

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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MORLAIS YHA Morfa Borth

At the northernmost end of the village on the east side of the road and facing the sea. Built as two houses, Pen-y-morfa and Maesteg by a distinguished master mariner Captain John Davies who chose to live in Maesteg. He bought the land for the houses in June 1908. In 1952 Maesteg became a Youth Hostel called Morlais and in 1970 Pen-y-morfa was added to it.



ABOVE Morlais the Youth Hostel in 2015.

Morlais is two and a half storeys high, parallel with the road with a symmetrical front with the two gabled sections of the original houses plus extensions of two storeys each side with hipped roofs. Dormer windows and windows in the two gable ends light an attic floor. There are bay windows on the ground and first floors and the lower ones have a prominent roof with red tiles. The main entrance for the hostel is on the north side of the building, but there is a front door on the southernmost half of the main front of Morlais. It is a red brick building.



The walls at the front and sides are rendered and there has been some care taken with decorative features.

LEFT Above the central first floor windows is a decorative hood in the rendering, and below the window sills is a string course (of moulding) which continued round the sides of the original houses.

The gable ends are topped with finials and the red ridge tiles make a pattern. There

are applied timbers around the gable end windows, they were there in 1921.



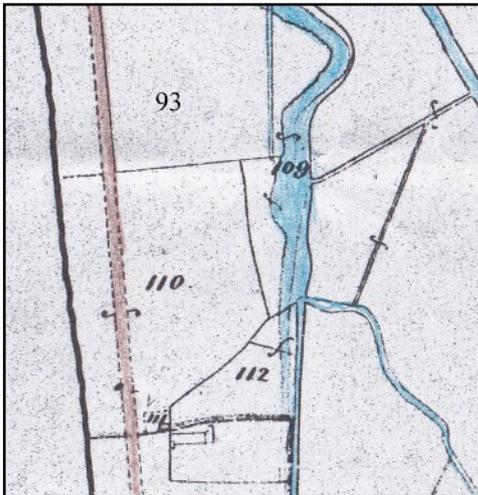
ABOVE The rear of the building. There are two wings with rendered ends and further small extensions around the yard. The building on the far left is a schoolroom. *BELOW* Access to the yard is from a drive along the north side of the building which turns to run along behind it. It is behind the wall in the photograph which shows some quite complicated extensions on that side of the building. The red brick section is the main entrance to the hostel.



Today the Youth Hostel has beds for 60 people. Of the eleven bedrooms nine have sea views. Two are private en-suite family rooms sleeping four. There are three bedrooms sleeping four

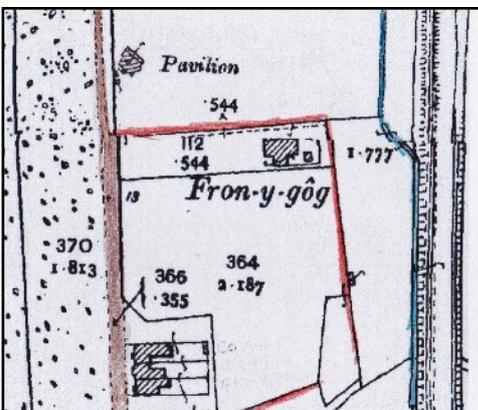
people each, four bedrooms sleeping six people, and one room for lads sleeping eight and one for lassies also sleeping eight. There is a lounge, a large dining room with views of the sea and splendid ceiling roses in the plaster, a self-catering kitchen, a laundry and drying rooms, a games room, a bar, and rooms suitable for meetings. There is also a garden and the owner has a flat. There is a staff kitchen to make visitors breakfast if they want it. All the toilets and showers are on the first floor. In 2013 there was one full time and three part time members of staff. That year the hostel was up for sale, with a suggestion that £600,000 would be needed for necessary renovations and repairs.

The ground on which Morlais stands is a stone bank thrown up by the sea and called 'waste' by the Crown Manor who owned it as it was no use for farming. 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. The large Cors fochno bog was also 'waste' and parts of it were enclosed by 1847.



