



YHA (England and Wales)
Youth Hostel Profile

compiled by the Association's volunteer archivist, John Martin, 2023-12-27

Slaidburn Youth Hostel

with notes on Heys Farm and Staple Oak Youth Hostels

Heys Farm Guest House Youth Hostel 1931 to 1932

Heys Farm Guest House, West Bradford, Clitheroe, Lancashire
Historic County: Yorkshire W Riding YHA Region: MAN

GR: SD 747454

In 1931 YHA's Manchester Region set out to develop youth hostels in the grand walking country to both the north and the south of the metropolis. These widely separated areas were located along the North East Lancashire and West Riding of Yorkshire border and in the northern parts of the Peak District. Its first hostels were small, experimental and their establishment relied greatly on good will and voluntary help. In many cases established accommodation providers offered bed and board under the YHA banner to the small but rapidly growing numbers of YHA members.

Table with 5 columns: Name, Situation, Accommodation, Date of Opening, No. of Bed-nights. It lists six pioneer youth hostels: Birchfield, Errwood Farm, Flagg, Heys Farm, Staple Oak, and Town Head Farm.

A list of Manchester Region's six pioneer youth hostels, as illustrated in the Region's annual report at the end of 1931. All were short-lived. The two examples in the Forest of Bowland area, Heys Farm and Staple Oak, lasted only until 1932 (YHA Archive)

Hey's Farm was one such youth hostel set up within an established business. Though close to the Lancashire town of Clitheroe and the attractive Trough of Bowland, it lay just inside the West Riding of Yorkshire, but the boundaries and names of YHA's initial 19 regions were only just being defined. West Riding Region seemed happy enough for Manchester to lay claim to Lancashire's Bowland area and any hostel within striking distance of it.

The youth hostel opened here on 17th May 1931, a date that makes it one of Britain's first, though Heys Farm Guest House was probably long established. It had been advertised as an Adult School guest house, run along non-denominational religious lines. An undated leaflet defined the premises as 'standing for a spiritual attitude to life as opposed to a materialistic attitude. It is therefore a church, a home and a school. A church of experimental religion, with dogmas, creeds forms and ceremonies put to one side, A home of deepening fellowship in the great comradeship of those who serve and a school for the study of Nature, Literature and Art.'

The hostel operated alongside the guest house and it may be no surprise that one of the guests in that same year, 1931, was Mahatma Gandhi, visiting England to argue for Indian independence: his mission brought him to North East Lancashire, where he was saddened to see Lancashire mill workers left unemployed by an embargo on foreign cotton in his home country. Duncan Simpson writes:

Gandhi spent the night here on 27th September 1931, sleeping in the owner's son's bedroom while the boy was away at school. Gandhi was visiting Darwen, East Lancashire, to see the effects on the mill workforce of the Indian boycott of Lancashire cloth, a visit organised by [first General Secretary of YHA] Jack Catchpool's brother, Corder. The resident owner of the Guest House was millowner Percy Davies, who had been at school, Sidcot and Boothams, with Corder Catchpool and was instrumental in getting him work in Darwen.

Heys Farm was typical of those spiritual and philanthropic establishments that helped found YHA's first sketchy network, and as it was the early 1930s, it may have wanted to strengthen its finances too by appealing to a new trend.

The Manchester Region annual report of 1932 described accommodation for 25, though the total was flexible, depending on guest house visitor numbers. There were 77 hostellers' bednights in 1931 and 178 in 1932. It is interesting that the original daily and weekly terms given on the Guest House leaflet stated that private rooms cost extra; perhaps shared bedrooms, youth hostel style, were already the standard provision here.



Three postcards of the Heys Farm Guest House that probably predate the YHA's brief use of the property. The second is captioned 'Adult School Guest House' (author's collection)

Kevin Flanagan adds that Heys Farm Guest House continued to advertise in the *Dalesman* magazine until 1952.

Staple Oak (Dunsop Bridge) Youth Hostel 1931 to 1932

Staple Oak, Dunsop Bridge, Clitheroe, Lancashire

Historic County:
Yorkshire (West Riding)

YHA Region: Manchester

GR: SD 651503

Staple Oak youth hostel, near the isolated Dunsop Bridge in the Forest of Bowland, opened on 29th August 1931, a little later than Heys Farm. Its existence underlines the influence of YHA's supporters in its emerging first years. As early as 1894 Arthur Leonard, so influential in the formation of the Youth Hostels Association, had formed the Co-operative Holiday Association. Almost 40 years later, a letter dated 19th August 1931 archived in YHA's Manchester Regional Group's minutes stated that the CHA was making arrangements for taking over and equipping suitable hostel accommodation at the Staple Oak farmhouse. This would then be placed under the control of YHA. There were 100 bednights in its first month, up to September 30th.

Staple Oak hostel, sometimes termed Dunsop Bridge, only lasted a few months. After a change of tenancy, the hostel was closed, by 17th April 1932, necessitating a search for a replacement. 272 members had stayed between 1st October 1931 and the final date.



Photo by

STAPLE OAK YOUTH HOSTEL.

E. Pye.



1: like the CHA, the Ramblers' Federation was an early supporter of the YHA. This image appeared in the Federation's Handbook of 1932; 2: a postcard that probably predated the youth hostel (author's collection)

Slaidburn hostel replaced Staple Oak within the same year, while Gisburn hostel, opened in 1934, was effectively a replacement for Heys Farm. A separate profile for Gisburn hostel is available in this series.

Slaidburn Youth Hostel 1932 to present

King's House, Slaidburn, Clitheroe, Lancashire BB7 3ER.

Historic County:
Yorkshire (West Riding)

YHA Region:
Manchester, Lakes, North

GR: SD 711523

The replacement for Staple Oak was King's House, otherwise known as the Black Bull Inn, a venerable building at the centre of the village of Slaidburn. The hostel opened without delay on 14th May. The tenure arrangements at the outset were probably very informal, described by Manchester Region as an adoption. The first warden was Mrs Woffinden, probably the former innkeeper's wife; there were beds for 16 men and 16 women. As with Staple Oak, Slaidburn lay properly within the boundary of the West Riding Region, though there seems to have been an acceptance in YHA of this dispensation to serve the remote Bowland area of Lancashire. Curiously, the 1932 Manchester annual report gave a precise definition of its own territory: only to the border with the West Riding.

