

# Black Rock Facts & Features

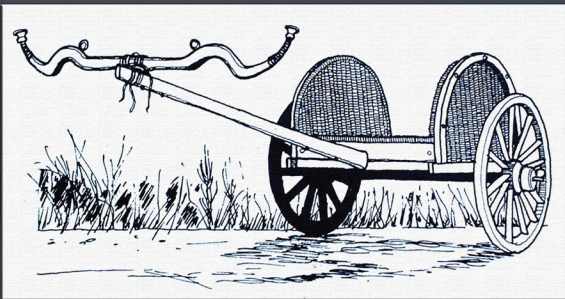
10,000 years ago the Severn Estuary was a dry, populated valley, changing radically at different times from tidal mudflats to quite dense forest where red deer and wild cattle, pigs and horses roamed.

## Neolithic, Bronze And Iron Age

Though the earliest inhabitants were nomadic, the later tribes cleared forests for crops and livestock and established huts and forts. Evidence of Neolithic man (4,500 - 2,000 BC) is found in fragments of flint: the Bronze Age (2,000 - 700 BC) is represented by hut circles, a standing stone on Gray Hill, a sword scabbard and a wooden walkway discovered at Caldicot Castle: the remains of a wooden hurdle used as a pathway over the mudflats dates from the Iron Age (c 450 BC).



The Silures, a Celtic Iron Age tribe established a strong fortress at Sudbrook with walls over 16 feet high to dominate the cross-channel trade, but as well as being warriors they were inventors - introducing the wheeled chariot, primitive reaping machines and soap!



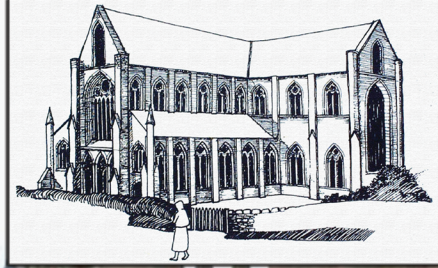
The intensity of the Roman occupation is well documented by discoveries of coins and other artefacts which indicate the likelihood of a landing stage to serve the busy river traffic transporting the products of local industries such as mining, charcoal burning, iron smelting and ceramics. The Romans built a sea wall to defend the levels from the Severn's tidal rise - the greatest in Europe. It is also believed that they operated a ferry at Aust to link important routes from England into Wales and the garrisons at Caerwent and Caerleon.



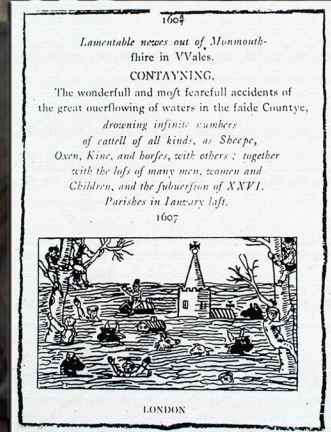
The Normans established a mighty castle at Chepstow in 1067 to guard access to the major crossing point of estuary at Beachley.

## Ferries

The Tintern Abbey charters, between 1138 and 1148, document a ferry service between Beachley and Aust (The Old Passage) used freely by the monks, their servants and cattle.



History is now sketchy until 1606 when local church records show that the Severn flooded an area 24 miles long and 4 miles wide, wreaking destruction and drowning cattle, horses and taking the human death toll to over 2,000.

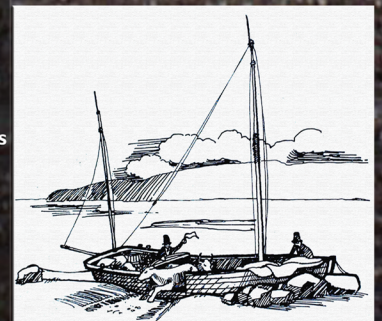


Charles I used the New Passage to escape a band of Cromwell's followers. He fled to Portskewett and was taken by boat to the English side. When the boatmen returned they were ordered, by point of sword, to take the Parliamentarians to the place where Charles had been landed. Instead, the Royalist boatmen took them to the English Stones, the large area of rock in mid-stream: from here, they said the soldiers could easily walk to the far shore. But before they were half-way the fast flowing tide came in and the troops were all drowned.

By the 18th century the commercial benefits of the River Severn led to the establishment, around 1715, of "The New Passage" between Black Rock and Chissell Pill on the Avon side. The Old and New Passage ferry companies competed fiercely and advertised widely.

In 1752, the fares between England and Wales were: 16s. 0d for a coach and six horses; 14s. 0d for a coach and four horses; 12s. 0d for a coach and two horses; 4d. for foot passengers; 1s. 0d for a man and a horse; 8d. for a single horse; 4d. for each beast; 2s. 0d a score for sheep; 2s. 6d a score for hogs.

Travellers from England wishing to make the somewhat hazardous 15 minute crossing had to light bundles of straw to attract the New Passage ferryman whose boat was kept at Black Rock. An annual Astromical Tide Table was published by a Chepstow printer and locally made long-case clocks indicated the times of high water at the passages.



Love of money led to the tragic deaths of passengers, and all but one boatman, when a young traveller's hat blew into the water. He insisted on attempting to retrieve it and in so doing capsized the ferry. Later the hat was found, with many banknotes sewn into the crown.