

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 127

March 2023. Bottles

The subject of bottle deposit is high on the agenda just now. Oh, we did have fun as youngsters collecting bottles to get money back. Sometimes there was a problem when the shopkeeper said that the bottle was not purchased in his shop, or you could not return them if they did not have a top, or they were not clean.

In Glasgow, all types of “aerated waters” were known as “ginger” and the bottles were therefor called “ginger” bottles.



When we, for a while, sold ginger from our boathouse business on the riverbank beside Glasgow Green, we had many people bringing back ginger bottles. We sold coca cola and Charlie Moore’s ginger. When ordering ginger, it was preferred that if we ordered three dozen cases, we had three dozen cases with the requisite empty bottles to return. We never seemed to make any profit on the sales of ginger and crisps (Polycrisps our only other item for sale) as every cop, council worker or friend who came down to the boatshed, got a bottle of ginger and a packet of crisps. I also admit to having eaten and drank many packets and bottles. Some wonderful names “Dandelion and Burdock”, lemonade, cream soda, pineappleade, limeade and ‘red cola’. In adulthood the real value of money back on a “ginger” bottles, was driven home to me by the following.

I received word from Force Control, that a man had fallen into the river next to the Albert Bridge, north side of the river. A towing vehicle was on route. As I ran the boat on its trailer to the front of the house, Echo Mike one arrived. We hitched up and with flashing lights and siren sped to the west end of the park and the sloping bank downside of the weir, The ropes holding the boat to the trailer, were flung off, gate opened and police and passers-by manhandled the boat down the slope into the water. I was soon rowing alongside a struggling man just under the north arch of the bridge. A quick spin to put his back against the boat, a quick lift and he was in the boat beside me. I landed him and with Police

assistance, helped the old man up the banking towards the now waiting ambulance. He told me what had happened. He lived on his own and found it hard to find enough money for his needs, so he started to collect ginger bottles. On seeing a couple of bottles floating, swirling round in the currents next to the banking at the bridge, he had climbed the fence, gone down the banking to try to retrieve the bottles and fell into the river. Poor old soul. Now those of you who know me, know how eccentric I have become about removing footballs, toys and anything that would attract children to the water, from the river or from the banking, can add to the list “ginger bottles”

An added danger from bottles was that if they were half full and floating vertical in the water, neck sticking up, they were the worst thing for scullers breaking their oar blades on. When you were coming forward with your blade on the feather, and you clipped a bottle, the blade could break, especially in the days of wooden oars. I broke many a blade this way. So, we had another reason for taking them out of the water.

Now there was the question of what to do with the many bottles. Those we did not give away to old men like the poor soul above mentioned, were returned to the firms after cleaning the river muck off them. At first, we exchanged for full bottles, but we did not drink that much. Then we got cash that went to charity. Then the ginger firms said they could not afford to collect them. So, we stopped. But it was fun, to race out, especially when there was floodwater coming downriver, to collect a football, or a “ginger” bottle.

The deposit system was stopped, many manufactures have moved to cartons or to plastic, so people like the old man I rescued, had a source of income stopped.

What will happen now?



So many bottles.