

Patron: **Tim Coghlan**

**Autumn  
2011**



**The Raymond & Nutfield  
News**

## Editorial

The boats move on into autumn with a very successful summer behind them. You'll see from the latest batch of photographs that Raymond is looking as fine as can be – and by the end of this winter Nutfield will look every bit as spic and span.

You can find full progress reports to date in this newsletter, along with reports on the boats' journeyings through the season. Also featured, we present the second chapter in Chris's research into the origins of boat names and another reminiscence from Mike about the "good old days" boating on the BCN – it sounds pretty dangerous to me!!

I hope that doesn't put anyone off volunteering to come and help/crew on Raymond and Nutfield – these days Health & Safety regs. apply! If you'd like to join in the contact details are below. Additionally, Jeremy now has our website fully up, running and regularly updated – which illustrates that a historic boat society can still 'cut' it in the modern world.....

**Jenny Freeman**

### To Contact Us :-

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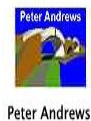
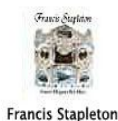
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## **Treasurer's Report**

I am very pleased to report that, in general, the 'better than expected' takings we enjoyed at Northampton and Rickmansworth have continued throughout the events season. Part of this may be due to the nice weather we had but it seems that many people are interested in the old boats and have given us good support. Despite attending fewer shows this year, our takings for the year will be better than 2010.

We did have to spend some money on Nutfield's insurance survey and maintenance in the dock, and our printing expenses will be higher than usual. In the last year, the cost of diesel for Nutfield has increased by over 20%; fortunately she only uses about 1.25 litres per hour but it is still an unavoidable running cost.

Thanks to everyone who puts their £1/day into the Crew Donations Pot or contributed useful supplies. For those who forgot, please do it next time.

Last time I appealed for a low wattage tube heater for Raymond, and I'd now like to thank the kind member who has donated a suitable heater to us. Keeping Raymond warm and dry all winter really makes a difference.

**Marty Seymour**

## **Membership**

Membership remains steady at just over 70. Our Trustees are keen to increase this, with several initiatives under way. Can you help? Perhaps you have a friend who is interested in boats and canal history who you can introduce?

If you want to renew but find getting out the chequebook a bit tiresome, why not set up a Standing Order? Just let me know – via the website or drop me a line – and I'll send you a form. It really helps me when you renew promptly!

**Marty Seymour**

### **Notice of Annual General Meeting**

The Annual General Meeting of the Board of Trustees of The Friends of Raymond will take place in the executive suite at Braunston Marina on Sunday January 22nd 2012, commencing at 2.00pm.

All members are welcome to attend and take part. Refreshments are likely to be taken in a local hostelry after the meeting.  
Steve Miles, Chairman



A glimpse of history from our Friends of Raymond picture archive.

Source of photograph not known, unfortunately.

### **NUTFIELD AND RAYMOND ON TOUR**

"Nutfield" and "Raymond" left Braunston marina on Thursday 28th April to travel down South to Northampton to attend the IWA National Campaign Rally from Saturday 30th April to Monday 2nd May.

Following on from the Northampton event the boats were moved to Cosgrove. I joined the boats at Wolverton on Wednesday 18th May when they were on their way from Cosgrove to Rickmansworth. The crew on this journey were Steve Miles, Richard Scarff, Merv Brookes, Les Houghton and Robin Bishop. We reached Slapton on Wednesday, Boxmoor on Thursday and arrived at Rickmansworth early in the afternoon on Friday. There were many other boats that had already arrived there for the Rickmansworth Canal Festival that was taking place over the coming weekend.

We wended the boats in the winding hole just before Tesco's then reversed them to their Number 11 mooring position alongside the towpath. "Nutfield" was moored outside of "Raymond". We then started to get them ready for the Festival. The Sales Stand was set up and operated here from inside "Raymond". There was a constant stream of "through traffic" of the general public as well as visitors to the event itself. We had a lot of interest taken in "Raymond" and there were many people who came on board to see inside her cabin.

There was the usual large number of ex-working boats present. These included "Corona", "Nuneaton" and "Brighton" who were resplendent in their new highly visible new paint jobs.. Together with all the other boats attending the Festival there were plenty of boats to view. In addition to all the boats present there were many side stalls and a fun fair in the nearby Aquadrome as usual.

