

## YORKSHIRE EVENING POST 1921 to 1955

### 1 8 January 1921

#### MERCURY IN A LOAF TO FIND A BODY

AN OLD TIME SUPERSTITION CROPS UP AGAIN A loaf of bread containing mercury is stated to have been the means of finding the body of John Bryne (65), an employee of Messrs Brunner, Mond and Co, who had been missing for six days, and was supposed to have been drowned in the canal or brooks at Wheelock, Sandbach.

The police had dragged the canal and brooks for six days without success, and the method of the loaf and mercury was suggested by an old boatman named **Tolly**. The loaf was floated on the canal and afterwards removed to the adjacent brook. It swirled on the surface and stopped directly over the body, which was then recovered by dragging.

“I was an eye witness of this strange occurrence”, writes a correspondent, “and can vouch for the loaf withstanding the strong current of the brook, floating directly over the body”.

It is supposed that Bryne fell into the swollen brook after attending to the engines of the pumping station on Saturday night.

The belief that a loaf filled with mercury will find a dead body is common among superstitious folk, and not in England only. It figures in one of Mark Twain's stories of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.

Other unlikely means are also adopted in the country when waters are being searched for a corpse. The commonest is to take a piece of shingle – a wooden tile used before slates came into vogue – and having inserted a lighted candle in the centre, set it adrift in the water. It is believed to halt immediately above the body. In some districts, a cake of unleavened bread is substituted for shingle.

An eminent Manchester scientist, questioned about the mercury loaded loaf, said he considered the idea ridiculous. If it had been done in the Sandbach case, it was merely a fluke.

### 2 9 January 1922

#### GIRLS WHO STOLE FROM OFFERTORY BOX

SERIES OF OFFENCES ALLEGED AT SKIPTON Two girls who were alleged to have committed a series of thefts from places of worship and other places in the town appeared at the Skipton Police Court today, and were remanded until Saturday.

The girls, **Doris Bates** (19) and Doris Guy (16), both of Spring Gardens, Otley Street, Skipton, were charged with stealing 1s 6d from an offertory box in the vestibule of the Congregational Church, Newmarket Street, on December 18, and a cigarette case, valued 20s, from a coat hanging in the vestibule. The case was the property of Clarence Naylor, 7 Wellington Street, Skipton.

Superintendent Vaughan stated that the girls had been working together for several months, and that the number of charges he intended to bring against them would be at least a dozen, relating to thefts from churches, chapels, whist drives, and different places in the town. “In my opinion,” added the Superintendent, “they have not stopped stealing for the last twelve months at least”.

Replying to the Chairman (Mr R B Barrett), Bates said she had no home in Skipton. Her father, she said, was a boatman living at Shipley, but he never visited her.

PC Hartley explained that he received a complaint that the prisoners had been seen at the Congregational Church in suspicious circumstances. When charged with stealing the cigarette case, Bates replied, “I took it and sold it to Doris”, (meaning the prisoner Guy).

Guy replied, “That is right ; you will find it at my house on the shelf”.

When charged with stealing the contents of the offertory box, the prisoners stated that they broke open the box with a piece of iron and shared the money.

### 3 1 June 1922

Three hundred spectators lustily cheered a boatman named **George Dinsdale** for rescuing a boy from drowning in the River Humber at Hull. This is the fourth rescue he has effected.

#### **4 4 August 1923**

**DIVED INTO CANAL TO RESCUE HER BIG BROTHER** Elsie Bleasdale, a Blackburn girl aged five, made a gallant effort to rescue her brother John, aged seven, from drowning today. John fell in the canal, and his sister dived after him to assist him.

**Richard Prescott**, a boatman of Burscough, ran over 100 yards to the scene and, recovering the boy, successfully used artificial respiration.

The girl managed to scramble out of the water little the worse for her immersion.

#### **5 14 September 1923**

**RESCUED TOO LATE**

**AGED CONSUMPTIVE MAN'S DEATH IN THE AIRE** An open verdict was returned at an inquest in Leeds today on John Fitzsimmon (68) of Saxton Lane, Leeds, whose body was recovered from the river Aire on Wednesday.

A lodging house keeper said she had tried to persuade the man to go to the workhouse, and he finally consented, though he did not like the idea.

Fitzsimmon was seen in the water by Alice Topping of Balmoral View, Hunslet, who shouted, "My God, master! Keep up. I've called for help".

**Charles Lee**, a Hull boatman, got the man out of the water, artificial respiration being tried with no effect.

At the Infirmary, it was found that the man was suffering from consumption and died from shock.

#### **6 28 September 1923**

In Leeds today, **Michael O'Hara** (34), boatman of West Street, was sent for trial on a charge of stealing an overcoat from the billiard room at the Albion Hotel, Briggate.

#### **7 19 October 1923**

**FISHING AT LEEDS BRIDGE**

**"ROACH, PIKE AND EELS IN PLENTY"**

Sir – I am an old boatman, and have spent the most of my early life about the Leeds wharves. I have had the pleasure of catching fresh water fish such as roach, pike, and eels in plenty at the old goit near the old Leeds Bridge (which in those days stood at Swinegate, near the bottom of Mill Hill, close to the old Queen) and also at the dam near Messrs Teal's boatyard.

I used to catch them with fine cord leather upon my hands. I have many a time also fished at the breakwater itself, and at the old warehouse hill near the old London Wharf in the Calls.

I very well remember the river being clear ; in fact you could almost see the bottom. More than once I have taken some fine examples of fish from the water at Kirkstall Abbey, whilst I have been waiting to take an active part in the sports in tub racing and greasy pole walking across the river.

I was in those days a noted champion swimmer and life saver. I have quite a few rescues to my credit. Besides, I have taken hundreds of drowned persons from the river and canals around Leeds.

Yours, etc

**JAMES ABBOTT**

Late Captain, Mary Gordon

Roundhay Park

Leeds October 18

#### **8 10 April 1924**

**LIFE ON OUR INLAND WATERWAYS**

**MASTER OF A LINER WHO IS NOW CAPTAIN OF A BARGE** I once lived in a town where, by the songs of children in the street, their highest ambition was to go "up the cut in a canal boat", "cut" being the local name for the canal.

After spending some hours in company with the superintendent of the Riverside Mission, the Rev F Fowkes, visiting the barges in the various wharves in Leeds, I am not at all sure that I too should not

enjoy, at least, the trip up and down the Aire and Calder in company with the genial and interesting people to whom my guide introduced me.



There is something of the sailor about the boatman. Many of them, indeed have been sailing, and nearly all seem to possess that slow moving, philosophical and meditative nature, which comes to those whose business is the "great waters".

But though a trip or two would be most interesting, I should never of choice become a boatman.

"It is a rough life," said one, "and not a very profitable one. And it's certainly no life for a family". All the same, I came across a lot of little folk, who pass the greater part of their lives on board the boats.

Jolly, cheery little people they are too, as will be seen from the illustration.

I think independence is the mark of the canal child. He has very early in life to learn to fend for himself. There's work to be done and, as soon as they can toddle, the little "bargees" have to bear their part.

Tidiness is another lesson which is early inculcated, for, on the boat, with its minute living space, there is no room for the usual disorder of a home where there are children. Everything superfluous goes overboard ; there is a place for everything which is vital, and everything must be in its place.

But my friend the boatman was right. It is not a life for a child, nor yet for a woman, and more and more the men are beginning to realise it.

"Nay", said one in response to a query from Mr Fowkes, "I haven't had the missus with me for a couple o' year now. The young 'uns want education ; they're nowt wi'out it nowadays, so I've left her and the four kids at home".

I found pride in the educational attainments of their children a mark of the boatmen.

"He's only 11", said one proud father, pointing to a little lad fetching water for his mother, "but he's well up in the sixth standard", and another father, a relative of the last, introducing me to his girl of 13, said, "She has no mother, and has to look after us all, but she passed the 7<sup>th</sup> standard all right".

On some canals it is still the fashion for the whole family to live aboard, but, generally, the family is left at home altogether, or taken for occasional trips only.

Especially is this true of the Humber men. The Humber is as dangerous almost as the open sea. The fast traffic, the tremendous swells, and the narrow channels make Humber trips unfit for women.

Nearly all the captains employ an extra hand for that part of their trip.

“It is not so very long ago”, said Mr Fowkes, dipping into his memories of 25 years, “that never a Saturday night passed without the most bloodthirsty fights taking place over there”, (pointing to the courts and alleys on the South side of Leeds Bridge), “but things are very different now, and a fight is quite a rarity”.

One man's views were worthy of particular attention. He was till quite recently employed in a very different way. He was master of an ocean going liner, and as a result of war service, during which he was torpedoed three times, he broke down.

A period of command of a coaster followed, which proved as unsuitable as the other for a man in his state of health. Now he is the owner of a river barge.

He finds the work very hard, but he speaks in the kindest terms of his fellow bargemen. “They are all ready to help”, he said, “and I find them real good fellows”.

“Do the lads follow their father?” was a question I asked, and the answer generally was, “Yes”.

