

A black and white illustration of a man wearing a hat and a patterned tunic, standing inside a coracle. The coracle is a large, conical basket-like structure made of woven reeds or wicker, with a pointed top and a small opening at the bottom for the man's legs. The man is holding a long pole or oar.

The Coracle Society

Founded 1990



*Our Founder and President, Sir Peter Badge with his
Dwyrhyd Coracle Replica*

Built by Alan Grove

January 2005

Officers of the Coracle Society

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Hon. Secretary	Vivienne Faulkner 24, Watling Street Leintwardine, Shropshire, SY7 0LW
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Education Officer/Website	Conwy Richards www.coracle-fishing.net
Committee Members	Martin Fowler David Gent Frank Jones Terry Kenny Jane Pearce Dave Purvis Conwy Richards
Stand in Editor	Peter Faulkner

I hope that you find this issue interesting and illuminating. Positive comments and constructive criticism are welcome. "Copy" is always needed for the Newsletter (its *your* society) so please send any material to the Stand in Editor.

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Cilgerran Regatta 2004

Old Stables,
Cilgerran,
Pemb.
SA43 2SL

Dear Dave,

I am so sorry that Cilgerran Festive Week was unable to have the coracle races this year. As you know the day was brilliant with glorious sunshine but the state of the river was far too dangerous - in flood and fast flowing. This is a fun event and we don't want to encourage people to put their lives at risk. In 54 years it is only the third time that the event has had to be cancelled, so we haven't done too badly have we?

I hope that you didn't think you had had a wasted journey to Cilgerran. I'm sure that you had a good time in the Cardiff Arms the night before and were able to make some contacts! I know that your B&B was good and I hope that you didn't bump your head on the beam!

We look forward to seeing you here next year.

Thanks again Dave,

Sarah Moore
(Festive Week Sec)

Coracle Society – CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2005

The Newsletter really speaks for our Society; it tells of a vigorous, healthy and sustained interest throughout the membership. A sincere "thank you" to all who have taken the trouble and effort to send in articles. I do hope that the contents will stimulate those of you who perhaps may need a little coaxing to put pen to paper.

You will all, I'm sure, join with me in congratulating Alan Grove on his most excellent documentation regarding the Dwyryd coracle.

AGM AT CARMARTHEN ON 17TH July 2004

This proved to be an excellent meeting held in the very heartland of coracling. A record of the Minutes is on file should anyone wish a copy. The presence of Cllr. Michael Elias (traditional netsman) was indeed very significant. He spoke very warmly of the fact that netsmen were keen to be involved in the Society and he offered to be their representative if this was agreeable to all. Cllr. Elias also said that Objective 1 money had been applied for to fund a possible Coracle Centre in Carmarthen. After the meeting coracles were taken to the river's edge for a photo call and subsequent photo and article appeared in the Carmarthen Journal.

The Society is very fortunate in having a dedicated band of officers who give freely of their time to ensure that all runs smoothly. Your support and encouragement is their best reward.

The Spring Flyer will come to you in early April and will herald a busy and enjoyable year for us all.

Finally, my sincere apologies for the delay in getting the Newsletter out caused by circumstances beyond my control.

Peter Faulkner, Chairman, Coracle Society 2005.

WANTED FOR SEPTEMBER 2005

Do you wish to take part in the Great River Severn Coracle Trip starting at Plynlimon and ending in Shrewsbury on the second Sunday in September either in sections or for the whole journey.

The enterprise is being organised by the Shrewsbury Tourism Association and masterminded by its Chairman Michael Connor who can be contacted, for further details, at Willow House, Crescent Lane, Shrewsbury SY1 1TR or by telephone (01743 355047).

The route is about seventy miles long starting at Plynlimon and goes through Llanidloes, Caersws, Newtown, Welshpool and Shrewsbury.

Throughout most of its length the Severn remains a natural waterway wild and unspoilt in its upper reaches. It is this unspoilt state of the Severn that gives the traveller some of the best journeying river to be found in Britain. The few towns along the course do not intrude, and lack of riverside properties in the upper sections gives a wilderness feeling that is not easy to achieve in central England today.

Some Lesser Known British Coracles

All members of the society will be very familiar with the well known English and Welsh coracles still to be found on the Rivers Teifi, Tywi, and Taf in West Wales, at Ironbridge and Shrewsbury on the River Severn and on the nearby Teme. But a reading of the works of the late James Hornell and our former President, Dr J Geraint Jenkins, indicate they were to be found on many more rivers within living memory. I would like, however, to spend a little time considering some of the much less well known coracling areas.

At the outset I must record my gratitude to Conwy Richards for all the information he has been able to unearth in this field which is so well described in his excellent web site. Neither photographs nor sketches of these lesser known coracles will appear in this article because they are sparse in the extreme. Such as there are can be found in Conwy's website.

The English coracles I shall be referring to were to be found at Tewksbury, on the Thames and Avon and at Chester. So far as Wales is concerned I will mention craft which were to be found on the Rivers Dwyryd, Dyfi and Lledr in North Wales, on the Rivers Cothi and Nevern in West Wales and on the Rivers Taff and Llwchwr in South Wales.

ENGLISH CORACLES

The evidence concerning the Thames and Tewkesbury area is not strong but worth considering. So far as the Avon is concerned it is much stronger.

