

Book "To tell the Truth" Anna Smith ISBN978-1-78087-249-0

Prologue of "**Screams in the Dark**" ISBN 978-1-78087-9

Note. Anna Smith spoke with George Parsonage, but used a fictitious name "Ben Gates" rather than Georges real name.

Acknowledgements. "And George Parsonage at the Glasgow Humane Society for giving me the benefit of his knowledge and experience".

"At around the same time across the city, Ben Gates steered his boat up the river Clyde, where a crowd had already gathered on the walkway despite the steady drizzle. People always stopped for a look when a body was found in the water. Morbid curiosity. Ben had seen it all before. He waved at the uniformed cops standing on the embankment, but he didn't need them to direct him. He could see it already, bobbing in the current. He carefully eased his boat closer to the corpse, but his trained eye knew straight away. He took out his mobile and called the Strathclyde cop who had phoned him twenty minutes earlier at the Glasgow Humane Society to say they needed his help.

"Jim...It's just a torso".

"What? You winding me up, Benny? I'm trying to eat a fried egg roll here".

"Seriously, Jim. Torso".

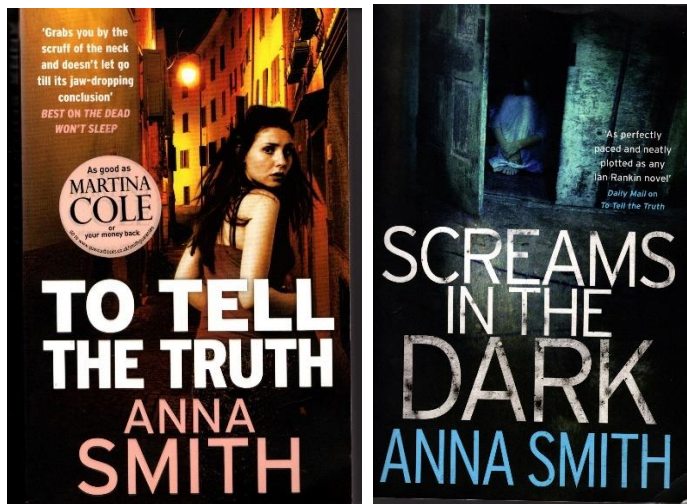
"No legs or anything?"

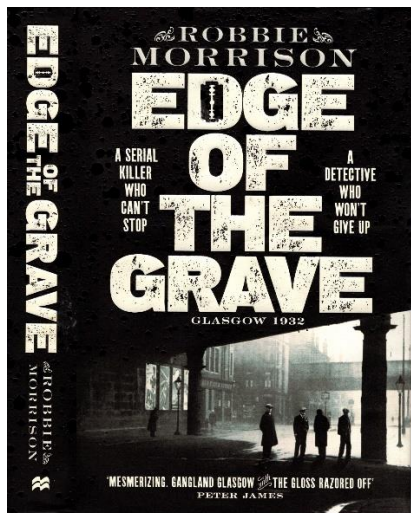
"Christ sake man. Do you not know what a torso is?"

You'd better get rid of the ghouls up there before I bring it in". He hung up.

Ben pulled his boat around so it shielded the torso from the gaping crowd. Whoever belonged to the remains in front of him had been a living breathing person at one time-recently in fact, judging by the look of things, the colour of the raw flesh where the arms and legs had been severed...He picked up the oilskin and expertly cast it across so the body was covered and snared, enabling him to drag it towards him. When it was close enough, he gripped the ropes and dragged it onto the boat, easing it over the side and gently laying it on the bottom as though he was handling a precious child. He didn't touch it, or lift the cover back. His father had always taught him that curiosity wasn't his job. His role was to preserve the dignity of the poor soul they'd recovered and take it towards its final journey. He slowly made his way to the embankment where he could see police already pushing everyone back.

Ben tossed the rope to the young cop standing at the edge, trying to keep his feet on the slippery, muddy bank, and turned off his engine as the two cops hauled the boat up the slope inch by inch. The ambulance men made their way down with a stretcher. Ben could hear the Strathclyde police sergeant on his radio, telling them to send transport. The boat, with the torso still in it. Would be taken in a low loader to the mortuary so that everything would be kept intact for the post mortem. Not that there was much left to examine.





Edge of the Grave by Robbie Morrison. ISBN-13-978-1529054019 Macmillan.

Edge of the Grave by Robbie Morrison. Page 33. “Dreghorn walked to the bow of the tug, where a smaller boat floated as close to the jetty as it could get. Benny Parsonage, Chief Officer of the Glasgow Humane Society, was on his feet in the bot, balanced with the deftness of a tightrope walker, pulling a rope slowly through the water.

“A body?” Dreghorn asked. “Feels like it” Parsonage nodded. “Depending on how long it’s been in the water, getting crushed against the wall, like your man up there said, would have expelled any gases, made it sink”. “Need a wee hand short arse?” McDaid grinned. “We’ve no’ got all day y’know”

“Away and bile you big baw heid” Parsonage maintained a steady pull on the rope, careful not to jar loose whatever ws under the water. The rope was attached to a four pronged steel grappling hook, with which Parsonage dredged the bottom of the river, searching for bodies. Over the years. He’d become expert at gauging what the hooks ensnared, weight and water resistance alerting him to whether the object was made of wood, steel or flesh and bone.

Founded in 790, the Glasgow Humane Society was dedicated to rescuing people whether from accidents or suicide attempts, from the River Clyde. One of Parsonages other duties was the recovery of bodies from the muddy depths or otherwise inaccessible riverbanks; his house on Glasgow Green, overlooking the river, was the police’s first port of call on receiving reports of such. He was only five foot one, but Dreghorn had seen him dive into the Clyde without hesitation to haul a drowning man the size of McDaid, to safety. Nice and easy, but quick and gentle; if you stop pulling, the current will catch it and the body could float away.” Satisfaction broke across the river mn’s face. “But no the day”

The corpse broke the surface of the water gently. Parsonage eased it towards the boat, freed the grappling hook and, as respectfully as possible pulled it aboard. It was a sad sight. The head hung forward hiding the features. Other officers approached watching, watching silently as Parsonage rowed towards the nearest landing bay. -----McDaid gestured at two young officers as Parsonage moored his boat. “I did more than my fair share of humphing bodies around when I was in uniform”, he said. “See this suit? Detective. That means it’s your turn”

The officers lifted the dripping body from the boat. One of them gagged, but managed to maintain control, the other was focused and composed, trying to impress in front of superior officers. "Do people drown often in the Clyde?" he asked.

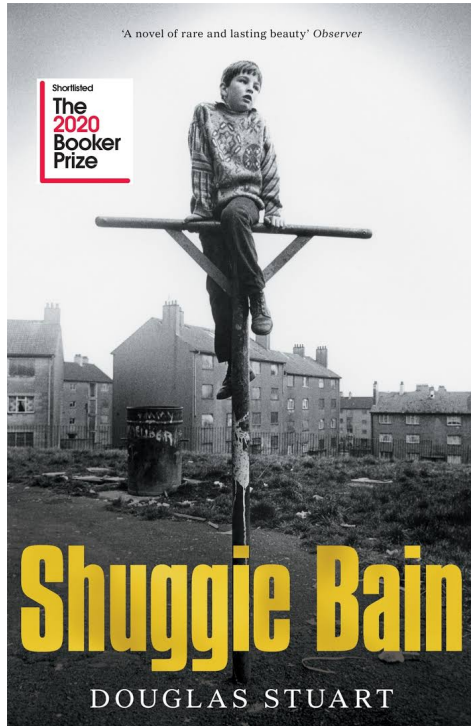
Parsonage threw a glance at Dreghorn before answering "No son, just the once".

Page 402 Authors notes.

Benjamin Parsonage was Assistant Officer of the Glasgow Humane Society from 1918 to 1928, and Chief Officer from then until his death in 1979, whereupon the position was taken by his son George, who patrolled the Clyde until his own retirement in 2019. Visit their web site

<https://www.glasgowhumanesociety.com>

-for a fascinating history of the Society; the oldest continuing lifeboat service in the world and an inspiring record of the Riverman's quiet undemonstrative heroism. Thousands of lives have been saved and bodies recovered since the Society's founding in 1790.



**Douglas Stuart**  
Picador ISBN 13-978-1529019278

Douglas Stuart has won the Booker Prize for *Shuggie Bain*, his debut novel about a boy in 1980s Glasgow trying to support his mother as she struggles with addiction and poverty.

"The Clyde shipbuilding yards were dead now. The wide river was quiet and empty except for a lonely boatman in a small boat. The reflective strips on his raincoat shone brightly as diamonds through the steady smirr. Everyone knew of this man; he was always on the front page of the free Glaswegian newspaper. Like his father before him, the man patrolled the Clyde without rest. He rescued those old men who, with a skinful, had fallen in over by Glasgow Green. Other times he pulled out the bodies of men and women who hadn't wanted to be rescued, those who slipped silently, deliberately, from the side of the stone bridges into the brackish water."

# Catalogue illustrated of the Paintings and Drawings in the Old Glasgow Room 1927

## 49.—VIEW OF GLASGOW GREEN FROM THE EAST, EARLY 19th CENTURY.

SHOWING the Justiciary Court Houses in Saltmarket, with Merchants House Steeple behind, also St. Andrew's R.C. Cathedral. In the foreground to the right are the Humane Society House and Nelson's Monument. The old Timber Bridge and Hutchesons' Bridge, which succeeded it, are seen on the extreme left.

*Coloured Engraving presented by Richard Cameron.*

## 49.—VIEW OF GLASGOW GREEN FROM THE EAST, EARLY 19th CENTURY.

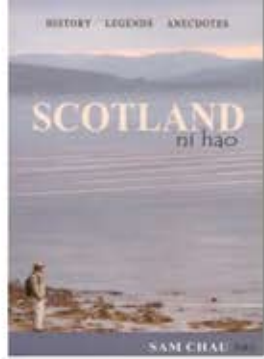
SHOWING the Justiciary Court Houses in Saltmarket, with Merchants House Steeple behind, also St. Andrew's R.C. Cathedral. In the foreground to the right are the Humane Society House and Nelson's Monument. The old Timber Bridge and Hutchesons' Bridge, which succeeded it, are seen on the extreme left.

*Coloured Engraving presented by Richard Cameron.*



The Passion of Harry Bingo by Peter Ross  
ISBN978-1-910985-81-6

“This is a story of blood and water. Blood inherited and spilled. Water loved and feared. It is the story of a man called George Parsonage, a city called Glasgow, and the river which passes-like a soul, like a scythe-through the lives of both”



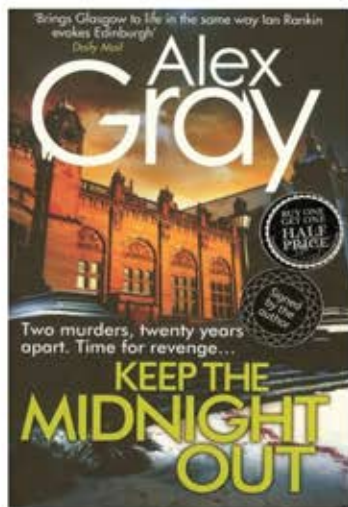
## “SCOTLAND NI HAO”

by Sam Chau

Published 2014 by Glasgow Chinese School ISBN 978-190861-666-1

“Nearby there is a beautiful lonely house by the river. This is the base of the Glasgow humane society, founded in 1790.

George has been a good friend of mine for many years; He is very keen on the Chinese traditional dragon boat races. We have worked together several times to put these on the River Clyde and on lochs in different places, and it has always been a popular event”.



## “KEEP THE MIDNIGHT OUT”

by Alex Gray.

