

## The Town Bridge

### Stade Street Bridge (Nelson's Bridge): Bombing, Bailey Bridge, and Rebirth

The Town Bridge carries Stade Street over the Royal Military Canal. It is believed that there has been a bridge at or near this location since the sixteenth century. Before the building of the canal there was a bridge that crossed a natural channel that followed a similar course and then turned south towards the harbour. This is reflected in the name of Stade Street (from Old English *stæð*: landing-place, bank, shore.) A bridge on the present site is shown on a plan of the canal drawn between 1805 – 1851 and now in Hythe Museum. From the 1850s it was popularly known as Nelson's Bridge after the nearby Nelson's Head public house (now the Taste of Kathmandu Restaurant.) By 1876 the bridge had become very dilapidated and was pulled down and re-built, the opportunity being taken to increase its width from nine to thirty feet. The bridge was destroyed by a German bomb on 5th November 1940. A bailey bridge was subsequently erected in its place, and that remained in use until work started on the present bridge in 1955. The new Town Bridge was built by Mears Bros (Contractors) Ltd of Sydenham, South London. It was opened on 21st January 1956 by the Mayor, Councillor C. T. Sanford. Two boys on bicycles were the first to go across.

The loss of Stade Street Bridge severed Hythe's vital link across the Royal Military Canal and cut off the town's principal route to the seafront. The Royal Engineers acted quickly. With no time or materials for a traditional rebuild, they installed a Bailey bridge — a modular steel structure designed by Donald Bailey. It could be assembled by hand, without cranes, and was strong enough to carry tanks. Though intended as a temporary wartime solution, it served Hythe reliably for many years and became a familiar part of the town's landscape.

View of Bailey Bridge from Stade St to Rampart Road



Bailey Bridge with Nelson Head pub on the right



The Bailey Bridge, looking towards Wesleyan Methodist chapel and Rampart Road.



## Postwar Delays and Government Refusal

After the war, Hythe hoped to replace the temporary Bailey bridge with a permanent structure. But Britain was in a period of strict economic control, and funding for local infrastructure was extremely limited.

In September 1949, *The Dover Express and East Kent News* reported the Ministry of Transport's refusal to approve the rebuilding. Under the headline "**HYTHE BRIDGE REFUSAL**", the paper quoted the Minister's explanation:

"I have... gone into it carefully to see whether there was any change in circumstances which would justify me in reconsidering my original decision. I am sorry to say that I can find none... In present economic conditions, the Government are bound to restrict works of capital investment to those that are vitally necessary... I can authorise only those works on roads and bridges which are essential on grounds of public safety, or to further production."

Despite pressure from Brigadier Mackeson, M.P., the answer remained no. The Bailey bridge stayed in place far longer than anyone expected.

## Life Beside the Bailey Bridge

By 1950, the bridge had become part of everyday life — and not always a peaceful one. The *Sunday Dispatch* of 8 January 1950 carried a short but telling report under the headline "**Non-Sleepers**":

"Residents complain that heavy wooden sleepers of a Bailey bridge spanning the Hythe Canal, Kent, rattle continuously under the weight of traffic and keep them awake at night."

This glimpse of local frustration captures how the temporary bridge, though vital, affected the rhythm of the town. Its clattering timbers were a nightly reminder of wartime improvisation still echoing into peacetime.

## A New Beginning: 1956

After more than a decade of waiting, Hythe finally received its new permanent bridge. The replacement for the wartime Bailey bridge was officially opened on **Saturday, 21 January 1956** by **Councillor C. T. Sanford**, the Mayor of Hythe.

- **Alderman Sir Frederick C. Bovenschen** – Chairman
- **L. Nowell** – Town Clerk
- **R. C. A. Ashdy** – Consulting Surveyor
- **Mears Bros. Ltd.** – Engineering Contractors

**The commemorative plaque records the moment and the people responsible for the project**



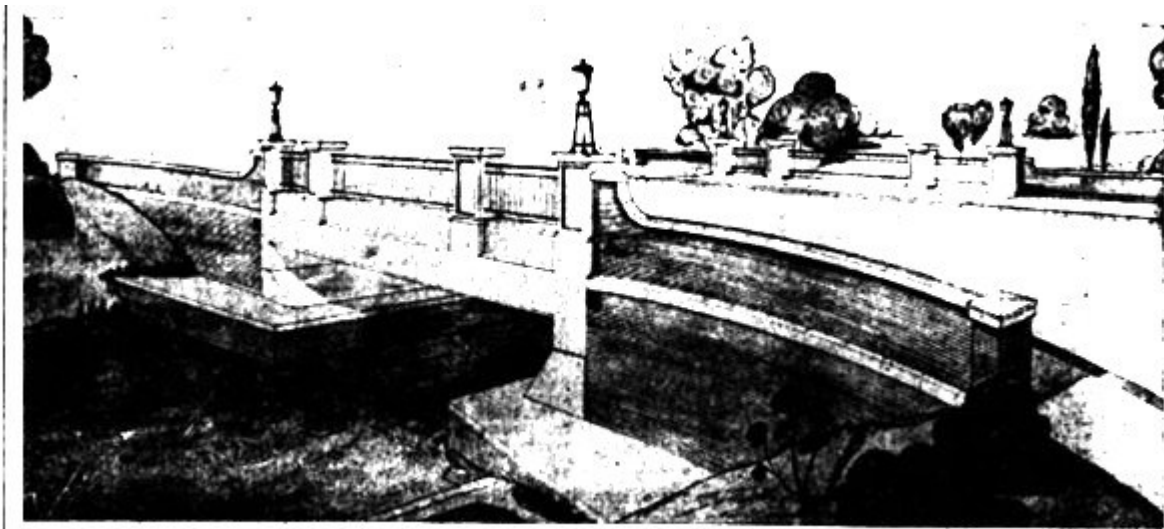
The 1956 bridge marked the end of a long chapter that began with destruction, continued through wartime improvisation, and concluded with a permanent structure that restored the town's confidence and continuity.