Following on from this event the next move was to start the return journey from Rickmansworth and travel North as far as Boxmoor. We left Rickmansworth at 7.30am on Monday 23rd May. The crew on this return journey were Steve Miles, Robin Bishop, Richard Scarff, Merv Brookes and Les Houghton. We reached Boxmoor at 2.30pm the same day. The boats were moored up alongside the towpath just above Lock 64. We had arrived here to attend the Boxmoor Canal Festival, which was organised by the Wendover Arm Trust, which was happening over the following weekend.

The boats were then left here for a few days when we all went home. I returned to Boxmoor on Friday 27th May to prepare the boats for this event.

Our mooring was near the entrance to the Festival site from the towpath and also the trip boat was operating from right in front of us. The Sales Stand was set up and operated here from inside "Raymond" and her back cabin was open for people to come on board to see inside.

We left Boxmoor late Monday afternoon this time heading for Stoke Bruerne. We reached Berkhamsted on Monday and Linslade on Tuesday. The crew on this section of the journey were Robin Bishop, Richard Scarff, Merv Brookes, Les Houghton and Roger Golder.

On Wednesday we picked up Mike Bowley on route at Soulbury Top Lock. We arrived at our final destination late in the afternoon on Wednesday. The boats were left moored up in the Stoke Bruerne long pound in readiness to attend the Stoke Bruerne Gala Weekend and Canal Festival which was being held over the weekend of 11th and 12th June.

Following on from the Stoke Bruerne event "Nutfield" and "Raymond" were then moved back "home" to Braunston marina the journey starting out early on the Monday morning. Our boats had been away from their home mooring for nearly seven weeks whilst attending all these events. They got good exposure and helped us to take a lot of money at all of these events as well.

**Robin Bishop**



## NUTFIELD IN THE DOCK

No, it's okay, our motor boat hasn't been prosecuted for anything! This year, we took advantage of the occasional free docking we get by the generosity of Tim Coghlan at Braunston Marina to have the Nutfield re-surveyed. This was due after four years since its last, and was particularly important this time around as we have had a lot of work done on the hull since 2007 – and if we are to try for a loaded trip in 2012, we have to convince the insurance company that the boat isn't going to sink!

Barrie Morse, who surveyed the Raymond two years ago, attended on Saturday October 8th and spent most of the day crawling over the boat, poking, prodding and hammering. The upshot is that we have a pretty-well clear bill of health – there are a few very small areas of corrosion still present which will need attention, but Barrie is happy that these are of only minor consequence and will not prevent us from running the boat loaded if the opportunity arises. We will need to have this small amount of welding done at the Nutfield's next docking, in two years time, if not before.



Pictures: Robin & Graham Clearing the Decks;      Robin on the Fore-End;  
Tom Supervising Dad!      Pete Decorating

Otherwise, a lot was achieved over the weekend. Nutfield was completely reblacked, and some other paintwork done including the slide hatch and pigeon-box, fore and counter decks, and most of the running gear. The inside of the counter was rubbed down and painted, protecting the new steel added there by Steve Priest when it was rebuilt, and much of the interior of the hold was recoated with red oxide (until we ran out of paint!). Pete Copeland finished the redecoration of Raymond's stands, and he has taken Nutfield's deckboard and stands home with him to repaint over the winter. Two of Raymond's cross-beams were repainted as well, where they had suffered during the season's trips. Once again, a very useful weekend's effort by all concerned – my thanks go to all who came along to help: Robin Bishop, Roger and Diana Golder, Pete Copeland, Nick Scarcliffe, Ray Robinson, Graham Swallow, Chris M Jones, Chris R Jones, Mike Freeman, Brian Seymour and Jenny Freeman. Also to Marty Seymour for laying in the required supplies – and a special thank-you to young Tom Jones for being so ready to get stuck in with a paintbrush!