Published 2015 by Sphere ISBN 978-0-7515-5485-4

“You, Lorimer! Come with us. Another corpse has been fished out by our friend at the Humane Society and we need to see it”

“What....?” Lorimer followed his boss out into the car park and into a waiting squad car where a uniformed officer ushered them into the back seats.

“George Parsonage,” Phillips continued, stretching out the rear seat belt as the car swung out of the police compound. “The Humane Society officer. You know him?”

“The art teacher?”

“Ben’s son, yes.” Phillips nodded. “He’s taken more bodies out of that river than you and I will ever hope to see,” he said grimly

“A riverman, just like his father

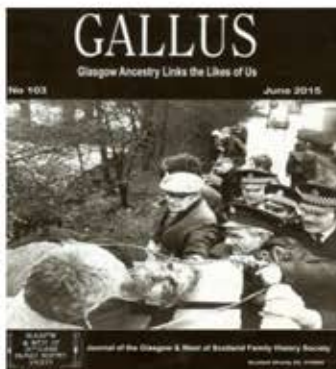


## “OVERTURE”

by Erl B. Wilkie Published 2013 by Crtvalepress

ISBN 978-0-9576590-2-5

“Due to the difficulty of getting the body out of the water on the south side of the river, Parsonage and Chalmers agreed that the most convenient place to land it was the boat house on the opposite bank. -----By 10.00am all this was in progress. The Humane Society had done their work; the gruesome parcel was in the tent and the daily pathologist and her assistant were preparing to remove the wrapping from the victim”.





# “GALLUS”

–Journal of the West of Scotland Family History Society. June 2015.

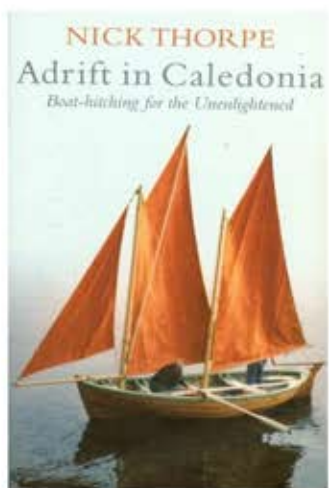
“This is the report of the talk given to members in January by George Parsonage MBE chief officer of the Glasgow Humane Society. The speaker, born in 1943, succeeded his father, Ben Parsonage to the post on his death. But George had been assisting his father since childhood and like dad, has worked all his life on the river Clyde”.....



## “RAMBLES ROUND GLASGOW”

Third edition 1860

“It is a fact not generally known that it was in Glasgow Green, near the site of the Humane Society House that the idea of his great improvement on the steam-engine first flashed upon the mind of the immoral James Watt”.....



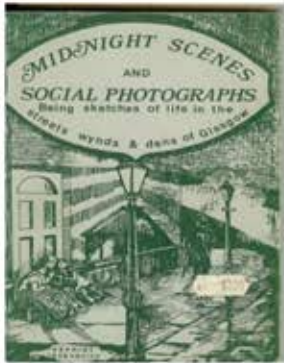
## “ADRIFT IN CALEDONIA”

– Boat-hitching for the Unenlightened”” by Nick Thorpe Published by Little Brown 2006 ISBN 0-316-72688-5

## Chapter 4 – The Riverman on the Clyde

“He was the one you called when the Clyde was threatening to take another life. A kind of people’s superhero. If you happened to fall off the quayside, capsize your canoe, or even throw yourself off a bridge, your greatest – perhaps only – hope would be the urgent slap and creak of his oars.

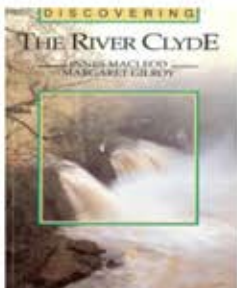
His sculling boat had capsized suddenly in the swollen current, dragging him downriver towards the tidal weir where the water thundered down over a steel barrier. Luckily the lifeboat man had seen it happen from the window of his cottage, and within seconds there had been shouts from the bank and two men had ploughed across the current towards him in a rowing boat. “They threw me a line and told me to leave the boat and hang on,” he did, and was hauled to safety only feet from the weir. His sculling boat was not so fortunate, and was sucked over and smashed to pieces before their eyes. Jan shook his head wonderingly. “If George and his father hadn’t been around, there’s a very good chance I wouldn’t be here now.””



### “MIDNIGHT SCENES AND SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPHS”

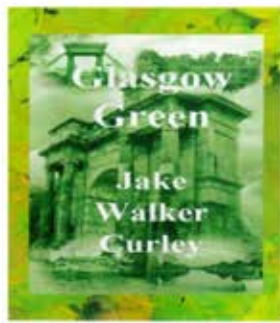
Published 1976 ISBN 0 905 192 01 x

Approaching the suspension Bridge and the Humane Society House, we remember having read it was near this spot that James Watt, in one of his accustomed walks in the Green, first conceived his immortal thought touching the improvement on the steam engine



### “DISCOVERING THE RIVER CLYDE”

“Beside St. Andrews Bridge is a house occupied by the Glasgow Humane Society Officer. In 1787 James Coulter, a Glasgow merchant, left £200 in the care of the Faculty of Surgeons to set up a society for the rescue and recovery of drowning persons and in 1790 the Glasgow Humane Society was formed. It is now the only one of its kind left in existence”.



## “GLASGOW GREEN”

by Jake Walker Curley Published by Tyne & Esk Publications

ISBN 978-0-9563662-7-6

“Then Henderson spotted George Parsonage, who is unmistakeable with his thick mop of white hair and dressed in orange overalls that would not have looked out of place at Guantanamo bay. Obviously his big black wellies would.

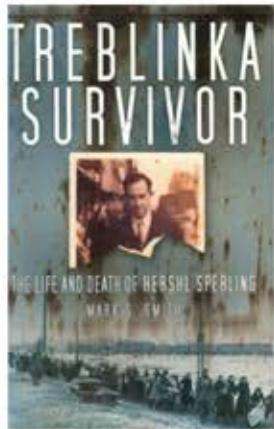
“Some people called him the Riverman and others called him the Ferryman. He worked for the Glasgow Humane Society and one of his tasks was pulling the dead from the river. Today, George Parsonage was teaching a large group of students how to save lives, and he didn't look impressed by their efforts”.....

.Henderson heard the Ferryman say in a dismissive tone, “Don't think about throwing the rope just throw the rope.”

That little snippet of information hit a chord with Henderson. He was throwing Margaret Logan a rope today. He looked again at the man in the orange overalls. He'd met him years ago when the Ferryman had pulled parts of Davy Syme from the river. Parsonage had inherited the job from his father. Between them they'd pulled out around 1500 bodies from the Clyde. The vast majority of those were suicides. Henderson remembered that quote from the article he'd read on Parsonage.

“They all struggle. It's survival. It does not matter how determined they are to die, they all show signs of struggle.”

The Ferryman had found Owny on the first of January, 1986, forty yards from the Glasgow Humane Society building, at Lifeboat position un1”



## “TREBLINKA SURVIVOR”

The Life and Death of Hershl Sperling - by Mark S. Smith Published by the History Press 2010.

ISBN 976-0-7524-5638-8

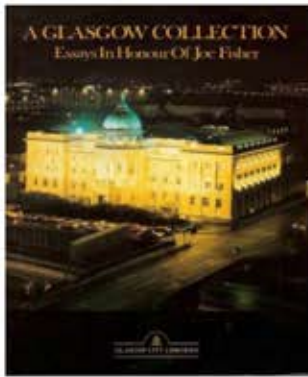
“At 4.00pm, on Wednesday 27 September 1989, George Parsonage, the sole lifeboat officer of the Glasgow Humane society, received a call from the City’s police. A body had been observed floating in the shallow part of the river, just under the Caledonian Rail Bridge. Mr Parsonage rowed to the scene. “I always row to these kinds of incidents,” said Mr Parsonage, who in four decades has dragged more than 2,000 bodies from the River Clyde, some 1,500 of them alive. I met him at his house on Glasgow Green in the summer of 2007. The river flowed fast over a weir a few yards in front of the house.

“A motor boat creates waves,” he said, “and maybe, just maybe, there is a pocket of air in a jacket that can keep a person afloat and maybe alive.” Then his face darkened. “I saw him lying face-down on the south side of the river, in about two or three feet of water as I rowed towards him. Men nearly always sink, unlike women. So, for a moment, I thought he might be alive. When I reached him, I turned him over, with his back to the boat, and pulled him on to the gunwales. I had to decide there and then whether to try to resuscitate him with mouth to mouth, but now I could see he was dead,” I asked him if he could tell how long he had been dead. “I’d say maybe half an hour,” Mr Parsonage replied.

“I searched his pockets for identification. He was wearing jacket, which I took off him. It was then I saw the number. I was utterly shocked. I realised that man in the water had been in Auschwitz. To think what he had been through was unimaginable.” He looked directly at me. I could see his eyes water. “He had my

respect. And what kind of society are we living in, when we let this happen to a man like this, who had been through what he had? I've never forgotten him."

Mr Parsonage, who possesses an optimism that perhaps can only come with the kind of work he does, added: "We cannot be sure it wasn't an accident. Personally I don't believe in suicides. I have yet to encounter a suicide that didn't cry for help when he hit the water. Therefore, at the moment of death, it is no longer a suicide. It was clear the man had come off the bridge. But if he were lying on one of the girders, it would be easy to fall, either if he was sleeping or drunk. There is a big possibility he was sleeping and fell off the bridge."



## A GLASGOW COLLECTION

ISBN 0-906169-30-5

Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher- published by Glasgow city Libraries 1990

"Body found-Glasgow drownings in the early 1850's"

"He wore only a striped shirt and old moleskin trousers. Mr Geddes, the Humane Society officer, recovered the body and took it to the (boat) house which is still used today by the present officer George Parsonage"

"George Parsonage's book, incidentally, refers to bodies being left at the Humane Society (Boat) house on Glasgow Green for claiming up until 1861 when the police took over this responsibility. Many of the accounts in the Herald refer to the "Receiving House" in Ropework Lane" "Who operated this early morgue, if not the humane society? Presumably it closed down when facilities were provided at the high Court in Jocelyn Square later in the century".

# The Glasgow Experience

An Interview Series

James J. Kelly

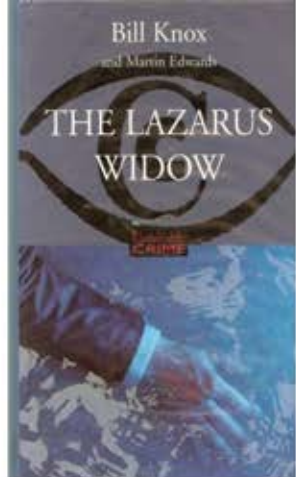
## “THE GLASGOW EXPERIENCE – AN IRREVERENT SURVEY”

by James J. Kelly –

“I have no idea what Ben Parsonage’s denomination was. And I suggest that anyone who reads his son’s biography would be equally uninterested. His father’s life was led in bedrock Christianity. It was obviously Christian to save lives, but in dealing with those who had given up their lives, he was equally Christian. Those not rescued had obviously repudiated the integrity of their bodies as Christians. Ben Parsonage spent his life restoring this integrity in every way”.

“In 1936, the head of a body decapitated by a Carley float in Fairfields was reverently taken by him to the mortuary. What was left of a human body after being squashed by an iron ore ship was given a Christian burial thanks to him. One body, whose day to day existence as a human being can only be imagined, because it had a wooden leg and a wooden arm, was finally dignified as a person by Ben’s rescuing it. New-born babies, random skulls and parts of bodies in sacks were eventually given the dignity which life could not give them through Ben Parsonage’s efforts”.

“While not employed in rescue, he did his best to keep the lifebelts round the river from mindless vandalism, and there is no vandalism more mindless than that of lifebelts. He even spent time removing such possible sources of danger as footballs, a potent menace, from the river. Perhaps most touching of all on one occasion was his inspired use of police officers with the Gaelic to keep the details of a death from Glasgow’s journalists until the family had been informed”.