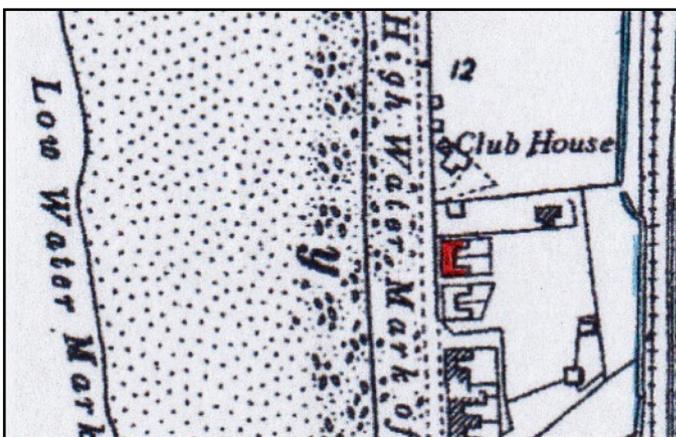
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LEFT Morlais stands on a five acre field called an 'allotment' and was number 110 on a map of 1848. Pryse Pryse of the Gogerddan Estate received it after the enclosure of the 'waste'. Number 93 to the north was the property of the Jones family of the Gwynfryn Estate at Taliesin and had become an eighteen hole golf course before Morlais was built (Tithe Apportionments Map, Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, Henllys Township, online at CYNEFIN, NLW).



In 1891 Pryse Pryse sold some of Number 110 to Elsie Cecil Wright, the wife of a Birmingham manufacturer of screws and a keen golfer. She had the bungalow Fron-y-gôg built on a strip of it, and had four acres of agricultural land as well.

LEFT Fron-y-gog in 1904. Red marks the boundary of former field 110. (A detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map revised in 1904, published in 1905, Cardiganshire III.10)



That ground was sold to John Harden Jones, a surgeon at Buttrells Llandre. In 1908 he sold a strip of roadside land to Captain John Davies (1872-1947) who divided it into two sites and planned to build two houses on it. In 1910 for a valuation for a tax planned but not levied the two sites were valued at £40 each. One had an occupier, a potential tenant perhaps, a Dr Williams. The other site was for the Captain himself (Ceredigion Archives T/DV/18)

ABOVE The pair of houses marked in red, each had a wing at the back. (Detail from a six inch map of 1948.

At that time the Captain was living elsewhere in Borth. His pair of houses were semi-detached, the northern one was Pen-y-morfa - meaning in Welsh the top of the marsh harbour, and the other was Maesteg - meaning fair field. Captain Davies was a master mariner,



ship owner and a business man. He cared about local young people and founded the Borth Sea Scouts. He also taught navigation to youngsters. He had the last schooner built in Borth and owned or had shares in several other ships both schooners and steamships. Having been based in Shanghai for many years he was back permanently in Borth by 1910 (Terry Davies, Borth, A Maritime History pp 38-40).

The house the Captain chose to live in was Maesteg. In 1917 he needed a mortgage from the London and City Midland Bank. In 1925 and 1934 his daughter Meiriona E. Herbert the wife

of a sea captain was living in Maesteg. In March 1935 the Captain paid off his mortgage. By 1937 or 1938 his grand-daughter Gillian Caswell says he had built himself a new house

nearer the station and the shops, and called it Maesteg. It is still there. In 1944 the Captain sold his former Maesteg to John Edwin Corfield who was living in a bungalow in Borth and was a garage proprietor. He changed the name to Morlais. In Welsh this is môr - the sea and llais - a sound, so it would mean 'sound of the sea'. With a vote for Morlais in the General Election of 1945 was Beatrice E. Hatt. Paying the rates as the owner in 1949 was Mr Corfield.



In 1952 Mr Corfield applied for a change of use for the house and sold it to the Youth Hostels Association for £2,600.

LEFT 'Maesteg' a postcard made when it had become a Youth Hostel. (Picture courtesy of the present owner of Morlais).

By that time the house had a garage and an outbuilding. The extension on the south front of the house is dated 1952 and the drive alongside Morlais led to a 'camp'. Today this is the 'Golden Sands' caravan site. When the YHA paid the rates in 1963 the Youth Hostel was valued at £58 for them. In a Handbook and Guide to Borth, undated, but published in 1968, Munro Taylor was listed for the YHA (Private Collection).



