

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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BIRCHFIELD Morfa Borth

At the beach side of the southern part of Borth High Street. It is one of a pair with Mansfield, and it replaced an old cottage, Number 2 Florence Place. Birchfield built between 1925 and 1928 was the twentieth century home of Mr Samuel H. Johnson and his wife, and Jesse Johnson.



Birchfield is a semi-detached and single fronted house of two storeys, with an attic floor served by dormer windows at the back of the roof. It has a gable roof parallel with the road, and there is a central chimney shared with Mansfield, each house with three chimney pots. This is a brick house, and it is built in a style very fashionable in the suburbs of cities in the 1920s and 1930s. The front is divided with exposed red bricks below, and rendered rough cast above, and like them has canted bay

windows for the top and ground floor, Birchfields top bay is narrower than the one below. The top bay has a typical 1930s pediment above it topped by a finial, and with decorative timbers. Dividing the two parts of the front of the house is a shallow lean-to roof which extends right across both houses, giving a protective roof over the front door. Slender posts support this roof, and they stand on a wall which ends with a decorative mouldings, like the top of a column, and whose lower moulding exactly matches the line of moulding below the ground floor bay window. There is a plinth below it. The low, rendered wall which encloses the front garden has posts which echo the these columns with their tops. The wall is decorated with a shallow recessed panel which matches the one on the ground floor bay. In 1909 it may have had the original windows. One step at the gateway and then four steps lead up to the front door which has a small window alongside. This is a front door higher up than many other High Street houses. This is a rare late 1920s style of house for the High Street and it is lucky so many original features have survived.

At the back the upper floor has a picture window and a door opening on to a balcony for a fine view of the beach. The rails are very 1930s, with a similar pattern to those used for Brockhill's windows (now replaced). Brockhill was built in 1935. (Photograph in the Royal Commission for Historic Monuments Wales). Birchfield's balcony is supported by slender posts, and the ground floor rooms of the house have generously large windows, almost all the

front is glass. They have a door to the yard. A rendered block wall gives privacy from The Cottage next door. On the other side, Mansfield extends further out into the yard, and a lower wall encloses the yard. Part of the yard, as in so many other beach side houses, has a platform giving a clear view of the beach. At the beach edge of the yard is a sea defensive wall of vertical planks. On the south side of the back of the house a walled passage ends at a tall wooden gate from which there is access to the platform with steps down to the beach behind The Cottage.

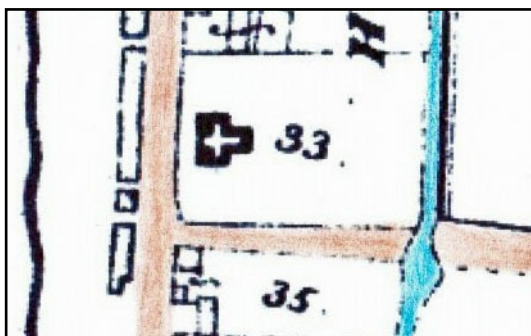
Birchfield from the beach in 2015.



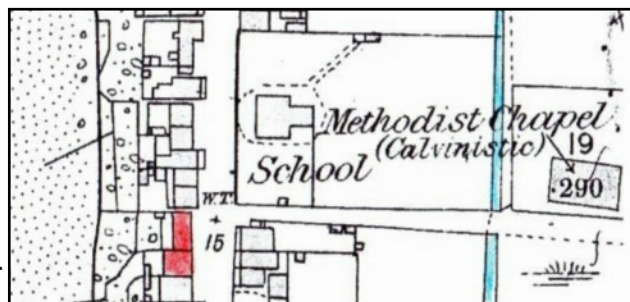
The ground for this house, a bank of stones thrown up by the sea, was still open ground in 1829 and called 'waste' by the Crown Manor who owned it as it was no use for farming (National Archive Crown Manor Map LRRO 1/3060). When a villager enclosed this plot to build on he would have either paid a rent for it, or bought it. The road was centuries old 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 on the other side of the road - the tailrace from the Glanlerry Corn Mill (Felinwern) plus two small streams. Taps in the street with spring water had arrived by 1883 (Cambrian News 9th November). For fuel villagers had their own area to dig peat on the other side of the River Leri just north of Ynys Fergi (Tithe Apportionments Map, Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, Henllys Township, on-line at CYNEFIN National Library of Wales). By the time Birchfield was built running water and quite soon or even at the time of building, electricity was available for the house, and coal could come by train. However there was not yet a sewage system for the waste. Houses had outdoor lavatories in the yard over stone lined pits that had to be cleaned out at intervals.