## THE LAZARUS WIDOW

by Bill Knox (and Martin Edwards) 1999

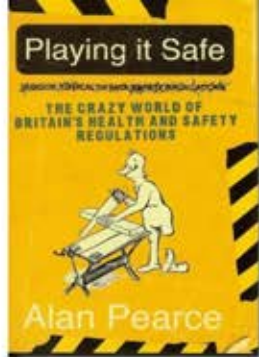
ISBN 0-094-796807

“There is a real-life Riverman. His name is George Parsonage, legendary son of a legendary father. We have been friends a long time”.

“He picked up his oars to start back upriver, then stopped and stared. Another bubbling swirl had begun to show on the water only a stone’s throw away. He waited, he watched, and a second body broke the surface – face down, meaning a male. The Riverman swore under his breath. He hadn’t been told about this one”.

“The Riverman stopped rowing, brought the oars inboard, and lifted a boathook. For a few seconds the boat drifted on, the river water chuckling against her bow. Then, using a single thrust of the boathook, he gaffed a small, almost awash home-made raft. The raft was constructed from broken pieces of white polystyrene which had been crudely lashed together. In the middle, some child had tied on a small, very battered rag doll. A new upward swing of the boathook brought the dripping raft over into the boat”.

“Job done. Kids play with rafts, kids fall off rafts, kids drown. Call me a professional spoilsport.” The Humane Society officer picked up the oars again. Two powerful strokes brought the boat’s head round, bow pointing towards its home jetty again. For the return, he settled into a steady but slower pace. “Now to why you’re here-- Thane nodded. “Our body maybe out of a car.”



## “PLAYING IT SAFE”

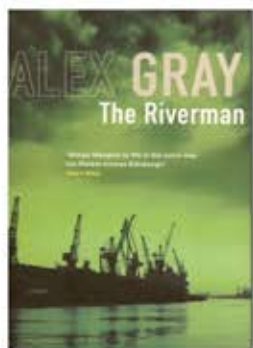
the Crazy World of Britain's Health and Safety Regulations

By Alan Pearce

“Cold shoulder for river hero.

A man who has saved more than 1500 people from drowning has been told that police can no longer work with him because he is in breach of Health and Safety regulations.

George Parsonage, 61, has plied the River Clyde in Glasgow for nearly 50 years. He has even received a special lifetime achievement award from Princess Alexandra. But the future of his rescue missions has been thrown into doubt by a decision by Strathclyde Police to cease all contact with him. The force said that it had taken its decision for Health and Safety reasons, after learning that Mr Parsonage's assistant had left. However, Mr Parsonage insisted that he would still rescue people from the water, but questioned the “practicalities” of Strathclyde Police's decision. “The police won't call me. But, if a member of the public calls and there's someone out in the river, I'll be out there. If I see someone, I'll go”.



## THE RIVERMAN

by Alex Gray – 2007 HB | SBN 978-1-84744-026-6

C ISBN 978-1-8744-025-9



Cover blurb – “The Riverman’s job is to navigate the swirling currents of the Clyde, pulling detritus from Glasgow’s great river. But occasionally he is required to do something altogether more unpleasant – such as lifting dead bodies from the water.

The day he pulls the lifeless body of a middle-aged man from the river, it looks like a case of accidental death. But DCI William Lorimer of the Glasgow Police is not convinced. When he digs deeper, he begins to suspect that the death is part of a sinister chain of events”, ----

“This novel is dedicated to George Parsonage, Glasgow Humane Society Officer, to The Riverman”.

“The Riverman

The riverman knew all about the Clyde. Its tides and currents were part of his heritage. His father and others before him had launched countless small craft from the banks of the river in response to a cry for help. Nowadays that cry came in the form of a klaxon that could waken him from sleep, the mobile phone ringing with information about where and when. It wouldn’t be the first time he’d pulled someone from the icy waters with only a hasty oilskin over his pyjamas.

This morning, at least, he’d been up and doing when the call came. The body was over by Finnieston, past the weir, so he’d had to drive over the river towing a boat behind him on the trailer. He was always ready. That was what this job was all about; prompt and speedy response in the hope that some poor sod’s life could be saved. And he’d saved hundreds over the years, desperate people who were trying to make up their minds to jump off one of the many bridges that spanned the Clyde or those who had made that leap and been saved before the waters filled their lungs”.



## “THE WEE GREEN BOOK”

– The extraordinary story of Glasgow Green: Britain’s oldest public park. By Neil Baxter/Donny O’Rourke 2007

“Acknowledgements

-----Others have made valuable contributions—Ann Parsonage and George Parsonage applied their knowledge to the draft, a process that resulted in significant improvements”.

“However the most famous resident of Glasgow Green was Ben Parsonage, for over fifty years the Officer of Glasgow Humane society. The society had its origins in a legacy of £200 from James Coulter in 1787 who stipulated that this very significant sum should be used to set up a society for the rescue of drowning persons. In August 1787, a meeting was held in the tontine Hotel at Trongate to inaugurate the Society and, by 1790, Glasgow Humane Society was fully established. Five years later in 1795, the Society built its first boathouse on the Clyde and a house on Glasgow Green, in the same year the Society’s first Officer, John Wiseman was appointed, somehow balancing his life-saving role with working as a shoemaker in the Saltmarket. Within the first thirty years of the Humane Society’s existence over 600 lives were saved.

George Geddes was appointed the society’s Officer in 1859. His son, also named George, succeeded him in the post in 1889. The younger George Geddes remained in the post for a remarkable forty years. His son, also George, became the assistant Officer of the society; sadly the daily danger faced by the officers of the Humane Society was demonstrated by his death by drowning in 1928. Over the next fifty years, George Geddes’ successor, Ben Parsonage, supported by his wife Sarah, rescued over 1,500 people in danger of drowning in the Clyde. When Ben Parsonage died in 1979, he was succeeded by his son George, who has himself rescued over 1,500 people from the Clyde”.



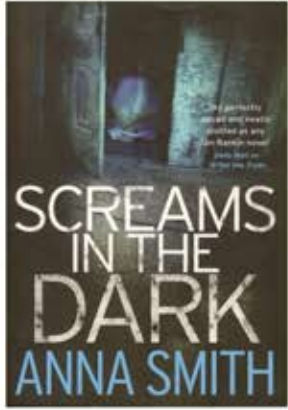
## POOR THINGS

by ALASDAIR GRAY ISBN 0 7475 12469 1992.

“Alasdair Gray for George Parsonage with admiration and respect, on hearing via my wife Morag, of your courage in both defying the personal risk & health and safety regulations, and thereby saving a life”

“GEORDIE GEDDES WORKS FOR GLASGOW Humane Society, who gave him a rent-free house on Glasgow Green. His job is to fish human bodies out of the Clyde and save their, lives, if possible. When not possible he puts them in a small morgue attached to his dwelling, where a police surgeon performs autopsies. -----“I

was called to examine the body you know as Bella soon after our quarrel a year ago. Geddes saw a young woman climb onto the parapet of the suspension bridge near his home. She did not jump feet first like most suicides. She dived clean under like a swimmer but expelling the air from her lungs, not drawing it in, for she did not return to the surface alive. On recovering the body Geddes found she had tied the strap of a reticule filled with stones to her wrist. An unusually deliberate suicide then, and committed by someone who wished to be forgotten". -----



## SCREAMS IN THE DARK

by ANNA SMITH –2013. –

HB ISBN 978 1 78087 117 2-TYB ISBN 978 1 78087 118 9-EBOOK ISBN 978 1 78087 119 6

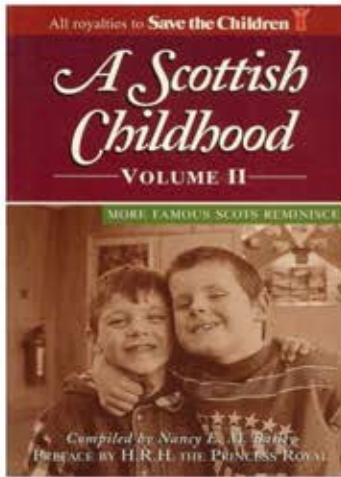
“No legs or anything?”

“Christ sake, man. Do you not know what a torso is? You’d better get rid of the ghouls up there before I bring it in.” He hung up.

Ben pulled his boat around so it shielded the torso from the gazing crowd. Whoever belonged to the remains in front of him had been a living, breathing person at one time – recently in fact, judging by the looks of things, the colour of the raw flesh where the arms and legs had been severed. He picked up the oilskin and expertly cast it across so the body was covered and snared, enabling him to drag it towards him. When it was close enough he gripped the ropes and dragged it into the boat, easing it over the side and gently laying it on the bottom as though he was handling a precious child. He didn’t touch it, or lift the cover back. His father had always taught him that curiosity wasn’t his job. His role was to preserve the dignity of the poor soul they’d recovered, and take it towards its final journey. He slowly made his way to the embankment, where he could see the cops already pushing everyone back.

Ben tossed the rope to the young cop standing at the edge, trying to keep his feet on the slippery, muddy bank, and turned off his engine as the two cops hauled the boat up the slope inch by inch. The ambulance men made their way down with a stretcher. Ben could hear the big Strathclyde Police Sergeant on his radio telling

them to send transport. The boat, with the torso still in it, would be taken in a low loader to the mortuary so that everything would be kept intact for the post-mortem. Not that there was much left to examine” -----



## A SCOTTISH CHILDHOOD VOLUME 11

Compiled by Nancy E.M. Bailey Published 1998

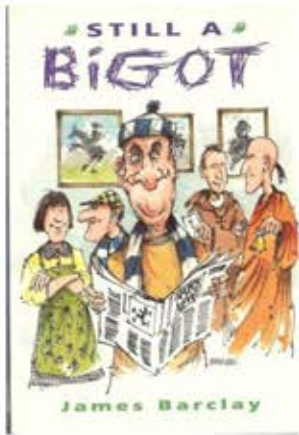
Again the Glasgow public read in the Evening Times of a woman being rescued on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1955...As was the custom in these days, Father wore a shirt with a separate collar, using collar studs. When he entered the water to rescue this woman, the collar shrank and he very nearly choked. He had to burst the collar loose, but so bad had been the choking that the doctor had to be sent for, and Father lost his voice for fully three weeks. In fact, Mother said his voice and throat were never the same again. She backed up her statement with the fact that the sandwiches he always made with his food were only half the size they were pre-1955; as a result Father always drummed into all of us near the river not to have our ties or collars too tight, and I think he must really have got through to me to a fanatical degree, for anyone who knows me will know that it is a rare occasion to see me with my top button fastened and my tie tightened up!

I remember this rescue quite well for I was the wee boy who carried the large stretcher running as fast as I could down the river banking. When I reached the spot Father was bringing the woman round, I offered the stretcher as I had been told to do, but Father said that, since the woman was conscious, they should keep her so by walking her to the house.

Father put one of the woman's arms round his neck and another man went on the other side. This was one of my earliest recollections of this wonderful method used by Father; keep people warm, make their muscles and their brain work; in other words, make them move and try to get them talking.

The boat Father used for these rescues was a fairly new one that he had built specially for the job and was named Bennie.

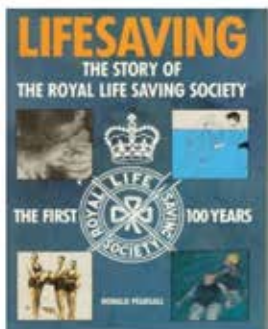
It could be rowed double-scutt without someone sitting at the back, and it would still not dive down at the bows. You could also bring a person over the side of it (most boats capsize if you try to bring people over the side), Father's boat was perfect, it went down to the water level to allow someone to be lifted, backside on the gunwale, when you'd step back and the boat would even up, you would swing the person's legs around, and they'd be in the boat. Remarkable workmanship! Every detail was worked out for perfect rowing and speed; the height of the seats, the distance from the seats to the rowlocks; open rowlocks so your oars couldn't get jammed in – you could lift it out before bringing someone aboard (you could injure someone with a fixed rowlock)".