Thames - Clues to this usage are to be found in the comments of the well respected historian, Christopher Hibbert MC, in his book 'London, The Biography of a City' where he asserts that coracles were in evidence on the river during the building of a second bridge over the Thames in the city during the nineteenth century. Moreover, support for this claim is to be found in the fact that a well known firm of Charring Cross basket makers: GW Scott's trade mark contained a coracle

Tewksbury - A neighbour of the late Eustace Rogers told me of a conversation he had had with an elderly lady from Madeley Wood who used to make nets for poachers. She said that there were coracles on the Severn at Tewksbury which were of a different design to any other found in the area.

Avon - Hornell makes reference to coracle usage between the wars near Evesham. He stated that it was a recent innovation and not a continuation of a local tradition. He was clearly referring to Copthorne Mill, Fladbury, Worcestershire, which is between Evesham and Pershore on the banks of the Avon. Coracles are still in use there.

Chester - The Chester regatta web site refers, inter alia, to coracles racing against each other during their regatta in 1733.

WELSH CORACLES

NORTH WALES

Dwyryd - Coracles were used on this river which flows through the vale of Maentwrog in North West Wales. They were used for net fishing. One was discovered in Bicton near Shrewsbury in the possession of the Sandford family. It is now in the Museum of Welsh Life, St Fagans, Cardiff. The Dwyryd coracle is not mentioned by either Hornell or Jenkins but its authenticity was established by the Sandford family.

Dyfi - This river runs in the Machynlleth area of mid Wales. They were reported as being used for net fishing involving two coracles in 1798 by the Rev. W Bingley. They were oval in shape and covered with pitched canvas. A combination of pollution from the local lead mines and aggressive action by a Lord Lieutenant and his cohorts terminated their use in the nineteenth century.

Lledr (Conwy area) - During the 1861 commissioner's hearings a local fisherman stated that there used to be coracles and nets in use 'up on the Lledr fisheries but I suppose they stopped 25 - 30 years ago'.

Wye area - In addition to extensive coracle usage on the Wye, Hornell, writing about the period between the wars, reports that coracles were also used on the tributaries, The Monnow and The Lugg 'until a few decades ago'. In Jenkin's book 'The Coracle' appears a photograph he states is of a coracle in use on the Monnow, circa 1900.

WEST WALES

Cothi - This river is adjacent to the Tywi. During a hearing before Sir Jim Jardine Bart on 27th September 1860, a witness made it clear that net fishing with coracles took place on the Cothi.

NeVERN (Afon Nyfer) - This river in North Pems. Flows into Newport Bay south of the Teifi and north of the Tywi According to Jenkins coracles in use on the NeVERN were similar to Teifi coracles but even in the 1860s no more than four pairs operated. During a commission to inquire into salmon fisheries a witness was critical of the behaviour of the coracle nets men on the NeVERN.

SOUTH WALES

Taff - This river flows through Cardiff and was known for a drowning incident in 1908 involving a three year old boy, Cromwell Davies. Coracle men were involved in searching for the boy's body but they were not local but had come from Carmarthen to help. This last fact lead people to think that local coracle men did not exist otherwise they would have participated. Conwy Richards however as a result of searching local records in Cardiff established that a family of coracle fishermen existed who fished on the Taff where the Royal Hotel was later built. Furthermore there is clear evidence not only of the lives but also the deaths of two named members of this coracle net fishing family. A water colour by JC Ibbetson of a coracle in Cardiff indicates a coracle closely resembling a West Wales Taf coracle

Llwchwr (Loughor) - Coracles were used on this river at Pontardulais near Swansea. This is clearly documented in correspondence in the archives of the Museum of Welsh Life dated 30th September 1891, which describes 12 coracles being in use then. The writer describes these coracles as being similar to Teifi coracles in shape but an inspection of a photograph of them shown on Conwy Richards web site reveals a greater similarity to a Llangollen, Upper Dee coracle.

I hope what I have written gives some indication of how widespread coracle usage once was.

Peter Badge

In the News

The Drogheda Independent newspaper reported in July the cancellation of the annual River Boyne currach event due to dangerous flooding although the nearby canal was used for short paddling trips. The previous year the Meath Chronicle reported on the same event when there were twenty one Boyne Currachs on the river.

Near to Newcastle Emlyn in the River Teifi valley South Wales is the recently refurbished National Museum of the Welsh Woollen Industry (see last newsletter). Part of the new displays now feature coracles that were at one time (until the importation of cheap cotton cloth) covered in flannel made at the mill and others like it. Videos showing coracles at work can now be seen and surprisingly a River Tywi coracle is on display when a local Teifi type would have been more in keeping with the location.

On British television on August Bank Holiday was shown the nineteen fifties Walt Disney version of Treasure Island. Featured in it is the coracle made by Ben Gunn and the script claimed it was made of bamboo and goatskin although it appeared heavy and was rowed.

Surprisingly large increases have been announced for coracle netting licences with proposed fees for annual increases till 2007 known. What 'science' this is based on is unclear but the new fees are;

	2005	2006	2007
River Teifi	191	211	227
River Taf	191	211	227
River Tywi	428	471	508

On display at the Gwent Museum of Rural Life in the town of Usk and unlabelled are a pair of Usk coracle paddles. The paddles are very rare and surprisingly displayed with a River Teifi coracle that has no connection to the River Usk.

