



The Rochester Bridge Trust
ANNUAL REVIEW 2009-2010



Welcome from the Senior Warden

As I move into my second year in the historic position of Senior Warden, I am pleased to report on another successful and busy year for the Rochester Bridge Trust. The Trust was established in 1399 and it is a great honour for all of us to continue the work of our predecessors over the centuries.

It was a great pleasure in November to recognise the 30-year contribution of one of my fellow trustees, Paul Harriott, and thank him for the excellent service he has provided to the Trust since 1980. Paul continues as a trustee.

In May, we welcomed back our Bridge Clerk (Chief Executive), Sue Threader, after a nine-month absence on maternity leave. We are very grateful to Heather Kerswell who did a sterling job as the acting Bridge Clerk while Sue was away.

Last September, the Trust opened its doors to visitors as part of the annual Heritage Open Days scheme, now run by English Heritage. We were very pleased to welcome the public to view the ancient Bridge Chapel, which is one of only six surviving bridge chapels in the country, and the Bridge Chamber with its fine collection of paintings and furniture. The Trust has participated in the event for many years and it was wonderful that so many people came along.

Our website was redesigned by our own staff this year and now provides even more information about the history and work of the Trust. I recommend a visit to the site at www.rbt.org.uk if you would like to find out more.

We hope that this, our second Annual Review, explains the work of the Rochester Bridge Trust and its role in the local community over the past year. I hope you enjoy reading it.



Dr Anne Logan
Senior Warden

About the Trust

In 1381, a flood swept away Rochester's Roman bridge which had crossed the Medway for the previous 12 centuries. By 1391, Sir John de Cobham and Sir Robert Knolles had built a new stone bridge. They persuaded other benefactors to give land and property for the perpetual maintenance of the crossing and were, in effect, the founders of the Rochester Bridge Trust. Formally established by Richard II in 1399, the Trust continues to provide its bridges at Rochester at no cost to the public. All its income is derived from the original endowments.

Today, the Trust is a modern charity registered with the Charity Commission. It has a board of 12 unpaid trustees. Six of the trustees are nominated independently by Medway, Maidstone Borough and Kent County Councils. The other six are appointed by the Trust for their skills and experience. They are supported by a small team of salaried staff.

As well as taking care of its two road bridges and the service bridge at Rochester, the Trust has the powers (but not the responsibility) to support other crossings of the Medway and to make charitable grants.

The Rochester Bridge Trust is a unique survivor of the medieval system of providing bridges. It is the only independent bridge trust still serving its original purpose – to provide a river crossing free of charge to the public.

The Bridges

Like any owner of major infrastructure, the Trust needs to make sure its bridges and other assets are well maintained. This year, major works are taking place to repair and renovate the historic cast iron balustrade and footway of the Old Bridge. The Old

Bridge is Grade II listed and this part of the structure has not been completely refurbished since it was constructed in 1914. The work is being undertaken to an exacting specification by the main contractor, Jackson Civil Engineering, and a range of specialised sub-contractors. The estimated cost of the works is £860,000.

A detailed inspection of both road bridges was completed this year and the condition found to be generally very good. Some works are planned for next year to address maintenance issues, although these are relatively minor compared to the contract currently underway, and most will take place without affecting traffic.

One of the large porticos (towers) on the Old Bridge was damaged by a lorry some time ago. The insurance claim has been settled and it is hoped that the structure can be repaired next year. Traditional stone masonry techniques will be used.

A new electrical maintenance contract was placed with a local company, Lyons Electrical. The Trust hopes to replace the temporary street lighting on the Old Bridge in the next year and renovate lighting on the New Bridge and Rochester Esplanade.

The trustees are advised on structural inspection and bridge maintenance by a firm of consulting engineers, Mott MacDonald. This year, preparations have been taking place to retender the role of bridge engineering advisor so that a new company will be in place from the start of January 2011. In the past this role was performed by such notable engineers as George Rennie, Thomas Telford and William Cubitt and there has been considerable interest in the commission from consulting engineers.



Renovation work on the Old Bridge's historic cast iron balustrade



New House Farm, Thanington



Murex Biotech Ltd, Dartford



5a St Peters Street, Canterbury

Estate

A major part of the Trust's income derives from rent and other payments for property. In past years, the Trust had owned property in London, Essex and Herefordshire as well as its main holdings in Kent. By the 1960s, the last of these outlying properties had been sold and the estate was all within Kent.

Needing further property investments and being unable to identify suitable land for sale in Kent, in 2008 the Trust extended its property ownership to Cambridgeshire when it purchased a new estate at Conington near Peterborough. This comprises farmland, residential property and an airfield. During this year, the Trust has invested significant sums in the estate and staff and the trustees' surveying advisors have been working hard to bring the properties into a good state of repair and management. All of the properties are now let apart from one surplus house which the Trust hopes will be sold this year. A successful event was held in Huntingdon in January for the tenants to meet the trustees and staff.

On the Kent estate, investment in property maintenance has continued. Some redundant land and buildings which have been in the Trust's ownership for some years have been identified for possible future development. Sympathetically designed proposals are being drawn up for some of these sites and consultation is taking place with local planning authorities. In particular, the Trust has invested in the advice of specialist architects and achieved planning consent for the restoration of Westmoor Cottage, a listed building near Rainham. As this property is surplus to requirements, it is intended that it will be sold later this year.

