

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 154



Think about what you do, little eyes may be watching.

My Tales, hopefully, have an interesting side, and an educational side. It is though, sometimes difficult to concentrate. You start writing a story and the media come up with an item which you feel must be addressed. So, you start again

I have supported Surfers against sewage and assisted Greenpeace, I would support anything that helps stop filth entering our rivers. I have fought hard to try to prevent sewage and other pollution entering the Clyde and its tributaries, but I find it impossible to support, to sign petitions, on the basis of having rivers suitable for swimming; other sports, yes, swimming, no. I have taken the bodies of far too many young and old from our rivers, drowned while swimming. It was after all, the deaths of hundreds of our citizens that caused the opening of our first swimming baths, and subsequently pools were opened all over the city. At the turn of the 20th century nearly every primary school had a swimming pool. Rules were brought in to prevent swimming in city rivers. It is my opinion that rivers in cities are not for swimming in. I saw too much tragedy heartbreak and sorrow.

A few days ago, I heard a man on BBC saying that he hoped in his lifetime the citizens of Glasgow would be swimming in the river Clyde; many already did in his lifetime, and many drowned, If he looked at Victorian records, hundreds drowned. Then I see a programme about sewage, where a hotel owner is complaining that he cannot advertise in his brochure that you can get up in the morning and have a swim in the river. There is even a detective programme showing people swimming in city rivers. Paris is going to have Olympic swimming in the Sienne? (maybe). Whatever you do, remember, there are always youngsters and less experienced watching you, especially in a busy city. Children see and copy, they see adults in the river, think "great idea."



A number of years ago during the World Pipe Band Championships, I had to race downriver to remove two wee boys, aged about 8 or 9, who were stripped to their underpants and wading into the Clyde. These boys were from a small town up north, where they were used to paddling in the local stream; but now they were in the deep flowing, deadly river Clyde. Police returned them to their group. You could ask why they were not being supervised, but that's another story. The thing is there could easily have been two deaths if they had waded out another couple of feet where the river bed suddenly drops deeply and currents sweep west to the weir. Forby two deaths, just think the effect this would have had on the World Championships (a wonderful event) in Glasgow Green.



Glad to note that on today's news the emphasis was on cleaning waterways for sports like rowing sailing and canoeing.



It is difficult to get my point across about safety when the following gets printed in a Council *"Leisure in the Parks"*. *"Swimming in the river was a*

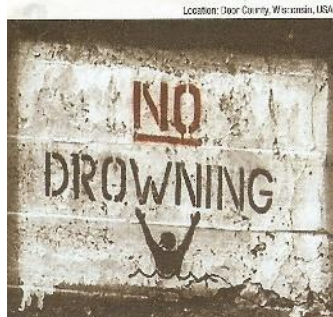
popular pastime. In fact, bathing boxes and springboards were provided until 1877 when doubtless industry took its toll on the river waters”.

Sadly, it was the grim reaper as well as industry who took his toll. That swimming ceased because of the state of the river with industrial waste, is no doubt partly true, but that fact pales into insignificance beside the hundreds of citizens drowned. I would like to have seen the city brochure give praise for building so many Swimming Pools, not talking about past river swimming as though it was a good thing. The brochure should have praised the rowing community, who produce national, European and world champions as well as giving so much recreational pleasure.

At least we don't have Alligators. A Police diver told me that when he started his career in Africa, one of his jobs was to sit up in a tree overlooking the area where divers were operating, and shoot any alligators that came near.



And there is this magnificent sign—if only.



© Parsonage George