Conwy Richards

Treasure Trove at Coracle Sale

A treasure trove of items belonging to a legendary Shropshire coracle maker raised more than £9,000 when they went under the hammer at an auction which attracted buyers from all over Britain.

Boats made by Ironbridge's famous craftsman Eustace Rogers, who died last year, were among the most sought after lots at an auction of his possessions and were all sold for nearly twice their value.

Sale organisers today revealed the handmade coracles found at his former home, Severnside Cottage, raised a combined total of £1700 while personal items including tools, paintings and pictures also proved popular.

The Stour Coracle

I started fishing from a coracle so that I could get past the weed beds in my lake to where the fish were swimming.

It was rather a dangerous thing to lean over the gunwales to net the fish on water some 40 feet deep. I started to develop a coracle that was stable enough to lean out from without fear of tipping over. The coracle I've developed is called a 'Stour' simply because I live by the River Stour in Suffolk, where I go net fishing and coracle sailing in the estuary. It is very sea-worthy and floats well over rough and choppy waters. On the lake I can follow the fish as they move around. I have also developed a technique to cross the



Quentin Page in his Stour Coracle

lake using a little drogue or anchor on a very long rope. This enables me to pull myself to different locations.

The actual fishing side of it, once you've got a safe coracle, is very exciting because even a small 2lb fish can tow or twizzle you around. The fish ignore the coracle so that it's possible to get right in amongst them where they are rising and watch as they come up to take fly. Fly-fishing from a coracle can be done all year round whereas float-tubes are only suitable for summer.

My 'Stour' is easily capable of carrying two adults for fly-fishing purposes and of handling a full sized drift net 50 metres long and 5 metres deep.

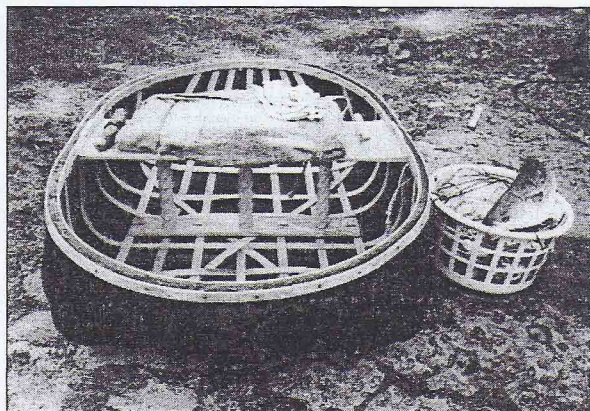
I believe that a coracle is the best way of fishing on any river. It can be carried to

wild inaccessible places and then used on water where access by land is impossible.

When you are bank fishing it is easy to drop and lose things unlike in a coracle where items are contained and there is no risk of treading on the line. Of course there is room for a picnic basket and even a dog. I carry an umbrella (not with a sharp point) which can be deployed as a sail or sunshade.

The coracle is also ideal for observing nature and artists find them useful for sketching. It is also ideal as a boat tender for it will easily carry 2cwt of goods. I think it's a thoroughly practical craft.

Quentin Page
(01255 870303)



'Stour' Coracle and Catch

The Dwyrdd Coracle

Building A Replica And Some Observations

In June 2003 I was asked to build a replica of the unique original coracle then in the possession of Humphrey Sandford of The Isle, Bicton, Shrops. Following my experience of building early musical instruments, the brief to build a replica of a particular coracle, in my opinion, meant nothing less than a vernier copy. Whilst some might question the point of such precision, as most coracles are made freestyle, in this case, the Dwyrdd is a very different proposition being more the work of a boatbuilder or highly skilled cabinet maker.

The history of the Dwyrdd coracle has already been admirably researched by Sir Peter Badge, so I will begin with a visual description of this craft. Firstly, the most striking feature is what I call the fan strutting rib configuration at both ends of the coracle, the more complex arrangement being for the foot positions at the front. The laths were originally painted with white or possibly grey lead paint and the whole design presents us with a visual treat. The gunwale is also exceptional in that it is beautifully sculpted in profile, forming an elegant sheer both fore and aft. The accumulation of gunwale hoops, (originally three, now four) show a very complicated constructional procedure, (see fig.1).

The entire frame and gunwale is of native Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), every lath being planed, sanded and with bevelled arrises to all four edges. The seat is almost certainly Cedar (*Thuja plicata*) determined by type of grain and knot orientation. A curious feature is a decorative groove at both top edges. It was felt that this alone, whether intentional or perhaps a 'found' section of reclaimed timber, was of sufficient aesthetic importance as part of the 'look' of the coracle to be repeated on the replica. This involved making a special tool (in itself, three days work) in order to carry out this procedure. The seat support blocks are oak; the seat posts and bulkhead are spurious and whilst of some age, are clearly a crude replacement or even an addition. This is unpainted and not in keeping with the quality workmanship of the rest of the craft. The cover is of linen and again, although old, is a replacement. Microscopic examination reveals that it is identical to the remains of the original covering still trapped inside the gunwale, (see fig.2). It is safe to assume therefore, that the present cover was either done by the original maker or whoever, at a later date, had access to some of the original cloth. The gunwale consisted of three hoops, (see fig.2), the main central one attached to both endblocks and to which the ribs are fixed. The original cover was tacked to the central hoop and a third hoop was nailed to the others forming the outer gunwale. When the coracle was re-covered, perhaps as a matter of expediency, the third 'outer' hoop was left undisturbed and the replacement cover was attached to this, necessitating the addition of a fourth, outer hoop to complete the gunwale, (see fig.3). On my replica, purely on aesthetic grounds, I decided to keep to a 'four hoop' construction because to do otherwise would have changed the appearance too dramatically, possibly even the strength. However, in the final analysis three hoops would have been strong enough.

