

# The Friends of Raymond

## Chairman's Report to AGM 28 January 2024

In delivering my first chairman's report I am very pleased to have a great deal to report on because 2023 was a busy, successful, and achieving year for us.

First of all, at our AGM in February, we appealed for members willing to take on the roles of treasurer and membership secretary and, within a week, our plea was answered. Tracey Little volunteered to be treasurer, and Michele l'Anson volunteered to be membership secretary. Although it has taken all year for me to be in a position to hand over to them, I am glad to say that they will be taking over from me with immediate effect. Both are very well qualified and experienced to take on their new roles, and we welcome them to the Management Committee.

Not long after the AGM, Nick Scarcliffe flagged up the fact that National Historic Ships UK had opened a short window during which they were accepting applications for grants towards the restoration of vessels on their register. And so, with only a week to go, we submitted our application, and were delighted to be awarded a grant of £1,500 towards the work planned for both *Nutfield* and *Raymond* during the year.

The first tranche of this work started straightaway, taking place during March and April, and involving among other things, repainting *Nutfield's* cabin in the dry dock at Brinklow Boat Services. Norman Townsend's Boat Maintenance Report covers all the details.

Our season began in earnest over the Easter weekend of 7th to 10th April. While *Nutfield* was still at Brinklow, Brian Seymour and Kath Wheeler held a successful pop-up sales event by the arm at Braunston Marina, while Norman led the work on *Raymond* in the marina's dry dock, to make her ready for the summer.

At the end of April, on Sunday 29th, *Nutfield* returned from Brinklow looking resplendent in her new paintwork. The bulk of the basic preparation and painting had been done by Norman and me, but the intricate work was left to our experts – the graining was done by Chris M Jones, and the signwriting and decoration by Will Hewitt.

During the first two weeks of May the boats were made ready for their first big trip of the year. *Nutfield* was clothed up at low level and a new, large tent was installed beneath the cloths as a semi-permanent fixture to ensure the boats could accommodate at least three crew members in relative comfort.

On Monday 15th May, the boats left Braunston for Rickmansworth where we attended another very successful and profitable Ricky Festival, arriving back at Braunston on Friday 26th. While this two-week trip was undoubtedly great fun for everyone involved, blessed by perfect weather, and with *Nutfield* & *Raymond* receiving accolades all along the way, it was made possible only by the exceptional turnout of volunteers to crew the boats, staff the festival, and help on the way there and back, for which we are extremely grateful.

The following weekend, the boats returned to Brinklow where they stayed until 21st June while *Raymond* received new gunwales and woodwork repairs, and a new foot board was fitted to *Nutfield* – not a minute too soon because steerers on the Ricky trip had feared it might collapse at any moment!

With the work completed, the boats were back at Braunston just in time for the traditional highlight of our year, the Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally on the weekend of 24th and 25th June. *Nutfield* & *Raymond* once again led the opening parade, we were presented with a generous donation of £1,000 by Tim Coghlan on behalf of Braunston Marina, and our extensive sales area recorded another record-breaking Braunston Rally.

Being still only half-way through the season, the boats were off again on Sunday 16th July, when Will & Clare Hewitt, and Frankie Morini moved them down to Cosgrove for the festival the following weekend, after which we went on to the Linslade Canal Festival on Saturday 29th July.

Although the two festivals enjoyed mostly good weather, and produced a decent return, as has become something of a tradition, the crew got thoroughly soaked on the way home, but the boats were safely back on Monday 31st July.

After three weeks off, work resumed on the August Bank Holiday weekend. Brian and Kath ran another pop-up sales event by the arm, while *Raymond* was docked again, this time to have new side cloths fitted, and for Norman to instal bilge pumps in the stern – once again, this work is detailed in his report

Our final trip of the year took place between Wednesday 20th and Tuesday 26th September when *Nutfield* & *Raymond* attended the Heritage Gathering at Huddlesford Junction organised by the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust.

On our return, Tim Coghlan kindly consented to *Nutfield* staying in the arm, at least over the winter. This greatly helped Norman and Will to get on with the job of refurbishing the interior of *Nutfield*'s cabin, which was completed just before Christmas. All that remains to be done in the spring is to paint the castles and put back the cabin range.

Also just before Christmas, we received the grant money from National Historic Ships UK, which was a fitting close to a year in which we made significant improvements to the boats, attended a full programme of events, and even managed to deliver no less than four of our talks on 'Raymond – the story of the last wooden working boat'.

Our thanks go out to everyone who helped to make 2023 an outstanding year for The Friends of Raymond.

Nick Lake  
Chairman