## STILL A BIGOT

by James Barclay Pub 1997 ISBN 1 898169 13 6

"Hughie gave a discreet cough. "Ah notice – that wee man ye've got staunin' on tap o' the sideboard, Andra. Who's he?" "That's a gnome, Hughie," Andra said, "For the windae boax." "Where's his rod?" Hughie asked. "He disnae carry a gun, Hughie." Andra said "Naw, his fishin' rod!" Hughie cried. "He is a fisher of men, Hughie," Annie said. "Aw!" Hughie nodded, "Ah see. He's a wee Ben Parsonage?" Annie shook her head and peter laughed loudly. It was the first time he had heard dear Saint Francis compared to Mr Ben parsonage, of the Glasgow Humane Society and whose job it was to recover drowned citizens from the River Clyde"



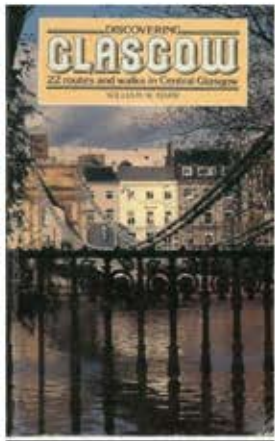
# LIFESAVING THE STORY OF THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY

The first 100 years By Ronald Pearsall Pub 1991 ISBN 0 - 7153 – 9867 – 9

“Heroic Rescue

1978: George Geddes Parsonage of Glasgow.

In the early hours of an April morning, a 43-year-old woman threw herself into the River Clyde from the Albert Bridge in Glasgow. The river depth at this point was between 9 and 12 ft. and an additional hazard was constituted by the remains of the metal structure of a former bridge projecting from the river bed into the fast flowing waters. George Geddes Parsonage was awoken from sleep and rushed to the bridge, where Insp. Kenneth McLean and Sgt Colin Campbell of the Strathclyde Police were in attendance. Parsonage dropped a lifebuoy into the river, securing its retaining line on the parapet of the bridge. The police officers then lowered him some 60 ft. into the river by means of a second rope. In the pitch darkness and with the temperature at 2°C, he swam 6yd to the woman and returned her by a chin tow to the rope end at his point of entry into the water. Her unconscious body caught on the parapet as it was raised on the rope by the police officers. Parsonage was himself raised by the second line to free her, before she was finally brought to safety. Although by this time he was very much fatigued he applied artificial respiration and, within less than a minute, the woman’s breathing re-started and she was removed to hospital by ambulance”

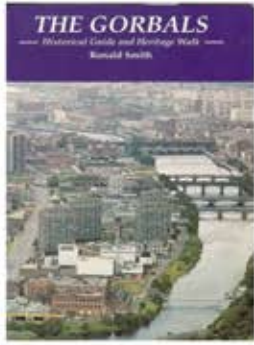


## DISCOVERING GLASGOW

William W. Barr Pubd.1980 ISBN 0 904002 53 5

“At McNeil Street the St Andrew’s Suspension Bridge spans the River Clyde and leads on to the Glasgow Green and the Glasgow Humane Society House. It is on record that the officers of the Society have recovered from the River Clyde and

surrounding waterways more than 500 bodies within the last eighty years and rescued more than 1,000 people”



## THE GORBALS

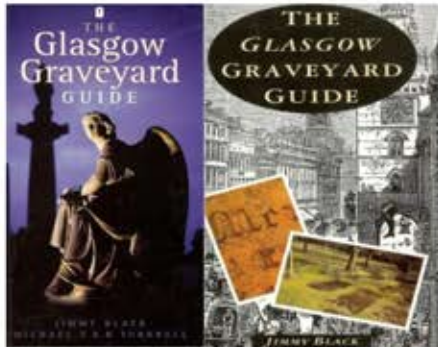
Historical Guide and Heritage Walk – by Ronald Smith

1999 ISBN 0 906169 56 9

“Southern Necropolis – Key to Headstones/Burials

No.5. the Geddes family--Officers of the Glasgow Humane society which has saved many from drowning in the Clyde (stone lying flat on ground)”

P.78 Photograph of St Andrew’s suspension Bridge looking north into Glasgow green so showing the Glasgow Humane Society House at the end of the bridge



## THE GLASGOW GRAVEYARD GUIDE

Jimmy Black – first published 1992. P. 109/111

“Members of the (10) GEDDES family lie here

“In 1787, James Coulter, a Glasgow merchant, left £200 to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, the money to be used to set up facilities for the rescue and recovery of drowning persons. Thus, in 1790, the Glasgow Humane Society was founded, and later a house for the society officer, and a boathouse, were built by the Clyde in Glasgow Green.

“Drama filled their lives. They were constantly on call to rescue people from the Clyde. Sometimes it was victims of accidents, but more often those who had jumped from a bridge in a bid to commit suicide. The recovery of dead bodies, and sometimes murder weapons, was also part of the Geddes’ grim profession.

The third George Geddes, grandson to the original Geordie, joined the rescue business when he gained the Diploma of the Royal Humane Society when he was 17.

On a dreary day in November 1928, young Geordie dived into the Clyde to rescue a man who had jumped from St Andrew’s Bridge.

The struggle with the fellow determined to end his own life was desperate. This time young Geordie did not succeed. He drowned in the dark, cold waters of the Clyde.

The whole of Glasgow was plunged into mourning for that brave young man. He was just 37. The base of the Geddes stone bears the inscription relating to Geordie’s death.

THE Geddes family did a job that inevitably made legends of them. It also made a legend of their successor, Ben Parsonage. The Glasgow Humane Society is very special to this city which always raises its banner to courage. It is probably the last Society of its kind in the world.



## **SOUTHERN NECROPOLIS HERITAGE TRAIL**

Glasgow City Council

“George Geddes (1826-1889) orphaned as a baby he was adopted by a family from Govan. At the age of 7 he was sent to work 10 hours a day at a silk mill. In 1837 there was no St Andrews Bridge at McNeil Street and a ferry took people across the river at that spot. George often helped his brother who was in charge of it. Aged 11 he saved a young girl from drowning which gave him a taste for rescuing people.....his dedication to lifesaving was recognised by the award of a gold medal by the Glasgow Society. As might be expected of someone who rescued people



from a river George was an able oarsman. In a contest on Kilbirnie Loch he once beat the then famous Bob Campbell Champion of Scotland..... “

“James Banks McNeil (1831-1878) was connected with boating and swimming in Glasgow during the late 1800's.....At one time he was a contender for the post of officer at the Humane Society House.....McNeil saved over 70 people from drowning. This resulted in his recognition by the London Humane Society who awarded him their silver medal.....”

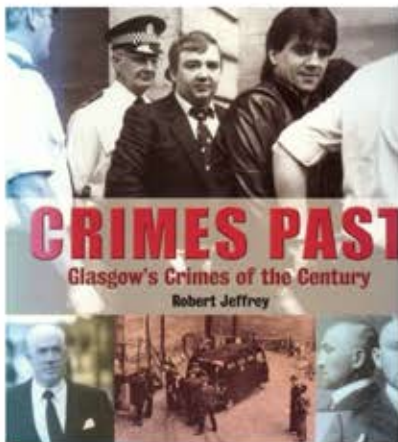


## GLASGOW 1955

Through the lens Published by Culture & Sport Glasgow (Museums)

ISBN 978 0902752 89 4 2008

“Rowing on the Clyde-This photograph is taken from the Glasgow Humane Society pontoon at Glasgow Green and looks southwest along the river Clyde”



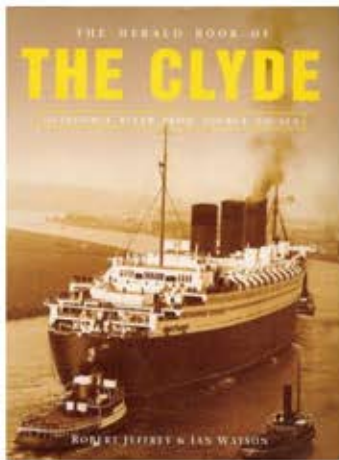
## CRIMES PAST

Glasgow's Crimes of the Century by Robert Jeffrey ISBN 13 9781845 020903  
Published 2006

p. 69 Photograph – “Rowing boats on the Clyde were commandeered in the search for the gun that killed the Smarts. (Two boats from the Glasgow Humane Society were used – Ben Parsonage is at the oars in one, a son rows the other).

p.153 – “Picture of Benjamin Parsonage in “The Bennie” (the boat he built in the early 50’s specifically for his work now in the River Museum).

Caption – “Man of the Clyde George Parsonage Snr, (wrong) of the Glasgow Humane Society, spent many years saving lives on the river and pulling bodies from its murky waters – sometimes they were the victims of a crime, sometimes victims of an accident or suicide. On his retirement, his son took over from him”. (Wrong again! Ben never retired but the day he died his son George automatically took over when the Police called for assistance with trouble on the Clyde!).



## THE HERALD BOOK OF THE CLYDE

Glasgow's River from source to sea by Robert Jeffrey & Ian Watson

Published 1998 ISBN 1 90326504 5

2 Photographs – no.37 “The River has its tragic side and, over the years has claimed many lives. The task of recovering the bodies fell mainly to the legendary Ben Parsonage of the Glasgow Humane society who, in his time, had the grim task of recovering more than 2000 bodies from the river. However, he has also saved more than 300 from drowning. Ben worked more years on the river for more than 50 years before he died at the age of 76”.

No.38 “Ben’s son, George, continues the family tradition, although with much-improved equipment. He is in the *Sarah Parsonage* rescue boat out on the water with Lord Provost Robert Gray in 1986. Provost Gray is seated in one of Ben Parsonage’s old dinghies. In the background is part of the Gorbals redevelopment”.



## 1970S' GLASGOW; THROUGH THE LENS

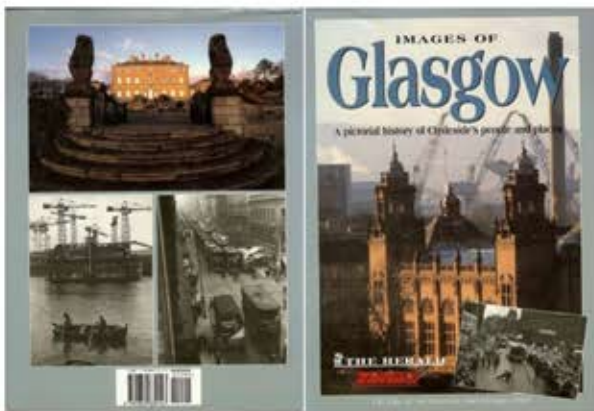
Published 2011 ISBN 978-1-84033-542-2

“Ben Parsonage, Glasgow Humane society

Ben Parsonage (1903 -79) was the longest serving Glasgow Humane Society Officer. Here he is on the River Clyde at the Glasgow Humane Society wharf on Glasgow Green. The Society was founded in 1790 “for the rescue of drowning persons” in Glasgow’s waterways and Ben Parsonage is credited with saving over 1,500 people from the river during his 51-year tenure as Glasgow Humane Society Officer. His son George succeeded him.

P.13 UCBS Building, River Clyde Jetty and George Parsonage

This imposing multi-coloured brick building, photographed from the Humane Society wharf, is the United Co-operative Baking Society bakery.



