

Friends of Raymond



Patron: Tim Coghlan

Autumn 2013



The Raymond and Nutfield News

Editorial

This has been another very successful season and RAYMOND & NUTFIELD have again traversed many miles of our canal network attending a wide spectrum of events. Both boats are looking smarter than ever – this time NUTFIELD has spent some extra time in the dock – you can find full details inside.

Our Treasurer (Pete Copeland) informs me that our finances are in good order – all bills as received are paid, our income has covered all expenses and we have not had to touch our capital! Our Membership Secretary (Barbara Evans Rees) reports that we have gained another 10 new members taking our membership up to 104. Clearly, this has been another great year for The Friends of Raymond.

It has had its tragedies though. Thanks you to everyone who sent us their memories of Richard Scarff. For those who missed our last newsletter – Richard was one of our most hardworking and esteemed members who passed away, quite suddenly, this summer. He is greatly missed and in this issue we are proud to share some memories and pictures.

ps. We could have a competition here – how many people (& dogs!) can you name in the photograph at the top of page 10?

Jenny Freeman

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EXERCISE, FRESH AIR AND ENJOYMENT ON OFFER!

You all know that most of our 'boating season' is taken up moving our boats from place to place and showing them off to the general public at any number of waterway events. Those of us who are involved in this I believe all derive a huge amount of pleasure and satisfaction, both from the boating and the interaction with our numerous visitors.

So now I'm offering all of you the chance to join in this merriment! We are always ready to welcome new volunteers to our 'active' ranks; it doesn't matter if you have limited experience of the canals, or even none at all! All new crew members begin under the supervision of one of our experienced skippers, and we're prepared to offer as much training as you want to accept, on the job, so to speak. The same applies to anyone who is eager to help out at events – you may not know too much about our boats and their history, but we can teach you, and it takes no special skill to help with our sales stall, or simply talking to people as they pass by about the canals.

So if you're looking for something to do through the summer months, and fancy a lot of fresh air and the chance to meet a lot of new people, get in touch! Either with me or better, perhaps, with our volunteer co-ordinators, Roger and Diana Golder. We are always glad of more help and support, and this is an opportunity for you to help us in what we believe is a very important and valuable activity – the history of our canals, now that the carrying era is long finished, will be forgotten if groups like ours allow it to be. And our boats, as the very last to unload on a long-distance carrying contract, are perhaps the most significant pair available to the public as examples of what the canals were really all about.

Having said all that, can I just say a word to our 'armchair' members too? Please don't feel guilty! We all know that many of you are not in a position to become actively involved in what we do, but that doesn't mean we value your support any the less. Every one of you contributes to the success of the Friends of Raymond, not just with your annual subscription but by simply being there – it is much easier for us to obtain outside support such as sponsorship and donations if we can show a numerically strong membership

Steve Miles



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Grateful thanks to our Patron and Sponsors for their support

Front and Back Cover Photographs by Steve Miles

EVENTS FOR 2014

Following is a list of the waterway events we are proposing to attend during 2014. This will be subject to change as things unfold; but get the dates in your diaries – the boat movements will be fitted around these dates of course, but we'll decide on them nearer the time!

BCBM Open Day	Braunston Marina	April (date TBA)
IWA Northampton Rally	Braunston Marina	May 2-5 th
Rickmansworth Festival	Batchworth Lock	May 18-19 th
Crick Boat Show	Crick Marina	May 24-26 th
Foxton Festival	Foxton Locks	June 21-22 nd
Braunston Historic Boat Show	Braunston Marina	June 28-29 th
Buckingham Canal Soc. Rally	Cosgrove	July 19-20 th
Linslade Festival	Linslade	July 26 th
Blisworth Festival	Blisworth	August 9-10 th

There may well be others, especially later in the year, but we'll see what offers arrive, and how our crewing goes – last year we struggled a bit to cover the necessary trips and events. With that in mind, it is possible that some of our boat movements this time might take place over weekends – we'll keep you all posted!

As always, we would love to see any of you less active members who are able to come along to an event and meet us – as I've said elsewhere, we do appreciate our 'armchair' members, and it is always grand to put faces to the names in our membership list. I promise not to coerce you into a job! Unless you want me too, of course?

Steve Miles

NUTFIELD AND RAYMOND ON TOUR

The report in the previous newsletter covered the events that the boats attended earlier in the year. This report follows on from that one and completes the rest of this year.