The first people to cross the bridge were young boys riding bicycles.

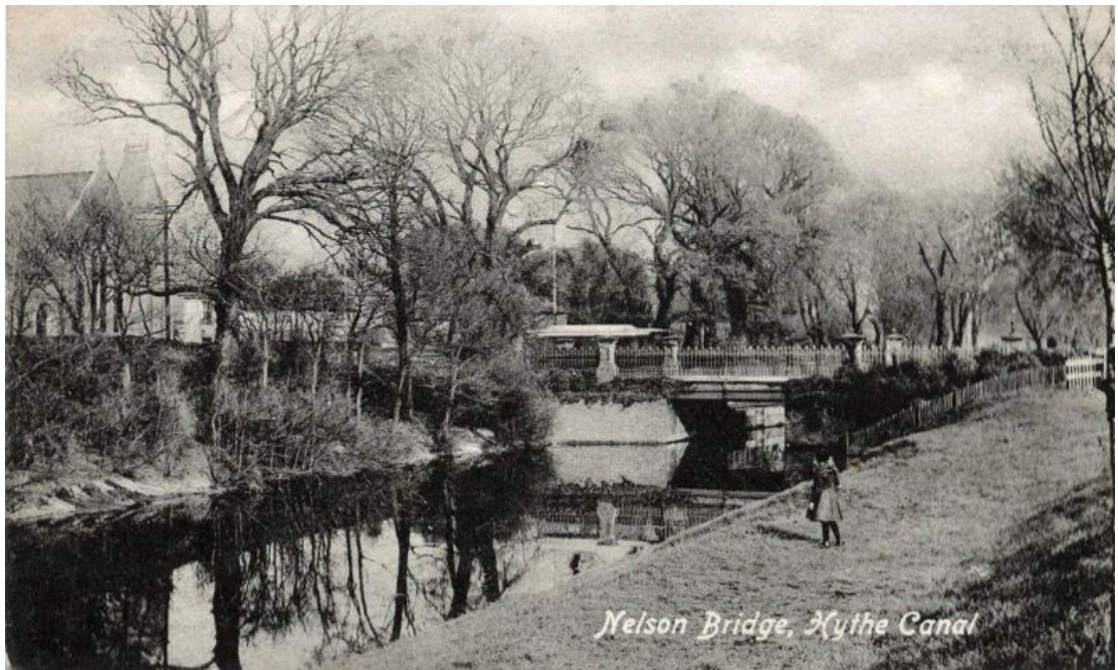


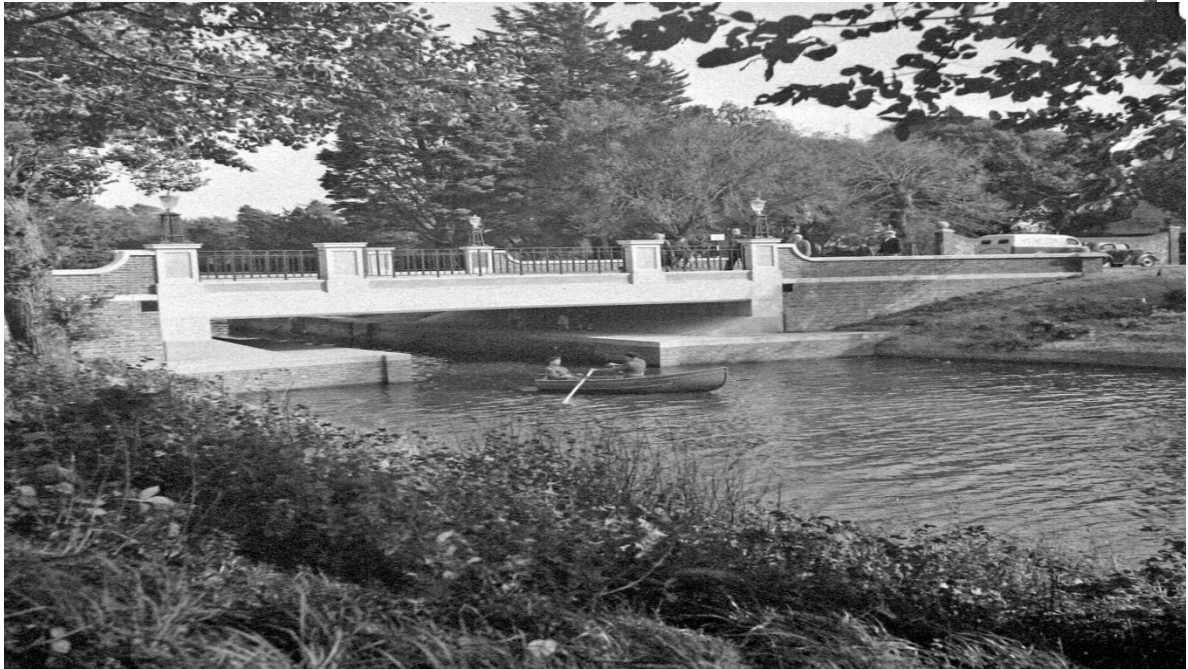
Drawing of the new bridge



For years Hythe has tried to replace the old Bailey bridge across the canal in the centre of the town. At last they can go ahead, and this is the first view, drawn by the surveyor, Mr. K. C. A. Ashby, of how the new bridge will look

Pictures of Town Bridge







Source:  
Thank you to Raymond Butler for his research contributions  
Pictures from HCS  
Newspapers