

The earliest recorded bridge at Rochester: corrections and additions

A reproduction of my book about the bridge (Flight 1997) is about to be made available. In appearance, the file is very different from the printed text; in substance, it is the same. Beyond preserving the lineation, I have not attempted to simulate the format of the book. Beyond correcting obvious misprints, I have not made any changes to the text. For my own convenience (perhaps for the reader's too), I have put the illustrations into a separate file.

Since the book was written twenty years ago, I am not surprised to find many things in it which I would say rather differently now, or perhaps not say at all; but I have let them stand. A red plus sign + in the margin refers the reader to the following list of corrections and additions.

Some comments relating to the modern bridges -- of interest but not of much relevance -- can be found in a separate file.

(2a) [disbound and disassembled](#). On reflection I am doubtful whether I had any reason for saying that. It is possible that the manuscript could have been photographed without being disbound.

(4a) [Lambarde](#). The spelling 'Lambard' is to be preferred. That is how the family consistently wrote their name, from the mid seventeenth century until the mid nineteenth. The antique spelling was adopted by William Lambarde (1796--1866) -- who was entitled to make this choice for himself, but not to impose it on his ancestors. (The article about the family in Burke's *Landed gentry* has 'Lambard' throughout in the second edition (1843--9), 'Lambarde' throughout in the third (1856--8).)

(7a) [synonyms](#). Kilburne (1659) made a point of noting which parishes were liable for work on the bridge, and it is clear that he still saw nothing wrong with the idea that 'peer' and 'arch' might be synonymous. (His usage drifted while he was writing the book: he started with 'peere or arch', but halfway through he switched to 'arch or peer'.) Hasted paraphrased all these comments of Kilburne's, dropping the word 'arch' and altering 'peer' to 'pier'. Paraphrasing Fisher (1772), he suggested that the bridge 'consisted of nine piers, which made ten intermediate spaces in the length of the bridge' (Hasted 1782:16).

(7n4) Page images of the 'Textus Roffensis' are now available online. So are my transcripts of the two constituent books.

(8n19) [pipe roll](#). In defiance of the Ministry of Silly Names,

I have stopped calling them that.

(8n27) This was written before I had seen Lambard's first draft of the book (Maidstone, CKS-U47-48). As I expected, that draft includes the Hollingbourne memorandum, but neither these nor any other excerpts from the 'Textus Roffensis'.

(9n30) [His nephew John Wotton](#). Wrong. Dr Wotton's nephew was Thomas Wotton (1521--1587) of Boughton Malherbe. He supplied a preface for Lambard's book but did no more than that.

(11a) [Domesday Book](#). A name which I think it wiser not to use.

(11a) [lathe of Aylesford](#). I realize now that the word is 'lath', not 'lathe' (Flight 2010:270--2).

(14a) [undomesdaylike](#). A word which I would not dream of using again.

(21n29) [Eccles](#). For the modern village see Newman 2009:110--16.

(25a) [ridiculous](#). Brooks did not take it kindly that I used the word 'ridiculous' (twice) in speaking of his 'reconstruction' of the bridge. On a third viewing (Brooks 2006, fig 3) as on the first, it still looks ridiculous to me.

(28a) [broken in 1282](#). Here I should have cited a passage in the Rochester copy of *Flores historiarum* (ed Luard 1890 3:56) where it is said that during the winter of 1281--2 'the whole of Rochester bridge collapsed and was carried away'.

(28n1) [mentioned frequently](#). Not frequently, but sometimes.

(28n8) [But that is a small point](#). Is it? I am not so sure about that now. If the planks rest on the beams, how can it make sense for the planks to be mentioned first?

(29n10) For the 'farm of the land of the bishop of Bayeux' see Flight 1998.

(30n24) The king says he has been reliably informed that the prior and convent 'ought to receive and were wont to receive the fourth penny from the ferry over the water there', whenever the bridge was broken, 'and that they were in peaceful seisin of such fourth penny in times past until Simon de Greye, when he had the custody of the castle and town during the disturbance in the realm, detained such fourth penny from them of his own motion and will' (*Calendar of close rolls 1279--88*, 152--3). (The 'fourth penny' means every fourth penny, i.e. a quarter share; the 'water'

means the river.) There is some confusion here, and my note just made things worse. It was Richard de Grey who 'had the custody of the castle and town during the disturbance in the realm', from June 1264 till August 1265. Simon de Creve did also have custody for a time, but not till several years later, from April 1272 till September 1274. These facts can all be established from the entries relating to the farm of Rochester on the exchequer rolls, about which I hope to say something more elsewhere.

