



The **Coracle** *Society*

established 1990



Currachs return after epic voyage at Ludlow Regatta

November 2001

Coracle Society – Information

Coracle Society WEBSITE

www.coracle-society.org

Website developed by

christophersauvarin@bigfoot.com

The National Coracle Centre

01239 710980

www.coraclecentre.co.uk

The Greenwood Trust

01952 432769

www.greenwoodtrust.org.uk

INSURANCE

**The Coracle Society now has Corporate Membership, class P, of the I.W.A. (Inland Waterways Association)
Our Membership Number is 3003787.**

This Insurance provides Public Liability cover for all Coracle Society members whilst participating in 'official' events. If anyone intends to organise a coracling event for and on behalf of the Coracle Society, and wishes to take advantage of our Insurance, please contact the Secretary for a schedule of limitations, exclusions etc. and written authority confirming approval for the event.

NB: It is a pre-requisite that Accounts for any event must be compiled and incorporated within the Coracle Society Balance Sheet, proving that the Profit is for the benefit of the Society.

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MR UNDERHILL'S at DINHAM WEIR

THE CORACLE REGATTA LUNCH
SATURDAY - 9th JUNE, 2001.

Canapes & Sushi

Springfield Farm Chicken 'Bois Boudran'

Italian style bread & butter pudding

Coffee & petits fours



LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE - 01584 874431

Editor's Notes:-

Apologies to contributors for reductions in your text due to limited space, however do not let this deter any of you from submitting pictures and narrative an any coracle related subject.

The quality of some pictures is due to re-scanning existing photos or poor prints.

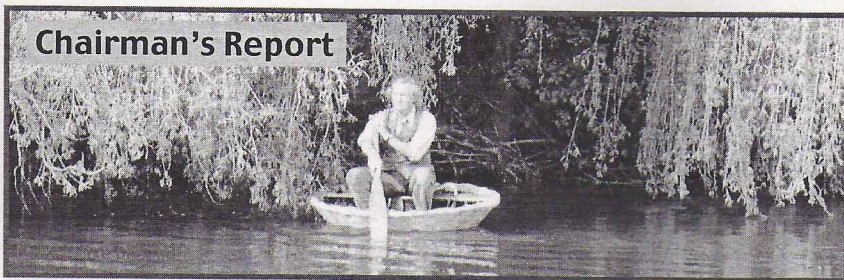
The editor would appreciate best quality photos and if possible Text on disc in WORD format or alternatively both pictures and text can be Emailed to:-

mike@paradeigma.fsnet.co.uk.

This magazine is your opportunity to further interest and promote coracling wherever you are.

Footnote:

The successful Spring Newsletter will be repeated next year so please send your Coracle Event details as soon as possible.



"I don't know where it's going but it's leaving here" was the yokel's reply to a smart visitor requesting information on the local river.

I feel somewhat nonplussed trying to work out where the last year has gone. However one only has to look at the EVENTS list for 2001 to realise that there has been something of an explosion of activity in the coracling world. This of course is excellent news for our society and its aims.

New names such as James Wynter, Dave Purvis and Rick Taylor have emerged from the 'lath and calico' to boost our healthy public image. Educating the public is an on-going dynamic task and giving the correct information is vital. An excellent example of this occurred in 'Country File' recently when Cilgerran Regatta was featured. The interview and cameo with Bernard Thomas was a masterpiece. The presenter's 'patter' about coracles was furnished by a Society member on site and was not dreamed up, as is often the case. Incidentally your Chairman, much to his amazement, won the open one-handed race in his hide 'Boyne'

Perhaps the coracle is thought of as a cute, even comic craft to look at but on the water, with an expert inside, it comes to life and quickly brings looks of astonishment and abject wonder to the faces of casual onlookers. Every September at Newbury Show I demonstrate on a small pond equipped with a radio mic. This live performance never fails to draw a large captive crowd who hear my ten minute 'patter' as I skim about.

The regattas are excellent shop windows and long may they continue. Though wet Cilgerran was well attended and proved very successful especially as it had TV coverage.