One or two said that they would not like their boys to carry on with the life. But in most cases, it is the custom for a boy to take service with his father's firm as soon as he leaves school.

“My dad brought me aboard one of ---'s boats when I was three weeks old”, said one, “and his father worked for them before him, and I am working for them yet, and this lad here will be working for them in a couple of years time”.

## **9 20 May 1924**

**ROBBED A CORPSE** **Matthew Jones**, canal boatman of Congleton, was bound over at Wilmslow for stealing a watch and chain, worth £3 5s, from the body of Stanley Price, a Bollington man, who had been found dead in the canal.

The body was first seen by Jones and his father. The police were notified and, after they had searched the clothing, it was learned that Price was wearing a watch and chain when last seen.

Later, Jones admitted to the police that he had stolen it.

## **10 25 October 1924**

**DOCK BRIDGE SMASHED BY STEAMER**

**CUSTOMS OFFICERS RESCUE SWAMPED BOATMAN** The steamship *Poulton*, which arrived at Hull from London today, crashed into Mytongate Bridge when passing from the Humber Dock up to the Princess Dock.

The bridge was being elevated at the time, and the crash occurred owing to a misunderstanding.

The iron castings of the bridge were snapped, and half the structure, weighing about 50 tons, fell into the dock.

The ship was only slightly damaged.

**George Berry**, a boatman, had a narrow escape. Parts of the wreckage swamped his boat, which was capsized on top of him.

He was rescued by two Customs officers.

## **11 2 May 1925**

**GOOLE DOCKS MYSTERY**

**KEEL ADRIFT AND BOATMAN'S BODY IN WATER** The body of **William Ernest Rowley**, aged 31, a canal boatman who lived at Hull, was recovered from Goole Docks today.

Rowley arrived at Goole on Thursday in charge of the keel *Lizzie and Arthur*, belonging to Messrs William Hill and Sons of Leeds, and at night took the vessel into the harbour basin. Later the keel was found adrift, and when it was boarded, Rowley was missing.

**12 21 January 1926**

**LEEDS BARGEE DROWNED** **Stephen Brook**, a canal boatman aged about 40, believed to belong to the Marsh Lane district of Leeds, fell from his boat into the canal during the fog early this morning at Lemon Royd Lock near Methley, and was drowned. He worked on a boat carrying coal between Leeds and Shipley. The body was recovered later in the morning.

**13 25 January 1926**

**RANGES FROM EMPTY HOUSE**

**TAKEN AWAY, SMASHED AND SOLD AS OLD IRON** Two Shipley boatmen – **George Cowman** (49) and **Josiah Patchett** (40) – pleaded guilty at Bradford today to the theft of two fire ranges, valued at £8.

It was stated that the ranges were taken from an empty cottage at Shipley, broken up, and sold to an old iron dealer for 15s.

Superintendent Woodcock said Cowman had been convicted once for being drunk and disorderly in 1911. Patchett had been before the court 15 times, and had been sentenced to three years for a black list offence.

Detective Shaw said Patchett had a wife and seven children. He would not work regularly, and his home conditions, because of his drinking habits, were very bad. He was also an associate of thieves and men of bad character.

The case against Cowman was dismissed under the Probation Act, and Patchett was sentenced to three months imprisonment.

**14 15 April 1926**

**ESTIMATING A WIFE**

**BOATMAN WHO WANTED "BUYING IN" QUALITIES** **Joshua Beaumont**, canal boatman of Wakefield, was summoned for desertion by his wife **Hannah** of Marsden at Huddersfield today.

It was stated that the wife had been suspicious of her husband, and on visiting his boat found another woman there.

Mr Eaton Smith, for the wife, read a letter from defendant in which he said that he and his wife had never been suited, and that if she had "bought in" as well as the other woman could, he would have had a good bank balance now.

The wife said that her husband was now passing off the other girl as his stepdaughter.

The husband said he would rather pay £5 a week if he had it than live with his wife again. He denied that there was any other woman concerned, and said he had never had a decent weekend since he got married. He had never been able to get a word in edgeways.

A separation order carrying 15s a week was granted.

**15 15 May 1926**

**COLLIDED WITH MOTOR VAN** **Reuben Fozzard** (30), a boatman of Stanley near Wakefield, was riding his motorcycle at Catterick, when he collided with a motor van owned by a York firm. He was removed to Leeds Infirmary with a fractured knee.

**16 29 September 1926**

**GAOL FOR LEEDS BOATMAN** When **Thomas O'Hara**, a Leeds boatman, was sentenced at Selby today to a month's imprisonment for theft of timber, the magistrate took into consideration a charge of stealing in Leeds a sideboard obtained on the hire purchase system.

**Charles Dockerty**, another Leeds boatman, was fined 30s for his part in the timber theft.

**17 4 February 1927**

**WAKEFIELD BOATMAN'S FATE** The body of **Thomas Bolton**, boatman of Wakefield, was recovered from the canal at Thornfield this morning. It is stated that yesterday, while he was

pulling a boat under a bridge, the boat lurched and he was jerked into the water.

## **18 22 February 1927**

### **“WRONG BOTTLE” DEATH**

**CAMPHORATED IN MISTAKE FOR CASTOR OIL** When the circumstances of the sudden death of **John William Taylor** (66), a boatman of Rawcliffe, were investigated by the deputy coroner of Goole today, Thomas William Hodgson, of Rawcliffe, said Taylor called on him and said he had drunk camphorated oil in mistake for castor oil. He wanted to know if it would do him any harm, and witness replied that he did not think so.

Taylor said he would go for a walk, and left the house. Twenty minutes later, Taylor fell, and was picked up dead.

Dr Cunningham said Taylor was in a half starved condition. Death was due to cerebral haemorrhage. The camphorated oil would stimulate and accelerate the heart, and walking would create further acceleration and cause cerebral haemorrhage.

A verdict in accordance with the medical evidence was recorded, the jury finding that Taylor had taken the camphorated oil by mistake.

## **19 2 April 1927**

**LIGHTER SUNK AT CAWOOD** A lighter belonging to **Mr James Milner** of Hull has been sunk in the river Ouse in a collision with Cawood Bridge.

The lighter, which was being towed down the river from York to Hull, was badly damaged before sinking. The boatman escaped.

The west waterway is blocked by the sunken craft, but the east waterway is clear.

## **20 28 May 1927**

### **HAIR COMPARED IN COURT**

**ASSAULT CHARGES DISMISSED AT SKIPTON** During the hearing, at Skipton today, of charges of assault against **John Thomas Gibbons**, a Salterforth boatman and his wife, the complainant, Elizabeth Bartle, said that Mrs Gibbons, at the instance of her husband, grabbed her hair and dragged her for some yards on the ground.

She produced from an envelope a medical certificate as to her injuries, and also a switch of hair which she alleged had been torn from her head by Mrs Gibbons.

Some amusement was caused in court by one of the magistrates summoning the complainant to him, taking from her the switch of hair, and matching it against her own.

At the close of the evidence, the chairman, addressing the defendants, said : “The Bench do not think there is enough evidence to convict you, and you can go”.

Mrs Gibbons : Thank you very much. I have never been in a court before, and I don't want to come again.

## **21 9 September 1927**

### **GIRLS LEAP INTO THE CANAL TO ESCAPE FROM FILM FIRE**

### **FOUR PEOPLE BURNED TO DEATH – STAMPEDE TO ESCAPE**

### **BUILDING BECOMES A ROARING FURNACE IN A FEW MINUTES**

Four work people were burned to death in a fire at the premises of the Film Waste Products Company, London, today.

Another body is believed to be buried in the debris, and two other people are in St Pancras Infirmary in a serious condition.

The whole premises seem to have burst into flames suddenly and, according to an eye witness, “It was more like an explosion than a fire”.

Exciting scenes were witnessed. Trapped girls, with their clothes ablaze, jumped from the windows into the canal, where they were rescued by men on a barge.

Only two of the six girls working in the winding room, where the fire started, escaped. One of them

said the fire was "like a vision of hell".

#### "VISION OF HELL" - GIRLS GROPE BLINDLY AMID FLAMES

The victims were :-

Miss L E Wells, 18, of Dudley Street, Paddington.

Miss May Smith, 19, of Equity Buildings, St Pancras.

Miss Ada Baker, 15, of Little Rambelt Street

Mrs G Bartlett, 27, of Spencer Road, North Wood.

Two people detained at St Pancras Hospital, seriously injured, are :-

Bert Crosby, of 121 Fleet Road, Hampstead.

Herbert Wingrove, of 48 St Paul's Road, Camden Square.

Four persons were taken to the London Temperance Hospital and, after treatment, sent home.

The premises are in Redhill Street, Albany Street, near St Pancras Station, and the building backs on to the Regent's Canal. There is a garage next door, and adjoining wharves were filled with hay, straw and timber, and it was feared that the flames would spread and involve the whole street.

When the alarm was given, a district fire brigade call was sent out.

Within a few minutes, nearly 20 fire engines arrived and got to work. Soon the building was surrounded by water a foot deep.

