade in the Yorkshire Dales, and made a great success of their career there. Les Hughes retired in 1988 after more than 30 years serving YHA. After 1962, however, it was all change on an almost yearly basis of warden until 1969, often on a single appointment basis.

An article ‘*Hostel Close-Up, Wilderhope*’ in the *Youth Hosteller* magazine, May 1959, by Birmingham and Mid-Wales’s hard-working Regional Secretary, Don Errington, added more historical description:

The building is noted for the decorated plaster work in the ceilings and for the main circular staircase, each step of which is a solid block of wood. The external walls are in places over four feet thick and there are internal walls of timber framing, filled with wattle and daub. Since it was opened in 1937 the house has probably seen more visitors than in the previous 300 years.

From the outset and in the earlier years, the hostel existed in a rather hand-to-mouth fashion, with few extra resources or expenses possible. Wilderhope Manor offered a popular overnight contrasting experience of a historic country mansion with the hard comforts of an 18th-century farmhouse, but even with its admirable reputation, it was drawing only 3,000 to 4,000 visitors a year and incurring heavy losses; a youth hostel in such a property was vulnerable.

In 1960 Birmingham and Mid-Wales Region launched a Wilderhope Fund to make its future more secure. The January 1961 *Youth Hosteller* elaborated:

During the past few months contributions have been arriving to the Wilderhope Fund, ranging from cheques for £2 to a copper in the collecting box. All have been gratefully received and the total sum at September 30th was just over £17. This means that full advantage can be taken of the generous offer by an anonymous donor to double contributions up to a total of £10. A further offer has now been made to double gifts up to £20 received by 30th September, 1961. This offer applies to Groups and Clubs as well as to individual members with the provision that no contribution from an individual can rank for more than £2.

Many of the contributors have expressed their appreciation of Wilderhope and their wish to see it continue. A few have expressed concern that Wilderhope should be closing and reference has been made to the ‘Save Wilderhope Fund!’ The fund has no such dramatic title – it has not been started because of any imminent danger that the hostel will close. In fact, Wilderhope is as secure as any other hostel, except that it does have a heavy running loss.

It is hoped that the fund will help to reduce this loss and so ease the burden which at present falls on YHA finances. The special claim of Wilderhope to be helped by such a fund is that it is of interest as a historic building, as well as a hostel, and it is well worth while keeping it open even if there is a running loss. To all who wish to help, the Region says ‘Keep the contributions rolling in so that we may far exceed the target figure of £20’.



South Wales long-distance cyclist JD Thomas was a regular guest at English and Welsh hostels for a 35-year period after the war, photographing and keeping a diary of his stays, as here in 1966. His first image shows the one-time location of the reception and hostel shop in the south-east corner of the dining room; the second the first-floor corridor leading to Wenlock Edge dormitory. Note the dustpan and brush ready for the next hostel duty and washrooms on the left (YHA Archive)

The next issue of *Youth Hosteller* painted this Gothic, atmospheric picture, *A Night in Wilderhope Manor*, perhaps with an element of advertising propaganda attached to it:

After meeting the warden and duly admiring his office with its Jacobean Oak panelling, we had supper and settled down for the evening in front of the huge, open fireplace. There were only six of us in the hostel; three boys from Crewe, a German student, my friend and myself.

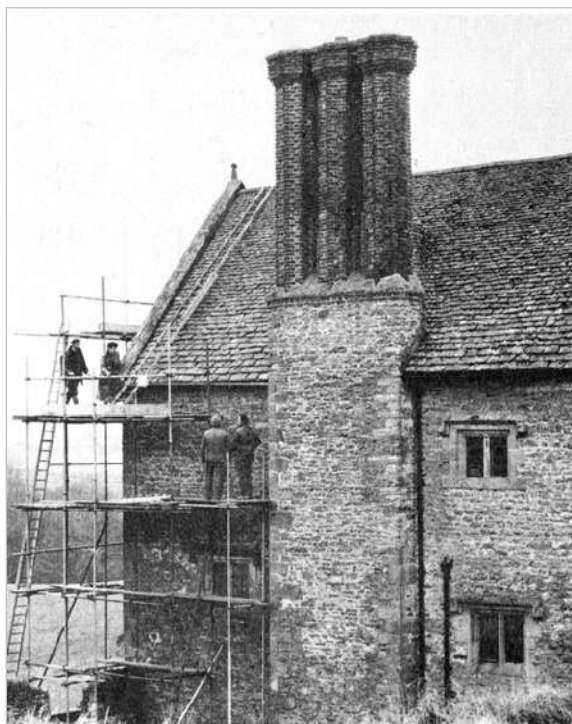
The log fire cast lurid shadows on the opposite walls of the great dining chamber – as it used to be – but dark, impenetrable shadows defied the flickering, uncertain light of the solitary paraffin lamp.

