



TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 29



Armistice Day got me thinking of the number of drownings at home related to wars. Soldiers returning from the Napoleonic Wars, Soldiers of the Boer War possibly not wishing to have to be involved in WW1, soldiers guarding our Docks and sailors on ships in our harbour during both WW1 and WW2 fell into the Clyde during heavy fogs and of course the blackout.

From George Geddes's notes: Monday 18th August 1902 Attempted Suicide 7.50p.m. A 28yr old soldier returned from the front plunged into the river from the south bank nearly opposite the Humane Society House. He was hauled out and taken to the house put to bed, provided with a change of clothing & handed over to the Police, about 12 midnight.



Wednesday 20th August 1902 Attempted Suicide 1.30a.m. A 19yr old soldier (3 weeks home from the front) went into the river at the garden at the Humane Society House. He shouted for "Help" and his cries were heard by those in the house. He got out and was taken into the house put to bed and afterwards handed over to the Police.

From Ben Parsonage's notes: 10th October, 1939 'I recovered the body of a Royal Artillery man who was drowned in the River Clyde having fallen into the water while on sentry duty on the south side of the River near Finnieston Ferry. This accident occurred at 4.00 a.m. during the blackout. I rowed from Glasgow Green to Finnieston and recovered the body at 11.20 a.m.'



2nd December, 1939. 'I recovered the body of, a Chief Stoker, from the River Clyde at Shieldhall Wharf. I had visited the locus the previous evening but due to the blackout I was unable to make a search. Soldiers were under orders now to shoot at anything moving in the River at night in case it was enemy saboteurs.'

20th December, 1939. 'I recovered the body of a Naval Officer from Berth 5; George 5th Dock after shout had been heard the previous evening about midnight during the blackout and heavy fog.'



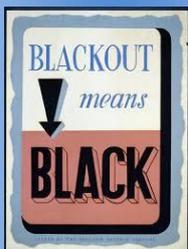
8th July, 1940. 'Monday, while searching for boy drowned out of canoe a 25yr old woman and her daughter and her baby, fell into the River Clyde 70 yards east of the King's Bridge.'



I saved the mother and daughter and the young Policeman who was with me dived in and saved the baby, 8 weeks old. All were taken to the Society House and treated before going to the Royal Infirmary.



This woman had decided to end all for herself and her two children when life became, it seemed, too difficult for her. Her husband was away in the army and she was finding it difficult to cope. Her baby had started crying one night and she had put the light on without drawing her blackout curtains and had got into trouble with the Police so she took her dramatic actions. All ended well, her husband came home on compassionate leave and they flitted out of the district.’



One Sunday morning I was getting ready to go to the Armistice Service when my sister Ann said that it was her turn to go this year. This was before portable phones and pagers when we always had someone at the Green

to answer the phone. So it was decided neither of them were going and so at 1030hrs both were at the Society base when the weirman phoned and informed me that there was a woman on the north bank next to the weir taking her clothes off obviously going to enter the water. While Ann contacted the Police for back up, I raced to the wharfage and rowed speedily downstream. Police Officers on route to the armistice service, uniforms gleaming and wearing their white gloves were running from the high street where they had been marching to George Square. Seeing the officers the woman turned to face them all the time backing towards the water. I brought the boat quietly to a position right behind her (another of the benefits of not using a motor boat) and was able to step off the boat onto the banking without her seeing him and catch hold of her. The police removed the woman.

Now if either I or Ann had gone to the Armistice Service or if the Police officers had not been marching up the Saltmarket the woman would probably have entered the water.

