

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 146 January 2024

Patience, determination, perseverance, pays off.



Ben searching on a "dry" day. Shows the oilskin over his knees.

This was an excellent recovery by my dad. Had he not recovered this body, it may not have surfaced for 6 weeks due to depth and temperature. If it was snagged somewhere, it could have taken longer, or never surfaced. To search for 6 days 8-11 hours at a time in deepwater (40-50ft) is physically and mentally exhausting. The ropes and hook are lifted frequently and every time they are lifted, freezing cold water, cascades over the legs of the person dragging. Ben always sat with an oilskin coat over his knees. Objects from the river bed, some large, some very heavy are lifted, and removed. The weather was poor, freezing cold, and with a biting wind howling up the river. Ben had the recovery relayed over the Police radios in "Gaelic", the language of the islands, (where many Police Officers came from), to baffle reporters. I remember dad saying that he asked the officer rowing his boat, "do you have the Gaelic?" The officer said he did. "Does anyone at Control have the Gaelic?" "Of course," was the reply. "Then send the message about the recovery, in "Gaelic".



The timetable of events went as follows;

23rd March 1956 Asked to search the river Clyde in the vicinity of Meadowside on the North Bank for a missing woman. 24th, 25th, 26th, March, searched for woman at Meadowside. 27th Searched at Meadowside for woman. Had to halt my search and go upstream to recovered the body of a man at the Broomielaw. Resumed search at Meadowside. 28th Searched at Meadowside. 29th. Recovered the body of "Doris", from the river Clyde.

“The body of 35-year-old Londoner was taken from the Clyde today near Meadowside Quay. She was found by Mr. Ben Parsonage, who located her in the middle of the river in about 40 feet of water. He had been dragging the river from dawn to dusk since last Saturday. Chief Detective Inspector John Johnston and Detective Inspector Alex. Duncan, Marine Division, who stood by while the body was brought up the quay steps, said they were satisfied the woman was Doris. Uniformed police stood guard while the woman was brought ashore.

The following is Ben’s Police Statement.

“BENJAMIN PARSONAGE (52) Glasgow Humane Society Officer, States: -On Saturday, 23rd March, 1956, I received information from Chief Inspector Johnston, Marine Division, that a woman had been seen to jump into the river Clyde adjacent to Meadowside Ferry from the north bank and eastwards of the ferry. Same date I had my boat taken to that locus and started dragging operations. These continued until Thursday, 29th March, 1956, mostly during the hours of daylight. About 10.30a.m. on 29th March, 1956, whilst making a sweep about 75 yards west of Meadowside ferry and at a position in the river between a third and a half of the distance across the river from the north bank, I recovered the body of a woman and took it into my boat. I immediately sent word to the Marine Police Office. CDI Johnston and DI Duncan arrived a short time later. The body was taken to the Mortuary”.



Photo - Mr. Ben Parsonage (right) is pictured at Meadowside Quay, today, with D I Alex. Duncan (left) and C D I John Johnston, after recovering a woman’s body from the Clyde

This “murder” hunt had the media heavily involved. Dad had one or two cases where an accused was in court before there was a body.

“Dead Girl’s Identity Soon”. “I Knew Her,” says worker. Detectives are almost certain that they will today identify “Doris”, the mystery girl who jumped into the River Clyde near Meadowside Ferry”. “Today a woman gave a possible name. A man who is certain he knows her is ready to travel to Glasgow as soon as the body is recovered”. “Dragging operations are still going on. Detectives have made intensive inquiries in many parts of Britain in their work to identify Doris. A man’s raincoat and

a woman's blue hat, were found on the river bank near Meadowside Ferry". "C D I Johnston has six magazines pinned to the door of his office. They were found in the river, and are believed to have belonged to the woman. The magazines, were bundled together and tied with string. Someone may have given them to Doris. Police ask that this person come forward to give information". "At the Central Police Court on Saturday, a 23-year-old labourer, was charged that on vacant ground near Meadowside Street, he assaulted and robbed a woman, meantime unknown, of a handbag containing personal belongings; that he threw the handbag into the river Clyde, causing the woman to jump into the river to retrieve her property, as a result of which she was drowned, and that he did kill her". "At 1 a.m. workmen in G.P.O premises overlooking vacant ground in Meadowside Street heard a man shouting that a woman was in the Clyde. They ran down to the river's edge, but there was no sign of her. Later a woman's hat was found on the bank and police took a young man to the Marine Police Office. Nine hours later, a 23-year-old appeared before Stipendiary Magistrate James Langmuir at Glasgow Central Police Court". "A slim, tousle-haired young man, was ordered to be detained in custody in Barlinnie prison for four days for examination. While he was there, Mr. Ben Parsonage, was dragging the Clyde near Meadowside Ferry". "Detectives were trying to discover if any woman had been reported missing in Glasgow since Friday night, and later the police issued this description of a woman who may be the river victim: Between 25 and 30 years of age, 5 feet four inches in height and slim build: sharp features with dark eyes, pale complexion and dark hair. Wearing blue-green woollen coat and dark coloured bootees. Her Christian name may be Doris and she may have come from London. Anyone who recognises this description is asked to contact the Marine C.I.D". "Late last night D I Alex Duncan issued this statement: - About midnight on Friday a woman spoke to a man in the uniform of a Glasgow Transport employee, inquiring as to the buses or trams to the centre of the city. They were joined by a young man. Later that night a woman of similar description was seen to jump into the river Clyde near Meadowside Ferry. So far, her body has not been recovered, and she is presumed drowned. It is desired to trace the transport employee referred to, who, it is thought, will be able to supply valuable information. She had an English accent and carried a brown paper carrier".

The Glasgow man last week charged with culpable homicide had his charge against him, yesterday, reduced to one of assault.