Something else came of the weekend too: The trustees have been trying recently to clarify the way in which we thank and refer to those who support us, and we are now listing those who provide substantial cash or material support as 'Sponsors' – the like of Braunston Marina and so on. We have been looking to appoint at least one 'Patron', a figure-head type of figure who gives us moral if not financial support, a known name that people will relate to. I was able to speak to Tim Coghlan at the docking, and he has said that he will be delighted to be shown as a patron of the Friends of Raymond. As someone who is known pretty well throughout the inland waterways, his name carries some weight with most of those who come into contact with us, and will add credibility to our presence. We are looking to approach one or two other 'names' – bright ideas welcome

**Steve Miles**

## **NUTFIELD UPDATE**

I'm pleased to be able to tell you all that things are moving forward with the restoration of the Nutfield. As I write, I and a few volunteers are preparing to take the boat to Ivy Bridge Marine for the steelwork that is needed on the engine-room. This will involve a long and arduous journey – all the way from Braunston Marina to Braunston Bottom Lock.....

Roger Farrington of Ivy Bridge has agreed to tackle the work we need, which primarily involves the replacement of some steelwork and the repair by patching-in of other parts. The side panels of the engine-'ole will be patched up, and the doors retained;

the two strips which act as supports for the roof at front and rear will be replaced as they are beyond repair, as will the steel channel which spans the back end of the hold. The front and rear bulkheads will be inspected and repaired as necessary. That leaves the roof!

Roger is happy for us to tackle some work ourselves, and the intention is that we will remove the roof panel, which is bolted in place, when we deliver the boat to his yard. He will allow us space to work on it under his canopy, and we will organise a couple of work-parties in the coming months to strip back, de-rust and repaint the roof panel. Structurally, it is quite sound, but if we find any really dodgy bits, he will do a patch-up job for us! It can then be replaced, with nice fresh bolts, when the rest of the work is done.

I am also looking to having the cabin reskinned over the winter – James Griffin at Wyvern Shipping has offered to do this, and throw in a complete repaint for the whole boat, but he cannot take it on until May next year as his dock is occupied by the boats of his own hire fleet until then. Another possibility has come to my attention, which I am pursuing, but I cannot give any details at the moment – the advantage would be that we could have the reskinning done sooner, and then take up James's offer of the repaint in May. I intend to look for grants to help with the cost of these works, and if enough money is in the kitty, I would like to see the very rotten gunwales also replaced – watch this space!

I feel quite excited personally – with 2012 being the 50th anniversary of Blue Line Canal Carriers, it would be really good to have a pair of smart, presentable boats for the occasion – Tim Coghlan, our Patron, has said that he intends to promote our anniversary at the Braunston Historic Boats gathering next June, and it will be great if we can support that by being well turned out!

**Steve Miles**

### **The Boats names of the Samuel Barlow Company.**

We have seen in the previous article that our boats- Raymond and Nutfield – were named by their respective builders in line with the current naming policy of those companies. But did companies such as Barlows have strict corporate naming policies like modern day haulage companies or was the whole process more haphazard?



One issue to point out right from the start is that boat names often changed when the boats were sold on to another owner to tie in with the naming style of the new owner. These name changes were registered with local authorities – in theory - under the 1877 Canal Boats Act and most registers survive in our Canal Archives so tracing changes through a boat's working life is possible, though often time consuming.

Another issue to think about is who actually controlled what was painted on the side of the boat? In large companies like Grand Union canal Carrying Company (GUCCC) or Fellows Morton Clayton (FMC) there were company directors and boat managers to manage the company fleet. They would commission new boats from yards such as Nursers at Braunston and provide the new boat names in line with the company style such as Rivers, animals or Towns. As boats were sold or disposed of newer boats may follow the naming policy of a particular theme or a new theme would be started. Second hand boats bought into the fleet would be renamed in line with the Company style as this would be of little expense when repainting the whole of the cabin .

The earliest recorded boat names of the Samuel Barlow fleet like many smaller boat owners were based around members of the family. Early boats included Thomas ( his brother), Mary Ann ( his wife) and Ellen ( his sister). The family theme continued during the 1880s as the fleet expanded with the move to Tamworth to exploit the growing Warwickshire coalfield. Barlows concentration on family names may have been around the closeness of Samuel to his siblings and their children, many being employed in various capacities in the business.