Outside the wind screamed demoniacally, while the windows rattled fitfully. The rain beat down fiercely, and huddled together round the fire we could not suppress a shiver at the thought of being out on the Edge on such a night.

After 35 years as a large but very basic youth hostel Wilderhope Manor was ready for upgrading; from 1971 there was a significant extended programme of modernisation, lasting about six years. *Hostelling News*, the successor to *Youth Hosteller*, carried this article in its Winter 1972-73 edition:

Improvements costing £34,000 are being carried out at Wilderhope Manor. The oil lamps are being replaced by mains electricity, the 'Elsans' by water-borne sanitation, hot water is being laid on and heating installed. A number of structural repairs are being made and a new access road has been built. The major part of the cost is being met by Mr and Mrs John Cadbury.

Mr Cadbury, National President of the YHA, has been associated with Wilderhope since the building was first bought and restored in 1936 by the WA Cadbury Trust – WA Cadbury was John Cadbury's father. It was then given to the National Trust on the understanding that it would be used as a youth hostel.



1: the *Hostelling News* article above carried this image and caption: 'Work has started on exterior maintenance at Wilderhope Manor, stage one of a £34,000 scheme of improvements. The aim is to bring in mains water, electricity and better facilities without altering the character of this 16th century manor house. It may be necessary to limit the number of beds and meals, but the hostel will be open while work is in progress' (Photo J Billingham);
2: 'oil lamps are being replaced'. This dormitory photograph shows one of the traditional lamps (photo YHA Archive)

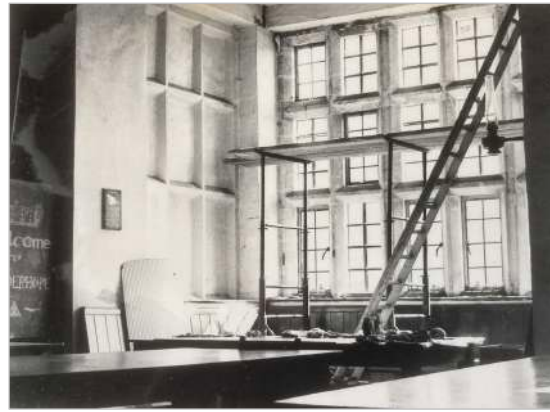
The arrival of electricity and modern toilets and showers was confirmed in 1977, as was the news that John Cadbury paid for the drive to be put in. Olive Thoumine, wife of YHA's National Treasurer John Thoumine at that time, remembered further philanthropy in a conversation with the author in 2010:

John Cadbury paid for new lighting to be installed at Wilderhope out of his own pocket. He also bought a Land Rover for regional use.

John Thornley had brought a greater measure of permanence to the warden's post; he and then Mr and Mrs Crane were in charge through this period of improvements, from 1969 to 1978. Despite all the improvement disruptions, the annual recorded overnights figure was increasing steadily. An official reopening was held on 28th May 1977.



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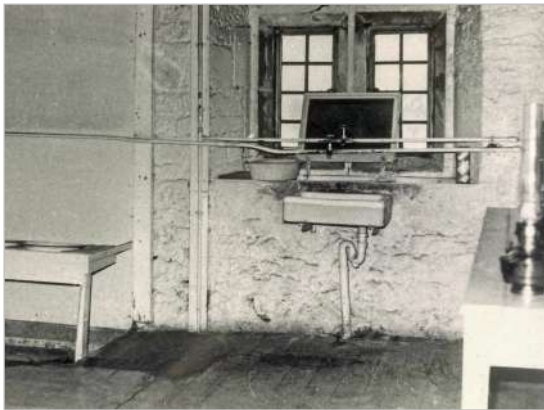
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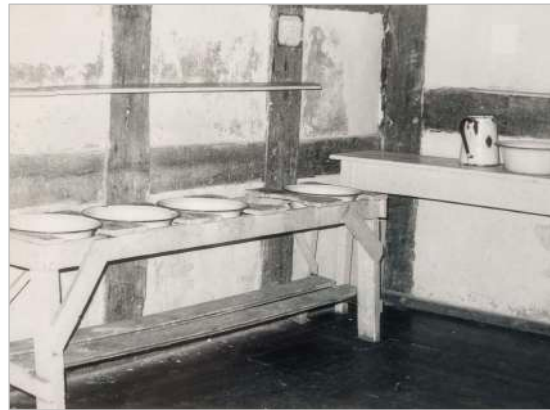
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The old days: Wilderhope youth hostel before the major refurbishment of the 1970s.