I commenced work by making a comprehensive photographic record. Some fifty pictures were taken. I made rubbings and templates (both internal and external) and then made full-size drawings on my Zucor Bieffe drafting machine.

Before accurate measurements could be made, it was necessary to construct a jig to enable me to pull the now very distorted coracle gently back into its original shape. I

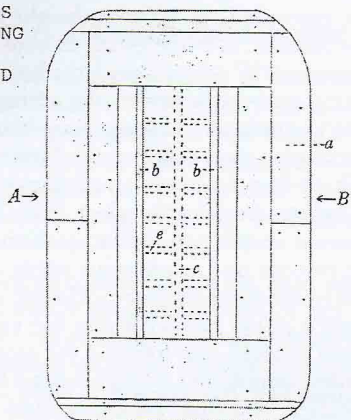
was then able to confirm the following dimensions:- overall length 1144mm, overall greatest width amidships at gunwale level 900mm, height at seat 345mm, height at stern 370mm, height at bow 362mm. It is interesting to note that, visually, I judged the framework laths to be, on average, 1 1/8" wide, some laths being very much wider. When every individual lath was measured with a vernier, the average measurement proved to be exactly 1 1/8" wide. As the preliminary rubbings were being taken, the astonishing similarity between the internal plan-view shape of the Dwyrdd and the coracle mould made by Mr. Hudson, the Shrewsbury boatbuilder, could not be ignored, (see fig.4) and also Hornell's own scale drawing, (text-fig.5), taken from 'British Coracles'. Careful examination of Hudson's mould reveals two flats at both ends of the mould base and begs the question why the smooth and continuous curve of the gunwale outline is broken; there is a visual need to complete this curve. Hornell's only too brief description of how Hudson built his coracle passes over what is in fact an extremely important first stage of construction. Hudson's mould calls to mind the same procedure as that of the moulds on which classical lutes, violins, and even guitars are built. Hornell's description of the way by which the coracle was built on this mould was so similar to that of constructing early musical instruments, that it dawned on me how 'shaped' endblocks would fill-in the truncated ends of the mould and complete an uninterrupted curve of the gunwale shape, (see fig.4a). In the lute, for instance these blocks would have been temporarily screwed to the ends of the mould thereby completing the outline shape of the mould and eventually, when the finished instrument frame is removed from the mould, becoming an integral part of the lute, or in this case, coracle, (see figs. 7 & 7a).

I was naturally excited to find these crescent shaped endblocks present at both ends of the Dwyrdd, fully explaining why the maker had built the coracle on a mould. Whilst not going so far as to say the Dwyrdd, came off the Shrewsbury mould, I am convinced that perhaps, one day, further research will prove some kind of connection. Certainly, the complex nature of the gunwale construction can only be justified by the fact it was built in this way. Why would the maker have made life so difficult for himself when he could have taken the easy route and constructed the gunwale in the usual two piece way? When I started the actual construction of my replica, using a similar mould to Hudson's, it was obvious to me that this was the only way in which the Dwyrdd was built with symmetry and accuracy.

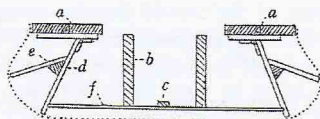
Another astonishing observation is that the pronounced tumble-home of both coracles is identical, (see fig.6, taken from Hornell). Other constructional details began to support my theory. Close examination of the way in which the laths are nailed at all the crossing points, reveals that the Dwyrdd is not nailed in the same way as, for example, Shrewsbury coracles when built freehand, 'the right way up', where nailing is carried out from the *inside*, the nails then being cleated on the *outside* using a dolly. This is the easiest and obvious way to build a coracle. The Dwyrdd, being formed on an 'upside down' mould would have to have been nailed from the *outside*, in order to keep the laths in their correct positions before removal from the mould. After removal, the frame (with nails still in place), would then have been cleated on the *inside*. The remaining half and diagonal laths were then fitted and nailed from the *inside* in the usual Shrewsbury manner. This seemingly trivial, unimportant detail, has so far been overlooked by other observers but is in fact a vital pointer to the way in which the Dwyrdd was put together.

Finally, last but not least, the way in which the transverse ribs attach to the main gunwale hoop is quite unique. (see fig.8) In the Shrewsbury or Ironbridge coracle

PLAN VIEW OF HUDSON'S
CORACLE MOULD, SHOWING
TRUNCATED ENDS READY
TO RECEIVE PRE-SHAPED
ENDBLOCKS



Text-fig. 5. Face view of the Shrewsbury coracle mould; *a*, the wooden decking; *b*, *b*, two boards set on edge beneath the decking; *c* and *e*, web of struts at a lower level (cf. Pl. V, fig. 3).



