

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 96 Dummies 3 12 21.

We have over the years been called out hundreds of times because of dummies. People throwing dummies into the water and shouting for help. Old dolls, Teddy bears dressed up. Film companies and student film makers often got it wrong when they threw a dummy into the water. Most had arranged for it to slowly sink, but often they did not sink, and they did not summon assistance and they just ran away, as their dummy floated away downstream. Others did the right thing and had a boat standing by to retrieve it.

I apologise for some of the photos of dummies being quite frighteningly realistic, but no wonder members of the public phoned 999 thinking they were real.

My dad and I were called to the Canal one day in 1978, by the arrival of a Police car at the house, to go and recover a body. We proceeded to the locus and found what appeared to be the body of a man lying over the topside of the lock gate near to the old Maryhill Barracks. We launched the boat and carefully retrieved the body. It appeared to be that of a male, but mutilated, no arms, no lower legs. We carefully lifted it out onto the towpath. It seemed to be tied up in sacking. CID were in attendance and a preliminary examination was being held. The body was wrapped up in cloths and appeared to be decapitated. The Police were about to contact the murder squad, when Bennie starting to laugh. "What's so funny?" an Inspector asked. Bennie said, "do you know what that took place on the other side of that wall? (the wall running along the side of the canal towpath)." "That is the wall of the old Maryhill Army Barracks". "What you are looking at Sir, is a dummy used by the soldiers for bayonet practise. It must have been dumped into the canal". This proved to be the case.

A Body drifting down the river in a bath caused a fair bit of interest until it proved to be another dummy. Lying in a bath, stuffed clothing, false face, shirt and pullover and dungarees and boots. Very lifelike to people looking down on it when it passed under a bridge. Caused a fair bit of panic.



In the months after we recovered the Torso from the river at Govan, we were being called out for anything that looked like a limb. A dolls leg, a shop dummies arm, shoes. One day I recovered a hand from the river. It was very realistic, a mechanical hand. It must have come from a "toy" shop, somewhere like our Tam Shepherds "joke shop" in Glasgow. It was a hand, operated by batteries, and by remote control. The hand had a sleeve covered in red paint to look like blood trailing behind it. When new, it had crawled along the floor. The story has it that some Police Officers repaired it and it used to crawl around the prison cells at night. If that story is true, it must have given some Glasgow Drunks, In the cells for the night, a very quick sobering up.



Recently a police officer told me a story that I had forgotten all about. During the time when the New Sheriff court was being built, he was a Sergeant with the Support Unit. He received a call, early one evening, to the Suspension Bridge on the river Clyde at Carlton Place. Passers-by reported a body visible below the water. Women had apparently fainted at the sight. It was an exceptional low tide and the body was clearly visible. Our services were called on and the officer clearly remembered my arrival in a small rowing boat. I located the body and managed to take a secure hold of it. The officer and I, immediately saw that the body was weighted down and I suggested we await arrival of CID before any further action. As would have it we could not contact any CID so the policeman asked me to go ahead and recover the body, before the tide rose any more. I started to lift the body but as I brought an arm to the surface, a hand fell off, revealing straw and a wooden pole. We realised immediately that this was a dummy, well made, dressed and with a full head, rubber face mask with hair. Realising we did not have a significant incident on our hands the policeman arranged for the Cleansing Department to attend to remove the "item". We then had the issue of removing the 'body' from the riverbank and negotiating the railings of Carlton Place. We sourced an 8x4 plywood board from the hoarding at the Sheriff Court building site and used it as a stretcher. We lifted the "body" on the board, over the fence, then unceremoniously threw it in the back of the cleansing truck. Only then did we notice the sea of young faces pressed against the windows of an adjacent school building. They seemed shocked at our method of disposing of a 'body' and the policeman had to go and explain that it was only a dummy. It was later found out that university students had been making a film at the location some months previous, and a scene had involved someone jumping off the bridge, but they 'lost' their dummy.



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