

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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ST CLARE Morfa Borth

On the beach side in the northern part of Borth High Street. Captain David Jones's 'St Clair House'. Built after 1859 and before 1880.



LEFT St Clare in 2013

St Clare is a two and a half storey, single fronted terrace house under a roof parallel to the street. Two gables at right angles carry windows up into the roof area. The house is built of random rubble stone but with no round beach stones in the front wall, and the stones are often coursed and nicely dressed. Yellow bricks edge the windows which are under shallow arches, but interestingly, like London house the bricks do not edge the outer wall edges. The two windows above

the front door are sash windows. The front has square bay windows on its ground and first floor, these were added after 1921. The topmost window above the bay is larger and squarer. The house has a dark brick chimney on the north end of its roof with three chimney pots (flues).



LEFT There are two outer front doors below an arch, which open into a porch. Inside is a door on the right and a window on the left. However a door on the left would have opened on to a coloured and patterned tiled floor leading under an arch to the stairs and beyond. The other doorway did not open on to tiles and shortly there is a door with glass panels of a small room. The outside edge of the main doorway has grey brick walling which suggests the doorway may have been an alteration. The style of the row of windows above the doors is interesting and matches the panels on the doors. Possibly 1930s? There are no others like them in Morfa Borth.



ABOVE The rear of the house from the beach in 2016. The house was having a new roof, its third. At the back of the house are two gables with windows which match the front of the building. On the ground floor is a glassed porch with doors into the yard leading from a dining room beyond which today is the ground floor living room alongside the front hall. There is a two storey extension on the south side of the yard, with a wooden clad upper floor ending with a door to a balcony. On the north side is a single storey stone holiday 'chalet' with rendered walls which abuts a small cloakroom adjoining the kitchen. The kitchen and dining room end in an extension from the main house. The back of the house has closely grouped second floor windows which would have avoided the extensions on both sides on the old maps, and suggest these were two storey. Stone walls enclose the yard and there is an outer yard area with a gateway leading to the beach.

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. By the time this house was built there was a tap with good spring water in the street outside the Cambrian Hotel (later Pantyfedwen and now gone), and other taps by 1886.

In 1848 the site was still open ground. (Tithe Apportionments Map Llangihangel Genau'r Glyn, Cyfoeth Township - on line at CYNEFIN - National Library of Wales). However on a map of encroachments belonging to the Crown Manor in 1859 a plot ready for a house of quite a good size, wider than Arfôr's, is marked but no house had been drawn on it. (Map National Archives LRRO 1/3060)

St Clare was Captain David Jones's house. He was the son of a mariner, and was wed in 1863 aged 24, and became a captain in 1868. In 1875 he was working on a steam yacht in Cowes, the Isle of Wight. He eventually became the captain of the Duke of Alban's steam yacht 'Ceres' until the Duke died in 1898 (*Welsh Newspapers on-line, Cambrian News 29 November 1895, 17 March 1899*). The Duke was from an old family and had been a Liberal politician in the House of Lords for some of his life. Possibly good pay from the Duke enabled Captain Jones not only to build St Clare but also the terrace of three 'St Alban's' villas in Upper Borth listed for the first time in the 1901 Census. The Captain named his second daughter Moyra, possibly after the duke's eldest daughter from his second marriage whom Captain Jones would have met on the yacht. 'Beauclair' was the family name of the Duke and in the earliest listing of the house for the 1881 Census it was spelt St Clair House.

The house was there by 1880 called St Clare House when Mrs Jones took in holiday visitors for three weeks in August. She had a family of four from Middlesex staying, Mr and Mrs Noel and their children (Cambrian News). At the 1881 Census in the house was Elizabeth Jones aged 44, Captain Jones's sister, unmarried and listed as a 'domestic servant', probably meaning she was acting as housekeeper. She was local, born in Borth. With her were three children of the Captain; Thomas 11, Jane 8 and Myra 1 (spelt Moyra in the 1891 Census). The niece of Miss Elizabeth Jones, Jane Jones, single, 24 and a dressmaker was also in the house. Elizabeth would be company for Mrs Jones when the Captain was away.

