

THE BUILDINGS OF MORFA BORTH

- the Marsh Harbour

Ceredigion



That part of Borth Village on a pebble bank with the sea on one side and the Cors Fochno marsh some reclaimed and the railway on the other. In the distance is the River Dyfi. Photograph Michael Lewis

Photographs and History by BERYL LEWIS

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BEL-AIR Morfa Borth

On the beach side in the northern part of Borth High Street. Home of a wool weaver taking in holiday visitors, a master mariner and later a greengrocer's shop. For a time owned jointly with Minfôr. Formerly called Number 1 Libanus Terrace about 1880, then Rodney House about 1910. Built after 1859 but before 1871.



LEFT Bel-air in 2016.

Bel-air is a house and a shop, and is two storeys high, semi-detached, single fronted, and is one of a pair of houses with Minfor, under a gable roof parallel to the High Street. They share a central rendered chimney each with two chimney pots. There is an attic floor with roof lights. A roof over the shop front continues over the main entrance. The walls are plain, and rendered. The two upper windows are modern but have the pattern of sash windows. In the later part of the twentieth century the tall Garage House was built next door which blocks any window in the south wall of this house and belonged to the large garage beyond. Before

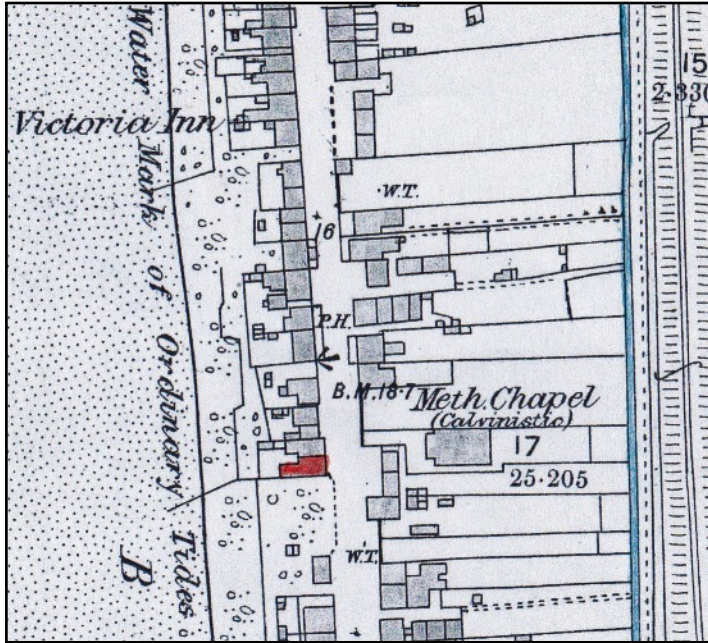
1910 there was open ground there, and even earlier, open ground with one cottage, gone by 1896.

The ground for this house is the stone bank thrown up by the sea and called 'waste' by the Crown Manor who owned it as it was no use for farming. On a map of 1829 it was beach (National Archives LRRO 1/3060) The road had been there for centuries, it was used in the twelfth century and was a turnpike road by the 1770s. It led to a ferry from Ynyslas to Aberdovey and was a quick way to North Wales. Fresh water for the cottages and houses came from a brook behind the buildings on the other side of the road.

In 1848 the ground was still beach (Tithe Apportionments Map Llangihangel Genau'r Glyn, Cyfoeth Township - on line at CYNEFIN - National Library of Wales). However an encroachment had been divided off in 1859 though a house had not yet been drawn on it. It was Number 18 and a dotted line divided it up from 18a next to it as though both plots would be built on by the same owner. (1859 Map National Archives LRRO 1/3060)

By 1871 Bel-air and Minfôr had been built. The Census did not have individual names for the houses, Bel-air was Number 1 Libanus Place. This was named after the Calvinistic Methodist 'Libanus Chapel' (later the Gerlan) on the other side of the High Street which gave its name to a group of cottages and houses close to it. Living in Number 1 was a forty four year old wool weaver, and woollen manufacturer Thomas Gough Thomas. He was not a local

man but born in Penmorfa, Cardiganshire. For ten weeks in the summer of 1871 he and his wife Ann, a local woman born in the parish about 1812, were taking in holiday visitors. It is likely these came on the train as Borth Station had opened in 1863. The Thomas's managed to take as many as eleven people at once. Among the addresses given to the Cambrian News were people from as far away as Kidderminster, Gloucester and Manchester. In 1880 there



were seven weeks of visitors including some from Liverpool. Mr Thomas was 56 at the 1881 Census, his wife was much older, 69. The house was still called Number 1 Libanus Place. Mr Gough Thomas was the only weaver among many mariners in Morfa Borth. He was a useful member of the community being on the parish council in 1878 and on the committee for a Borth Eisteddfod both to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in July 1887 and to raise funds to protect Morfa Borth from the sea (Aberystwyth Observer, 27th April 1878, and Cambrian News 8th July 1887)

ABOVE Mr Gough Thomas's house in 1886 is marked in red. The house had a sizeable extension at the back. The surveyor has put both Bel-air and Minfor with the same owner, they shared the yard. The small buildings at the back of Minfor were probably contained the TyBach, outside lavatory. (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map surveyed in 1886 and published in 1888. Cardiganshire III.10)

