

# 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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## NEPTUNE Morfa Borth

On the beach side at the north of Borth High Street. Formerly the Neptune Bath House up and running by 1868.

Neptune stands at the smart end of the High Street, close to the railway station which opened to passengers in 1863, the huge Cambrian Hotel, later Pantyfedwen, (now gone) and the Cambrian Terrace completed by 1870. It was also close to the place where the main street runs alongside the beach with no buildings in the way, (now with a promenade), and old postcards show that this area had bathing huts and was popular with visitors.



*LEFT Neptune in Spring 2017. Owing to the height of the building and the width of the street it had to be photographed at an angle.*

Neptune is a three storey, single fronted terrace house, one of four under a gable roof parallel to the High Street.

There is a red brick slab chimney on the southern end of the roof with five chimney pots - so five flues inside. The roof has a single roof light front and back for an attic floor. The walls are rubble stone and rendered. There are sash windows set centrally in the rendered wall, the upper pair being smaller and squarer than the rectangular lower pair. Similar windows are on the rear of the house. Using small panes is characteristic of the older kind of windows when larger sheets of glass could not be made. Neptune's are either original or modern copies, and tall oblong windows with twelve panes of glass were copied from eighteenth century houses. The ground floor has a canted bay window topped with simple moulding. The narrow front garden has railings, and railings lead up to the front door. Decorative posts edge the corner of the railings. This front garden was already there on the map of 1888 surveyed in 1886.



*ABOVE LEFT* The decoration of Neptune's porch makes it the only one of its kind in Borth. The design has 'classical' shapes, a little pediment at the top, with pronounced dentils supporting it. Fitting neatly inside the pediment is a carved winged shape. A plain rectangular glass panel is below. Free standing, round columns, with plain tops and bases, support the porch. In the woodwork of a wide surround for the door are recessed panels that match the lower panels of the front door. There are

lights in the upper front door panels with arched tops. I like to think that this porch and entrance to the house was designed and carved by Mr Edward Jones, a carpenter by trade, who operated the 'Bath House'. The photograph was taken in 2017.

*ABOVE RIGHT* This is the porch of a house called 'Carpenter's' on Marine Terrace (the seafront) at Aberystwyth. Built between 1807 and 1825. (Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, Pevsner, p.401). Had Borth's Mr Edwards seen this one perhaps?



*LEFT* The back of the house from the beach. The extension on the south side of the yard is single storey and one was there on the old maps. There are further extensions on the other side, which have been made since

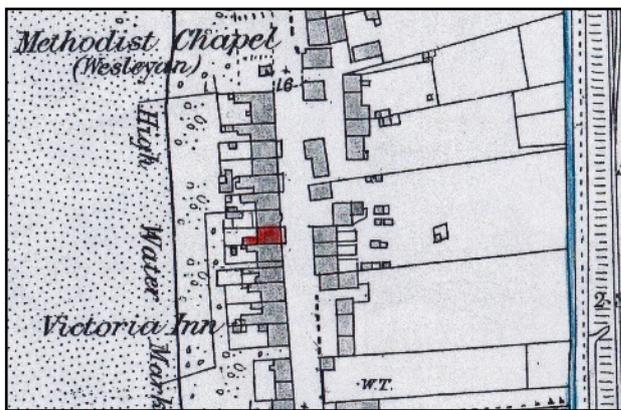
1904. *A platform in the yard gives a good view of the sea.*

The ground on which the house stands 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. The road had been there for centuries and it was there 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. In 1848 the site of the terrace was still open ground. At that time the northernmost cottage along the beach side of the road was where the Lerry Garage once stood (Tithe Apportionments Map of Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, Cyfoeth Township, online at CYNEFIN, National Library of Wales).

In 1859 the Crown Manor had a survey made, and the ground on which the terrace stands was marked as 'sold' but the surveyor did not draw any buildings there.

In June 1863 the railway began to bring passengers to Borth Station, and by 1868 Borth had a "Baths". The proprietor was forty two year old Mr E. W. Jones, and he also provided accommodation for lodgers or visitors (Slater's Directory of South Wales). He was listed as a builder and joiner which would make him a useful person to have in Borth at a time when considerable building was going on. He was a respected member of the community, and had opinions to present at meetings. In 1877 the Cambrian News reported that "Mr Jones of the Neptune Bath House" seconded a speech when local people organised a farewell to Uppingham School (Tues. April 10th. 1877). In 1883 he spoke at a meeting in the National School concerning 'Sea Damage and Flooding' and was cheered for his contribution. (Cambrian News October 26<sup>th</sup>.) He also was part of a team with the Vicar and three others who were to 'wait on landowners' about selling off Borth's common land. In 1897 he was upset because of Borth's serious lack of water when holiday visitors came to the village in the summer, and the paper had reported that the Local Government Board had seen water going to waste and suggested some should be stored. He wrote to the Aberystwyth Observer suggesting if the editor 'ran to Borth one fine morning I shall give him a salt bath, which will invigorate his health, and I shall convince him on whose shoulders lays the responsibility for the scarcity of water (pure spring water) where it is mostly wanted' (28<sup>th</sup> April 1897)

The house had its name 'Neptune' by 1871, being called the "Neptune Baths and Neptune House" in the Cambrian News, and in 1881 the Census gave some details about Mr Jones. Edward William Jones was born in Towyn about 1826 and was a carpenter by trade. His wife Margaret was born in Dolgellau about 1836. Lodging in the house was a "clergyman out of place." This was perhaps Richard Davies, whom the 'Borth Review' in the National Library of Wales wrote lived there for a time, and provided sermons before regular ministers were appointed at Borth's Libanus Chapel founded in 1866,