Captain Jones's house in 1886. It opened on to the street and shared a yard with Arfôr which was also in Jones family ownership - living there was Mrs Margaret Jones widow of master mariner Captain John Jones. There was a considerable extension on the north side at the rear of St Clare, in three sections, leading almost to the end wall or fence. There was a second building blocking a passageway from the street. Somewhere in these would have been the Ty Bach - outside lavatory. The yard had a rear fence or wall and there was one other fence which ended, probably stakes at an angle driven into the stone bank, but these were little protection from the sea in storms. (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance survey Map surveyed in 1886 and published in 1888. Cardiganshire III.10)

At the 1891 Census the Captain's wife, Margaret Jones was at home. She was from a Williams family of Borth master mariners, and a Welsh speaker. With her were her daughters; Jane then 18, single, and Moyra 11. Her sister Elizabeth was still there, and her nephew, Thomas Williams 15 who was a pupil teacher. He had been born in Aberystwyth. He was living in St Clare when he died in 1895 and his gravestone is in the churchyard at Llandre, 'Fe lwydodd yn ei flodau, a hunodd cyn hannerei dyddiau, Ehedodd uwch nin weid iau, I fywyd gwell I fyd gau'.

Possibly by 1895 a St Alban's Villa was completed for the Captain to move there, as Kelly's Directory lists a master mariner, David Jenkins living in St Clare.

In the 1901 Census incomers from Shropshire were living in St Clare, John W. Walton aged 46 with his 'own means' born in St Chad's parish Shrewsbury. His wife Mary aged 47 came from Shrewsbury too. They had brought a servant with them, Gertrude Ingle aged 16 from Lawley Shropshire. This household spoke English.

This was the Walton's St Clare, marked in red. The house was much the same, but after a very bad storm in 1896 which did serious damage to some beach side houses in Morfa Borth the yard had three fences, and an inner one very close to the building. (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map revised in 1886 and published in 1905. Cardiganshire III.10)

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In 1910 for a valuation for a tax planned but not levied, the house was valued at £326. Victoria Walton was the owner and occupier. She would have paid £12.15s, gross £15. The house is not in the 1911 Census, nobody was there to fill in the form.



In June 1925 Victoria M. Walton was still the owner and occupier.

LEFT In this detail from a postcard dated about 1921 we can just see St Clare, the third house from the left, and though the bay window of Arfôr partly hides the ground floor we can see large windows but no bay windows on the front of St Clare.

Paying the rates in 1934 as the owner was Lilian Clarke, and Victoria M. Walton was the occupier. Lilian Clarke paid in 1938. She died in 1943 aged 83 (Parish Register, St Matthew's Borth).

In 1949 paying the rates was B. W. Spargo. About 1950 Mrs Spargo was letting a flat in St Clare with three bedrooms. The house had hot and cold water, a gas cooker and a 'Chalet' was available. In 1962 the 'furnished chalet' on the beach side was again to let, and a furnished flat with a sitting room and three bedrooms, altogether suitable for eight people. In 1968 Mrs Spargo had a telephone, Borth 379 (Several Borth Guide Books, Aberystwyth Public Library and 1968 Ceredigion Archives). William Spargo died in 1959 aged 74 (Parish Register, St Matthew's Borth).



This detail from a postcard of the 1950s shows St Clare, the third house from the left, at the time the Spargo family lived there. The prominent bay windows with their striped edges are there, and the upper one is topped by a balcony.

In 1963 Constance W. Spargo paid the rates and she had a vote for the house (Electoral Registers and Rates, Ceredigion Archives).

Today the house has three floors and four bedrooms, and a modern bathroom on the second floor. There are also a workshop, hobby room and dressing room. The floors are pine and slate for the kitchen, the staircase is pitch pine, and there is a good looking arch in the hall alongside the foot of the staircase - and arches are a feature of the halls of the St Alban Villas though those houses are brick. The reason for the double front door is not clear. I have found no record of this house having a room used by a bank as in the double doorway for 'Bank House' in Bridge Street Aberystwyth with a door for the family and a door for the bank.

Further history of Captain David Jones and his sons who also became captains can be found in Terry Davies, 'Borth, A Maritime History', page 55.

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gan/by Beryl Lewis
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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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