



The Rochester Bridge Trust  
**ANNUAL REVIEW 2010-2011**





## Welcome from the Senior Warden

I was honoured to be appointed to the position of Senior Warden in June this year and to be following in the footsteps of my many distinguished predecessors in this role. The Trust was established in 1399, and it is a great privilege for all twelve members of the ancient Court of Wardens and Assistants to lead the charity and ensure it continues its 600 year history of providing crossings of the River Medway at no cost to the public.



The Trust's primary purpose is to maintain the road and service bridges at Rochester. During the year a very successful contract was completed for the refurbishment of the parapet on the Old Bridge. Works were finished ten weeks ahead of programme, under budget and the project received an award for engineering excellence in the South East. We are grateful to our contractor, Jackson Civil Engineering, and our supervising consultant, Mott MacDonald, who worked so effectively with us to achieve this result.

It has been a successful year in terms of the Trust's commitment to furthering research, education and practical skills in the field of engineering: from university research to a grant to support the learning of practical skills in further engineering; from scholarships for sixth-form students to primary school competitions; as well as training support for staff and local businesses. I hope you will read more about these activities later in the report.

The longevity of the Trust is due largely to centuries of strong and effective financial management. Mike Bird continued this tradition for the last five years as Chief Finance Officer until his recent retirement. We were sorry to see him go but delighted to welcome Helen Corbett who has been appointed to the role.

I hope that this, our third Annual Review, gives you an insight into the work of the Rochester Bridge Trust over the past year (1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011) and that you enjoy reading it.

**Russell Race, DL**  
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 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 river crossings free of charge to the public.

Today, the Trust is a modern charity registered with the Charity Commission. It has a board of 12 unpaid trustees, called the Wardens and Assistants of Rochester Bridge. Six of the trustees are appointed by the Trust for their skills and experience. The other six are nominated independently by Medway, Maidstone Borough and Kent County Councils. 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 Trust's income and reserves are derived entirely from endowments of land and money from benefactors in the late 14th and early 15th centuries. The charity does not raise funds, charge tolls or receive any public funding. Most of the original endowment was in the form of land, some of which remains in the Trust's ownership.

## 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 took 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 had not been completely refurbished since it was constructed in 1914. The work was undertaken to an exacting specification by the main contractor, Jackson Civil Engineering, and a range of specialised sub-contractors.

The project was completed ten weeks ahead of programme with disruption to traffic being kept to a minimum throughout. At an awards ceremony at Leeds Castle in June, the Junior Warden and representatives of Jackson Civil Engineering and the supervising consultant Mott MacDonald were presented with a Highly Commended Award for Engineering Excellence by the Institution of Civil Engineers (South East region).

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

In December 2010 the Trust invested in new Christmas lighting for the bridges. The new blue and white LED display is far more energy efficient and easier to maintain than the previous lighting and was supplied by a local firm, Gala Lights, which is based in Aylesford.



Renovation work on the Old Bridge and (inset) some of the wear and tear needing repair



New energy efficient Christmas lights for the bridge



Bridge Clerk Mrs Sue Threader with this year's bridge building competition winners, St Mary's Island Primary School in Chatham



The Bridge Wardens' Arkwright Scholars Joshua Mudie and Jessica Salisbury with Senior Warden Russell Race

## Engineering excellence

When the Trust's founders built the medieval stone bridge in the late 14th century, they enlisted the help of Henry Yevele. He was the best English master mason of his day, builder of the naves of Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral. Yevele knew all about big bridges from many years of service as a Warden of London Bridge. From that time onwards, the Wardens of Rochester Bridge sought out the greatest engineers of their times to guide them. The list of advisors reads like a history of eminent British civil engineers throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and includes Thomas Telford, George Rennie and William Cubitt.

The Trust continues to invest in the development of civil engineering techniques and the profession itself.

At the University of Greenwich at the Medway campus, the Bridge Wardens' Chair of Bridge and Tunnel Engineering has been sponsored by the Trust since 2009. Professor Alani holds the post and leads the University's Department of Civil Engineering. Research is being undertaken into non-destructive testing methods to detect internal defects in the structure of a bridge which are not visible from the surface. As well as guiding normal maintenance of structures these techniques could be invaluable in assessing damage following catastrophic events such as earthquakes.

Since taking up the post, funded for three years by a £250,000 grant from the Trust, Professor Alani has reported a significant rise in the number of students keen to study civil engineering. There are now over 200 students studying the subject at the University.

The Trust has also made a grant to Mid Kent College this year to support the development of students' skills. The grant has been used to buy a

solar rig and air source heat pump. These will be used by plumbing and heating engineering students to demonstrate the benefits of renewable energy at the 2011 World Skills International Trades competition in October. The competition, formerly known as the Skills Olympics, brings together highly skilled young tradespeople from 52 countries across the globe.

