



the motorways such as the M2, M3, M4, M5 and M27 as well as on major highway improvements, including the Chudleigh bypass, the Havant bypass and the Chandlers Ford bypass. Raymond Brown Ltd, which was turning over more than £312,000 in 1970 (worth £2.7 million today), had earned a good reputation in the industry based on capability, integrity, thoroughness and punctuality. Raymond Brown, whose maxim had always been to plan ahead, now began to think of the future. He drew up a four year plan, intending to delegate more and more responsibilities to others in the firm so that he might take the time to journey round the world, assessing other opportunities, even considering moving abroad.

He was already sharing his responsibilities within the business, involving other managers in whom he placed his confidence as the company grew. The two men with most influence during the late 1960s and early 1970s

were Ray Brothers and Jack Riggs. Ray Brothers, who joined the firm in 1966, was responsible for reviving the civil engineering side of the firm after the failure of Rayed. Jack Riggs joined the firm as plant manager in April 1971 with many years of experience in the industry. Later in the year Ron Isaac became his assistant. While Ray Brothers was a contrast in personality to Raymond Brown, Jack Riggs was much the same. He could be difficult and aggressive to the point of rudeness but though he often argued long and hard with Raymond, he won his trust and confidence and relieved him of a great deal of the day to day pressures of management. Not that this led to any less frenetic a lifestyle for Raymond. The pressure he imposed upon himself remained just as intense. Towards the end of 1972, his old friend, George Farwell, became so concerned about the effect this might have on his health that he told Raymond to take things a bit easier. Raymond, as was often the case, paid no notice.



## Illness, recovery & new life - 1973 Onwards

One day in March 1973, Raymond Brown, now forty-three years old, had risen early as usual. In the early afternoon, he went to see how work was progressing at Poulner Hill on the A31 where his men were clearing the site for a realignment of the road. While he was there, he began to complain of a headache and decided to drive the short distance home. It was as he neared the house that he experienced a severe brain haemorrhage. Only instinct and immense willpower got him home. His car grazed the gate post, collided with the open door of the garage and came to a halt inside. As, somehow, he remembered to switch off the engine and managed to open the car door, he lapsed into unconsciousness. This final act probably saved his life. He fell forward head first out of the car. So he avoided the risk of choking when he retched while the cold in the garage, combined with the fact that he would lie still and undiscovered for an hour, probably stemmed the internal bleeding. Pola was out of the house when he collapsed and discovered him only on her return. She accompanied him in the ambulance which took him to Boscombe hospital. With a police escort, it rushed past Sue, then fifteen, and Fiona, ten, as they were getting off the school bus. The consultant at the hospital had to tell Pola that he believed it was unlikely Raymond would survive the night. She never left his side all the time he remained unconscious. A friend, Gerald Downer, sat with her for three or four nights and Raymond's colleagues from the local

branch of the Round Table also took turns to keep her company at his bedside. He was moved to Southampton General Hospital for an operation but this never took place since it was judged to be too dangerous. The doctors warned Pola that even if Raymond did regain consciousness, he might be severely brain damaged and fail to recognise her.

*African safari - Raymond Brown and Oliver Robinson with termites' nest built in an old tree stump*





*African safari - The going could be quite tough although the mud usually dried very quickly in the hot African sun*

After fourteen long nights at eleven o'clock one morning Raymond came round. Opening his eyes, he haltingly asked his wife 'What are you doing here?'. He remembered nothing about his illness, nothing about the hospital. Coming out of his coma did not mean he was a well man. Paralysed down his right side, he had severe loss of memory, repeated himself frequently, and had lost the ability to write. He was brought home after a month in hospital by his friend Dave Barter but argued with him vociferously that he was not taking him the right way and that he was not bringing him to the right house. He was still suffering from paralysis. He could walk only with difficulty and occasionally over-balanced and fell into the swimming pool at his home. He refused to take instruction in writing from Pola who brought in a local doctor, Dr Dean, to set writing exercises for Raymond. She was devoted to his recovery and became as hard a taskmaster for her husband in maintaining his progress as he had been with his employees although it was not something she enjoyed for it was a complete reversal of roles. Depressed at being deprived of the one thing, his business,

to which he had been devoted, Raymond hated being an invalid and was an aggressive and ill-tempered patient, particularly as he now found himself dependent upon other people for the first time. But the one thing he still possessed in abundance was determination. The willpower which had seen him win his fight for life would, with the help of his wife, daughters and friends, see him through his recovery.

