

# 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

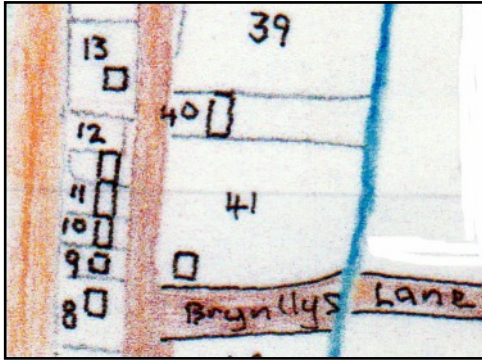
Photographs and History by BERYL LEWIS

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# BORTH'S NATIONAL (Church) SCHOOL gone.

## Morfa Borth - the Marsh Harbour

Today the Meddygfa stands on the site of the National School which was on the east (Cors) side of an ancient road on the shingle embankment that was once considered 'waste' as it was no good for farming. In 1803 a piece of this ground was enclosed and sold for £6.10s



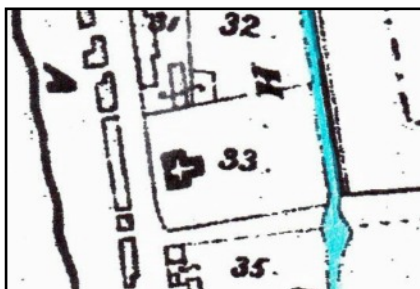
ABOVE A detail after the 1829 Map (National Archives LRRO 1/3060).

to the Vicar of the then parish, Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn. We can see the site on a map of 1829 map drawn for the Crown who owned the manor, it was the encroachment Number 41 on the main road and alongside the 'Road to Brynlllys' very much where the Meddygfa is today. The Rev. L. Evans had a cottage on it in the corner and alongside the lane to Brynlllys, but not far from the main street. The ground measured two rods and thirty three perches which is nearly three quarters of an acre, and running along the back of the plot was a brook with fresh water needed in the days before a piped water supply. This area of the main street had the largest cluster of cottages at that time, with five across the road and a row

alongside where the Glanrhyd cottages are today. So what was this cottage used for? The vicar did not live there, he had his vicarage at Llandre. However in 1868 the Kelly's Directory listed a 'chapel of ease' at Borth – perhaps the cottage on this site was previously used for this purpose? Certainly when the school was built in 1842 on the Vicar's ground it was licensed to be used for services and was used for these until St Matthew's Church was built for Borth and consecrated in 1876.

There had been an earlier school at 'Morfa Borth' supported by the Church. The Vestry Book of St Michaels at Llandre noted that Borth had a schoolmaster called Henry Evans in June 1818. He was owned money to help support his school A £100 bequest was given to it in 1825 and it was for 'poor children' and supported by subscription of the inhabitants of that part of the parish and others. (Ceredigion Archives, Parochial Registers, Vestry Book 2.) We do not know where it was. In 1824 had 95 children aged between 5 and 18. (Randall Enoch Evans 'Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, a Church History' p.70) The schoolmaster in 1838 was Lewis Parry, a farmer's son. (Marriages Register, Genau'r Glyn parish 1837-61, Ceredigion Archives).

The National School on this site was built in 1842 for 125 children, boys, girls and infants. Local people gave money, in particular the Miss Pritchards who were responsible for some other good school buildings. Elizabeth and Martha Pritchard had left £222 each in their Wills to employ a schoolmaster and mistress. There was also a grant of £100 from the Lordships of the Committee of the Council for Education in Downing Street, London ('Ceredigion', Vol. XIV, 2004 and Randall Enoch Evans 'Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, a Church History').



LEFT In 1848 the recently built school sat in the centre of its site close to the road, as the Meddygfa is today. The Vicar was the Rev. John Jones, the owner was the Church. It was number 33 on the map (Tithe Apportionments Map, Llanfihangel enau'r Glyn, Cyfoeth Township). The surveyor measured the ground at three rods and 36 perches – more than in 1829. It was the largest building in Morfa Borth by far, more than twice the size of any other house then. The cross may indicate that it could be used as a church.

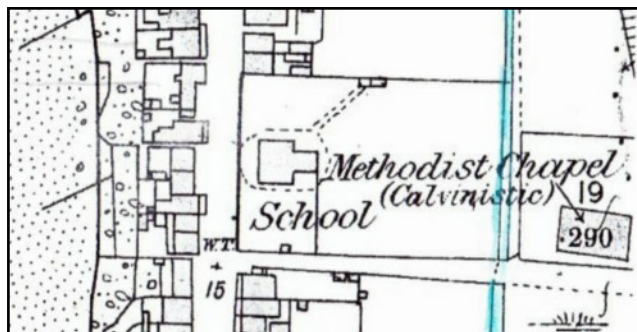
There were no outbuildings on the site. On the map the High Street is drawn north to south,

and the smaller road alongside the school was the lane to Brynlllys. In 1842 there were no school toilets and letters exist between the Vicar and London concerning providing 'privies'. By 1846 they had been provided. Maps of 1888 and 1905 do not show a separate building on the site – so the 'privies' were within the building. The 'Blue Book' inspection of the school in 1847 by J. C. Symons soon after it was built, reported, 'Borth is a desolate place consisting of a long straggling street of the houses of fishermen. The school house was 'good'. The schoolmaster however was 'untrained' and the pupils behind in reading, writing, arithmetic and general knowledge and had 'a very limited knowledge of English'. These first pupils on the Roll were the children of, '30 seamen, 4 farmers, 5 blacksmiths, 4 cobblers, 1 carpenter and some agricultural workers.' Despite the endowments pupils had to pay 1d. per week. (Randall Enoch Evans 'Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, a Church History') By 1871 this was 8s.9d per week and some of this money had to be used to heat the building (Elizabeth Evans, Y Tincer Jan. 1995 .)