Terry Kenny held yet another brilliant day at the Severn at Ironbridge. Due to the F&M the Leintwardine event moved to Ludlow – still on the Teme. despite a few teething troubles this proved an excellent site. The race between the two currachs was historic and spectacular. Heavy silting at Leintwardine may result in a repeat at Ludlow next year.

It has been a wonderful year and I thank you all for playing your part in it. We are of course indebted to the Society Officers who keep the wheels oiled and turning.

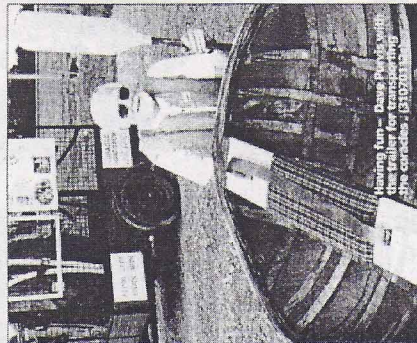
Peter Faulkner
Chairman

Ripon Gazette & Boroughbridge Herald 17/08/2001

FEATURE - A DAY ON THE LAKE IN A CORACLE

Our reporter is all at sea at Ripon Raccourse

When you're in a coracle, reporter NAOMI PAYLOR found out sensible footwear is essential



Having fun - Naomi Paylor with the trailer for transport to the coracle. (S10701724)

the side of the lake, but I started heading for some reeds eventually ending up in a shallow fishing bank, where I was stuck, struggling from three local fisher men.

A coracle looks like half a coconut shell with a seat across the middle. David's coracle was made of woven willow, which is a traditional style, which is still used in many communities such as Tibet, India and Vietnam for transport and storage. It is also used for fishing and as a boat.

As we pulled out, David explained that despite the fact that there are back thousands of years old, coracles are still used in many communities such as Tibet, India and Vietnam for transport and storage. It is also used for fishing and as a boat.

Three-inch beads proved a major hindrance whilst the coracle was being pulled along. David explained that the coracle is made of woven willow, which is a traditional style, which is still used in many communities such as Tibet, India and Vietnam for transport and storage. It is also used for fishing and as a boat.

'Rather than battle on all day we decided to head to the side... I missed the shore completely and started heading for some reeds, ending in a prime fishing spot - greeted by much head-shaking from local fishermen.'

Along there - Naomi Paylor finds her way home. (S10701724)



organisations which include the Ripon Day on September 8 at the race track. For more details contact him on Ripon 66033.

The coracle enthusiasts are hoping to raise money for the youth club and are looking forward to forthcoming events which include the Ripon Day on September 8 at the race track. For more details contact him on Ripon 66033.

Back on dry land, as we carried on David told us that he and youngsters from Ripon City Youth Arts were going to be using a coracle to go fishing on the North with a nearby river.

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Ripon Gazette
BOROUGHBRIDGE HERALD

Friday, August 17, 2001

Investiture

On Friday 2nd March 2001 Graham Fisher attended Buckingham Palace where he was invested with the MBE (services to Inland Waterways with a citation for his work with the Inland Waterways Trust in the West Midlands) by His Royal Highness Prince Charles.

