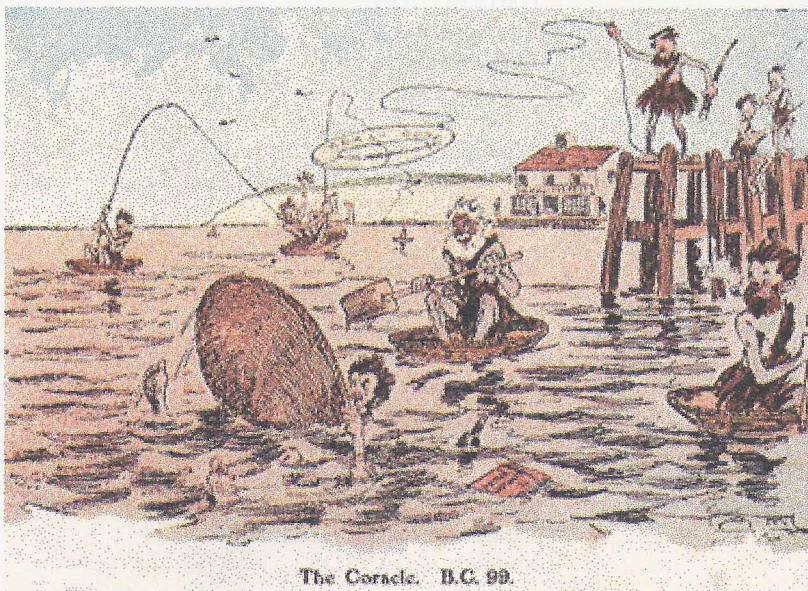




newsletter



spring 1998

OFFICERS OF THE CORACLE SOCIETY

President	Sir Peter Badge Mill End, 6 Springfield, Horrabridge, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 7QS
Chairman	Mr Peter Faulkner, 24 Watling Street, Leintwardine, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 0LW
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Membership Secretary	Mr Brian Pearce 1 Eastcote Road, Pinner, Middlesex, HA5 1DS
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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The year started with a real zing, for our President has now become *Sir Peter Badge*. We send our warmest congratulations to Peter and Mary down there in deepest Devon.

At the time of writing, mid-February, we are enjoying what must be a phenomenon of nature. Can you remember seeing bats, butterflies, celandines, primroses, and hawthorn in leaf at this time of year?

What a wonderful opportunity to be out in a coracle exploring the freshwater habitat. Unfortunately, torn back muscles have denied me such a luxury. Mobility is at last returning, although there was a time when it seemed as if I'd never step into a coracle again. I will never again laugh at anyone with back trouble!

Having had time to read through all the Newsletters, I can't help but think what an incredible group of folk we are. What other form of transport could boast an unbroken lineage in excess of ten thousand years? There may be no material evidence to support this statement; however, large sea-going skin boats are known to have existed in these islands and in Scandinavia five thousand years ago. These were sophisticated craft, often with crews of a dozen or more.

The last Ice Age was a mere 30,000 years ago and I believe that, as man started to move back into the land, he would soon be crossing the large tracts of waterscape that must have existed. Here in the gravel beds of the Teme I have found Neolithic flint scrapers, perhaps once used to clean skins to cover those early coracles—what a wonderful thought!

This year there are two new coracle-friendly events; one in Co. Meath, Eire, the other on the Dee at Chester.

Brian Pearce has got to grips with Membership, which seems to be steadily growing. Well done! And is it true that you have become a serious paddler too?

Did you spot the deliberate mistake in the last issue? Reference to the Brendon Voyage on page 7 should have read June 1977 and not 1997.

Please send in YOUR contribution for the Newsletters. You all have stories to tell, so let's have them, no matter how trivial you may think they are. We all want to hear more tales of the riverbank.

I very much hope to meet you during the new season. Please make a special effort to support the AGM at Gloucester Docks, especially as we are to put on a demonstration on the water. Yes, do bring your coracle and a buoyancy aid—it's very deep!

