

NEW PASSAGE

MEMORIES OF TIMES PAST

HERITAGE TRAIL



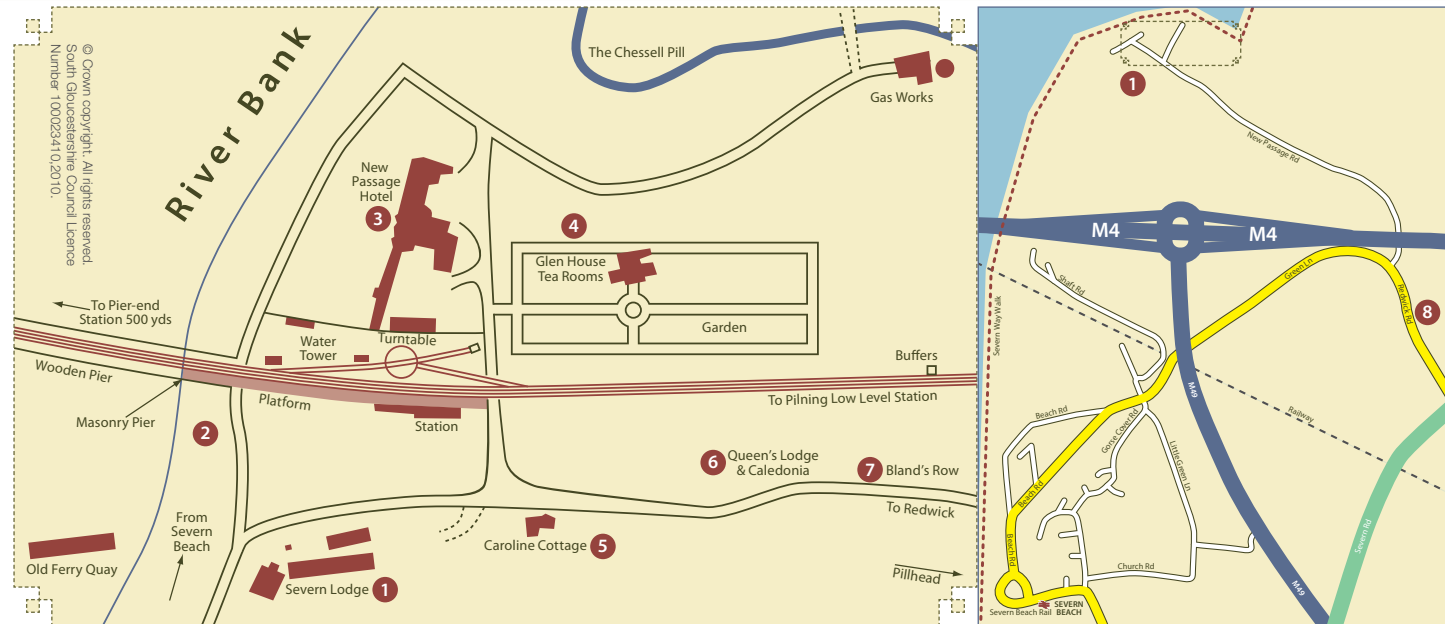
New Passage Hotel & Station engraving - about 1870

The trail starts on the sea-wall, almost underneath the Second Severn Crossing. It continues north from the trail described in the Severn Beach leaflet. Unlike in Severn Beach, many of the sites still exist and can be seen by following this trail.

APPROX LENGTH: **1 mile:** Point 1 to Point 8

1 mile: From Severn Beach Railway station to Severn Lodge (Point 1 on the map).

Produced by Pilning & Severn Beach History Group.
 Researched by Robin Pencavel, completing the text and using the map drawn by the late Geoff Rickards.



HISTORY

At New Passage a ferry boat had plied the river for centuries, and the Bristol and South Wales Union Railway updated this system when it arrived in 1863. The huge tidal range and the weather meant many disruptions to river traffic and a large hotel was built for waiting passengers at New Passage. A broad gauge line brought passengers to New Passage from Bristol, the locomotives pulling the carriages onto a wooden jetty that stretched nearly 600 yards out into the river. Passengers would then board a ferry boat to be taken across to Portskewett. As the railways grew the Great Western Railway decided to build the Severn Tunnel under the river near this point. The enormous undertaking was beset with problems, but the tunnel finally opened in 1886. The New Passage ferry and the branch line ceased, but the beach there had become popular and was frequently visited by day trippers and Sunday School outings.

The TRAIL

Walking north from Severn Beach along the sea wall, before coming to the Second Severn Crossing is a fenced compound where stood the original Pumping Station seen in the picture, built to pump spring water out of the Severn Tunnel directly underneath. Water can still be seen coming from "the bubble" on the river bank beside the bridge. Next to the motorway bridge are Shaft Cottages, built for the workers who operated the pumping station. After walking under the motorway bridge a stone set into the railings celebrates the rebuilding of the Binn Wall in 1815 and 1993-1998.





During the Second World War guns used for naval target practice were placed along this part of the sea-wall. The first large house by the sea wall, **Severn Lodge Farm** ①, offered

stabling and accommodation at the turn of the twentieth century.

A little further on is **the masonry pier rebuilt on the site of the railway jetty** ②. Two plaques recall the ferry journeys made by Charles and John Wesley, and the Bristol and South Wales Union Railway

On **the site of the New Passage Hotel** ③, the old railway embankment is visible in the front and rear gardens of Puffer's End, near where the turntable was positioned. (Harry Grindell Matthews, the eccentric inventor of "The Death Ray", lived in New Passage Hotel in the early 1900's.) **The Glen** ④, behind the new houses, offered Tea Rooms at this time.



Caroline Cottage ⑤ was at one time the New Passage Stores and Cafe, with a Tea Garden in the field behind.



Turning away from the river, the road to Redwick passes a pair of large semi-detached houses on the left. **Queen's Lodge and Caledonia** ⑥ were built by the Great Western Railway and subsequently provided accommodation for visitors, were used as a school and also as a nursing home. Then comes **Bland's Row** ⑦, a terrace of houses between the road and the railway line. These were built originally for the ferrymen by the ferry operator John Bland and then used as accommodation for railway staff from the 1860's.

Further on, the railway embankment can be glimpsed again before reaching Pillhead. The modern houses here have been rebuilt in a shape similar to the original cottages dating from 1700 to 1720, as seen in the modern photo. This building was used as offices by the Bristol and South Wales Union Railway, and known as "The Coal Offices". It is difficult now to visualise that until the early 1900's coal barges sailed to Pillhead on the high tide, delivering fuel for the pumping station and the Gas Works which provided gas for New Passage Hotel, the Pier and local houses. Nearly opposite Pillhead the former Zion Chapel was a NAAFI club in WWII.

Walking on over the motorway bridge you come to several cottages. At no. 64, **Zion House** ⑧, the "upper room" was the site of a Methodist Chapel from 1850 to 1879.

It was owned by John Codrington Norris, a relative of Oliver Norris who built the Gloucestershire side of the Severn Tunnel from 1877. **(The picture shows a shop in front of Zion House about 1900).**



About 100 yards further on, the Kings' Arms can provide a refreshment stop. To return, either retrace your steps or take the shorter route bearing left to Severn Beach following the sign at the mini-roundabout. This road roughly follows the line of the former railway between Severn Beach and Piling Low Level Station. After the next motorway bridge, on the left is Crossings House, with a pair of level crossing posts still in place. Here if wished you can turn right onto Shaft Road to return to the pumping station.

For more information please read "Around Severn Beach" - available from your local library.