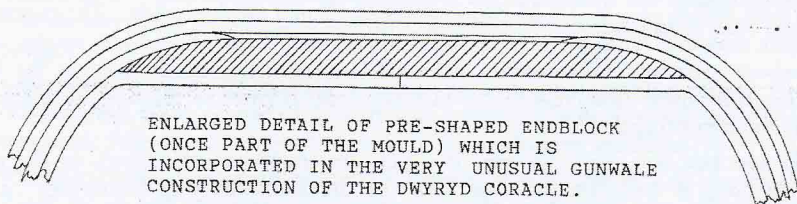
Text-fig. 6. Transverse section of the Shrewsbury coracle mould along the line *A-B* in Text-fig. 5. *a*, *b* and *c*, as before; *d*, the hinged longitudinal flap with its flange (*e*), extended by the spreader *f* to form the bilge curve of the coracle frame along each side. The dotted outer line represents the position of a transverse lath bent into shape.

Fig. 8

TYPICAL PRE-TAPERED
TRANSVERSE RIB OF
THE DWYRYD CORACLE



Fig. 1



ENLARGED DETAIL OF PRE-SHAPED ENDBLOCK
(ONCE PART OF THE MOULD) WHICH IS
INCORPORATED IN THE VERY UNUSUAL GUNWALE
CONSTRUCTION OF THE DWYRYD CORACLE.

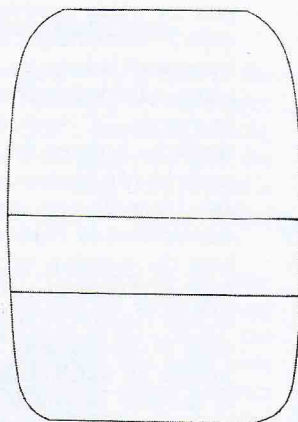


Fig. 4

INTERNAL PLAN-VIEW
OUTLINE OF DWYRYD
CORACLE WITHOUT
SHAPED ENDBLOCKS

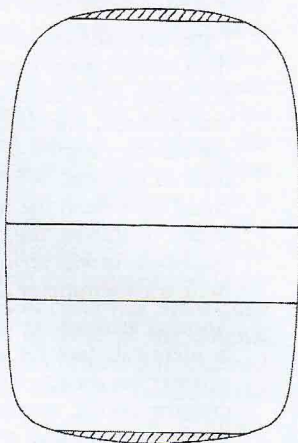


Fig. 4a

SAME OUTLINE AS ABOVE
BUT WITH ENDBLOCKS
FITTED (SHADED AREA)

Fig.2

CROSS SECTIONAL VIEW OF THE
ORIGINAL DWYRYD GUNWALE
CONSTRUCTION USING 3 HOOPS

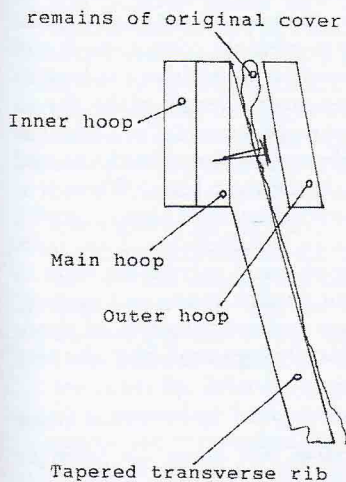


Fig.3

CROSS SECTIONAL VIEW SHOWING
PRESENT STATE OF DWYRYD
GUNWALE WITH 4 HOOPS

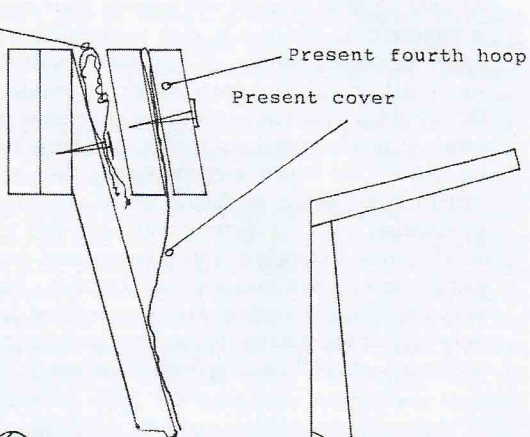


Fig.7

PLAN VIEW OF LUTE MOULD
WITH SHAPED ENDBLOCKS
IN PLACE, READY FOR BUILDING
LUTE BODY AROUND THEM

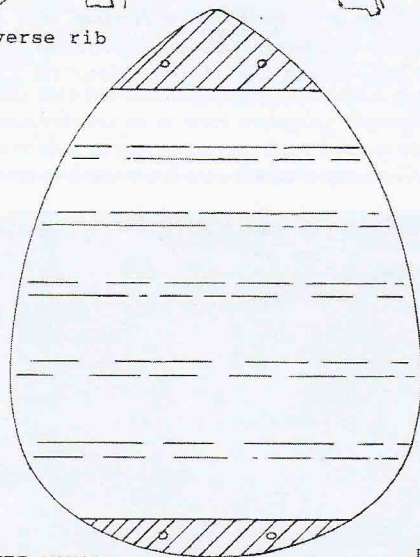
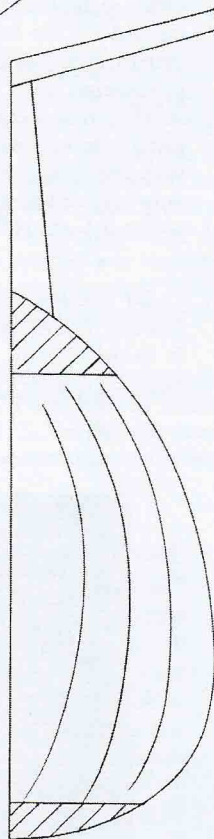


