

# TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 100 Feb 22



100 tales of happenings on the river. Some funny, some tragic, some more to your personal choice than others. It is hard to find stories that suit everyone. I can but try. Perhaps this tale deserves to be the hundredth as all involved gave 100% of their individual abilities to achieve a sad, but successful outcome.

It is a longer story, but in the end, there was the satisfaction of closure for family and searchers. A tale of hard work, of patience, of refusing to give up, of individual expertise and of intimate knowledge of the Clyde.

The Police had a man missing from upriver in Lanarkshire, with the possibility of his having entered the water. There had been a lot of rain causing floodwater and the possibility of the man having been washed downriver into the harbour area. First thing was to make sure as best we could that the man was not just lying on the riverbank and searches of the river in Lanarkshire were made. This entailed coming downriver several times, through rapids, over weirs, checking under trees and among the rubbish piled up against bridge piers. Different boats were used for different areas of these searches.



Every day before high tide, I would check among the items gathered at the weir gates. Not an easy task and as is obvious from the photos, it was sometimes like looking for a needle in a hay stack.



Other areas of the river where flotsam was known to gather had to be searched also.



I reached a stage where I knew that by this time, this poor man's remains must be on the surface somewhere, but where? And of course the police were getting worried lest the man was not actually in the river and something else had happened to him.

I was pretty certain that the man must have passed downriver with the floodwater and should concentrate my searches in the harbour area. Every morning for the next few days, I contacted Force Control and arranged a towing vehicle to take me to the slipway at the Renfrew to Yoker Ferry. My then assistant, Mark Gash and I launched and proceeded to search upriver on the north bank. Difficulty was found even when just retrieving a lifebelt due to the amount of rubbish and rocks/sunken trees at this locus. We noted a number of polystyrene blocks on the banking, which should be removed immediately if possible but definitely before the school holidays.



Opposite the King George 5<sup>th</sup> Dock, where there is a large amount of rubbish gathered on old slipways, we concentrated on this area. Mark landed on the banking to walk, to retrieve another lifebelt and to observe the area from the land giving us cross reference. I moved close as I could searching the rubbish from the river. Noting something among the rubbish, we looked more closely. I pulled items away as best I could, and observed under more trees and debris what could be a body. We contacted the GCC boat St Mungo and requested assistance. I fastened ropes to certain trees, which the St Mungo then pulled clear allowing me to observe better the "object". It was indeed a body and appeared to have been in the water for some time. Some more debris as I directed, was pulled away. I observed, due to the bright sun that there was today, something glinting on the bottom of the river directly below the body, on the concrete slipway, which at that point was only 1meter deep. I reached down carefully and retrieved a mobile phone (which later proved to belong to the deceased). I contacted Force Control and

informed them of the find and would further contact the Duty Officer when I had more details. I contacted Lanarkshire Police and informed that I suspected the body to be that of their missing man. After sharing details, I again contacted the Duty Officer and informed him that I was now certain that this was the man missing from Uddingston. I gave directions on how to gain access by land to the locus. A chain saw was used to cut branches and whole trees into pieces small enough for us to remove from the surrounding area making access easier. Uniformed Police attended followed by Casualty Surgeon, CID and SOCO Photographers. They reached the locus using a ladder which Mark and I obtained from a nearby work site. Alan from the St Mungo cut the last piece of tree needed to allow Mark and I to lift the last large tree branch from on top of the body. We advised and assisted Police Officers and Casualty Surgeon as requested. The Undertakers arrived and together with Police Officers we placed the body onto a stretcher and carried it to the hearse. Near this locus I also retrieved a woman's handbag. When handbags are seen on the riverbank or in the river, persons contact the Police in case the bag belongs to some missing person.

We then continued our search for a man missing from Govan as far upriver as the Glasgow Bridge and then downriver on the south bank to Renfrew where a traffic vehicle met us and conveyed us back to Glasgow Green. During this search we retrieved and replaced 12 lifebelts.

I then received a call from County Police thanking me for my assistance and informing me that the Superintendent wished to know my thoughts regarding a body having travelled such a distance downriver. I said that the finding of the body where we did was conducive with the facts. The body would have surfaced near to where it entered the river after about 3 weeks. This coincided with heavy rainfall and subsequently a heavy flood on the river bringing downriver trees and anything floating. The body would be washed downriver during this time. When the flotsam including the body reached the area of King George 5<sup>th</sup> Dock, the current lessened as the river widened. The prevailing wind at this locus is from the southwest and blows fiercely straight down the Dock and across the Clyde blowing any surface objects onto the north bank. This is no doubt what happened to the trees and the body. The body lay on the slipway, out of the water at low tide and under the water at high tide but all the time trees and more and more debris covered it until today.

I stated my opinion that the finding of the phone on the bottom of the river, close by, confirmed that. The body had little clothing when found as the clothing had almost all disintegrated. When the body arrived at the locus where found, the phone was probably in the deceased's

pocket. As the days went by, the clothes rotted away and finally the phone fell out of the pocket. Had the body been floating or lying at some other locus, say in deeper water, subsequent to our locating it, the phone would probably never have been found.



I was then asked my thoughts regarding the man having had a wallet with money in it, when he went missing. He normally kept the wallet in his hip pocket. With the wallet now being missing it was feared that the man had been “mugged”, robbed of his wallet, and then ended up in the river by fair or foul means. I received confirmation that the wallet pocket was missing from the trousers as was the pocket in which the phone had been kept. I explained that the difference between the two objects being released from the trousers, was that the phone sank, whereas if the wallet had come out of the pocket, as the pocket rotted, it would have floated. The wind had been extremely strong and constant for some time and I opined that the wallet should have been washed into the north west corner of the slipway shown in the above photographs. A support Unit team was placed at my disposal and a search arranged to begin at a low tide the next day. I supervised safety and advised from the boat as officers removed trees, oil drums, beer kegs, tyres hundreds of plastic bags and all sorts of disgusting detrius. Their perseverance though, paid off, and the wallet was found with the money in it. This team really knew how to carry out a thorough search, so impressive.



Finding the phone and the wallet proved that the man had not been mugged, but the poor soul, had, accidentally fallen into the water.