



The **Coracle** *Society*



 **Spring**
2000

Officers of The Coracle Society

President	Sir Peter Badge Mill End, 6 Springfield, Horrabridge, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 7QS
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Chairman's Report

It is now ten years since the first Coracle Society Newsletter was published. Since then the society has grown steadily, both in membership, but more importantly I feel, in stature.

I have seen a huge revival of interest since getting involved in 1987 and now activities throughout these islands and indeed abroad, for coracles are very much alive and well in the USA, New Zealand and on the Continent. This hasn't happened by chance. Many in the society have been actively promoting our courses, exhibiting at shows and spreading the word. People like Terry Kenny, Graham Fisher, Martin Fowler, Jane Williams Thomas, Priscilla Labouchere, Olivia Elton Barratt and more recently our man in East Anglia; Conwy Richards.

The media has also championed our cause over the years, it seems that the coracle is an ever popular item to brighten up our news. I believe too that we have raised the status of "our craft" by being better informed, given our best in raising the more serious aspects of these prehistoric vessels. The Coracle, I think, the only craft to have a sense of humour of its very own, those who have been caught off balance will know what I mean.

So ten years on and still going strong, thanks to the vision of one man, Sir Peter Badge who made it a reality by total dedication and hard work. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

On the 19th of February the Committee had a very positive meeting at St Fagans. My thanks to all the officers who gave freely of their time and energy, and to John Williams Davies and Bethan Lewis for putting the board room at our disposal free of charge.

The following Tuesday my wife Vivienne, Deanna Jones and I visited Bodnant where we met Martin Puddle, (General Manager & Head Gardener) to discuss and plan this year's A.G.M.

Finally, I would urge you all to keep the 'AIMS OF THE SOCIETY' in focus so that we can take it confidently and successfully into this new century - a new one for us but perhaps the 21st for the coracle.

Peter Faulkner

Leintwardine, February 2000

A Quick Word From The Editor

Due to printing problems which have now been fully resolved, some events have already passed. May I apologise for any missed items.

Martin Fowler, Editor

A.G.M.

Saturday 17th June Bodnant Garden Tal-Y-Cafn North Wales

We hope that having the meeting at 1:30pm will allow folk to travel, relax and have lunch. The National Trust have a large car park and café. If you are bringing a coracle, these can be transported by car after the AGM to an area close to the canal terrace for the demonstration. There will be a short debriefing at the AGM.

The pond is formal. Long, rectangular and eight feet deep! Bring your buoyancy aid. As some 2,000 visitors daily are expected in mid June, the terrace could be crowded and our display will be more formal than usual, allowing only a few individuals at a time on the water; everyone will have an opportunity to take to the water though.

Whilst the River Conway is inaccessible (tidal) at Bodnant it is none the less exciting to be able to promote the Society in what was once an area where the Conway Coracle ruled (see Hornell travel note).

There are currently major road works above Llangollen on the A5 and long delays can be expected; check nearer the date. Best route I am told is to go towards Chester and then take the A55 to Colwyn Bay and the south on the A470 to Bodnant.

For Your Information

CORACLE SOCIETY WEBSITE
Coracle Society website put together by

www.coracle-society.org
christophersauvrin@bigfoot.com

THE GREENWOOD TRUST

01952 432769

BEWDLEY MUSEUM

01299 403573

THE NATIONAL CORACLE CENTRE

01239 710980
www.coraclecentre.co.uk

INSURANCE

The Coracle Society now have **CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP class P of the I.W.A.** (Inland Waterways Association). Our membership number is **3003787**.

This provides **PUBLIC LIABILITY** for all Coracle Society members. If you need cover for an event, a copy of the schedule is available within the society.

MILLENNIUM DOME

Journey Zone - See our President's TEIFI Coracle on show.



Project 2000: The Millennium Coracle

As part of their continuing efforts to promote coracling Graham Fisher and Dave Darby have departed from their usual style of recreating historic vessels based on old plans and have instead constructed a radical new shape of coracle.

Project 2000: The Millennium Coracle is a twin hulled catamaran style vessel with reportedly excellent handling characteristics (designed to hold one person it in fact comfortably accommodates two) and capable of being powered either by the traditional paddle or a small outboard motor. It was completed in under three days at their latest public demonstration held at Bewdley Museum (25th - 27th October 1999). Although planning and research into the build had been conducted for months beforehand into what the builders believe is a unique step forward in coracle development.

“We have taken all the positive features from our previous builds and put them together in a style which is stable and portable with a large carrying capacity” said Graham, who is seeking to register the design with the Patent Office.

“But we have managed to retain the traditional building methods of construction using ash lathes covered with cloth and made waterproof” added Dave.

The pair explained that coracling is an increasingly rare activity and this latest project is an experiment in identifying how coracles could have developed into the 21st century had their use not been increasingly stymied throughout the 20th century.

