

# 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

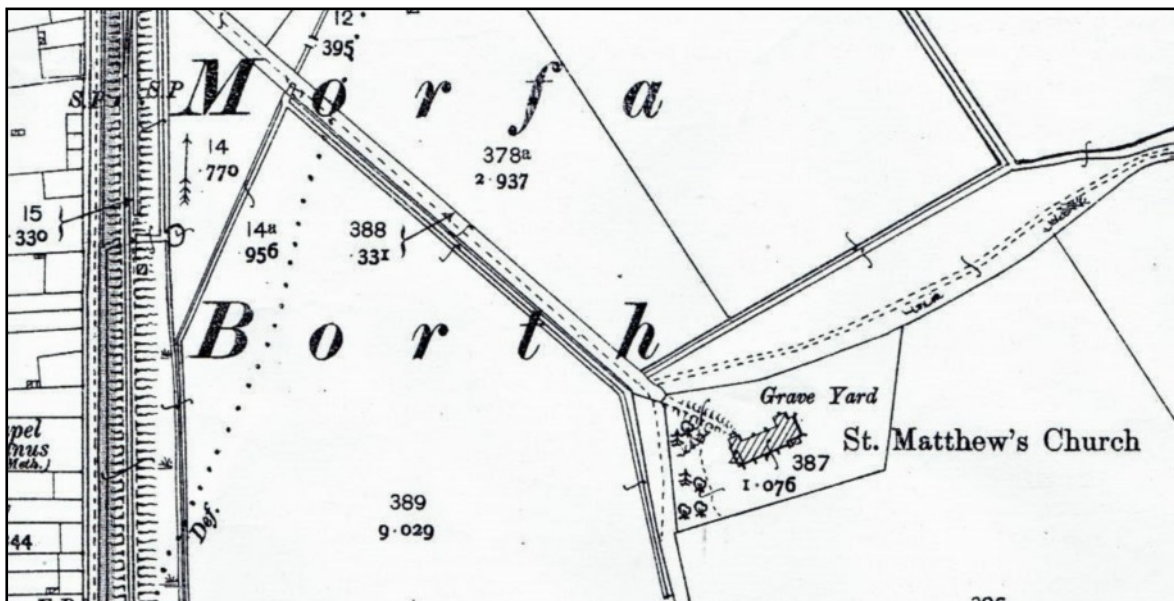
*This work is for research and educational purposes only.*

# ST MATTHEW'S CHURCH, BORTH

First Service on June 30<sup>th</sup>. 1876,  
Consecrated on 15<sup>th</sup>. September 1879



The site is the west side of a rocky island, Ynys Fergi (otter island) rising out of former marshland. This a very prominent site seen from the village, and was sensibly above the level of flooding, as Morfa Borth main street had very little spare land by then, and the land to the east was drained marsh but could flood. The church site came from Sir Pryse Pryse Bart, there is mention of his deeds in a letter of Mr Corfield the solicitor dated April 27 1876, who did not want the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to 'overhaul them'. (Ceredigion Archives CPR/BOR/2)



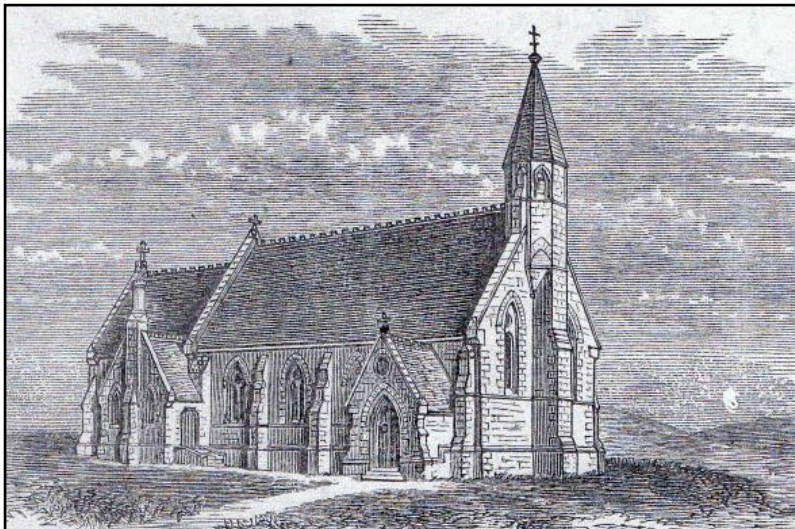
*The 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map revised in 1904 shows the building was basically a rectangle with a porch and larger vestry on the north side. The alignment of the building is not exactly east-west. It had no car park at that time. (Cardiganshire III.10)*