LEFT *The bath house in 1886 coloured red. (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map surveyed in 1886 and published in 1888. Cardiganshire III.10)*

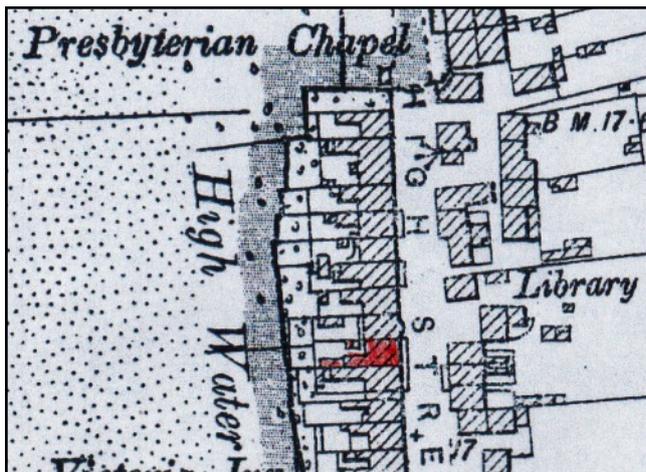
Behind the house is the beach so Mr Jones had easy access to sea water. We do not know as yet how the Neptune Baths operated. The baths would have been in sea water as this was considered good for health, and the water would have been heated. Today stretching out on to the

beach behind the house there is no remnant of an iron pipe through which sea water could be pumped into a boiler to be heated up for the baths as happened in Aberystwyth, where in 1824 a great iron pipe from the sea led to a 500 gallon boiler at its Marine Baths at the then northern extremity of Marine Terrace where the shelter on the promenade stands today.

There is no line on the old maps to suggest a pipe leading down from Neptune's yard over the stones and sand to the sea.

However Aberystwyth also had a less grand "Warm Bathing House in the centre of the Terrace" with two "humble" baths lined with wood. Water was carried to those in buckets. (T.J.L.Pritchard, "New Aberystwyth Guide" 1824). Borth's baths were probably in private rooms, as in Aberystwyth's Marine Baths, where each bath, lined with Dutch tiles, was in a private room which could be heated with a coal fire. There were also bedrooms for guests. Mr Jones, being a carpenter, would have had no problem making baths lined with wood, and he probably carried buckets of sea water up to Neptune House.

Like the Aberystwyth baths visitors could lodge in the house. In 1871 Mrs Jones of Neptune Baths was taking in holiday visitors. The Cambrian News listed people staying there over eleven weeks from the end of June until September. Many were from places directly on the railway such as Newtown and Welshpool, and some came from Oswestry, Corris and Ellesmere. She had seven visitors on June 23rd, and she had room for servants that came too. In 1880 she had visitors for 10 weeks. Visitors came from Beeston in Cheshire, from Shrewsbury, from Rhayader, Dowlais, Merthyr, Bridgend, Welshpool and Llanwrst. Some stayed for two weeks, and she could manage to accommodate a family with a nurse and children plus another family. On the week of August 27<sup>th</sup>. four different visitors were fitted in. Edward Jones and his wife could speak both Welsh and English.



*LEFT* By 1904 the extension ran almost to the beach, and was drawn as part of the house. There was also a detached building - perhaps a fuel store or boiler house, and possibly a Ty Bach - outside lavatory (A detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map revised in 1904, published in 1905. Cardiganshire III.10).

In 1910 Neptune was in the ownership of Margaret Jones and was still a 'lodging house'. The house was valued for Rates at £270, with £11.18s to pay, £14 gross. This is the same value as the house on the north of it - suggesting perhaps it no longer had 'baths' to add extra value for Rates. (Ceredigion Archives T/DV/19 and map at the National Library of Wales). In the 1911 Census Neptune was listed with nine main rooms.

Jean Caswell kindly told me the later story of Neptune. Margaret Jones had a sister Ann who wed an Ellis. Her daughter was Jean Caswell's grandmother, Margaret Catherine Ellis (born about 1872). She had lived at Neptune House as a girl, and from there in about 1906, she married Borth's Captain John Davies at Llandre Church, and she and Captain Davies (born about 1873) inherited Neptune from her aunt Margaret Jones.

Jean Caswell's mother Meiriona Ellis Davies (Rona) was born in Neptune House about 1907. The house was later let to tenants. In 1925 the tenant was Thomas Edward Tomkins and Neptune House continued to be let until the early 1960s. In 1934 Mrs Jones paid the rates. In 1938 an E. C. and D. O Morris had paid the rates but this was altered to John Tibbott as a Tibbott family had moved there - and in 1950 Mrs Tibbott advertised four bedrooms and two sitting rooms for visitors in a Borth Guidebook. (Aberystwyth Public Library). Margaret Catherine Davies eventually sold Neptune House to the Tibbott family. Mrs Tibbott was

another useful member of the community like Mr Jones. She was on the Committee of the British Legion Women, and on the parish council (Borth Review, National Library of Wales) John R. Tibbot paid the rates in 1963 and Gladys Tibbott had a vote for the house that year Electoral Registers and Rates, Ceredigion Archives).

The name 'Neptune' reminds us of its history as the only 'baths' in Borth, and as such it is a very special house.



*ABOVE In the back garden of Neptune in 1906 this is Mrs Margaret Catherine Davies née Ellis with her daughter Meirona (Rona). In the background is the old window with many panes and with an attractive blind. (Photograph courtesy of Mrs Jean Caswell - this was her grandmother)*

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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-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.

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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-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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