It had been a long hilly walk for elderly people and small children to reach their parish church, Llanfihangel (St Michael's) Church) at Llandre, which was probably why the National School was licensed as a church and 'well used' for services and Sunday School until Borth had its own parish church consecrated in 1876. (Mr Randall Evan's 'Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, a Church History', p. 71.)

Twelve years after the National School was built, in 1864 a school was built for Upper Borth called locally the 'top school'. Chapel going parents preferred the 'top school' while church going parents favoured the National School. (Dr Terry Davies) In 1879 there were 220 in the two schools ( Elizabeth Evans,Y Tincer).

The National School seems to have run with two teachers. In 1868, Thomas Erasmus was the schoolmaster. (Kelly's Directory) It is not yet known if there was accommodation for the teachers in the school building but it did not have a separate school house as the 'top' school did.

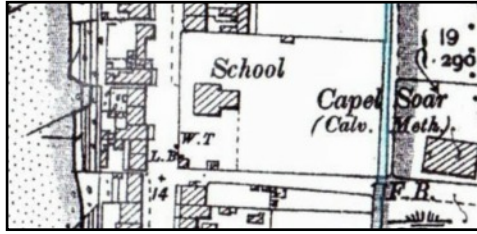


*LEFT This detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map of 1888, surveyed in 1886 shows the school site. An area was walled or fences off and included a tiny building. On the north side a path led to another small building in two parts, the 'privies' perhaps?*

The head teacher Miss Annie Bathurst, a 'certified teacher' and an Englishwoman born in Warwick was appointed in 1892 and was still there in 1924. She lived across the road in Epworth House and her salary was £100 per annum. The school then had a second qualified teacher, salary in 1897 £18, in 1907 Catherine Louisa Jones was appointed, paid £29 per annum, and described as a 'public elementary trained teacher'. The school also used pupil teachers, each paid £4. In 1904 there were 74 pupils on the books and the average attendance was 50. Considering this was a school built for at least 115 pupils it was not doing so well. The 'top' school had more pupils with better attendance. (Cardiganshire Education Committee, 'Extracts from Returns' published in March 1905, Ceredigion Archives CPR/ASM/77). There was plenty of land behind the school, so 'gardening' could have been taught. However, we do not have the school log books for the National School at present which would give a picture of the school's activities.



The school employed a caretaker, and in 1901 this was a 60 year old widow, Mary Davies who lived at Number 1 Rhiwlas Cottages on the High Street (now gone). (Census)



*LEFT This detail from the 25 inch map of 1905 shows a fenced area again, and there is an extra small building in the south west corner. The 'W.T' indicated a wireless telegraph station.*

In 1910 for a valuation for a tax planned but not levied the school was valued at £1,000, its site at £480. The occupier was the 'Education Committee', but the owner was still the Vicar, then the Rev. E. Davies of St Matthew's Church who lived in Diana House now 'Pebbles'. (Ceredigion Archives T/DV/18 and a NLW map). He would have taken a personal interest in the school and visited it.

At the end of the first World War the Cambrian News of November 15th 1918 reported that, 'the school children assembled outside the National School with flags and bunting and sang the National Anthems. The street was decorated with flags and bunting, and in the evening was fireworks and other amusements'.

At Armistice Day in 1924 the school was again decorated and seven boys were on the Roll of Honour, lost by being torpedoed by German submarines in World War 1. Miss Annie Bathurst gave an address and there was a two minute silence (Cambrian News November 21).

The headmaster in 1924 was Brinley Llewellyn Jones.

In the 1950s and 60s a local lady remembered that pupils aged only 9 had to teach others and the parents did not like that.

There continued to be a Sunday School after the school had become a church hall, and a nursery school was also there.



*ABOVE The remaining part of the National School's ground in 2015. It still belonged to the Church. Schoolchildren would have been able to look across to St Matthew's Church.*

The National School was called the ‘prettiest building with its tudor windows and bellcote’ in the Pevsner, ‘Buildings of England’ (Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, p. 440). Map evidence of 1888 surveyed in 1886 shows its plan was an upside down ‘T shape. There is some evidence of the building from three old photographs.