1: the entrance into the dining room was via the pale coloured folding doors. The older oak door is hinged behind them; 2: ongoing repairs. Close to the ladder in the dining room is a hanging oil lamp; 3: the right-hand side, members' kitchen; 4: the hostel kitchen, with Aga cooker, gas stove and interloper; 5: the potwash, later the bar; 6&7: old-fashioned ablutions; 8; more ablutions, but with a pail for the night toilet; 9: fire prevention – water storage tanks in the basement. A view from the basement stairs, looking towards the front wall. The black inlet pipe carried water down from the roof. The windows were later rebuilt and the new exit door made in the left-hand corner (YHA Archive)



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The 1977 major refurbishment – before and after pictures.

1-3: the first picture shows the old kitchen arrangements. The second and third the pleasing modern décor and storage and the wardens' enhanced working environment. The Aga cooker was retained; 4&5: a marked contrast in the self-catering kitchen; 6&7: an even stronger disparity between the old men's wash, possibly located in the piggeries, and new internal arrangements (YHA Archive, photographs provided by Don and Sylvia Errington)

Hostelling News, Autumn 1977, carried this detailed description of the latest work and a further insight into the state of affairs when The Cadbury Trust first became involved in the 1930s:

Wilderhope – before and after

'It is not usual to find a house of this description which stands today as it stood when it was originally built. One of the greatest charms of Wilderhope is that it has survived practically untouched.' – National Trust Handbook. 'A long wait, but well worthwhile,' was the general verdict when the improvements at Wilderhope Manor Hostel were completed this year. A long wait for the Region – six years of painstaking work. A longer wait for the solid stonebuilt Manor, for the house had been waiting for almost 400 years! Wilderhope's history began in 1583 when land in Hopedale was purchased by Thomas Smallman and leased to his younger brother Francis who then built the house. The house is noted for the main circular staircase, being capped by a conical roof. The Smallmans were an old Corvedale family and the building remained in their hands until 1742.

The YHA's interest in the building dates from 1935 when the house was discovered being used as a farm outbuilding with implements, farm produce and even chickens in residence! The National Trust guidebook records: 'The house was then in very bad condition: of the five chimneys at the west end not one was intact, and the southern-most had fallen through the roof. Although the timbers of the roof remained sound, there were several places which were badly leaking, the rain running through into the house and endangering the ceilings.'

This account describes the reroofing with stone tiles by Cotswold craftsmen, the rescue of some of the original glass, the building of the terrace. So that the house could be used as a hostel, washrooms were added and water tanks installed, but it was not found necessary to make any structural alterations.

Wilderhope Manor opened as a hostel in 1937, recording the modest total of 1,591 overnights. The annual report states that it was 'greatly appreciated by members not only as a hostel but as a building of intrinsic beauty.' This view must have been echoed by many who stayed there in the next 35 years but some who sampled the spartan conditions must have felt that a little of that kind of romance could go a long way – the overnights rarely exceeded 4,000. In 1971, thanks to the generosity of Mr and Mrs John Cadbury, work began on the scheme which was to transform conditions at the hostel but leave the structure and external appearance of the buildings much as it was in Elizabethan times. Major items of maintenance included replacing defective stonework, repointing external walls and the partial rebuilding of chimney-stacks. The long job of modernisation included flush lavatories, drains and septic tank, showers and wash basins, warden's bathroom, the construction of a new entrance via the cellar at the east end of the Manor (which incorporates a drying room), and the installation of electric light and heating.

The members' kitchen and the washup were completely re-equipped, and so was the kitchen except for the Aga. Water supply problems were solved when the mains water supply came to Longville and a supply to the Manor is now pumped from there.

The main entrance hall, with a new inner door, now leads straight through to the back door. This is the original plan – the wall cutting this entrance hall in half and built at a later date has now been removed. Fire regulations have necessitated the erection of smoke doors. The fine table in the hall – three planks of elm 16ft long – came from Attingham Hall.