The Region's 1932 annual report outlined the acquisition:

The King's House hostel, at Slaidburn, has formed an excellent substitute for Staple Oak, the transfer being made necessary by a change in the tenancy of the latter house. An analysis of visitors to the [Staple Oak and Slaidburn] hostels shows that 770 'bed-nights' have been spent by members in the Bowland Forest area during the 12-month period ended 30th September, 1932. 40 per cent have been members of other Regional Groups. Several organised parties of young people have used the Hostels.

Youth Hostels Association
MANCHESTER AND DISTRICT REGIONAL COUNCIL

A RALLY

(Organised by the Blackburn and District Sub-Regional Council)
will be held in the

Grounds of "Whiteholme," Slaidburn, nr. Clitheroe
(by kind permission of Wm. King-Wilkinson, Esq.).

On Sunday, 28th August, 1932, at 3-0 p.m.

CHAIRMAN:
Rev. CYRIL SLATER, Vicar of Dalehead
(Chairman of the Blackburn and District Sub-Regional Council).

SPEAKERS:
T. BOULGER
(Hon. Secretary of the Footpaths Preservation Society);
J. PERCIVAL DAVIES
(Heys Farm Guest House, West Bradford);
WM. KING-WILKINSON, of Slaidburn.
KENNETH SPENCE
(Chairman of the Lakeland Y.H.A. Council, Chief Consul for Westmorland C.T.C.);
H. P. WESTON, M.A.
(Chairman of the Manchester and District Y.H.A. Council).

Members wishing to stay overnight at the King's House Hostel, Slaidburn, Clitheroe, must book their accommodation in advance, enclosing the accommodation fee and a stamp for reply, and notifying the Warden of meals required. Camping facilities have been arranged in Slaidburn. Day visitors are advised to bring their own lunches, but teas and light refreshments will be obtainable in the Hostel and the Village Hall.

TRAIN ARRANGEMENTS

In addition to the usual trains, a special train will be run by the L.M.S. Railway on 28th August, as follows:—

	Return Fare to Clitheroe (3rd Class)
Manchester (Victoria, No. 14 Platform) ... dep. 10-0 a.m.	3/-
Bolton (Trinity Street)	2/-
Darwen	1/3
Blackburn	1/3
Clitheroe	0/-

Return from Clitheroe at 8-40 p.m. Passengers for Blackburn may return for any train. For further particulars see handbill.

The walk to the Rally from Clitheroe is through delightful country, offering excellent views of the Ribbles Valley and the Forest of Bowland. Leaders, wearing orange and black armbands, will meet the train at Clitheroe and will be prepared to lead parties to the Rally, a halt being made en route for lunch.

As this is the first Y.H.A. Rally organised in the region frequented by North Lancashire Ramblers and Cyclists, it is hoped that all members and friends of the Association will make an endeavour to be present.

Any further particulars can be obtained from W. F. Edwards, Hon. Secretary, Blackburn and District Sub-Regional Council of the Y.H.A., 9, Ribbles Street, Blackburn.

Rallies were popular forms of advertising and promotion in the early years of YHA; members from the towns and cities would congregate at a remote hostel, especially a new example, often travelling by means of special trains, followed by long walks. This example for the new King's House hostel was arranged for a date six weeks after the opening. Other examples of rallies were at Bellever (Devon), Kilkwydd (Montgomeryshire) and at the Scottish YHA's Loch Lomond hostel (YHA Archive)



Two very early postcards of Slaidburn youth hostel.

1: an image full of interesting detail, probably from mid-1932. The large sign above the old Black Bull Inn entrance has replaced one even larger, and names the hostel as King's House. It includes a small painted YHA insignia, a thick central letter Y flanked by smaller H and A. Underneath the title is an advertisement for Refreshments, and at the base of the sign appears to be the name of the inn licensee, Arthur Woffinden. The sign has an angled top, perhaps to match the outline of an earlier inn sign. A 'For Sale' sign to the right has not yet been removed, while above the benches are two signs, one of which was for the Cyclists' Touring Club, founded in the late 19th century. Meanwhile, villagers pass the time – perhaps waiting for a local bus to Clitheroe;

2: a similar view, though slightly later. The peripheral signs have disappeared, as have the benches, while the large sign has had a repaint, and notably has adopted the much broader 'squashed triangle' YHA symbol that represented the Association through the majority of the 1930s on letter headings, etc – and is displayed at the head of this profile (author's collection)

In 1934 the adoption was formalised into a tenancy, though for many years this remained at a peppercorn rent. The capacity of the hostel rose to 50 beds in that year. By 1935, Mr and Mrs WW Lewis had replaced Mrs Woffinden; they settled in to remain in post for the next ten or so years.

The Region reported regularly on the support of its local groups in the East Lancashire towns. The activities of Blackburn and District Sub-Regional Group came in for special mention in the annual reports. The 1936 report, for instance, described Blackburn's busy year and sound financial position; it was even in a position to loan £10 to the Central London Hostel Fund in favour of the new city hostel at Highgate. Working parties organised by the Sub-Region redecorated a large part of the new Gisburn hostel and made improvements to the amenities of Slaidburn hostel. Local involvement was key. Mayors of four of the five Boroughs in the area were YHA Vice-Presidents. A harsher note of realism in this decade of hardship struck with the comment that there had been a large fall in the population of the Blackburn Area, with a parallel decrease of 20 in the membership of the Sub-Regional Group.

By 1937 Manchester Region was advertising a continued rise of usage at its eight hostels, noting that this was a worthy achievement as some of the hostels were not in recognised holiday areas. It commented:

The total number of overnight visits at all hostels for the year amounted to 20,974, an increase of 10.5 per cent. over the figure for the year 1936. Once again this is a greater increase than that for the previous year.

