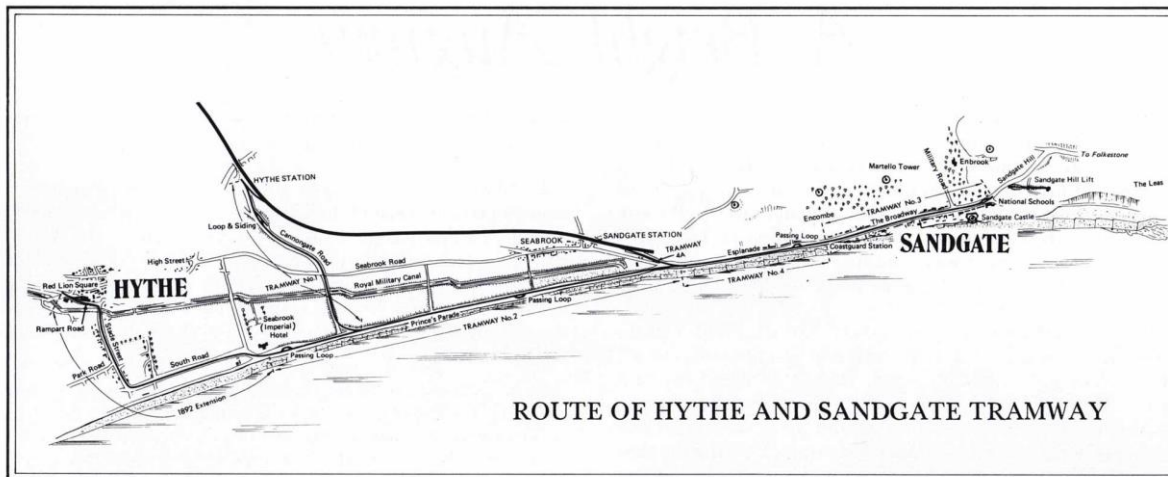


Folkestone, Hythe and Sandgate Tramways

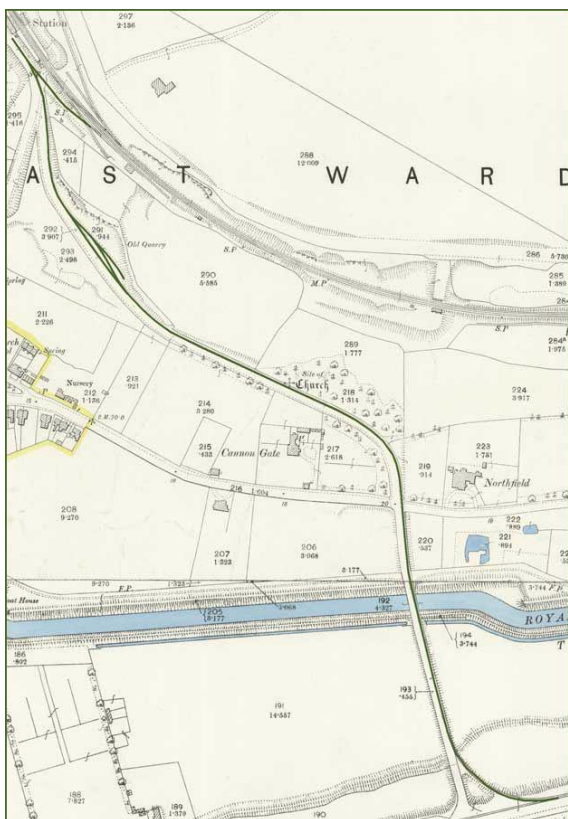


In 1870, when the Tramways act was passed, towns throughout Britain began to provide a tram service for public transport. At first these were horse drawn trams running on rails, sunk flush to the road surface. The metal wheels on metal rails caused less friction than tyres, which meant that a horse drawn tram, could carry a greater number of passengers than a conventional horse drawn bus. In later years, trams were electrified and continued on into the 1960's. In recent years, trams have re-emerged as a popular form of transport in city areas.



The Folkestone, Hythe and Sandgate Tramways operated a tramway service in Hythe, Kent, between 1891 and 1921. A horse drawn tramway ran from Red Lion Square, Hythe to the Sandgate Hill Lift, along the Kent Coast. This was at first, owned and run by South Eastern Railways (S.E.R) and was one of the schemes pioneered by its chairman, Sir Edward Watkin, who was also the MP for Hythe for over 20 years. (Watkin had great plans for the area which can be viewed here [Watkin's dream](#)).





