

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 113



The year I was born the world was at war. While helping Sadie look after the family with its newest addition, Ben Parsonage carried out his duties both on the river and as an ARP warden at Glasgow Green (which seemingly included such varied tasks as gathering up unexploded incendiaries after air raids and heating babies' bottles).

Ben happily, continued rescued many people from a watery grave. He was also, sadly, recovering bodies of men women and children, from the rivers Clyde, Kelvin, White Cart, Black Cart, the Forth and Clyde and Monkland canals, quarries and emergency water tanks. There were of course, also prolonged searches for missing people, which turned out to be false alarms. Three of the drownings were bathing fatalities; some were off rafts. Some things never seem to change.

Newspaper Report *"Two boys were drowned, and two other boys suffered severe shock from immersion last night, when the raft on which they were playing on the Monkland Canal, at Castle Street. capsized. The boys' bodies were recovered by Ben Parsonage"*.

So many unsupervised children, fathers at war, mothers working. Several successful searches were made for stolen goods, yes even with a war going on, crime continued.

Ben recovered the body of a WAAF from the canal and a few hours later, same locus, he recovered a man. Next day in the Clyde another two bodies, a woman and a man both thought to have lost their way during the blackout, and fallen in. A tragic number fell into the river, as, usually. there was not even the moonlight, to guide them. Next day after recovering the body of a man near the west boathouse, Ben was taken to the Kelvin, where he recovered a woman jammed in the centre of the Beam Dam at the back of the Kelvingrove Museum. Day after day these recoveries went on. A Fireman at the General Terminus Quay, A watchman at Queens Dock, a Canadian seaman, a Military Policeman, a new born child at the Tidal Weir, at Kingston Dock, Princes Dock

Stobcross Quay, Plantation Quay the Priory Pit Blantyre, Canal, Partick, Cumbernauld, Oryan Bridges, Paper Mill, Merklands, Old people, young people, many very young children. The war took its tragic toll at home.

Newspaper Report 1943. *Water Tanks Danger.*

“Covering of emergency water tanks to lessen the danger of drowning accidents was urged at the annual meeting yesterday of the Glasgow Humane Society, When it was reported that the bodies of two children had been recovered from emergency water tanks, Provost George E. Mann, Rutherglen, suggested that additional protection should be given, and stated that in Rutherglen the tanks were being covered over solidly, with wood”.

Lord Inverclyde, who was re-elected president, congratulated the Society on its work and the services of the officer. Inverclyde and Ben were good friends and Ben was in later years, able to persuade Inverclyde to gift a boat to the Scottish rowing eight competing in the Commonwealth Games, Wales. The boat was of course called the “Inverclyde”



The following is my favourite report from my father’s records for 1943
“Made search in the Canal at Knightswood for a girl, 2 years old, who was missing from her home on the Canal Bank since early morning. On the arrival of a Policeman at about 6.00 p.m. with the little girl in question who had fortunately only strayed away and was lost for several hours, the search was stopped”. Ben returned home with a smile on his face.
My second favourite report, *“Mother had just given birth to George a few days earlier. An old woman came to the door and asked if she could see mother and baby. She told Mother that she would not know her, but she had brought her a cake that she had made and iced, as a present. She had read about George’s birth in the papers and just felt that she wanted to give a small present since father had given her back her son by rescuing him from the river”.*



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