



# The Rochester Bridge Trust

## ANNUAL REVIEW 2011-2012



The Court of Wardens and Assistants presents its  
Annual Report and the financial statements of the Trust  
for the year ended 31 March 2012.



## Welcome from the Senior Warden

In June 2012, I began the second year of my term as Senior Warden and it has been interesting to reflect on all that has been achieved in the last twelve months.

This year, the Trust entered its 613th year of providing and maintaining a bridge across the River Medway at Rochester at no charge to the public. Along with my fellow Wardens and Assistants, I am acutely conscious of how fleeting our time is in the context of this historic organisation and yet how heavy is the responsibility of ensuring its work will continue uninterrupted in the centuries to come.



The Trust receives no public funds, no grants and does not carry out fundraising activities. Instead, our finances continue to be derived from the charitable donations given by benefactors in the 14th and 15th centuries. Those donations came in the form of property and money which our predecessors have managed and invested to sound effect, ensuring the survival of the Trust and its work for the benefit of the travelling public. It is a legacy of careful financial management that we are committed to continuing.

The Court needs to take a very long-term view of its assets to ensure that funds are available for future maintenance and, eventually, the extremely costly replacement of the current bridges. After several years of volatile financial markets and a difficult property background, the Court is pleased that its resources are holding up reasonably well. Costs, however, continue to rise, and we must be ever vigilant to ensure we leave the Trust in good shape for our successors.

I hope that this Annual Review gives you an insight into the work of the Rochester Bridge Trust over the past year (1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012) 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

The Trust owns and maintains three bridges at Rochester. The Old Bridge was originally constructed in 1856 to the designs of Sir William Cubitt and then substantially modified to its current appearance in 1914. The New Bridge and Service Bridge were both built in 1970, the former to carry eastbound traffic and the latter to take essential pipes and cables across the River Medway.

During the year it was necessary to carry out a number of repairs to the Old Bridge, much of which was the result of damage from traffic accidents and vandalism. Some of this work was covered by insurance.

One of the large porticos on the Strood side of the bridge had been damaged by a lorry. Chips and cracks had appeared in the structure following the impact. Traditional techniques were used to dismantle the top of the tower and remove the damaged stone, which was then transported to the original quarry in Cornwall for a duplicate to be cut and lifted back into place. Repairs were made to the stone balustrade on the upstream side and to the power supply for street lighting cables, and a section of railing was replaced.

During the year, the Trust tendered for the appointment of a new bridge engineering consultant to provide specialist advice on the management of the structures. Hyder Consulting (UK) Ltd was appointed with effect from 1 June 2012, beginning work with detailed inspections of the condition of all the bridges. This will be used to plan future management and investment.

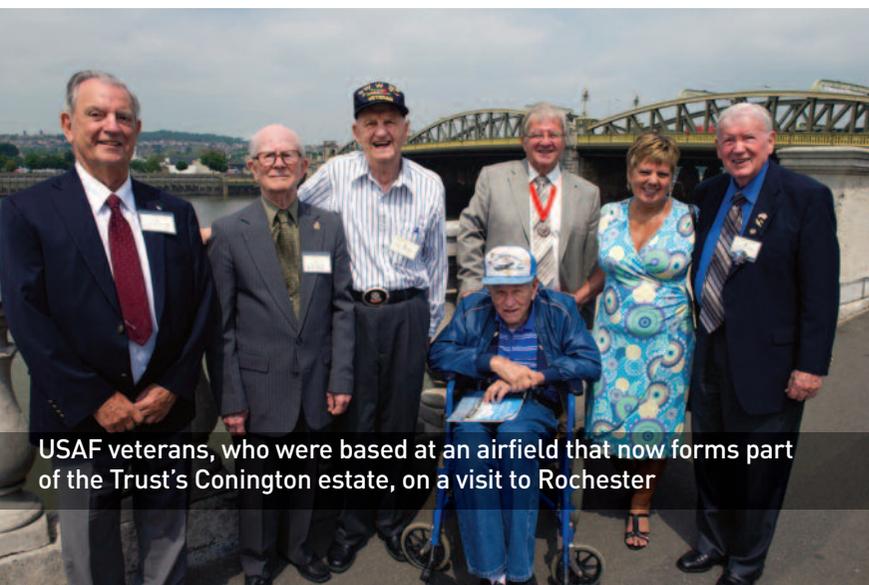
The Trust has a small Bridge Maintenance Team of three staff responsible for the day-to-day care of the structures. The Bridge Maintenance Technician and Assistant Bridge Maintenance Technician have