The first section to be built (imaginatively called Tramway No.1), was from Hythe Railway Station on Blackhouse Hill, via Cannongate road, crossing the Hythe-Sandgate road, over the Royal Military Canal and across a raised embankment to Princes Parade. This brought material for the construction of the Parade (Princes Road) and a new sea wall designed by Sir John Goode for the Seabrook Estate Company.

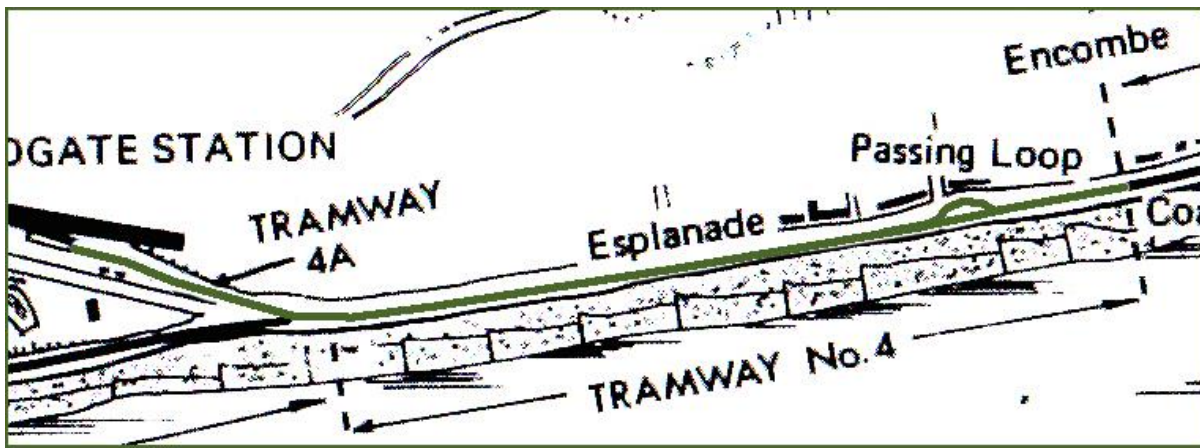
This section was to have been built to the standard gauge of 4 ft. 8½ inches, as was the entire tramway. A small steam locomotive, was taken out of storage from Lydd, for use on this section. According to some documents, this was a narrow gauge, 3 ft. 6 engine but as the carriages were taken along the normal rail track to Ashford for servicing, and one of the main objections to the tramway going through Sandgate being that standard gauge was too wide for the high street, it seems that the engine was actually standard gauge. The locomotive was from the Suakin-Berber Railway in the Sudan and was used in an unsuccessful attempt to reach and rescue General Gordon in 1885.

The section from Hythe Station, was used only as a construction line. In 1886, the little engine was often seen to belch out smoke and steam, as it struggled on the uphill journey to Hythe station, with sparks flying from the metal wheels as it fought to gain traction.

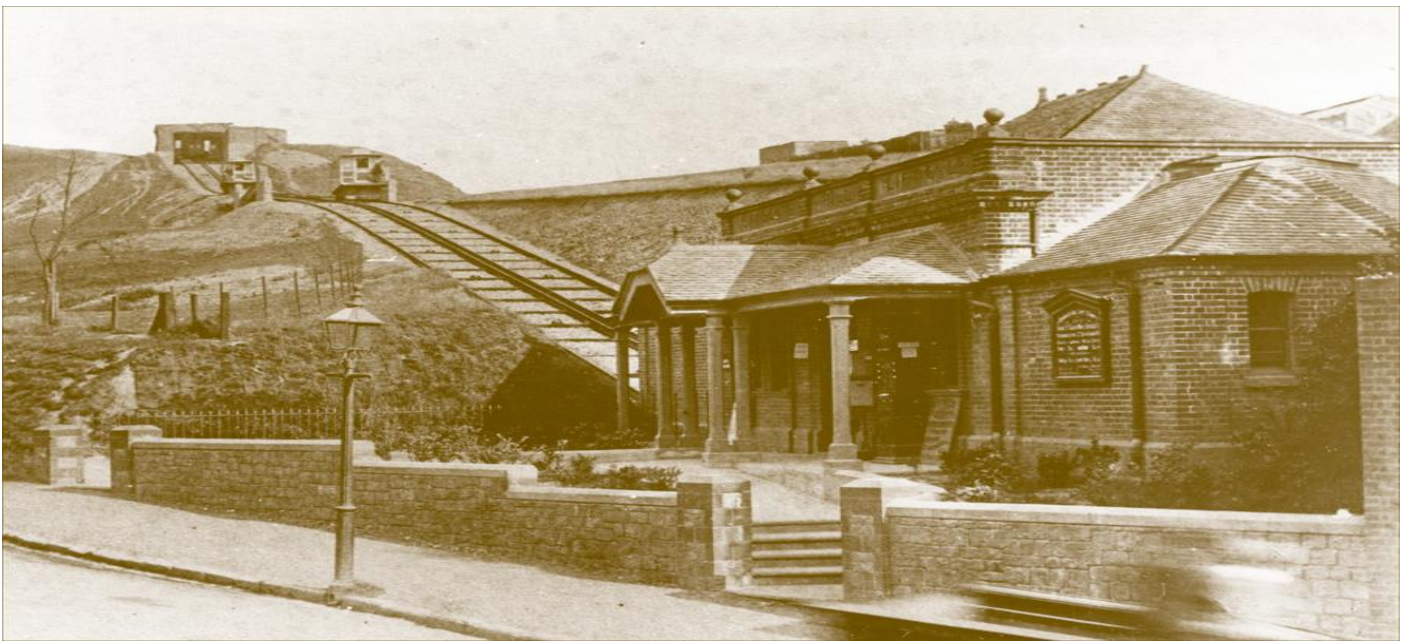
The second section, Tramway No.2, ran from The Seabrook Hotel (now the Imperial Hotel), along the length of Princes Road to its junction with the Hythe-Sandgate road, close to Sandgate Railway Station. This horse drawn tramway, at first was used to transport materials along the sea front, for the building of the Parade and sea wall.