To appreciate truly the significance of these figures it is necessary to bear in mind that, although certain parts of the Region are becoming more used by holiday-makers, the regional hostels are still in the main bases for walkers and cyclists going out on Saturdays for a week-end's relief from the toil and smoke of the industrial centres. This demand for accommodation at week-ends has been the Council's main reason for increasing the number of beds at the hostels during the year from 366 in all to 393. It has fortunately been possible to do this without any danger of overcrowding.

Derwent Hall continues to be [Manchester Region's] most popular hostel with 7,849 overnight visits, but the most striking increase in usage occurred at Slaidburn Hostel, where 2,191 overnight visits were made, an increase of 14 per cent over the year 1936.

Slaidburn hostel stayed open through the war years. A YHA memo of 18th March 1941 stressed the need to keep it from requisition, as it was important to members from the South Lancashire towns, the Potteries and West Riding. The Manchester annual report of 1941 praised the loyal work on the part of wardens Mr and Mrs Lewis. Three years later they were again lauded for their untiring and faithful work at Slaidburn, though their stay here had come to an end. Typical of the later 40s, the hostel endured rapid changes of warden for some years after that. Mr and Mrs Bolton arrived in 1945 and left the following year. Mr and Mrs Crawford took over in 1947, only to move to Oakenclough hostel in Cheshire a few months later, to be replaced by Mr and Mrs Copley.

A rare treat was the fitting of a new drying room in 1948. The following year, the wardens changed again, to Miss Bulman and Miss Cooper. The annual report for 1949 described their impact:

During their short stay at Slaidburn, they did much to foster cordial relations between hostel and village and succeeded in introducing a most pleasant atmosphere into the hostel itself.

During the 1940s, the hostel was well-used and recorded about 3,000 overnights each year. It was performing particularly strongly at the end of the decade, but even this popular double wardenship was short-lived. Miss Bulman and Miss Cooper left during 1949, with Mr and Mrs Mills replacing them.

Perhaps in a move, commonplace at the time, to replace smaller tenancies with more substantial freehold properties, Manchester Region gave very considerable consideration in 1949 to alternative premises, the large and rambling Dunnaw Hall, one mile to the south of the village, but it was not a practical economic proposition.



This postcard probably dates from the early post war period. The stucco appears quite freshly applied, the old outline of the huge inn sign has been painted out, and the signboard redecorated yet again – in a lighter colour, with a more modern YHA roughly-equilateral triangle sign. The postbox is a reminder that the adjoining building on the right was the village post office, nowadays a private dwelling, though it contains part of the hostel on its upper floor (author's collection)

If YHA members were expecting the considerable wartime growth of YHA to continue into the 1950s, they were to be disappointed. The national trend was downwards. Slaidburn's yearly total soon dipped, and barely averaged 2,000 through the decade. Any confidence that the hostel would remain in the network must have been jolted every time the wardenship changed hands, and it continued to do so with alarming regularity for another 15 years.

The loss of Mr and Mrs Mills must have been keenly felt, after only two seasons in charge. They moved on in 1950, when he was appointed headmaster of a Rochdale school. In such a short spell, Mr KF Mills, BA, contributed a great deal to the study and knowledge of King's House and Slaidburn village. He produced the small blue illustrated booklet shown below, published by YHA's Manchester Region. The text is worth reprinting here in abridged form for its valued history of the village, the connection with the King and Wilkinson families and especially for its guided tour of the youth hostel building at that time:

I. History of King's House

Standing at the busy corner of Slaidburn's two principal thoroughfares, the visitor cannot fail to notice King's House at the junction of Church St. and Chapel St. Its rather uninspiring appearance, however, gives little hint of the age and character of the old building for the front has been refaced with cement. In former years it was an inn known as the Black Bull and reference to it goes back nearly two centuries though parts of the building must be much older than that. Situated in the middle of the village, it must stand on one of the oldest inhabited sites in the parish.

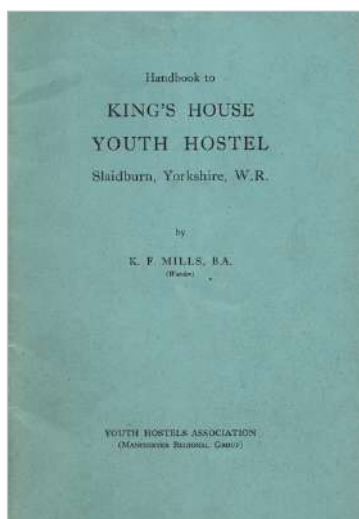
The village itself has watched more than a thousand years pass by, for the name 'Slaidburn' is almost certainly Anglo-Saxon in derivation and means the 'Slaughter (or battle) by the stream.' It may refer to an English victory over the Britons in the 6th or early 7th centuries or to a Northumbrian victory over the Mercians a little later. The presence, however, of Teutonic roots in both Old English and Old Norse makes certainty in this case rather difficult and the third possibility is that the name Slaidburn may perpetuate a Danish victory over the English in the 9th century.

The Black Bull appears to have been one of the three inns at Slaidburn and the first known reference to it is found in the Churchwardens' Accounts for the year 1764, where we read: 'Spent of the persons who brought the slate from Ribchester at several times and other necessary meetings of the Churchwardens as appears by the Bill at Black Bull £1 5s. 5d.'

In 1828, the inn appears to have changed hands for we find the churchwardens paying a Mrs Howard the sum of £4 11s. 6d. for dining.

When the old inn was adapted for use as a Youth Hostel, its old name, familiar to generations of Slaidburn folk, was changed to 'King's House,' the new name commemorating the King family who had lived at Whiteholme on the other side of the Hodder since the days of Queen Elizabeth. This family became linked with the Wilkinsons of Long Preston and their descendants are still at Whiteholme and Rock House to-day.

The isolation which has been such a disadvantage to the village in the past gives it a charm which all members, whether cyclists or walkers, happily acknowledge. This building, too, whatever the name, Black Bull or King's House, hostelry or hostel, still welcomes the tired traveller, gives him food and rest, then speeds him on his journey as it has done for centuries past.