Preparing to repair the damaged portico



Langdon Manor Estate Map, 1699. The estate, near Faversham, is still owned by the Trust



USAF veterans, who were based at an airfield that now forms part of the Trust's Conington estate, on a visit to Rochester

continued to attend training courses to add to the skills they have available for use on the Trust's assets. They are currently studying for qualifications in bench joinery and stone masonry respectively at the Building Crafts College.

## Estate

Property rental is a major source of income for the Trust, which has a responsibility to maximise the long-term return from its property in order to fund its main charitable purpose.

Some properties are still held from the original endowments; whereas others have been sold and the proceeds used to invest in new land or buildings, or in financial investments.

Over the past year, planning permission was obtained to convert redundant traditional farm buildings into residential units at two Kent farms, and a further farmhouse was sold. The Trust reinvested funds to buy a cottage in Hollingbourne and has committed to buy seven newly-built houses at Kings Hill, West Malling, for residential letting. On its Cambridgeshire estate at Conington, the Court carried out two major residential refurbishments and marketed one of its large houses for sale.

The usual programmes of property and estate maintenance have continued during the year. New opportunities to enhance property values across both estates are being actively developed.

The Trust's long history of estate management has now been put to use in support of academic research. In 2007, David Ormrod, Professor of Economic History at the University of Kent, received a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council to research historic rents in London and the South East. The estate records in the Rochester Bridge Trust Archive provided the raw data, and

Phase I of the City and Region Project extracted from the account books and leases the rent and acreage for each property for each year from 1577 to 1914. Between July 2010 and December 2011 the Rochester Bridge Trust funded Phase II of the City and Region Project, which digitised the estate maps and building plans relating to these properties and incorporated both the images and rent data onto the Trust's website at [www.rbt.org.uk](http://www.rbt.org.uk)

## Grants

The Trust's primary activity is the maintenance of its bridges at Rochester; however, there is also a long history of making grants to other charities when surplus funds are available. Because the Trust has limited funds for this purpose, grants are focused on areas which reflect the Trust's own history, values and activities, e.g. education in science and engineering, preservation of heritage buildings and deepening understanding of the River Medway and its history.

## Education in Science and Engineering

This year saw the launch of the Growing Scientist Project, a partnership of six Maidstone secondary schools which aims to engage up to 1,000 pupils a year in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and to encourage further study and future careers in these subjects.

Funded by the Trust, the Growing Scientist Project was launched with a dinner for teachers, academics and industry representatives at the Trust's historic buildings in Rochester. The guest speaker was Dave Rowley, Education Programme Director for the Bloodhound Supersonic Car, an initiative that aims to promote engineering and science by developing a car that can travel at 1,000km/h – faster than

sound and quicker than a speeding bullet – and by retaining the World Land Speed Record for the United Kingdom.

Pupils from some of the Growing Scientist schools took part in a Space Day in the autumn when they learned about living in space through a live link-up with the National Space Centre and carried out experiments in rocket building and a wide range of other activities. Throughout the year the schools have been working together on projects as diverse as astronomy, beekeeping, and manufacturing miniature Formula One cars. The first year's activities ended with a very successful Schools' Science Expo hosted with the help of The Historic Dockyard at Chatham. The Trust is delighted to be funding this exciting project, which should help to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers.

The Rochester Bridge Trust is a keen supporter of The Arkwright Scholarships Trust, a national charity dedicated to raising funds from businesses, institutions, and individuals to sponsor talented would-be engineers through their sixth-form studies and into university.

The Trust has sponsored two Arkwright Engineering Scholars through their sixth form studies and was delighted when both Joshua Mudie and Jessica Salisbury achieved excellent results in their final year examinations. Both scholars plan to study civil engineering at university.

