

# TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 53



## The wallet and the phone



One gets to know the river, its movements, where items move under the surface and where they move when on the surface, you learn of the tides, winds and surface currents.

I received call from a Police Inspector (known as “old mother Reilly” informing me that a man had been reported missing 20 miles east and one of the theories was that he was in the river Clyde. As usual I was given a description of what the man was wearing. Searches of surrounding areas were carried out by Police specialised search units which “old mother Reilly” was in charge of, while myself and the Underwater Unit concentrated on the waterways. In the man’s home town baffled family and friends were expanding their search for the missing man  
A trace of blood found on the riverbank by Police dogs was checked but proved not to be human.

Reports kept being received of “sightings” of the missing man

There was nothing to suggest that the man had actually entered the water, or if he had, how had he entered and where. If he had entered the water it could have been anywhere. When someone does not come home or is found lying in some out of the way locus, and time passes, the river becomes the most likely place.

This was the middle of winter and as usual there had been a lot of rain in the Clyde valley, floodwater was hurtling down the river washing old fallen trees and all sorts of debris in its path. I took note of any peculiarities of any of the trees or debris that I saw being washed downriver and tried to locate where they ended up. As thought, I saw quite a number of them on the old slipway opposite the mouth of the King George 5<sup>th</sup> Dock. Items drifting downriver mostly get washed into the north bank and this is especially so opposite the KG5 as the prevailing south west wind tunnels up the dock and hold floating items tight against the slope of the slipways. Even when the tide is flowing out items are held tight in here due to the wind.



I decided this was an area worth a closer look and so I contacted Force Control and arranged for a towing vehicle to convey myself and the boat to the Yoker/Renfrew Ferry slipway. From there I made my way upstream to the selected search area. After some time searching through the flotsam, I saw what I was looking for, lying below a pile of trees. With assistance from a workboat, some of the trees were pulled out into the river giving me a better view of the situation. As I confirmed that this was indeed the body of a man, I observed something glinting in the winter sunshine on the concrete bed of the slipway below where the body was being held by the trees and the current. It was only about 2ft under the surface so I lay over the side of the boat and reached down into the water and came up with a mobile phone in my hand (which was subsequently proved to belong to the missing man). I spoke with Force Control and other specialised Police groups and gave directions as to how to gain land access to this rather out of the way locus (which I had received from site security guards and workmen). Trees were cut into smaller manoeuvrable pieces and gradually the area around the body was carefully cleared. I kept the Duty Officer at Force Control updated regarding all this procedure. Uniformed Police attended followed by the Casualty Surgeon, CID and SOCO/Photographers.



After the deceased had been removed and the Police had finished at the locus, I continued a search of the river for another missing man, retrieving a stolen handbag, and 12 lifebelts before returning to Glasgow Green

I received a call from "County" Police thanking me for my assistance and asking my thoughts regarding a body having travelled that distance downriver. I said that the finding of the body at this locus was conducive with the facts. The body would have surfaced near to where it entered the river after about 3weeks. At this time there was heavy rain and subsequently a heavy flood on the river bringing downriver trees and other debris. The body was most probably washed downriver during this time. When

the debris (probably including the body) reached the area of Govan/ King George 5<sup>th</sup> Dock, the current lessened. The prevailing wind at this locus is from the southwest and blows fiercely straight down the King George 5<sup>th</sup> Dock into the Clyde blowing any surface objects onto the north bank. This is no doubt this is what happened to the trees and the body. The body lay on the slipway, out of the water at low tide and under the water at high tide. All this time the trees and other debris covered it until the day we located it. It is my opinion that the finding of the phone on the bottom of the river close by confirms this. The body had little clothing when found as it had almost all disintegrated. When the body arrived at the locus where found, the phone was probably in the deceased's pocket. As the weeks went by, the clothes rotted away and finally the phone fell out of the pocket. Had the body been floating or lying at some other locus subsequent to our locating it, the phone would not have been found.

Next day I again visited the slipway along with Inspector Reilly. It appears that the wallet belonging to the recovered man was missing. The back pocket where the wallet would normally be was missing and it was uncertain as to whether or not it had been ripped off or the stitching had rotted away with the river water.

A large number of specialised search Officers gathered at the slipway. I explained that if the wallet had come loose and floated, that we should find it right in the North West corner of the slipway where rubbish was piled high. The search Officers meticulously sieved through the masses of stinking rubbish and finally after hours of searching their efforts payed off and the wallet was located with all the deceased items still in it.

If the phone and the wallet had not been found there was the possibility that this case would have been treated as a "mugging" or even a "murder" rather than an accidental drowning.

Patience and determination pays in the long run

"Old Mother" Reilly was one of the finest search organisers I had the pleasure to meet.