Fig.7a

SIDE VIEW OF FINISHED LUTE
AFTER REMOVAL FROM MOULD
WITH ENDBLOCKS NOW
INTEGRAL PART OF INSTRUMENT



building tradition where, during construction, the ends of the ribs were fitted, firstly overlength, then sawn off flush with the top of the gunwale. The Dwyryd ribs, on the other hand, end in a knife-edged taper, ending very precisely flush with the top edge of gunwale. On close inspection, every single rib end is accurately finished in this way. This taper was not worked after the rib was fitted because once nailed it would be impossible to work the taper without damage to the plane. Also, the taper was made on the inside face and before fitting, necessitating predetermination of the entire rib length in advance. A little thought will provide more evidence that if the curvature of all the ribs is symmetrical, which it is, then it would be impossible to guess the correct length and build the coracle 'in the air' as it were, since the ribs would end up either too long or too short! a nightmare situation for the builder. By measuring the length of the ribs on the mould (in the same manner as a wheelwright measures the perimeter of a wheel in order to fit the metal tyre), the exact length of the ribs can be determined, cut and tapered on the bench with the surety they will finish in the right place. Whilst it is extremely difficult to explain in words, what are in fact a whole series of highly complex procedures, even for anyone with skill and experience in woodworking, I am quite satisfied that a coracle of this accuracy and degree of finish could only be the result of using a mould as a means of construction. After sixteen months 'eating and sleeping' with the Dwyryd coracle and four replicas later, I have amassed hundreds of notes, drawings and measurements and at a point where I was finally 'separated' from this very old boat I was still making fresh discoveries.

Alan Grove

I wish to express my grateful thanks to Professor Richard Harding, Hon. Editor, The Society for Nautical Research, for permission to reproduce the illustration of Hudson's Shrewsbury coracle mould, in 'British Coracles', Part II by James Hornell, 'The Mariner's Mirror' Vol. XXII, No. 3, July 1936.

Photography by Nina Grove ©

The Scottish Traditional Boat Festival

Portsoy, Banff - 2-4 July 2004

The long trek up to the Moray Firth coast of Northern Scotland proved to be a most enjoyable trip for Society member Dave Purvis and colleague Ridley Youngman from the World of Boats in Eyemouth, Berwickshire.

We took a selection of coracles, a Dingle curragh and a birch bark canoe from the World of Boats collection to demonstrate the ancient craft of skin-on-frame boat construction, and provoked much interest amongst all the traditional 'boatees' who inundated our stands. We were busy all weekend answering questions and organising rides in the harbour.

This part of Scotland has its own microclimate, and while the rest of the United Kingdom was basking in a rare heat wave, visitors to Portsoy were treated to early morning showers and afternoons of brilliant sunshine, which all added to the appeal of this tremendous little festival, as well as the smell of smokies cooking on oak fires. Oh this is the stuff dreams are made of, and well worth a visit next year!

For more information go to www.scottishtraditionalboatfestival.co.uk

Dave Purvis

The Only Caves Discovered by Coracle

Near the village of Abercrave in the Brecon Beacons lived the Morgan brothers. In 1912 they discovered the opening to what we now know as the Dan-yr-Agov cave which is part of the National Show Caves of Wales. They decided that a coracle would be the best way to cross the lake and explore the cave and transported one from the River Towy in Carmarthen. Oil lamps and candles were the only means of light and by using ropes and an arrow system they managed to find their way in and out of the network of tunnels and caves. The National Show Caves of Wales is a very busy tourist attraction which now incorporates a dinosaur theme park, an Iron Age farm and Shire-horse centre. In April 2004 I had a phone call from a representative of Channel Five Television explaining that they required a traditional Towy coracle as they intended re-enacting the discovery of the caves in 1912. Having volunteered such a craft they then asked me if I would be prepared to play the role of one of the Morgan brothers. I agreed subject to certain conditions and waited for a date to be confirmed.

On a stormy day in May I drove the seventy miles to the Brecon Beacons, and found the main reception for the caves. The first task was a visit to the wardrobe department where I had to swap my clothes for a set of clothes typical of the 1912 period. This included a collar and tie, tweed waistcoat and jacket (just the type of clothing to discover a cave in!). Then the bombshell! The Morgan brothers did not have beards and I was asked to remove my designer stubble and have a handlebar moustache glued to my upper lip. After the torture of removing my facial hair came the discomfort of the hairy appendage being secured beneath my nose. My on screen brother was similarly attired and moustached, however his suit was at least one size too small (as time would reveal). I set off for the first filming shots down a steep embankment carrying the coracle on my back.

