

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 147.



Please, listen to local advice.

I have a large file marked “proved right”. I do not like being proved right if it is as a result of someone else’s misfortune, but sadly it has happened. Hopefully, from tales like the following, people will learn.

We should always seek local knowledge and advice when working on a waterway. To save hassle, and hopefully ensure safety, I drew up codes of practice for craft working upstream of the weir at Glasgow Green. Easy to read and understand it saved a lot of time, talk, and perhaps, lives.

You would not believe the number of firms who just left a craft, for example, tied to a tree, unattended, where children (or others) could easily get onto it, and, motor boat drivers rarely understand, how much their wash effects, can even sink, racing rowing boats, or damage the habitat of river life.

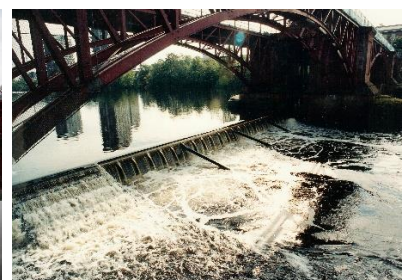


Mid-way through August one year I received visit from an engineer-diver with an international firm, who said that they wished to launch a 20ft inflatable at my boatyard. I suggested they launched at a better slip upriver, but that was not suitable (they actually had no knowledge at this time, of this excellent slipway). A dive survey of the river was to be carried out the next day. I asked if he had contacted any of the rowing clubs; he had not. I explained that, forby safety, which was paramount, there was such a thing as courtesy, and, for all he knew, there could have been a rowing race on tomorrow. He claimed that he had been given the go ahead by the Port Authority, which I found hard to believe, as their Authority is only downstream of the weir, (downstream of the Albert Bridge). and they would have told him so. I also explained that

there was a dead slow policy for any motorised craft on this stretch of river. No one seemed to have carried out a proper reconnoitre of the river. They were discourteous and obviously of the opinion that they could do what they liked. He had never heard of the Glasgow Humane Society. I gave copies of Rules and Guidelines for this stretch of river. and due to the firm's attitude, I contacted the Duty Officer at the Police Control Room, passing on details of the firm involved, for perhaps future reference. The Duty Officer was completely in favour of my stand regarding safety on the river. There is a triangle of groups who should know what is happening, the City Council, the Police and the Glasgow Humane Society. By now this firm must have checked my credentials. Still willing to assist, (always better to turn the other cheek than have accidents), as I suggested and the firm agreed, I posted notices on Clubhouse doors warning of their diving operations. Later that day, I observed a boat coming upriver throwing up a very large wash. Fortunately, there were no racing craft on the water.



I signalled for them to slow down but was ignored, I continued shouting and waving. Mutttered comments could be heard, but they slowed, though not fast enough to stop the wash battering my moored boats. This was the diver's boat that was scheduled to be coming upstream tomorrow morning. I contacted the engineer and asked him what was going on. It seems that the boat is going to moor overnight at Rutherglen (where I had suggested they launched). I said that we should have been informed and was told that I should have received a fax; I never did. I reiterated that the rules and guidelines should be adhered to. The engineer agreed and apologised. I was also informed that the divers would later, be working at the south Gate of the tidal weir.



I advised on procedures at the weir explaining just how dangerous the gates could be, and how, I tried, to work before high tide, it being always safer to work with a rising tide. I could tell though; they knew it all. I noted that the diver's boat did not come downstream until after tide time, therefore, it was obviously not going down below the weir to berth as arranged and agreed. It tied up to the south bank next to the weir gate. I contacted the weirman as I was worried for the safety of the diver's boat being moored at the banking and so close to the gates. I was informed that the divers were staying with the boat all the time and would be going through the weir, in the early morning at high tide. I requested that the weirman ask the divers to be very careful.

Next morning, there was a call from the weirman informing me of an accident with the diver's boat, fortunately no person had been on board. It appears that the boat went downstream through the weir at 0530hrs, then came back upstream and moored, again, just upstream of the South Gate (which, to reiterate, they had been told was dangerous). The currents had then ripped the boat from its mooring, it was overturned and dragged down under the gate, ending upside down on the bank downstream. The engine had been ripped off and everything inside had been washed away. I attended and with one of the Bosuns from the Nautical College and the engineer, managed to turn the boat over. The boat was still able to float and we emptied it of water. Thousands of pounds worth of expensive equipment was lost. I arranged for their boat to be towed to a slipway downriver, then updated Force Control, as they had received reports from public that a boat had gone under the gates. I confirmed that everyone was accounted for, then kept a watching brief on futile attempts to recover lost goods.

I learned that the boat had been left unattended topside of the weir. The divers had left the boat tied up and slept in their van. This means the boat was not being watched all the time as requested and anyone could have entered it. The next night the boat full of equipment was again left unattended while the divers slept in the van. It was indeed fortunate though, that no one was in the boat when the current overturned it and swept it away. They were extremely lucky.

As said, people should always seek, listen, and adhere to local knowledge and advice. I have great respect for the weir, almost a fear. Never think that you know it all. Sadly, there are other stories like this.