However there were obviously only so many names that were available and having more than one boat with the same name would not have made sense in trying to manage the expanding fleet. Old boats were replaced with new ones and name such as Thomas, Ellen, Samuel and Emma continued to be used.

Following Samuel's death in 1894 his sons and widow took over the management of the business and a change of emphasis took place with an expansion in business, wider range of contracts and new boat purchase. From 1900 the boat names with family connections continued but various other themes began to be used including Barlow's religious beliefs providing names of Faith, Hope and Charity a well as their locality, the boat named Glascote being registered in 1893.

The increased demands on the canal system during the First World War resulted in the Barlow brothers forming a Limited Company in August 1916 and with it a Board of management was established who would direct a more structured approach to the fleet managemet..

**Christopher Jones**

Chris, Chris and Robin at Atherstone



Leaving Buckby Top Lock

Tea Time!



Back Home

## AUTUMN TRIPS

The latter part of the year is always quieter for those of us who take the boats out to waterway events – not that there is any shortage of places we could go! But much of what happens around September and October centres around Birmingham, and that is an area that is harder for us to get to, not just because of distance but because it has to involve a lot of narrow-lock working which is slow and hard with a pair.

This year, we did make two forays out of Braunston late in the season – to Huddlesford for the Lichfield and Hatherton canals event in September, and then to Stoke Bruerne for the excellent Village at War festival in October.

The trip to Huddlesford was one of those which might be best forgotten! Merv Brookes, Robin Bishop and myself set off from Braunston on the Thursday morning, enjoying a warm sunny day cruising up the northern Oxford Canal. But it all fell apart at Hillmorton – we had expected problems because of a shortage of water, but BW's decision to padlock half of the paired Hillmorton locks without telling anyone had led to the build-up of quite a queue, so that we lost about an hour and a half there. And yours truly managed to make a total pigs-ear of getting the pair around the 180-degree turn at Hawkesbury Junction... Instead of stopping at Atherstone, at the top of the locks, we ran out of daylight before we got to Hartshill and stayed there overnight.

The next morning we set off in good time, and were met at Atherstone locks by Ray Robinson – with only a couple of boats in front of us, we made quite a good start down the flight and soon met both Chris Jones's walking up to meet us. With such a good crew, the rest of the descent went pretty well – but even below the locks, the water level was quite low, maybe six to eight inches down, and the cut is pretty shallow there anyway... The Nutfield was struggling quite a lot of the way – drawing about three feet under power, it felt as if we were ploughing for some of the time! Down Glascote, and we got there at last.

The event itself was quite successful for us, despite a rather less than perfect mooring spot – and the weather was kind, only raining about ten minutes after the show had finished! Knowing that we were going to face problems on our return journey, we set off as quickly as we could once everything was packed up, and made it to the top of Glascote locks that night. An excellent meal in a local curry house, and we got away in good time the following day. At Atherstone, we were amazed to get straight into the locks without delay! A good run uphill, but we were ploughing again along the pound above.

This time, the turn at Sutton's went much better – I actually got them swinging around perfectly, if I do say so myself! The only problem was when I found the Flamingo, an

ex-Willow Wren boat, blocking the basin outside the Greyhound, waiting for their turn to get into the stop-lock... A frantic stop, with the pair nicely jack-knifed under the bridge – but we didn't even touch the Flamingo. There were about four boats there, including the one in the lock, so it was a while before our turn came – we'd been waiting in sunshine, but as Robin, Merv and Neil Hankin bow-hauled the butty into the lock, the Heavens opened.

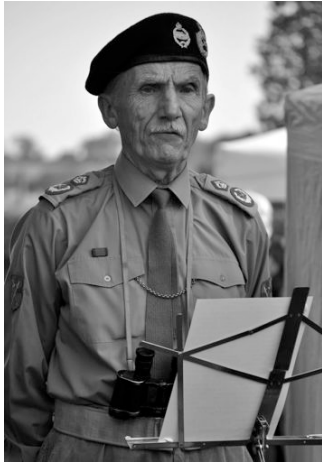
A night outside the Elephant & Castle at Tusses Bridge, and another curry courtesy of the local take-away, and we had a very pleasant trip back the following day in warm autumn sunshine. We even saw no delay at Hillmorton, although the duplicate locks were still padlocked – not so the poor devils waiting at the top! I counted sixteen boats in the queue as we sailed off into the distance.