(32b) an employee of Cubitt's. Not so. Hughes was working for the contractors, the firm of Fox and Henderson, not for Cubitt.

(33b) published straight away. Not so. Hughes's paper did not get printed till 1857.

(34n7) no evidence connecting Yevele with the construction of the new bridge. Wrong. I ought to have known better -- all the more so because Britnell (1994:46) did know better. I was overlooking a document which, even though the words 'Rochester' and 'bridge' are not to be found in it, is sure to represent the first recorded step towards the building of the stone bridge at Rochester. It is dated 4 Aug 1387 (*Calendar of close rolls 1385--9*, 430--1). As Britnell saw, this document gives us the names of the contractors who were going to design and build the new bridge: Henry Yeveley (d 1400) and his partner John Clifford (d 1417).

(35n25) I know scarcely anything about him. I am, happily, not quite so ignorant now.

(35n28) There was no 'reprint'. The first and only edition of this volume was begun in 1851 but not completed till 1857.

(35n31) The last pile was completed -- to the point that it was ready for its filling of concrete -- in Feb 1852. There was a tour of inspection on 26 Feb, followed by a lunch at the Crown Hotel (*Times*, 27 Feb 1852, 6).

(35n32) Refer rather to the first edition: Smiles 1861:240.

(37b) transverse planking. If Essex saw nothing wrong with this, I ought not to disagree. But I wonder whether it would not be preferable for the planking in the deck of a bridge to be laid longitudinally.

(42b) I hope no one takes this viaduct too seriously. The point is that there was some sort of structure -- a 'bridge' (in some sense of the word), not a causeway -- connecting the western bridgehead with terra firma. What it looked like is anybody's guess.

(47n27) But this assumption is not as straightforward as I supposed. If the modern esplanade on the Strood side of the river can be taken to determine the site of bishop Gilbert's wharf (as I think it probably can), that gives us an approximate fix on the site of the western bridgehead. If the eastern bridgehead cannot be much more than 500 feet distant from that (for reasons given in the text), the site of it must now be well out into the river. In other words, my assumption seems to entail a further assumption -- that the width of the river has increased by some considerable margin, through erosion of the right bank. I am not sure that I am happy with that idea. But perhaps the alarm expressed on this point in 1355 was not so exaggerated after all.

Supplementary bibliography

Except for a corrected version of the entry for Hughes's paper, references given in Flight 1997 are not repeated here.

Brooks 2000 N. Brooks, 'Rochester Bridge, AD 43--1381', in N. Brooks, *Communities and warfare 700--1400* (London and Rio Grande, 2000), 219--65. -- Brooks 1994 reprinted, with a postscript (256--7).

Brooks 2006 N. Brooks, 'Rochester, A.D. 400--1066', in T. Ayers and T. Tatton-Brown (eds.), *Medieval art, architecture and archaeology at Rochester* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 28, 2006), 6--21.

Flight 1997 C. Flight, *The earliest recorded bridge at Rochester* (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 252, Oxford, 1997).

Flight 1998 C. Flight, 'The earldom of Kent from c.1050 till 1189', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 117 (1998), 69--82.

Flight 2010 C. Flight, *The survey of Kent: documents relating to the survey of the county conducted in 1086* (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 506, Oxford, 2010).

Hughes 1857 J. Hughes, 'On the pneumatic method adopted in constructing the foundations of the new bridge across the Medway, at Rochester', *Minutes of proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, 10 (1851--7 for 1850--1), 353--65.

Kilburne 1659 Richrd Kilburne, *A topographie, or survey of the county of Kent* (London, 1659).

Newman 2009 J. Newman, 'Aylesford, Eccles and Snodland', in A. Hann, *The Medway Valley: a Kent landscape transformed* (Chichester, 2009), 99--127.

Smiles 1861 S. Smiles, *Lives of the engineers*, vol. 1 (London, 1861).

C.F. March 2018.