And so the Manor is now lit by the wonder of electric light! Some mourn the passing of the flickering oil lamps, the long cold walk to the washrooms – and yet the overnights increase! 1977 will certainly be a record. The house that has seen so much turmoil and armed conflict as well as rural peace now welcomes the hosteller who can with a little imagination relive the life of an Elizabethan, but still enjoy the comforts of our modern society!



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The Grand Reopening on 28th May 1977. 1&2: a good crowd gathers; 3: John Cadbury cuts the opening ribbon; 4: Mr and Mrs John and Lucy Agatha Cadbury (YHA Archive, photographs by Don and Sylvia Errington)

Overseeing the later stages of this work were wardens Wal and Nesta Rixon (1978-80). Ted and Jean Daynes took on the post in 1981 and stayed until their retirement in 1993. Under the stewardship of both teams and with the benefits of the 1970s improvements hostel usage soared from 5,000 or 6,000 per annum to 8,000 or 9,000. Indeed, there was a new record set in 1984 with over 10,000 Wilderhope bednights registered for the first time.

A National Executive memo recorded in December 1984 that it had proved impossible to resite the members' kitchen. Better news was that there were now 12 wash hand basins in the hostel and two more in the all-day external toilets.



Upper: In Memoriam John Cadbury, 1905-1985. A plaque, framed obituary and a fascinating tribute to his work with the local YHA Regions (Birmingham & Mid-Wales, later Midland) are on display at the hostel;
 Lower: a tribute to the 1970s transformation, the original opening plaque and an acknowledgment of the 2011 refurbishment. It is doubtful whether any other NT or YHA establishment has so many plaques on display (author's images, May 2015 and October 2023)

In 1985, at the hostel's height of success, John Cadbury (former National President of the YHA) died; the National Executive Committee of the YHA duly designated the hostel as the John Cadbury Memorial Hostel the following year. A framed tribute to his life is illustrated above. It reads:

JOHN CADBURY 1905 – 1985

John Cadbury, a founder member and former president of the YHA, died in June 1985, at the age of 80, while fishing in the Clent Hills.

He was the great grandson of the founder of the Cadbury Chocolate firm, and before his retirement he worked as buying director and export director in the family company. He had during his career been involved in the development of the cocoa trade in West Africa and the establishment of the cocoa marketing board.

His involvement in the YHA began at the very first meeting of the Birmingham Regional Group in 1930, and he became the group's first Honorary Treasurer. He was chairman of the Region from 1946 until reorganisation took place in 1965, holding also the office of President from 1961 to 1965.

John Cadbury represented the Region on the National Executive from 1931 until he was elected National Chairman in 1939. He held that office through all the difficult war years and was elected a Vice President in 1945, He was elected National President of the YHA in 1964 and continued in that post until 1981. John Cadbury was elected to the Council of the Youth Hostels Trust in 1961, became its chairman in 1963 and retired from the trust in 1981.

John Cadbury did so much for the YHA, yet it is with Wilderhope Manor above all else that his name will be associated. It was in 1935 that the 16th century manor house was discovered, then being used as a farm outbuilding with implements, farm products and chickens in residence. One of the tall chimneys had fallen through the roof, which was leaking badly, endangering the plaster ceilings. The building was purchased by the WA Cadbury Trust, donated to the National Trust and opened as a youth hostel in 1937.

Thanks to the generosity of John Cadbury and his wife a second scheme of renovation was carried out in the 1970s which modernised the facilities without altering the character of the building. Externally it was left much as it had been in Elizabethan time. Of all the things that John Cadbury did for the YHA this was perhaps the dearest to his heart. Lucy Agatha Cadbury died on 4th August 1999, aged 88, having survived her husband by 14 years.

In 1990, a YHA schools publication listed the capacity as 68 beds in a mere four bedrooms (probably Long Mynd, Corvedale, the Ditches and Wenlock Edge), with 8, 16, 22 and 22 beds each. Modernisation came in 1997-98, especially in the provision of family rooms and better staff facilities. YHA removed the manager and assistant, located in present-day Cadbury, Lutwyche and Smallman rooms on the top floor of the Manor House, to the renovated separate stables building to the north-east, previously used by YHA for a Field Study facility. These three rooms then became family bedrooms, and the capacity once more totalled 70 – the same as in 1938, but with considerably more comfort, especially in the smaller rooms. The 1998 YHA handbook listed four 4-bedded rooms, one 6-bedded, two 10-bedded and two 14-bedded. Of the three new family bedrooms, two had four beds and one six. During the middle years of the 1990s Andrew Smith was hostel manager.