Photograph 1 This is a view of the building from the north, looking down Borth's High Street, and as the road had no tarmac this may be the oldest picture we have. The building had a gable roof parallel to the street. At the north end of this was a slab chimney, probably stone, divided into three sections by projecting ridges. Matching it at the south end was the bellcote, also divided into sections with an arched open slot for one bell in the upper two sections, the bell hanging between them. It was crowned by a gable roof at right angles to the street. The bell would have summoned children to school in the morning when the poorer families did not have means of telling the time in their cottages. It is likely that the children went home to lunch, so the bell could also summon them to afternoon lessons, probably at 2pm. Also on the roof, and not far away from the bell cote and the big northern chimney were two ventilator small chimneys, each with one chimney pot. These would perhaps have served stoves below in the schoolroom. There were four tall windows along the front which look as though they lit a large schoolroom, like a hall which would have had a high ceiling. Reports in the Cambrian News indicate there was room there to hold an Inquest, (to hold Bazaars to raise money for the church and meetings of parishioners to discuss matters such as flooding, and 'competitive meetings' (eisteddfod like) events. There is only a tiny glimpse of the rear wing whose roof was lower than the roof of the front section of the building. In front of the school was a wall with many rounded stones from the beach. It was too tall for mischievous children to climb over and access to the school was through a front gateway between sturdy stone gateposts. Fitting into the furthest corner of the yard and under a gable roof at right angles to the street is another building, with a lower section at the back with a chimney. It had a window facing the street and access from the street by a gateway with one gatepost visible.

(Ceredigion County Council, 'School', Picture 2, Acc. No 5853. On-line.)





Photograph 2 shows the front of the school with the 'tudor' arch at the top of the windows formed from brick shaped stones above. The wall was exposed stone, and nicely coursed. The windows were tall casements with a central glazing bar, with three sections each side, each with four small lights, and possibly a section hidden behind the wall. At the top under the arch was a division with two curved glazing bars, the lower two subdivided by thinner curving bars. These were like tall chapel windows, indicating a high ceiling inside. Like all school windows they were too high up in the wall for pupils to see out and be distracted by events outside. The roof had been altered, the northern chimney had gone and the two small ventilating chimneys. There were two substantial square stone gateposts and the southern run of wall had been altered from one all the same height as in the other photographs, to a lower height. There was a post box set in this. A safety railing barrier was outside the gate to prevent children from running into the street. There is a tall street light. It is possible this picture shows the school when it was being used as a church hall after the pupils left in July 1968. They went on to the newly built Craig yr Wylfa primary school at Upper Borth. There is a shield shaped plaque in between the central windows. It is like the one on today's Meddygfa but set on a knob of stone and with some decorative shaping round the edges. It is not possible to read the words (Photograph courtesy of Y Tincer, February 1995).



*LEFT This was the Aberystwyth's first National School in Northgate Street opened in 1819. On the building the words are 'Established 1819'. Borth's school also had the four large schoolroom windows along the front, the bellcote one end, a chimney the other and a protective wall to the street. Borth probably had a gate too. (W.J. Lewis, 'Born on a Perilous Rock' p. 166).*

Photograph 3 shows the south side of the building, possibly shortly before it was taken down as the gable end shows rendering with large cracks patched up. The rear wing is much longer than it appeared on the 1905 map. It was of exposed rubble stone with red ridge tiles. Its small window has the tudor arch and decorative curved shapes in the glass below it. It is not possible to see the other glazing bars. The gable end of the front section has a very large window, but this does not match the front windows in the other photograph. It has a simple four centred arch, and four large square lights with the section above filled in. Against the south wall of the wing was a lean to of rubble stone lower than the wing itself, and with a window in its east end. Its door fits untidily with the roof at the top, being a little taller. The ground has the remains of stone paving. (Amgueddfa Ceredigion Museum)

*BELOW Photograph 3*





Photograph 4 dated to the 1930s shows nearly 50 children and with a schoolmaster and a schoolmistress and possibly another woman teacher. The children range from infants to young teenagers, and some of the lads were wearing ties. This shows us a little more of the building with another lean-to section ending with a lower section with possibly one of the original doorways, with its wooden door of tongue and groove. The wall is very random rubble stone, and heavily pointed. We do not know if there was a separate entrance for girls and boys. There was probably some kind of kitchen as in 1918 a 'tea' could be laid on for Sunday School pupils. By then it had a water supply other than the stream at the back.

The School closed in July 1968, and was then used as a Church Hall. (Elizabeth Evans, Y Tincer Feb. 1995). All that remains today is the northern section of its front wall of rounded beach stones, the rest of the wall, still rounded beach stones has been altered. Today the Meddygfa has room for a car park round it, but does not include the fenced off rear area of the former school ground, which is flat and grassy and still belongs to the church. This is now fenced off and up for sale. (2015/6)



*ABOVE The demolition of the school, Y Tincer February 1995 (Photo by courtesy of Y Tincer).*



*LEFT The school had a building on the street edges in the corner of its site (Photograph from an old glass plate, courtesy of Peter Fleming)'*

There is a John Thomas photograph of pupils at the National School possibly about 1885 from a glass plate at the National Library of Wales. They have put it on-line. Random rubble stonework and part of a window are visible. There is some damage to the picture.



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**Tai'r Borth / Houses of Borth**  
gan/by Beryl Lewis  
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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.

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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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