Borth was right at the edge of the huge Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn parish, its church was St Michael's at Llandre and this was a long way for Borth villagers to travel to church. Many Borth villagers were buried in its graveyards.

Before the Church in 1842 a National School was built by church people and private subscription and it was licensed for public worship. For many years services were held there, two in Welsh and three in English (now the Meddygfa is on that site). In 1868 Slater's

directory lists a 'Chapel of Ease' at Borth under the Rev. Thomas Matthews, and it is likely this was the National School.

The railway opened to passengers in 1863, the great Cambrian Hotel and the Terrace had been built and by 1874 the rapid increase of population in the, 'rising watering place', and the large influx of visitors during the summer months caused the lack of a church to be keenly felt. A committee was formed to see about providing a church. The Committee comprised; The Bishop, the Rev. John Jones the Vicar, H. C. Fryer Esq. of Lodge Park, L. P. Pugh Esq. of Abermaide, the Rev. T. H. Hunt, Bardsey Vicarage, Mrs (Anna Marie) Lewis, Rhiw Goch, Mr Thomas Jenkins, Borth, George Lewis Esq., G. Owen Esq., H. C. Corfield Esq., T. Savin Esq., John Ward Esq., and the Rev. D. P. Evans, Borth, who was the Hon. Sec. (Ceredigion Archives, CPR/BOR/3, Cambrian News 31 July 1874). Several of these gentlemen were connected with the railway – H. C. Corfield Esq. of Oswestry was the solicitor for the Cambrian Railway, and George Lewis and G. T. Owen were in the Company, and Thomas Savin had been behind the building of many railways. Mrs Lewis was the owner of the Glanlerry Estate comprising most of the local farms. A site for the church had been found, and one-half of the money needed was promised. A public appeal was made. The cost would be £2,800 and there would be 220 sittings. Plans had been prepared by A. Ritchie Esq. of Chester, and approved by the Incorporated Church Building Society which gave a grant of £100. Subscriptions were received from the Rev. W. W. Haw Whittington, Rev. John Jones the Vicar, Mrs Lewis of Rhiw Goch, Sir Pryse Pryse, Bart., Rev. D. P. Evans, Mr Lewis Pugh Pugh of Aberlmaide, Mr John Evans, the Rev. T. H. Hunt, Mr H. C. Fryer, and Mr George Lewis. The total in November 1874 was £1,000, but another £800 was needed. 'Owing to the poverty of the inhabitants who were



*A card was issued to encourage people to subscribe with this etching of the proposed church. The striped patterning on the roof was not there, and the tops of the bell turret windows were very pointed. (Ceredigion Archives CPR/BOR/3)*

mostly poor sailors and fishermen' it was impossible to raise all the money needed, so an Appeal for subscriptions was launched.

On August 1st 1874 tenders for the church were considered, and the work given to John Tudor of Trawsfynydd for a sum exceeding £1,500. The architect was to be Mr Archibald Ritchie, the Clerk of Works was to be Mr L. C. Jones of Borth and the builder would be Mr John Tudor.

