

The Hythe & Sandgate Tramway

By CHARLES E. LEE



Glass-sided car for winter use in Edwardian days

A SMALL and almost forgotten horse tramway, which formerly extended between Hythe and Sandgate, along the Kent Coast, occupies an unusual place in railway history. Not only was it the only example of a street tramway owned by a main-line railway, but also it represented the survival of some of the unsuccessful schemes of Sir Edward Watkin. The monopoly enjoyed in early years by the South Eastern Railway was being challenged in many directions by the London, Chatham & Dover Railway in the period before the Hythe & Sandgate Tramway was promoted. The L.C.D.R. had reached Dover in 1861, and, by buying Churchward's cross-channel steamers, was proving a serious rival to the Continental traffic of the S.E.R. *via* Folkestone. Not only is the sea voyage from Folkestone to Boulogne longer than that from Dover to Calais, but the railway approach to Folkestone Harbour was (and is) slow by reason of the trains having to negotiate a steeply graded tramroad from Folkestone Junction. Various schemes were prepared from time to time with the object of improving the rail access to Folkestone Harbour, and the Sandgate branch (opened in 1874), together with the Hythe & Sandgate Tramway, were regarded as providing the possibility of a

new approach line, either along the coast, or in a tunnel under the west end of Folkestone.

The tramway was also associated with the efforts to develop the properties of the Seabrook Estate Company and the Seabrook Hotel Company, both of them promotions of Sir Edward Watkin, of the S.E.R. Originally, the tramway undertaking was a separate company, and it is not now clear how far the S.E.R. was behind its initial promotion. Few small tramways have had so many parliamentary powers. The first application appears to have been made in April, 1880, but the first Act was July 28, 1884, which incorporated the Folkestone, Sandgate & Hythe Tramways Company. The South Eastern Railway Act of July 12, 1887, authorised the railway to guarantee interest on the capital, and from that time the scheme appears to have been avowedly one of the S.E.R.

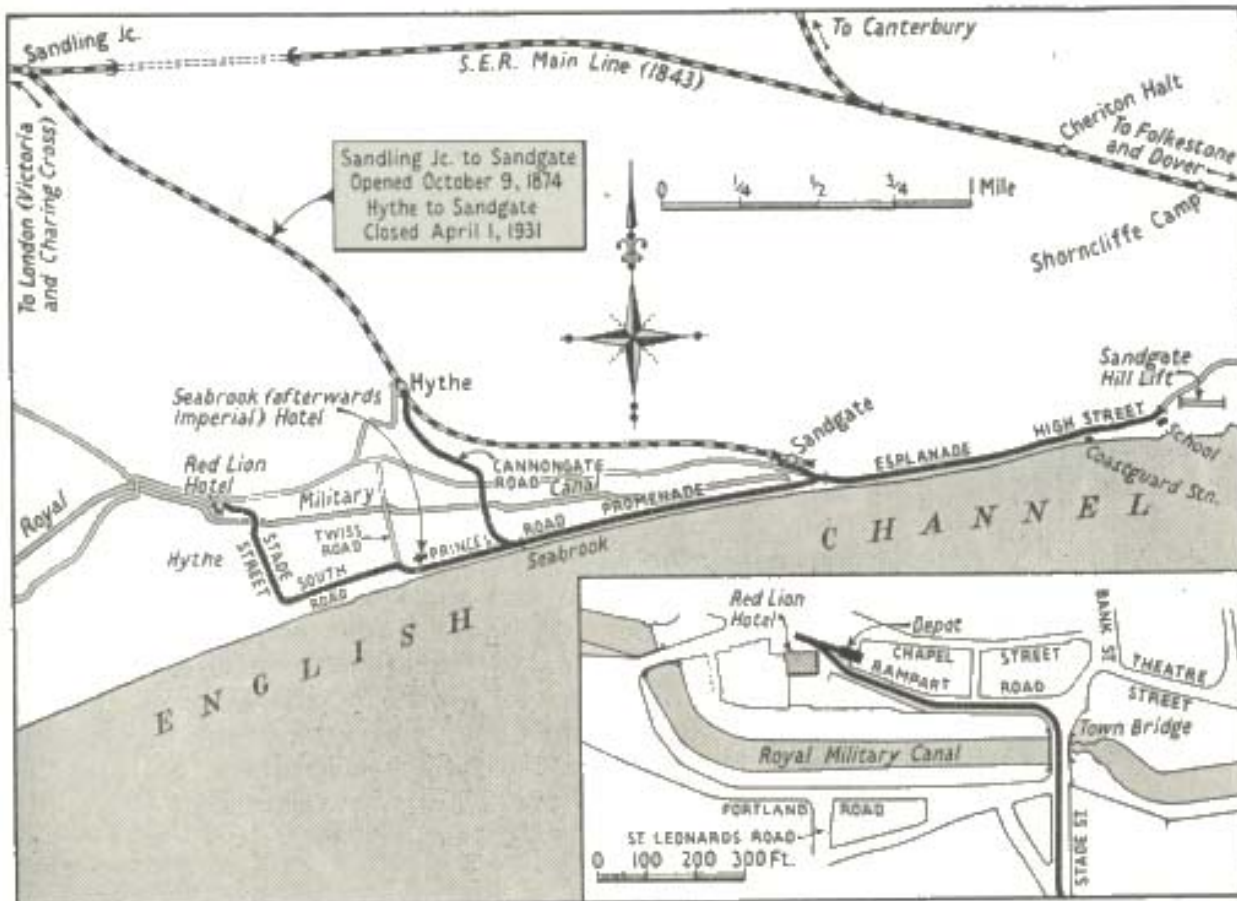
The first section to be built seems to have been a line laid from Hythe Station to Seabrook, to facilitate the construction of the Parade (Princes Road) and sea wall designed by Sir John Goode for the Seabrook Estate Company. This section is stated to have been built to the standard gauge of 4 ft. 8½ in. and to have been used for the haulage by horses of trucks from the main railway at Hythe. A small