## IMAGES OF GLASGOW

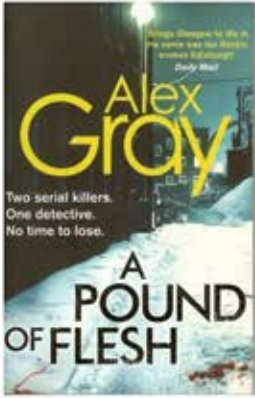
A pictorial history of Clydeside’s people and place

The Herald & Evening Times compiled by Robert Jeffrey & Ian Watson

Published 1995 ISBN 1 85983 014 5

P. 74 Top photograph – “This view of the St. Andrew’s Suspension Bridge shows a boat hiring station on the left and the People’s Palace, the Cathedral and royal Infirmary in a smoky background. (The boat hiring station mentioned is the Glasgow Humane Society wharf and the Society House is prominently seen at the end of the bridge.)

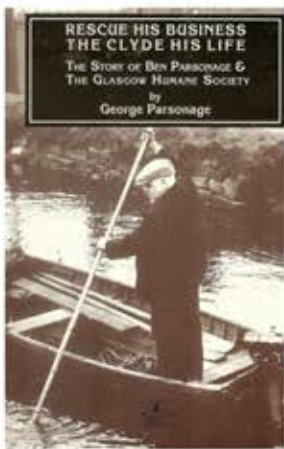
Back cover, “Ben and George Parsonage searching the river”



## **A POUND OF FLESH**

Author Alex Gray ISBN 9781847443939 Publisher Sphere

“Maybe it was because her murder was different, but it felt at the time that it could have been the same person who killed them both. George Parsonage, the Glasgow Humane Society Officer, told me at the time that her body was probably pushed into the Clyde near the City centre. He knows all there is to know about tides, currents and stuff”, she added”



## **RESCUE HIS BUSINESS THE CLYDE HIS LIFE**

Author George Parsonage ISBN 0-906169-29-1 Publisher Glasgow City Libraries

Chapter 4 the Making of a Legend p. 62 – 64

“At this time, he was living in temporary accommodation at 11 Templeton Street. The Humane Society was having a new house built, as the old one had been condemned. As the winter nights advanced about half a dozen of us went back to Templeton Street. What happy times they were, Ben would send for fish suppers at 3d each! As he lived by himself, the loaf went on the table, the margarine, the bag of sugar, and the milk bottle, and we all thoroughly enjoyed our fish suppers out of the paper.

Of course Ben and I were engaged by this time. We had become engaged on Fair Saturday, and were planning our wedding for Christmas. Guess what? Ben's first thought was to hold the wedding as near his boatshed as he could. The wedding was to take place in the Green, as he never even thought then of leaving the place. It was to take place in the Glasgow Rowing Club on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1933, adjacent to his own boatshed. In those days Bennie shied clear of all reporters, but a young reporter was always around, looking for news, and told Ben he had come up with a great heading: “Ben takes the plunge”, for his article, and he would get a photographer down. Ben told him if he did this he would land in the Clyde himself – camera and all. I think he terrorised the young reporter, who didn't come near, and I now feel it would have been a nice record for the family to look back on/

What a night that was! Glasgow Green rejoiced into the early hours of the morning, and a great time was had by all. The young men at the boats managed to get their bit in by hanging a notice on the bridge which read: “All intending suicides please leave off till tomorrow.”

You might like to hear a bit more about the wedding: I was all ready and waiting, and wondering what had happened, as the best man and bridesmaid hadn't turned up and the usual teasing was going on that I'd been deserted. Knowing Bennie, I might have been. If a case had come in, I'm sure he would have gone on it. As it was, his brother, who was best man, said they had a job getting him away from the river so he would be dressed in time for the wedding. However, back to the best man and bridesmaid; the taxi driver couldn't find the bridesmaid's address, and this was the reason for the delay. When I arrived at the clubhouse, however, all was well. The minister and all the guests were waiting – and Ben!

After the reception we walked across the Green, to 11 Templeton Street. What a laugh next morning, when Ben first opened the glass door, and then the storm door, to find sitting on the steps, his brother and a friend with milk and rolls.

But Father didn't even get his breakfast in peace that morning, and there was no time for a honeymoon, after the wedding. He received a message from the

Rutherglen Police, telling him that they had found a coat, pipe and spectacles on the bank of the River Clyde, about 50 yards east of Dalmarnock Bridge on the south side; they had been identified as belonging to a Rutherglen man who was missing from home”



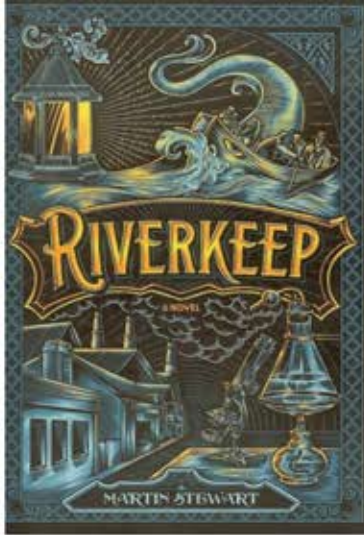
## PORTRAIT OF THE CLYDE

Jack House 1969 Robert Hill & Company SBN 7091 1065 0

“We have reached the elegant St. Andrew’s Suspension Bridge, which, like the Unlucky brig, was erected to take workers from one side of the Clyde to the other, and I must depart from my practice so far of following the left bank after we’ve discovered the right bank. The left bank is drably industrial thereabouts, and we are better to stay put, rather than investigate drabness. Incidentally, there are gates on St. Andrew’s bridge and they are closed at night.

We have come to the most interesting part of Glasgow green. From the suspension bridge, we see, below us on the right, the landing stage for the boat-hirer, Benjamin Parsonage, Jr.\* (wrong!-not Jnr)

When I visited it the last time there were thirty small boats for hire. But hiring boats is not really Benjamin Parsonage’s job. He occupies the handsome house just above the boat-hiring place and is the representative of the Royal\* Humane Society (wrong – should be Glasgow!). In other words, he looks after rescues in the river and is also involved in trying to find the bodies of drowned people. His father did the work before him\* (wrong –no relationship to predecessor), and the name of Parsonage is highly regarded in Glasgow”.

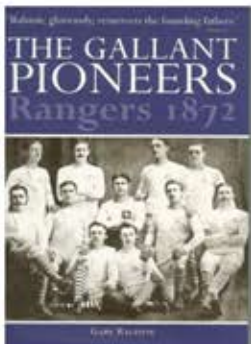


## RIVERKEEP

By Martin Stewart ISBN 978-141-36203-8

“Riverkeep tells the story of Wulliam, a 15-year-old boy who helps his father pull bodies from the waters until the day the body he pulls from the water is his own father's. Not that his father is dead. Or not quite--It's a book full of monsters and magic but it's possible readers might be prompted to think of George Parsonage, chief officer of the Glasgow Humane Society, who has been recovering bodies from the River Clyde since he himself was a teenager.-When Martin first read a newspaper article about George he knew he had found something he could write about. “George had been 14 when he first went out with his father for a recovery from the river which seemed extraordinary to me. I couldn't do it now as a 33 year old.

“It seemed unbelievable that no one had written that story before.”-So when Martin sat down to write the book at the beginning of last year he paid George a visit.-“I took him some Hobnobs to grant me safe passage and he made me a cup of tea and told me amazing stories. What a life he's had. It's extraordinary. He might be the most physically strong man I've ever met. It's like he's carved out of wood. He spends his whole life rowing. He's an impressive figure. The idea of the river is in his blood.”-

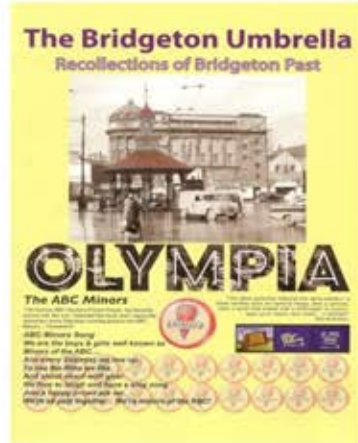


# THE GALLANT PIONEERS RANGERS 1872

Author Gary Ralston ISBN 978-1-85983-747-4

Publisher –The Breedon Books Publishing Company Ltd

Acknowledgements – p.8 “Thanks to..... George Parsonage of the Glasgow Humane Society”

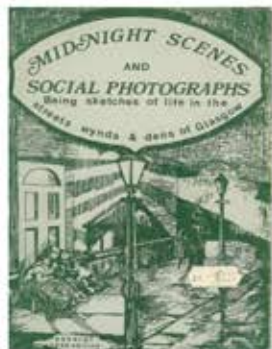


## THE BRIDGTON UMBRELLA

Recollections of Bridgeton Past - Clyde Gateway- Lottery funded.

Crossword – Test your knowledge of the Bridgeton Cross area.

47 across – G Parsonage society down by the river



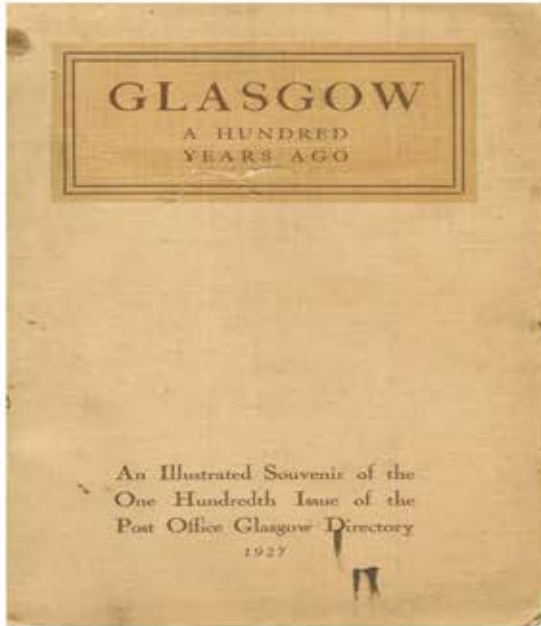
## MIDNIGHT SCENES AND SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Being sketches of life in the streets, wynds, and dens of the city of Glasgow by Shadow Reprint of 1858 edition pub 1976

ISBN 0 905192 01 X



“Approaching the Suspension Bridge and the humane society House, we remember having read it was near this spot that James Watt, in one of his accustomed walks in the Green, first conceived his immortal thought touching the improvement on the steam engine :-

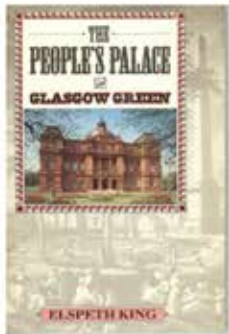


*Swan's Views of Glasgow, 1828.*

**VIEW OF GLASGOW FROM BEYOND THE HUMANE SOCIETY HOUSE.**

The spire to the extreme left is that of the Merchants' Hall. Between the second tree and the Nelson Monument is St. George's. Between the Monument and the third tree are (l. to r.) Hutchesons' Hospital (low), St. Andrews' (tall), the Tron Steeple, Tolbooth, St. David's. Seen through the third tree is the University Tower. St. John's is seen close to the tree to the right side of which is the Cathedral.