The Architect's plan showed a nave, chancel, north porch, vestry (with a chimney), organ chamber, and a bell turret at the west end. The vestry and organ chamber were divided off by a screen. The building was to be in local stone with Grinshill stone dressings and a Welsh blue slate roof. Inside would be open to a timbered roof. The pews of pitch pine would be open and have bench ends, and there would be stall seats in the chancel, and about half a dozen steps up to the altar. The style was described as 'Early Decorated' (Gothic). July 1875 was the hoped for finishing date. The ground plan was a simple rectangle, though the roof

of the chancel was lower. The porch and vestry on the north face were nearest the access road, Church Lane, from Borth beginning not far from the railway station.

The Cambrian News of the 28 August 1874 reported arrangements had begun for the laying of the foundation stone. It was to be a 'pretty style of architecture'. The day of laying the foundation stone was not helpful – heavy rain had flooded the low land around the church site. However the building committee had arranged a 'moderately good road from the railway to the site'. A large gathering of church people under the presidency of the Bishop had lunch in the Cambrian Hotel at 2 pm. At 3.30 they had walked to the National School for a service, it was packed full. The Bishop gave a long sermon (his text 1.Cor. 3; 9-17). Then the people processed to the site of the church where a memorial stone was waiting, suspended by a pulley and ropes attached to three uprights. The Bishop conducted Lady Pryse (of Gogerddan) who was given a silver trowel to spread the mortar and the stone was lowered into position. Beneath, in a small cavity in a glass bottle were several coins of the realm, a small view of the proposed church and the names of the building committee. The ceremony ended with a hymn and a blessing from the Bishop and at 5 pm they all had a 'memorable public tea' and then back to the National School for Evensong and a sermon in Welsh, at 6 pm. (18 November 1874)

A year later, on 13 August 1875, a visitor commented on, 'a pretty church in the course of construction. It will stand in a very prominent position, and very fittingly will be built on a rock, so characteristic of the Church of God'. The cost had risen to £2,000 and more money was still needed.

1 October 1875 the church was ready for slates to go on to the roof. On Thursday September 30<sup>th</sup> flags were hoisted to show that the building had been 'reared'.

24 March 1876 The building Committee had instructed Mr L. CV. Jones the Clerk of Works to finish the building by 18th. April. By the 12th of May 1876 the Church was being furnished.

On Trinity Sunday June 30<sup>th</sup>. 1876 the first service was held with a fine sermon from the Rev. Dr. Edward Thring, headmaster of Uppingham School on the text, 'my house shall be called a house of prayer' (Uppingham School had arrived on April 4<sup>th</sup>). The first sermon in Welsh was heard at a service in the afternoon given by the Rev. Edward Jones, nephew of the Rev. J. Jones the Vicar of Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn (Llandre). The sermon at an evening



*This is a postcard dated 1915. The church was then very exposed on its hill. The photograph was not good enough quality to show the stripes that decorated the roof, using two colours of the Welsh blue slates.*

service was in English, preached by the Rev. E. F. Lewis (Felix Lewis who became Borth's curate, he was the son of Mrs Lewis the local Glanlerry estate owner). The future services were two for Uppingham School at 10 am and 4.15 pm, and for the villagers, Matins at 11.35 am, and 3.30 pm and 6.30 pm Evensong.