Wilderhope in the later 20th-century. 1&2: The large Corvedale and Long Mynd dormitories with traditional bedding and iron framed beds, though there are now colourful blankets and covers. Despite the old order, the rooms are in immaculate order; 3: Long Mynd again, this time with new wooden beds; 4: view of the hostel lounge with period easy chairs (YHA Wilderhope)

Duncan Simpson recalled in 2015 further improvements made under his guidance in the late 1990s:

Herbert Gatliff left an endowment fund to assist in Wilderhope's upkeep. YHA have modernised it, once in the seventies when major improvements were made, then again when I was operations manager, during the winter of 1997-98. We had spent ages considering how best to heat the building so that we could use it during the winter. The National Trust's building manager, a heating consultant, and I put together plans and examined schemes for electric heating, but in the end we all thought they were far too expensive. I think it was Graham Dench, the NT building manager, who then said that we could do the job for half the price if we put in a new boiler and conventional heating system to which I retorted that we could but he wouldn't let us. Graham stared at me. Of course we could put in conventional heating. He thought YHA wanted electric heating! Misunderstanding resolved, a conventional heating system was finally installed.

Over the winter, contractors also rewired the hostel, moved the staff accommodation to the stables where an underused field study room had been, converted the staff accommodation into three new bedrooms, completely overhauled the washrooms and installed two large cast iron chandeliers in the hall. I seemed to spend every Friday at the manor for site meetings, fretting over costs, budgets and the time it was all taking, while we all froze in an unheated building, but the hostel was transformed.

Wilderhope is special, not just because of the building, which was described to me as a completely unmodernised, meaning that neither the Victorians nor the Georgians had touched it, but also because of its location. For a big building, a stay there can take you close to nature and there's a footpath right past the front door. The night skies there have to be seen to be believed and owls could be heard while you fell asleep.

YHA News of Summer 1998 looked back on a successful 60th anniversary celebration for Wilderhope:

Hostels which have been open for sixty years are an elite part of the YHA. John Cadbury, a former regional and national chairman of the YHA, had the foresight to present this dilapidated but unspoilt manor house to the National Trust, with the proviso that it be used as a youth hostel. The YHA and the National Trust have a complementary purpose and this produces an arrangement which works well for both organisations. The house is lived in as a home, albeit by hostellers, and the YHA provides access for NT members to tour the house and become more aware of the YHA.

In arranging this anniversary celebration an effort was made to invite as many people as possible who had been associated with Wilderhope over the past 60 years and a skilful juggling of dates brought Lucy Cadbury, Derek Hanson, YHA chairman and a large number of current and former YHA officers, wardens and staff together for a delightful day of reunion, including a tour of the house and the newly opened family accommodation.

Working behind the scenes were Wilderhope's managers Caroline and Matt, who, supported by their staff and with help from volunteers, provided a first-rate buffet lunch and oversaw an event which was worthy of such a splendid hostel. The involvement of volunteers was significant as Wilderhope began, as did many early hostels, dependent entirely upon volunteer effort.

Old photographs show a washroom comprising one cold tap on a bare wall over an earthenware sink, a kitchen with paraffin stoves for cooking, and iron beds with straw mattresses. The only concession to comfort was an indoor chemical toilet for night use only. Slowly over the years this austerity and bleakness has gone but so too did much of the volunteer involvement with those left receiving little or no recognition for the important contribution they make to the YHA, until two years ago the creation of the Volunteer Initiative began to redress this imbalance.

Today a large number of volunteers are registered on the Initiative with their skills and interests being matched to worthwhile tasks.



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Modern colour images. 1: John Elliott's photograph of the rear of the Manor shows the cone-topped tower and Tudor chimneys with attractive diagonal brick mouldings at the base; 2: a postcard shows the location of the former stables, now staff quarters; 3-6: lesser-known views of the hostel. 3: the west end and piggeries; 4: the east end; 5: the turret tower; 6: rear entrance (3-6: author's images, October 2023)

Caroline Wells succeeded Andrew Smith as manager in 1998 and steered Wilderhope successfully through ten years of change and challenge. The hostel suffered a dip in trade in 2001 during the restrictions of Foot and Mouth, but it was not hit as hard as some, and numbers soon recovered. One lasting effect of the loss of trade during the epidemic was to encourage YHA to explore other markets and expand its commitment to youth: an example of new thinking was the introduction of Summer Camps, held here in 2005 and 2006 under the title Do It 4 Real.