## GLASGOW A HUNDRED YEARS AGO 1927

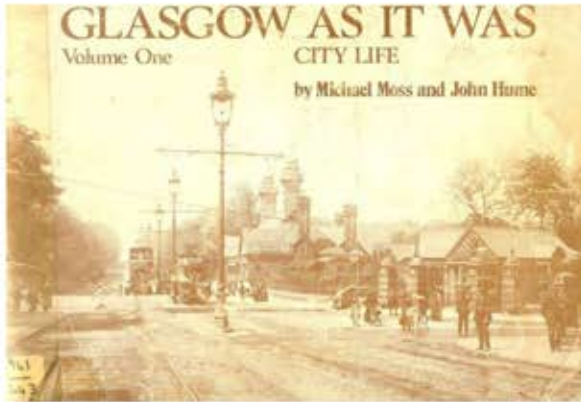


## THE PEOPLES PALACE

Elspeth King---Richard Drew Publishing ISBN 0-86267-094-2

Page 25-26 “Only two buildings have been built on Glasgow Green proper-one is the Peoples Palace, and the other is Humane Society House. The Glasgow Humane Society was founded in 1790 “for the purpose of giving encouragement to efforts for rescuing persons from drowning in the Clyde” Unlike similar societies elsewhere, the Glasgow Humane Society felt it expedient, right from the beginning, to employ its own Officer. A dwelling house was built for him on the Green, near the river bank, with a boathouse beneath, so that no time would be lost in carrying out rescues. Part of the boat house was used for mortuary purposes because of the fatal accidents in

the Clyde” (Not quite true as what happened was that the body was only stored/kept in the boathouse for a short time until either removed by Police or in the very early day, by relatives) Over the past two centuries hundreds of people have been saved from drowning by the Humane Society Officer. For two generations the work was in the hands of the Geddes family, George Geddes (1826-1988) was succeeded by his son, also called George (1862-1932). In 1937, Humane Society House was demolished and replaced by the present building, and the work of the Humane Society continues.”

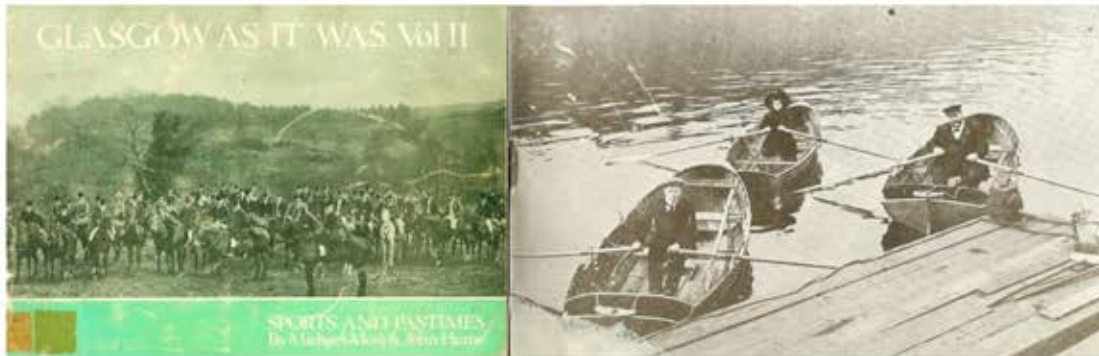


## GLASGOW AS IT WAS

ISBN 0 902907 70 0

Michael Moss and John Hume

“Mr Geddes, the Officer of the Glasgow Humane Society, outside the boathouse at Glasgow Green about 1900. Mr Geddes was a very strong man and rescued many people from drowning in the Clyde.



## GLASGOW AS IT WAS VOL 2

ISBN 0 902907 78 0

Michael Moss and John Hume

“The boating stage in Glasgow Green which has/ customarily been run by the Glasgow Humane Society’s officer. In this view George Geddes Snr poses with his family in 1911



## GLASGOW GREEN

Promoted by the Glasgow Institute of Architects 1990

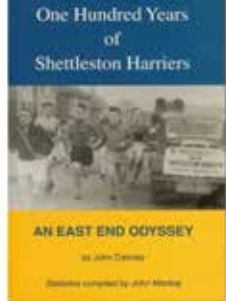
“Close to the Suspension Bridge is a house belonging to the Glasgow Humane Society. Set up for the purpose of rescuing persons drowning in the Clyde. The Humane Society celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1990. In the past its property included a mortuary. The Society still operates from this house. Doubtless among those who have been rescued in the past were students of Glasgow University whose boathouse and boat club are both situated close by. Note—there was never a mortuary.



ISBN4-06-142667-2

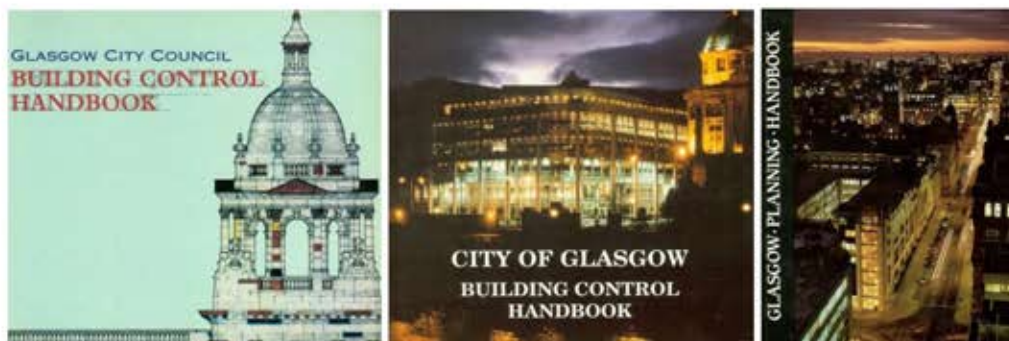
## GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS

recording George Parsonage’s row of Loch Ness in 1974



## ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SHETTLESTON HARRIERS – an East End Odyssey by John Cairney 2004/5

p.299 – “among the other Shettleston competitors out that day were George Parsonage, an art teacher in Glasgow well known for his rescue work on the River Clyde with the Glasgow Humane Society”.



## BUILDING CONTROL HANDBOOK

“In the process of naming streets there are basic guidelines that must be followed: e.g. the re-use or linking to an existing name within the area; the avoidance of proper names of people (either alive or dead). There have been some exceptions to this last situation, such as the name Parsonage (as in Parsonage Row) which was the direct result of a competition run during the Garden Festival Celebrations”



## STRATHCLYDE GUARDIAN

“Many police officers retired or still serving will have their own memories of the work they saw being carried out by this amazing little man”

“Ben Parsonage was a great man-not in physical stature-but certainly a man with a great and kindly heart. He was a pocket Hercules with indomitable courage, mingled liberally with the milk of human kindness and many police officers have seen him display these qualities in his humanitarian and dangerous work in and on the rivers and other waterways”.



## SCOTTISH MEMORIES

“Time capsule-Officer Geddes of the Humane Society outside his Glasgow Green Boathouse base in 1900. In a long career, Geddes, an amazingly strong swimmer, had saved dozens of citizens from drowning and retrieved the many bodies of the less fortunate”



## SCOTTISH DISASTERS

“The Chief of Police Captain McFarlane asked for assistance from Humane Society House in providing boats and men to begin a search of the river. A similar call was made to Renfrew Police. A Mr Geddes of the Humane Society attended immediately and began dragging the murky depths of the swollen river in the area around Clyde Street, but he could not find any trace of those who had perished”-----Within two hours of the beginning of the search, the first body was recovered. From then until 5pm a total of 17 bodies were reclaimed from the bottom of the river in this area”



# SCOTS MAGAZINE

August 2002

"I was prevailed upon by my then best pal Henry Shone an apprentice printer to join him in the printers Rowing Club which shared a boathouse with Glasgow university close to the suspension bridge, itself always enveloped in the tantalising aromas of the Co-op bakery across the river. I didn't last long as a club member for sitting in a flimsy boat with three other idiots' only inches from the sewer like waters of the Clyde was never my idea of fun. I was always aware that on the other side of the bridge was the base of the Glasgow Humane Society, whose primary function was to save the drowning or failing that, to fish out their corpses.



## THE BIG ISSUE IN SCOTLAND

April 21-27 2005

"There is something about George Parsonage that triggers people's imaginations. Friends have told me about him: the man who recovers dead bodies from the Clyde. Songs have been written about "the Riverman". He has been the subject of several documentaries, is the main character in the acclaimed crime novel "The Lazarus Widow" and will feature in a new novel by tartan noir author Alex Gray

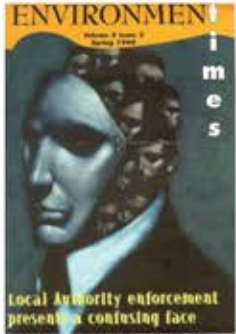


# THE MAGAZINE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GLASGOW

December 2001

“Space to Savour”

Historical markers are being placed on the Green to illustrate the significance of the area as a public space over the many hundred years, commemorating the visit of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the “Pennie Geggie” theatre and famous locals such as David Dale and Ben Parsonage.



## ENVIRONMENTAL TIMES

Volume 5 Issue 3 spring 1999

“Raw sewage has been polluting the river especially during recent periods of heavy rainfall when the sewerage systems have overflowed and discharged directly into the Clyde. George Parsonage who patrols the river for the GHS said that in recent weeks the problem has gone from bad to worse. “The river is a flowing sewer and vital lifesaving equipment, our boats and ropes are continually covered in this muck. It’s disgusting”. He said

The Mid –Clyde angling association say there is now a serious risk to health with sanitary products clinging to bushes and washed up on river banks.



## SUNDAY HERALD MAGAZINE

15 04 07 the Soul of a River by William McIlvanney

“George Parsonage Officer of the Glasgow Humane Society and popularly known as the Riverman is rowing on the Clyde. This is something he has been doing since he could barely walk. It shows. His arms powering the oars could stand in for pit props. The handsome clear eyed face above them glows with health, often showing a smile that could light up a small town. The close cropped grey hair looks more like a whimsical choice than the effect of ageing. He is 63 but it isn't easy to believe when faced with his energy.



## THE TIMES MAGAZINE

16 August 2003 Tales of the Riverbank

“As Alex Mosson the Lord Provost of Glasgow says “George Parsonage has carried on a proud tradition inherited from his father. Georges work on the river Clyde over the years has resulted in the saving of lives and he has worked in very difficult circumstances. All credit is due to George for carrying out this role”



## SAFE

Making the bright side of town safer-Strathclyde Police magazine

George Parsonage Glasgow Humane Society says, “Waterway safety in the East end of Glasgow is much the same as elsewhere. All waterways have to be treated with respect. In our area we have Lochs like Hogganfield, Quarries, and of course the Clyde and its tributaries. Waterways, shallow or deep, narrow or wide, each have their own peculiar dangers and we have to be careful around them”



## ROWING ACTION

September 2005 Article by David Collie

“There must be few in the Scottish rowing community who are not familiar with the Glasgow Humane Society boathouse which sits some 500metres above the weir in Glasgow Green. Some of those newer to the rowing scene may be less familiar with the Society’s Officer George Parsonage MBE whose record of rescue and recovery work is unmatched.” “Estimates of his rescues vary but probably some 1500 people have George to thank for getting them out of difficulty in either the Clyde or some of the other waterways around Glasgow. Not surprisingly because of this George is obsessive about safety and he does not mind making himself very unpopular if it means that safety precautions at Regattas etc. are adhered to and improved”



## KEEP OFF THE GRASS

Walter Gilmour

“Apart from the Peoples Palace the Humane Society House is the only other permanent building to have been built on Glasgow Green Founded in 1790 to co-ordinate rescue efforts on the river” “



## CITY INSIDER for everyone working in Glasgow City Council

October 2000

“Wrecked boat lifted

An object believed to be the chassis of a long sunken WW2 landing craft was raised, in an operation led by Land Services from its watery grave in the Clyde. With the aid of divers from Strathclyde Police's Underwater Unit, soldiers from the Army's Scottish Transport Regiment and the Glasgow Humane Society, the huge metal frame was lifted onto the river near Dalmarnock Bridge before being broken up and taken away for disposal-----“



## SCOTTISH FIELD

December 1973 Glasgow Green by John McShane

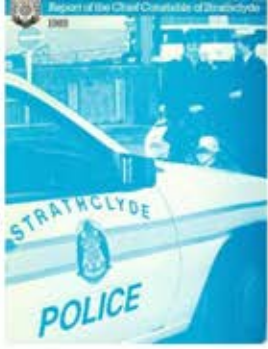
“-----Ben Parsonage could well be called Mr Evergreen. He has rarely been away from the place. Born in Bridgeton, he would nip over the Green as soon as school was out to help with the boats-----“



## THE WEEKLY NEWS

NO 7 1999

“-----“Saving Lives is the family business” “As lifeboatman on the Clyde, George Parsonage has won awards for his rescues, just like his father before him” “Often they dive in for a dare or out of bravado, not realising that the water can be over 30ft deep, is shockingly cold and has fierce currents”-----“



## REPORT OF THE CHIEF CONSTABLE OF STRATHCLYDE 1985

“River search by Strathclyde Police Underwater Unit assisted by Mr George Parsonage of Glasgow Humane Society.



