

# THE BUILDINGS OF MOREFA 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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# THE LIBANUS RESTAURANT and CINEMA

Morfa Borth - Borth Marsh

This is on the east side of the High Street, set back from road. Formerly the Libanus Chapel, later the Gerlan Chapel. On that site by 1866. The present building dates from 1877 and 1892.



*The front of the Chapel in 2009 when it was still the Gerlan. On the right is the Min-a-don Cottage*

What we see today is the chapel after it was rebuilt in 1892 with classical details. It was a branch of the Chapel at Pen-y-garn, Bow Street.

It is under a gable roof at right angles to the street, and it has considerable extensions at the rear.

The front is a gable end with a porch built of brick. On the upper face of the building is the

moulding of a prominent string course, and there are classical style pilasters dividing it into three sections. Three, the Trinity was an important number for Christians. The porch is single storey, and the entrance door to the chapel has a simple classical frame with a prominent keystone. Three windows are above with six large rectangular lights and three small ones each to fit the curving arched top of the window. A simple frame with a keystone encloses them. Beside the front entrance are taller windows of six narrow lights with three tiny lights beneath their arched top. Such tall narrow rectangles are like Art Nouveau style patterns. The chapel is lit from the side by very tall windows with a strong central division. The interior measures about 31 feet 7 inches by 49 feet 3 inches, and has a very pretty moulded plaster roof. The vestry measures about 28 feet 8 inches by 26 feet 1 inch, and once contained stores and toilets

In a photograph of the chapel for the Borth Review of 1949 and 1950 there were iron gates to the street, and a further set of gates where the stone wall of the cottage on the south (now Min y Don) ends.



*One of the classical style windows taken during re-building work in February 2016.*



Photographs taken in February 2016 as the Chapel was being turned into a cinema and restaurant.

*LEFT A decorated plaster arch with a keystone and a circular motif based on a seamen's compass marked the important east end of the Chapel for worshippers. .*



*LEFT The ceiling was divided by moulding into geometrical shapes.*



*LEFT There is a very beautiful rose moulded in plaster in the centre of the ceiling, with curled acanthus leaves.*

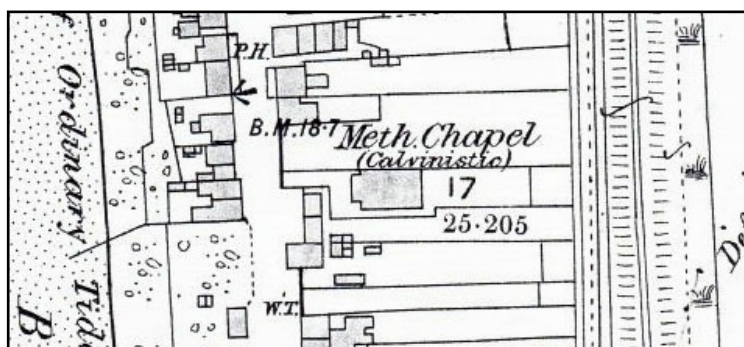
*Ceilings divided into panels with ceiling roses are found in some Chapels in Aberystwyth.*

The beginnings of the Libanus Chapel go back to a Sunday School founded in 1801 by Calvinistic Methodists. They already had a chapel in Upper Borth. (Bert J. Rawlins 'Churches and Nonconformist Chapels in Wales' Ceredigion Archives.)

The ground on which the Libanus Chapel was built was enclosed from the shingle embankment and the marsh alongside in 1802 by a carpenter from Glanwern (Ty Gwyn) called John Benjamin. By 1829 he had a cottage on the southern street front of the site - this is where Min-a-don is today. He rented it out. (Plot 33 Map, National Archive LRRO1/3060.) In 1848 the cottage was still there but there was no Chapel there yet. (Tithe Apportionments Map for Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, Cyfoeth Township).

A writer in the Borth Review said that there was a Libanus Chapel on the present site in 1866, and seafaring people went there. (National Library of Wales). In June 1871 teachers and pupils of some Calvinistic Methodist Sunday Schools who were visiting Borth had tea there.

(Cambrian News June 15<sup>th</sup>) In July that year the Rev. J. H. Evans gave a lecture at the Chapel towards a building fund for a new Chapel. (Cambrian News 6th July 1871) Six years later in 1877 a bigger Libanus Chapel was built - the congregation had probably increased. It was in the Gothic Style and designed by David Williams of Cemmaes. (RCHM Wales) Walls of this Chapel may still survive.



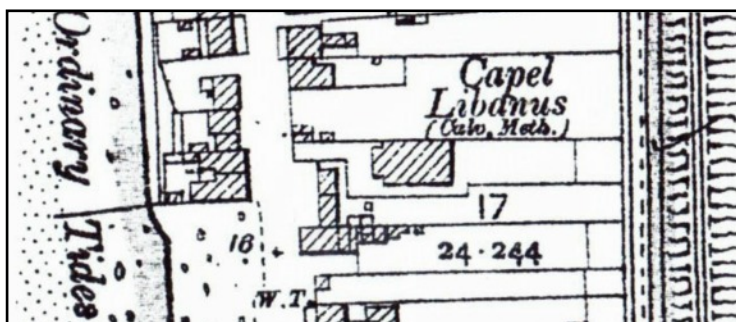
We can see it on the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map of 1888, surveyed in 1886. John Benjamin's ground had been divided into two parts. There were two cottages on it, and the chapel has to have its porch on the north side of the front to access it from its driveway to the street. All its front could not be seen from the street as the cottage in front

blocked some of the view of it. There were two plots behind the chapel, the smallest one on the east was alongside the stream of fresh water that supplied all the cottages and houses. It would have supplied the needs of baptisms at the Chapel too perhaps. Today all that remains is a ditch.