26 April 1878 it was reported that the 'beautiful church had been decorated with much taste for the Easter services.

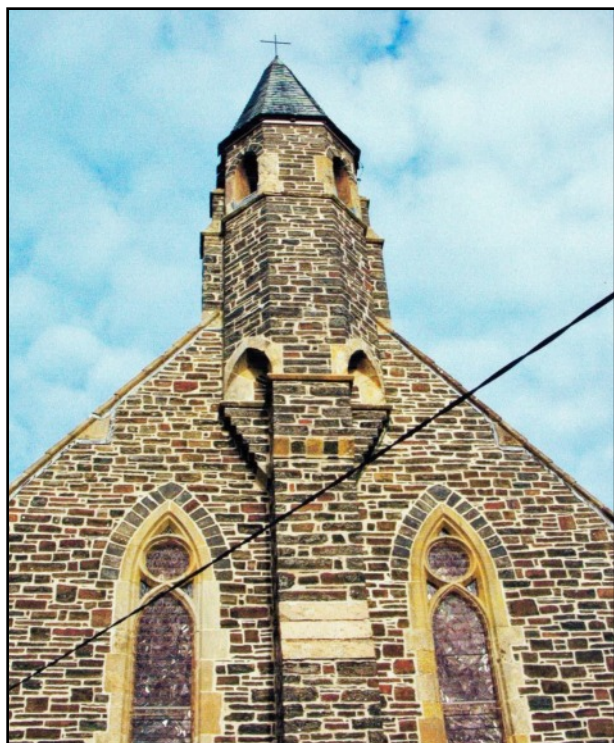
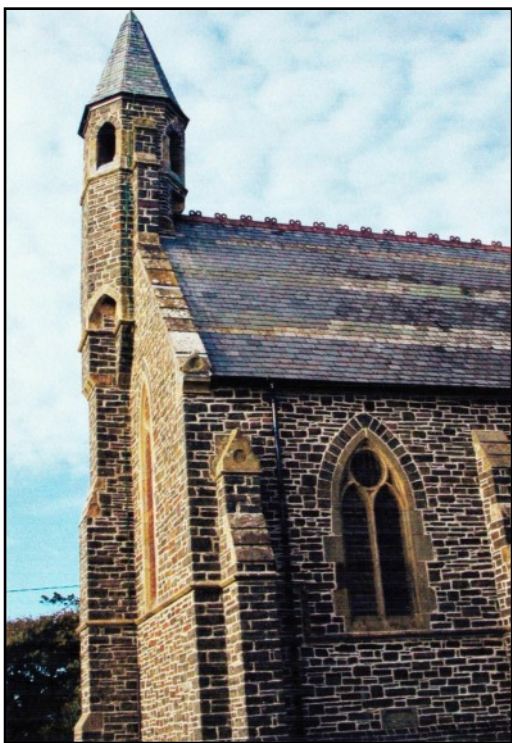
The consecration of the church by the Bishop (Right Rev. William Basil Jones) was held on the morning of September 15th. 1879. He was met at the gate by the Churchwardens and a procession with clergy and officials was formed. After the legal work, signing of documents was done, there was the Matins service followed by the first communion. The church was to be called 'St. Matthew's'. The preacher at the afternoon service was Hugh Evans, Vicar of Carmarthen and at the Evening service the Rev. John Pugh the Vicar of Llanbadarnfawr. 80 years later his son Austin Pugh was living at Maes Arfor, Borth.

Marriages were licensed to be held at St Matthew's on 28th. November 1887. By 1959 there had been 110. The Churchyard was consecrated on 13th August 1892 and the first burial was on September 1st. By 1959, 80 years later, 221 burials had taken place there. (80th Anniversary Newsletter, 12 September 1959 Ceredigion Archives, CPR/BOR)

Confirmed between 1930 and 1950 were 102, between 1951 and 1959 62. Looking at the lists of congregation members, many were English people who had retired to Borth. Lists of worshipper can be found at the Ceredigion Archives CPR/BOR/from 42.

Congregations have dwindled. In May 2013 the vicar, Cecilia Charles, the Vicar's Warden, Margaret Griffiths and the People's Warden Joy Cook were obliged to distribute a letter to all Borth villagers saying the church was in crisis, and it was both physically and financially very difficult to maintain an active church. They appealed for more villagers to go to services and support the church.

*The bell turret and spire grow out of a buttress, more like a sculpture. This style was also used at Llangorwen by Butterfield for its west front and bellcote in 1849, 1850.*





Built by Penson and Ritchie. Grinshill stone is from Clive, near Shewsbury, Shropshire, and is a sandstone which is good for window tracery and is easily worked. It comes in pure white, cream, light brown and deep red. It was used for important buildings such as in Downing Street and for the Prime Minister's Chequers and has repaired Malvern Priory. It could be sent to Borth on the train. A cream coloured stone was chosen for St Matthew's.