LEFT The building in 1921 when it was two homes, Pen-y-morfa is on the left and Maesteg is on the right. The bay windows were topped by a balustrade. There was a central slab chimney shared by both houses, with room for six flues each, so they were well heated. Each house had a front door facing the street, and the pairs of little gateposts show the paths to

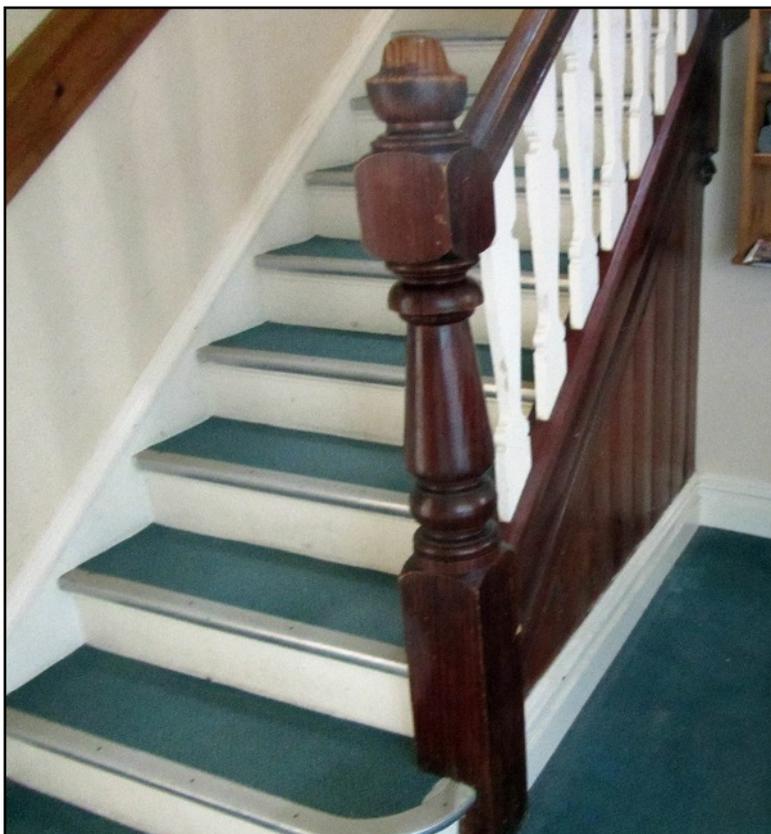
those doors. The door on the right is still there. (Detail from a postcard, private collection)

PEN-Y-MORFA

Pen-y-morfa began by providing the Captain with rent. However he sold it in 1922 to a physician and surgeon, Dr John James for £1.400. There was a covenant that a garage and public works could not be built on its land. Dr James was already living there. In 1925 Mai James paid the rates for the house as owner and occupier. The valuation for the rates was £30. Interestingly Maesteg at this time was less valuable at £19. Paying the rates in 1938 was Louisa James. In 1950 Mrs James bought a small strip of land on the north of the house next to Brockhill for £250 from Joseph Billingham the owner of Brockhill. In 1963 J. Millard paid the rates for Pen-y-morfa. Isaac Millard and Jane Mai Millard had votes for the house that year.

RIGHT The staircase from the ground floor still has its original balustrade.

At Pen-y-morfa in February 1970 were Thomas Maldwyn Price and his wife Mary Elizabeth Hannah Price. They sold the house to Alun and Freda Owen for the YHA



which allowed the Youth Hostel to double in size. A further extension was added to the north of the house to match the one on the other end of it.



ABOVE Two fine ceiling roses from ground floor rooms formerly Pen-y-morfa.

The author would like to thank the present owner for his kindness in showing his Deeds for hostel, and giving a tour of the interior.



ABOVE In June 1933 this was the front of 'Maesteg'. This is Captain Davies's wife Catherine and her daughter. The front wall using beach stones is no longer there nor the balustrade above the top window. (Photograph courtesy of Mrs Jean Caswell)

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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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