

## Rochester Cathedral from the Top of the Roof

We climbed until we came out on to the roof overlooking the River Medway and an ex-USSR submarine parked somewhat incongruously on it (river, not roof). Stone turrets and the warm honey-coloured stone of the spire soared above us. This was a tour of the roofs of Rochester Cathedral, led by its Architect and Fount of All Knowledge, John Bailey.



As one who had come to a fear of heights quite late in life (yes, I blame my parents for a clamber over some massive boulders!), I had been wondering whether this would be a sensible excursion. It was. With no nightmares of hanging in space, it was an enormously interesting and enjoyable visit. We stooped underneath huge beams supporting the belfry which had to be imported from Scandinavia since we'd run out of them ourselves - too many ships-of-the-line over the centuries - and found ourselves finally inside the bell ringing chamber just as the massive clock beside us peeled three o'clock.

It is very unusual for a county to have more than one cathedral in it but Kent, of course, is blessed with two.



Though, as John was keen to explain, not everybody has always felt blessed and the rivalry between Canterbury and Rochester has over the centuries frequently led to animosity, not to speak of feuding.



Gundulf (c. 1024 - 1108, and therefore of a ripe old age when he died) was a Norman monk who came over to England following the Conquest in 1066. A friend of the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, he was appointed Bishop of Rochester in 1077 and began reconstruction work on the cathedral shortly afterwards. He was described as “competent and skilled at building in stone” and was asked by William to oversee the construction of the White Tower, the Keep of the Tower of London, then the castle at Colchester and also the St Leonard’s Tower at Malling Abbey.

Gundulf is recognised as the first King’s Engineer and therefore as the “father of the Corps of Royal Engineers”, military engineers of the British Army. With the Royal School of Military Engineering being situated nearby in Chatham, the links between the Corps of Royal Engineers and Rochester Cathedral remain strong to this day.