*These are dressed and coursed rubble stone walls and the local stone is various colours. A string course of darker stone runs round the top of the footing. A string course below the windows is carved from the Grinshill stone - its shadow providing another dark line to unify the faces of the building.*

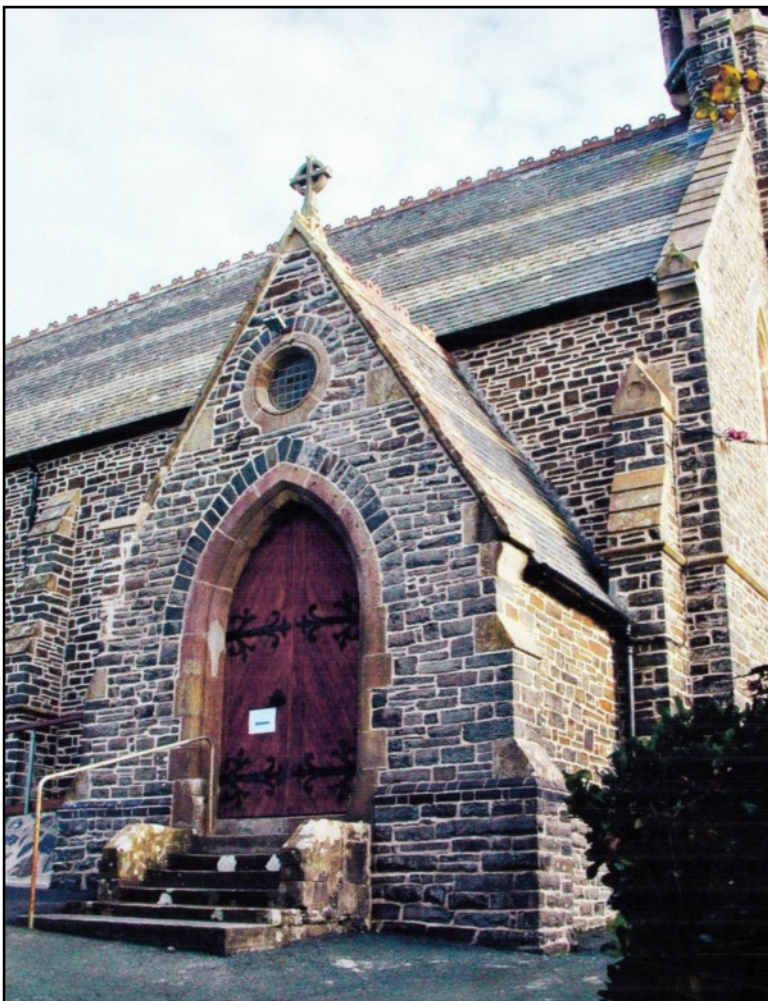
*(Photographs 2009)*

Paler stone makes accents on the buttresses and around the windows of the bell turret. There was one bell of 50 lbs weight. This was re-cast in 1928 as a 'minute bell', and a new four and a quarter cwt. bell was put up, a gift from the local branch of the Girl's Friendly Society. (CPR/BOR/17-19).

*LEFT The tracery of the larger windows has unfoiled circles in the heads.*



*There is a plaque set in the wall with no apparent inscription. Interestingly the Soar Chapel close to the railway on the lane to Ynys Fergi Farm and the Animalarium has a very similar plaque 'Laid by David Davies MP' .... The chapel has similar coloured rubble stone walls, but grey stone dressings. It was built in 1876.*