There was not a cottage on this site in 1829 it was the garden of the cottage immediately to the north - owned by Lewis Jones a master mariner who enclosed the plot in 1825, and who had shares in the sloop Emmett and later all the shares in the schooner Success and commanded them. ((Map 1829, Crown Manor, National Archives, LRRO 1/3060, plot Number 8)

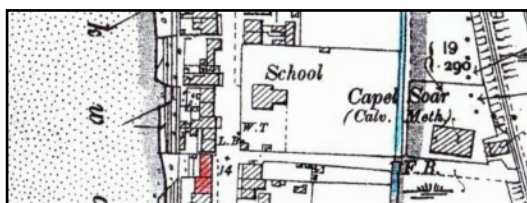
By 1848 another cottage had been added alongside it on the south, on the plot where Birchfield now stands. Marked in red is the block of cottages in 1848. Buildings on this beach side of the road were only sketched in as they paid no tithe. Number 33, then the National School, now has the Meddygfa on the site. (Tithe Apportionments Map, Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, Henllys Township, on-line at CYNEFIN National Library of Wales).



Detail from the Tithe Map of 1848, 33 was the National School, now on the site the Meddffa.



RIGHT In 1886 there are a terrace of three cottages, the southernmost one has survived as The Cottage, Number 3. The other two cottages, marked in red are Number 2 the site of Birchfield and Number 1 Mansfield. The Number 1 plot was much wider than Number 2 so Mansfield has room for a garage alongside the house. Their address was Florence Place. They were set further back from the road than Birchfield and Mansfield. (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map surveyed in 1886, published in 1888. Cardiganshire III.10)



LEFT Little had changed in 1904, except some four rows of sea defensive fences behind the southernmost cottage, now Birchfield, and these were shared with its neighbours. They were usually rows of stakes driven into the stone bank.

There had been a seriously bad storm in October 1896, with damage and flooding (Cambrian News 9th October)



This old postcard from a 'Breezy Borth Guide Book' dated 1907 shows the cottages that were taken down and replaced by Birchfield and Mansfield. 'The Cottage', Number 1 Florence Place is hidden, but we can see Number 2 partly behind the railings of Tara (Convoy House), Birchfield has replaced it, and next to it was Number 3, now replaced by Mansfield. (Aberystwyth Public Library).

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In 1881 at the Census Number 2 Florence Place had a mariner and his wife and four children. In 1891 at the Census there was another mariner and his family at Number 2. In 1901 Number 2 was empty.

In 1910 for a tax planned but not levied, the two on the site of Birchfield and Mansfield were very poor cottages, whereas The Cottage was valued at £100, Number 2 was £11.1s with £2.4s to pay,, £2.15s gross, and Number 1 £17.1s. In 1925 no-one paid rates for them - they may have been about to be pulled down, if not already pulled down.

By 1928 Birchfield was built and paying rates. In 1934 J. M. Johnson paid the rates as the owner and occupier, £23 16s per annum, Mansfield with its garage was more valuable at £27.2s. Mrs S. H. Johnson gave a recipe that year for a Bun Loaf for a booklet published by the Cambrian News in support of St Matthew's Church, Borth (Ceredigion Archives). In 1949 she paid the rates. Mrs Johnson attended St Matthew's Church, and in 1953 gave it two sanctuary chairs, dated 1653 also clergy desks and a communion kneeler in memory of her late husband (Ceredigion Archives, CPR/BOR/16). She is remembered as having a Rolls Royce.

Mrs Johnson paid the rates in 1963 and she had a vote for the house, and so did Kate Morton. (Rates and Electoral Registers, Ceredigion Archives) St Matthew's Church was given the stained glass window of St Cecilia on the south side of the nave nearest the West wall in memory of Jesse Johnson and Samuel Herbert.

It is possible that the Johnson family came from the Midlands, as Birchfield is in Perry Barr, Birmingham.

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yn cyflwyno / presents
Tai'r Borth / Houses of Borth
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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