

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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STEEPLEJACKS

Morfa Borth - the Marsh Harbour

Formerly CRAIG-Y-DON and on the east side of the southern section of the High Street of Morfa Borth, it was possibly built by a master mariner by 1871 for his family rather than for holiday visitors. Enlarged it became a Steeplejacks Pizzeria. Today it is three flats.



ABOVE Steeplejacks photographed in November 2008. The extension at the back of the building with a door can be seen and the passage leading to Y Wern in the background. The front of the house nearly reaches Britannia on the right, with another passage leading to Aeron House.

The walls are rubble stone, and the exposed stone on the northern side wall shows that some rounded stones from the beach were used. The front wall is rendered. All the windows are modern, of the casement style. The ground floor has an angled bay window with an almost flat roof. There are no chimneys. The extension on the southern side of the house is set back further from the street, and has its own modern front door. The other front door which is also modern has a slate roof over it supported on simple wooden brackets and with a finial and a shaped decoration below. Hanging down from it are curving flaps. This is unique to Morfa Borth. The low wall at the front of the main section of the building does not have a gate. There is no rear garden just an area of hard standing.

The ground for this house was enclosed from the pebble embankment 'waste' in 1820 by Hugh Hughes. The ground measured one rod and nineteen perches (over a quarter of an acre) and extended to a brook. On a map of 1829 it is shown with one cottage built on it - now Y Wern. A rent of £1.3s. had to be paid every year to the Crown manor who owned the ground (Map National Archives LRRO 1/3060) The road was centuries old and a quick way to North Wales via a ferry to Aberdovey. It became a turnpike road by the 1770s.

By 1848 the ground had a new owners, and more cottages. Ebenezer Lewis and others owned all the cottages and all the ground, and William Jones and others occupied them. The earlier cottage was still there, and a cottage alongside that would become Aeron. Also another much larger building alongside the street up against the northern boundary of the ground was on the site of the later London House. There was nothing where Steeplejacks/Craig-y-don would be built.

That house may not have been built at the Census of 1861. The two old cottages behind it (now Y Wern and Aeron) however were owned by a shoemaker John Lloyd. (John Ellis, History of Borth, see Terry Davies's website). However by 1871 a new house, Craig-y-don/Steeplejacks had been built on the site beside the street and there was a Lewis family living there. At the Census living in the house was the wife of a master mariner, Jane Lewis, aged then 37, so born about 1834 in Borth. With her were two sons, Thomas born about 1861 and John born about 1866.

In 1881 Jane Lewis was still there. Her son John was there too, aged 15 and a mechanical draughtsman. In the Census the house was called Craig-y-don House, the name means 'mountain wave'.



LEFT In 1886 this was Jane Lewis's house marked in red. It was the shape of a cottage with a yard on the back, but it was bigger than Y Wern which in 1911 had only 3 rooms. It shared the ground with Y Wern and Aeron House suggesting they all had the same owner which later evidence suggests was the Lewis family at Craig-y-don. The ground extended to

a brook. The front of the house opened on to the street as it does today. London House on the north was then Borth's Post Office also owned by a Lewis family. There was a gap between the house and Britannia on the south (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map surveyed in 1886 and published in 1888, Cardiganshire NW III.10)

By 1891 at the Census Jane Lewis was a widow, and aged 54 she was 'kept by her sons'. In 1901 at the Census she was still there. She spoke both English and Welsh.



LEFT In 1904 a wall or fence had given Aeron House a front garden. Between Craig-y-don and London House was a passage to its back yard, and there was an extension on the rear of the house (Detail from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map revised in 1904 and

published in 1905, Cardiganshire NW III.10)

In a valuation in 1910 for a tax planned but not levied, the house was valued at £166. There would have been £5.19s to pay, £7 gross. Jane Lewis owned the house. She was 74 by then.

Living in the house was James Lewis. In the Census of 1911 Craig-don was listed with 7 rooms. Any back scullery would not have counted. Also living in the house was John Lewis, by then a marine engineer working at sea. He was 45, born in Borth about 1866. In 1900 he had a wife. In 1911 looking after them all was a housekeeper, Mary Elizabeth Roberts aged 35, unmarried and also local (Cambrian News, 2 February 1900)

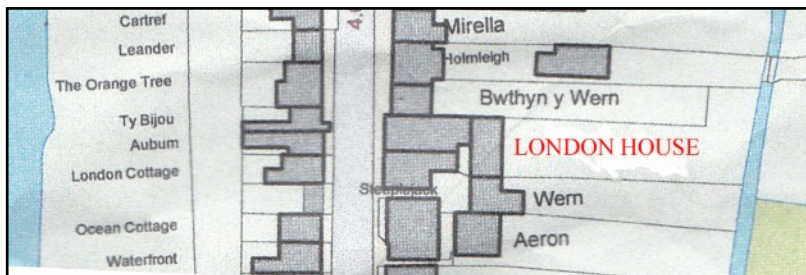
Though John Lewis was the owner in 1925 and paid the rates for the house and garden he had moved away to live in Cambrian Villa. Paying the Rates for Craig-y-don and Aeron in 1934 were Margaret Lunt and Laura Ross who were tenants of John Lewis. He died on 12th June 1936, and in his Will Craig-y-don and Aeron went to his two cousins, one cousin Mrs Marion Rowlands purchased them from the other cousin for three hundred and seventy four pounds. Laura Ross, a tenant, was still in Craig-y-don in 1949.

In May 1959 Mrs Rowlands sold the two properties to Miss Lizzie Jones of Manchester House.

W. J. Evans was a tenant in Craig-y-don when he paid the rates for it in 1957 and he was still there with a vote for the house in 1963.

By 1975 the extension on the south side of the house had been built and the older part of the house then had a narrow front garden At the back was a larger extension and the surveyor had divided the house into the old part and the new part. The extension almost as far as Britannia did leave a narrow passage between the two for access to Aeron (Historical Maps On-line).

The building became the Steeplejacks Pizzeria, and since has been made into three flats.



LEFT A modern Council Map shows how Steeplejacks fits in to the surrounding buildings (Map courtesy of Councillor Ray Quant who provided it for research for a village event).

There was a fire in the top flat in the early hours of a Thursday morning in February 2011. This flat was at the southern end of the building and the flames burst through the top of the roof leaving a large hole with just the rafters surviving. The occupants of the flat below had to flee. A pregnant woman in the other flat was not there, she was staying at her boyfriend's house. Nearby houses were at risk from the fire and residents were evacuated to the Village Hall - and Marianne Baron and her daughter at Aeron House had to run along the passage between Steeplejacks and Britannia - their only access to the High Street- beneath flames coming out the Steeplejacks top flat, while her husband looked after their dogs in their garden. The story with photographs was in the Cambrian News of February 24th 2011.

The house has since been repaired.

Today the house front extends almost to Britannia, and it shares a yard of hard standing with Y Wern. It is still flats.

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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-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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