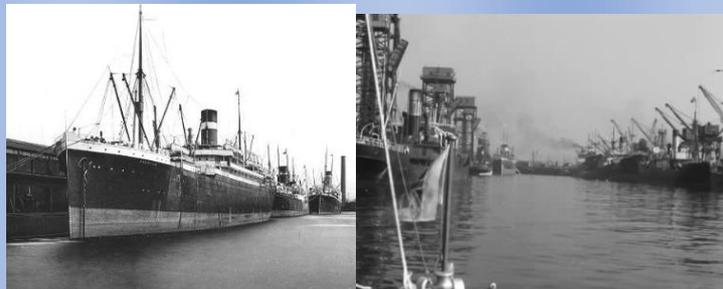


TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 52

Different types of boat throw up different wash. Some shapes travelling very fast throw up very little wash, others a huge wash. Several people in a small craft can create a large wash whereas the same craft with only one person in it sometimes does not. Large ocean liners and massive cargo ships moving up and down river usually do not throw up a large wash. By far the largest and most dangerous wash I have seen on the river is the one from a fast-moving tug. Tugs are extremely powerful craft; they have to be to do the work they are designed for. Tugs were meant to move slowly on the river but often they did not and one had to be careful if a tug would suddenly come out of a dock or from behind a ship travelling fast. Being in a small boat could be precarious in the wash of a powerful tug unless the small boat was in the hands of someone who really knew what they were doing, a real riverman. Tugs moving upriver could cause the largest liners to bounce in their wash. There were, of course, Clyde Port Authority regulations on the speed that tugs could travel and indeed there used to be speed traps on the river, but like on our roads the speed traps were few and far between. Tugs could move so quickly and so fast that they could just suddenly appear, the first you might know of their arrival was the noise of their engines.



Bennie Parsonage was called to the Harbour area one day when a man fell between a large cargo ship and the quay wall and drowned.



There was just enough room in between the ship and the wall for Bennie to manoeuvre a small boat to commence a search. Police and CID Officers peered down the narrow gap to watch the search.



Grapnel dropped on its rope and trip rope and in a very short time span Bennie brought the body of the unfortunate man to the surface. Just at that moment, a tug passed upriver at speed throwing up such wash that the Cargo ship was bounced back and forth against the quay wall. Its large steel sides juddered as it collided against the stones of the quay with terrible scraping and banging. Everyone was in panic for the safety of Bennie down below, panic in the certainty that his small boat would be smashed by the weight of the ship and that Bennie would be in the river along with the man that had fallen in a short time earlier. Sure enough, when the ship settled and went back to its original position, unmoving, with a small gap again between its sides and the quay, the Officers thought their worst fears had been realised, as there was Bennie's boat lying on its side, crushed by the weight of the ship and with no sign of Bennie. Then they saw a movement and an arm appeared from the quay waving up at them. On hearing the noise of the Tug and seeing the first movement of the ship, Bennie had stepped from his boat onto a recessed quay wall ladder where he had clung until the wash and movement of the ship had subsided. Thank God the ladder was recessed. Unbelievably, he still had in his hands the ropes holding the poor dead man's body. Bennie finished tying the man up properly and climbed the ladder with the ropes. He was helped over the top onto the quay wall, for even that was an arduous task in these days since the quay wall at the top of the ladder was not cut away as currently recommended. The man's body was brought towards the bow of the ship and lifted up the quay wall carefully. The boat, well it's remains were collected later. The Tug? They never knew how near they had come to causing disaster. Whenever possible lookouts were thereafter placed up and downstream. Ships and tugs moving on the river were informed by radio to enforce on themselves the dead slow rule whenever a search was being made.



Recessed quay wall ladder with coping stone that was extremely difficult to climb over at the top and (right) semi circle cut into stone to allow easy climbing.