The boats left Braunston marina on Saturday 6th July to travel down South to Cosgrove. The crew on this journey were captained by Nick Scarcliffe. This was in readiness to attend the Buckingham Canal Society Lock Ransom at Cosgrove which was taking place over the weekend of 13th-14th July.

We had our usual mooring spot which was a short distance along from below the lock. The boats stayed at Cosgrove for a few days afterwards.

Nick Scarcliffe, Merv Brookes, Robin Bishop and Mike Bowley were the crew when the boats were moved onwards from Cosgrove to Linslade on Friday 26th July to attend the canal festival there on the Saturday.

The boats headed back to Blisworth on Sunday where they arrived later on the same day.

This was to get them ready for being present at the Blisworth Canal Festival on 10th-11th August. The crew on this occasion were Nick Scarcliffe, Robin Bishop, Merv Brookes and Christine Thompson.

To get the boats ready for the Festival I returned to them on Friday 9th.

As on previous occasions this event was well organised and well advertised in advance, including on their own website. Several groups in the village fully supported the event with many activities taking place in various locations around the village. Once again a good number of both trading boats and private ones too were moored all along the towpath. The usual boat trips started out from the same two points as before. We were blessed with good weather again and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves.

Our boats were then moved back "home" to Braunston Marina following on from this event on the Monday. Neil Hankin, Robin Bishop, Peter Copeland, Chris R Jones and Jenny Freeman were the crew this time around.

The Alvecote Historic Boat Gathering at Alvecote Marina on the Coventry Canal was the next event attended on 24th-26th August. Steve Miles, Neil Hankin and Robin Bishop were the crew this time. We left Braunston Marina on Thursday 22nd and by the end of the day made it as far as Hartshill. Chris M and Chris R Jones joined us at Hartshill before we moved off the next morning to assist us down the Atherstone flight of locks. We arrived at Alvecote later that afternoon and we found our mooring location. This event was once again being referred to by some of the boaters as a "mini Braunston". There was again a large number of historic boats in attendance but unfortunately not a great deal of members of the public.

Steve and Robin on the return journey were joined by Mike Bowley at Atherstone bottom lock and Chris M Jones at Atherstone lock 9 to assist us up the Atherstone flight. We reached Hawkesbury by Tuesday evening. Neil Hankin met us at the bottom of Hillmorton locks to help us up the flight. We made it back to Braunston on Wednesday.

The final event of the year that we attended was the Stoke Bruerne "Village at War" weekend on 14th-15th September. The boats left Braunston Marina on Friday 13th September. The crew on this journey were Steve Miles, Neil Hankin, Norman Prior and Robin Bishop. The main attraction, put on by two Spitfire aircraft from the Battle of Britain Display Team on the Saturday at this event, was unfortunately cancelled this year due to bad weather.

On the Monday following the Stoke Bruerne event the journey started early in the morning to move our boats back "home" to Braunston marina. On this final event journey of the year Neil Hankin, Norman Prior and Robin Bishop were the crew.

With the exception of Linslade, the Sales Counter was set up at all these events and operated from inside *Raymond*. At Linslade, due to the height of the towpath, we set up our sales counter on the towpath alongside the boats. At all of the events *Raymond's* back cabin was open for people to come on board to see inside her and see how the working families used to live.

Our previous luck of good takings continued for nearly all of the events that we have attended this year and we have beaten all previous annual records.

Robin Bishop

NUTFIELD IN THE DOCK

No, it's all right, we haven't done anything wrong! This October, once again by the generosity of our landlord and patron, we were able to dock the Nutfield for some essential work (and a lot of less vital but just as important stuff).

The big job was to deal with a few small thin patches on the hull which were spotted by Barrie Morse when he surveyed the hull two years ago. We've been very lucky this year to sign up as a member Dale Howlett – Dale is not only a keen and experienced boater, but a fully qualified welder(!). And so in the dock we had Nick Scarcliffe wielding the angle grinder to cut out the old steel, and Dale following along to weld in the new. They both worked extremely hard all weekend, and we owe them both a big thank-you for the fact that we now have a boat which should continue to float for another 70+ years!

As usual, we had a lot of other volunteers on site too, and a lot of other work was achieved: the regular maintenance that keeps the pair sound and smart, like repainting the running gear – beams, stands, planks, uprights and so on. The graining on Nutfield's roof had a fresh coat of varnish – looking after the new paint on the cabins is an essential, especially the scumbling, as this will deteriorate very quickly if it is allowed to. Graining has an outer covering of varnish, which is subject to damage by UV light, and the only way to prevent this is to rub it down very gently and apply a fresh coat at least every other year. That fits in very nicely with our annual docking, of course!