The Trust will sponsor two new Bridge Wardens' scholars from the autumn and hopes to encourage other Kent businesses to consider sponsoring scholars as a cost-effective and rewarding way to support the development of future engineering talent.

In partnership with the University of Greenwich and the Arkwright Scholarships Trust, an engineering experience day was organised for GCSE and A-level students from Kent and Medway schools. Participants were able to try experiments with ground-penetrating radar, build towers, and use computer-aided design to create prototype models.

As part of the 2011 Medway Business Awards, the Trust sponsored a special award for commitment to training young people in engineering. The award was won by Geku Automation, a high-tech robotics company based in Rochester.

The Trust also continued to support projects for which it had made major grants in earlier years, most notably the Bridge Wardens' Chair of Bridge and Tunnel Engineering at the University of Greenwich.

### Historic Building Preservation

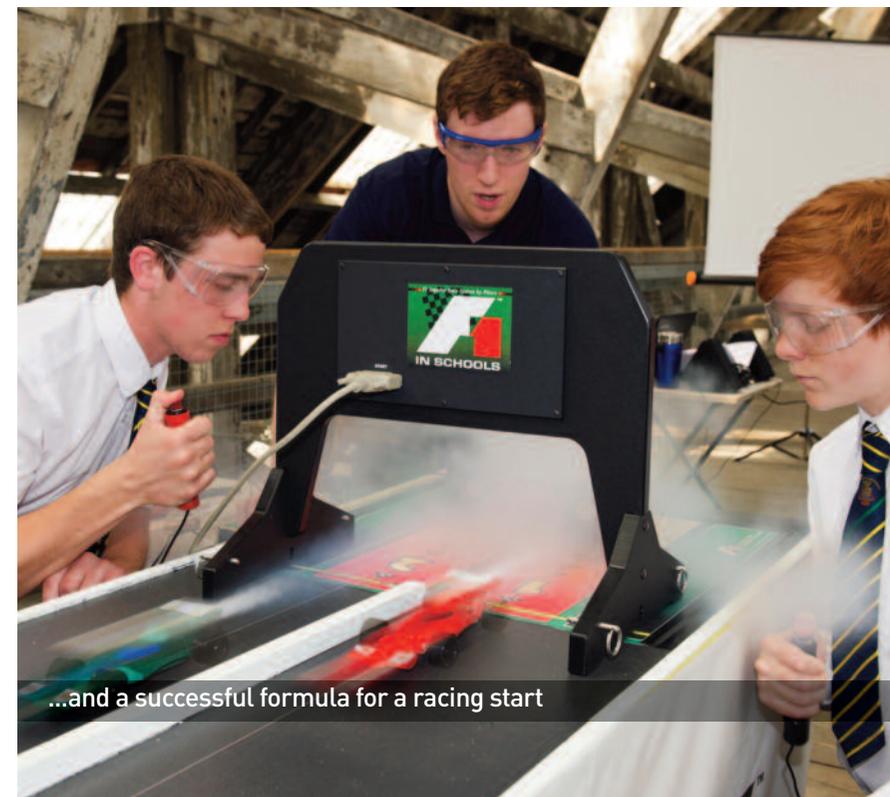
As usual, some small grants were made for the preservation of the historic fabric of churches. Two of the most notable projects are described below.

The colourful Queen Anne Royal Arms in St Laurence Church, Hougham, near Dover, were restored, thanks in part to a grant from the Trust. St Laurence Church is a Grade I listed building with 12th-century origins and Victorian alterations. The Queen Anne Arms, displayed on the north wall of the north aisle, date from the first five years of her reign – before the 1707 Act of Union – and celebrate her position solely as Queen of England.

Tom Organ and specialists from The Wall Paintings Workshop in Faversham completed the



Making waves at this year's Growing Scientist Expo...



...and a successful formula for a racing start



Restoring the Queen Anne Royal Arms in St Laurence Church, Hougham, near Dover

conservation and restoration project. Cleaning, removing darkened varnish, and repairs were undertaken in the church to avoid the oil paintings, wood panels and supports suffering further stress from temperature fluctuations. Once completed, the refurbished Royal Arms were secured in their original position with additional space created between the woodwork and the wall to enable air to circulate. As a result, visitors for years to come will be able to enjoy the rich colours and the intricacies of the historic painting which had become so dulled with age.