Section three, was next and was actually called Tramway No.4. Running from and included a spur line No.4A, up to Sandgate Station, along the Sandgate Esplanade and ending near the Coastguard Station at the beginning of the Broadway.

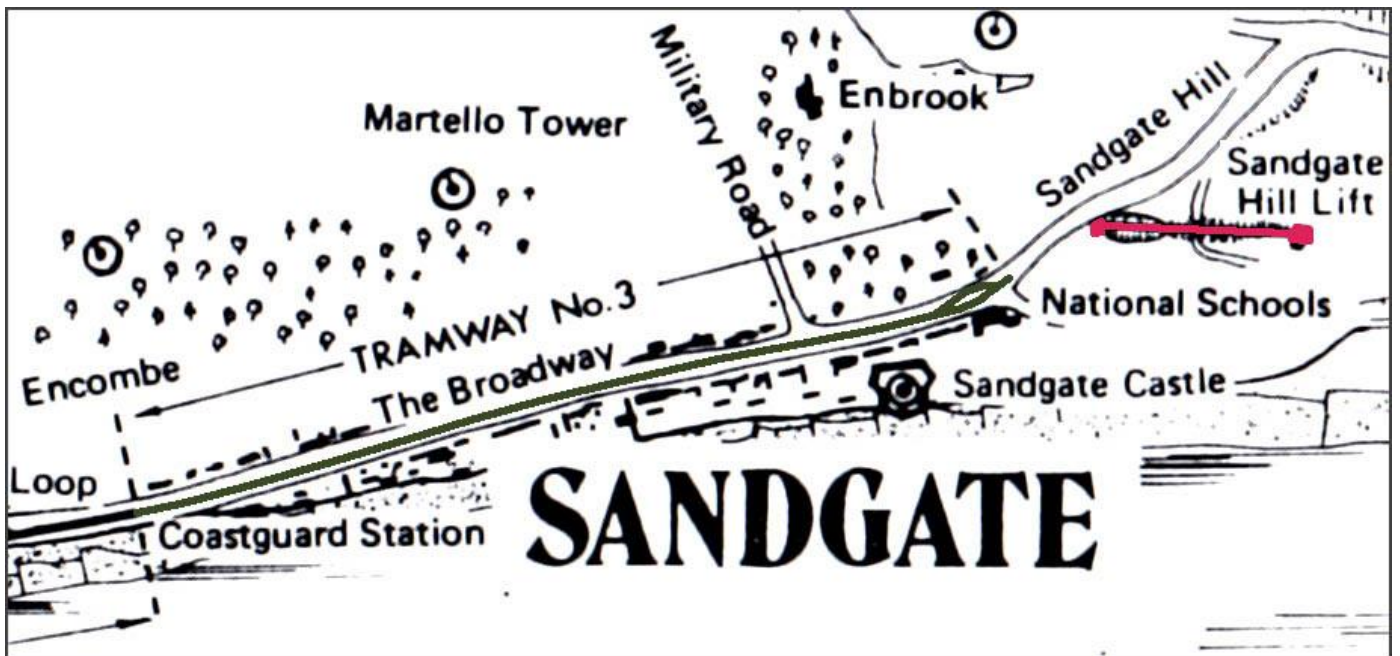


The section from the west end of Sandgate to the foot of Sandgate Hill, Tramway No.3, suffered long delays, due to repeated objections from land owners and in the main Lord Radnor (the 5th Earl of Radnor [1841-1900], a substantial landowner). He was not at all in favour of Hythe becoming a rival to his grand plans for Folkestone and the Leas, as at the time he owned most of the land from Sandgate to the far end of the Leas and raised all manner of objections to the tram running through Sandgate, which may well have opened the way for extending the new railway, which already had government sanction to run through to Dover and the continent.