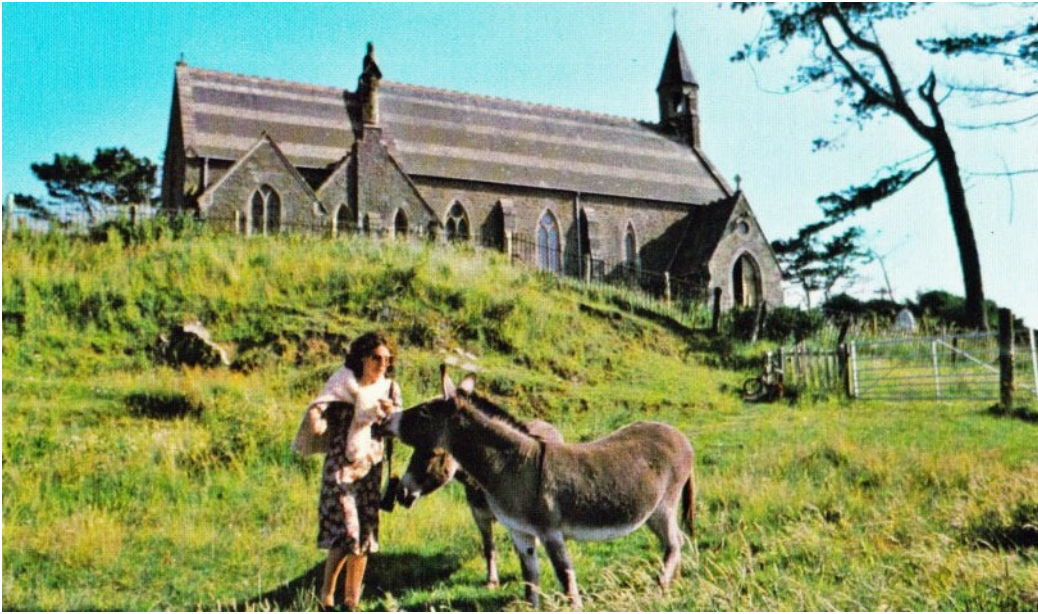


*The porch with the entrance to the church photographed in 2009. Since then a ramp has been built to enable wheelchairs to access the church. Even the roof of this has stripes of different coloured slates.*

*The doors are probably original.*

*BELOW Some very solid dressed stones were used for the outer edges of the buttresses. The stone ledge of the string course is at the top of the photograph. (2009)*





*A new Vestry was begun at the end of May 1915 and consecrated on 11<sup>th</sup> August. The plans were by Mr Barrett of Aberystwyth, and the contract to build it awarded to Messrs. E. Jones and sons. It cost £125 of which £83 10s were from contributions. It was built adjoining the existing vestry with the chimney, and the postcard shows it was very sympathetic in style to the existing building.*

BELOW Looking towards the altar the chancel is almost as wide as the nave. The church is open to the roof and the roof timbers end with simple brackets. The interior is pleasantly cosy in size with satisfying relationships between the spaces under its handsome, timbered roof. The pews are not enclosed, nor are they numbered.







*ABOVE The other end of the Nave has two simple tall windows.*



*LEFT The roof ends with a band of simple decoration.*

*BELOW LEFT The inlaid circles at the pew ends echo the trefoil shape, and all sharp edges have been rounded.*

The Reredos is wooden and in the Gothic Style and dates from 1911. The original pulpit was plain bath stone. painted white.

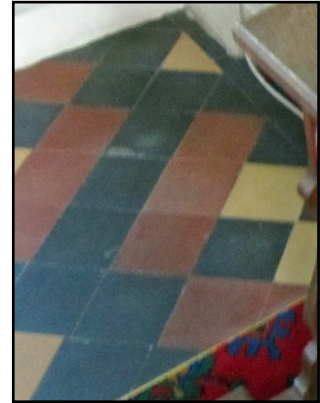
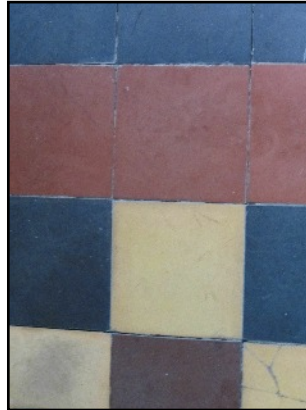


The present pulpit is intricately carved, and features Saint Matthew. It was installed in 1920 in memory of men lost in World War 1 and money was collected from parishioners to pay for it.