Stoke Bruerne's Village at War event is possibly the most enjoyable weekend we go to – all the events we do are great in their own way, but to spend a weekend surrounded by the kind of enthusiasm and involvement that takes the village over during this one is something special. It seems that the entire village gets involved, dressing up in 1940s fashions – we even have the august presence of Mr Churchill himself, and this year he was joined by the newly-promoted Field Marshall Montgomery! The army were there, with a lot of their impressive vehicles, and the local home guard were doing their usual fine job of guarding the facilities and keeping up morale – the Royal Air Force were represented not only by some airmen and officers, but also by a lone Lysander which treated us to a flypast on the Sunday afternoon.

That, in fact, was quite a treat, as this one is the only flying example of a Lysander anywhere in the world – and of course the Lysander's contribution to the efforts of SOE and the various resistance movements is well known.

The boating was a pleasure, too – well-known territory for us, of course. Nick Scarcliffe, Robin Bishop, Graham Swallow, Duncan Oxley, Mike Bowley and myself had an easy and enjoyable trip over the summit on the Friday; the Monday return saw Robin take charge with Nick, Graham and Duncan while I and Neil Hankin did our bit to help, lock-wheeling by car at Buckby and Braunston. The only disappointment was an encounter with a difficult 'jobsworth' of a BW man at the top of Buckby who kept us and a lot of other boats waiting for considerably more than the allowed hour while he held lock against us on the pretext of saving water. A situation made even more ludicrous by the total absence of any BW presence at the other end of the summit at Braunston!

Even so, we made it back in reasonable time, and left the boats out on the towpath ready to go into the arm for Nutfield's docking the following weekend.



Pictures taken by Steve at the Stoke Bruerne Village at War Weekend - "Monty", "Churchill" and Lysander.

All photographs in this edition courtesy of Steve Miles and Mike Freeman.

My thanks as always to all of those who turned out to help – not just the boat crews named above, but those who came along to the events to help man the stand and show people around: Roger and Diana Golder, Brian and Marty Seymour, Jeremy and Barbara Cooper, Jenny Freeman. And a special thank-you to Jeremy – I am looking forward to seeing the result of his exploits with the video camera! If I've forgotten anyone, please forgive me, it wasn't intentional – I have a job remembering who I've seen where by the end of our season!

**Steve Miles**

## **Surgery Begins - Fifth of November**

Guy Fawkes day found Nutfield reversing towards the yard of Ivy Bridge Marine, Mike in the hold, Steve on the helm and Richard on the fore-end with a big stick making any necessary navigational modifications. Apart from the noise of the engine it was a quiet, grey, overcast morning. In times gone by our destination used to be the base of "Willow Wren", the wharf sloping towards the canal, the semi-circular brick supports that used to house the tank for fuelling the boats and the supports for the swinging gantry that took the hose over to the boats all still in place today.

All three 'volunteers' had come with their own bags and boxes of tools for the days efforts and once tied up these were collected from Steve's car so that battle could commence. The initial stages were more of an anticlimax as anything in the engine hole that was moveable had to be and was transferred to the hold followed by anything connected to the roof being separated - wiring, engine controls and engine cooling air ducting. Only then was the "fun" able to begin. The main roof retaining bolts had been in position since 1968 when the present engine had been installed. Steve escaped to start the process of putting the clothes across the fore end of the hold; this was probably to escape the hammer blows of Richard and the fumes of burning paint caused by the blow torch being used by Mike inside the engine-room.

Richard's technique was to drill a series of holes through the centre of each bolt head and break it off using a cold chisel and lump hammer, leaving the remaining thread and nut to be knocked through into the engine room below. Meanwhile Mike was attending to the series of retaining bolts that helped keep the roof fixed to the inside frame brackets. These were freed using the blow torch, a screwdriver and wrench.

Last but not least there were a couple of places where sections had been welded in due to the levels of corrosion that had taken place over the years. A lot of sparks from the grinding wheel later the roof was ready for removal, or so we thought. The junction between the roof had been bedded onto fore, rear and sides with a sealing mastic tape. This and copious quantities of rust appeared to be the problem, but after much prising and banging to release the trapped rust. Finally it turned out that the man in the engine hole had missed one of the smaller retaining bolts. After this had been dealt with and the help of Roger Farrington the roof finally allowed itself to be carried into the covered dock.