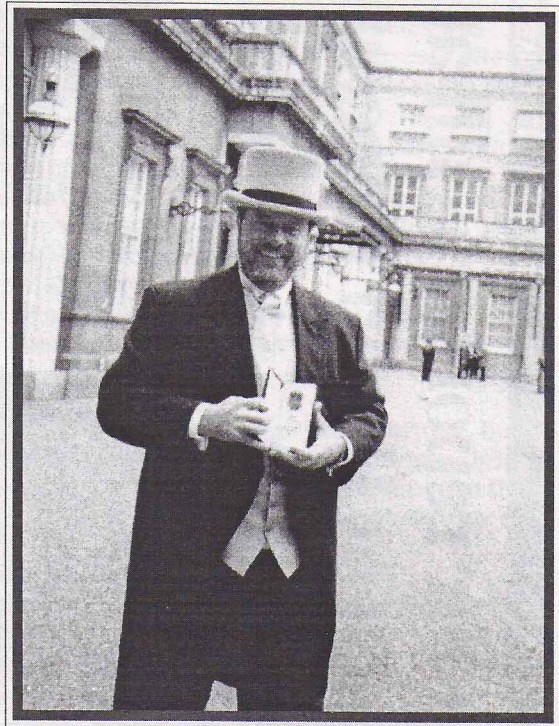
Graham Fisher has over 35 years association with inland waterways. An active member of numerous preservation and restoration groups including The Staffordshire & Worcestershire, Stourbridge Navigation Trust and Birmingham Canal Navigations Societies and for several years held two committee posts as General Secretary and Press & Publicity Officer. He has also had a lengthy involvement with the Birmingham Canal Navigations and the Montgomery Canal in Wales. He is also known to many as the annual Father Christmas in the limestone caverns for Dudley Canal Trust.

A member of the Coracle Society, he is one of the few remaining coracle builders in the U.K.

Graham who is single & 46 years of age, is a freelance writer and broadcaster. He has his own series of radio shows on Kidderminster Ace FM and currently holds the position of Review and Special Features Editor for *Canal and Riverboat Magazine*.

Contact details:-

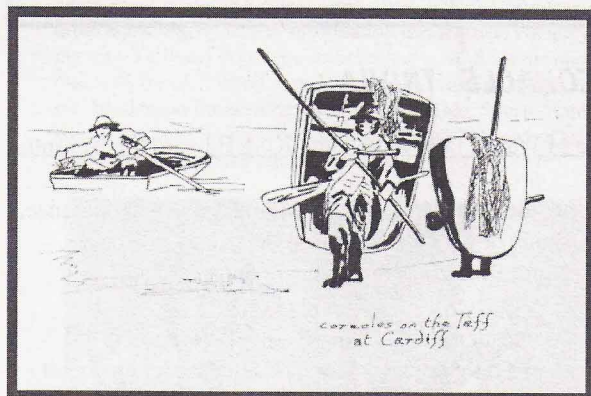
Graham Fisher
Montgomery Lodge
18 High Wood Close
Kingswinford
West Midlands
Tel: 01 384 270020



Discoveries

Society member John Underhill wrote to reveal his latest discoveries on matters 'Coracling'

Aberdeen Art Gallery has a picture recorded on postcard of "Cardiff from the West" by J.C.Ibbetson [1759-1817] Featured in the foreground are three coraclers. Unfortunately the costs of reproduction and permission from AAG are prohibitive but John has kindly sketched the salient features and appended the following description:-



They seem to be unusually large, very square almost flat bottomed and have a very sharp chine.

The paddles are as long as the coracle with a broad blade tapering linearly to the loom.

Each coracler has a pole some nine feet long. I don't know what it is for, but the one on the water seems to be holding it as if it were an oar.

John has also sketched a sculpture recently created in Sandringham Forest.

It is carved from a large log and depicts Saint Felix carrying a coracle with an attendant otter. Apparently the Saint used a coracle to travers the fens whilst coverting the population of East Anglia. Does any one from that area have any more information or can take a more detailed photo for the archives ?

John asks *could this be a a contender for the patron saint of coraclers ?*



Editor

Obituary

We wish to advise the death of Edgworth Evans who was a Vice-President of this Society.

He was well known throughout the 'coracle world' and will be sadly missed.

Raymond Rees will prepare a detailed obituary for publication in the Newsletter or next magazine.

CORACLE TRIVIA

1863 (The marriage of the Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward the Seventh)

At 9 o'clock old Carmarthen Bridge, the Quay and the embankment a gay appearance, each place being thronged by thousands of persons all attired in holiday attire and decorated with a variety of description of wedding favours, to witness several boat races.