## REPORT OF THE CHIEF CONSTABLE OF STRATHCLYDE 1989

“Constable Farhat Bashir and Mr George Parsonage of Glasgow Humane Society on the River Clyde”



## STRATHCLYDE PEOPLE

Autumn 2005 University of Strathclyde

-----“I was born and brought up on the river Clyde and it’s become very special to me. My father and I used to joke that if we cut ourselves we wouldn’t shed blood—it would be Clyde water”-----



## THE PEOPLES FRIEND

November 30 1996

“There’s no speed limit non Loch Ness-----George Parsonage, well known for his life-saving exploits on the river Clyde rowed from Fort Augustus at the head of the Loch to the narrows at Bona Ferry ---a distance of almost 23 miles---in an astonishing 2 hours 43 minutes.-----



## ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY

Recognising the bravery of people Annual Report 2005

“George Parsonage lifeboatman and Officer of the Glasgow Humane society, was presented with a Special Silver medal by HRH Princess Alexandra in recognition of a lifetime devoted to rescuing people from the river Clyde. It is estimated that he has saved the lives of at least 1500 people. George#s reaction to his award “It’s an honour for us all, not just for me. Members of the public, the police, fire brigade and ambulance servise are always on hand and ready to help”



## HUTCHESONS’ GRAMMAR SCHOOL

“Hundreds of pupils and staff were involved in “Colours of the Clyde” a whole school concert presented on 24 November in Glasgow City Halls-----George Parsonage, current Hutchesons’ parent and the inspiration for the title figure in

Gray's book "The Riverman" also presented and part of "The Riverman" was used in the text for the heart of the evening"



## GUARDIAN

Winter 74 magazine of Strathclyde Police

-----"as a family we must have seen more policemen than most-we were used to having them on the phone, at the door, in and out of the house at all hours of the day and night"-----



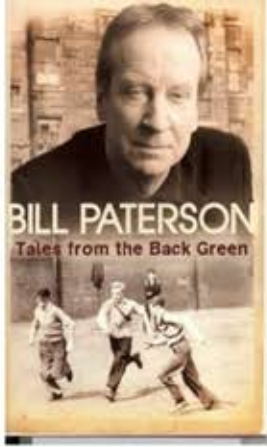
## COG

City of Glasgow College magazine June 2013

Clyde Life

With the River Clyde constantly changing Matthew MacArthur asks: Whose river is it anyway

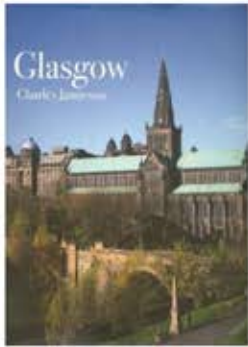
-----Parsonage said: "At New Year about 25years ago, come midnight every ship on the river would sound off. You'd be on the river and this cacophony of sound would envelope you. Now there's nothing, you hear the parties and the bells but now just before midnight, threes a funny kind of silence. I'm still out on the water with a bell though' keeping the tradition alive-----



## TALES FROM THE BACK GREEN

Bill Paterson

-----“my old school chum the legendary George Parsonage for helping fill in some gaps in my memory”-----

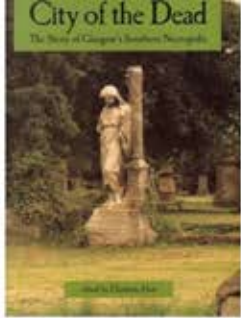


## GLASGOW

Charles Jamieson

ISBN 978-0-7112-2187-0

“Sitting close to the St Andrews suspension Bridge is the Glasgow Humane Society House. The Society was formed in 1790 after the merchant James Coulter made a donation. At that time, with a lack of bridges, ferries were used to cross the river and many accidents occurred. The Society was formed to rescue those who were drowning and retrieve the bodies of those already drowned. Today the Society, now a charity, still operates from the small boatyard on Glasgow Green under the watchful eye of George Parsonage MBE who took over from his late father Benjamin who had been the Society’s officer since the thirties when the current house was built”



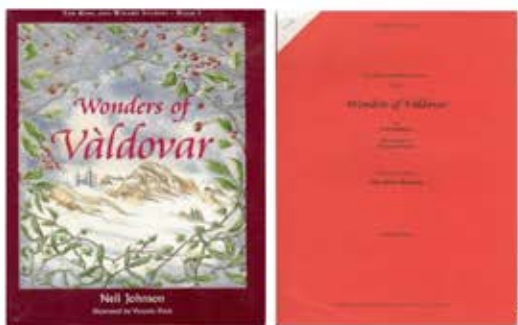
## CITY OF THE DEAD

The Story of Glasgow's Southern Necropolis

Edited by Charlotte Hunt

ISBN 0 906169 42 9

“People have lost their homes and lives in its floods. Small boats have capsized, ferries have sunk. Steamers have been caught in dangerous currents, night travellers have fallen in and the desperate have been driven to suicide in it. The City has struggled through the centuries to limit these dangers. One of the best known safeguards is closely associated with the Sothern Necropolis. Since 1790 the Glasgow Humane Society has maintained a house and “Keeper” on the green. The first officer was John Wiseman a shoe maker”-----“By 1820 the Society was able to report that six hundred and eleven lives had been saved by the start of the watch. The Geddes family arrived as officers in 1830, first James, and then George”-----  
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## THE WONDERS OF VALDOVAR

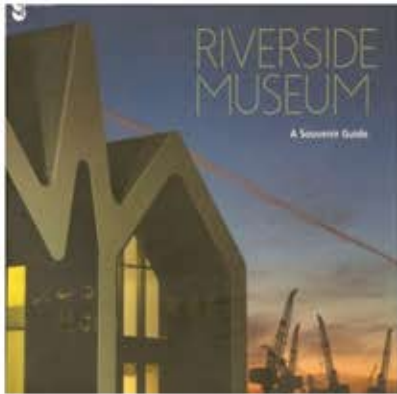
Neil Johnson

“The story of The River Warden is also dedicated to George Parsonage MBE recipient of many honours, including the Silver Cross of the Royal Life Saving Society and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Royal Humane Society, for his heroism in saving more than 1500 lives from the River Clyde Glasgow”



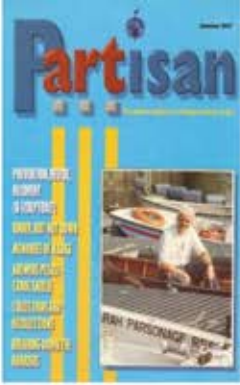
## BROADCAST

The good work that is done by one of our members, Mr Benjamin Parsonage of the Humane Society has been recognised by the award of a second bar to the Corporation Medal he had already received for bravery. We give him our congratulations on a reward so richly deserved.



Since 1790 the Glasgow Humane Society has been based at Glasgow Green-its mission to prevent accidents and to rescue people from the city's rivers. In 1954 Ben Parsonage BEM (1903-79) Officer of the GHS, designed and hand built the Bennie wooden rowing boat for rescuing people and recovering bodies from the River Clyde. Bennies shape and strength gave her great stability and her unique design features meant Ben or his son George could haul a body into the boat safely and easily





## PARTISAN

The alumni magazine of Glasgow School of Art

Summer 1997

Prevention, Rescue, Recovery and Sculpture

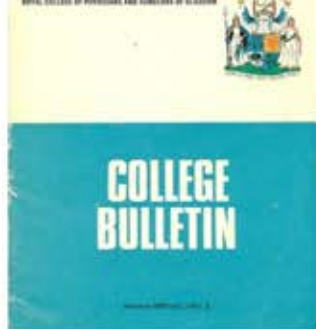
“.....Work on the river is certainly varied. The main aims of the Society are prevention, rescue, recovery, and I am on call 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. I have a fleet of small boats, mostly rowing (although some have outboards) as these are the types of boat that suits the Glasgow waterways.....”



## SCOTTISH FIELD

September 2005

A regular highlight of the show is the work of an artist with a strong Glasgow connection. George Parsonage is a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art and an accomplished sculptor. Outside of his art he recently won an award for his voluntary work with the Glasgow Humane Society who are involved in rescuing people from the River Clyde



## ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF GLASGOW

College Bulletin January 1978 Vol 7 No 2

“When he is not actually away working with the Police he is involved in some of his most important work, that of training the public in how to treat waterways with respect, trying to encourage people to chase away children from canals, ponds, rivers, never to climb fences near water, never to walk past when they see a child unattended near water, never to walk past when they see someone interfering with a lifebelt, never to play on thin ice (Mr Parsonage for years kept rescue equipment on the Canal and at Hogganfield Loch and tested the ice during winter for skating). He watches the river users, the racing skiffs, the canoes, the motor launches and gives them the benefit of his years of knowledge, watching they do not do anything to put themselves in danger. He is a one man Life Guard Corp, a one man Rescue Tea, a man completely devoted to the saving of human life and the humanitarian work of the Society, a man who never takes a break, who in over 50 years has never let his telephone ring unanswered no matter what time of day”.



## THE BIG ISSUE

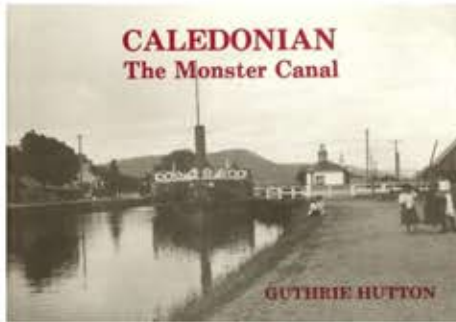
In Scotland

December 28 1996-January 8 1997 Number 100

The Clyde Watcher

“River hero George Parsonage, Scotland very own one-man Baywatch, explains why he finds New Year such a worrying time”. -----“New Year used to be a bad time-so

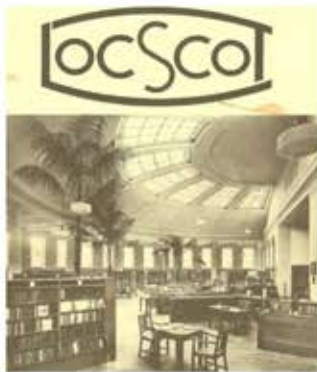
many people with unhappy memories. We did a lot of rescues, but I do not call them suicides. I don't believe in the word. To me they're "regrettable accidents". Only one or two out of hundreds of people won't be screaming or shouting for help"



## CALEDONIAN

The Monster Canal by Guthrie Hutton

"It is hardly surprising that a record breaking loch should attract other record breakers.....but no one has beat the astonishing time of 2 hours 43 minutes and 34.1 seconds set by Scottish internationalist, George Parsonage, for rowing between fort Augustus and Bona Ferry lights. Despite his feat appearing in the Guinness Book of Records he is still better known for his life saving exploits on the River Clyde".



## LOCSCOT

Vol 2 No 10 winter 1991

The magazine of the Scottish branch of the Library Association Local Studies Group

Article by John Smith Central Librarian Aberdeen City Libraries

ISSN 0261 7935

"Review: Rescue his business, the Clyde his life"

“This is indeed a fitting tribute, long overdue in many respects, to Ben Parsonage, Officer of the Humane Society and “Custodian of the Clyde”

“His love of the river is apparent for all to see, but this look back at his life reveals far more than a man who had a particular job to do. A diminutive figure, but big on heart, Ben won the regard and respect of city officials. Police and more significantly, the ordinary man in the street (and in the water)”

“In 51 years of service, lives were saved, property and inevitably, bodies were recovered. It was at times a very harrowing job. Since his death, the same work has been continued by his son George, so keeping on not just the association of the family name, but undoubtedly his spirit too”.