A cordon of mounted and foot police was placed to keep back the huge crowds who milled round the premises.

The firemen's work was made difficult by the highly inflammable nature of the stock of the premises, which continued to blaze till the whole building was destroyed.

Nine cars in the adjoining garage were destroyed.

**Huddled in Corner** The bodies of the three girls were found huddled up in a corner of the winding room.

There were, it is believed, fourteen men and girls in the building when the fire broke out.

The outbreak was in the winding room of the Film Waste Co, and from this room only two girls escaped. The other four – trapped and overcome almost immediately by deadly fumes – sank to the floor and were burned beyond recognition.

Miss Kitty White, one of the two girl survivors, in relating what happened, said, "We were working as usual, when suddenly there was an explosion, and the whole room turned red. I saw a great ball of fire, and the whole room disappeared in flames. It was like a vision of hell. I happened to be near the door and I managed to get out. Behind me I could hear the cries of my companions as they groped blindly amid the flames and suffocating fumes to the door".

**Risked His Life** Bert Crosby, one of the injured, sustained his injuries in a gallant attempt to rescue a girl. He had escaped from the building but, when told that others were left inside, he rushed back. In trying to drag a girl from one of the rooms, his clothing caught fire. He got her to safety, but found his own exit blocked by flames. He was forced to jump out of the window on to a parapet, and from the parapet to a barge in the canal.

**Boatmen's Rescues** **Mr G Lewis**, a boatman employed by a firm of building constructors next door, helped in the rescues by taking out a barge.

"In the building yard, I heard shouts of fire", he said, "and then saw flames shooting up about twenty feet above the building where the films were stored. I immediately shoved out our boat, which is 12 feet long, and pushed it against a wall at the back of the burning building.

By this time, some men were clinging to window sills and pipes on the upper floor. With assistance, I placed ladders against the wall, down which some of the men clambered.

Two had fallen into the water and were swimming. They were rescued. A boy who came down last had his shirt smouldering. We pushed the boat along a few yards, and my wife tore off his burning garment and wrapped up his shoulder in a large towel. The whole thing was over in a matter of minutes".

**Attacked by Wasps** A boy named Jones, who was treated at the London Temperance Hospital, was supposed at first to be suffering from burns, but it was discovered that actually he had been badly stung by wasps which had been disturbed by the fire. They descended on him, he said,

as he was dashing through the flames into the yard. He did not know at the time whether the flames or the wasps were hurting him.

**“LIKE AN EXPLOSION” - GRAPHIC ACCOUNTS BY EYE WITNESSES** “The blaze happened without the slightest warning”, said a bystander to a London *“Evening Standard”* representative, “A lorry that was apparently unloading films had just discharged them into the building when they burst into flames. In an instant there were the most exciting scenes. Men and women attempted to escape in all directions”.

On the first floor, above the garage, was an upholsterers, and above that a firm of Japanese lacquerers, and Mr Taylor, a member of the firm, said, “There were some marvellous escapes. I was able, with some others, to dash downstairs and get out through the doorway, but many people, in their fear, jumped from windows into the canal alongside. Others came down the pipes of the building. One girl was brought out dead, and five others were badly injured. A motor car standing outside the building was destroyed by the fire”.

“It was more like an explosion than a fire”, said another eye witness. “I was walking past the building, when suddenly there was a roaring sound, and in a couple of seconds the whole place became a mass of flames. Huge clouds of smoke poured from the windows and doors. Four or five girls who worked in the building sprang out of the windows and into the water.

**SHOUTED WARNING** Mr Henry Jones, proprietor of the garage, said to a London *“Evening News”* representative : “I was sitting in my office about 11 o'clock, when I heard screams. I looked out, and to my horror, I saw the whole place next door ablaze. I rushed to get out of my office, shouting at the same time to warn my employees. I got to the front, but I found it absolutely impassable. The whole place was a roaring furnace. I could not get out”.

“I was blinded and choked by smoke and fumes, and flames seemed to be spreading right over the building. I rushed out at the back, and was followed by several others. We got to the canal, and jumped on to a barge, on which we were pulled across. My place was very quickly involved in the fire, which spread with amazing rapidity”.

“I had nine men working for me, and they all managed to get out at the back of the building on to the canal. I think there were about 9 or 12 girls and women employed in the film place where the fire started. I heard their screams and saw several of them jump on to the canal barge”.

“I was cleaning a car in the garage next door”, said a 15 year old youth, John Hall, “when there was a big bang. Before I had time to think what had happened, the garage was full of black smoke and flames. I realised that I was trapped, and made a dash for a fence leading to the canal. As I was trying to climb over, my clothes caught fire, but I scrambled on to the other side.”

“I extinguished the flames on my clothes and waited there until some bargemen took me away. I noticed two boys climbing over the fence, and they were both burning. One of them fell into the canal, but he must have been rescued, for I saw him being taken to hospital”.

**EFFORTS TO SAVE GIRLS – DIRECTOR AND SECRETARY RUSH TO RESCUE** The secretary of the company, Mr R J Gallaher, said he was totting up the petty cash book when he heard a slight “pouf”. Then a sheet of flame shot up in the winding room. He and Mr P H Hymans, managing director, who was with him, rushed into the winding room shouting to the girls, “Come on, get out quick”.

“We did our best to get the girls out”, he proceeded. “Some rushed to one exit, others to another. I was one of the last to leave. It was impossible to see across the room owing to the smoke and flames. I pulled out several girls, and Mr Hymans pulled out several others. Then we were forced to stand back, but I thought everybody was out before I left”.

Mr P H Hymans said he had no idea how the fire originated. He was in his office when he heard a shout and saw a flame in the workshop. He immediately rushed to the door and shouted, “Clear out everybody, quickly”.

“There were men, women and girls at work there,” he said, “and I saw them, as I thought, all making for the doorways. Then I rushed down the passage to the fire alarm in the street, and broke the glass with my fist. My hand is very badly cut”.

“When I went back, I heard that all the staff were not out. We tried to get in, but it was impossible.



There seemed a solid mass of flames to face”.

## **22 20 September 1927**

### DEATH AFTER LORRY WRECK

MAN'S SHOUT OF “THERE'S A BOLT OUT” “Accidental death” was the verdict at the inquest at Pontefract today on **William Beckett** (21), boat hauler of Beckett Road, Knottingley, who was fatally injured in a motor lorry smash on Saturday. The jury found that no blame attached to the driver of the lorry.

George Beckett Goulding, carting agent of England's Lane Farm, Knottingley, Beckett's cousin, said he met Beckett at Lee Gap fair on Saturday, and the latter asked witness to give him a lift back in his lorry. Witness had three other passengers, two of whom dropped off at Wakefield.

The lorry reached Featherstone, continued witness, when suddenly George Slater, who was in the lorry with Beckett, shouted, “Stop! The body is loose”. Witness applied both brakes hard, and the next thing he remembered was finding himself lying in the road. He found Beckett in the road with his head on the curb near an electric light standard. Slater was lying in the middle of the road.

The body of the lorry was at one side of the road, and the chassis was at the other, twisted but not broken. A brake coupling was broken, and witness thought it might have been wrenched off in the collision with the standard. He had used the lorry on Thursday night, and it was then quite in order, he said. He thought the rattling of the loose brake rod caused Slater to think that the body of the lorry was also loose.

CRASH INTO STANDARD **James Pearson**, canal boatman, who was riding in the cab of the lorry, said that Slater called out, “Pull up, there's a bolt out. There is something falling”. As soon as Goulding applied the brakes, the lorry swerved and struck the standard.

Police-Constable Lee said he found that one of the wheels of the lorry had scraped along the kerb for 10 feet, stopping two feet from the electric standard, on which the marks of a violent impact were to be seen. The brake rod of the lorry was hanging loose, with the shackle pin missing, and the under side was worn flat, as though it had been running on the ground, he added.

## **23 29 November 1927**

ONE MORE CHANCE **Wilfred Haigh** (19), boatman of Ouse Court, Selby, pleaded guilty at Pontefract today for stealing a £1 note from the wallet of **Albert William Phillips** of High Street, Hull, captain of a keel on which he was working at Knottingley.

He had been bound over when a 10 year old for theft ; birched twice in the following year, and at York committed to an Industrial School as a truant.

In view of his subsequent good behaviour, he was now put under probation for three years, and ordered to pay £1 15s 9d costs.

## **24 8 December 1927**

### GIRL'S BODY IN CANAL

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST AN EX CONSTABLE The trial of James Joseph Power (33), an ex police-constable, charged with the murder of Olive Gordon Turner, a young factory worker, was resumed at Birmingham Assizes today.

Mr Norman Birkett KC, prosecuting, stated when the case opened that Turner and her sweetheart, named Broomhead, were walking on a canal towing-path when they were accosted by Power, whom they assumed to be a policeman and who, having laid hands on them, said he could be “squared”. The couple tried to run away, but Power struck the youth, who fell. Power, it was added, put one arm round the girl and took her towards a bend in the canal. Later, her body was taken from the water.