It was a long, slow and difficult process. George Farwell remembers that Raymond was speaking only with difficulty six months after he had left hospital and would often lose the thread of what he was saying. Fiona Brown remembered how he would squeeze a tennis ball in his palm as an aid to recovering his movement. After six months he began to walk again, accompanied sometimes by Sue and sometimes by his friends from the Round Table. Sue and Fiona saw more of their father during his convalescence than they had ever done before. Learning to write was hard work, page after page would be covered with 'the' and 'and' repeated time after time. It was expected that Raymond would never drive



*African safari - Raymond with a group of tea leaf pickers*

because the haemorrhage had reduced his peripheral vision but this just gave him yet another challenge he was determined to meet. His old car having been sold, he asked his friend Barry Price to find him a car and within three years, after a number of scrapes, he had overcome yet another hurdle. As his recovery progressed, he became concerned that he should re-activate his mind. He found inspiration from reading the works of Churchill which he had bought in an expensive limited edition. Aware of Churchill's own scrupulousness in checking his proofs, he read and marked any imperfections in the text, writing to the publisher with his comments. This became a lengthy correspondence but provided him with the stimulus he needed to begin thinking again.

Five years passed before Raymond's recovery could be counted complete. His illness and the length of his convalescence had a fundamental impact upon his life. Today he divides his life into two periods - before and after his illness. The effects of the haemorrhage could not be totally overcome. His short term memory in

particular was seriously affected. (In a typically practical way he sought to overcome the worst effects of this by using a small dictaphone on which he could record reminders.) The paralysis of his right side left him with a tendency to lean to the right as he walked. Perhaps most significantly he was completely changed in character. He lost much of his previous self-confidence, relying upon others, particularly members of his family, to do many of the things he had always done himself. Much of the aggression which had driven him before his illness also vanished and he became much calmer and more easily emotional. But some of his characteristics not even serious illness could erase. He still hates people being late (on one cruise he even upbraided the ship's captain because he had kept the passengers waiting too long for dinner). He still likes to be the first person into the office each morning. He still tells people exactly what he thinks. He remains straightforward and down to earth, occasionally tactless, sometimes stubborn. He will never bear a grudge, always expects others to justify themselves to him, and his word continues to be his bond.





Raymond began to attend board meetings once more from October 1973 and made appearances at the firm's Christmas parties but his involvement in the business was minimal, principally because of his memory problems. By May 1976 his specialist had given his approval to Raymond's greater involvement in the firm but told him that it would be another two or three years before he was as well as might be expected. Raymond recognised that this meant a completely different pace of life which could come about only through 'common sense and moderate application and involvement'. He realised that his re-assumption of a central role in the company was no longer possible. This was not only because of the lasting effects of his illness but also because he was away so long that his role had been absorbed by the expanding responsibilities of men like Ray Brothers, Jack Riggs, Ron Isaac and Maurice Matthews. They and other staff had been determined out of respect for Raymond that the business should continue to grow despite his absence, and the financial results for the years immediately following his illness demonstrated their success. Even as early as December 1974, when he spoke to the staff at Christmas, Raymond acknowledged that 'events have tended to pass over me to some extent', that 'people have grown in stature and matured in responsibility within the business', that 'people have secured areas of responsibility within the business which they may not otherwise have acquired'.

Another significant result of Raymond Brown's illness was that it

prompted his elder daughter, Sue, to join the company. Raymond had wanted her to go to college and hoped that she would become an accountant but she was not academic. In the normal course of events she might have had to take this road but her father's illness gave her the opportunity to make her own mind up about her future. Instead she decided that another member of the family should work within the firm. So, leaving school at sixteen in the middle of her 'O' levels, she spent four years in the office before going out to sites once a week and taking a supervisor's course. Then she decided that she wanted to become a plant operator. At the Construction Industry Training Board centre at Bircham Newton in Norfolk she was the only girl among hundreds

*Raymond in July 2002 preparing the lawn at his new lakeside home, Linlake, in Ringwood*



*A family group - Raymond (standing far left) with his brother Edward (standing far right), his sisters Victoria (seated second left), Marjory (seated fourth left) and Dorothy (seated fifth left) and his wife Pola (seated far right)*

of boys, sleeping in staff quarters rather than the dormitories since there was no separate accommodation for girls. She hated the first week, survived the second and then spent two and a half years working on machines, acquiring a wide range of skills and expertise. She returned to the firm to train under Jack Riggs and took over from him as plant manager in which post she spent six years, also being appointed to the board in 1982.

Her father was able to adapt fairly easily to his changed situation within the company. Raymond's role in the business became more like that of a fond parent overseeing the development of his offspring. He was able to accept a background role because he knew

this was what he had intended when he prepared his plan to take time off for travelling around the world. Although a round the world cruise was no longer possible after his illness, he did take a three month cruise with Pola departing from Tilbury and sailing around Africa during the winter of 1975-76. Not only did he learn to play bridge, which became a favourite pastime, together with golf and shooting, he fell in love with the oceans, with the whales, porpoises and flying fish. Attuned to nature since his boyhood, this reinforced his love for wildlife and the natural world. So when a farming friend of his, Dan Tanner, asked him several years later to join him on an African safari, Raymond jumped at the chance.

