



YHA (England and Wales)
Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, 2020-01-01

Taliesin Youth Hostel 1935 to 1945

Free Trade Hall, Tre-Taliesin, Machynlleth, Montgomeryshire

Historic County: Cardiganshire

YHA Region:
Birmingham and Mid-Wales

GR: SN 657916

YHA's speculative Mid-Wales Sub-Regional Group was formed in 1933, within three years of the very beginning of the Association; the area around Aberystwyth was to be its main sphere of development. It aligned itself with the Birmingham Group from the start, which had pushed into eastern and northern Montgomeryshire in aiming to link with Merseyside's chain, but had not ventured further west. In little more than four years the Sub-Group had been formally wound up and absorbed by its English neighbour. The name Birmingham and Mid-Wales Region was coined as early as 1934 however, lasting until major reorganisation of the YHA's territories in 1965.

The Sub-Group's early experiments with hostels at Llanbadarn Fynydd and Llangurig were unsuccessful in attracting customers, and soon closed, but Ponterwyd, which opened like them in 1934, was longer lasting, if hardly more financially sound.

Late in 1934 new premises were investigated at Tre-Taliesin, on the Machynlleth-Aberystwyth road. The committee paid a visit on 7th September and were impressed. They found a large house, garage and warehouse. The Free Trade Hall was a substantial handsome brick building, slate-roofed, with a sizeable house-cum-shop at its centre and a warehouse with hoist at the northern end. Further north, adjoining the warehouse, was a low garage lean-to.



One of very few known illustrations of Taliesin youth hostel, a postcard produced by FW Chambers. JM Davies' shop features at the centre (perhaps with Mr Davies standing outside) with a house adjoining to the left and rooms above. YHA members were directed by signage into the warehouse, though they may have been accommodated elsewhere in the block (author's collection)

The Group's minutes of their first visit are frustratingly ambiguous. They state: 'owner would allow room in house and garage for bikes', with more than a suggestion that the house, as well as the warehouse, was to be used for hostel accommodation and services, while another reference describes the hostel as 'above a shop'. This has not been settled. What is clear from the postcard illustration above, however, is that it was the warehouse entrance that was signposted YHA. The Group was finding its feet in matters of finance not conspicuously well, and considered what it could pay: perhaps they could stretch to a rent of £15pa, or offer a percentage of the YHA's 'Magic Shilling' overnight fee to the

owner or warden. They decided to offer £10pa and 3d in the shilling (25%). Arrangements were still not complete by the end of 1934.

TALIESIN Taliesin hostel opened on 30th March, 1935, three weeks before Easter. Equipment came from the unsuccessful hostel at Llanbadarn Fynydd, south of Newtown. Just before opening, finishing touches had been put to the arrangements by an agreement to pay £3.10s for an earth closet. There were to be beds for 24 men and 12 women, eased over 1936-38 to 22 men and 12 women. At the end of 1936, however, the Group resolved to discuss rental for a further two rooms (whether the house or the warehouse is not specified); some time later, in 1939, the hostel was enlarged to 22 beds for either sex. In the first year, the warden was given as Mr JM Davies, but by 1936, and for the rest of the hostel's existence, the name was changed to Mrs JM Davies. Whether this was a change in family arrangements or a correction of a mistake is not clear.

At the end of 1937 the Sub-Group passed responsibility for its hostels at Taliesin, Ponterwyd, Van and Llanilar to Birmingham, with a debt of £57 hanging over Ponterwyd.

Taliesin hostel operated throughout the war, and typically raised its usage by members during that period. There was a threat of closure in 1943, but the hostel survived until, for reasons unknown, the Birmingham and Mid-Wales Region found it necessary to close the facility. Nine years later, a large youth hostel at nearby Borth was opened; this has lasted into the 21st century.

TALIESIN. B. 128
 Mrs. J. M. Davies, Free Trade Hall, Tre-Taliesin, via Machynlleth, Mont.
Position and Map. Last House W side N end of Village of Tre-Taliesin, on Aberystwyth—Machynlleth main Rd. 8 m. NE of Aberystwyth. O.S. 68. Bart. 16.
Station. Glandyfi 4 m ; Ynyslas 2½ m ; **Bus.** Aberystwyth—Machynlleth, passes Hostel door.
Next Hostels. Ponterwyd (by Hill Track 14 m., by Road 19 m.). Llanilar 14 m. Dolgelley 26 m.
Other Details. M. 22. W. 12. Store : adjoining Hostel. P.O. : 2 min. E.C.D. : Wed. S.B.H. Sea bathing 2½ m. Camping. J. Advance booking essential Oct.-Easter. I.P.



TALIESIN.—Free Trade Hall, Tre-Taliesin, via Machynlleth, Mont. O.S. 68 (K.5) or 69 (C.1). Bart. 16. (On main road N. end of village, W. side).

Taliesin takes its name from a VI century bard of immortal memory in Welsh literature. A large slab of stone, just outside the village, is reputed to mark the burial place of Taliesin. Tre-Taliesin lies on the so-called "coast" road from Aberystwyth to Machynlleth, a little south of Cwm Einion (the Artists' Valley) and Llyfnant Valley, either of which is an artist's paradise. A strip of

low-lying ground separates Tre-Taliesin from the sea at Borth and Ynyslas, and from the sands of the Dovey estuary. Aberystwyth, 8 m. to the S., is sufficiently well known as a watering place, but special mention should be made of the University College of Wales, and the National Library of Wales, which are situated here. Pen Dinas, which lies beyond the Ystwyth estuary, is one of the largest hill-top earthworks in Mid-Wales.

YHA Handbook entries of the 1930s. 1: Taliesin details in the 1938 handbook; 2: entry in the 1939 regional handbook

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows										
1935-1945: previous Oct to Sept										
...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	
...	...	...	...	...	773	867	598	885	1060	
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	
594	1335	1362	1230	1515	1169	...	...	...	...