*LEFT* The entrance door for the congregation. Bold stonework frames it. The pointed door shape harks back to the Gothic, that shape echoed by the timbers to strengthen the planks.

*BELOW* The colours and patterns chosen for the tiled floor of the nave.



*BELOW* The floor of the Chancel is richer in its pattern.



*This notice board explains that a grant of £100 was given in 1873 during the building of the church on condition that all the 'sittings' (pews) be free and un-appropriated. There would have been no problem as Borth did not have an important 'squire' to dictate the 'sittings'.*



*The original font was plain bath stone painted white, but has since been replaced.*



*ABOVE Funds were raised in 1899 and 1902 for this organ made by Nicholson of Walsall and the organ pipes add some pleasing colour and decoration to the south wall of the Chancel. The choir stalls in the foreground are oak and were given in 1933 by the wife of Alfred Cecil Wright, a Birmingham manufacturer, who lived at Fron-y-gog and who died in 1920 and when he retired to Borth became a president of the local Golf Club.*

The original windows were of plain glass with diamond leaded panes. A small one of these survives in the corridor to the vestry on the north side of the building. The rest have been

donated since. The east window paid for by Old Boys of Uppingham School was dedicated in 1925.

*BELOW The three figures are Abraham, Christ and Moses. The window was designed and made by James Powell and sons (Whitefriars Ltd.) Their stained glass studios were in Fleet Street London and they corresponded from 100 Wigmore Street, London.*





There is a window of 1934 in memory of Borth's National School Headmistress for 50 years, Miss Annie Bathurst, an Englishwoman of Epworth House in the High Street who was also the organist. It cost £180 including the fitting.



*ABOVE This 'St Cecilia' window 'The Ministry of Music' on the south side of the Nave in memory of Samuel Herbert and Jesse Johnson of Birchfield in the High Street was designed and made in Swansea in the Celtic Studios in 1965.*

**RIGHT** One of the pair of tall West Windows of 1966 by the Celtic Studios of 'The Church Triumphant' in memory of Richard Evan Jones OBE MA JP who died in 1928 and Gertrude Helen Jones.

The Celtic Studios designer Hubert Thomas was involved with the design of the 'Christ Healing the Leper' window of 1962 in memory of R. O. Jones of Ryelands.

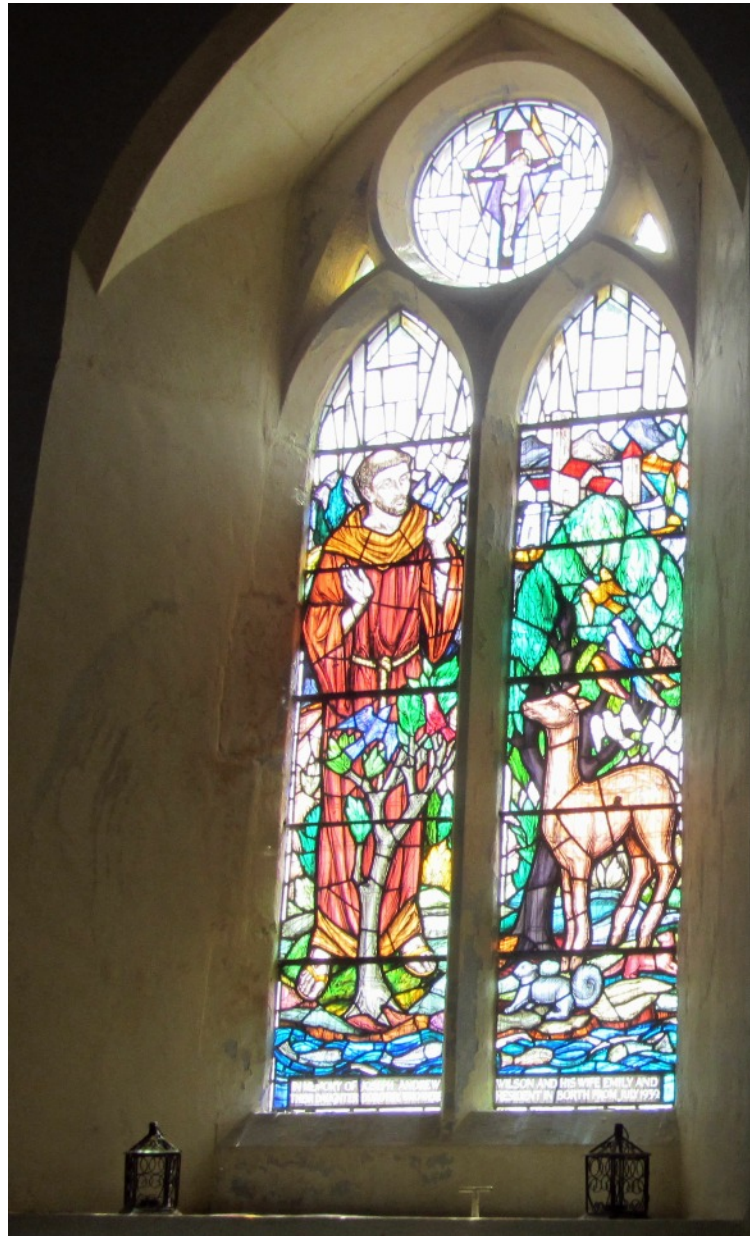
Celtic Studios were the first stained glass makers in Wales, and had an Arts and Crafts background, and they tried to produce original designs rather than copies of medieval windows.

