

Tales of the Riverman no 23



Polmadie Bridge

Before there were Bridges, ferries crossed the river at Polmadie (Bridge), Rutherglen (Bridge) and McNeill Street (St Andrews Bridge)

Polmadie Footbridge connects Richmond Park with Glasgow Green



The original, mostly wooden, Polmadie Footbridge had a span at each side of 40 ft. flanking two central ones of 60 ft. 6 in. using girders 4 ft. deep with piers formed of three rows of timber piles. When built from 1899–1901, this bridge was enclosed in timbered ornamental work giving it the appearance of an arch bridge. It was opened on 13 June 1901.

This Bridge was partially destroyed by fire in 1921 and new girders were supplied for the central spans. It was finally closed in 1939 and remained in a dilapidated state until the present footbridge was erected during 1954/55. The new concrete Bridge was named the Baillie Kay Bridge and there was a brass plaque placed in the centre of the Bridge. The plaque did not last long and the Bridge has really always just been known as the Polmadie Bridge.



The hamlet of Polmadie was situated on the west side of the Polmadie Burn, just to the south of the road between Rutherglen and Little Govan.



An early Gaelic name is Polmadie, containing Gaelic poll "pool", usually meaning "burn" or "stream". The middle element is Gaelic mac (of (the) sons). The third element could be either the personal name Daigh, or the Gaelic Dè (of God), referring to an early religious establishment beside the burn.

The Bridge was used (and is still used) as the starting place for 1450metre rowing races with the south bank being given an advantage to make up for the first large bend on the course (1450metres from the Bridge to the post at the Clydesdale Rowing Club)

Many children and adults were rescued or were drowned in this area with the Humane Society officer playing his part in most of the occurrences. In the late 1890,s and early 1900,s there were sand pits in the area; boats were hired at Rutherglen even to persons who had been drinking, people jumped in, fell in, tried to swim, tried to retrieve items from the water. Boats have crashed into the piers.



Saturday 28th November 1891 1620hrs a 25yr old Bridgeton miner, Bridgeton, went into the river with the intention of swimming to the Green Side from the Polmadie Ferry steps. It appears that along with some companions (who were all under the influence of liquor), he came to the ferry with the intention of crossing, but on account of the boat not being there. He undertook for a small wager to swim across. He partly divested himself of his clothing, took to the river, swam a short distance but was overcome, sank and was drowned. George Geddes was communicated with and the Humane Society officers recovered the body soon afterwards, but life was gone.

On Tuesday 2nd September 1930 Ben Parsonage was rowing upriver to search for a parcel that had been dropped from Polmadie Bridge the previous night when he saw a man struggling in the water. He raced to the rescue, dived into the water and brought the man to the boat. He lifted him into the boat and applied artificial respiration bringing the man round. This man had embezzled the Anchor Line Shipping Company of a large sum of money. A medal commemorating this rescue is in the possession of the Parsonage Family.



One extremely sad occurrence was when a man stood in the centre of the Bridge. Because the parapet was low (lowest on the river) this large strong man was able to lift part of a wall, bricks and mortar, onto the parapet, then place a rope around him, tie it tight and then overbalance into the river. Needless to say he sunk immediately. When recovered it took 8 of us to lift the man and the part wall out of the water.



The Alarm was raised when a body wrapped in plastic was seen floating down the river. I rushed to the location and carefully retrieved the "body" and brought it to our wharf. CID attended and carefully examined the bound up figure. At that moment a passer-by arrived and informed that he had seen a film crew on the Bridge filming two men dumping the "body into the water. Seemingly the "dummy body" was meant to sink; but it did not; and the film crew ran off.

In the 1980's a member of the public informed me that there had been an incident at Polmadie Bridge where Police had been chasing two young men one of who was carrying a rifle. The rifle had been thrown into the water and this member of the public had seen where it had entered, but he did not wish to go to the Police. I went upriver in the launch and recovered the rifle using specialist grapnels and handed it over to the Duty Inspector.



Two years ago I was sitting in front of the telly on a cold November night, pouring with rain outside, when the room was lit by headlamps and blue flashing light and I heard the noise of a car screaming up the brae outside the house. I was at the door with shoes in hand before the Police Inspector arrived. A woman had phoned the Police saying she was going to enter the river and when the Police arrived she jumped. I raced for the launch and about 40 seconds later was lifting the woman into my boat. Seemingly, this woman took her rescue as an omen and lived a long and happy life.

At present no craft are allowed to go upstream of the Bridge. This has caused the area of river between Polmadie and the Tidal weir to be extremely busy with as many as 500 rowing racing boats going up and down this 1400metre stretch of water on Saturdays and Sundays and every day during the week though with lesser numbers. It has been very trying on rowers training for summer glory and they are to be congratulated for their tolerance and understanding. No rowing Regattas or Head Races have been held since the Bridge was closed. Cabin cruisers going up to the Rutherglen Club have all been escorted through the Bridge by Glasgow Humane Society

Much occurred on and around Polmadie Bridge. In its short lifetime it has many stories to tell. It is though going out with a bang. Since it was declared dangerous a year ago, it has seen floods wash away the pontoons that were supposed to be being used to dismantle it. It has to be taken down bit by bit, lump by lump of concrete. Many floods this winter have stopped work. High winds have stopped work. But it will be down soon, though the piers will still (hopefully) stand and in the future be used to support another Bridge