In partnership with the Arkwright Scholarship Trust, the Trust is sponsoring two scholarships for sixth form students intending to study civil engineering at university from October 2012. The Bridge Wardens' Arkwright Scholarships are awarded to two academically outstanding young people and provide them and their schools with additional funding and open up career development opportunities such as site visits and networking events.

Joshua Mudie, of Dartford Grammar School, and Jessica Salisbury, of Newstead Wood School, Orpington, were awarded the scholarships. The Trust recently organised a guided tour of the QEII Bridge at Dartford while it was closed for maintenance. Joshua and Jessica joined the Trust's Bridge Clerk (Chief Executive) Sue Threader, who is a chartered civil engineer, for a visit to the control centre to observe how traffic was being monitored and diverted as the closure came into force. Other highlights of the visit included an inspection of the tunnel ventilation systems and an opportunity to examine the structure of the underside of the bridge. Finally, the students were treated to views right across Kent and Essex having taken a service lift to the top of one of the cable pylons.

For many years the Trust has developed its own staff to work on the bridges and historic Bridge Chamber and Chapel. In August 2010, a new trainee was appointed, Daniel Thorpe, bringing the bridge

maintenance team to three craftsmen. Already a skilled welder, Daniel has completed a bricklaying course and since September 2011 has been studying stonemasonry. His colleague, Gareth Edwards, has completed training in welding, has qualified as an electrician and is now studying joinery. Both members of staff attend the Building Crafts College in Stratford, East London, which was founded in 1893 by the Worshipful Company of Carpenters.

The Trust hopes to encourage other local firms to commit to skills training for their staff and is sponsoring a special award in the 2011 Medway Business Awards.

Supporting the development of the engineers of the future is an objective of the Trust. As in previous years, it was delighted to sponsor the annual bridge building competition for primary schools organised by the Royal Engineers Museum. This year the competition was won in style by a team from St. Mary's Island Primary School in Chatham.

## Estate

A major part of the Trust's income for providing the bridges still comes from rent from property derived from the original endowments. 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, the Trust in 2008 extended its property ownership once again, when it purchased a new estate at Conington near Peterborough, comprising farmland, residential property and an airfield.

Over the last two years, the Trust has invested significant sums in the estate and has been working hard to bring the properties into a good state of repair and management. Of particular note this year has been the complete renovation of Ivy Farmhouse and a cottage in Cooks Lane, Sawtry, which have both now been relet.

Included in the Conington Estate is a former WWII airfield, known at the time as RAF Glatton and now operated as Flying Club Conington. During the war the airfield was home to the US 457th Bombardment Group (Heavy), which flew 237 missions until April 1945, tragically losing 83 B-17 bomber aircraft in action. Last May, surviving American veterans who flew from the airbase assembled in Peterborough for a reunion. Several representatives of the Trust were honoured to join the veterans for a memorial service and wreath-laying at Conington Church. The Trust also provided a banquet for the veterans and their families at a local hotel.

On the Kent estate, investment in property maintenance has continued. Some redundant land and buildings which have been in the Trust's ownership for many years have been identified for possible future development. Sympathetically designed proposals have been drawn up for some of those sites, and consultation is taking place with local planning authorities. Planning permission was granted recently for one of these sites at Street Farm, Boxley, to convert former agricultural buildings into four residential units.

Some properties which are surplus to requirements are being marketed for sale this year. The Trust acquired a cottage in Hollingbourne in May and is actively seeking to increase its residential holdings in Kent by acquiring new properties.



University of Greenwich's Professor Amir Alani demonstrates ground penetrating radar equipment to Trust representatives