Edgar Whillock, a young labourer, said today that, with his sweetheart, he was on the canal bank on the night in question. He identified Power and Broomhead, and a photograph of the dead girl.

Power, said witness, made a gesture as if to arrest Turner, who swooned, and he then put his arm around her waist, and when remonstrated with, said, “I am a police officer, and that girl is coming

with me". He then led her out of sight.

**John Godfrey**, boatman, said he saw a heavily built man peering over a bridge at courting couples, and he told several of them that there was a detective about. Subsequently he picked out Power at an identity parade.

## 25 24 May 1928

**BOAT'S FATAL SWERVE** **David Pearson** (33), a boatman of Skew Bridge, Knottingley, fell from one of a string of boats on the canal near Heck Bridge, owing to the boat swerving on touching shallow ground. His mate searched for him without success.

The body was recovered after two hours.

## 26 28 August 1928

**GIANT ASH FALLS ON A BARGE – SKIPPER INJURED**

**CANAL TRAFFIC HELD UP AT ARMLEY** A curious accident occurred on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal near Armley today, when an old ash tree, 40 feet or 50 feet in height, crashed on to a canal barge, seriously injuring the skipper and knocking him into the water.

The injured man is **Stephen Alderson** (50), boatman of Lastingham Road, Rodley, and he has been admitted to the Leeds General Infirmary suffering from a badly crushed arm, concussion and shock. Alderson is employed by Mr M E Keighley, coal merchant of Rodley, and is the skipper of a coal boat. He had for his mate his younger brother, **Harry Alderson**, and together they set out early this morning to take a load of coal to Rodley.

It was when they were about 200 yards past Redcote Farm, Armley, and skirting the wooded slopes of Gotts' Park, that the accident occurred.

The skipper was sitting on the stern of the vessel, smoking a pipe and holding the rudder, while his brother was in the cabin.

Had it not flung him aside, the skipper would probably have been crushed to death.

The police were informed of the accident, and the Leeds Corporation Parks Department despatched a gang of men to assist in removing the tree. The Canal Company had already sent down a gang, and repair boat with a crane followed.

**HEAVY RAIN THE CAUSE?** They found the tree completely blocking the canal, the topmost branches protruding into a field on the other side. It was some hours before the imprisoned coal boat could be got free.

Traffic on the canal was held up, and four other boats were kept waiting until the branches had been lopped, and the trunk was hoisted on to the boat about noon.

The cause of the crash is not yet known, but an official of the canal company said to an "*Evening Post*" reporter that it looked as if the fall might have been caused by the heavy rain, which had rotted the roots and loosened the tree's hold on the sloping bank, on which it grew only a few inches above the water line.

## 27 7 February 1929

**FIVE INJURED AT HULL FIRE**

**BOATMAN'S BRAVERY – COLLAPSES AFTER HE HAS SAVED BABY** Thrilling rescues from fire were made at a house in Spyvee Street, Hull, today.

A fireman, Inspector North, covering his head with a mackintosh on to which water was poured, made his way through the flames and saved a three year old child ; **Clarence Draper**, a boatman, collapsed after rescuing an eight months old baby ; and the mother of the children fell from a window ledge on to a bed on the pavement.

Five people received injuries. They are :-

**William Matchett** (39), lighterman, a lodger, extensive burns of both arms.

Emma Kennett (31), wardrobe dealer, 2 Spyvee Street, severe cuts on hands and burns.

William Kennett (8), burns on hands and body.

Ellen Kennett (3), burns on arms and legs, condition serious.

Joyce (8 months), eyes affected by smoke.  
The three last named are the children of Mrs Kennett,



**MOTHER FALLS FROM WINDOW ON TO BED** The fire broke out about 7 am in the kitchen and burned fiercely, the flames piercing through the floor of the back bedroom in which Matchett was sleeping. The landing had been partly burned through, and gave way as Matchett rushed downstairs. His impression is that the stairs gave way under him, and that he fell near the kitchen door. Matchett made his way through smoke and flames into the back yard, where he raised an alarm.

Climbing on to the roof of the scullery, he rescued the boy, William, aged 8, from a bedroom. By this time Mrs Kennett, who had been roused by the alarm given by Matchett, broke the window of the front bedroom. The bedroom was full of smoke, and she got out on to the window ledge. Neighbours unable to reach her spread a bed on the pavement, on to which Mrs Kennett, who was overcome, fell.

**ESCAPE BY LADDER** Clarence Draper, a boatman, who lives in Spyvee Street, reared a ladder to the front bedroom window, through which he climbed and rescued the baby, Joyce, aged 8 months. He had just reached the pavement with the child in his arms when he collapsed.

The Fire Brigade arrived when the house appeared to be doomed, with flames roaring through the bedroom windows.

Inspector North tried to enter through the front bedroom window, but time and again he was driven back. He then covered his head with a mackintosh onto which water was poured from a first aid appliance. Inspector North, cheered by the terrified neighbours, then got through the window. Later he was seen with a child in his arms, and at great risk he brought the child out.

It was Ellen, aged three years. She was found unconscious in bed, covered with charred wallpaper, which had fallen on to her.

Mrs Kennett, who acted with great presence of mind until overcome by smoke and heat, cut her hands badly in breaking the front bedroom window. When neighbours saw her, she was standing on the window ledge in her night dress.

"I heard them shout to me to jump", she said, "but I think I fell rather than jumped. I don't remember what happened after that. I had been aroused by the shouts of Matchett, but I did not realise that it was my house that was on fire until smoke poured in to the bedroom. When I opened the bedroom door there was a burst of flame. My first thoughts were for my children, and I put my fists through the window".

**CHILD BURIED IN BED** Inspector North of the fire brigade, who has several rescues to his credit, modestly disclaimed any gallantry when interviewed.

"When I heard that a child was in the blazing bedroom", he said, "I tried to enter, but the smoke and flames drove me back. There was no time to get a smoke helmet, so I threw my mackintosh over my head, and the fireman who had followed me up the ladder sprayed on it with water as I groped my way through the window. I felt on the bed, and found the child Ellen. There was no movement.

Raising my mackintosh from my face, I saw the child buried beneath the bedclothes and charred wallpaper, which the flames had stripped from the walls. I carried the child out through the window and down the ladder, round which the flames were darting. I was lucky in getting hold of the child. FELL INTO FLAMES Matchett said that he was met by a wall of flame. "The kitchen and shop looked like an inferno", he added, "I rushed upstairs shouting "The place is on fire", and had begun to help the others when I slipped and fell back into the flames, burning myself severely."

"I climbed on to the roof of the outhouses, and managed to save the boy through the window. After seeing him safely out of the way, I tried to get to the others, but the flames were so fierce that I had to wait for help".

The three children were taken to the Children's Hospital, and Mrs Kennett and Mr Matchett were treated at the Infirmary.

Mrs Kennett's husband, Mr Herbert Kennett, is a ship's steward, and is at sea. The greater part of the house was gutted.

## **28 4 September 1929**

### **GIRL'S SUICIDE ON IMPULSE**

LETTERS FROM A BOY AND MOTHER'S APPEAL An inquest was held at Horbury today on a girl of 13 1/2 years known as Annie Duckworth, whose body was found in the river Calder on Monday evening.

Dinah Gara, wife of Patrick Gara, Rabley Street, Ossett, said the dead girl, whose real name was Allan, was adopted by her when she was three months old, the child taking what was then her name. She had found that the girl had been receiving letters from a boy between 14 and 15, and on Monday she spoke to the girl about it, giving her what she thought was sound advice.

She begged of her not to bother with boys at her age. The girl held her head down when she was talking to her, but afterwards seemed all right. Witness walked with her up the street to see her off to school, and she had no idea she had not gone to school until about 3.10, when she was informed she had jumped into the river.

Walter Caldwell of Dewsbury said he was walking along the river towing-path at about 1.45 when he saw a girl swimming in the middle of the river. He was then about 400 to 500 yards away, and as he approached her, she called for help.

He ran towards her, and she had got to within four or five yards from the side when his view of her was obstructed by a bush, and when he got to the other side of the bush she had disappeared. On the bank, he found a hat, a coat and a book entitled "A Catechism of Christian Doctrine".

**William Martin**, a boatman, spoke to recovering the body five yards from the bank.

Mrs Gara, recalled, said that if the girl could swim, it was quite unknown to her.

Caldwell said he was quite certain the girl was swimming when he saw her.

The Coroner (Mr C J Howarth) said that Mrs Gara had a perfect right to remonstrate with the girl. The girl might have taken to heart what had been said to her and, in an impulse, jumped into the water.

A verdict of "Suicide whilst temporarily insane" was returned.

## **29 7 December 1929**

### **BLOWN FROM BARGE**

FATHER SEES SON DROWNED IN THE RIVER DON The body of **Frank Parkin** (23), boatman of Hull, who, it is thought, was blown off his father's keel in the gale on Thursday evening, has been recovered from the rover Don at Roundwood, after extensive dragging.