We now have fresh decoration in true Braunston style on the cabin doors, thanks to the skill and application of our treasurer, Pete Copeland; Ray Robinson performed some contortions to get at and tighten the stern tube, so hopefully less water will find its way into the bilges in future; and we have a new headlamp which we should be able to obtain bulbs for in future, removing one of our potential headaches!

With fine weather, we were also able to achieve a lot of work on Raymond, tied in the arm nearby – again, all the running gear was repainted, along with the top frame inside the hull.

So again our thanks to all those who turned out over the weekend to get tired and grubby – without you all, we couldn't present the smart and efficient public face that is so important to us during the year.

Steve Miles





Nick Cutting Out
The Old

Dale Welding in
The New



and
Pete Copeland
Waxing Artistic

Photographs by Steve Miles

RICHARD J. SCARFF

You will all know by now that earlier this year we lost a stalwart member of the Friends of Raymond in Richard Scarff. To those of you who never knew Richard, it may seem a little odd for us to make such a fuss about the sudden death of one member among the 100+ of you; I hope that maybe reading some of the comments in the tributes that follow might give you an insight into how badly the trust feels his loss.

He was one of the most reliable and skilled skippers we had, when it came to moving the boats; and he was an important, ever-jovial and popular part of our public face at the events and shows we attend. To those of us who knew and worked with him, he was more than that – a delightful companion and a true friend; one of those people who seem to sneak their way into your heart and mind without you quite noticing that they're there.

These tributes were all received when the news of his death broke in July, after I had the sad duty of passing it on with the details of his funeral. There were many others – I have been selective, if only to limit the amount of space taken up here (and the ear-bashing I would otherwise receive from our editor). I hope they mean as much to you as they do to me:

This is devastating news to me. I took Richard on his very first trip on a working narrow boat in April 2005 when we, along with David Blagrove, took NUTFIELD and RAYMOND from Braunston to Paddington in three and a half days. Richard was like an excitable schoolboy and was captivated in the way that two ex-professional boatmen handled a narrow boat pair with ease. Clearly Richard learned a lot and revelled in taking an active part with these boats, especially as he had memories of narrow boats in full time trade on the lower Grand Union Canal. Richard did a few other trips with me and although I have done little boating since July 2007 we stayed in touch and remained firm friends. I last spoke with Richard only a few weeks ago and he was telling me of his plans for his forthcoming retirement. I will miss Richard with all my heart but I am glad I knew him and that I have such fond memories of our boating escapades.

Rest peacefully Richard.

Pete Harrison

Richard was a very kind and generous man. His 'bottomless teapot' was always very welcome at events. He loved boats & boating and treated our pair with immense care and respect. He paid attention to detail and liked to do things properly. He was a bit of a free spirit – viz that diversion up the Crow when he was supposed to be returning the boats straight to base, but perhaps you'd better not mention that... As a volunteer with FoR, he could turn his hand to virtually any task and he was always ready to carry the heavy or awkward items.

Marty Seymour

What a shock and such sad news. We only knew Richard briefly but he was such a friendly, cheeky chap, always laughing and very positive. He will be sadly missed as a reliable volunteer for the boats.

Pete and Jenny Copeland

So sorry to hear about Richard. He was my first captain on FOR in 2010. Definitely knew how to handle the boats and pass this knowledge down to the new recruits. Will really miss him.

Mike Bowley

He really was a terrific supporter of the FoR, and always such fun. It is tragic he did not make retirement, as I know just how he would have spent it. The Friends are indeed the poorer for his going.

I have very special memories of I think the 2004 Jam Ole Run, when Richard lock-wheeled with us all the way from at least Watford to the top of Cowroast - he joining us on his bike. We were keen to get the whole fleet of twelve boats up those thirty plus locks in one day, having started from the Jam Ole at 5.00 am. Each of those locks had to be opened and closed six times as the six pairs worked their way through - so at least 180 openings and closings. My boat was well-crewed with five, and didn't really need me, whereas others were short-handed. So I happily got on my bike to take photos and work the locks with Richard and other free-wheelers who had joined us. It was great fun just keeping the fleet moving, which included the Nutfield crewed by Laura and Peter. I remember it was dark when we finally cleared the top of Cowroast, when Richard told us he was knackered and only just had the energy left to cycle home to Bushey.