In recent years this area has the added attraction of a dinosaur landscape. Examples of such monsters towered over us or were swooping through the air. The trick was to film us with them out of shot as dinosaurs may have been extinct by 1912. For the next scene we had to disappear underground into the cave system. Outside the entrance on the wall



was a picture of the original brothers with the story of them discovering the cave. I thought it would be nice to have a photograph of us on either side of the picture. Looking at the picture I then realised that our moustaches had been stuck on upside down (I didn't think that would be a good time to tell the director!). Having struggled with my coracle perhaps half a mile underground we finally reached the point where the brothers had crossed the cave. Here I had to launch the coracle onto the water. The only means of lighting would have been candle power and to make it look more realistic I had to carry a candle in one hand and a further two candles were attached to the seat of the coracle.

It was at this point that the director decided my now somewhat unfortunate facial hair had taken on a life of its own and needed urgent attention. She proceeded to apply spirit gum to my lip and attack the hair. In so doing she managed to dribble the highly flammable stuff down my jacket. When I sat down in the coracle the fumes from my coat made the candles flare and I envisaged me going up in a ball of flame. My show biz brother leaping forward to assist me suffered the embarrassment of his tightly fitting trousers splitting from prow to stern and it was some time before we could regroup and finish the filming.

After some two hours underground we emerged into the daylight very cold and fatigued with the thunder rumbling and the rain beating down. My moustache was by now hanging limply down one side of my face and I dreaded the final removal of the offending article. With my partner's trousers looking much the worse for wear we returned to the safety of the reception area where we replaced our ill fitting clothes for our own clothes.

Driving home with a sore upper lip, a bald face and smelling of surgical spirit I mused on the wonders of being a coracle handler!

Martin Fowler
Coracle Centre
Cenarth.

Coracles Day in Enkhuizen

June 26th 2004

It is already five years since, under the leadership of Peter Faulkner, we built four coracles in the old ice factory of Henk Hortensius, in Enkhuizen.

So it was high time that there was a coracle event in Enkhuizen. Then came an excellent occasion. A group of English friends who call themselves 'Sailathon', wanted to visit Holland, with a number of sailing boats. The 'Sailathon' group raise funds for charity using their own boats, this is their third year of charity work. The funds this year were destined for a cancer charity, life boats (Dutch as well as English) and a Deep Sea Fishermen's Home.

The 'Sailathon' group had also contacted Olivia Elton Barratt and Kay Johnson (also through charity activities). Very quickly came the plan to bring a number of coracles from England on board the 'Sailathon' boats. With four coracles from Enkhuizen and three from England we would have a good number for an event.

On Saturday morning, we gave a presentation on 'Het Landje Van Top', in front of the 'Drommedaris' and the Enkhuizer Almanak Museum. The public had the opportunity to look at coracles and to ask questions.

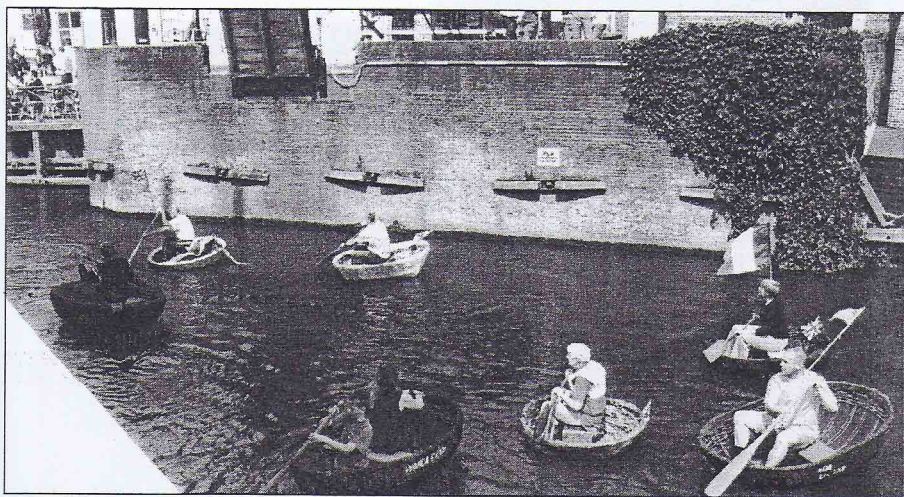


The fish wife choir 'Haar Op De Dijk' sang a few Dutch songs, the choir standing between coracles. After that, there was a party with Dutch drinks (jenever) and Dutch salt raw herring, in the Enkhuizer Almanak Museum.

In the afternoon the coracles were launched in the old harbour in front of the fish auction. The public had the opportunity to try out the coracles, there was great interest and we had a lot of sponsored life jackets (for security). After an hour of boating, all the coracles paddled from the old harbour into the town which naturally was followed by a drink party on the quay, with a wonderful buffet and performance from our local shanty group 'Enkhuizen 4+1'.

Altogether this was a great Coracle Day in Enkhuizen.

