

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 115

Saying goodbye to those we love

Recently we have witnessed a family losing their mother a short time after losing their father. It is always a tragic time for a family as most of us will know at some point during our life.



I wrote a fair amount about my father's funeral in the book "Rescue his business, the Clyde his life".

My life changed forever that day when circumstances gave me no choice but to take up the oars and compete for lives, against the river. Like many, I loved my father so much, not just because he was my father, but because he was the Gaffer, the Guru, as regards working the waterways. He was respected for his ability, his faith and his willingness to help his fellow man.

I remember little of the days leading up to the funeral. I knew every undertaker from working with them on the river, but I have no idea for example, who organised the service in the St Andrews Church.

Parkmen came and cleaned up the front garden, which was then filled with flowers and wreaths. The Poll Bearers were Jeff Stewart representing Glasgow Police, Graeme McGrath (friend), John Thomson (son in law), Jack Crosbie (relative), Patrick Barnes Graham (Glasgow Humane Society), Bill English (Glasgow Council), and Tom Findlay (friend and rower) and myself.

Ben Parsonage B.E.M. was carried from the house to the waiting hearse in the pouring rain and escorted to St Andrews Square by Police cars and mounted Officers. He was then carried up the stairs into the Church, past Police of all ranks, City dignitaries, and members of the public from every walk of life.



After a very emotional service the cortege entered Glasgow Green at Turnbull Street. Parkmen had lined up on either side of the pathway, past the west boathouse where rowers had formed a guard of honour, and past our boathouse where his most famous boat aptly named “Bennie” (now in the Glasgow Riverside Museum) sat at the side of the road with its oars placed backwards. The flag flew at half mast and by some quirk of fate, time stood still (our boathouse electric clocks) as someone had accidentally switched the power off. Every crossing was manned by Police Officers in dress uniforms and white gloves.



Ben and his beloved Sarah are buried in Rutherglen Cemetery on a hillside overlooking the Jennies Burn/Malls Mire where Ben had carried out what he reckoned to be one of his finest recoveries, that of a boy from a culvert (tunnel).

I laughed for the first time in days as, when the coffin was lowered down, it floated. There had been so much rain, the grave had a lot of water in it. Ben had the last laugh.



I can still shut my eyes and talk to him and ask his advice regarding our waterways. His knowledge will never be surpassed and I am proud to have been able to follow in his wake.