Parkin was working on a keel bound from Tinsley to Denaby, when the boat was blown across the river and stuck on the bank. After it was released, Parkin was seen sitting on a rail on the vessel, but when it had gone about 150 yards he was missing. His father saw Parkin struggling in the water, but when the boat stopped, it was again blown across the river, away from the drowning man.

### **30 27 December 1929**

**BOATMAN'S BODY IN CANAL** The body of **John William O'Brien** (60), who lived in a barge in the Leeds and Liverpool Canal was recovered from the canal near Neville Street, Leeds, today. O'Brien had been reported missing.

### **31 21 March 1930**

#### **BODY IN CANAL**

**UNKNOWN WOMAN FOUND AT APPERLEY** The body of a woman was found in the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, between Apperley station and Apperley junction, yesterday, by **George Pickles**, a Bingley boatman.

The body was taken to the Calverley mortuary, and the following description was issued by the police :-

Height 5ft 2in, between 45 and 50 years of age, black hair (bobbed), false teeth top and bottom, medium build, wearing wedding ring and dress ring (containing seven sapphires and seven pearls), long rolled gold bar brooch, dressed in black – gaiters, stockings, shoes and dress. The right leg was fractured, and the right foot almost severed, apparently by passing barges.

On March 6, a pair of woman's gloves and an umbrella were found on the embankment of the canal at Calverley, but dragging failed to locate any body.

### **32 12 October 1931**

**SENTENCES PASSED** **George William Bentham** (17), boatman, stealing £5 10s 7d at Skipton, three years in a Borstal Institution.

### **33 23 May 1932**

#### **RIVER RESCUE**

**BOATMAN WHO JUST SAW MAN'S FINGER TIPS** The rescue of a young man from drowning in the river Aire was described in the Leeds Police Court today, when Alfred Grimes (21) pleaded guilty to attempting to commit suicide. Grimes was also charged with committing an act of indecency, but he pleaded “not guilty” to this charge.

**Ernest White**, a boatman of Allison Street, Thorne, stated that at about 10.30 on the night of May 18, he was in the cabin at his boat *Thrift*, moored in the river Aire, when he heard a woman screaming for help. He ran up to the deck, got into a boat and sculled it in the direction of the screams, and could just see some finger tips above the water. He caught hold of the defendant, who was unconscious, and pulled him into the boat.

The Stipendiary Magistrate found Grimes guilty of indecent conduct, and Superintendent Moss stated that on two other occasions Grimes had molested girls. He was out of work, and had been a source of anxiety to his parents for some time past.

The Stipendiary Magistrate sentenced Grimes to two months imprisonment in the second division for indecent conduct, and dismissed the charge of attempted suicide under the Probation Act.

### **34 10 October 1932**

**James Barnes** (62), boatman, was found not guilty at the Leeds Quarter Sessions today, of stealing wood from the yard of Illingworth, Ingham and Co Ltd, Canal Basin, Leeds, on June 27, and was discharged.

### **35 1 April 1933**

#### **YOUTH'S SACRIFICE**

**DROWNED IN TRYING TO SAVE WOMAN** A verdict of “Accidentally drowned” was returned at an inquest in Castleford on John William Platts (19), pony driver, West Street, Castleford, who lost his life while attempting to rescue a woman from the river Aire on Thursday.

Sydney Townsend, William Street, Lock Lane, said that from the Allerton Bywater side of the river, he saw a woman acting in a curious manner on the opposite bank. She had a boy about four years

old with her, and a child in a push chair. She walked about on the bank for three quarters of an hour, and occasionally let the push chair go towards the water, but she stopped it. Eventually she placed a piece of newspaper on the (..... ....) post, wedged the push chair against the wall, and jumped into the water. He called out to Platts that there was a woman in the water, and like the brave man he was, Platts immediately threw off his coat and went into the water after her.

He caught hold of her, and was lifting her out, when she threw her arms around his neck and there was a terrible struggle. Eventually Platts fell back, and went under. He came up three times and then disappeared.

Men from an adjoining chemical works came on the scene, and the woman was rescued.

**George Johnson**, canal boatman, said he found the body of Platts in 20 feet of water later the same afternoon.

The Coroner, Mr Will Bentley, said it was a tragic thing that such a fine youth should be taken in this manner, and that such a valuable life had been thrown away.

### **36 26 September 1933**

WOMAN STRANGLER BY HUSBAND

DOUBLE TRAGEDY AT BATTYEFORD

INQUEST STORY OF BOATMAN'S STRANGE CONDUCT A verdict that the man murdered his wife by strangulation and that he hung himself while of unsound mind was returned at the inquest at Mirfield today on **Sam Oates** (62), canal barge captain, and his wife **Esther** (66) of South View, Huddersfield Road, Battyeford.

The couple were found dead at their home on Sunday morning – the woman in bed and the man hanging behind the door downstairs.

The West Riding Coroner (Mr C J Haworth) sat with a jury and the West Riding Police were represented by Superintendent H Stone of Dewsbury and Inspector Townend of Heckmondwike.

**Leonard Oates**, of Walker's Row, Battyeford, said his father met with an accident on September 8, when he knocked his head against a wheel when working at Stanley. Since then he had complained of pains in his head.

His parents had lived happily together.

Mrs Florence May Eagland of Huddersfield Road, Battyeford, said she had known Mr and Mrs Oates nearly seven years. About three o'clock on Saturday morning, Oates knocked at the door of her house, and when her husband opened the window, said, "Will you tell Mrs Eagland to come? Mrs Oates is not so well". Witness went to the Oates's home and found them in the kitchen.

DROWNING THREAT They were both upset, and witness said to Mrs Oates, who was in her night clothes, "Let Mr Oates take you back upstairs to bed", which he did.

Later, said Mrs Eagland, Mrs Oates told her that her husband had said he would drown himself. The man "was in a very queer way, as if his nerves were upset". He had not been drinking.

On Sunday morning about half past eight, Mrs Eagland said she went to the Oates's house to see how they were. She knocked on the door, but got no reply, and the same thing happened when she went again later.

A ladder was brought, and witness's husband climbed up and entered the house through the window. He opened the front door and, said Mrs Eagland, they saw Oates hanging by a rope from a nail. She went upstairs and found Mrs Oates lying dead on a bed. She was in her night dress and partly covered with bedclothes.

"NOTHING RASH" Replying to Superintendent Stone, Mrs Eagland said she got a promise from Oates that he would not "do anything rash to himself or Mrs Oates".

Sam Eagland said Oates was very excited and agitated when witness was called to his house. He said, "Ee! I have made a mess of it this time".

Eagland asked him what was the matter, and Oates showed him a doctor's certificate. Apparently Oates got the certificate last Wednesday, and instead of taking it to the offices of his employers and reporting the matter, he had gone in a canal boat and made another trip.

Witness told him there was nothing to trouble about, and persuaded him to go back to bed and settle

down.

**NECKLACE ROUND NECK** Police-Constable Dolan said there were marks on the face of Mrs Oates just below her right eye, and on her neck. A necklace of beads was lying naturally around her neck and chest, but the clasp was unfastened. The beads appeared to have been placed there.

Superintendent Stone : The clasp of the necklace is weak, and could easily come unfastened in the least struggle. - Yes.

Dr Sutherland, West Riding pathologist, who made a *post mortem* examination, described the marks on the body of Mrs Oates, and said her death was caused by strangulation.

The Coroner : Is there anything to show how strangulation may have been caused?

Dr Sutherland said there was no mark of any cord or band around the neck. It was obvious that some of the external abrasions on the neck were caused by the necklace having been pressed into the skin. Presumably, strangulation was by hand.

Oates's death, the doctor added, was due to hanging. The bump on his head might have affected him mentally.

### **37 4 November 1933**

#### **A HULL MYSTERY**

**LEEDS CLUE IN SUPPOSED DROWNING MYSTERY** The only clue to the identity of a man who is supposed to have been drowned in the river Humber at Hull, during the night, is an account bearing a Leeds address.

**Frederick Berry**, a boatman, was walking along the quay of the Humber Dock Basin today, when he noticed on the ground a blue serge jacket and waistcoat and a brown mixture cap. Inside the cap was a note, "Good bye all – Joe".

On searching the clothing, the police found an account for £1 3s 4d made out to "Woodcock" and dated 17/10/33, from E S Adgie, Kirkgate Market, Leeds, number 18934.

On inquiry in Leeds today, a "*Yorkshire Evening Post*" reporter found that Joseph Woodcock (41) of Denison Street, Burley Road, Leeds, is missing from home, and that Woodcock had had business dealings with E S Adgie, Kirkgate Market.

### **38 3 January 1934**

#### **RESCUED FROM RIVER**

**SELBY WOMAN'S NARROW ESCAPE IN FOG** Mrs Hinks, the young wife of Mr Llewellyn Herbert Hinks of 34 Ousegate, Selby, who fell into the Ouse late last night in the fog, is progressing satisfactorily, but is in a weak condition.

