

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN ¹²¹

New Year traditions and happenings.



New Year approaches as I write this. I have had some unusual occurrences at New Year. As the Tron Steeple Bells rang out, I have wished a Happy New Year to Ambulance crews, Police Officers and strangers I had rescued, having gone off the St Andrews Bridge hoping I would rescue them as they did not wish to spend New Year's Eve in a street corner, and knew they would now have the heat and company of a hospital. So sad, but they were always so grateful.



St Andrews Bridge at night



Ambulance



A good handshake

I have searched the river at midnight chasing a seal, which Police were convinced was a swimmer. On the sad side I have had to make a recovery from inside a Hopper (a type of boat on the river) on New Year's day.



Hoppers



One of the river's seals

From the river shortly before midnight you would see people scurrying along to be in their desired position at the bells, ready to first foot their friends. After midnight there were a lot of drunks wandering the streets. They were all very kind, and if I was out in my boat, they would shout

Happy New Year in between renditions of row row row you boat. They would offer you a drink. Some even threw their bottles at us, hopefully still with alcohol in them (never caught one to find out) and with a gesture of friendship. shouting “Here, have a drink pal”.



The build up to New Year in the household was frantic. The house was scrubbed from top to bottom, windows washed, then closed, not to be opened until the new year could blow in, new curtains were hung, floors polished; father even dismantled the stove, burned the grease off in the coal fire, cleaned it all and put it together again.



If you owed anyone money you had to pay it before midnight, no debt was allowed to be carried into the next year. After all the work had been done, table laid out with the lace tablecloth, best China, silverware, crystal glasses, black bun, cherry, sultana, homemade ginger wine, shortbread. No drink was taken as we could be called out at any minute. After the housework had been completed, you showered, cleaned teeth, combed hair, put on your best clothes, the men with their freshly polished boots and the women with their best hair do's.



Usually, the radio would go on, (latterly the television), and we would listen to Kenneth McKeller, Moira Andreson, the White Heather Club, Ricky Fulton and so many other great Scottish entertainers.

The men would go out in a boat on the river, so. at midnight, father and I would listen to a cacophony of ships horns. Later on, out on the river myself or recently with my son Ben, I would take a handbell to ring and a klaxon to sound. Once or twice in the late 80's I would get an answer from a ships horn, but that has stopped and ours is the only bell and horn to be heard in the Glasgow area, a bit sad. After we had listened to the Tron bells playing Scottish Tunes, when the bells finally chimed midnight, (as said I would ring my bell and sound my horn) we would tie up, climb the brae and first foot the house with a lump of coal, a calendar and shortbread.



Food for the house



Lump of coal for the fire



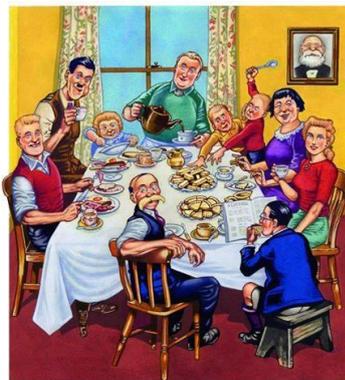
My hand bell Hand klaxon.

Sometimes my Uncle John would walk across the park to be a first foot. He always came to the door with his jacket and bunnet back to front. We would sing songs and dance, “slipperene” on the linoleum floors to help the dancers, tell stories, recite poems.

Occasionally we had strangers in but it was mostly family.

And we just hoped the phone would not ring. So often, sadly, it did. But we were always ready to move as there were so many drunken capers and sad people at New Year.

I wish all readers of my Tales, whatever part of the world they may be, a Happy, Peaceful, Healthy New Year If only I had a magic wand.



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