steam locomotive is then said to have been obtained from the Suakim-Berber Railway, which necessitated the narrowing of the gauge to 3 ft. 6 in. This section from Hythe Station to Seabrook, along Cannongate Road, appears to have been used only as a construction line.

The ordinary street tramway was built from Sandgate School to the Red Lion, Hythe. It was opened from Sandgate School to the Seabrook Hotel on May 18, 1891, and absorbed a portion of the earlier line along Princes Road. It was

There were five cars in all, and in 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 and waterproof side curtains. For the winter there was an enclosed glass-sided car with longitudinal seats. The service was half-hourly, increased in summer to 20 minutes on fine days. The through fare was 3d.

Competition arose from a motor service

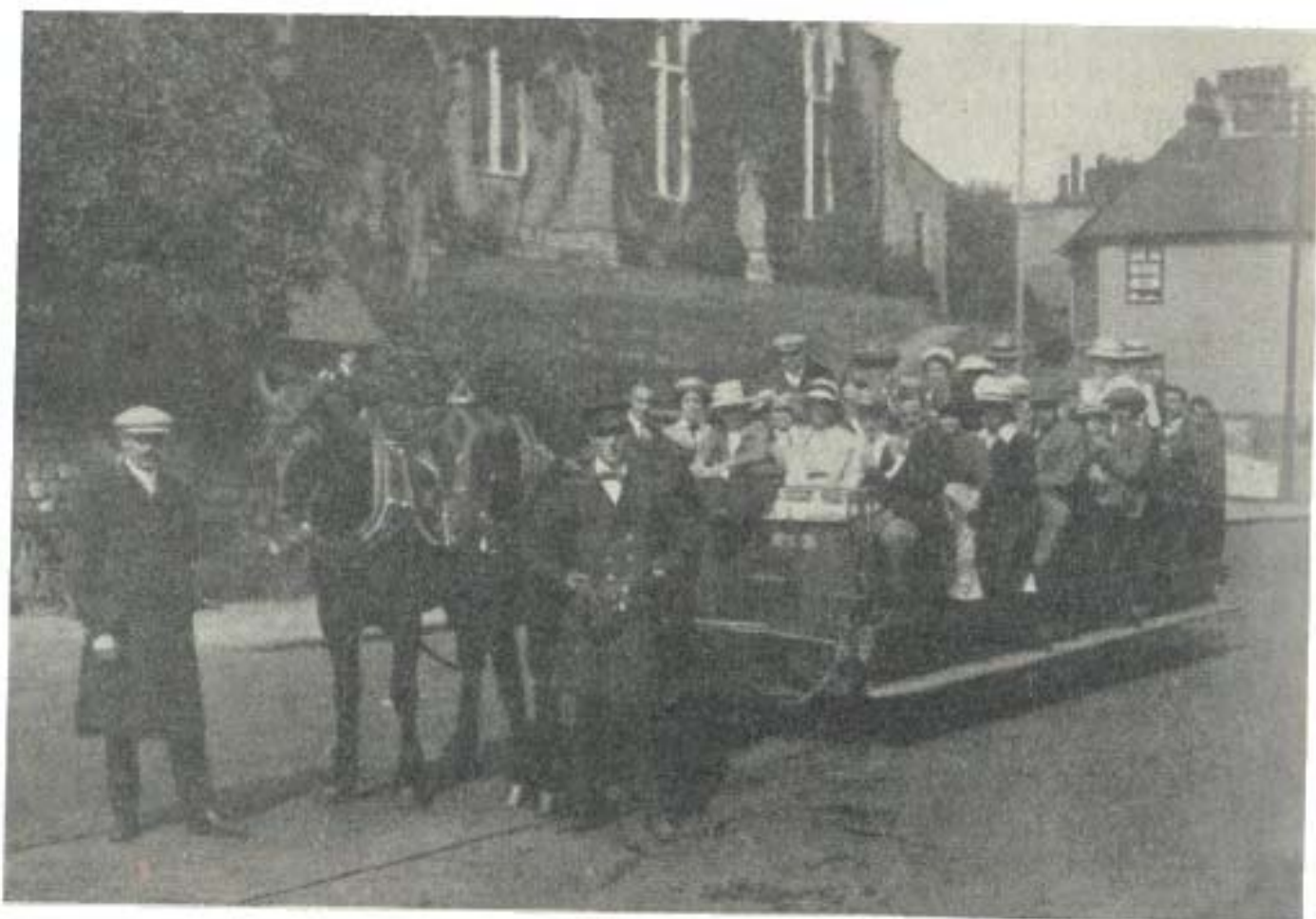


Sketch map of the Hythe and Sandgate district before grouping. The tram line to Hythe station was derelict for many years, and partly removed. The Sandgate Hill lift was closed in July, 1918

extended to the Red Lion Hotel, Hythe, on June 6, 1892. The S.E.R. Act of June 29, 1893, authorised the railway company to acquire the undertaking, which was duly done. So far as is known, 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. The capital expenditure of the S.E.R. company on this enterprise was £26,753.

The line, which was 3 miles 29 chains in length, of 4 ft. 8½ in. gauge, was single throughout, with three passing loops.

begun with small wagonettes in July, 1901, between Folkestone, Sandgate and Hythe. In the early years of the century there was also an agitation for electric tramways in the Folkestone district, and eventually the Folkestone, Sandgate & Hythe Tramways Company was incorporated by an Act of August 4, 1906, and secured powers to take over the Hythe & Sandgate Tramway of the S.E.R. The latter had become purchasable in accordance with the provisions of the Tramways Act, 1870, and the Sandgate Urban District Council had given notice on January 27, 1906, of its intention to exercise its rights



Open toast-rack car at Sandgate in August, 1913

in respect of the portion within its area. In fact, no such purchase took place, and the electric tramway scheme came to nothing, mainly because of the success of the motorbus service. During the 1914 war, the horses were commandeered by the Government, and the service was suspended on August 7, 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.

We are indebted to the Southern Region of British Railways, and to Mr. R. Howarth, the Borough Librarian and Curator of Folkestone, for assistance in verifying particulars of this little-known railway enterprise.