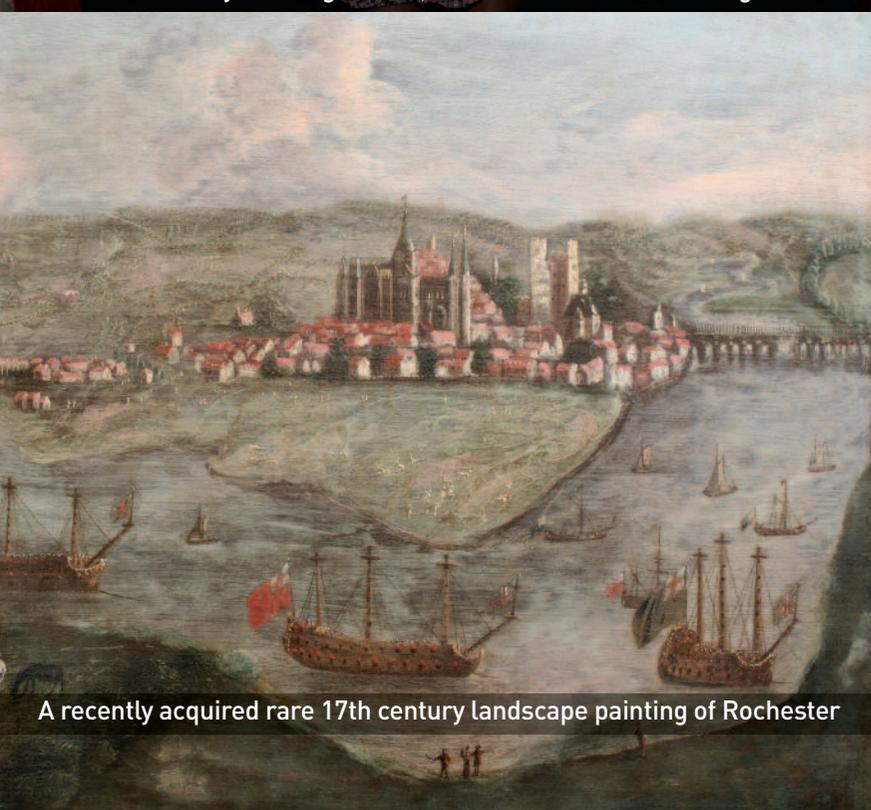
Ivy Farmhouse on the Conington Estate after restoration



Crew from the US 457th Bombardment Group (Heavy) on their return to Conington having completed their final mission



Art Prize winner, Isabelle Lush, with Professor Alan Cummings, Pro Rector of the Royal College of Art, and the Trust's Dr Anne Logan



A recently acquired rare 17th century landscape painting of Rochester

## Activities and historical research

The Trust holds an extensive archive of material dating from its foundation in 1399, which is managed by the Bridge Archivist Dr. James Gibson. The archive catalogue is available on the Trust's website and is extensively used by historical and family history researchers.

An important economic history research project is being carried out in partnership with the University of Kent. The Trust's property records provide an invaluable continuous record of rents paid over many centuries. This information has been analysed to establish historic trends. The current phase of the project is to digitise the Trust's extensive collection of historic estate maps, building plans and photographs and to link these to the rents database and modern mapping. When complete, the information and analysis tools will be made available on the Trust's website.

As well as the paper archive, the Trust holds a collection of fine paintings and furniture with connections to its history. A museum-style catalogue for the collection has been created during the year. The Trust is able to establish excellent provenance from the Trust's archives for most items with original bills and orders relating to their acquisition. A new item has been added to the collection this year with the purchase of a rare 17th century landscape painting of Rochester, in oils on board, which has been attributed to the marine artist Isaac Sailmaker. The public has the opportunity to view selected items from the collection when the Trust opens to visitors on Heritage Open Days each September and other occasional events during the year.

The Bridge Clerk and Archivist have given talks on the history and work of the Trust to local history

societies and other groups across Kent during the year. For details of how to arrange a presentation, tailored to your group's particular interests, please visit the website.

## 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 and turbulent 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. The Trust is able to take a very long-term view of its financial position given the usually extended periods between major expenditure.

	2009/10	2010/11
Expenditure on bridge maintenance	£436,000	£1,492,726
Expenditure on investment property (essential repairs and improvements)	£856,731	£676,200
Incoming funds (mainly investment income and rents)	£2,356,936	£2,200,628

Expenditure on bridge maintenance was fairly high this year reflecting the cost of the refurbishment of the Old Bridge parapet.

A vital part of the Trust's financial management approach is to ensure that 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.

## Other activities

When other priorities and funds allow, the Trust offers a programme of grants to charities in Kent and areas close to its landholdings elsewhere. Grants are made primarily for engineering and historical research, promotion of engineering and science education and historic building restoration. For 2010, grants totalling £48,900 were made to eighteen charities; and for 2011, a total of £20,000 was granted to twelve charities. In addition, the Trust was delighted to provide £30,000 of funding for essential work to the nave of Rochester Cathedral to allow the installation of a new memorial to the Royal Engineers.

The call for applications for the 2012 grant programme will be made in February, and details will be available on the Trust's website in due course.

The second Bridge Wardens' Art Prize competition for schools was very competitive and was won by Isabelle Lush of Maidstone Girls' Grammar School with her oil painting of Maidstone Bridge at night.

## Looking ahead

In the coming year, the Trust will continue to maintain the bridges and will try to support other charitable work as funds 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
- continuing refurbishment and repair of property to maintain and enhance value, and investment in new residential property
- continuing support to the Bridge Wardens' Professor of Bridge and Tunnel Engineering and the Bridge Wardens' Arkwright Scholars
- a partnership project with secondary schools in Maidstone to encourage pupils to consider further study and careers in engineering and science subjects
- Orchestra One – a partnership project with Kent Music and young people from all backgrounds to create and perform music on the theme of rivers and crossings.





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