Peter Faulkner, Leintwardine

THE EXETER MARITIME COLLECTION

The Exeter Maritime Museum was opened in 1969 by Sir Alec Rose, and provided a backdrop for the TV series *The Onedin Line*. The collection of boats, ships and various sailing craft, including coracles, was obtained from far-flung places around the world, by members of the International Sailing Craft Association.

The collection at Exeter was largely the work of David Goddard M.A., who had spent a great deal of time and research obtaining these craft. Among his collection were a variety of coracles, such as those from India and Iraq, as well as British versions, and it is very sad this wonderful collection has had to be split up for various reasons. However, in 1997 the different craft found new homes, some in Suffolk and some in Bristol. The following articles explain the story.

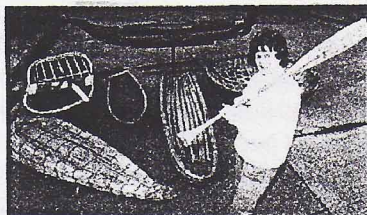
From the *Eastern Daily Press*, March 13, 1997. Story by **MATT RADLEY**

Around 150 boats, thought to form the biggest collection of ethnic vessels in the world, began their voyage to East Anglia yesterday. The million-pound collection, once housed at a maritime museum in Exeter, was loaded aboard a ship bound for a new museum at Lowestoft. A 52ft Arab dhow, a Taiwanese sampan and a majestic gondola from Italy are among the water-borne treasures which may be seen floating across Oulton Broad this summer. The museum, which already has 20 boats at its warehouse on Caldecott Road, is set to be up and running by Easter.

The International Sailing Craft Association, which owns the collection, will seek cash support from the National Lottery to build a venue that could attract 100,000 visitors a year.

The unique collection was put together by the association in Devon over 30 years. But the Exeter museum ran out of space as the number of exhibits grew and a new home had to be found.

Eighty boats, including Brunel's steam ship *Bertha*, will form an exhibition in Bristol. Businessman Neil Hunt, who is putting the collection together, said the boats would put Lowestoft firmly back on the maritime map, giving visitors and local people access to ancient boat-building traditions from all over the world. "Many people will never have seen a gondola or a Samoan outrigger in their lives, but now they will be able to see and sail them at Oulton Broad," he said. "We are going to sail a 62ft Chinese junk into the harbour at Easter which is bound to turn a few heads." He added: "It is without doubt the biggest collection of ethnic boats in the world. It's so important that some boat designs have become extinct and are no longer used."



VARIETY: Barbara Hunt of the International Sailing Craft Association Museum with some of the boats to be put on show.

Picture by Chris Gorman

Introducing The Coracle To Cheshire's Waterways

Marjorie Watson

It wouldn't do to be of a shy and retiring nature when out on the water. Peter and Vivienne Faulkner delivered my hide coracle in May, and since then I've had my photograph taken a hundred times by complete strangers. I've spent the summer paddling along my local stretch of the Shropshire Union Canal, about 15 miles in all, between Barbridge Marina near Nantwich, and Tower Wharf at the western edge of Chester. I did it in short sections, between road access points, and while each journey was different, the flowers along the banks, the birds and dragonflies and butterflies, the questions were always the same: What do you call that thing? What's it made of? Did you make it yourself? I take that as a compliment, but I'm not sure it was always meant as one.

Travelling through Chester itself was magical, seeing the city from a very different point of view, and being waved at from buses and bridges. Passing the pub with a big waterside frontage was a little disconcerting, like finding myself alone on stage with a vast audience watching. In the deep sandstone cutting under the city walls lots of heads were peeping over the top, and children were instructed to look carefully and take notes. I decided not to follow my usual practice of yodelling loudly under bridges while turning round in circles, even though I was wearing my customary heavy disguise—hat down over my eyes and Catwoman shades.