King's House: the large court yard

Cover and illustration from KF Mills' booklet 'King's House Youth Hostel', published by YHA about 1950 (author's collection)

KF Mills's booklet continues with this authoritative description of King's House. References in square brackets are to the hostel plan on page 13 and room numbers and names in use today.

II. Guide to King's House (as in 1950)

As we stand at the front door, we notice on the right-hand side, the iron ring for the tethering of horses and the small upright bar or gudgeon for holding a looped rope. There used to be heavy shutters on all the windows and the iron gudgeons for holding them can still be seen as well as in one case the flattened part of the window sills upon which they rested.

Entering the building, we see on the left an old door now no longer used but still fitted with its hinges on the inside. This led into the public bar, now the members' Dining Room [today Lounge 2] but we enter it nowadays by a door further along the passage. Here in this old room, we can still see where mine host served his customers and where they in their turn sat drinking their ale round the room. We find that the seating is carried round past the blocked-up door showing that it became disused at an early date. One of the old beams is carried on a corbel table, that is, a number of stone projections of similar shape and size which help to take the thrust of a roof or upper storey. This is a usual feature in old buildings like churches but is not so common in domestic buildings of this type.

The door beyond leads behind the old bar to the top of the well-worn steps down to the gloomy old cellar. The light, such as it is, comes through a small window let into a large blocked-in opening at ground level. This opening was large enough to admit the kegs, casks and barrels so necessary to the life of an inn, but the blocking-up must have been done before the steps were built up to the Village Hall. Cellars like this one have suffered less from change than other parts of the building and this has probably presented very much the same appearance for at least two or three centuries.

The flagged passage leading to the Common Room [Lounge 1] contains a small window with two old panes of bottle glass. The nearby door [Rear door] will take us into a small courtyard of rather unusual shape, surrounded on three sides by hostel buildings and on the fourth by the Village Hall which appears to have been built diagonally across it. There is an upstairs passage leading from No. 2 Dormitory [the Warden's Room] across to the Village Hall but the entrance to it is now blocked up. This leads us to suspect that this small yard was once more regular in shape and the old inn buildings surrounded it on all four sides [the old Village Hall was for a period until 1909 a butcher's shop at ground level and a barn store above]. Here again we see the old gudgeons on the windows and we notice, too, that on the oldest roofs the 'slates' are really sandstone slabs.

If we re-enter the hostel and turn left, passing the entrance to the Warden's [Hostel] Kitchen, we will notice a window of twenty panes, some bearing interesting scratchings.

The passage takes us past the old pump into the Members' [Self-catering] Kitchen with several indications that at one time it consisted of two storeys just as the fuel house next to it [Double height store] still does. The steps lead up to the large courtyard, partly flagged and partly cobbled.

A word here about cobbles may be useful. They were once in universal use as a method of drainage for in wet weather they give a firm surface for walking yet at the same time allow the rainwater to drain away. They were used in the open air as in this case and inside stables as we shall shortly see.

This large open space was the inn yard [Courtyard] and round it are built the old stables. In the centre lies a large circular concrete block which was used for the retyring of wagon wheels. The wheel lay flat on the slab (the hub fitting into the hole in the centre) and the mark where the rim rested can easily be seen. The iron band round the concrete is itself an old wheel tyre lengthened by the insertion of an extra piece. The tyre was heated and then fitted round the wheel, cold water being poured on both to prevent the wood catching fire and to help the contraction of the metal. Next to this are the lines of small flagstones where carts and wagons would stand.

The outside steps up to the Men's Dormitory [nowadays divided into Rooms 6 and 7 and accessed from inside] are a local feature of domestic architecture attributed to the influence of the Danes who invaded this country so frequently in the 9th and 10th centuries [today the steps are out of use except as a fire escape]. They were eventually granted half of the country in which to settle, where Danish laws and customs were observed, and Slaidburn found itself in the 'Danelaw,' part of the Danish Kingdom the capital of which was at York. It is primarily for this reason that the village is in Yorkshire and not, as so many people imagine, in Lancashire.

At the bottom of these steps stood the mounting stone and they were linked together by an iron bar, the socket of which can still be seen on the second step.

The bicycle shed was obviously a stable, for the concrete rests for the eating troughs and the remains of the cobbled flooring can still be seen. The square hole in the wall was probably used for holding a lantern, near enough to the door for the sake of convenience but not too near because of draughts. A scrutiny of the yard shows clearly that the carriages entered by the gate and stood just inside, the spot where the ostler stood to hold the horses' heads being flagged. The passengers would descend under the cover of the projecting roof [Covered space] and a now blocked-up doorway would admit them to a room which is no longer part of the hostel.

On the far side of the yard is another cobbled outhouse [now used as a store-room] where the cobbles are in better condition and the mangers still in position. Scratched on a pane of glass inside are the following words: 'Friday Dec. 22nd, F 1865.' This old stable is part of a larger building which is quite separate from the main building, a narrow space being left for the gradual accumulation of rubbish.

King's House is old, perhaps even older than we suspect, and though newness and the modern touch have much to recommend them, there are yet many hostellers who have succumbed to the charms of this erstwhile inn. They return to it again and again to enjoy on a summer's day the glorious countryside in which it is situated and on a winter's evening the cheerful fires and the oft-told travellers' tales.

SLAIDBURN

Mr and Mrs Warwick wardened from 1950 until 1953, when they moved to the larger hostel at Scarborough. Miss Bulman came back to the hostel between that year and 1956, when she resigned on health grounds, and 1956 was a particularly disrupted year: Mr Warner was in charge for a short time, then volunteers held the fort for two months. Mrs Irene Herson arrived in 1957, for three seasons, but overnights were dipping and fell to below 2,000 for three years in a row.

None of these difficulties would have dampened the enthusiasm of the local groups, especially the one based in Blackburn, who supported and serviced the old hostel as shown below in the 1950 Manchester Region annual report. There is also first mention here of the hostel's figurehead owner and lessor, though he may well have been in place from the outset in 1932:

The dance at Slaidburn in the previous November did much to cement the good relations between hostel and village, to whose Squire, Lt.-Col. LC King-Wilkinson, the owner of King's House, the Council's thanks are due for his unfailing interest and help. A handbook to King's House has been published by the warden, who is donating all profits to the Group.