Lord Radnor seemed to have had a change of heart, possibly due the completion of the Sandgate Hill Lift, taking visitors from the top of the Leas, down into Sandgate, where they would have to travel over a mile to get to Sandgate railway station or the operational section of the tramway. Perhaps he saw that his percentage of the takings from the popular Hill Lift would increase if the tramway terminus was just a short walk away?

With the objections now removed, the section was quickly completed and opened in 1892.



While all these delays were taking place, at the other end of the tramway by the Sandgate (Imperial) Hotel, it was decided to continue the route westwards along South Road, turning right into Stade Street, over the canal, left into Prospect Street and terminate at Red Lion Square. Here a tram shed and stables were built. The front of the Tram Shed with it's stone fascia saying ' S.E.R. Folkestone Hythe & Sandgate Tramways 1894' is still visible today, as are the stables, all be it, now converted into housing but retaining most of their character.



The ordinary street tramway ran from Sandgate National School at the foot of Sandgate Hill, to the Red Lion, Hythe. It was opened from Sandgate School to the Seabrook Hotel in May 1891, and absorbed a portion of the earlier line along Princes Road (Tramway No.2). It was extended to the Red Lion Hotel, Hythe, in June, 1892. The S.E.R. Act of 1893, authorised the railway company to acquire this undertaking, which was duly done. This line was used only for passenger traffic, and the physical connection with the main railway at Sandgate was to enable the cars to be sent to Ashford Works for servicing. Although the steam engine was not used for passenger service there is a report that in 1890 the engine and wagons were used on the tramway to bring materials to repair a large hole in the sea wall, caused by a recent storm. The line, which was almost 4 miles in length, of 4 ft. 8½ in. gauge, was a single track, throughout, with three passing loops.



Men working on the track in South Road as it turns right into Stade Street - and the tramway as it turns left into Prospect Road.



A post war Toast Rack, mule driven due to the loss of so many horses - and a covered Toast rack type carriage.

There were five cars in all and in the early years, 25 horses. The cars were of three different types. During the finest weather open 'toast racks' were operated, drawn by a team of horses. Ordinary summer weather toast racks had roofs, with waterproof side curtains. For the winter there was an enclosed glass-sided car with seats running lengthways. The service was half-hourly, increased in summer to 20 minutes on fine days. The through fare was 3d.



The less familiar glass sided carriage

In 1901, competition arose when a motor service, began with small wagonettes, between Folkestone, Sandgate and Hythe.



In the early years of the century there was also a move for electric tramways in the Folkestone district but the electric tramway scheme came to nothing, mainly because of the success of the motorbus service.

An act of parliament in August 1906 authorised the Folkestone, Hythe and Sandgate Tramways Company to take over the system from the South Eastern Railway S.E.R.

The tram line to Hythe station was derelict for many years, and partly removed.

The Sandgate Hill lift was closed in July, 1918.

During the 1914-18 war, the horses were commandeered by the Government, and the service was suspended in August, 1914. It was resumed after the war. during the summer months, but was closed finally at the end of the 1921 season. The track was taken up and the site abandoned in 1922.



Watkin's Grand Plan

The tramway was associated with the efforts to develop the properties of the Seabrook Estate Company and the Seabrook Hotel Company, both promotions of Sir Edward Watkin of the South Eastern Railway.

Sir Edward Watkin had great plans for the area ([Watkin's dream](#)).

He wanted the newly opened (1874) branch line of Hythe & Sandgate Railway to extend on into Folkestone and through to Calais via a tunnel. Test drilling began in 1880, with the intention of meeting up with a tunnel that had been started in France. This was stopped by the British government in 1882 due to worries about possible French invasions.

The tramway was also hoped to help develop the Seabrook Estate Company and the Seabrook Hotel Company, also the idea of Sir Edward Watkin. The tramway undertaking was started by a separate company and it is now not clear how far the S.E.R. was behind its initial promotion.