The rest of us pushed on into the night and made the bottom of Marsworth by about nine, before calling it a day. The weather was glorious and it was veritably canal boating at its best. In about 1995, Ernie Kendall told me that when they unloaded first thing in the morning at the Jam Ole, they would aim to make top-of-Cowroast that night. We, like him were unloaded, and having got to the bottom of Marsworth, I thought we had sort of equalled him, and with a fleet of 12. Much of this achievement was thanks to Richard's sterling efforts.

Herewith a photo I took of Richard steering the Raymond with Tony Hales in the opening parade of the 2012 Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally :-



Tim Coghlan



Jam 'Ole 2006 - Richard is right in the middle!

Picture from FoR Archive



Richard and Neil

Picture courtesy of Steve Miles



Crew Training Trip, Wigrams, 3rd April 2011

Picture by Chris M Jones



Richard with Jeremy, Robin & Neil

Photographer unknown

I'm saddened to say that I've got commitments down home in Devon. However, I and all my friends will raise a glass in Richard's memory and I'll be picturing the other glasses being raised around the country. He was a super guy with a wicked sense of humour but also with a true sense of duty and a desire to make the lives of those around him better in whatever small way he could.

Duncan Oxley

With great regret I won't be able to make it on Wednesday because of work commitments on the A11; Richard would understand because he used to phone me about it all the time saying "come on hurry up and finish the job." I will miss our long phone calls discussing chainsaws and poaching; rest in peace my friend.

Richard Scarff - A gentle Englishman - An English gentleman

Nick Scarcliffe

This is most sad, for everybody that knew Richard. My sincere sympathy goes to his family and close friends Richard was in fact one of the three first "friends of Raymond" that I met 3 years ago at Ricky when they were struggling to fit the boats into a space far too small for them in front of mine and we had to do quite a lot of pulling and pushing to fit them in. I will always remember the interests that he shared with myself and others especially with the railways and my copy of "The Grove Story" that he read from cover to cover. I also knew Richard outside boating as he was delivering to the Sports Centre where I work. They too are devastated by this news. R I P Richard.

Christine Thompson

Anita was with me when I first got the opportunity to chat for any length of time with Richard and we both got on with him very well. First impressions and gut feeling have served us well over the years - often keeping us in one piece - and he was a solid bloke. He even seemed to appreciate my manner and humour - a rare bird indeed! We were looking forward to meeting up with him again - which were our last words to one another - as we shook hands and said our goodbyes. If ever there were a reminder needed not assume there will be a tomorrow, and to seize the day, here is another.

Norman Prior

We have received a donation of over £160 following the funeral, at the request of Richard's family. It is our intention to have a small brass plaque engraved and fitted in Nutfield's cabin, in his memory – not only did he always favour the motor boat, but his exploits with the Brasso were justly famous! The rest will go towards improving the visitor access and experience on the Raymond, as he was always an advocate of the history of our boats and a great exponent of the 'show-round' at our events.

If I can add one last tale, perhaps one that illustrates just the kind of person Richard was: Once, in the course of conversation, I mentioned my liking for odd pickles, and that I hadn't seen a pickled walnut for many years. I gave that no more thought – but a few weeks later Richard and I were crewing together on the boats, and when we met at Braunston he came up and handed me a carrier bag, saying: 'I found these for you.' Inside was a jar of pickled walnuts.

Steve Miles

And more memories are still coming in :-

RICHARD SCARFF ON “NUTFIELD”

The first time I went boating with Richard was in September 2006 when I set out from Braunston Marina - single handling NUTFIELD to Parkhead. I met up with David Griffin, who helped me down Calcutt and Stockton locks and then met up later with Roger Gelder, who helped me up Hatton locks.

Richard had travelled to Birmingham by train with his bike and then cycled along the canal towpath to meet me on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. I picked him up plus his bike at the northern end of Edgbaston Tunnel on 22.09.2006. That Saturday evening we went for a cruise from Parkhead via Merryhill with Francis Stapleton - to give Richard further tuition on boating techniques with NUTFIELD.