The landlord and local members showed further support in 1953, despite an unfounded rumour of closure that had to be officially corrected by YHA:

Slaidburn has been greatly improved in consequence of work done by the landlord, Lt.-Col. King-Wilkinson, and working parties from the Blackburn and Bolton Sub-Regional Groups [*Rucksack Magazine* of May-June 1953 referred to extensive repairs, and the 1954 annual report to a new drying room stove and transformation of the hostel's interior by working parties from northern groups]. The twenty-first birthday of the hostel was celebrated by a tea and dance, organised by Bolton Area Group.



Usage rose by 24% during Mrs Gamble's brief wardenship from July 1959 to June 1960, when she and her husband became joint wardens at Charlbury hostel in Oxfordshire. She was succeeded by Mrs Summers, though ill-health forced her resignation in 1962. In turn Mrs June Driver was warden from 1962 to 1964, and Mrs Herson returned for a brief spell in that year, perhaps as an emergency measure.

During the winter of 1961 special events were organised in the adjacent Village Hall on the last Saturday of each month. The cash surplus from these events was donated to the hostel. By 1961 the hostel was noted as running at a loss, but an effort was made by the Region to improve and keep it. Costs were saved over the winter 1961-62 period by opening on Saturday nights only. In an effort to boost trade, in 1962 Manchester office published a leaflet to make Barley [Pendle Hill] and Slaidburn hostels better known to leaders of school parties, and in 1963 pony-trekking parties from Barley spent two nights a week here, and helped to increase its usage from 1,530 overnights in 1962 to 1,897 in 1963.

Left: a postcard image that must have been photographed after 1958, the date when YHA's cast rectangular plate, 'This youth hostel is one of many...' first came into service. The hostel still had its old wooden sign, later removed for a new window. Note the Post Office next door (author's collection)

The era of control by Manchester Region, one of YHA's original 19 regions of 1931, came to an end in the mid 1960s, when the 19 regions amalgamated into ten. From now, the Trough of Bowland area was attached to the new Lakeland region and again the remote Yorkshire hostel was estranged from its natural county location. The 1965 Lakeland Region was larger in scope, with a wider pool of staff, and on the whole brought a measure of stability to the wardening problems that the hostel had faced. For 20 of the next 29 years, until the hostel moved to volunteer wardening in 1994, there were just three wardens – Reg Murray from 1965 to 1970, Christine England from 1980 to 1989, and Graham Best from 1990 to 1993. Gaps were filled by John Wardley, Graham Watkin, Mr M Forecast, Lee Stott, Peter Todd, Carol and Michael Rock and Carol and Clifford Duffell.

Graham Watkins had been deputy at the new Patterdale hostel, and though his spell at Slaidburn was short, he was especially well thought of by the Region, who agreed to increase his salary after sterling work. He arrived late in 1973 to a background of complaints about dirt and untidiness and soon improved the standards, assisted by working parties from Barrow Local Group.

In that year electrical rewiring was completed, for which the landlord, Col. King-Wilkinson, reimbursed the region with £325. The Committee expressed their appreciation of this, particularly as it accounted for the first five years' rent of the new ten-year lease. *Hostelling News* of Winter 1973-74 added that thanks to his co-operation and generosity, Lakeland Region was able to undertake several improvements to the hostel, including indoor toilets at Slaidburn, averting the danger of closure for economic reasons. Lakeland Region also reported on improvements to the floors and equipment and the provision of foodboxes in the members' kitchen. Colonel King-Williamson died shortly after these improvements.

In 1975 the Region turned its attention to attracting more cyclists to Slaidburn, an ideal calling point, with increased YHA and *Cycle Touring* publicity and a cycling slide show at the hostel.

A new factor arose in the mid-1970s, when there was much outcry against the imposition of full VAT on youth hostel stays. Experimentally, in order to minimise the impact at some of its smaller hostels, YHA passed control of them to new bodies created as individual youth hostel associations for one or two premises, in this case to the Slaidburn and Black Sail Youth Hostel Association. Because their combined income was less than the threshold for VAT charging, overnight stays could be marginally cheaper. Each non-VAT association had an executive officer and an annual general meeting. In 1976, the officer reported that the popularity of Slaidburn was being maintained since the improvements carried out in 1973. The surplus on revenue was slightly reduced in 1976 and the total Gross Income was under the ceiling of £5,000. The experiment lasted only a few years; it created much work for relatively little gain for its members.

In 1978 the warden (probably Mr Stott) further improved men's comforts by fitting shaver sockets and an internal porch to the men's dormitory. The latter point is a reminder that the outside steps were still being used. A comment in Lakeland's 1979 annual report referred to contracts for external painting of the Region's hostels. The exception was Slaidburn, 'for which we have no responsibility for external painting, according to the current lease.' This statement underlines the generosity of the terms of tenancy from the owner.

Once again, there was a decline in usage at Slaidburn in the late 1970s after a peak of over 3,000 in 1975. Lakeland Region was hoping things would improve with Christine England, formerly assistant at Derwentwater, as warden from 1980. In truth other factors were always at play with these ups and downs: recession, rising prices, cheap foreign holidays and something as simple as a bad year for weather, or how late Easter fell in the year. As a consequence, annual figures varied quite dramatically through the 1980s, but the Regional Committee praised Miss England in 1981 for her efforts to keep the hostel going under difficult circumstances.

It was noted that the lease of Slaidburn would expire at the end of September 1983 and that the future development of this hostel would depend very much on the landlord. The Lakeland Committee felt that this hostel was a candidate for closure and that any decision regarding the future of the hostel would have to be taken in June 1983. YHA's National Finance Committee was recommending closure by a vote of 5 to 4. Contributing factors were the poor state of the building and the uncertainty of its future from the landlord's point of view.

