

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN ¹⁴⁴

What do most folk do on Christmas day?



Look at presents, binge on food and drink, moan about Brussel sprouts, chat with family. Many do go to work, and it would be a sad place without the wonderful people who work throughout the Festive Season.

George Geddes, Ben Parsonage and George Parsonage had to work Christmases; at least on standby, ensuring instant readiness.

Christmas Day 1914, George (Geddes) was at Hogganfield Loch testing the ice to see if it would support the people who wished to go skating. There was a thaw on and the ice thickness varied between one and two inches, so no skating that day. The Christmas presents of skating boots were put away for another time or taken to another safe place.

Christmas Day 1949, a Clyde Rowing Club member, trying out the new oars he got as a present, fell out of his sculling boat. Ben quickly rowed downriver, brought the young man from the water and returned him and his boat (and his “baptised” oars) to his clubhouse none the worse for his dip.

Christmas Day 1965 Ben was out, recovering the body of a 39 years old man from the river Kelvin at the rear of the Art Galleries.



Christmas Eve 1961, Ben searched at Queens Dock for a Clyde Trust Watchman who had gone missing. Ben searched every day for 11 days until he made the recovery. A difficult search as new one new for certain that the watchman had fallen into the river, or if he had, where?



At 0645am on 25th December 1968 at Berth 31, Princes Dock a man fell into the river between a ship and the quay wall and drowned. Ben spent the entire day searching, a search made almost impossible by the ship being hard against the wall. Before setting off on Boxing Day, Ben had to recover the body of a man from the river at Glasgow Green, then, straight it was back to Princes Dock. The search continued on and off (due to other incidents) until the 29th when Ben (searching in the dark at 9pm (2100hrs)) found the man about 15 feet from the Quay wall. This man must have been lying completely under the ship, which had just sailed.

Evening Citizen, *“Dock Hunt for Man Goes On. The search for a man who fell into the Clyde at Berth 31, Princes Dock, Govan, yesterday, continued today. A Police spokesman at Govan said that a check of ships at the dock had been made. “Most of the crews have gone off on leave,” he added. Mr. Ben Parsonage of the Glasgow Humane Society is searching the dock”.* Daily Record, *“Mystery Man in Dock Plunge”.*



M.V. CANADIAN STAR

A mystery man plunged into the Clyde yesterday morning after slipping from a ship’s gangplank. The crew of the ship, Canadian Star, were wakened by the man’s cries for help. They rushed on deck to find him hanging by his foot from the safety net, but before anyone could reach him, he fell between the boat and the quay. Police and Ben Parsonage, of the Glasgow Humane Society, were called to berth 31 of Princes Dock, Govan. A security officer said: “It was very dark, but I could just see a man hanging by his ankle from the safety net. “I shouted to him to keep still until we could climb down to reach him, but he kept wriggling and suddenly fell loose.” Police said: “The man wasn’t a crew member.” I never found out why this man was trying to board the ship.

The comment (due to other incidents) was because on the 29th Ben brought a, middle-aged man from the river Clyde near Main Street Bridge (Rutherglen Bridge). The man had been in the water for less than an hour, but sadly was beyond help. In the Evening Times police issued a description of the dead man *“He is about 5ft. 6in tall, wearing a sports jacket and flannels and crepe-soled boots.”* Glasgow Herald said, *“the man, still unidentified, was aged between 50 and 60, slimly built, and about 5ft. 5in. tall, with brown hair and brown eyes. He was wearing a green checked sports jacket, green trousers, green pullover, a cream shirt, red socks, and brown suede boots”*.

Next day, after returning from Princes Dock, Ben was informed at 9pm that a man had been seen struggling in the river at the Albert Bridge. Ben (and his son George) immediately started a search and early next morning they recovered a young man east of Victoria Bridge. During these days, Ben had to deal with an unusual incident, when some schoolboys took a boat from their clubhouse without permission, crashed and nearly sunk the boat. Everyone was rescued thanks to Bens rapid intervention. They were lucky Ben was in the vicinity and not away searching downriver.

Then there were days when little of note occurred, but the general work continued, like on 25th December 1986 George removed beer kegs from the water (that someone had been trying to make a raft with) and reported oil on the surface (to the Purification Board), and same date in 1987, retrieved three lifebelts and two lifebelt ropes, retuning them to empty stances.

On 25th December 1990 George. having received word from A Div Control Cranstonhill, a few days earlier, that they had a 65-year-old man missing, last seen in the area of Queens Dock, was out searching. This man was found safe, in another part of the city. That’s the news we always like to hear.

Try to give the emergency services a rest this Christmas by staying safe.

Enjoy a peaceful Christmas, but if you have to work, I hope people appreciate what you are doing.