The season has just ended with a regatta on the Dee in Chester for traditional boats, a charity event in aid of a local hospice. After the straight and sluggish canal (I never could keep up with the ducklings) it was very exciting to be on a wide, busy river, mixing with canoes and skiffs and sculls and dragon boats, and riding the wash of the showboat and motor launches, who were taking no prisoners.

The coracle classes were quite exclusive, just two men and two ladies, the other (two) coracles being the black shopping basket variety and not as manoeuvrable as my flying saucer. I'm proud to say I won my race over the full course of half a mile, and the shared time-trial. I have two gold medals and consider myself Champion of the Dee.

This revived October regatta, Dee Day, is to be annual event, so next year there ought to be more coracles. It was great fun and very well organised, and I'm certainly looking forward to spending more time on the river.

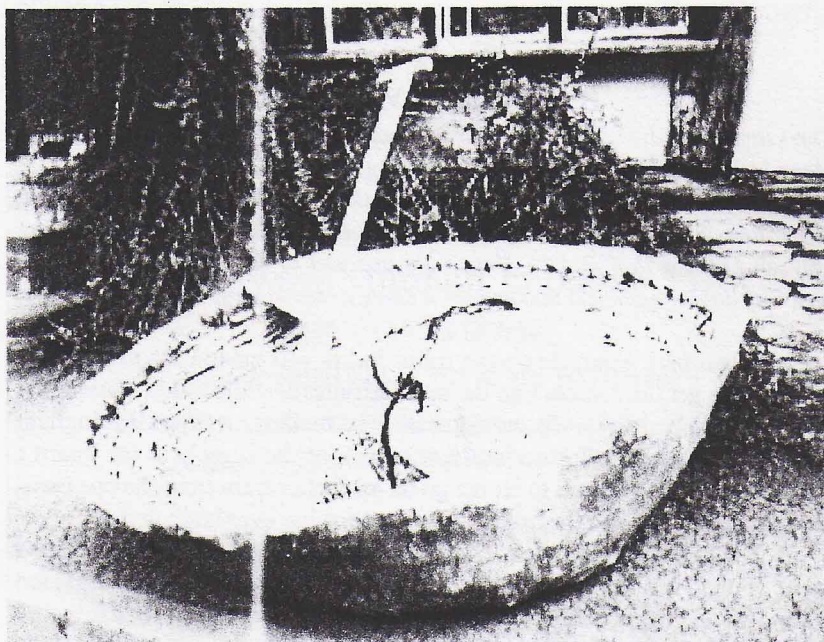
♦ *This article was written by Marjorie in October, 1997. Ed..*

Coracles On The Canal

Jane Pearce's use of the Grand Union Canal at Rickmansworth as her coracling base led to an invitation to attend the annual Canal Festival and put on a demonstration. Consequently she spent the weekend of May 17th/18th happily paddling coracles, answering numerous questions, serious and otherwise, and having a lot of fun.

Brian produced a display board with general information about coracles and their construction, the Coracle Society and some photographs of the Leintwardine and Ironbridge regattas.

Considerable interest was shown and there were a couple of enquiries about the Society and its aims. Who knows, next year (yes, we have been invited back) we may even recruit someone!



Paper Boats for Grown-Ups

At craft fairs, people frequently say to me, "Have you ever thought of covering a coracle with polythene pond liner / curtains / a pair of Val's old knickers / etc?" So when a fellow phoned up saying that he wanted to cover a coracle frame with paper, I put on my *what-a-novel-and-interesting-idea* voice and asked him to continue. When it became clear that he intended to purchase said frame from me, I became more attentive.

His company, Stora Newton Kyme had recently developed a waterproof coating for paper and card, the idea being to make things like cereal packets from proofed material, thus doing away with the plasticky inner bag. As a promotional stunt to publicise the product, they proposed to cover a coracle with it and film some intrepid ad-man afloat.

This they duly did, and kindly sent me a photo. It was not the neatest skin I've ever seen, but remembering the maxim, 'if it floats, its good enough', a success. So if the cost of calico and bitumastic gets too high, try recycling some comflake packets.



