

# Tales of the Riverman 44

53 years after what Bennie Parsonage counted as his greatest achievement he finally laid down his oars for the last time.



Bennie is buried beside his beloved Sarah in the Cemetery at Rutherglen, on a hill overlooking Glasgow, his City. It also overlooks the Cityford Burn, Spital Burn which flow into the Malls Mire or Jennies Burn or Polmadie Burn through Richmond Park and into the River Clyde. It is fitting that Bennie looks down on the waterways that meant so much to him.

They said that if you cut Ben Parsonage it would be Clyde water not blood that flowed out.

Bennie Parsonage was a very shy man, he never boasted about his achievements. He rescued hundreds of people sometimes with unbelievable courage. He carried out tasks on the waterways of Glasgow with Herculean strength, with patience and with characteristics that singled him out as a special person.

Strangely enough, one thing he would talk about was the following “case”. Not a rescue, but the recovery of a dead body. Bennie realised even at this young age the importance of having a “body” to assist the grieving progress.

The last date mentioned in the previous Tales (42) was Saturday 27th December 1929 when a 10yr old boy while playing on the banks of Jennie's Burn Rutherglen, fell in and was drowned. There was a strong current flowing down the Burn and it was soon realised that the boy's body had been washed into a narrow culvert (pipe). The pipe was full of rubbish, old prams, tree branches dead animals, all the types of rubbish that are still dumped into and flow down our waterways.



Rutherglen Fire Brigade pumping water out of Jenny's Burn in an attempt to find the body of James Campbell (inset), a Bridgeton boy who was drowned in 12 feet of water. Story on Page Two.

Forby Bennie Parsonage viewing the locus to see if he could figure out a way to retrieve the boy's body, many of Glasgow's watermen, Police and Fire Brigade Officers attended.

The Rutherglen Fire Brigade were trying to divert the course of the burn to lessen the ferocious current going through the pipe. 26yr old Bennie decided that it was time to enter the "tunnel."



Typical Culvert

Jennie's Burn today

Hundreds of local people lining the banks of the Burn watched as a rope was tied to one of Bennie's arms and another to his waist, and as Bennie entered the tunnel the ropes were being paid out. Inside the "Tunnel" Bennie took the ropes off (only holding onto the one round his waist) because not only were they

hindering his progress but he had decided that if the dam burst, and the water had surged through the “Tunnel”, he would have been caught like a rat in a trap, held tight at the end of the ropes. Bennie decided that the best action was to let the water flow take him right through the tunnel battering his way through the rubbish build up. After fighting against the surge of the water, pushing his way through the rubbish, fully 40 feet into the pitch darkness Bennie located the boy’s body. He carefully freed it from what was trapping it in place, and a short time later Bennie crawled out with the body of the child in his arms.

Bennie is quoted as saying “I never gave a thought to the danger I was running, as my thoughts were concentrated on the work of recovering the body”.

Newspapers praised the courage of what had become a local hero:

“The recovery of the body was made by a Bridgeton man named Benjamin Parsonage at great personal risk”.

“Mr. Parsonage had performed an exceedingly plucky act. There was no doubt that the body had been recovered at considerable danger to the finder”.