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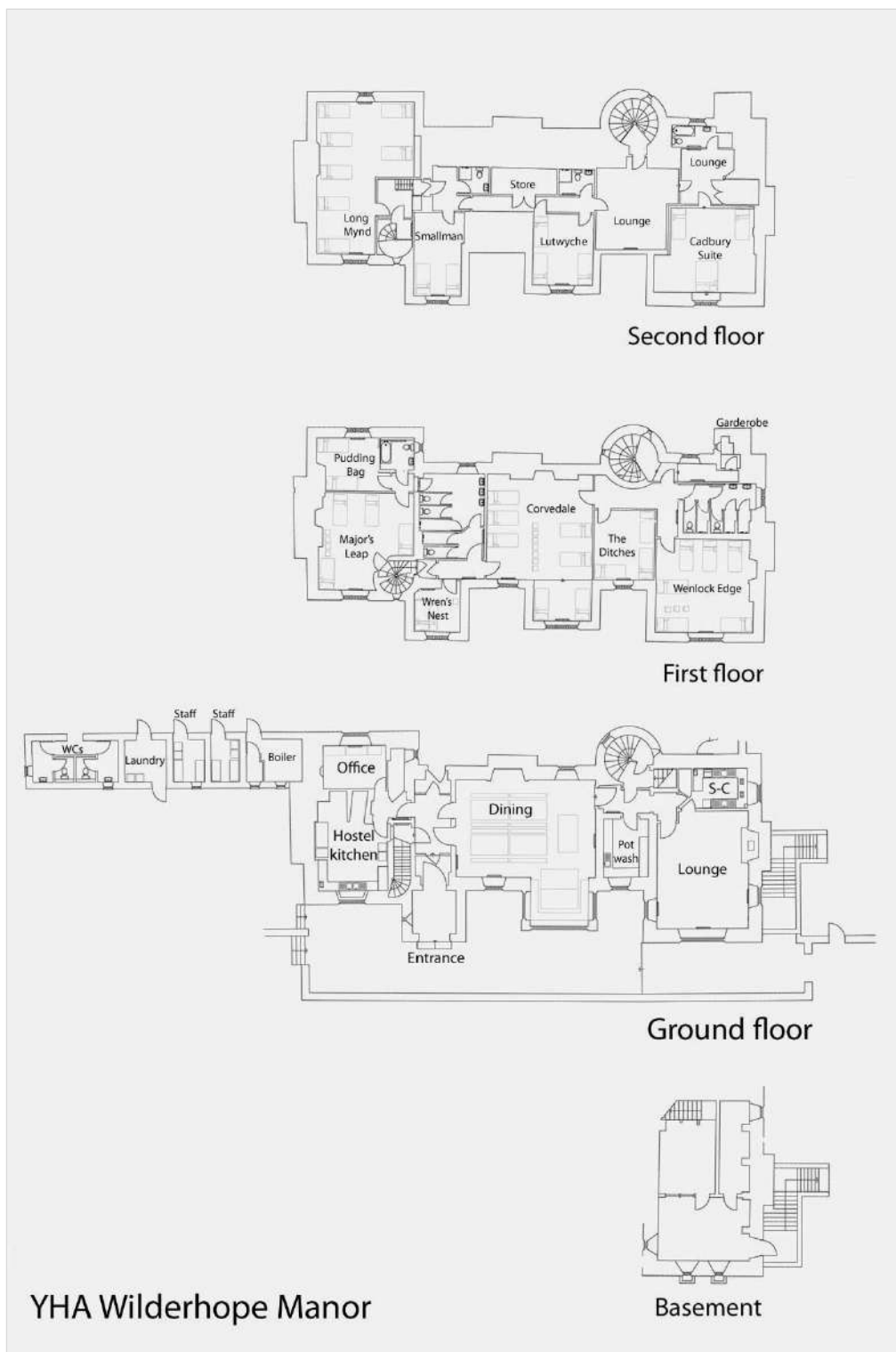
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The cosy atmosphere of YHA Wilderhope – as it was still officially titled – is shown in these images of July 2007. 1&2: the large lounge, with ancient moulded ceiling, fireplace and other features; 3: the dining room; 4: hostel kitchen; 5&6: top floor bedrooms (Lutwyche and Cadbury); 7&8: the subdivided basement social area, later the classroom; (YHA Archive – W Stephenson’s photographs for YHA publicity purposes)



This plan of YHA Wilderhope Manor is based on a comprehensive series of CAD drawings of many network hostels provided in the years 2005-2007. It represents the hostel as refurbished in the late 1990s, but before the further changes of 2011-12.