This account does not have photographs of all the windows, but these give an idea of the treatment of the subject matter in these twentieth century windows.

*RIGHT The St Francis window on the south side of the Nave.*

*BELOW A detail showing how the plainer glass 'sky' at the top and round the 'roundel' have interesting shapes and form a symmetrical pattern.*

Another window by the Celtic Studios was the window in memory of Evan Lewis and his wife of 1964, the 'Parable of the Sower'.

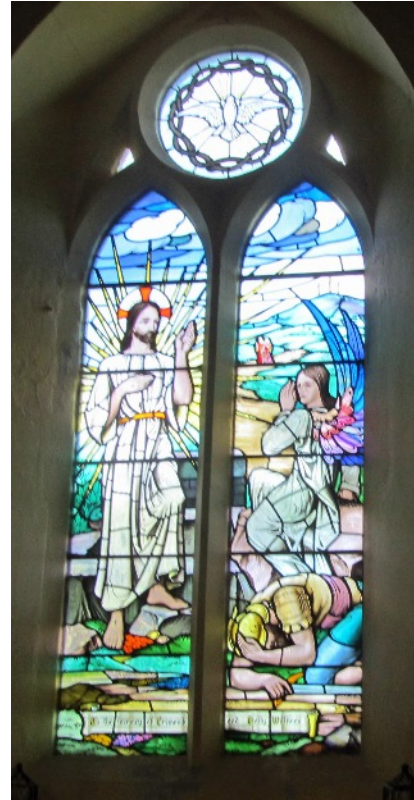


More information about the Church, its fittings, its Vicars and its congregations are in the booklet sold in the Church 'A Brief History of St Matthew's Church Borth' by Drs. John and Valerie Norrington-Davies.



LEFT and Below Left 'Our Lord Walking on the Sea of Galilee, in Memory of Evan and Margaret Alice Lewis of 'Ryelands' Morfa Borth.

BELOW 'The Resurrection' of 1959 memory of Caswell Emlyn Williams.



BELOW 'Christ in the Temple'



TO THE GLORY OF GOD & IN MEMORY  
OF EVAN LEWIS 1879-1942. ✠ ✠  
MARGARET ALICE LEWIS 1877-1964

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MARGARET ALICE LEWIS 1877-1964



Archifdy Ceredigion Archives  
yn cyflwyno / presents  
**Tai'r Borth / Houses of Borth**  
gan/by Beryl Lewis  
[cyf/ref ADX/1629]

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-eredigion.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-eredigion.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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