Through another grant it was possible to renew ancient historic ties between the Rochester Bridge Trust and Nettlestead. Funding was given to the parish's medieval church of St. Mary the Virgin, a Grade I listed building, for the restoration of a 17th-century memorial.

The monument depicts Lady Katherine Scott, wife of Sir John Scott of Nettlestead Place, both of whom died in 1616. Lady Katherine is depicted kneeling with a child at a prayer desk. Sir John had an illustrious career, including serving in Elizabeth I's armies under the Earl of Essex in Spain and the Earl of Leicester in the Netherlands, and was closely connected with the Rochester Bridge Trust from 1604 to 1616. During this period, he was twice Senior Warden of the Trust. However, the Trust's links to Nettlestead go much further back to the foundation of the Trust in 1399. From that date the parishes in the ancient Lathe of Aylesford, which included Nettlestead, were obligated to elect the wardens of Rochester Bridge and to provide for the upkeep of the medieval bridge across the Medway. The obligation remained legally in place – but was not enforced – until 1908, when the Trust's constitution was changed.

## Community relations

The Bridge Clerk, Bridge Archivist and some members of the Court gave presentations to nearly 30 local interest groups about the work and history of the Trust. As in previous years, the Bridge Chapel and Bridge Chamber were open to visitors for two days in September as part of the national Heritage Open Days. News and information about the Trust were published on the website at [www.rbt.org.uk](http://www.rbt.org.uk), and there were almost 13,000 visitors to the site during the year, including more than 8,600 unique visitors.

## Looking ahead

In the coming year, the Trust will focus on the maintenance of its assets and the securing of its financial strength for the long term. In particular it will:

- support the mobilisation of the newly appointed Bridge Engineer, Hyder Consulting, including new inspections of all the structures to form the basis of future maintenance planning;
- review the street lighting and electrical systems on the bridges and parts of the esplanades and carry out a review of energy costs;
- complete the purchase of further new houses for rent;
- develop new opportunities to maximise the value and return from other investment property across the estate;
- undertake a full repair of the roof and wooden windows of the Grade II listed Bridge Chamber and review options for restoring both the original metal windows at the Bridge Chamber and the roof of the Bridge Chapel.

## Finances

In August 2011, Helen Corbett joined the Trust as Chief Finance Officer following the retirement of Mike Bird. Helen is a Chartered Certified Accountant with a background in the asset management industry, where she has held various positions in portfolio management and corporate finance areas. For the Trust she has responsibility for the statutory accounts, financial management, insurances, and financial relationships with the Investment Manager and Property Surveyor as well as managing risk and health and safety issues.

The Trust works hard to ensure that its assets are carefully managed in order to fund maintenance and eventual replacement of the bridges at no cost to the public. The recent uncertain and turbulent economic climate has continued to have an impact on income levels but the charity's finances have fared reasonably well, largely because of strong management of spending and the diversity of the investment portfolio. A property revaluation was carried out as at 31 December 2011.

The Trust is able to take a long-term view of its financial position, given the extended periods between major expenditure. Periods of major investment in the condition of the bridges are followed by more restrained expenditure to allow the reserve balances to recover.

	2010/11	2011/12
Expenditure on bridge maintenance	£1,492,726	£571,423
Expenditure on investment property	£676,200	£593,970
Incoming funds (mainly investment income and rents)	£2,205,625	£2,431,964

Expenditure on bridge maintenance was much lower during 2011/12 than in 2010/11 when major works were carried out to the Old Bridge upstream parapet.

A formal actuarial opinion is taken every three years to test assumptions and monitor financial performance. The latest report was received during the year, and under current assumptions the Court is satisfied that it has sufficient resources in the short and long-term to deliver its responsibilities. However, the balance between assets and liabilities remains very fine, and close attention continues to be paid to ensuring optimum value for money and maximising investment returns. In light of the analysis, the Court of Wardens and Assistants has determined that its surplus funds are restricted. As a consequence, the funds available for making charitable grants will be limited for the next few years.





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