



## YHA (England and Wales) Youth Hostel Profile

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

### Telscombe Youth Hostel 1979 to 2015

Bank Cottages, Telscombe, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 3HZ

Historic County: East Sussex

YHA Regions: Southern, South

GR: TQ 405033

After YHA hostels at Lewes and Jevington were both closed in 1946 there were various ideas for post-war replacements in the area between Brighton and Eastbourne to cope with an upsurge in hostelling. One of these schemes, hatched about 1950, was for a property at 51 Telscombe Cliff Way, Peacehaven, that had been bequeathed to the Association. It was the subject of an architectural competition within the YHA's journals for a new youth hostel design, but the plans remained dormant and the site was not disposed of by YHA Trust until 1986. The idea was replaced by the firm offer of Alfriston hostel in 1952.

Another plan in the immediate area was a curious development at Piddinghoe, between Newhaven and Itford Farm, a proposed mooring site for the ex-naval launch MV Queenleigh. The Grid Reference was TQ 434031. The project was abandoned after opposition from the local parish council.

There was better news in 1976, when the October issue of YHA's Southern and Eastern magazine Wightwash announced a hostel at Telscombe, with a likely cost of £30,000.

Plans pressed ahead. The hostel was converted from a row of three Grade II-listed 18th- or 19th-century flint cottages and finally opened in 1979. Volunteers helped get the hostel ready. Members stayed from 5th January 1979, and there was an official opening a few months later on 28th April, with guest Mrs Shirley Whitley, Chairman of Lewes District Council. The hostel was leased throughout its lifetime.

*Hostelling News*, Summer 1979, described the new premises with a degree of irony:

The hostel, though simple, is well designed and offers a higher standard of comfort than the cottages from which it was adapted.

Wendy Nicholls was manager at nearby Alfriston for most of the life of Telscombe hostel. Writing in 2018, she recalled the running of the little establishment in detail:

At the beginning, Telscombe had a discrete, paid, warden for many years. Margaret Botting still lives in the village, she used to walk to the hostel for 5pm, run reception until mid evening and return in the morning. She kept the place pristine. The arrangement ceased for a few years, when Telscombe was run with assistants from Brighton, then Margaret was persuaded back again for the winter (then called 'rent a hostel') shifts. I believe Craig Thomas persuaded her back when he was Small Hostels manager. She was still welcoming and cleaning for the winter E2s ('Escape-Twos') when I was managing Telscombe from Alfriston. She knew the hostel and the village (and villagers!) inside out, and on many occasions smoothed troubled waters when over-enthusiastic visitors mis-parked or otherwise upset over-zealous residents!

When I was managing Telscombe, day to day work was done by volunteers in the summer and Margaret in the winter. I used to love going over to welcome the volunteers and show them the ropes if needed. Many were regulars. We stacked the minute shop high with almost anything which could be needed, quite an old fashioned idea in the early 2000s, but it sold well, and most of the volunteers liked having something to do. The hostel was so small (tight for space), it created a friendly atmosphere because everyone was so close ('Excuse me...' 'could you pass the...'). Again, quite old fashioned but the customers seemed to like it too.

One summer when it was run from Brighton, they had a goat to mow the grass in the garden.

Ten years after Telscombe's opening, in August 1989, YHA laid out its Product Development Marketing Plan for the year: the hostel was to receive a general refurbishment of the existing facilities, costing £22,000. Then *YHA News* of spring 1998 described how both Telscombe and Street hostels had been brought up to date with new heating and hot water systems to ensure that Rent-a-Hostel users were more cosy and there was plenty of hot water.





1: 2006 Geograph image by courtesy of photographer Bob Embleton (<http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/179808>);  
2-4: 1984 images by YHA member and volunteer warden George Miller (author's collection)

Telscombe was a small hostel, receiving about 3,000 to 4,000 guests each year. Further to Wendy Nicolls' reminiscences, there was a brief episode in the 1990s when it became an unlikely satellite of Blackboys hostel, over 20 miles inland, and much later its control passed to the manager of Eastbourne hostel. It latterly relied on exclusive



hire, especially after the opening of South Downs hostel, less than three miles distant, in 2013. Late in 2015 the lessors announced that the hostel lease was to expire. YHA announced that bookings would be taken up to November 9th of that year, leaving a week to hand over the property.



author's memories from visits in 1983 and just before closure, in May 2015

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
1979-1991: previous Oct to Sept; 1992: Oct 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
*: 17 month period; +: notional figure included for exclusive hire and/or camping									
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2793
1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
3876	3424	3146	2802	2743	2532	2347	2101	2520	2612
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
4062	3990	4340*	3318	3411	3204	3405	2950	3500	3203
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
2939	2400	2891	3414	3340	3401	3173	2737	2431	1970
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
2066	3147+	3141+	3240+	3512+	2229+	...	...	...	...

John Martin, 2020. YHA Profiles are intended to be adaptable in the light of new materials gained by YHA Archive