Once this had been achieved we were allowed a tea break that was becoming long overdue. All that remained was to put things away and weather proof the engine 'ole against the weather - tidying up under way, Brian, who had been otherwise occupied (sensible fellow!) during the morning, arrived to lend a hand. This achieved, Brian headed for home complete with a huge pack of sugar provided by Richard, to be

passed on to Irene for next year's jam and marmalade, and a weary three made their way back to their homes, pausing to mark the days activities with pints at "The Galleon" in Old Wolverton.

The boating season may be over, but there is plenty of activity still taking place!

**Mike Freeman**

### **The Marl Hole Run - A Last Traffic on the BCN**

Having been on several canal trips in cruisers, fallen out and made up with cruising partners, I decided that the answer was having a boat of my own.

After investigations I discounted wooden joey boats, composite day boats and a big Woolwich and settled for a River Class "Blue Top" butty that was built in 1961 by E C Jones of Brentford. There was proof that it had worked commercially in the remnants of grain that were to be found beneath the Shuts (floor boards to the non-boaters). Indeed, it is possible it may have worked on the grain traffic from Brentford to the Whitworth flour mills on the River Nene at Wellingborough.

The boat in question was found high and dry on the dock of "Les Allen & Sons" at Oldbury, having had a counter stern formed under the butty stern for its owner, who had died before the work was completed, and was now awaiting a new owner. The boat was 'EXE'. There was an engine to find, a superstructure to build + the "abuse" of the "voluntary effort" of numerous hapless acquaintances and the forging of friendships that last to this day.

The Allen's yard was located on the old main line of the BCN between Whimsy Bridge and Five Star Bridge, on the towpath side and opposite to the entrance to the Oldbury Loop that was the water supply for the "London Steel Works", which were situated there at that time. The entrance to the yard was off Churchbridge between a non-conformist chapel and a rather large black corrugated building. At first sight one was entering a Lorry Park and only on turning left was the canal arm to be seen – as well as a faded sign that confirmed one had found the Allen's yard.

The year was 1969, "James", a wooden day boat, was being repaired for the Birmingham & Midland Canal Carrying Company and the first steel pleasure boat built



by the Allens was tied up at the entrance to the arm. Looking up and down the canal from the yard there were abandoned narrowboats on both banks as far as the eye could see. They were there due to the rapid decline in canal traffic, their owners either going out of business or becoming road hauliers. Over the years a fair amount of my time was spent at the yard for construction work, alterations and as a mooring base and during this time I met several of the names that have now passed into canal folklore – but this is not the main point of this tale.

If not too busily engaged in boat repair, modification, restoration, conversion, etc. one could see that when the boats floating in the arm tried to move towards the canal a short time later a motor boat would pass by towing one or two day boats – in one direction down in the water and in the other empty. There was something strange about their appearance. The difference was that the visible insides of the boats were a yellowish-off-white colour rather than the usual red oxide or rust. Strange.

When the Exe was finally in the water with means of propulsion interesting things came to light, literally. Dependent on the number of boats in the arm and tied up outside it was a work of art to enter or leave. A “blip” of the throttle was often needed and if the boat was stern on to the towpath at the time then there would be a cascade of sparks worthy of bonfire night. The sparks or flashes of fire were in fact burning specks of elemental white phosphorus whose source was the three tall towers of Albright & Wilson’s chemical works, which dominated the locality.

Elemental phosphorus exists in two forms: red, which is to be seen on the end of match sticks, and white – which spontaneously catches fire on contact with air. This has been seen in war films of the Vietnam War. Albright & Wilson refined phosphorus from its ore using electric furnaces and no sooner had they got the phosphorus than they burnt it; the resultant oxides passed up the tall towers, condensing on the walls and chains, and rotated against the walls knocking the oxides to the bottom where they could be collected. These phosphorus oxides are the basic starting material for many products that we use every day, from detergents, through rust removers to cola drinks. So this was all very clever but there were flaws in the scheme of things. The first of these was that not all the phosphorus burnt, so the gases leaving the tower were fed through a lime slurry in a large tank to catch the remaining particles of unburnt phosphorus.