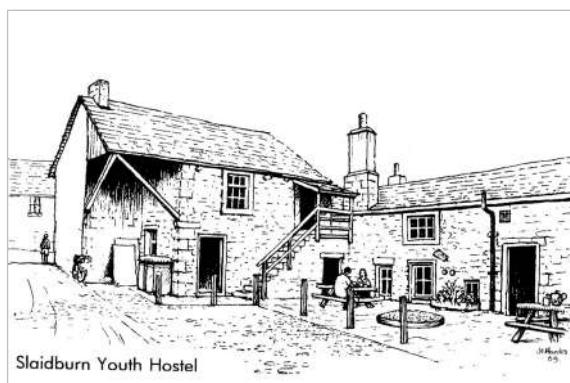
At the end of the debate, a proposal to close the hostel was lost by 8 votes to 11, and Slaidburn hostel's prospects gradually picked up from that point.

The new owner was the Colonel's son, John King-Wilkinson. He expressed his concern over closure and hoped that YHA would maintain its presence in the Slaidburn area. He was quite willing for the present lease to be extended on whatever terms best suited YHA and had no plans for increasing the rent.

In July 1983 the Regional Officer visited Slaidburn with the regional architect. The hostel had been thoroughly cleaned and some decoration had been done by the various assistants. The architect reported that the main roof structure was not bad, the dampness in the gable end wall being due in his opinion to a cracked chimney. The worst part of the roof was that facing the courtyard, which required reslating throughout. Amidst all this uncertainty, the hostel had now been designated as a listed building. Fire regulations were stiffening too, and would need urgent attention.

By October 1984 Lakeland Region had come round to retaining the hostel. Mr King-Wilkinson was pleased that YHA was staying and hoped that he would be able to keep the rent as low as possible. Builders were quoting for necessary works. The Countryside Commission offered £2,500, being half of the estimate for repairs to the roof and gable end. The Region asked National Office for a grant from the Small Hostels Fund.

It was agreed to progress this development and the Region's architect was asked to produce preliminary plans for an improvement scheme.



Before and after the 1985 reroofing work, as sketched from the Courtyard by 'JR' and Martyn Hanks. Note the contrast in roof outline, the round block for retiring wagon wheels, the curious open shelter, originally for those stepping down from coaches, and, in the second image, the extra safety measures for protection against now-essential car parking (author's collection)

In 1985 the hostel was reroofed and other structural repairs were carried out with the Countryside Commission's financial assistance; furthermore there was a commitment to carry out major improvements at Slaidburn when finance allowed. After the £5,000 spend on repairs to the structure, it was time to consider the complete refurbishment of the hostel at an estimated cost of £40,000, with the blessing of a major grant aid from the Countryside Commission and YHA's National Finance Committee. Meanwhile, the lease was being finalised, despite Mr King-Wilkinson's ill health. After 50 years of operating with a peppercorn rent, the rent would rise to £500 per annum for a period of five years and thereafter be increased in accordance with any movement upwards in the Retail Price Index.

In an effort to promote hostels as serving wider areas, YHA altered some names in 1985. New Lakeland Region titles were High Close (Langdale), Helvellyn (Glenridding), Windermere (Troutbeck), and Slaidburn (Forest of Bowland).



Several members of the Regional Council noted the possibility of some winter business for Slaidburn and agreed that it would be beneficial to the hostel if it could be kept open through the winter, though heating was still quite restricted.

Left: the Slaidburn hostel stamp from about 1990 (YHA Archive)

At the end of 1992, Slaidburn joined a number of small northern hostels on the winter Rent-a-Hostel scheme. The November *YHA News* marvelled:

At long last Slaidburn has (or will shortly have) a shower. This news plus that of plans for a drying room must surely tempt many to stay longer in that delightful area.

The drying room was at the foot of the stone steps in the courtyard.



1 2



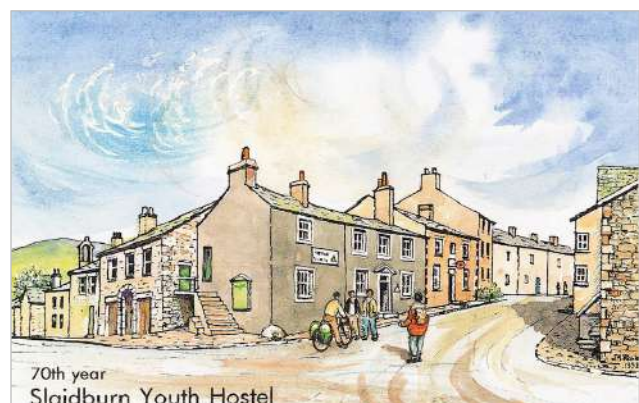
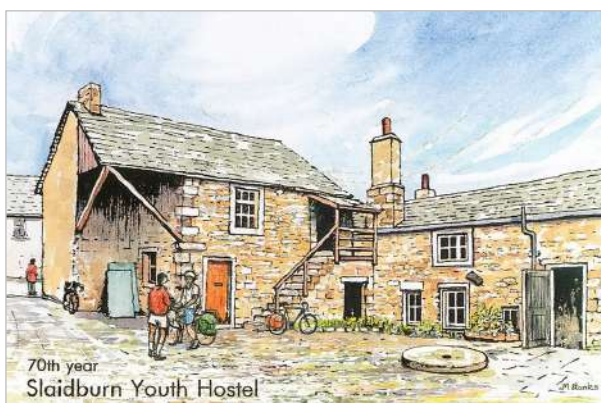
Sitting rooms, probably viewed about 1994, from a collection of photographs prepared for Rent-a Hostel (YHA Archive).
1: the original bar room, nowadays Lounge 2; 2: thought to be the former warden's sitting room, now the Dining room

In March 1994 *YHA News* said goodbye to warden Graham Best, and indicated that the hostel would in future be run by volunteers. With their needs in mind, *News* noted at the end of 1995 improvements to the former warden's bedroom. The men's dormitory was spruced up. Much work went into improving the members' kitchen, and a second shower was ready for installation over the winter in the upstairs washroom. The former warden's sitting room to the right of the entrance was converted into a guests' dining room and sitting room, cosier than the old dining room and not so far from the kitchen. While older visitors would remember the Aga in the warden's kitchen being used to keep adjacent rooms warm, it had been out of use for some time, so the full central heating installed over the winter of 1996-97 benefited the hostel greatly. Improvements continued to flow, with an enhanced members' kitchen, an additional WC and another wash basin downstairs to ease congestion, and a further extension of the central heating.

