

The Friends of Raymond

Chairman's Report to AGM 2nd February 2025

After an exceptionally good year in 2023, we were looking forward to building on that in 2024. However, last year did not go quite according to plan, and turned out to be a bit of a rollercoaster. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that we ended the year in considerably better financial shape than we might have expected, so it is not all bad news.

But to get such bad news as there is out of the way first, in March we lost the last of our members who had been a working boater, when Alice Lapworth died. Several members of the committee represented Friends of Raymond at Alice's funeral in Nuneaton and afterwards at The Greyhound at Sutton Stop. Alice was a friend and an inspiration to us all, and she will be sadly missed.

Then in May, we encountered our first set-back. We were due to take *Nutfield & Raymond* to Rickmansworth for the new-look Batchworth Boat Rally, but for various unforeseen reasons, we could not muster enough crew and helpers over the two weeks it would have taken us to get there and back, so we had to cancel taking the boats. The same problem befell us over our intended trip to the Brownhill's Festival on the Wyrley & Essington Canal in August but, as the weekend coincided with the cyanide spillage on the Walsall Canal that closed all the canals in the Walsall area, it may have been a blessing in disguise.

In early October, *Nutfield & Raymond* set off to attend the Banbury Canal Festival, but got no further than Lock 12 at Napton, where *Nutfield* jammed fast between the walls at the tail of the lock. And had it not been for the spirited crew of a hire boat who agreed to come down in the lock and repeatedly ram *Nutfield's* stem post until she eventually came free, we might have been there all weekend. The upshot of this incident was, of course, that we had to forego what was, by all accounts, a very well-attended, and potentially profitable show.

These mishaps apart, however, last year was not all gloom and doom. The good news is that in January a major refurbishment of *Nutfield's* cabin was completed by Norman Townsend and Will Hewitt. The transformation into a bright, welcoming cabin, was outstanding, and this was followed up by more work on *Nutfield* at a well-attended docking in the two weeks from Easter. At the same time, over the Easter weekend, Brian Seymour and Kath Wheeler ran a successful "pop-up" stall next to *Raymond* in the arm.

In May, although the boats did not make it to Batchworth, we did. With thanks to Norman and Kath, and to Christine Thompson for organising us a pitch, we took the gazebo by road and did a roaring trade on the Saturday, which was the one day we were able to be there.

The Braunston Historic Rally in June was, once again, our best ever, which has set the bar a bit high for this year. We also had good weekends at Cosgrove and Linslade.

In August, despite the boats not being able to go, Norman and Kath took the gazebo by road to Brownhills, where we did a considerable amount of business over the two days, which prompted the guilty thought that perhaps this was in the end, a better option than taking the boats 70 miles and through 53 narrow locks in each direction.

And then in September, for what turned out to be our final trip, we took the boats to Warwick and back for the Saltisford Canal Trust's gathering in the Saltisford Arm. And with the gazebo set up next to the boats, we had another successful event.

Other good news involves people. We are delighted to welcome Tracey Little as our Treasurer and Michele l'Anson as our Membership Secretary. Tracey and Michele are very experienced and well-qualified to take on these roles, and your chairman is pleased and very relieved to be able to pass the responsibility into their capable hands.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, although we experienced some difficulties with crewing at certain times last year, at others we had a good turnout of volunteers, among them some new faces and some old friends coming back to us. We are extremely grateful to everyone who helped in 2024, and from the responses to the 2025 Schedule received so far, we are quietly confident that we can look forward to this year going largely as planned.

Nick Lake
Chairman
27th January 2025