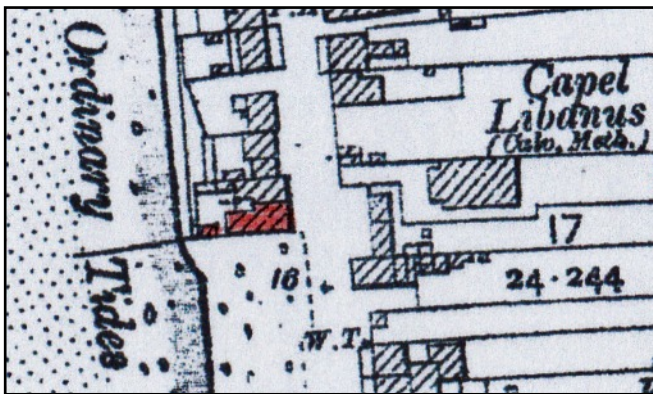
RIGHT This is a detail from a postcard dated about 1895, Bel-air, then called Rodney is the tall house fifth from the right. It had two chimneys so plenty of warm rooms. The ground floor at the front had a bay window, and there seems to be a notice on the window. The dark shapes are people whom I think the photographer cleared off the street to take a better photograph. (Postcard private collection)

By the 1891 Census there was a new family in the house, and it had a name of its own, 'Rodney House'. In the house was a master mariner Richard Lewis's family, his 39 year



old wife Elizabeth Lewis, and their teenage son, John B. Lewis. Also in the house was the weaver's widow, Anne Gough Thomas, then 81 years old. She was Elizabeth's mother in law and was being supported by her sons. They had a twelve year old girl servant, Lizzie Jones. Lizzie was local, born in Glandovey. 'Rodney' was a naval name, Baron George Rodney 1719-1792 was a very successful Admiral in the British Navy in battles against the Spanish and French in the West Indies.

In 1895 Kelly's Directory listed a tenant in the house, Chief Officer John Jones. In 1910 for a tax planned but not levied, Rodney House was valued at £210 - more than Minfor at £170. There would have been £5,19s to pay, £7 gross. Richard Lewis of Glanwern was the owner, and living there was Percy Morton. Richard Lewis was a retired ship master, aged 61 and with him was his wife Elizabeth and they had moved to Glanwern from Rodney. They had wed in 1873 and had one surviving child, Benjamin Lewis.



LEFT In 1904 the house was still in joint ownership with Minfor. It had its own small building behind it, and two fences against the sea, one shared with other houses. Usually these were rows of stakes at an angle driven into the stone bank. The tide line was quite close (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map as before, revised in 1904, published in 1905).

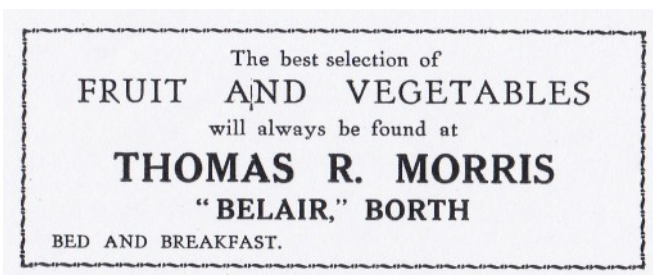


LEFT Another old postcard shows the house on the far left before it was a shop with its sash windows.

(Postcard from a private collection).

By May 1924 in the house was a new family and it had a new name 'Bel-air'. Thomas Rowley Morris owned it, and the family had been living across the street in Gleaner.

Sometime after 1922 the 'Illustrated Borth Guide' advertised furnished rooms to let - probably for holiday makers - of four bedrooms and two sitting rooms. By 1934 Mr Morris had a small grocery shop fronting the house, and in another Borth Guide Book he advertised both



'Fruit and Vegetables' and 'Bed and Breakfast' (These books are in the Aberystwyth Public Library). Also that year Mrs Morris gave a recipe for 'Cocoanut Lengths' in a Recipe Book in aid of St Matthew's Church Bazaar (Published by the Cambrian News, Ceredigion Archives). With votes for the house in 1945 at the

General Election were Thomas Rowley Morris, Jane Morris and Thomas Morris. In 1949 paying the rates was Aran Morris.

In 1963 the rates listed it as a 'house, shop and premises'. With votes for the house were Aran, Thomas and Eileen Morris (Electoral Registers and Rates, Ceredigion Archives).



A 'Handbook and Guide to Borth of 1968 listed a telephone for the house, Borth 396, and in the shop called 'Morris Greengrocer' were flowers, fruit and frozen goods.

LEFT Bel-air is one of a pair of houses that share a chimney. The spacing of the upper windows is the same, suggesting they were built at the same time. They had the same owner in 1886 when Thomas Gough the weaver lived there and Evan Lewis lived in Minfôr.

The photograph was taken in 2009.



The rear of the house from the beach in 2016. Like many houses that side of the street it had a sun room to take advantage of the view of the sea. A large dormer window in the roof of the main house also has sea views. An extension on the south side was already there in 1886, and the stone wall on the beach end of its ground floor would have been a be good protection against the sea.

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gan/by Beryl Lewis

Mae **Tai'r Borth** yn cynnwys dros 350 hanes sy'n ymwneud ag adeiladau unigol ac mae'r hanesion wedi'u darlunio â chyfoeth o ffotograffau, mapiau a dogfennau. Mae'r ffeiliau ar gael ar ein gwefan: <https://www.archifdy-ceredigion.org.uk/tairborth.php?lang=cy>

Hoffem ddiolch i Beryl am fod mor garedig â chaniatáu i ni rannu ei gwaith â'r gynulleidfa ehangaf bosibl.

Ceidw Beryl Lewis yr hawlfraint yn ei gwaith ac mae'r hanesion yn cael eu rhannu at ddibenion preifat ac ymchwil yn unig.

Houses of Borth consists of over 350 histories of individual buildings, lavishly illustrated with photographs, maps and documents. All the files are available from our website: <https://www.archifdy-ceredigion.org.uk/tairborth.php>

We would like to thank Beryl for her kindness in letting us share her work with the widest possible audience.

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