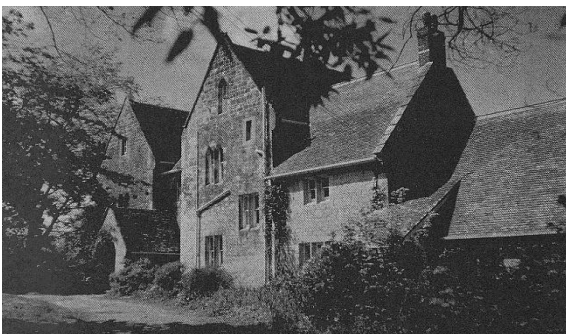




The picture shows 'The Hermitage' on St. Catherine's Down near Whitwell, the one-time home of Michael Hoy whose fascinating life was told by Colin Beavis in several articles in the *South Wight Chronicle* last autumn. This particular photo dates from the 1930s when the mansion had found a new lease of life as the Island's first Youth Hostel. It was in 1935 that William and Anne Whillier from Brightstone were engaged to run it. They had been baker and cook at the new Brightstone Holiday Camp and so were ideally placed to become hostel wardens, particularly with help from son, Dick, who became handyman and bar manager, and daughter, Nancy, who took bookings and ran a small provision shop.

The hostel 'dorms' were not in the mansion itself (despite its 10 bedrooms) but in prefabricated huts in the grounds that dated from use of the property as a sanatorium in the Great War. However, the main house was used to provide a dance hall, bar, billiard and table tennis rooms, while in the grounds there was a tennis court and a putting green. You had to be a YHA member to stay at the Hermitage, with a bed for the night costing a shilling, and dinner, bed and breakfast priced at three shillings. For visitors on more meagre budgets, there was a campsite for sixpence a night with free use of a kitchen and dining room. Opening hours were 5 pm to 10 am and all visitors were required to help with chores the morning they departed. Individuals were limited to three night stays, but parties from abroad were an exception, which included regular groups from the Hitler Youth in Germany.

In fact, the youth hostel movement had its origins in Germany prior to the Great War, the first hostel opening in Altena Castle, Westphalia, in 1912, and by the 1920s there were more than 2,300 hostels across Germany. In 1932, the hostel movement became worldwide with the establishment of the International Youth Hostel Federation. However, in Germany, over 1933 to 1945, the hostel movement there was forcibly merged into the Hitler Youth organisation and became part of the apparatus of the Nazi state.



The Hermitage Youth Hostel had to close in 1940 when St. Catherine's School was evacuated there. After the war, in 1947, a hostel was opened in the Old Vicarage in Whitwell village, by which time another hostel had already been opened on the Island at Sandown. The picture shows the Whitwell hostel in 1989, just three years before closure.