

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 158.



Ropes and swings.



It frightens me when I see a rope tied underneath a bridge, hanging down with usually several knots or a piece of branch or old tyre at the end to sit on. You catch hold of it from the river banking, run down the riverbank slope and fly out over the water. Too many fell, and drowned. I rowed for miles to remove these ropes, climbed girders to untie or cut away. Of course, sometimes I used the motor boat, but usually I rowed everywhere, which allowed a better observation of the river and the banking for signs of any other dangers. I am glad to say that due to constant vigilance and immediate reaction to reports, we had no accidents from rope swings in our section of the river. Further upriver and on other waterways, there were very sad accidents, Drunk young adults swung, fell and drowned. These were areas where we could not inspect by boat and relied on others informing or removing. We could not be everywhere. Our section was good in this respect. I drummed it into rowers and scullers to report such things, even to remove them themselves. I would ask them how they would feel if they passed some youngster playing with a rope under a bridge, did nothing about it and read later that the youngster had drowned. It was drummed it into them. We all have a duty of care to look after our fellow man and possibly reduce the risk to ourselves, as there are and were, many in the boating world who rescued someone in distress. This “duty of care” covered many things, raft material lying on a river bank, children making rafts, making a den to hide in, a football having been kicked into the river. It rankles me when I hear people telling of how they played on swings and swam in rivers and canals when they were young. They were lucky; it grieves me about the others who were not so lucky. We must educate, set examples, and if setting an example means being a spoil sport, so be it. If we know the dangers, let’s do something to alleviate them. Regarding rope swings. Walkers, runners, cyclists on the towpaths

should report if they see any dangers. One of the problems is that it is not usually the persons who put up the swing who drowns. They enjoy their swing then walk away leaving the rope hanging as a temptation to younger or less experienced. It's the same with rafts, there have been many incidents of children drowned off rafts, obviously made by experienced adults, then just left lying at the side of a waterway. Don't just drive, run, walk cycle, row past and say "they are enjoying themselves". At least report it. We do not have to just educate the children, we have to educate adults, to be careful what they leave lying about. I wonder if you decided to walk up the towpath of your nearest waterway, just how many "swing ropes" would you find dangling from bridges and trees, or other potentially dangerous items. Prevention is the best. Stop it before it happens. Do not just remove after an incident. Be pro-active. Media reported after a drowning, "A large rope swing hanging over the water from a branch was taken down". It should have been removed before the accident and I wonder if another rope is already back up. I google searched "rope swings over rivers" and viewed dozens of photos of youngsters and not so young, on swings. Photo after photo displayed as though this was a great thing. A youngster on the TV said it was a "rite of passage". Maybe I am wrong, too involved, eccentric, an old moan, a spoilsport about stopping people enjoying themselves because of potential accidents, but if one life is saved, it is surely worth it. Here follows a selection of items taken from the river or banking that could have attracted children.