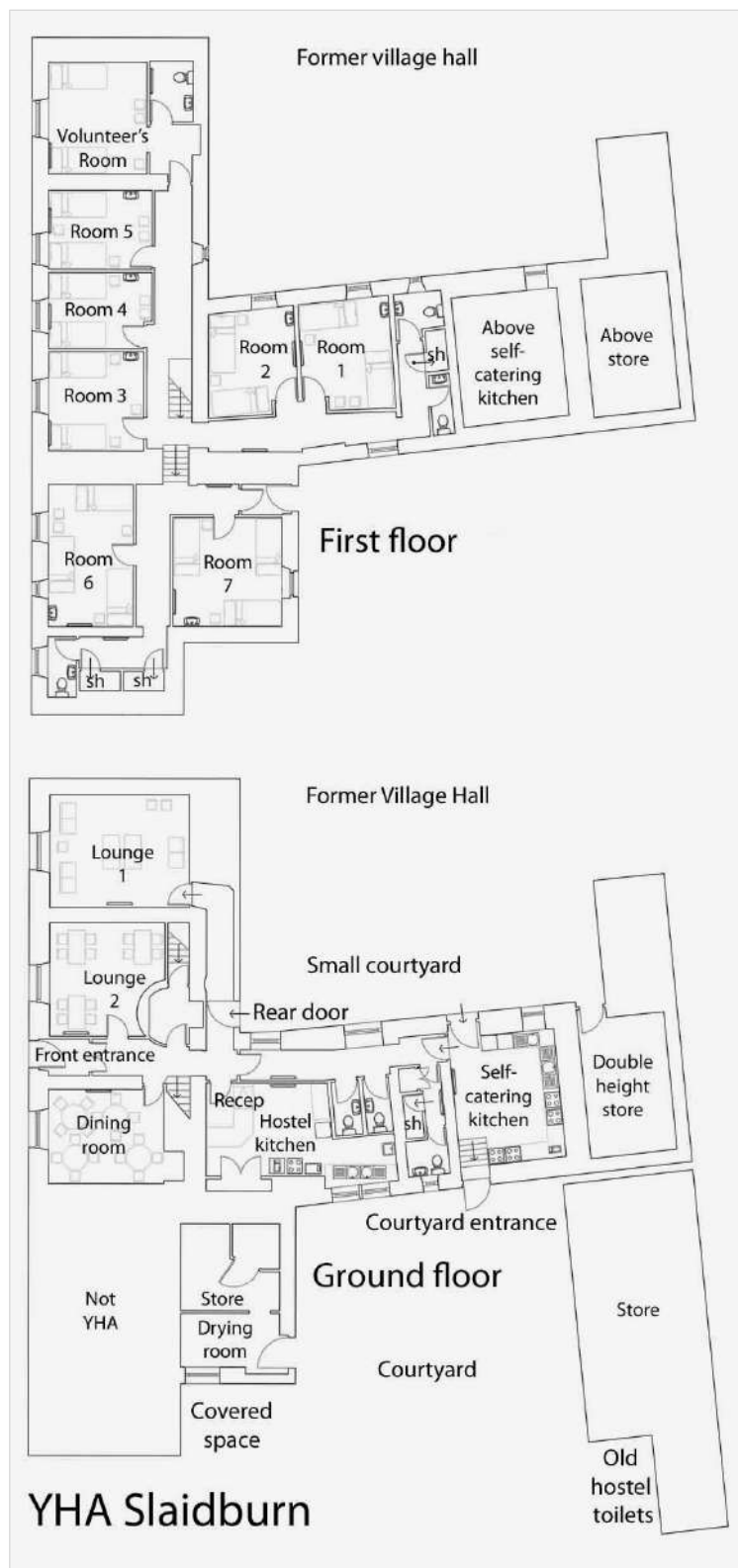
A significant change came over the winter of 1998-99, as described by *YHA News*:

The large annexe (the men's dormitory) has been subdivided into two rooms (Rooms 2 and 3) and the washing facilities and toilets refurbished. A doorway has been created to provide a link through to the main building. The next phase of the work will subdivide room 1, the women's dormitory, into two smaller rooms [today Rooms 1 and 2] off a corridor, and refurbish the associated facilities. New beds will be installed throughout thanks to Gordon Whittaker's fund raising, and the floors will all be carpeted. YHA is grateful to the North West Tourist Board for a grant covering a substantial portion of this work.

This work finally made the external stone steps redundant and brought all guest bedrooms inside. Over 100 visitors viewed the improvements at an Open Weekend.



YHA Slaidburn celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2002. YHA's volunteer artist of many years standing, Martyn Hanks, provided designs for these attractive coloured postcards and a new hostel stamp in honour of the occasion (author's collection)



This hostel plan of YHA Slaidburn dates from large-scale CAD drawings produced for YHA in 2007. Bedroom numbers have been further updated to represent the pattern in 2023 (plan redrawn and simplified by the author)

Between 1994 and 2020 volunteer wardens were the lifeblood of Slaidburn hostel, supported professionally by various arrangements from staffed hostels in the area, from 2000 to 2013 Simon Neal (Earby), then Alan Clarke (Haworth). In a tradition stretching back 90 years to the involvement of the Blackburn Sub-Regional Group of members, the hostel has also received considerable practical assistance from an energetic voluntary group, Friends of Slaidburn.

Though volunteers lost exclusive use of the current dining room, they had their own kitchen next to the reception and their own bedroom. This all changed with Covid, when Exclusive Hire removed the need for volunteers.



1 2



3 4



5 6



7

8

9

1-6: Slaidburn hostel's interior in recent years.