“The “Song of the Clyde” may well be synonymous with Kenneth McKellar, but the River Clyde will forever belong to Ben Parsonage



## THE SCOTS MAGAZINE

January 1991

“Glasgow’s Unique Lifesaver” by Joyce Somerville

“Two centuries of saving”

“If I see an old jacket floating in the river I’ll search for a body. If I don’t find one, I’ll check the jacket for identification, and try to find if the person is alive and well, just to make sure”.

“.....but people still persist in discarding such diverse items as old tyres, paint tins, even old cars into the water. Lorries will dump rubbish, and oil drums and old wooden pallets are found every day of the week. One of the most dangerous things is an old door. Without fail young boys will try to turn it into a raft, and that means disaster”.



## THE SCOTTISH LIFEBOAT

Royal National Lifeboat Institution 1995

“Tales of the Unexpected”

Bill Knox

“Two Hundred Years of Rescue and Recovery”

“A good river-boat has to be narrow. I have one motor boat in the water at all times and one on a trailer. Boats on trailers have to be river-boats, and also have to be narrow to go through gates to launching areas. There are many gates on the river and canal banks that are very narrow and sometimes we (myself and police) have to take the boat off the trailer and turn it on its side to get through. The most recent trailer that I bought –the narrowest I could get---had to be further narrowed by six inches to go through a gate in the City Centre of Glasgow. Then there is the length to think about, as there are places where a sharp, short turn is necessary”.



## THE JOURNAL

Glasgow Chamber of Commerce August 1983

“Don't throw things in the river

The main items found on the banks of the Clyde or in the water , are oil drums, beer kegs and scaffolding planks. Lorries come from demolition sites and and dump loads of timber and old doors which are almost ready made rafts. Railway sleepers, gas cylinders, polystyrene, old furniture, discarded air vents, in fact anything that floats can be and is used.....”

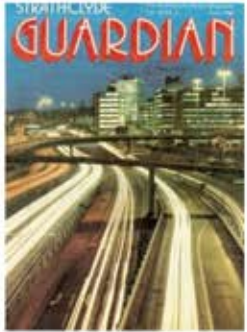


## THE JOURNAL

Glasgow Chamber of Commerce July 1981

“Glasgow Humane Society

The Chamber appoints representatives to a great many public bodies one of these being the Glasgow Humane Society. The present representative is Sir Robin MacLellan and he has written to us about the annual meeting held recently.....”



## STRATHCLYDE GUARDIAN

The Strathclyde Police Magazine Vol 10 No 2 June 1986

Fifty-three years meritorious service

“.....During World War 2 the Humane Society House was utilised by the RAF as a medical centre. However, despite a major disruption to their domestic life, Mr and Mrs Parsonage declined to leave their home and remained to ensure the maintenance of rescue services on the Clyde.....”



## STRATHCLYDE GUARDIAN

The Strathclyde Police Magazine Vol 10 No 3 September 1986

“George gets motorised

“Its full speed ahead on the Clyde

The Parsonage family have been well known for years for getting their oar in—in the best possible spirit. Now the Glasgow Humane Society have a brand new £3,500 rescue craft for George Parsonage to use on his essential business.....changed days since his father Ben patrolled the Clyde in a rowing boat.....”



## ROWING ACTION

The Official Magazine of the Scottish Amateur Rowing Association

June 2005 Number 29

“Award for George Parsonage”

“..... George and his wife Stephanie travelled to London to a reception where he was presented with a silver medal to mark a “Life Time Achievement2 from Princess Alexandra.....”



## **ROWING ACTION**

February 1999 Number 5

The Official Magazine of the Scottish Amateur Rowing Association

“New Year’s Honours list”

“Rowing Action is pleased to offer its congratulations to George Parsonage for his New Year Honours List award of an MBE for services to the Glasgow Humane Society. George who lives on the banks of the River Clyde at Glasgow Green is a member of Clydesdale Amateur Rowing Club”



Exploring Britain’s oldest public space

## **GLASGOW GREEN**

### **GATEWAYS TO THE GREEN**

“Ben and Sarah Parsonage Gate

Ben Parsonage, Officer of Glasgow Humane Society from 1928-1979

“A shy, unassuming boatman who single-handedly rescued more people from drowning than any man in Britain” (Daily Record, 2 October 1979)

The Importance of the Glasgow Humane Society to the life of the City has been, and continues to be, substantial. Ben Parsonage was a local hero and his wife was a constant support during his long and distinguished career”

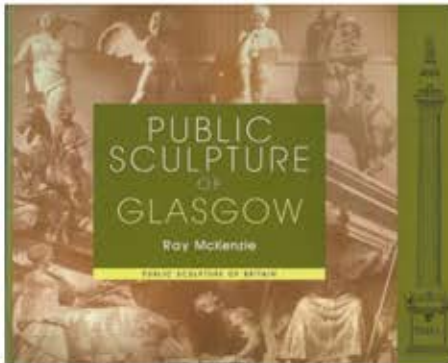




## SCOTTISH FIELD

September 2005

“Macmillan Cancer Relief Art Show.....A highlight of the show is the work of an artist with a strong Glasgow connection. George Parsonage is a graduate of the Glasgow School of art and an accomplished sculptor. Outside his art he recently won an award for his voluntary work with the Glasgow Humane Society who are involved in rescuing people from the River Clyde”



## PUBLIC SCULPTURE OF GLASGOW

Public sculpture of Britain

Public Monuments and Sculpture Association National Recording Project

Ray McKenzie

Liverpool University press ISBN 0-85323-937-1

“Less conspicuous, but no less vital, has been the role of the Green in promoting the safety of those taking advantage of the commercial and recreational benefits of the river, and in 1790 the Glasgow Humane Society was founded “for the purposes of.....rescuing persons from drowning in the Clyde”, establishing a small dwelling house for a full time warden close to the point where the river takes a sharp

westward turn. The house is occupied today by George Parsonage (b1943) who combines his life-saving duties with a thriving practice as a sculptor, specialising in fantastic, Wyllie-esque structures made from metal debris salvaged from the river banks. The many hundreds of discarded supermarket trolleys which find their way into the Clyde have proved to be a particularly rich source of inspiration, and which Parsonage's fertile imagination has transformed into sailing ships, wading birds and other riparian subjects. An entirely independent artist, he refuses to sell his work, or to exhibit in mainstream galleries, preferring instead to display it on a temporary basis in his riverside garden until it is donated to the annual Macmillan charity auction"



## **CLYDE HERITAGE GUIDE**

From Glasgow Green to Dumbarton

Clyde Waterfront

"At the far end of the Green near the St Andrews Bridge is the home of the Glasgow Humane Society which has been rescuing people from the river since 1790"



## **GLASGOW GREEN HERITAGE TRAIL**

"A ferry was in operation linking Hutchesontown with Glasgow Green crossing at the Humane Society House" "The Humane Society House had been rebuilt and a separate boathouse constructed"



## Waterways World

“Better than cure...Today, as when George’s father held the position, prevention is key to the Riverman’s role. George spends much of his time working to discourage people putting themselves at risk by water—especially children. Even without the attraction of floating objects (balls, gas cylinders, beer kegs, lengths of wood....) water acts as a magnet to children and holds a fascination that can easily prove fatal. Much of George’s time is spent removing these objects, together with a plethora of homemade rafts which he laboriously breaks up back at his boathouse”.



## GLASGOW’S EAST END

From Bishops to Barraboys

Nuala Naughton

ISBN 978-1-780-57652-7

“I had interviewed Parsonage some years previously as a journalist at The East End Independent newspaper. In 1958 as a young boy of 14, he had accompanied his father Ben, to a rescue for the first time.

Since then the Clyde has been his master and his mistress, and he takes every opportunity to praise his wife and children for their unfaltering support and tolerance”.



# CLYDE WATERFRONT REGENERATION

Annual Report 2004

“Water Safety Action Plan.....To date, a total of £1.5 million is committed to the Water Safety Action Plan. The safety of visitors and citizens using or visiting the River Clyde is a key responsibility of the Port Authority and public bodies including the City Council, Glasgow Humane Society, Strathclyde Police and SEPA. The Water Safety action Plan 2002-03 promoted the value of safety ladders, lifebelts, clean embankments and water.....The Action Plan for 2004/05/06 will continue this work but most importantly begin an educational programme on the safe use of the river and provide valuable support to Glasgow Humane Society, River Polce and Diving Team”



## GOOD BRITISH GUIDE-SCOTTISH FAMILY ATTRACTION OF THE YEAR- UK NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR 2002

Storm and Tide on the Clyde

George E Farrow Marine scientist and Clyde researcher Glasgow Science Centre

“Hurricane hit Glasgow-Belvidere Hospital recorded Beaufort Storm force 10 at 9.0am--The rise of only one foot can be attributed to the low pressure. At least six feet was caused by the hurricane-force wind forcing water into the ever narrowing Clyde Estuary. This is what we call a storm surge. “Great storm destruction of property and loss of life”

During the height of the hurricane a girl was blown 30 yards down the streets of Glasgow. Above the weir, which had recently been reinstated “large portions of the river bank were washed away and one of the boat shelters at the humane Society’s House was totally destroyed” Water was driven across the steamboat quay and rats flushed out of warehouses in their thousands as they became flooded. The wharf at

Partick was completely submerged, and the pier masters desk floated around his office”.

“The tide was seven feet above the highest marks on record for the last 40 years”

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“The tide was seven feet above the highest marks on record for the last 40 years”

“Flooding was severe in the west and central Scotland, with dozens of rivers overflowing their banks and many thousands of acres of farmland under water. The Clyde burst its banks at Renfrew Ferry and again ... “the strong winds coupled with a very high tide, flooded the Lifesaving Station at Glasgow green which is operated by Mr George Parsonage of the Glasgow Humane Society”

## **'TOUR OF MODERN AND PEEP INTO ANCIENT GLASGOW WITH AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION AND A STATISTICAL APPENDIX'**

Written by Rev. W. M. Wade published by Richard Griffin and Co., Hutcheson Street, Glasgow in 1822

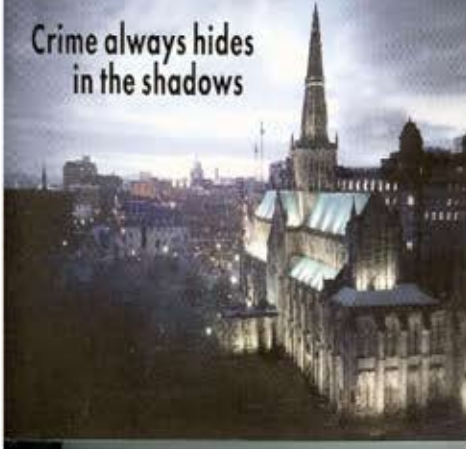
'That small building beyond the well, Humanity placed there. The bed of the river is of unequal depth as it flows past the green. Bathing is common. Accidents of a fatal kind have been very frequent, when the Humane Society of Glasgow reared, in, the edifice in question. It is called the Humane Society's House; and is furnished with every requisite of its destination. '

‘Convincing Glaswegian atmosphere  
and superior writing’  
*The Times*

# Alex Gray

## STILL DARK

Crime always hides  
in the shadows



## STILL DARK BY ALEX GRAY

ISBN 978-0-7515-6440-2

“The man had been found by the Riverman, George Parsonage, beneath one of the bridges that spanned the Clyde, face down in the mud, vomit-stained clothing a clue to his death”.