Terry Kenny

Have Coracle, Will Travel

Chris Brookes, who came on the July coracle making course, was sufficiently green to travel by public transport. Coming was one thing, going home with a coracle was another. Considering Chris is a big bloke and was toting an expedition size rucksack as well as his boat, I'm glad I wasn't travelling through London that daAAy. Here's his account of the trip: Judith, by the way, was another coracle maker who'd come to see him off at Telford station.

Yes, you can take a coracle on the train. Judith was asking me to pose as I struggled to get the coracle into the train at Telford, while fellow passengers and the guard looked faintly incredulous. The main train from Birmingham New Street station to Euston was fantastic—put the coracle in the guard's van, and the guard agreed to let me go on an earlier train than the one I was booked for, and waived the usual £5 fee for carrying over large items.

Underground—a cinch, except that on the escalators built up quite a queue going down as I could walk down the escalator or stand on the right too easily. An old chappie accosted me to explain that he had had a coracle before

the war, and used it for duck shooting. He looked immensely pleased with himself for knowing what it was.

The hardest bit was the last leg of the train journey (bearing in mind also that I had left subtle black marks on various bits of public transport - bitumastic paint does take an awfully long time to dry). The first part was amusing with two West Indian station personnel at Victoria talking in strange whispers: 'What's that he's got' 'He's not getting on the train with that' 'He is getting on the train' In the end we had a good chat, though it took the station woman a long time to believe I would actually sail in it. Finally, train stopped short due to engineering works - special bus service laid on. An over-full bus, but a friendly driver who said get on - so for five miles stood in the aisle holding the coracle, gently swaying to the bus's motion, holding my oar like a modern Boadicea.

Which just goes to show you can take a coracle anywhere, anytime, anyhow. Thanks Terry for a very well taught course that was pleasure from start to finish, and has given me a great sense of achievement, lots of funny fond memories, and a coracle for messing about on the river . . .

Coracle Society

A.G.M.

Saturday, 27th JUNE 1998

at The Waterways Museum, Gloucester Docks

(Tel: 01452 318 054)

Commencing at NOON prompt

Break for lunch - Dockside restaurant will be open.

PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION - 2.00 p m.

**Various Coracling activities and skills with possibly a race.
Please bring your coracle and bouyancy aid, the docks are deep!**

GOING WITH THE FLOW

Frank Burrow

Sometimes, rarely, in your adult life you are completely happy, and those times are cherished for as long as you live. I had one such experience last weekend, floating like a leaf down the river Teme in the Welsh Marches on a coracle.

A coracle is like a deep saucer, just big enough for one person. Deceptively simple to look at, the coracle is unlike any other boat I have ever stepped in—and I was solo from the beginning, in fast flowing water, as it is strictly a one-person craft.

My teacher and companion for the trip down the river was Peter Faulkner, a knowledgeable, delightful man, who is an expert in the building and handling of these unique craft. Along with others in the Welsh Marches, he has led a coracle revival over the last ten years. Friendly and patient, he spent a short while initially on the theory. Then to the river by the village bridge, where he showed me how to get into and out of the coracle and sit properly—with that we were off!

The skill of coracling lies in three things, calm, stability and using the paddle. The paddle is used in a lazy eight motion, hardly leaving the water, pushing water gently under the front, propelling you forward. I felt initially that I would capsize if I blinked, but after finding myself legs in the air, with the river rushing through my ears, the first time I grounded in the shallows, I was baptized and nothing worse could happen. From then on I just shrugged, got on with it and enjoyed myself.

With Peter a short paddle away, constantly ready to help and advise, I gave in to the magic of the river. We floated gently downstream, paddling hither and thither, lazy water beetles spinning balletically around rocks, shallows and weed clumps. When snagged by overhanging branches from the bank, I simply did as taught, crouched low and let the river tease me past the snag—if necessary fending with the paddle.