The first was a coracle race from Carmarthen Bridge, round a boat moored off the Pothouse Quay and back to the bridge. Eoght coracles came to scratch and on signal being given off they went and kept like a group of partridges, each man being quite at home in his one oared boat. However on their return the receding tide took its tale on these primitive vessels and the strongest arm and muscle would best. The winners were as follows William Thomas (Dan-y banc) Griff Lewis (Dan-y banc) David Lewis (Dan-y banc) and William Lewis (Dan-y banc).

1188 (Giraldus Cambrensis on his journey through Wales)

The boats which they employ in fishing or in crossing rivers are made of twigs, not oblong, nor pointed, but almost round or rather triangular, covered both within and without with raw hides: when a salmon thrown into one of these boats strike it hard with its tail, he often oversets it, and endangers both the vessel and it's navigator.

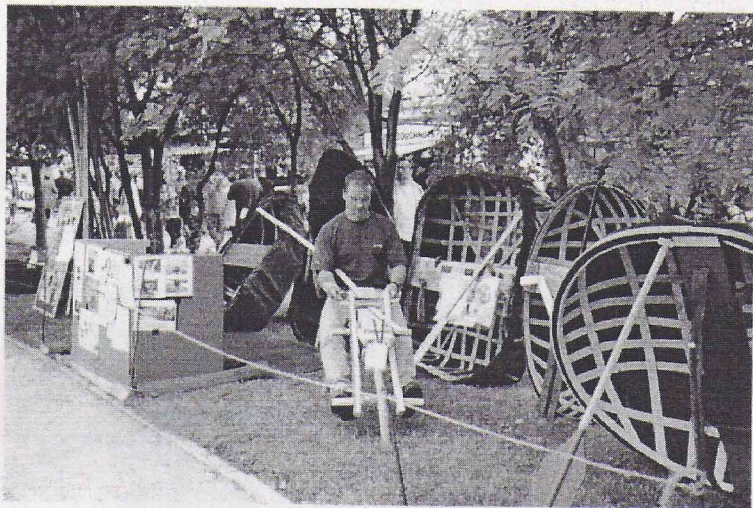
49 b.c. (Julius Caesar cut off in Lerida because of the collapse of the bridges over the River Sicoris wrote

When Caesars affairs were in this unfavourable position, and all the passes guarded by soldiers and horse of Afranius, and the bridges could not be repaired, Caesar ordered his soldiers to make boats of the kind that his knowledge of Britain a few years ago had taught him (55-54 b.c.) First the ribs with light timber, then the rest of the hull of the boats was wrought with wickerwork and covered with hides.

Lincoln Water Carnival Coracle Event. July 7th & 8th 2001

On a largely dry weekend in early July, the Coracle Society held its first official event in the Lincoln area. My aims in organising such an event were mainly to educate the general public about coracles and the work of the society, and to invite over and meet other society members and coracle enthusiasts who live in my part of the country. Being part of a larger event also ensured greater numbers of visitors than would perhaps turn out for a dedicated stand alone coracle event.

The event took place over the weekend, the bulk of my time over the two days being spent manning a display stand that included details and examples of coracle types and Coracle Society information and leaflets. I displayed several examples of my own Teifi and Wye type coracles and gave demonstrations of the preparation of materials for cleft wood coracles using the shaving horse, drawknives and billhooks etc. In addition further examples of Upper Dee, Severn Shrewsbury and Severn Ironbridge coracles were provided by Conwy Richards, Dave Nichol and Dave Purvis who greatly supported the Lincoln event.



During Saturday afternoon, a demonstration of coracle types were given on the water in the 'arena' to commentaries of their histories and uses. This also included a race and a dummy trawl to demonstrate coracle netting.

On Sunday afternoon an hilarious and very entertaining inter RAF station 'Coracle Challenge' took place which consisted of a series of relay heats and races involving RAF personnel from four bases, Cranwell, Digby Coningsby and Waddington. Whilst some were experienced canoeists, all were novice coraclers and most took advantage of the pre-race tuition being given by the society members present. Despite this there were numerous soakings and coracles that seemed to have minds of their own. An excellent commentary added to the spectacle and clearly the RAF teams enjoyed themselves with an all-female team from RAF Waddington claiming victory and the trophy.



