



YHA (England and Wales)
Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, rev2020-01-01

Marlborough Youth Hostels

Marlborough [Town Mill] Youth Hostel 1935 to 1950

Town Mill, Kennet Place, Marlborough, Wiltshire

Historic County:
Wiltshire

YHA Region:
Wiltshire

GR: SU 189689

Marlborough Town Mill was a venerable building, standing on an ancient site on the River Kennet.

The hostel opened here on 30th March 1935, one of only a handful of pre-war YHA properties in the county. It was operated under some kind of rental or adopted-hostel arrangement.

At the outset of war, on 28th October 1939, the building was requisitioned by the RASC Barrack Officer, Bovington Camp, for the 8th Worcestershire Regiment, and was therefore not available to YHA in 1940-42. Necessary repairs prevented it being reopened in 1942, but the youth hostel functioned again in 1943, 1944 and 1945.

Mabel Pratt wrote in her hostelling diary of a visit on 15th September 1948:

Just off the High Street, once barn, stable and outhouse to a mill, with uneven stone floors, dark interior and low unlined rooms.



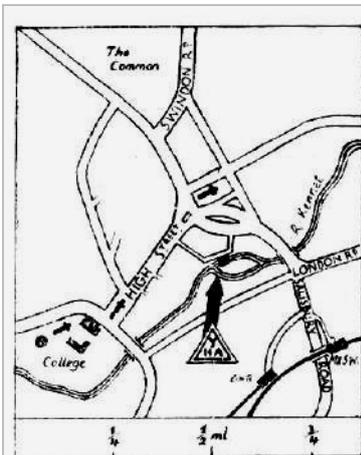
Sketched postcard of the first youth hostel in Marlborough

By 1949 YHA was hoping to purchase the property, though considerable work was needed to the roof. By early 1950 however it became necessary for the Association to seek new premises. The hostel closed on 20th May 1950 and was replaced by one at Plough Cottage on the same day, the equipment being moved on that day according to the Swindon Evening Advertiser. Keeping a hostel operating in Marlborough seamlessly must have been a logistical problem of great complexity.

Some time after YHA departed the mill was demolished. A retirement development of the same name is now established here.



2 3



MARLBOROUGH. *Town Mill, Marlborough, Wilts.* Marlborough Hostel is the Town Mill, just south of the Parade, standing on the site of a mill mentioned in Domesday. It is surrounded by the fine rolling downland known as Wiltshire Downs, and is rich in traces of the pre-Roman peoples, such as Avebury and Silbury Hill. Marlborough town, with its broad High Street and well proportioned buildings, is a typical example of spacious XVIIIth century town planning and being on the Bath road, was one of the regular coaching stages. Castle Inn, at the west end of the High Street, was the most famous hostelry, and part of its buildings form the nucleus of Marlborough College, founded in 1843.

*M30, W16 : PROVISIONS, Store *** : MEALS 1/-, 1/3 : STATION, G.W., Marlborough : BUS Swindon, Devizes, Salisbury (via Upavon), Andover, Hungerford. All infrequent : BATHING, River and open-air baths : DISTANCES Bishopstone 12m, Steeple Ashton 20m.*

Marlborough Town Mill youth hostel – 1-3: charming bucolic scenes (YHA Archive photos);

4: information for hostellers as described in a YHA Regional Guide (imaginatively titled 'South-East England') of 1935.

YHA hostels started to open in the early 1930s and in the early years the tiny Wiltshire Regional Group generally aligned itself with the Oxford Group or even London, hence the inclusion in the publication described

Marlborough [Plough Cottage] Youth Hostel 1950 to 1966

Plough Cottage, Bath Road, Marlborough, Wiltshire

Historic County:
Wiltshire

YHA Region:
Wiltshire

GR: SU 164689

Marlborough's new youth hostel at Plough Cottage on the A4, 1½ miles west of the town, opened on 20th May 1950. It was a freehold purchase, enabled with grant aid from the Ministry of Education. The property was vested in the YHA Trust on our about the opening day. YHA's annual report of 1950 described it as a pleasant house, formerly an inn, with gardens stretching down to the River Kennet.

Fred Blampied was one of the legions of YHA volunteers after the war who joined working parties to get hostels like Marlborough ready. He writes:

Marlborough Hostel fronted onto the A4 Bristol to London road. It was busy at night, no curtains, so every passing vehicle shone on one dorm wall then 'raced' across the walls as they passed, very distracting!

As was common in the post-war rush to provide enough hostel beds, it was partially opened before being fully ready. The first wardens were Mr and Mrs Elsworth, and accommodation was for 60. Subsequently, the hostel was wardened by the Downes, then Norman and Lis Pearson from 1960-63 and the Chandlers from 1963.



MARLBOROUGH

(Hostel Close-up No. 5)

SITUATED adjacent to road A4 and only two miles from Marlborough, Plough Cottage is ideally placed for those who want to make a through journey and for those who wish to explore thoroughly Savernake Forest or White Horse land—there are eight White Horses comparatively close—while barrows and earthworks abound in the neighbourhood with plenty for the "rough stuff" enthusiast.

Plough Cottage is a perfect foil for the first Wiltshire Hostel, the old Town Mill, Marlborough, which it replaces. The new wing, of which the hostellers have sole use, is large, light and lofty with spacious lawns stretching to the

banks of the Kennet. When the workmen have finished it will have all modern conveniences in keeping with the number it will accommodate as a hostel.

That portion of the building which the warden now retains for his own use held a licence in the days when the only method of travel was by stage coach. The huge fireplace warmed the hearts of patrons of the "Plough" as it was then. Older Marlburians say there is still in existence a secret passage which was used in those days. Although the licence lapsed before this century began comparatively modern maps designate it as an "inn". E. H. H.

Article from Rucksack Magazine, November/December 1950

The long-established marathon YHA Ridgeway Walk began in 1962 with an option to stay at Marlborough and Streatley hostels. Some years after Marlborough closed, another hostel became available for this event at the Ridgeway, near Wantage.

The Plough Cottage hostel closed on 8th September 1966, as it ran at a loss and needed heavy expenditure on building works. The property was sold over a year later, on 26th October 1967.



Marlborough Plough Cottage youth hostel in its early years –

1: Bristol YHA volunteer Fred Blampied took this photograph on 10 October 1950.

Though the hostel had opened some five months before, there were always outstanding jobs for work parties;

2&3: YHA of Northern Ireland member Norman O'Reilly snapped a busy scene with hostellers arriving on the main road outside, and a quieter view in the rear garden, in the early 1950s (1-3: author's collection)

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows

1935-1966: previous Oct to Sept

W: war-time closure;

*: Marlborough Town Mill Youth Hostel; Δ: Marlborough Plough Cottage Youth Hostel

...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	c1300*	1802*	2043*	2387*	Open*
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
W*	W*	W*	open*	open*	open*	4075*	4152*	5445*	5660*
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
5343*Δ	5125Δ	5697Δ	6033Δ	5141Δ	5516Δ	4739Δ	4766Δ	5059Δ	5223Δ
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
4743Δ	4412Δ	3932Δ	4187Δ	3425Δ	3370Δ	3359Δ	

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