In 1892 the fine Chapel we see today was built in the 'classical' style. (RCHMW) There was no regular minister at first. Mr Roberts of Garibaldi, then a drapers, and now the Premier Stores gave sermons and so did Richard Davies from Neptune. (Borth Review NLW)

The first regular minister was Rev. J. C. Evans, appointed in 1896, and there is a photograph of the Rev. and Mrs Evans in front of Tremydon in, 'Britain in Old Photographs, Aberystwyth and North Ceredigion,' published by Dyfed Cultural Services (Aberystwyth Public Library). There is also a photograph of the Sunday School. The Rev. Evans was to be the minister at the Libanus Chapel for 26 years. He died in 1924, and his funeral was at the Chapel, followed by a cortege to Y Garn as reclaimed marshland behind the Libanus Chapel was not suitable for burials. His successor, the Rev. E. J. Jenkins who was the minister for

23 years, and had recently retired in 1950. (Borth Review)



LEFT We can see the Chapel rebuilt in 1892 on this 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map of 1905. Its walls seem very much the same.

In 1910 for a tax planned but not levied, the Chapel was owned by Trustees, and valued at £1,200 and the site at £1,105 - a bit less than the Soar Chapel and the Siloh Wesleyan Chapel. The ground beside the Libanus Chapel and the bigger plock behind it were owned by Elizabeth Lloyd of Cwm Cethin, Glanwern, now Ty Gwyn. She also owned the cottage in front - now Minfor in which she had put a tenant. She was a descendant of John Benjamin who enclosed the land back in 1802, and we can assume that it was their family that gave the land on which the Chapel was built - in about 1866. As well as carpenters they had mariners in their family (for example Thomas Lloyd, Elizabeth's husband, born about 1839) and local mariners liked to worship there.

Like other chapels, it had social occasions. Each year there was a New Year Night's Concert and the Cambrian News of December 19th 1892 reported that singing classes were being held and the Libanus Chapel was preparing a cantata 'Y Teulu Dedwydd' by J. T. Rees, Mus. Bach. As New Year's Day fell on a Sunday, the concert would be on Monday evening. In 1911 Captain Abraham Davies of Glanwern House, a very notable retired local mariner was involved in their Concert. (Cambrian News)

In November 1924 the paper reported that members of the chapel founded a 'Literary and Debating Society' and the president at the first meeting was Isaac Pritchard. He was listed as a boot maker and repairer in the Trades Directory of South Wales, and lived at 5 Railway Terrace, now 'Hendre', and later at 'Welfare'. The secretary of the Society was Mr D. Hughes of 'Boston'. Also involved were Miss Buddog Roberts and also Mr R. Williams of 'Hyfrydle'. That year the superintendent of the Sunday School was Lewis Davies of 'Pomona'. In April 1924 there was a large congregation at a 'United Missionary Prayer Meeting'. The president was William Thomas Lewis. He was a deacon of the chapel, and a draper and grocer at London House (Cambrian News). In 1949 the Borth Review called him an elder of the Chapel. Other deacons in 1924 were Christmas Humphreys of 'Carron House', W. T. Jones of 'Bodfor', and Lewis Davies.

In the late 60s there was a service in English every Sunday morning which would have pleased holiday visitors. (Handbook and Guide to Borth Aberystwyth Public Library) The minister was the Rev. J. Tudno Williams. It was still the Libanus Chapel.

The chapel became a 'Gerlan' when it was owned by a group of non-conformist churches. In 1985 there was a Sunday School held in its vestry. (Pamphlet on Borth's new C.P. School by Dyfed Council 1985). The 'Gerlan' closed on the 25<sup>th</sup>. March 2013.

Peter Fleming and his partner Grug Morris transformed the former Chapel into a Restaurant and Cinema in 2016, calling it the 'Libanus 1877'. The building designer and planning consultant was Gareth Flynn of 'Hughes Architects' who have an office in Aberystwyth. Peter Fleming and sub-contractors did the work to build the interior.

The Chapel was given an upper floor and the interior is mostly a wooden structure. The ground floor entrance opens into a reception area, and beyond is the cinema and a bar in an extension on the back. From the ground floor stairs lit by one of the old chapel windows and a lift lead to a reception area with a kitchen alongside, and there are toilets at the other side of the corridor. The glass verandah encloses a very well lit dining area, a good place to eat in the daytime, and there is a further dining room at the east end of the building. Peter Fleming has an eye for sculptures and carvings which add interest everywhere. The courtyard at the front, covered by an awning, has seats and tables for smokers encircled by a long colour photograph of Borth. The entrance paved path is lit and a modern screen displays information on the current films. The name 'Libanus 1877' is carved on to a large standing stone just inside large iron gates.



*ABOVE The front of the building at the beginning of 2019. There is a classical feel to the front provided by simple columns and the egg and dart moulding of the edge of the balcony. The delicate ironwork above the balcony windows is a reminder of Regency houses, and of course there are sculptures.*

Note.

These Calvinistic Methodist chapels flourished. Bert J. Rawlins, writing about Churches and Nonconformist Chapels in Wales, said the Soar Chapel (by the level crossing) in Morfa Borth was an offshoot of the Libanus, and the combined Sunday Schools and members of both chapels numbered 450. The Soar had a Sunday school by 1826, and had built a chapel by 1831.



*The original chapel windows and entrance door have been kept, and the red colour emphasizes the framing they had in the rendering. This lower section of the front was an extension, but the new balcony above is the full width of the old building.*



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

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**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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