

# TALES OF THE RIVERMAN

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I would like to find some light hearted stories from the archives to turn into Tales. There must be more if I look hard enough, but with all the problems in the world it is hard to be jocular.

Rescue Societies including our Society in Glasgow, were set up all over the world at the time of the “Enlightenment” which spread across Europe and further afield. Among the ideals of the Enlightenment were that we should help our fellow man if he was in trouble.



If

If only.

If only countries and leaders would “help their fellow man” Forget their differences, religious or political. If only armies would lay down their weapons’ stop killing each other, and troops from everywhere work side by side to free people from the terrible earthquake, floods and starvation. Humane Societies train to help anyone in distress.



Society officers since the days of Robert Nathaniel Jones in 1790 have sadly had to deal with incidents, direct results of war. Soldiers returning after Waterloo, the Boer War, the two World Wars and the more recent Gulf and Afghanistan wars. Soldiers and sailors, WAAFS, some falling

into the river during the black out and sad souls not wishing to live through another war. One thing that comes over clearly in all these tragedies is that people do not believe their loved one is dead until they get proof. I have been at the forefront of returning peoples remains. A Queens waterman said that he wished there was a Society like ours in London, as when someone drowns in the Thames, a short search is made, and, if not located, they just wait until the body surfaces. I always try to recover remains as soon as possible, better a few hours than a week, better 1 week than 6 weeks, better 6 weeks than years. Rivers are strange, but they are prone to giving up their dead. The ideal situation is finding the remains either immediately, or just after they surface. In the media today, we have searches going on for missing persons, other families complaining that searches were not being made. Often, I was told, that bodies had been washed away down rivers, when I knew they had not, and I proved it by recovering them, often at the spot already searched. If a body cannot be located, the easy way out, is to say that it has been washed away. I have many reports in my records of this being the case, reports of my having located bodies after relatives and friends had been told by other search groups, that they had been washed away. My father told me to go over and over an area, repetition is a great thing. Never think that you could not have missed something.



I received the following, "Dear Mr Parsonage, I am informed you, recovered the body of my dear departed *brother* from the river Clyde last Wednesday. Your prompt and selfless action spared us unnecessary

and additional grief at a time of great sadness. Had *our brother* lain in the water much longer our family would have been unable to hold a “Wake” ceremony in which the coffin is kept open for one evening. It came as some consolation to us and our bother’s relatives and many, many friends that they were able to have one last look at him before his funeral. In fact, he looked beautiful, and his face bore a serenely calm smile. It helped us accept the fact he was actually at peace with God in Heaven. Needless to say, this ceremony could not have gone ahead without your assistance. Glasgow is indeed lucky to have had your dear departed father and now your good self at its service. Our prayers go with you in all the good work you do in the future and, indeed, Holy Mass will be offered for your intentions”.

Very few people contacted me, but here is another nice tribute.

“Dear George, I visited the transport museum today where I was reading about the humbling work you carried out. My aunt was with me, and mentioned that it was yourself that pulled my father out of the Clyde some 25 years ago, sorry, I was only 12 years old at the time. I am the daughter of John who passed away in the Clyde near the Portland Street bridge, he was early 30s. His friend also jumped in after him to try and save him and I believe you found my dad’s body. I was told that there was not a mark on my dad, that he just looked like he was sleeping. So, you must have handled him with great care. He always was a bit vain so he would have appreciated that! I thank you from the bottom of my heart that you were there that day. That our family had a body to grieve over, especially my gran who idolised her only boy. I’m aware of how much you’re calling must have sacrificed your own family time. How it must have impacted on your wife and children. So, I’m also grateful to them! Forever in your debt, you extraordinary man!”

I am proud to have followed on from my father. giving this service, and that the service is continuing.  
Greater Glasgow is fortunate.

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