Grants

When other priorities allow, the Trust offers a programme of grants to charities in Kent and areas close to its landholdings elsewhere. The 2009 Grants Programme was able to support the three-year appointment of Professor Alani, the Bridge Wardens' Professor of Bridge and Tunnel Engineering at the University of Greenwich (Medway). Professor Alani is managing a programme of cutting-edge research to progress understanding in the field of structural engineering.

In 1857, the Royal Engineers helped the Trust to demolish the old medieval bridge using gunpowder! The historic relationship continues with the Trust making grants totalling £25,000 to the Royal Engineers Museum at Gillingham for the construction of a new gallery to display model military bridges and another to support a bridge building competition for schools. A grant of £30,000 was also made to Rochester Cathedral for the works needed to site a new memorial to the Royal Engineers in the nave.

The Trust was delighted to make a grant of over £10,000 for the restoration of an important medieval ceiling painting, or "celure", in St Margaret's Church, at Rainham. The work has secured the future of this important feature and ensured that it can be fully appreciated.

For the third year in a row, the Trust provided sponsorship funding for the University Boat Race on the River Medway. A grant was also made to the Gravesend and Rochester Agricultural Association towards its annual ploughing match. The Trust has supported the event for over 60 years.

The policy for the 2010 Grant Programme was established and the availability of the scheme widely publicised. As always, the Trust will make grants to

a wide variety of projects which fall within the policy criteria. A new scheme is planned to sponsor two sixth-form students intending to study engineering at university.

Other activities

The freehold of the Medway Tunnel was transferred to Medway Council in October 2009 following public consultation, along with a payment from the Trust of over £3.6million towards future running costs. The Tunnel was formerly managed and financed by Medway Council under a 999-year lease. The transfer took place at the Council's request in accordance with the provisions of the lease and removes the need for the Council to report to the Trust on its management arrangements. On transfer, the Tunnel became adopted highway and its status is now identical to all the other crossings of the Medway upstream from Rochester for which the Trust has provided funding in the past 150 years.

The Trust employs a Bridge Maintenance team of two skilled craftsmen and a trainee technician who work full time taking care of the routine maintenance of the bridges, offices and other operational property. In November, Lee Hughes was promoted to the position of Bridge Maintenance Manager upon the retirement of Eric Clive who had served the Trust for 14 years. Gareth Edwards was promoted to Bridge Technician and a new trainee technician, Daniel Thorpe, was appointed after an exceptionally competitive recruitment process.

The Bridge Clerk and the Archivist continued to give illustrated talks to a wide range of organisations on the history and current work of the Trust.



(Top) Part of the £25,000 to the Royal Engineers Museum Foundation
(Below) The celure at St Margaret's, Rainham



Preparing the Old Bridge for the future



The iconic Old Bridge portico

Finances

The Trust works hard to ensure that its assets are carefully managed in order to fund maintenance and eventual replacement of the bridges. The uncertain economic climate has had an impact on income levels but the charity's finances have fared reasonably well, largely because of strong management and diversity of the investment portfolio.

Expenditure on property maintenance has been higher than usual, mainly reflecting the investment in bringing the Conington Estate properties into good order.

Significant investment in bridge maintenance took place in 2006/07 when the majority of the Old Bridge was refurbished.

	2008/09	2009/10
Expenditure on bridge maintenance	£616,000	£436,000
Expenditure on properties (essential repairs and improvements)	£473,000	£856,731
Incoming funds (mainly investment income and rents)	£2,656,883	£2,356,936

As anticipated, the Trust also incurred considerable costs in the year related to the transfer of the freehold of the Medway Tunnel to Medway Council.

A vital part of the Trust's financial management approach is to ensure sufficient reserves are in place for the replacement of bridges when that becomes necessary. Therefore, periods of major maintenance expenditure are followed by more restrained expenditure to allow the reserves to recover. The cost of the current works to the Bridge will be met in 2010/11.

Looking ahead

In the coming year, the Trust will continue to maintain the bridges and will try to support further charitable work as resources allow. Work planned or under consideration includes:

- Appointment of a new bridge engineering advisor and a review of maintenance plans for the bridges
- Preparation of contract documents for the repair of the damaged portico on the Old Bridge
- The purchase and installation of new Christmas lights for the bridges
- Development of the civil engineering research programme with the Bridge Wardens' Professor of Bridge and Tunnel Engineering
- Continuing refurbishment and repair of property to maintain and enhance value
- Establishing the Bridge Wardens' Arkwright Scholarship scheme to sponsor two young people through their sixth-form studies
- Award of grants for 2010 to a number of Kent organisations for charity projects that meet the Trust's policy criteria; launch of the 2011 grant programme
- A new research partnership with the University of Kent using the Trust's extensive archives of rent data and property documents
- The second Bridge Wardens' Art Prize competition and exhibition for local secondary schools and colleges
- A partnership project with secondary schools in Maidstone to encourage pupils to consider careers in scientific subjects





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