

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 46

Continuing the stories of Ben Parsonage who arrived on the Glasgow Green Lifeboat scene 100yrs ago (assistant 1918-1928, Officer 1928-1979)



Some of you will remember the year 1939

One evening Bennie talked to one of our family friends about an unusual rescue he had carried out at the Albert Bridge. Two boys had gone bird's egg collecting from the nests in the girders below the bridge. The boys were finding difficulty getting back off the bridge and as dusk was coming down, they started to shout for help. Bennie arrived with a policeman in one of his boats and a ladder. The ladder was stood upright from the boat, up against the girders of the bridge, and with the policeman holding it as tightly as he could the bold Ben, carrying a rope over his shoulder climbed up onto the girders. He then crawled along to where the boys were and lowered them down one by one into the boat below. He then returned down the ladder into his boat.

On the 26th August Bennie and Sadie's new house on Glasgow Green was commandeered by the War Dept., 947 Squadron RAF. They just arrived, and moved in. And so it was that on Sunday the 3rd September 1939 Ben and Sadie, along with five RAF Officers, sat or stood around the old wooden cased radio and listened to War being declared between Britain and Germany.



The Humane Society House was a landmark. The German bombers came across country from Grangemouth along the Forth and Clyde Canal, turned

upriver at Bowling and dropped their bombs, then they came upriver and at the Society House, they arrived at the first right angle bend on the River, and turned across country and headed home as the second wave of bombers came in.

The Humane Society House was altered radically inside. Oak panelled walls and beautiful floors were ripped apart to convert the rooms into dentistry and medical areas. Sadie remembers her once lovely panelled walls being covered with glossy magazine pages of “pin-up” girls. Due to the need for more space, the Forces left the House in 1941

Forby all the work going at the river, Bennie was an ARP Warden and worked among the Air Raid Shelters and Balloon Barrage adjacent to the house at Glasgow Green. During Air Raids Bennie could be found in the house heating up the milk for baby’s bottles.



There were events that occurred during the war years like when a boy was brought into the House having injured his head on falling into one of the wartime trenches in the Park. The wound was dressed and he was sent home. Later that day another boy was brought to the House by an Auxiliary Fireman, having received a bad injury after falling into a trench. This boy had to receive hospital treatment.

One morning when Bennie went down to the boats, he found his barge covered with shrapnel. Several unexploded incendiary bombs were lying nearby on the banking. He gathered them up carefully and carried them to the Central Police Office where they were safely decommissioned..

Some work in Glasgow was going on as normal and one such venture was that the Albert Bridge was being painted. One of the painters fell off the scaffolding and was drowned. Bennie recovered the body. The only other time that I am aware of a workman falling off and drowning from a bridge in Glasgow occurred almost exactly 100yrs later, and again, this was during the painting of the Albert Bridge.

The blackout caused a lot of accidents around the river and Bennie had to recover the body of a Royal Artillery man who was drowned having fallen into the water while on sentry duty on the south side of the River near Finnieston Ferry. The accident had occurred at 4.00 a.m. during the blackout. Bennie also recovered the body of an Able -Seaman off the S.S. Rowan at Berth 6, Queens Dock.

Another seaman went missing and it was surmised that he had fallen into the River in the vicinity of Berth 17, Queen's Dock. Bennie immediately carried out a search. During his grappling operations, Bennie picked up a large hawser, He asked the Policeman who was rowing his boat to row out to the centre of the River where he would drop the hawser out of the area of search, but as he rowed the hawser was getting heavier and heavier. Bennie pulled in the hawser and was amazed to see the man hanging onto it, holding it tight in his death grasp. He must have caught hold of the hawser when he sank.

Bennie also recovered the body of a Naval Officer from Berth 5; George 5th Dock after shouts had been heard the previous evening about midnight, again during the blackout and heavy fog.



Glasgow Naval Hero Drowned

One of the heroes of a recent sea fight between the British and German ships has met his death in a Clyde port (Shieldhall Wharf) in dramatic circumstances.

The chief stoker, (the victim) was returning to his ship, which was docked, when he is supposed to have fallen from the gang-way into the water. This occurred on Friday night and a petty officer's attention was attracted by screams. He was seen struggling in the water and almost immediately disappeared. The following morning Bennie recovered the body. He had visited the locus the previous evening but due to the blackout 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.