

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 98



I was watching the World's Strongest man competition. On screen appeared the weights of the competitors. The commentator said that he would not like to have to lift anyone that heavy. He was right, lifting someone over 26stone with the addition of wet clothing especially into a moving object like a boat is, to say the least, difficult. I have had some experience of this.



One day I received word from Force Control that a very large, very drunk man was trying to walk along the parapet of the Albert Bridge, and wouldn't come off. I wheeled a boat on its trailer out to meet the arriving police car. We raced to the area of sloping bank on the north side of the river between the Weir and the Albert Bridge, where we slid/dragged the boat down the slope, through the overgrown vegetation and across the concrete slab of the Molindinar Burn outflow into the water.



Just as we launched the boat, the man on the parapet stumbled and fell from the Bridge. Being large, he made a very big splash. Fortunately, it was not low tide or he would have made a bit of a mess hitting the rocks that lie just below the surface of the water at that precise locus. He was lucky he had fallen from the downstream side of the south arch right next to the Nautical College where it is deeper.



I rowed quickly across the river and swung alongside the very dazed man, lying on the surface face up. Immediately realising that he was probably too large for me to lift into the boat, I did some quick thinking. The Bosuns of the College were on the platform almost right above me. Beside them was a Davit used for lifting and lowering items into their lifeboats, and unbelievably the straps were already lowered and hanging just above water level. Yes, this was a “lightbulb” moment.



Shouting instructions up to the Bosuns, the cable was slackened enough for me to wrap the lines around the man’s trunk. He was lifted just enough to let me swing him over into the boat, or did I pull the boat below the man, can’t remember. The man seemed Ok though badly shaken from his fall. I quickly examined him, reassured him and ordered him to lie very still. With the man now lying on the bottom of the boat, I rowed as fast as I could back across to the north bank where I had launched the boat and where an Ambulance now awaited. I jumped out and ran up the banking with a strong rope which I had attached to the bow of the boat. It was tied onto the tow bar of a police vehicle which had backed as far as it safely could to the edge of the slope. Every available Officer, some members of the public and people from the nearby rowing clubs, slid down the banking alongside the boat with the man lying dutifully still, in it, As the Landrover slowly drove forwards, we all lifted and pulled. Once over the top of the slope and on the flat ground the ambulance personnel, police and myself managed to slide a stretcher under the man, and lift him carefully into the waiting vehicle for a speedy transfer to the Glasgow Royal Infirmary.

Lucky or what. Team work, Initiative. The result is what matters.

I have lifted some very heavy people into my boat and a struggling panicking person is a difficult lift at the best of times. I have lifted a motorbike, dozens perhaps hundreds of whisky barrels into the boat (of course one at a time). Father, having a lower centre of gravity and being stronger, had lifted a motor bike with side car and also pulled the door off the Cadbury’s lorry (Tale 36). Strength, balance and watermanship.