Project 2000: The Millennium Coracle will be on display at Bewdley plus various waterways shows throughout this year and, following satisfactory trials, Graham and Dave hope to expand their theme by constructing their next vessel from space age materials such as carbon fibre and acrylics.

“Dave and I believe the development of coracles has always been ongoing” said Graham “and although the purists may sometimes baulk at our methods we like to think our efforts may help these intriguing little vessels survive well into the next millennium”.

This project is a joint initiative between G Fisher Enterprises and the Leisure Services Department of Wyre Forest District Council. A video, Coracles On The Severn, which has been partly sponsored by Canal and Riverboat magazine and Bewdley Museum / Wyre Forest District Council, is currently on general release at various outlets including Bewdley Museum.



Picture: Dave Clapp



Graham Fisher and Dave Darby high and dry in their twin-hulled coracle.
All aboard for twin look



List of Events, 2000

- June 17th Coracle Society A.G.M. at Bodnant Gardens Tal-Y-Cafn, North
Wales. By kind permission of Lord Aberconwy and The
National Trust. A.G.M. in the staff room at the hall 1:30
prompt, followed by public demonstration on the canal terrace
pond. (see page 3)
- June 17th - 18th Currach regatta. River Boyne, Ireland. (see page 9)
- June 24th - 25th Dapdune Wharf, Guilford N.T. Display and demonstration by
Peter Faulkner.
- July 13th - 17th Brest 2000. Construction of 12' skin currach as part of British
Village contingent.
- July 20th - 23rd Art in Action. Waterperry Gardens, Oxford. Rural Craft
Exhibition.
- August 4th - 6th Risør Wooden Boat Festival, Norway.
- August 20th Sail Amsterdam. (provisional)
- November 11th B.C. Day at Manor House, Kettering.



News Items

Food for thought

Linden Troke has told us of a cooking book (A TASTE OF WALES) by Theodara Fitzgibbon (1971) Pan Books. One recipe (page 30) is for (SAW EOG TEIFI) and the accompanying text eludes to coracles. There is also a photo of coracle fishermen, Cardigan (Aberteifi c 1880)

Event May 2001 River Parrot Somerset

The Council of the St John for Somerset is looking to raise funds for the R.N.L.I. the Council plans to put on some kind of coracle event on the Parrot. Possibly a race. Our chairman has put forward ideas such as expanding the event to include allied aircraft to coracles viz basket & hurdle makers etc. A sort of green fair with the coracle race being the main event. There are no further developments to date but if you are interested please contact :- Appeal Director: James Nash M.B.E. 4 Wyatt Court, Hinton House, Hinton St George, Somerset TA17 8SS.

Coracle Sea Race Saturday 17th June 2000-03-18

The proposed race is part of the 1500 year celebrations at Llantwit Major Glamorgan South Wales. There will be big celebrations in the town and the race will be covered by the St Donats life boat. This clashes with our A.G.M at Bodnant, but if you can't make the latter and fancy a sea race contact: Bill Henderson on 01446 795798

Congratulations are in order to Peter Faulkner our chairman who has been made a Yeoman of the Worshipful Company of Basket Makers, one of the oldest of the City Livery companies. Peter is the only coracle maker to have received this honour. All the other Yeomen are distinguished basket makers.

The French Crossing

Mr Frank Jones reported on the crossing of the channel in the skin currach at present being arranged by Peter Faulkner possibly at the end of April. Mr Jones is arranging sponsorship, and at the moment P&O and Tanners have offered help. The Times newspaper has the story and the T.V. programme Country File is to be approached for the possible publicity. It is proposed to take A RIB OF BEEF worth £50.00 to France and present it to a restaurant to accept and cook on the crews behalf and to cement relations with France! Further news awaited!



The Trout Inn, Lechlade

3rd and 4th of June 2000

Held annually on the first weekend in June in the grounds of the old Trout Inn, this event is getting ever more popular. There was certainly a good flow of water running down the Thames during the 1999 weekend with worries of the river being put on red.

Although the weather looked grey for Saturday's picnic, lots of people joined in and we all had great fun and didn't get too wet. Later that night a torrential thunderstorm came along which looked like putting a damper on Sunday - however, we awoke to bright sunlight which stayed with us all day so the stalwarts who ignored the forecast were rewarded with a super day.

During the weekend a fine selection of craft attended - four steamboats, five vintage folding canoes, a launch of a new sailing/rowing boat - the Margaret built by David James from the Iain Oughtred design 'Grebe'. The coracles were a great success and their owners gave impromptu lessons to would be coraclists who took to them like ducks to water with no soakings.

Once again the whole theme of the weekend will be an informal event of the boat talk and exploring the river, as you will. On Saturday we all try to get on the river and make our way to a suitable site for a picnic - a great way of meeting people and paddling along discussing different crafts etc. Old, new, wooden, canvas, paddle, pole, or powered - all are welcome come and join in or just watch.