In 2023 site manager Laura Williams outlined the subsequent changes to this plan:

On the Ground Floor, the small room labelled as a Potwash was turned into an events bar and then a few years ago it was changed to the cleaning store. The small rooms marked 'Staff' in the old Piggeries wing are fridge/freezer stores.

On the First Floor, the bedroom labelled 'The Ditches' has been renamed 'Hope Dale'. The shower/toilet blocks have changed and there are no second doors within the block themselves. The entrance to 'Pudding Bag' is now via the neighbouring ablution block corridor and a new staircase, not from Major's Leap. Pudding Bag's en suite has been altered. Major's Leap and Pudding Bag may have been the warden's quarters and Wren's Nest an assistant's room in earlier days.

*On the Second Floor, there is no longer a large store as on the plan, but there are four toilet/shower rooms along that corridor with a small storage room in the middle. The lounges marked on the plan are awaiting development
(Plans redrawn and simplified by the author)*

One of Wilderhope's longest serving managers, Abbie Freeman, came to the hostel in 2008 from Medway hostel in Kent and stayed for over a dozen years before moving on to Hawkshead hostel in the Lake District.



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Interior detail - further YHA images from 2009 and 2012.

- 1: a recent view of one of the ornate ceilings. The initials FS and ES are depicted either side of the central wreath;
- 2: the door to the 'Major's Leap' bedroom that leads off the smaller of the two spiral staircases;
- 3: carved panel work in the manager's office shows a building date of 1672 and the initials TIS (Thomas Smallman)

In 2011, a dozen years after the previous refurbishment, it was felt that the hostel was in need of another, but it would take a special public request for funds to achieve it. An appeal publication 'Making Wilderhope more wonderful' referred to feedback of what its 21st-century guests expected:

'We want to create a better space and improve the experience we offer. Exciting plans include a new drying room, improved cycle storage, a games room and lounge and the upgrade of some rooms with en suite facilities. The self-catering kitchen, external lighting and paving and paintwork will receive attention, and there will be a new oil tank, extractor fans and more efficient heating. The cost of the project is £500,000 and we need your help to make it happen'. [The cycle storage is in a farmer's barn adjacent].



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New look, March 2012 (YHA publicity images, YHA Archive)

- 1: the lounge; 2: the dining room. Note one of the chandeliers referred to on page 13; 3: the small self-catering kitchen (compare this with the earlier forms, shown on page 10); 4: the events bar – since Covid repurposed as a store

The WA Cadbury Charitable Trust pledged £50,000 towards the total. Wilderhope Hostel was ready for reopening on 11th March 2012. A month later YHA's internal Council Bulletin enthused:

Set in acres of unspoilt National Trust Countryside, Wilderhope Manor is a jewel in YHA's crown. The stunning Grade I Elizabethan manor house, on the slopes of Wenlock Edge, has been tastefully restored to its 16th-century glory and now features purpose-made classroom, event bar with 24-hour licence, refurbished bedrooms, showers, washrooms, a self-catering kitchen and an exquisite honeymoon suite.

The 12-week refurbishment programme has enhanced YHA Wilderhope Manor's many original Elizabethan features, including the sweeping spiral oak staircase, large open fireplaces, ornate ceilings and period windows.

YHA Wilderhope Manor Manager, Abbie Freeman, said: 'Few changes have been made to the building since 1742 and it is steeped in history and period features. Being a National Trust property, we have worked with the YHA to ensure all renovations are in keeping with the history and character of the building; we have created teaching, conference and wedding facilities that are second-to-none. [It is] an historical building but with all the comfort and luxuries of modern living.'

Rupert Cadbury, a Trustee and family member said: 'Given the long association with the family, the WA Cadbury Trust is delighted to have helped with the refurbishment of the Manor.'