Overall, the event was a major success with the dry weather resulting in good numbers of public attending. Many people came away with the knowledge that coracle making is still very much a living craft and that the coracle is very much a working boat as well as a relatively cheap gateway to fun and recreation on the water. That can only be a good thing for those of us who have chosen to dedicate our time and effort to such an unusual and ancient craft.

Finally many thanks to all those who took part in and supported the event, to Flight Lieutenant Natalie Gudgeon for putting together the RAF teams and to Mark Turner for a great commentary.

Rick Taylor

Coracle Making. A personal account by Rick Taylor, Lincoln's resident coracle maker.

Since seeing a picture of a Celt carrying a coracle in a history book at school as an eight year old, these ancient craft have always fascinated me. It wasn't until my early twenties that I started to experiment with building such boats. My first attempts were fairly primitive affairs that relied more upon my more general knowledge of wilderness survival bushcraft techniques, common sense and whatever materials were close to hand rather than the more in depth knowledge of the craft that I possess today. Many of these early knock-up coracles and currachs, (sea going coracles) were built in remote areas during various wilderness survival exercises and courses away from home. Whilst these coracles basically did the jobs they were built for, I didn't feel that they really did the art and craft of coracle building justice. In the mid 1990s I began to research the methods of coracle building used by the craftsmen coracle makers of rural Wales whose art I have the deepest respect for.

My first efforts to seek out information regarding coracle building were frustrating with hard information being difficult to come by. It wasn't until early 1998 when I met and befriended Ronnie Davies, one of the last of the traditional coracle makers from the village of Cenarth in the Teifi valley of South West Wales that I seriously began to learn the art as a craftsman myself.



Around this time I also became a member of The Coracle Society an organisation devoted to increasing interest in the coracle and to preserving the rights of Welsh coracle fishermen to continue their traditional way of life. This is a way of life that is under increasing threat by forces beyond the fishermen's control.

During the same year I built a coracle based on the type used on the River Teifi and another type formerly used on the Wye. I then navigated it down the 70 miles or so of the Teifi from source to sea during flood conditions for charity with the aid of coracleman Ronnie Davies and a friend from Lincoln.

Since 1998 I have been building museum quality coracles, mainly the Teifi design which has changed little through the centuries. I prefer the Teifi coracle as I have a preference for working with cleft wild woods such as willow, hazel and ash rather than pre-sawn materials. This makes coracle building a very personal experience for me as I have to select my own materials from where they are growing before cutting them in a sustainable manner. I then have to prepare them with traditional tools before soaking them and assembling the coracle using traditional basket making skills as opposed to the tacks, staples and nails used in building some of the other types of coracle. Copper wire is however used to secure a tar covered canvas 'skin' to the framework a method used since the seventeenth century.

The Teifi coracle with its flat bottom only draws about 3 inches of water and is stable in the flood and rough waters common in rivers such as the Teifi. It is light enough to be carried back-slung for many miles and small enough to fit inside most hatchback and estate cars. It also makes an instant umbrella and overnight bivvy shelter. It is the ultimate small craft.

Using such a coracle on the water be it for fishing, bird watching or simply for the pleasure of paddling is very much a meditational experience for me. The coracle is built from nature with the utmost respect and reverence for nature. Willows that once bent and swayed in the wind now bend beneath the coracleman to support the skin that keeps him afloat and in a rustic celebration of nature and the skill and patience of the craftsman.





Coracle Man - South Wales
by George Delamotte c 1818

1794 (Llangunnor Hill)

Upon the glittering stream behold
Those fishermen, of courage bold,
In numerous pairs, persue their trade
In coracles, themselves have made;
Formed of slight twigs with flannel cas'd
O'er which three coats of tar are plac'd.
And (as porter bears his pack)
Each mounts his vessel on his back.

Anon.



A "chorus" of coracles.