Bob and Penny Warren of the Trout Inn host the weekend. In the field there are steam engines, cars, tractors, caravans, and all sorts. A great display of classic radio controlled model boats float about on a filled pool too.

Simon & Ann Cooper - tel : 01285 841231

Bob & Penny Warren at the Trout Inn - tel : 01367252313



River Boyne Festival

SATURDAY 17th JUNE

IMMRAMH CURRACHAIN: A voyage of traditional currachs from far and near, with participants from Dublin, Drogheda, Crawsfordsburn (NI), also members of the CORACLE SOCIETY wishing to take part.

The first leg of this two day event will take part in Milmouth. It will include a night of traditional music, an exhibition of Celtic art and woodcarving.

SUNDAY 18th JUNE

A historic walk shall coincide with the currach voyage on their second leg of their journey, from Slane to Bru na Boinne. The participants shall not only enjoy some of the most beautiful scenes on the river, they shall also be educated on the fine historic aspects of this magnificent river guided by Meath walking tours.

E MAIL CONTACT: sineadclive@eircom.com

Do you know who or where this is?



The Bull Boat of North America

Did they come from Great Britain ?



Native American Bull Boats have fascinated me for a number of years for two main reasons. Firstly, because I believe they closely resemble early Coracles and secondly, as their existence, it is argued, supports the theory that the Mandan Indians from the Missouri area of North Dakota are, at least in part, descended from Prince Madog of North Wales and his fellow voyagers who are said to have landed in North America before Columbus.

It was this fascination which took me last autumn to North Dakota where I received kindness courtesy and abundant information from the staff of the North Dakota Heritage Centre in Bismarck and the Three Tribes Museum on the Fort Berthold Reservation. (The three Tribes are the Mandan, Hidatsi and Arikara). I saw three Bull Boats, including one made for the Heritage Centre in the 1950s by the late Anna Crowsfoot (Mrs J.Y.Eagle). Some years before I saw another Bull Boat at the Smithsonian Museum in New York and have been sent photographs and details of another in Minnesota. They are all quite similar in construction. They are roughly circular being about 50" in diameter and having a depth of about 15". The laths numbered approximately 6 lengthwise and 5 transversely.



ANNA CROWS FOOT AND GRANDSON



ORIGINAL BULL BOAT PADDLE

The gunwale and lower hoop are both circular. They are all made of willow called locally "mahohesha" and are covered in animal hide (either buffalo or cow). The animal's hair is on the outside so that an easier movement is attained when under way. The animal's tail is left on so that it is possible to see which way the hair runs and so that the tails of two craft can be tied together when one is towing the other which often happened. Of particular interest is the boat's paddle. It will be clearly seen from the accompanying photographs. The odd shape in the centre of the blade I was told and have read was to make paddling easier. The marks on the blade denote ownership (Bull Boats were always made by the women of the tribe) and the husbands' battle honours. Not only were the Boats made by women but they were the principal users of them. The Bull Boat in the National Coracle Centre at Cenarth made by Terry Kenny is a perfect replica. It was made from a series of photographs of the late Anna Crowsfoot making a Bull Boat accompanied by



her grandson. He lives on the reservation and remembers the construction. It was my great pleasure to meet Harry Sitting Bear on the reservation. He remembers warmly his visit to Cenarth and paddling on the Teifi with Bernard Thomas.

Bull Boats ceased to be used by the tribes during the end of the 19th Century. I was told this was because of lack of materials i.e. the Bison and the mahoesha willow have gone. But also because the plains Indians are pragmatic people and when easier forms of locomotion were provided by the settlers they used them instead.

The Plains Indians used their craft for the following purposes , namely.-

- 1 . Ferrying buffalo meat after the hunt. The BullBoats would be made in situ sometimes numbering as many as 40 at a time.
2. Collecting firewood
3. Stealing horses (the boats being left behind after the theft)
4. To assist raiding parties
5. To protect chimneys of "earth lodges".



Catlin, the famous American painter who lived amongst the Plains Indians for a number of years believed that Welsh Coracles in the mid 19th century were identical to Bull Boats and this was a compelling reason for believing the "Madog" theory. Sadly, a perusal of pictures of Coracles in Cilgerran painted by Ibbotson in 1790 and Hugh Hughes' Twyi Coracles 1840 - 1850 show that far from being similar to Bull Boats they very closely resemble modern Teifi and Twyi coracles. Fortunately, however, there is other supporting evidence for the theory.

It is clear that Bull Boats originated in what is now the North Dakota area. But other Bull Boat " craft were found in the Southeast of the United States, particularly in parts of

Georgia, Carolina and Florida; areas settled by people from The British Isles. Perhaps these owe their origins to the British Isles as unlike the Missouri area there was no shortage of trees in the South East from which dug out canoes could have been made if required.

Finally, I very pleased to say that having studied a number of Bull Boats the replica at the Coracle centre is a true likeness of the originals.

Story by Sir Peter Budge