Mrs Hinks had just taken her husband's supper to Messrs Williamson's jetty, where he is employed as a dock hand unloading a sugar beet boat. She walked towards the edge of the jetty to call him and fell into the river.

She dropped between the boat *Eddie* and the wharf, and was swept away by the tide. Her cries attracted the attention of the crew of another boat which was moored alongside, named the *Slat*, and three Dutchmen, W Steenbergen, J Wolthuis and B Schuurman, rushed to the Nook and called to the boatmen of the *Southwark* which was stationed there.

Two boats were put into the river with three Dutchmen in one of them.

The other boat, in which was J H Fawcett, a docker of Selby, **G Douglas**, chief engineer of the *Southwark*, and **H Kitchen**, a boatman of Selby, found Mrs Hinks struggling in the water. Mr Fawcett pulled her out.

Mrs Hinks was taken to a nearby house and later to Selby Institution Hospital. Mrs Hinks, who is a German, is 35 years of age.

### **39 19 April 1934**

**LEEDS RIVER MYSTERY** The body of a man was taken from the river Aire near Old Mill Lane, Hunslet, Leeds, today. The body had apparently been in the water a few days. It was recovered from the water by a boatman named **Cawthorne** of Goodman Street.

#### 40 15 August 1935

STRUCK CHILD WITH BELT At Skipton today, **Joe Bridge**, canal boatman, Bridge Street, was bound over for two years on a summons for ill treating his step child, a girl aged 10 years.

It was alleged on behalf of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, who prosecuted, that Bridge struck the child several blows with a leather strap.

Bridge, who pleaded guilty, said he had lost his temper. He and his wife went out for the evening, leaving the girl in charge of the baby, and on their return found the girl playing in the street. He admitted striking the girl several times with a leather belt.

#### 41 4 October 1935

FOUND IN BUS

BOATMAN FINED FOR THEFT AT SNAITH **Kershaw Bates**, a Shipley boatman, appeared at Snaith Petty Sessions charged with the theft of an electric torch, the property of the Rev H Waterton, vicar of East Cowick, near Goole.

Mr Waterton boarded a bus at Selby, and placed his flash lamp on the seat beside him. When he left the vehicle, he forgot it. The bus went on to Goole, the lamp remaining on the seat. On its return from Goole, three men got in, including the accused. The conductor, on seeing the lamp, asked whose it was. Bates said it was his, and when he got off he took it with him.

The vicar met the bus, and asked the conductor if he had seen a flash lamp. As a result, the conductor reported the matter to a constable.

Bates told the Bench he was sorry he took the lamp. He had been out with two of his mates, and they had had a few drinks, and "this was the result". He had no thought of stealing it, and if the conductor had not mentioned it, would not have done so.

He had two previous offences, having been birched as a youth. He was fined 30s including costs.

#### 42 28 November 1935

BOATMAN'S DEATH

FALL FROM A BARGE THAT NOBODY SAW A verdict of misadventure was recorded at an inquest at Knottingley today on **John Rowbottom** (68) of Coward's Yard, Cow Lane, who was probably the oldest boatman engaged on the Aire and Calder Canal, and who was drowned on Tuesday. Rowbottom had been employed by the firm of Messrs Stainsby and Lyon for 50 years.

The evidence was that he and his son, **Richard**, were carrying a cargo of tar from York to Knottingley on the motor barge *John*, and after passing through Beale Lock, Rowbottom took over the tiller while his son went to attend to the engine. Two minutes later, the boat bumped the side of the canal, causing Richard to lose his balance, and on running up to investigate, he saw his father in the water.

Richard jumped into a cob boat, and reached his father in less than two minutes, but he was unable to haul him into the boat, and had to hold on to him with one hand while he sculled the boat with the other to the nearest farm, where help was forthcoming. Artificial respiration was tried until Dr Gillbanks arrived and pronounced life extinct.

Richard added that he did not think his father had been under the water at all, as he was on the surface and still struggling when witness reached him. He did not know what had caused his father to fall overboard, but there was a strong ebb, and he suggested that it might have caused the rudder to get out of control.

The Coroner (Mr Will Bentley) said that whatever the explanation was, he thought the cause of Rowbottom's fall into the water must have been purely accidental. It was quite evident that the son made a determined effort to rescue his father, but he (the Coroner) imagined that the father had been under water before the son was able to get to him.

#### 43 13 December 1935

MOTORCYCLIST IN CANAL – DID NOT SEE SWING BRIDGE WAS OPEN

BARGEMEN TO THE RESCUE AT APPERLEY A motorcyclist had an unusual accident at the



swing bridge over the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Apperley Bridge yesterday.

Lawrence Farrer (17), printer's apprentice, riding to work at Rawdon, did not notice that the bridge was open, and drove into the canal. He was rescued by boatmen, and is detained in Bradford Royal Infirmary with shock and cuts on his head.

It is understood that Farrer approached the canal from the Windhill side while the bridge was open to allow a barge from Leeds to Shipley to pass. Although men with the barge shouted, Farrer went on, and his machine dropped into the bed of the canal at a point where there is very little water, near the edge, and where the bed is gravel.

**George Gordon** of Shipley, master of the barge, rescued Farrer and then summoned the Bradford police ambulance.

Mr Albert Pullen, coal merchant, who lives near the bridge, said it was still dark when the accident happened. The bridge is lighted by a gas lamp, which had gone out automatically shortly before the accident.

Mr Pullen said he had lived at the spot for 30 years, and had never known of such an accident before.

#### **44 11 November 1936**

A boatman on the Leeds-Liverpool Canal, **George Mawson** (26) of Albert Street, Ince, near Wigan, who was injured when a marble slab fell on his legs at Canal Wharf, Leeds, is in the Infirmary with a fractured leg and a knee injury. He was stated to be "fairly comfortable" today.

#### **45 26 June 1937**

##### LEEDS BOY DROWNED

FELL 15 FEET INTO CANAL WHILE AT PLAY In an unsuccessful attempt to revive a boy taken from the canal at Spring Gardens Locks, near Wellington Bridge, Leeds, last night, police and civilians worked with oxygen apparatus for over an hour.

The boy was Alan Henry Johnson (11) of Woodsley Road. He fell about 15 feet into a lock, while watching wood he had thrown in the water.

A barge boatman, attracted by the cries of other children, summoned **Mr Jack Smith**, a lock-keeper, who, with a boat hook, recovered the body from water 10 feet deep.

Mr William Burrow of Seacroft, a railway shunter who was working near, applied artificial respiration until the police brought oxygen apparatus.

#### **46 27 August 1937**

DEWSBURY THEFT CHARGE **Harold Smith** (17), boatman of Kyffin Avenue, Sutton Trust Estate, Hull, was remanded until tomorrow, at Dewsbury today, charged with stealing timber valued at £4, the property of William Hodgson and Sons Ltd, Dewsbury, between August 18 and 24.

It was stated that he was arrested at Hull yesterday, and when told the nature of the inquiries against him, said, "Yes, I sold the timber to Joe Hunt at Wakefield, who gave me 10s for it".

#### **47 23 September 1937**

##### DYING MAN AT WORK

REVELATION AT DEWSBURY INQUEST ON BARGEE At the inquest at Dewsbury today on **Joseph Albert William Newsome** (50), a bargee, who was found dead on his barge at Ravensthorpe on Tuesday, Dr G H L Hammerton said he was surprised that the man had been able to do any work at all. He had suffered from kidney and liver trouble, his heart was diseased, and he had signs of pneumonia.

George Marriott of Calder Wharf, Ravensthorpe, said he was with Newsome on Monday night, when he was breathing with difficulty, but refused to see a doctor. Newsome had no home except the barge, and although he had a bed there he did not sleep in it, and he had told witness that he dare not lay down for fear of choking.

It was stated that Newsome was found lying on the fore-castle of the barge by a boatman who had

gone to make arrangements to tow the barge down the river.  
A verdict of "Death from natural causes" was entered.

#### **48 23 December 1928**

##### **BODY FOUND IN CANAL**

**PUDSEY MAN WHO HAD BEEN ILL AND DEPRESSED** A verdict of "suicide while of unsound mind" was returned at the inquest at Farsley today on Harold Wilson (61) of School Street, Pudsey, whose body was found in the canal at Todley, after he had been missing since December 3.

**William Dawson**, retired boatman, said he considered that injuries on the body had been caused by propellers of boats. There was only five feet of water in the canal.

It was stated that Wilson, a bachelor, living by himself, had been ill and depressed. His only income was 7s 6d to 10s a week, out of which he had to provide food, clothing and rent.

#### **49 18 November 1939**

##### **BLACKOUT ACCIDENTS IN LEEDS AREA**

**PEDESTRIAN WHO WALKED INTO RIVER** The blackout in the Leeds district overnight, aided and abetted by slight fog, for the second time this week, produced a big crop of accidents.

Henry Thompson (34) of Ascot Street, Pontefract Lane, was walking along the bank of the river Aire near the end of Goodman Street, Hunslet, when he fell into the river. He was helped out of the water by a boatman, **Charles Wray** of Montague Street, Doncaster, H Crabtree of Goodman Street, and two police officers who had heard his cries had great difficulty in finding him in the pitch blackness.