A.G.M. 2001 Cilgerran

Frank 'Ratty' Jones is often heard to quote:

"No perception without contrast".

This year at Cilgerran we certainly had contrasting weather to that experienced at Bodnant. It poured and we were down on members attending. The latter was partially due to the late announcement of the AGM date and I apologise for that.

A warm welcome was extended to our President Sir Peter Badge. The Officer's Reports were delivered, copies of which are on file. With the exception of Secretary the Committee and Officers were elected en bloc. Deanna Jones is taking over from Vivienne Faulkner as Hon. Sec. A vote of thanks was extended to Vivienne for her support and expertise over the years.

The meeting had a very positive flavour and it was unanimously agreed that the Society was in good heart.

Peter Faulkner
Chairman

HELP

A message from Ted Pitman.

I loaned a Video featuring 'Making a Teifi Coracle' to one of the Society members approx. 3 years ago.

If you have it I would appreciate its safe return.

Please call on 01 458 252723

Vietnam adventure pt: 2

This is the second and final chapter of a wonderful holiday-adventure to Vietnam and Cambodia in February 2000.

On to Saigon now re-named Ho Chi Minh City. This was a lovely vibrant city with much modern re-development, and a strong western influence, but retaining the elegant French influence of former colonial rule. We visited an exciting Chinese market place which was full of every conceivable product, food and spice. The smells of the food stalls was overwhelming and we could not resist sampling local specialities. The most memorable experience was the "war museum" A stunning display of memorabilia and a photographic cronologue by a Vietnamese reporter of the appalling horrors by man against man. The city is situated on the Mecong which winds its way from the Himalayas south through Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. No coracles in Saigon that we saw, as the port is heavily congested with large shipping of all types.

On to Phnom Pen in Cambodia. The Museum of Antiquities revealed a true insight into the artistic and cultural achievements of Indo-China over the last 2000 years. Amazing sculture and jewellery and architectural style proved how advanced this civilisation became long before the west developed.

The capital city has a river of extraordinary character. It is the only river that flows both ways, depending on the level and force of the Mecong and the level of lake Tonle Sap. This lake accomodates a huge population of refugees from Vietnam who live in a city created soley of boats and floating houses. This includes petrol stations, fish farms and other enterprises growing vegetables and rearing pigs and chickens. The use of willow was extensive and was all secured with handmade rope and twine, just like large coracles really.

The highlight of this part of the world was the "lost" empire of the Khymer people - Ankor. The stunning remains of long lost cities were only discovered in the jungle in the 1930's and have revealed building on a massive scale, with advanced societies living in harmony in walled cities in densities that defy modern standards. As each king came to power a new city was built and the craftsmanship was beyond compare.

Sadly the sight of so many landmine victim's still suffering appalling injuries brings one down to earth, and the recognition that hundreds are still maimed every year by dormant mines must be a lesson for the future.

Mike Bigland

Vietnam snaps

Serenity in a floating village



Detailed analysis of the coracle craft.

Please note your Treasurer's shoes and our guide Dang Lan



Currach Capers

Where does original thought come from ? A night down the pub of course, such was the inspiration for building a 20 ft long Currach in the living room. Using new technology – the Internet, to discover that a Currach is a traditional Irish fishing boat covered in tar, led via Portsmouth Dockyard to discover James Hornells accounts of his discoveries. Published in "Mariners Mirror" dated 1938, the dimensions and descriptions have proved to be the basis for many modern re-incarnations.

The boat shed alias living room, gave birth to the steam bent wooden frame, constructed from old school science desks and blocks of oak. Guidance was obtained from The British Coracle Society, an American currach racing club and many friends and fellow drinkers. The neighbours were extremely understanding particularly of the tar odours emitted as the final craft took shape. Overall dimensions were limited by the length of the room, minus wall heater, and the need to remove the craft through an existing window, with frame removed. This avoided the ultimate compromise – fitting patio doors ! All available friends attended a removal party, and the currach slid stealthfully out onto the front lawn. A short trailer ride to the Langstone Sailing Club and the launch ceremony, followed by a tentative row proved the potential, and subsequent training sessions have led to a competent crew now able to row each with two oars. Confident of success, as St.Brendan achieved before, an entry was made for The Great River Race – 21 miles down the Thames from Richmond to Greenwich in 3 hrs. 20 min. raising funds for the RNLI. Who knows what might happen next during a few beers down the pub!