The journey, two meandering miles or so, with a break for hot coffee to uncramp cold limbs, was bliss. A cold, rainy mid-October afternoon was transformed into a voyage from an earlier age. Moving with the river between its high banks, we were cut off from sight or sound of modern England. We came close to the herons, mallards, moorhen and other waterfowl we shared the river with, spinning carefree down past the Victorian pipes carrying Welsh water to Birmingham, to arrive at the lower bridge and the end of an extraordinary afternoon. A change to dry clothes, and tea and cakes with Peter and his wife, completed the day. Lucky man, he can do this any day he chooses.

NEWS FEATURE

Coracles at the National Exhibition Centre

Graham Fisher

Following the success of our coracle-building exploits at the Inland Waterways Association Festival (Henley On Thames, August 1997) Dave Darby and I found ourselves repeating the exercise at the recent Boat Caravan and Leisure Show held at the National Exhibition Centre between 13th and 22nd February.

Visitors to Bewdley Museum may already know of Dave Darby, who appeared with me by kind permission of the Museum and Wyre Forest District Council. Although I am personally not employed by Bewdley, I have become closely associated with the Museum in recent years and was delighted to appear in their support, not least in the promotion of coracles.

Dave and I were at the NEC at the invitation of *Canal and Riverboat*, a leading monthly magazine specialising in all aspects of inland waterways, which now of course includes coracling! Unlike Henley, where we gave regular handling demonstrations on the Thames (including one well-photographed sinking when I showed how *not* to handle one!) the available space precluded any active construction or demonstrations and was therefore largely a 'talking shop' where we chatted to all manner of folk about all aspects of coracling

We were, of course, also promoting the Coracle Society and if just a fraction of those we spoke to become interested in the Society's work then I will consider the NEC Show to have been 10 days well spent. To cap it all *Canal and Riverboat* had their own on-line internet link at the show and within minutes of our arrival we found ourselves on the world wide web. Just imagine, the oldest form of transport known to man as featured on the latest form of communication. A nice touch, that.

Spotted in a travel book club list
'Seven Weeks On a Tibetan River'

or

'I'm Alright, Yak!'



IN LIGHTER VEIN

with your editor, Martin Fowler

Bernard Thomas, the well-known Teifi coracle maker, told me a story I found very funny. He remembers the time a man called to see him, asking about the possibility of buying a coracle. The man made a point of saying the coracle was not for himself, and said, "Have you heard of George Harrison?"

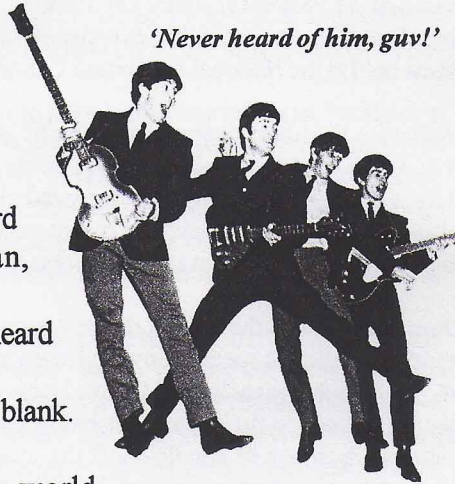
"George who?" said Bernard looking blankly at the man, "Should I know the name?"

"What? Haven't you ever heard of George Harrison?"

"No," replied Bernard, still blank. "Who is he?"

"One of the Beatles! A world famous guitar player, that's all!"

"Really?" riposted Bernard, "There must be literally thousands of guitar players around. Why should I know just one of 'em? On the other hand, I'm one of the very few coracle makers in Britain—and you didn't know my name!"



I had a phone call last year from a man with a very pronounced Midlands accent, asking about the possibility of buying a coracle from me. Having discussed the ins and outs and various sources of supplying his need, I got round to asking him what he wanted the coracle for.