The following year Richard helped me move BELFAST on 02.05.2007, along with Paul Stockwell. In 2008 we were at Parkhead boat gathering again. We left to return to Braunston – on 29.09.2008 – and went up to Tifford Pools to the summit of the BCN. Our route took us straight along the Birmingham Main Line to Farmers Bridge Junction. We went off onto all the loops – Soho, Icknield Port and Ouzells Street – Cruise Them or Lose Them!! Richard had a fascination with the BCN Network and loved to talk about and travel them whenever the opportunity allowed.

On one run from Braunston to the Rickmansworth Canal Festival Richard cycled ahead on the towpath setting the locks for our arrival. At the end of a full day's cycling he observed, "I really do like these boating holidays on my bike!"

Richard must have joined FoR early in 2005 because he helped take the boats to Canalway Cavalcade in May 2005. The crew then were David Blagrove, Pete Harrison and Richard.

Robin Bishop

TALKING ...

There is a fair amount of it goes on, particularly when Raymond is attending one of the many events during the year and people are queuing to be shown around the back cabin or having the niceties of commercial carrying explained.

More talking takes place when two of our Trustees give talks to interested groups around the country, within a reasonable radius of where they live.

Discussion is currently underway about the practicalities of other people giving talks further afield. Before the discussion goes any further we need to know if there are members out there who would be interested in giving talks in their locality. The concept is that a series of pictures, from the archive and members own pictures, would be made available along with a guide line script and a data sheet to help with answers to questions. Dependent on the nature of the group involved, alternative talks might be required.

If there are sufficient people interested then it will need someone to organise the necessary talk materials and liaise with speakers. Therefore if there is anyone interested in doing this vital part of the scheme then they should contact the Committee.

Mike Freeman

BOATBUILDING AT BRAUNSTON WHARF - 1858 to 1958.

RAYMOND was constructed at Braunston Wharf in 1958, and as fate has shown, became the last wooden carrying craft built to serve in the fleet of Samuel Barlow Coal Company Limited. At the time Barlow's were the latest in a succession of boat builders to occupy the wharf for over 100 years.

Boat building was a precarious occupation, dependant on the vagaries of the canal carrying trade, fluctuating patterns of transport and commerce, and even the country's economy. All these factors affected Braunston Wharf over the 100 years leading up to 1958 and after.

The Early Years:

In the mid-19th century it was boat builder James Hughes who rented the site from its owners, the Oxford Canal Company (OCC). He had been there since the early 1840's at least, but in October 1866 aged about 70, he intended to give up the Wharf, and both William Stephenson and Thomas Bradshaw jnr. applied to take it over with Stephenson having first refusal.

William Stephenson was an agent for the Grand Junction Canal Company in the early 1860's, and resided at a house at the Grand Junction Dock just below Braunston bottom lock, on land now occupied by Braunston Boats Limited. Stephenson started working as a boat builder there in February 1865, eventually employing several men and boys. His trade may well have been building and maintaining craft in the Grand Junction Canal Company's own carrying department; a large fleet of horse drawn boats and a small fleet of steamers.

A third boatyard at Braunston was Boswell's Bridge Dock. Thomas Bradshaw jnr. was established there by 1865, and called it Mrs. Boswell's yard, a reference to Mrs. Hannah Boswell who had a brick and tile works in the village during the 1850's and 60's. It was situated on the offside of the Oxford canal just north of bridge 90 known as Boswell's Bridge, where the turnpike road (A45) crosses the canal. The dock had an arm off the main cut, although OS maps show little in the way of buildings on the site.

James Hughes gave up possession of a cottage he built on Braunston Wharf, its garden buildings, dockyard and premises on the 20th April 1866, including a partly built boat on the dock to discharge rent and arrears. He was superseded at the Wharf by William Stephenson now trading in business at both Braunston Wharf and the Grand Junction Dock as a boat builder and coal merchant, and also renting a grain warehouse at Braunston Wharf. He obviously had enough work from the Grand Junction company to keep two docks employed.

Stephenson owned a number of boats such as RUGBY, LIGHTERMAN, PILOT, HERALD, WATERMAN, and one of his boats was said to be a steamer.

By 1875 Thomas Bradshaw jnr. had joined in business with his brother James Edward Bradshaw, trading as T. & J. Bradshaw, and continued as boat builders at Boswell's Bridge dock. Both men had business interests around the area as publicans, general traders, farmers, wheelwrights, coal merchants, general builders and contractors; and also as canal carriers. During 1880-81 they had ten boats registered under the Canal boats Act.