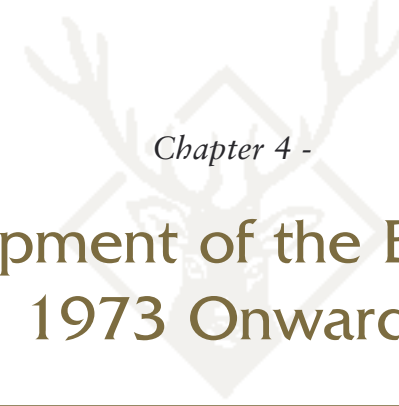


Dan, who had been travelling to Africa under his own arrangements since the late 1960s, first took Raymond and another friend, Oliver Robinson, to Kenya. They avoided as far as possible the game reserves and national parks. They visited a Kenyan tea plantation and at Lake Nakuru saw below the horizon a solid pink mass of flamingos. After travelling north and crossing the equator, they turned south again, running into heavy rain and floods and losing the roads in a sea of red mud. They came across another group of travellers whose vehicle was stuck in the water and needed to be pulled clear. Raymond without hesitation plunged into the crocodile-infested river, to attach a line. The weather lengthened their journey time through Tanzania, the floods sweeping away one pontoon bridge and forcing them to take a diversion 160 miles long. The road was often blocked from forest fires and their food supplies dwindled rapidly but eventually they were able to reach Tanga on the shores of the Indian Ocean in Tanzania before Raymond flew home from Dar-Es-Salaam.

On the second occasion Dan and Raymond travelled with Henry Richardson through Zimbabwe, Zambia and Zaire. They wanted to visit the open-cast copper mines in Koluwesi in Zaire but decided to camp outside the town which had a reputation for lawlessness. Dan and Henry went off into the bush, leaving Raymond in the four-wheel drive vehicle. Suddenly they came rushing back, shouting desperately to Raymond to get the car started, as they were being pursued by local tribesmen firing arrows at them. Raymond chided them for not picking one up as a souvenir! Instead they stayed the night in the relative safety of the compound of an old hospital. The principal routes were rarely

more than overgrown tracks, often lost to sight, so from time to time Raymond would sit on the bonnet to guide the driver. Then the rains came and the road disappeared. In the dark, the vehicle began to slide down a slope and ended up half in a ditch. The thought passed through their minds that they would be stuck and lost for good. Thanks to Raymond's practical ingenuity, they managed to get the vehicle out. They eventually reached the L'Upemba national park on the plains of Zaire, which had been abandoned since the country became independent from Belgium. They were the first visitors the astonished ranger had seen and they stayed in a guest lodge complex which was otherwise deserted. The scenery and wildlife were stunning and they passed staggering unnamed waterfalls of great beauty.

Raymond remained chairman and managing director until 1982, relying greatly on the advice of Jack Riggs and Ron Isaac. In that year Ron Isaac succeeded Raymond as managing director and also took over as chairman when Raymond stepped down in 1995 and became the company's president. When he handed over to Ron Isaac in 1982, the words of advice he offered were typical of the philosophy which had got the business off to such a sound start: 'In the position of Managing Director one had to practice the art of looking ahead to plan and programme for circumstances as they are and before a simple situation becomes an emergency. ... One must always take time to look ahead and see how the land lies'. Raymond adapted this philosophy to become his personal motto - 'Plan ahead ... your life cannot go according to plan if you have no plan'.



## Development of the Business - 1973 Onwards



*Susan Brown was the first woman to be trained as a plant operator at the Construction Industry Training Board's Bircham Newton instruction centre*

Most of the firm's contracts during the 1970s featured site clearance work for motorways and trunk roads and bypasses. There was also civil engineering work for new factories and so on, but this part of the business fared less well in the late 1970s and was wound down, leading to the departure of Ray Brothers in 1978. Under Ron Isaac, the firm began to carry out earthworks, using its site clearance expertise as a way into this side of the construction industry and working on several reservoirs which were started as a result of the drought of 1976. The company still acted as a

sub-contractor so negotiations were often long and difficult although the quality of Brown's work made it easier to gain repeat contracts with the same main contractors. But always the ambition was to achieve sufficient growth to establish the company as a main contractor in its own right.

The 1980s saw the company expanding geographically, partly as a result of the improving road network, bringing work on the new M25, , on the widening of the M1 and on the preparations for the Channel