He was admitted to Seacroft Hospital suffering from shock of immersion, and is stated today to be "quite comfortable".

#### **50 6 December 1939**

**CHILD FATALLY BURNED** An inquest will be held tomorrow on **Doreen Hardy** (6), child of **Tom Hardy**, boatman of Caroline Street, Saltaire, who was fatally burned at home last night.

Her mother went shopping, leaving Doreen and two other children in the house. Smoke was seen, and Mrs Maria Atkinson, a neighbour, ran in and found Doreen with her clothing ablaze. She put out the flames with an overcoat, but the child died in hospital.

#### **51 7 December 1939**

##### **HAD NO FIREGUARD**

**SHIPLEY CHILD'S FATAL BURNS IN MOTHER'S ABSENCE** "Probably proceedings will be taken against you, because it is an offence to leave children in a room with a fire and no fireguard. If you had a fireguard, it is quite likely this would not have happened".

So said the Coroner (Mr E W Norris) at a Shipley inquest today on **Doreen Hardy** (6), daughter of **Tom Hardy**, canal boatman of Caroline Street, Saltaire, fatally burned at home.

**Gladys May Hardy** said that on Tuesday she left Doreen, a boy aged 4 and the baby in the house while she visited a shop. There was a fire burning, but there was no fireguard. When she returned after a quarter of an hour, Doreen had been taken to hospital.

The Coroner : Have you never had a fireguard?

Witness : No.

Maria Atkinson of Ada Street, Saltaire, said two boys asked her to go over to Mrs Hardy's house. She found Doreen with her vest smouldering, and threw an overcoat over her. The other children were on the sofa. The baby was burned a little on the head. Witness and another woman carried Doreen to Salt's Hospital.

The Coroner : You acted well and promptly.

Witness said the little boy told her Doreen was lighting paper, and she tried to put it out and it caught her frock. All her clothing was burned off except her vest.

Dr E S Sharp said the child died from shock following severe burns.

The verdict was in accordance with the medical evidence.

## **52 26 April 1940**

**HULL WOMAN SENTENCED** Nancy Millar (21), widow, was found guilty at Leeds Assizes today on charges of procuring two girls of 15 and 16 for an immoral purpose, and of keeping a disorderly house in Kate's Terrace, Hull. Two counts of procuring were withdrawn. She was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment.

**William England** (33), boatman, pleaded guilty to an offence against the girl aged 15. He was sentenced to five days imprisonment (which means his immediate release), the Judge saying he had no doubt that she was as forward in the matter as England had been.

Dennis Ralph (19), hospital porter of Hull, pleaded "not guilty" to a charge of an offence against the same girl. His case is proceeding.

## **53 29 April 1940**

**WAR ALTERS LIFE ON THE CANAL**

**BUT THE TUGS AND THEIR CONVOYS ARE PLAYING A VITAL PART** The war, which has altered so many things, has changed the Night Tug into the Dawn Tug. To inquire into this change, I went to Leeds Lock at the early hour of 4.30 am.

I won't say anything about the weather, except to hint that it was not improved by the darkness, any more than my nerves were soothed by the gurgles of water on the stone side of the lock. Departure before dawn was most disquieting to one who remembered how, in the old days, the Night Tug would loiter, disdainful of Time and the Goole tide.

We picked up the "fly boats" - our tow - and before daylight had dropped down to Knostrop Lock, the red gleams of our convoy's shielded port lights winking balefully. Intuition and the mate told me that I should be better out of the way at this stage of our journey, so I went below.

The cabin resembled a whitewashed dug out, though few dug outs could have rivalled its tidiness. An oil lamp shone mildly ; the bunks were models of neatness ; and the mate brewed a milkless tea just short of the Navy's reputed peace time six spoonfuls of sugar to the cup sweetness.

**ADDED DIFFICULTIES** On deck again, in the very early daylight, I chatted to the skipper.

It must be known to the German High Command that in peacetime over 2,500,000 tons of traffic is annually borne over the company's network of waterways, in goods as diverse as coal, petrol, foodstuffs and silver sand. But the kinds and quantities of goods carried must not be mentioned nor, for other reasons, what the crew told me of their opinion of Hitler.

As the skipper talked to me of his job, I pieced together a picture of a hard life to which the war has added difficulties.

How would you like personally to manhandle 135 tons of goods in a week, as a canal boatman can and does?

Driving a heavy lorry calls for much judgement - but what about the task of steering a tug and maybe eight "dumb craft" on the tow round a bend in the canal, when another tug with its tow is rounding the same bend, going up as you go down?

Conditions are never the same twice. Apart from such trifles as fog and - nowadays - blackout, the load is never just the same. The barges may be loaded or light, few or many, towed taut or "at length" or a mixture of both, and in the river the current and the height of the water varies.

For at Bulholme Lock, our tug and its tow of five swam in through narrow gates with merely a foot or so clearance on each side, and not so much as one fender in the line bumped the side until the gates were cleared.

So we sailed on all day. At one lock we would pick up another tow ; at another cast one off. To me it was progress through an unknown world.

Canal men, if they have to return home by bus, probably feel the same sensation of unreality when they look at familiar country from a different angle.

**A SOLID WORLD** The canal man's is a solid world, very hard working, much closer to the country through which it works its way than to the towns at which it ties up ; a world where men

drink lashings of strong tea from mugs with thick white and blue rings round them, cut bread in huge slices and fry sausages over the tiny cabin fire in a cast iron frying pan with which you might brain an elephant.

It is a world from which I emerged reluctantly, a world in which the pace may seem leisurely, but in which the work, though heavy and unspectacular, is a vital contribution to our industrial war effort.

#### **54 17 October 1940**

##### LANDLADY VICTIM

**SHIPLEY BOATMAN'S THEFT AT BOSTON SPA** **Harry Walker**, boatman, Whitecliffe Road, Shipley, pleaded not guilty at Wetherby today to stealing a man's suit and other things valued at £5 17s 6d.

Superintendent McDonald said defendant was lodging at the house of a Mrs Shillito, Boston Spa, whose husband was in the Army. On August 15, he paid for his lodgings and said he was going home for the weekend. After he had gone, Mrs Shillito missed the suit, a shirt, a pair of socks and a tie, as well as a 2s piece. Before this, she had allowed Walker to wear the clothing because he had scarcely any boots and his clothes were "a disgrace". She gave him a week to return the suit, but he did not do so.

Defendant said that at the time he had to go into hospital, and at his request Mrs Shillito lent him the suit. He had been waiting for Mrs Shillito to send his working clothes before he returned the suit.

He was sent to gaol for two months.

#### **55 10 November 1941**

##### FINES FOR SWEEPINGS

**CHECK TO PRACTICE BY DOCK LIGHTERMEN** **John Fogarty** (34), boatman of Hull, pleaded not guilty at Selby today to stealing 151 lb of brown sugar, the property of the Ministry of Food, and **Henry William Johnson** (37), boatman of Selby, pleaded guilty to receiving the sugar. It was stated that when Fogarty's boat was moored at Selby alongside another boat on which was a man he knew, the man asked Fogarty if he wanted a few sweepings of sugar. Fogarty went into the hold and filled a carrier bag. The following day, he gave some of the sugar to Johnson.

Johnson pleaded guilty to stealing 8 1/2 lb of tea, the property of the Ministry of Food. It was stated that when his boat was being loaded with tea, he took some tea from the dockside to his lodgings.

Johnson was represented by Mr C G Bailey, who said lightermen usually regarded sweepings up as their property, but he thought the case would put a stop to the practice.

Fogarty was fined £5 and Johnson £5 on each charge.

#### **56 8 July 1942**

**HID BIKE IN MUD** A cycle thief who cleverly concealed the machine by dropping it into the mud of the river Ouse was sentenced to two months hard labour at Selby today. He was **Norman William Alls** (20), boatman of Cranbourne Terrace, William Street, Hull.

Inspector Jackson said that Alls had appeared at Hull on charges of stealing bicycles, and although sentence had been postponed, the Hull authorities now felt that the youth needed supervision, and they recommended institutional treatment.

#### **57 17 August 1942**

**Edward Greenwood** (66) of Garton Grove, East End Park, Leeds, a boatman employed by the Aire and Calder Navigation, collapsed on a barge at Leeds Lock, Clarence Road, Hunslet, this afternoon, and was dead on arrival at the Infirmary.

#### **58 6 January 1943**

**DUMB BOATS DELIVER THE GOODS** From the Humber ports sail the Calders, the

Newarkites, the Cuckoos and the Donkey dikers – the dumb boats which have an important part to play in the country's transport system, especially in days of war.

The Calders find their way to the West Riding. The smaller of the two usual sizes is a vessel of 60 ft, which climbs to Dewsbury and beyond. The Newarkite, 82 ft 6 in, with a width of 14 ft 8 in, plies normally on the Humber and Trent, though now and then such boats turn up close to Leeds.