Between 1875 and 1881 they drew some of their coal from Wyken colliery on the northern end of the Oxford canal, both by canal and rail, but not all of it was paid in cash. Some coal was paid for

by barter which in their case was timber, but they were not alone in this as a number of traders did the same with various commodities.

William Nurser was employed as a boat-builder in the early 1870's working for Bradshaw's, but after his request for a pay rise was refused, he temporarily left Braunston to work at High House Dock at Nether Heyford for boat builder William Thompson. Nurser was said to have worked for Stephenson for a time too, but events in the canal carrying trade were to cause a reshuffle of boat building activity in the mid-1870's, which would eventually lead to just one family dominating boat building at Braunston for the next sixty five years.

The Grand Junction Canal Company carrying department had been reducing their carrying operations for some time and eventually ceased carrying on the 1st July 1876, and their boats were sold off. It seems that without this carrying subsidiary providing work to Stephenson he could not remain in business at both Braunston Wharf and the Grand Junction Dock, so he established his own boat building business that year and worked on his own account solely at the Grand Junction Dock. With Braunston Wharf no longer required by Stephenson he vacated it along with the grain warehouse, and so William Nurser applied for the tenancy. The Bradshaw brothers also applied for it too claiming they may have to leave Boswell's Bridge Dock soon, but it was Nurser who was successful with his application.

William Stephenson continued in business at the Grand Junction Dock until 1879, he then quit boat building altogether and moved to Oxford, and set himself up as a coal merchant at Juxon Street Wharf owning two boats.

William Nurser founded his family business at Braunston in 1875, as a publican at the "Champion" nearby. When Braunston wharf was vacated in the following year he took it over on the 25th March 1876, at an initial rent of £8 per annum; much to the annoyance of Bradshaw's. Later the OCC probably thought they made a wise decision choosing Nurser as their tenant, as the boat building and carrying business of Bradshaw's was in trouble in 1881, and William Nurser subsequently also took over Boswell's Bridge Dock too when they eventually left.

Nurser probably only kept Boswell's dock a short time before it was taken over by another boat builder Matthew Evitts, who owned at least one craft named OUR DAISY in 1877. He stayed at the dock until the mid-1890's and later left to work in Burslem, Staffordshire.

The dock was then occupied by Simeon Clay working as a boat-builder around the turn of the 20th century with his two sons James and Harry. He was trading as Simeon Clay and Sons with a second hand boat named MAT, registered in 1901. The Clay family was still working there in 1911 although Simeon was then aged 71, so it is clear that later William Nurser and Sons at Braunston Wharf were to be the only boat building survivors in the district and outlasted all the competition.

Nurser's Domination

Despite others working at Braunston, William Nurser became the main boat builder there during the later years of the 19th century, and after his death in January 1899, his sons William Thomas and Harry Sidney Nurser continued on as surviving partners trading as William Nurser and Sons, with Harry Sidney as the junior partner.

Harry Sidney Nurser died in January 1909, and William Thomas bought out his late brother's

share of the business from his widow, Mrs. Mary Ann Nurser, who was the sole executrix of his property. Now as the principal, William Thomas continued to trade as William Nurser and Sons at Braunston, and continuing to employ his two sons Charles and Frank in the business.

Over the years various alterations were undertaken at the wharf. The Oxford canal engineer did various improvement works at Braunston dock in 1891, including some new buildings. The result of this pushed Nurser's rent at the time up from £12 to £20 per annum, £10 collected on Lady-Day (25th March) and another £10 collected on Michaelmas (29th September).

Nurser's owned a number of boats over the years but were used solely for hire and as change boats, they never operated as carriers like Bradshaw's did. William Nurser's first boat to be registered under the Canal Boats Act of 1877 was HUBERT at Birmingham in June 1879. She was an old boat dating from about 1874 at least. He bought another boat shortly after named DOUGLAS, which he renamed JOHN, and also registered her at Birmingham in October 1879. JOHN's history can be traced back to 1865 through several owners.

They built boats for many different customers from all over the canal system such as Emanuel Smith of Brentford, The Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company of Chester, Brunner Mond and Company Limited of Cheshire, Thomas Clayton (Oldbury) Limited, Henry Seddon and Sons Limited of Middlewich and several others as well as regular docking work for owner-boatmen and more local carriers around the midlands area.