1. the dining room to the right of the hostel entrance was formerly the warden's private snug, before volunteer wardening. The old fireplace seen in picture 2 on page 2 has been replaced and new furniture has superseded the old-fashioned benches;

2: the self-catering kitchen, viewed from the top of the steep stairs leading down from the courtyard entrance;

3: the former hostel common room, now Lounge number 1, at the north end of the building, complete with ancient fireplace;

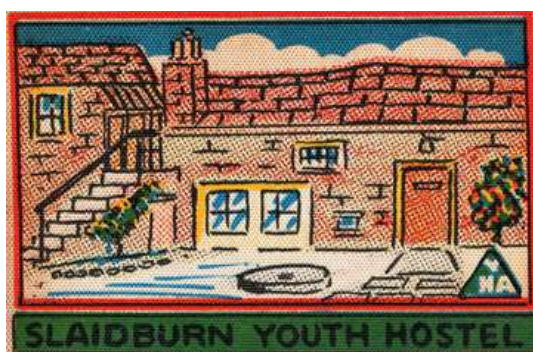
4: Lounge 2, the former inn bar, retains its original bench seating and fireplace. Across the road is the Hark to Bounty pub;

5&6: two of the bedrooms on the upper floor (undated YHA publicity photographs)

7-9: Hostel entrances.

7: behind the front door, lounges lie to the left, bedrooms up the stairs and reception and self-catering straight ahead;

8: the frontage with its added window above the front door; 9: entrance to the courtyard (author's photographs, June 2014)



Memories – Slaidburn youth hostel ephemera.

*The first two pin badges are from the Manchester Region period, the third from Lakeland's era.
The fabric badge is clearly from before the new roof of 1985 (author's collection)*

When Alan Clarke retired from Haworth hostel in 2016, the job of supporting YHA Slaidburn passed to the new manager there, Paul Keegan, for a short period in 2017 before he moved on to YHA York. His successors were Laura Cook from YHA Langdon Beck in 2017-18, Chris Garden in 2019, and Amy Holman from YHA Hathersage, who has continued to support YHA Slaidburn from 2019 to the present.

Covid had a profound malevolent effect on YHA in general and small hostels especially. Slaidburn recorded just 63 overnights in 2020, probably all before the first lockdown in late March. In 2021 the hostel was offered for exclusive hire only, and under extreme difficulties 1,050 overnights were registered. The figure rose to 1,634 in 2022, when some relaxation of the rules of separation was allowed, though in that year and 2023 exclusivity of use for a single group remained in force.

In 2023 the seven bedrooms contain the following bed numbers:

Room 1 – 4 beds; Room 2 – 4 beds; Room 3 – 4 beds; Room 4 – 4 beds;
Room 5 – 3 beds; Room 6 – 5 beds; Room 7 – 6 beds. Total: 30 beds



Round the back.

1: the steps at the north end of the King's House. The arrangements here are complex and suggest many changes over centuries. The building on the left was until 1909 part of a butcher's shop, with a barn above. This became garages below and the Village Hall above. The ground floor entrance in shadow is the entrance, through a covered alley, to the little yard at the rear of King's House. The door on the right at the top of the flight is an old access to the Black Bull; to the left is the entrance to the Village Hall, replaced by a larger former Methodist Church building on the village green in 2007;

2: the hostel's rear yard. The tall block on the right is the rear wing, with the self-catering kitchen door half way along. The outbuilding beyond houses small storerooms. On the left is the butcher's shop / Village Hall building.

3: a reverse view to photograph 2. The tallest building, beyond, is the main part of King's House, which can be accessed through the lower porch entrance (author's photographs, June 2014)



1 2



3 4



5



6



7



8 9



More interior photographs.

- 1: the reception, with the warden's kitchen, traditionally the source of provided meals, behind it;*
- 2: another view of the present dining room; 3&4: different angles of the bar room.*

The courtyard.

- 5: the former stables, now used as stores; 6: the hostel's original men's toilets, still kept in good condition. They required a night-time trek down the outside steps and across the yard from the dormitory; 7: a remarkable remnant;*
- 8: the rather crowded courtyard, with the curious sheltered space retained; 9: picnic benches and courtyard door*
(author's photographs, June 2014)

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows

1932-1991: previous Oct to Sept; **1992:** Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; **1993-present:** Mar to following Feb

†: Heys Farm youth hostel; ¶: Staple Oak youth hostel; Δ: Slaidburn youth hostel;

•: 1964 was the change from Manchester to Lakeland Region – overnights were not recorded;

+: notional figure included for exclusive hire; ø: operation affected by Covid

...	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
...	77†	178†	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	100¶	272¶/498Δ	openΔ	1251Δ	1788Δ	1885Δ	2191Δ	2379Δ	2385Δ
1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
2604Δ	3021Δ	2891Δ	3249Δ	3232Δ	2850Δ	2880Δ	3173Δ	3296Δ	3187Δ
1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
2685Δ	2573Δ	2318Δ	1949Δ	2205Δ	2015Δ	2096Δ	1939Δ	1849Δ	1810Δ
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
2250Δ	2036Δ	1530Δ	1897Δ	open•Δ	439Δ	1193Δ	1401Δ	1336Δ	1587Δ
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
1319Δ	1484Δ	1458Δ	882Δ	2115Δ	3117Δ	3073Δ	2793Δ	2577Δ	1973Δ
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
2463Δ	1934Δ	1960Δ	2191Δ	2487Δ	1983Δ	1914Δ	2227Δ	2232Δ	2338Δ
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
2017Δ	2169Δ	2633Δ	2836Δ	2515Δ	2410Δ	3121Δ	2920Δ	3216Δ	3676Δ
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
2944Δ	2338Δ	3114Δ	3649Δ	3468Δ	3823Δ	3958Δ	2501Δ	2032Δ	1808Δ
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1897Δ	2358+Δ	2564+Δ	2218+Δ	2962+Δ	3500+Δ	3122+Δ	2831+Δ	2691+Δ	2903+Δ
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
63øΔ	1050øΔ	1634øΔ	openΔ	...	...	...	...	...	...



Endpiece: a study of the busy courtyard about 1940 (photograph Geoff Haley, by courtesy John Haley)

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