Dillwyn & Jeannette Griffiths

dillwyn@electronic-fool.co.uk



Photos: D&J Griffiths

LUDLOW (nee Leintwardine) CORACLE REGATTA

The chatelaine of ' Mr Underhills at Dinham Weir' (one of the Ludlow Michelin starred restaurants which make the town the most celebrated place for gastronomes in England) was the innocent beneficiary of foot-and-mouth disease.

This year's regatta had to move from the Brockley Meadow, Leintwardine since Herefordshire authorities had imposed a ban on access to protect livestock. The Coracle Society was offered the new Millenium Green by Dinham Weir an alternative. As a consolation for those of us living in Leintwardine, a lunch visit was arranged at ' Mr Underhills' before progressing ten yards down river to start the Regatta at 14.30.

The menu card reproduced on page 1, illustrates the arrival of the Chairman and his acolytes at the table and demonstrates the improving authority of the Society. " Mr Underhills does not usually do lunch but for this happy and respected organisation, we will "

The new venue was a success- but a different sort of success to the normal Leintwardine entertainment. Because the River Teme is narrow and shallow along the Brockley Meadow, it is easy to persuade spectators to take up a more active role - to try the coracles on trips round the pond, to talk to the makers, to enter the novice and Grand National races. But at Ludlow the several hundred members of the audience were separated from the action by a six foot drop from the Green to gravel river bed or by the balustrade of the famous Dinham Bridge- and they were determined only to watch as an audience should .

" I am not going to make a fool of myself in front of all these people" was the characteristic response to pressure to join the Grand National race, usually a tumbling favourite with Leintwardine visitors. As a result, the race was won by an experienced coracler, Wendy Gee, . It was a triumphant day for her since she also won the Ladies Open race earlier in the day. (The Committee would like to thank Wendy for donating her substantial race winnings to the Coracle Society. It was a warm and generous gesture which is much appreciated, not least by the member organising the Grand National and responsible for the grand folly of giving so gifted a coracler absolutely no handicap whatsoever)

A new triumph was the race between two sea going curraghs, both made by Peter Faulkner from willow, hazel and rawhide mixtures. (Volume III of 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' describes the shallow bottomed vessels which navigated high up British rivers and allowed the Angles and Jutes to conquer the place. The description exactly fitted these curraghs.) They carry between five and eight people, paddling American Indian style, with a twelve foot long steering paddle to give direction for the helmsman. It was a scene of barbaric splendour as the two boats surged back to Dinham Bridge, foaming under the fury of the paddlers. The ladies on the Bridge roared and bawled with enthusiasm. Such wonders are not possible at Leintwardine- the waters are too shallow and narrow.

The Society is invited back to Ludlow next year - and thereafter. Tourist interests in the town believe they can build it into a major event. Given the growing world interest, they are probably right. Perhaps we should arrange a Biennial -year 1 in Leintwardine for enthusiasts, year 2 in Ludlow for a world audience. And so on.

Frank Jones

List of Events 2002

Leintwardine Regatta
possible at LUDLOW

Sat.8th. June

Cilgerran Regatta

Sat.17th. August

Ironbridge Regatta

Mon. 26th. August

Editors Note: An up-dated Newsletter – flyer will be issued in the spring to clarify the above and add new entries.

Work of art.

The basket makers art beautifully portrayed by this lovely picture of a Lower Dee Coracle made by Conway Richards.



photo: Conway Richards

Officers of the Coracle Society

President	Sir Peter Badge Mill End, 6 Springfield, Horrabridge, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 7QS
Chairman	Peter Faulkner 24 Watling Street, Leintwardine, Shropshire, SY7 0LW
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