

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 97 December 2021.



Christmas at the Green.

Early one Christmas morning I was on the river in my rowing boat and sitting stationary under the circular overhang that we call the viewing platform. I was well out of sight of anyone on the platform. Two old women came along with bread to feed the ducks, seagulls, Pigeons etc. As they threw the bread into the water dozens of birds swooped to the picnic. I could not resist it. In a very loud voice, I called up “Ladies, It’s Christmas, could we not have some Christmas cake”. Well, what a panic as the two startled women looked at each other, looked around and down into the river but all they could see was water and birds. “Yes girls, I’m talking to you, we are a bit fed up with bread”. Sheer disbelief by this time. Oh, I would love to have heard what they were saying to each other as they raced off to tell their pals. I wonder if anyone ever believed them or if they ever returned with Christmas cake.



Then there was the day that some artistic wags, sculpted snowmen (well a snowman and a snow woman) on a bench next to the west boathouse on the south carriageway where hundreds of commuters passed every day going to their work in the town. Very, very funny.



Why on earth a snowman complained that it was raining I do not know, but I dutifully held a Council umbrella over him until the rain went off. Not even a thank you, though I am sure I saw a smile forming below his carrot. And as for Elvis.



Geese with their backsides stuck to the ice. We had a rather large goose on the river we had named Gertrude and when the temperature dropped, Gertrude regularly got stuck. She would sit down on the ice, then when she tried to get up, she found her bum well and truly stuck. I had to break the ice round about her. Oh, the sight of a big heavy goose trying to walk on the ice, sliding about then sitting down on her posterior.



It's hard to believe, birds getting stuck to the ice, frozen onto the ice by their bums or by their feet. I was called out frequently for swans stuck on the ice, but there were also geese, ducks, even seagulls. Seagulls, pigeons etc were all stuck at the top of the weir at Carmyle. They had come down and sat at the edge of the weir where the water was turning into ice as there was very little of it going over the top. So many birds flapping their wings like mad trying to take off. Swans got stuck at ponds like Bingham's, or Richmond Park; or Hogganfield lochs. Often, they were stuck out in the middle proving quite difficult to free. How do you tell a bird that you are out there to help it? To free it when it is panicking?



I had to break the ice up to allow the swans and birds to move on the river.



Christmas Lunch parties are all over the media just now. Some of my friends and I decided, as we usually did every year, to get together for lunch one Friday at the beginning of December. We always went to a restaurant in Albion Street at Glasgow Cross. I was just leaving the house to attend, when my phone rang. It was the weirman telling me that his centre gate was not working and he could not lower it. He had tried to contact the engineers but could not get through to any of them. I knew where they were, they were all in the restaurant waiting for me. I jumped into my car and sped to Glasgow Cross. A few minutes later I drew up outside the weirhouse and the amazed weirman watched as the Tunnelmaster, and three senior engineers rushed past him onto the weir and started work. A couple of us commenced to put the gate down by manual means, turning a great big handle, while the “experts” worked out what had happened to the electrics. Everything was fixed and the river quickly returned to normal and we returned to Lunch with a bigger appetite. Lucky or what? If they had not been so nearby, the water level could have fallen to a dangerous level. Good old Christmas Dinners. The Christmas Angel was looking after the river.



Whatever you do at this time of year, I hope it brings happiness. But do it safely.



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