What to do with this dangerous by-product and where does canal traffic come into this? The answer is now.

The large tank was in fact a stanked off end of the canal arm where Albright & Wilson had their works. The arm, known as “The Chemical Arm” is situated towards Smethwick just before the locks that lead up to the Titford Pools. Environment, Health & Safety were hardly part of public awareness so the practice was to tip them down

old mine shafts and into old marl holes. Both the source and the destinations were connected by the canal, and boats were available for the transport. The next flaw was that the stanked off arm would overflow into the canal and, almost worse, the boats were paid by the trip and it seems that on occasion the murky cargos would be pumped out of the boats as they travelled – thereby shortening the time for a round trip.

Whatever the reasons, the canal for miles around was a weak, phosphoric acid solution; grass didn't grow, fishes didn't swim and ducks didn't quack. However, were one to drop iron or steel into the water and retrieve it later, rather than rusty it would be shiny and clean.

The quantity of phosphorus in the canal gave rise to the reality of a "canal being on fire". Fuel spillages were sometimes set alight due to the phosphorus that was present, giving rise to the unlikely spectacle of the canal on fire. It used to be said that if a dog fell in the canal in those parts it would be good as dead as its fur would catch fire when it came out.

At the time that I bought Exe the slurry boats would probably pass twice a day. A motor would be towing one, sometimes two, day boats on a short line. Just outside the arm a wooden day boat had slipped its moorings and sat on the bottom near the main channel, leaving just over a boat's width between itself and the boats that were still moored to the bank. Dependent on the time of day the steerer of the motor, who also made the tea, would steer through the passage between the sunken boat and its moored neighbour. The mug of tea for the dayboat steerer was placed on the stern of one of the stationary boats, to be collected as the dayboat passed by. Sometimes, if one was passing the Chemical Arm, Matty's Motor could be seen reversing up the arm to collect another load.

Production of phosphorus at Oldbury stopped in 1972 and so the traffic had to as well. The boats could be seen for some time tied up in Alfred Matty's Coseley Depot, their holds still a distinctive off-white. This traffic was probably the last regular contract on the narrow canals, running for the best part of two years longer than the coal traffic from Atherstone to Southall.

Today there is little sign of the Chemical Arm – just a stub leading to the Motorway that passes overhead on stilts. Clues can still be found – move the screen to the right and you will find the canal and the remaining arms that comprised the Allens Yard can still be seen, complete with some moored boats. These will be gone before too long as the family haulage firm that owns the site is selling up and intends to infill the remaining arms to increase the parking space and so the realisable asking price.

The steel works that were opposite relocated and then closed. The site became a "Homebase" DIY Store and is now home to Mecca Bingo. Follow the canal towards Birmingham and as the motorway approaches the canal there are two short inlets, the second of which was the Chemical Arm. It is possible to follow its course, now infilled, towards the site that was Albright & Wilson, now cleared and redeveloped. They ceased the phosphorus production at Oldbury to move the operation to Canada. Things did not go well and the firm ceased trading. However, there is now canal edge grass, fish, ducks and Brent Geese.

For this to come about a mammoth clear up was required. British Waterways tugs pulled aeration tools through the silt on the canal bed to burn out the phosphorus and later the canal was dredged from the junction near the Black Country Museum to the top of Smethwick locks. But before any of this could take place all the old boats had to go and it seems that B.W. had a good idea who owned which; they were given the option of paying Alan "Caggy" Stevens to salvage and dispose of them or they would do the salvage and present a somewhat larger bill. Unsurprisingly all the boats went, including those deemed impossible to move. A tribute to the skills and resourcefulness of BCN boatmen.

The name of Albright & Wilson lives on in Australia, where a subsidiary still survives.

**Mike Freeman**

**And finally,**

## **Christmas Shopping!**

**Please remember to put all your  
Internet shopping through**

**[www.easyfundraising.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk)**

Raymond gets a donation from all  
purchases and it costs you nothing.  
Please see our website for more information.

**Have a very happy festive season everyone!**



Getting Wet!

And into the Hole.....