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New look, March 2012 (more YHA publicity images, YHA Archive)

1: 5-bedded top-floor room 'Smallman' with its impressive supporting beam; 2: 14-bedded first floor room, 'Corvedale'. Abbie Freeman adds this is thought to have been the dining room in the manor with separate stairs for family and servants: 3: 7-bedded room 'Hopedale'; 4: 10-bedded room 'Major's Leap'; 5: modern washroom; 6: the new basement classroom



The 2011-2012 refurbishment set great store by a high-end upgrade to its most prestigious accommodation, the Cadbury Suite at the north-east end of the top floor. There had been a double bed in this family room location for some years, but now it was given the luxury of a four-poster and en suite roll-top bath in keeping with its wedding-venue attraction (YHA publicity images)

The expanded name YHA Wilderhope Manor was confirmed in March 2013. With the 2012 improvements came an increase in capacity from 74 beds to 78, and later to 80. In 2014 a record 10,060 bednights to that date was recorded.



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External views. 1: manager Abbie Freeman at the west end of the Manor House; 2: the terrace from the east end. An ancient footpath once led around the front of the house; 3: the former stables building; 4: from the Wilderhope Farm buildings (1: YHA Archive photograph, March 2012; 2-4: author's photographs, July 2015)

On 17th October 2020 local newspaper *Shropshire Star* recounted a cautious moment in the building's long history:

Bird's Nest causes Smoke to pour into Shropshire Youth Hostel

Smoke poured into a Shropshire youth hostel after debris from a bird's nest blocked a boiler flue. Crews were called to the Wilderhope Manor Youth Hostel, in Longville in the Dale, south Shropshire, last night to find that debris from a bird's nest had blocked the boiler flue. They dealt with the problem within half an hour, using breathing apparatus to go into the smoke-logged room, then chimney rods and a hose as well as a thermal imaging camera to check that there was no fire.

Covid hit all YHA properties very severely in 2020; the few stays at Wilderhope in that year were before the

imposition of lockdowns in March, or exclusive hire. Abbie Freeman moved to YHA Hawkshead in March 2021. During 2021 and 2022 it proved necessary to restrict YHA Wilderhope to more distant management, covered by Andy Clark at Kington, then Ben Platt and Andrew Philipson at Ironbridge, and to limit the hostel's usage, as elsewhere in YHA, to further exclusive hire or large group bookings only.

Nevertheless, despite all the restrictions, impositions, difficulties of staffing and inflationary pressures in those years, and with the trend, sometimes a frenzy, for home-based Staycations, the hostel was very busy in 2021, with over 9,000 exclusive hire overnights booked. It was even busier in 2022, when an all-time record 11,754 overnights was registered.

The management arrangements changed again in 2023, when cluster manager Alan Kempson took on responsibility for YHA Wilderhope, but with the appointment of hostel-based Deputy Manager Laura Williams in May.

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows
1931-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb
W: wartime closure; *: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire
•: operation affected by Foot and Mouth; ø: operation affected by Covid

...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	...	521¶	653¶	474¶	...	...	1591Δ	2386Δ	1965Δ
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
W	W	2341Δ	2714Δ	3933Δ	4148Δ	3199Δ	4234Δ	3703Δ	4189Δ
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
3863Δ	3557Δ	3624Δ	2952Δ	3222Δ	3260Δ	4051Δ	3644Δ	3163Δ	3251Δ
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
3372Δ	2850Δ	3654Δ	3151Δ	2547Δ	3667Δ	3106Δ	2619Δ	2419Δ	2774Δ
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
3241Δ	3686Δ	3669Δ	3849Δ	3770Δ	4577Δ	4228Δ	5626Δ	6813Δ	6994Δ
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
7507Δ	6788Δ	6900Δ	9279Δ	10028Δ	9675Δ	8640Δ	8866Δ	9929Δ	10122Δ
1990	1991	1992*	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
9003Δ	8729Δ	9314Δ	8415Δ	7324Δ	8285Δ	7347Δ	7957Δ	8242Δ	9088Δ
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
8038Δ	5167•Δ	7713Δ	8241Δ	6784Δ	9028Δ	8803Δ	7731Δ	6464Δ	7041Δ
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
7243Δ	5791Δ	8398Δ	8809Δ	10060Δ	8935Δ	8600Δ	9632+Δ	8861+Δ	8598+Δ
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
2701ø+Δ	9484ø+Δ	11754ø+Δ	open+Δ	...	...	...	...	...	...



Two designs for one-inch pin badges from the 1950s-1970s period. The first is the earlier (author's collection)