Braunston was a busy place during the Great War with steamers, butties and horse drawn boats coming and going at all hours of the day and night. A lot of their cargoes were munitions and other vital Government war traffic. Nurser's were kept busy too as all boats were expected to be repaired and pressed into service to relieve congested railways. Canals came under Government control in 1917, and they issued an order that if anyone wished to sell a boat, which of course meant boat-builders, the sale could only take place on condition buyers sign a written guarantee that their boat was to be put into service on the canals.

New boats continued to be being built during the War despite the rising cost of living and materials, seventeen in all. The cost of living continued to rise into the early 1920's with just a handful of new boats being built, but when it did eventually fall, the higher costs of transport by canals meant traffic became slack. Although things picked up in 1922 with six new boats being built, Nurser's rent was doubled from £25 to £50 per annum. His health had been poor for some two years and continued after an operation, and this in combination with the bad state of trade in the middle 20's, and his sons Charles and Frank threatening to leave him, he decided to try and sell the business as a going concern. But this was not possible and he had to wind the business up in order to pay off his creditors. His lease on Braunston Wharf was due to expire in June 1929, but asked the OCC to release him from this in February 1927.

The dock closed down early in March 1927 due to lack of trade and his men were out of work. The OCC agreed to Nurser's request and the business was wound up in June 1927 after 51 years at Braunston Wharf. After a bad closing down sale, he was forced to ask the OCC to waive his outstanding rent to help prevent him selling his house to pay off his debts. In order to push his case he commented that over the years he had built a brick office and adjoining storeroom, and concreted the bottom of the dock, which was done at his expense, and to the OCC's advantage. Nurser handed over the dock keys to the OCC's Braunston representative at 10.00 am on the 24th June 1927. This left the dock unused for a short time.

Canal carrier L. B. Faulkner of Leighton Buzzard was interested in taking over the dock but it

turned out that Nurser's sons Charles and Frank together with E.T. Hitchman re-launched the business under their control as Nurser Brothers shortly after in July 1927. Charles dealt with the carpentry and repairs, Frank with the painting and Hitchman was the blacksmith.

Their first new boat was for the Hon. Rupert Craven of Faringdon named JOS'E finished in December 1928. Other customers buying new boats included Fellows, Morton & Clayton Limited of Birmingham, Thomas Clayton (Oldbury) Limited, John Green of Macclesfield, Henry Seddon and Sons Limited, and perhaps most famously Samuel Barlow Coal Company Limited. Nurser Brothers also catered for many boatmen contractors working to Dickinson's mills by selling them second hand craft, and converted several former horse boats to motors, as well as the usual repair and docking work.

Braunston is well known for the standard of the decorative paintwork applied to boats at Braunston Wharf, and it is Frank Nurser who is rightly credited as being the master. His experience by the 1930's must have been tremendous as he was already described as a boat painter in both the 1901 and 1911 census returns. The earliest work I have seen that can be attributed to him is dated September 1920, and is in the T.W. King Collection, but we can only guess what decorative paintwork was like in the latter half of the 19th century in all three Braunston docks. Apart from a few grainy photographs of Daventry registered boats in the Edwardian period, little survives to show the decorative paintwork at the turn of the 20th century.

The Barlow Years:

Nurser Brothers business carried on into the Second World War, but in 1940 both Charles Nurser and E.T. Hitchman wanted to retire, which would leave Frank Nurser on his own to run the firm. Also because of the War, materials had become difficult to obtain, so they sold out to the Samuel Barlow Coal Company Limited on the 1st April 1941. The OCC transferred their tenancy agreement to Barlow's during the summer of 1941, and in July 1947 Barlow's company seal was fixed to a 21 year lease of Braunston Dock from the OCC.

Under the control of Barlow's, work continued with Frank Nurser as manager and with Charles supervising. Apart from all the regular docking work a succession of new motor boats were built for the fleet, then in 1944 the first of a series of butties with just one final new motor IAN in 1947. In all nine new boats were built at Braunston Dock, four motors and five butties, with RAYMOND being the last in 1958.

One of the problems faced by Barlow's at the time was finding enough skilled men to work at the Dock. Some travelled from Barlow's other dock at Hopley's Farm, Glascoate, to provide adequate cover, but during the summer of 1961 difficulties finding enough skilled men, a shortage of boatmen and increased use of lorries, forced Barlow's into disposing of Braunston Dock and the remaining carrying fleet. On the 17th November that year Braunston Dock was sold to Blue Line Cruisers Limited for £10,500; the sale was finally settled on the 12th March 1962.

