

SEVERN BEACH

MEMORIES OF TIMES PAST

HERITAGE TRAIL



The Blue Lagoon Pool in 1937

Produced by Pilning & Severn Beach History Group.

Edited by Robin Pencavel based on the work of the late Geoff Rickards.

A separate leaflet on New Passage describes a heritage walk to the north of the Severn Beach map.

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- 1 **Severn Beach Railway Station** Trains brought day trippers to Severn Beach from around the Bristol area and holidaymakers from further afield, especially during factories 'shutdown fortnight'.
- 2 **Funfair, dodgems, cafes** Early amusements included wooden rollercoasters, swingboats and steam driven roundabouts. Later dodgems and the Ghost Train were very popular.
- 3 **Refreshment Huts and Tea Rooms** Several wooden huts were set up on the top of the shingle bank at the Avonmouth end of the beach. Refreshment stalls on the beach were common; often supplied from bicycle sidecars.

- 4 **Paddling Pool** The first paddling pool was set on the beach and filled by the incoming tide.
- 5 **Blue Lagoon** The centrepiece of Severn Beach. An open air, salt water swimming pool. Water was pumped from the Severn, filtered through beds of sand and further treated with chlorine and alum.
- 6 **Boating Lake** Brightly painted rowing boats negotiated two islands in the lake. One housed Tarr's ice cream parlour which could be accessed by 'willow pattern' bridges.
- 7 **Miller's Field** Visitors stayed in chalets, sheds and old bus bodies.
- 8 **Putting Green** The original putting green was superseded by a crazy golf course.
- 9 **Cinema** Mr Shufflebottom's cinema was a corrugated iron building, known locally as the 'Galvanised Gaumont', where for 3d, 6d or 1/9d you could watch the latest adventure film. Cowboys and Indians featured highly.
- 10 **Crossing Cottage** Home to the crossing keeper who manned the crossing gates for trains and cars.
- 11 **Severn Beach Hotel, later Severn Salmon** The hotel was built in 1936. It had both a large public and lounge bar at the front, a skittle alley, snooker room at the rear and also a ballroom which was used for dances and public functions.



At the beginning of the 20th century Severn Beach was a very quiet rural location on the Severn estuary, with a pebbly beach. The only habitations were several farms and a few cottages. The land was below sea level, and frequently flooded at spring tides.

The railway came to Severn Beach in 1901, part of a circular route from Bristol, via Avonmouth and Pilning. In 1922 a station was built by the G.W.R. and from then on Severn Beach expanded into a riverside resort, largely developed by Robert Stride, a local entrepreneur.



By the 1930s there were shops and a large number of amusements available to the crowds that came by bicycle and train at weekends, or for an evening stroll, or even to take a weeks holiday in one of the many chalets that sprang up. There was a large hotel and a boating lake, and many cafés

catered for the visitors. The attractions began to flourish, centred around the Blue Lagoon swimming pool and Severn Beach became known as The Blackpool of the West.

By the 1960s the heyday of Severn Beach as a resort had waned. The motor car meant people could go further afield, and the amusement area became dilapidated. Because the village now contained many more houses the danger of flooding had to be addressed and the Blue Lagoon along with the boating lake, were demolished to allow sea defences to be greatly improved.



The shingly beach of the 1920's was about a mile long and attracted many people to Severn Beach. There is a story that the developer, Robert Stride, later had sand brought in to hold back the ubiquitous Severn mud! That early essential of the beach, the deck chair was readily available for hire for 2d and soon enterprising traders had set up little stalls selling refreshments to the picnickers. Often these stalls were box sidecars attached to bicycles. Over time more permanent cafes perched on the shingle at the top of the beach began to appear, although these were often damaged by storms and high tides.

Amusements began to appear at the southern end of the beach. Donkey rides were on offer and a paddling pool filled by the tide was provided for the youngsters.

Picnicking on the beach was always popular although beach wear of suits and long dresses may seem a little formal to us now. These well dressed folk also seemed to enjoy a promenade along the top of the beach and could stop for a cuppa in one of the many tea shops along the way.

The beach at Severn Beach provided cheap entertainment for visitors of all ages and many enjoyed a bracing dip in the river when the tide was right!

Of all the attractions in Severn Beach, the Blue Lagoon was probably the one that visitors remember the most. The earlier bathing and boating lake of the 1920's was very popular and when this was developed into the Blue Lagoon Swimming Pool things really started to take off. Situated close to the shops and only a short walk from the railway station together with ample bicycle parking, the visitors flocked to the pool. The pool was unheated and nearly 100 yards long and was equipped with changing rooms, various diving boards, fountains, a water slide, children's seesaws in the shallow end and earlier an additional section, big enough for boat races.

In the 1930's, Robert Stride the entrepreneur who developed Severn Beach as a resort, introduced Water Carnivals. These were hugely popular and attracted thousands of visitors. The Carnivals included Bathing Beauty competitions, Personality Girls and Seaside Revues with dance competitions in the evening.

With the demise of the resort the pool closed in the 1970's and was demolished. Nothing now remains except the ornaments at the base of the steps leading up to the pool. These can still be seen complete with traces of the old familiar blue paint.