The 72 ft 6 in Cuckoos are designed for the Lincoln run, and the 62 ft Donkey dikers are for Doncaster and the narrow Sheffield waterways.

They're all dumb boats, and their masters and mates are dumb boat men or, in the more formal language of the Ministry of Labour, tidal and canal boatmen. Their boats are dumb only because they are short of power.

**MASTERS WHO KNOW** Nowadays they are trailed along by stammering and fussy tugs, but most of them still carry sail, and all have masters who can use sail in the Humber, where the sandbanks stir so treacherously, or in the peaceful stretches of the inland waterways.

All, too, have masters and mates who know all there is to be known about “driving” or “launching” with poles, and experts say that the skill of the Humber boatmen in the laborious form of propulsion is unequalled.

But in these days, speed being of importance, the main part of the towing is done by tugs, and the dumb boats shuttle quickly between the Humber ports and the inland wharves.

“Sometimes”, says George, master of a dumb boat for over 20 years, “we're at Gainsborough in three and a half hours from leaving the lock pit at Hull. We often move a lot faster than people think. You may have a current of eight knots, and with the power of the tug as well, you may get a land speed of between 12 and 14 miles an hour”.

“But there are times when tides don't fit or when fog intervenes, and then you'll be a fair time on the way”.

**A BOATMAN'S LIFE** Sometimes George expresses surprise that a youngster should come into the business. Many, he suggests, would be far better off ashore ; but then he thinks again, and adds that there's a lot to be said for a boatman's life.

“There's no queuing for a ride home”, he says. “When my day's work is done, I'm at home on my vessel, safely tied up. And there's a lot to be said for the hard work we get – loading and unloading, stowing cargo, the tussle with the tiller when we're behind a tug. It's a healthy life. I haven't had a bottle of medicine in 20 years, and I don't know many boatmen who have.”

“But this is a job to be learned from childhood. I had a run around the world, I had a partnership in a sheep ranch in Australia until we were “droughted out”, and then I returned to the river where my father and his father worked.”

“I saw a lad enter the game the other week. There was a good job ashore for him if he'd wanted it. But there's water in his family's blood – he couldn't turn his face away from the river”.

**WATER IN THE BLOOD** “You find the same thing with the boatmen of Burscough, who run so many of the craft on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, and you find it down Thorne way, for there is another centre which has supplied masters and mates for many a dumb boat.”

“I've heard of Thorne men who built their own boats, and I know now of wooden boats the best part of 100 years old, still doing their work well. They are made of English oak, and they've been wonderfully well cared for.

But I like to think best of all of the vessels made of good Low Moor iron, It never rusts. There are boats built of Low Moor iron 60 or 70 years ago, still doing their job about the Humber.

George's ship carries a deadweight load of 130 tons. Since last May, to look back to a convenient date, she has transported, over various distances, between Hull and the inland towns, over 3,500 tons of goods.

**MANY CARGOES** Wheat, maize, barley, corned beef and general cargoes have been carried. She has carried gravel for urgent Government jobs, copper plates, timber, sulphur, pitch, and a hundred and one other things.

“Today”, he said, “I've been lifting and carrying 18st bags – a fair stretch, you know. But this is a reasonable sort of a cargo. Not so long since, we had one of copper plates. They're not so good –

the copper sticks together and it's hard on the hands when there's unloading to be done”.

“Sulphur's not a pleasant cargo either. For instance, you couldn't go to the pictures after working among the sulphur. Pitch is another nasty one – it burns worse than sulphur. We carry almost anything – from peanuts to linseed oil in bags – think that one out! The oil is like a mass of jujubes when it's bagged”.

Incidentally, George has had this Christmas at his home ashore. His family, evacuated from a blitzed house in Hull, have settled on the Yorkshire moors. George was there during the Christmas weekend – for the first time since the previous June.

### **59 9 December 1943**

**BOATMAN'S COLLAPSE** While sculling a boat in Goole Docks last night, **Daniel Harvey** (47), boatman of Heber Street, complained of pains in the chest. He refused, however, to let his son take the oar, and on reaching the dock wall, he collapsed. He was taken to a doctor's surgery, but was found to be dead.

### **60 18 March 1944**

**FOUND IN CANAL** Police have recovered from the canal at Dewsbury the body of **Isaac Henry Holmes** (69) of Calder Wharf, Ravensthorpe, a boatman who lived alone, and who had been missing since Wednesday.

### **61 25 June 1946**

**LEEDS QUARTER SESSIONS** The following decisions were made at Leeds Quarter Sessions today :-

William Doherty (43), fireman, a native of Derry, three months hard labour ; and **Joseph Dixon** (24), boatman, native of Hull, bound over for six months ; charged jointly with breaking and entering a shop, and theft.

### **62 14 September 1949**

**BOATMAN A NON SWIMMER** “Misadventure” was the verdict at a Horbury inquest today on **Ernest Oates** (64), canal boatman, Huddersfield Road, Mirfield, drowned when he fell from a barge. It was stated that Oates had worked on barges since childhood and had never learned to swim.

### **63 1 October 1951**

**60mph CAR WAS CHASED BY POLICE**

**PURSUIT ENDED IN CRASH, COURT TOLD** After being chased at speeds of up to 60 mph through Leeds streets at midnight, the driver of a car crashed at high speed into a hedge and escaped.

This was stated in Leeds today when **Sydney Smith**, boatman, Bishop's Avenue, Hull, who was remanded on bail, was accused of taking a car without consent, dangerous driving, and driving without insurance and without a licence.

Chief Inspector W Webster said that at midnight on September 27, Police-Constables Frank Smith and William McCarthy in a police car saw the car in Boar Lane.

**LIGHTS AT RED** They followed the car, which went through the City Square traffic lights at red and turned into a “no entry” street at 60 mph. They tried to overtake, but their car was forced on to the pavement.

At Dragon Bridge the driver almost overturned the car, but carried on up Whitehall Road, with the police car still in pursuit.

In Gildersome Lane the driver crashed the car into a hedge, jumped out and made off.

A running commentary of the chase broadcast by PC McCarthy enabled other patrol cars to converge on the area, and Smith was found and taken to Leeds Infirmary with injuries.

#### **64 8 October 1951**

**60 mph CHASE – LEEDS PCs PRAISED** Two Leeds police officers who in a police car took part in a 60 mph chase in pursuit of a car taken without the owner's consent were each commended by the Stipendiary Magistrate in Leeds today.

A third officer, Police-Constable H Rose, who arrested the accused, was also commended.

**Sidney Smith** (22), boatman, Bishop's Street, Hull, who pleaded guilty to taking a car without consent, driving it dangerously without insurance and without a licence, was remanded in custody for a week for a medical report.

Chief Inspector W Webster said shortly after midnight on September 28, a police car driven by Police-Constable Frank Smith, with Police-Constable W McCarthy as his observer, gave chase to a vehicle which Smith had taken in Leeds without the owner's consent.

**DELIBERATE CRASH** During the chase, which lasted for about 20 minutes, the defendant drove through Leeds streets at high speed, reaching 60 mph at times. The police tried to overtake, but were forced each time to mount the footpath, and in Whitehall Road the accused deliberately collided his vehicle with the police car, causing it slight damage.

The police continued to follow the accused who, in Gildersome Lane, drove his car into a hedge and made off through a field. Other cars, directed to the area by a running commentary of the chase given by Police-Constable McCarthy, cordoned off the district, and the accused was arrested by Police-Constable Rose.

Mr A Ryder (defending) said the accused had no recollection of taking the car, and the first he knew about it was when a policeman got hold of him in a field and said, "You have taken a car".

The accused had suffered from blackouts, and that was the only explanation he could give.

#### **65 23 June 1952**

**FOOTPRINTS LED TO ARREST** Footprints in the snow led to the arrest of **Percy Stead** (31), boatman, no fixed address, who was jailed for two years at Wakefield Quarter Sessions today for receiving property valued at £59 15s 4d.

Mr Alistair Sharp, prosecuting, said that after a shoe shop had been entered, and shoes and stockings stolen, in the winter of 1950, police saw footprints in the snow. They followed them to a house and found accused asleep on a rug with the stolen property beside him.

#### **66 19 March 1953**

**CANAL VETERAN IS 90 NOT OUT** **Mr Tom Priestley**, known as Halifax's oldest and nimblest canal boatman when he retired in 1939, has celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In his 70 years work on Britain's inland waterways – he is the son of a boatman, and was working on the waterways almost as soon as he could sit astride a boat horse – Mr Priestley has travelled by canal all over the country.

His wife, **Mrs Mary Ann Priestley**, now 85, also went aboard with her family of 13 on many of her husband's trips. She recalls pulling the boat while her captain husband sat at the tiller.

Mr Priestley was born at Brookfoot, Brighouse, and has lived in Castleford and Sowerby Bridge.

Now living in retirement in Halifax, he owns the best filled garden in Green Terrace Square, Saville Park. He is also a cinema "fan" and a man who believes in a two mile walk every day.