So after 100 years of continued use Braunston Wharf became the base for the last long distance narrow boat traffic in the midlands run by Blue Line Canal Carriers Limited. It also became the home of both NUTFIELD and RAYMOND as a pair, just as it is to this day, only now as Braunston Marina run by Friends of Raymond patron Tim Coghlan.

Christopher M. Jones © 22.10.2013

A WATERCAN PAINTED BY ARTHUR BRAY

We've recently acquired a number of historical artefacts related to our boats or their crew, and I thought it might be nice to start a series of small features in the newsletter about them. Maybe perversely, I'm going to start with our most recent acquisition!

I had an email from our patron, Tim Coghlan, telling me that he had been offered a watercan that had been painted by Arthur Bray, captain of our pair in their working days; following this up, it seemed as though the story held water (sorry!), so we got our secretary, Robin Bishop, to go and see the man as they live not too far apart. He came back with not only the can but a lovely old handbowl, and their fascinating story:

Their owner was a man by the name of Graham Israel, now in his eighties and on the point of emigrating to the Philippines (!). He had been a keen canal boater in his youth and middle age, and had for many years owned a cabin cruiser by the name of Miss Penny which he normally moored in Aylesbury basin. He had met the Brays a number of times when out and about on the canal; he remembers Rose as a lovely lady, very much the matriarch of the crew. Enjoying the history of the canals, he had bought the handbowl from the lock-keeper at Marsworth top lock in 1964, ready-painted as we see it today. The same man later gave him the watercan – this was unpainted, and Graham kept and used it like that for some time.

But then, in conversation with Arthur, he mentioned that it would be nice to get it painted one day. He thought no more of this, until he got up after a night on the boat one morning in June 1966 to find his water can missing – no-one had seen it taken, and he wrote it off as stolen. A few days later though, he answered a knock on his cabin roof to find Arthur stood on the towpath, can in hand, now fully painted:

'There y'are – painted this oop for yeh.'

He has kept the can all these years, although long 'retired' from the canals; now, he felt it should be somewhere where people could enjoy it. We agreed, and were happy to pay his asking price for what we believe is a unique artefact dating from Arthur Bray's time as captain of our boats. It remains untouched in almost fifty years, its paintwork original if slightly chipped, and we will be proud to display it on Raymond in future.

The handbowl too will be kept on Raymond; although not related directly to our boats it is a nicely painted, original piece – and we were short of one handbowl for the pair anyway!

Steve Miles

PS – can I take this opportunity to put right a common misunderstanding?

What we have is a watercan – NOT a Buckby Can! 'Buckby' cans were much prized by the boaters of old; originating from the shop next to the New Inn at Buckby top lock, their paintwork was recognised as among the finest to be had on the southern canals. Only painted cans from this source are correctly referred to as Buckby Cans – all others are watercans!

SGM

Photographs (by Steve Miles) -:

Next Page – The Watercan and Handbowl on View

Back Page – Richard and Cat!



JAM TODAY, JAM TOMORROW...

One of our most popular items which we sell at canalside events is the jam and marmalade, both prepared to 'historic' recipes. The plum and apple jam is the same as was made during the First World War by Ticklers, the predecessors of Kearley & Tonge Ltd at the Southall factory known to us as the 'Jam 'Ole': the general population were encouraged to donate their home-grown plums and apples, which were then turned into jam which was sent to the troops in the trenches. And our marmalade is made to a popular recipe dating from 1928 – eyebrows tend to be raised when people realise its biggest ingredient is carrots, but I expect you all know that it is a very appetising spread on your breakfast toast!

But the grand lady who has been making both for us for many years now would like to retire. So we need someone, or some people, who would be prepared to take on the job of making batches of jam and marmalade for us. You would need a hygiene certificate on your kitchen, because we sell this to the general public, but I understand that is not too difficult to obtain – some of you may already have one if you are involved in other groups like the W.I? The recipes will of course be available, and Irene will offer such instruction as may be needed in their preparation.

If you can help, please call or email Diana Golder who will put you in touch with Irene.

And can I offer a huge FoR thank you to Irene Reeves! I don't know how much her efforts with these products have made for us over the years, but I am quite sure it has been a very substantial amount of money. More than any other sales item we have had? Almost certainly – and it remains as popular as ever!

Steve Miles

RICHARD J SCARFF 1948 – 2013



Rest in Peace Old Friend