It was a good job we were on the phone and he couldn't see my face when he replied, "I'm glad you asked that! I am a Roman

legionary, based at Warwick Castle, and my arrows keep falling in the moat. Arrows are jolly expensive, one can't afford to keep losing them, so I thought a coracle would be an ideal way of retrieving them."

He asked me how much the coracle might cost, and when I told him, he said he would have to consult his wife.

A Roman legionary, consulting his wife? It seems the Roman army has gone soft over the years! Or

perhaps army pay hasn't improved much since Caesar's day? Anyway, my Midland Roman never did get back to me about buying his coracle, which was disappointing 'cos I would have loved to photograph him paddling a coracle in his uniform. Still, it's not every day you get a phone call like that, now is it?



And finally, I received this letter from a grateful little lad after his visit to the Coracle Centre at Cenarth . . . I think it speaks for itself!

Ysgol Rhydygors,
Carmarthen.

Dear Sir,

13th November 1997.

I liked seeing the coracles, I liked all the other coracles in your museum. Everybody liked having a go in the coracle, it was a lot of fun. We went to a coracle museum in Carmarthen, but it was not so interesting as yours, although we liked it there as well. We went to a trout farm after we saw you, we liked it at the trout farm. We caught some fish at the trout farm but we had to put them back, Mrs. George did not like to see the fish being killed and the fish would smell in the minibus and it would make people sick in the bus and take a lot of time to clean up.

Thankyou again for a lovely day visit
from Matthew David Shearby.

FIFTH NATIONAL CORACLE REGATTA

On the RIVER TEME at
LEINTWARDINE

In the
BROCKLEY MEADOW

(by kind permission of Simon Whiteman & The Harley Estate)

on

SATURDAY, 13TH JUNE 1998

Opening at 2.30 p.m.

Followed by The Traditional Grand Paddle Past

RACES

CORACLE BASKETBALL

NOVICE EVENTS

GRAND NATIONAL (open)

INVASION BY CELTIC WARRIORS

Admission - **FREE**

Collection on the field for & on behalf of the Coracle Society

ON SITE PARKING - REFRESHMENTS - EVENING BAR-B-Q

EVENTS 1998

- April 15 - 19 Coracle Making Course at Goole (PF)
- May 21 Lecture & Demo, Jinney Ring Craft Centre, Hanbury (PF)
 24 - 30 Jersey Maritime Museum—Build a 12' hide currach (PF)
- June 7 Acton Scott Farm Museum—Exhibition & Demo (PF)
 13 5th Leintwardine Regatta
 16 - 18 Three Counties Show, Malvern (Static Display) (PF)
 27 Coracle Society AGM, Gloucester Docks. Public Display.
- July 16 - 19 'Art in Action' Exhibition & Demo (PF)
 24 - 25 Tewkesbury Water Festival — *turn up and show them how!*
 Contact: Cllr Barbara Cromwell on 01684 291004
- Aug 7 - 9 Risør Wooden Boat Festival (PF)
 13 - 17 Douarnenez Festival (PF)
 21 - 23 Celtic Festival—River Boyne (includes coracle racing)
 Contact: Clive O'Gibne, 'Comhla Bheag' Donore,
 Drogheda,
 Co Meath, Eire.
- 22 Cilgerran Regatta — 1.30pm
 Contact: Bob Bird on 01239 614312
- 28 - 31 Portsmouth Festival Of The Sea (PF)
 31 Ironbridge Regatta, Dale End Park, at noon.
- Sept 4 - 6 Hull Sea Shanty Festival (PF)
 12 - 13 Winchester Agricultural Show. Provn. (PF)
 19 - 20 Newbury Agricultural Show (PF)
- Oct 10 'Dee Day' River Festival on the Dee at Chester
 Coracle Race—Contact: Chester Tourist Information Office

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HINTS TO YOUNG ANGLERS — NO: 5

In parts of Wales, the coracle—a kind of basket boat—is much used by the natives for fishing. The idea of anchoring it with a big stone seems, however, to have originated with a visiting angler. The experiment is not recommended to beginners.