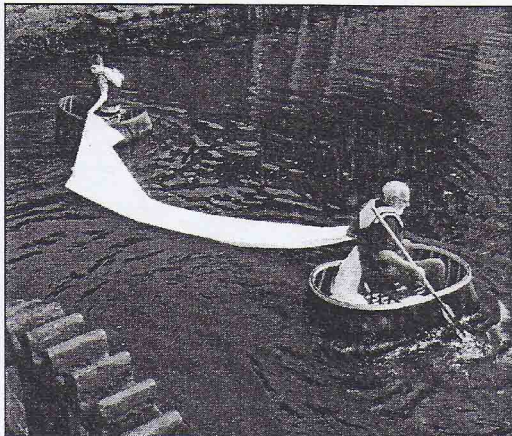
Hans and Wanda Weehuizen



Eyemouth Maritime Festival

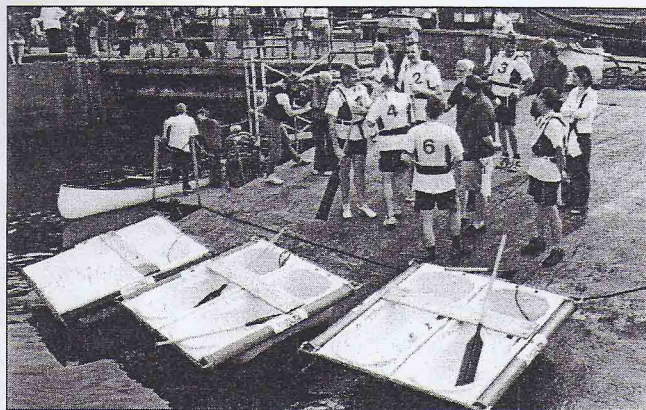
Eyemouth's very first Maritime Festival was staged in August last year, when many of the World of Boats collection (the ex Exeter Maritime Museum) were on display around the harbour side over the weekend.

Dave Purvis (him again!) was invited to stage some events on the coracle theme, which included his grandson Euan Raffel, acting as catchers for the local schools' model boat race on the River Eye. The bed sheet (see photo) proved to be a bit of a liability and was quickly abandoned when the curiosity of the local seal population felt a bit threatening.



Saving the best bit until last, much to our amazement (they actually worked) a fleet of plastic 'Bathermarans' took to the water for what is probably the first Bath Race to be held in British Waters. Using simple coracle design principles, they perform surprisingly well once the bath plug is firmly secured. Will they be seen at some future coracle regatta? I wonder.

Dave Purvis



The Launch of the Somerset Coracle

The framework of above mentioned coracle has been fabricated using five different species of willow found flourishing on the Somerset Levels. No screws, nails or wire have been used in the construction and the cover is attached using cordage formed from Somerset Willow.

Despite assiduous research the writer has unearthed no evidence that coracles have ever been made in the county of Somerset - is this then the first Somerset Coracle?



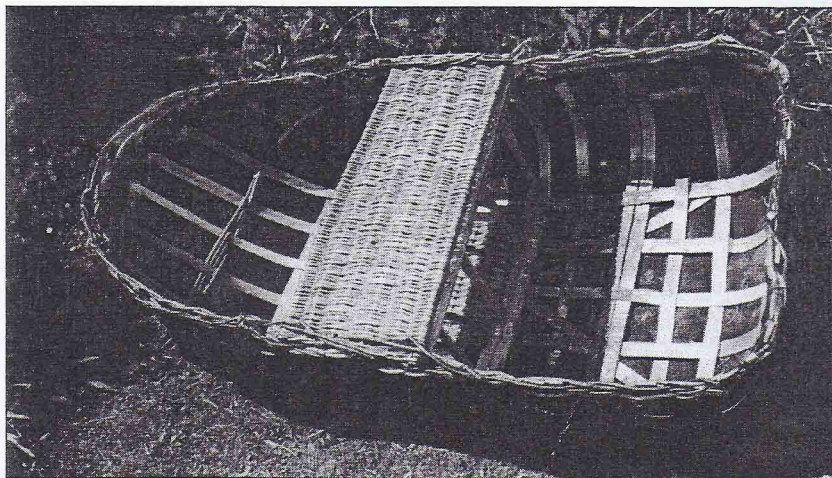
You are cordially invited to witness the historic launch of this vessel come rain or shine on the lake at Stort Drove. At 11.30 a.m. on Sunday 9th May 2004.

Participants wishing to master the skill of propelling a coracle using a single paddle will be encouraged to take to the water with vocal support from the onlookers (life jackets will be available and their use is recommended).

The launch of the Somerset Coracle will be followed by cider and cheese. The above venue can be readily located using the attached map. A reply to this invitation would be appreciated using the electric telegraph, the number to ring being 01458 252723. Thank you.

On a date to be arranged (probably in August), the writer plans to navigate the Bridgwater to Taunton canal in this coracle accompanied by a fellow enthusiast in a 'Teifi' coracle. It is hoped that, with generous sponsorship by the local populace, a goodly sum can be raised for St. Margaret's Hospice Somerset and the 'Babes Big Appeal' which raises funds for the Children's Hospital South West.

Ted Pitman



'Coracle on Camera' - My Mesolithic Adventure

I was rather curious when mum asked me to contact the Natural History Unit of the BBC who were doing some filming in Devon involving a coracle. As they needed a hide coracle, which Mum has, and someone slightly younger than her(!) to paddle it, I had been suggested by Peter Faulkner, who had seen me take part in the regatta at Leintwardine the previous year.

In my first conversation with the Assistant Producer of the programme, I was told it involved one day's filming, coracling in the background of the scenes and wearing a period costume - I thought perhaps a smock and bonnet? However, having agreed to help out, it later transpired that the programme was actually looking at the Mesolithic period and would involve much more than background work. It all sounded a little nerve wracking but I decided to go ahead.



I met with the film crew the night before filming in late July for a briefing and everyone oooed and aaahed over the coracle perched atop my car. It was decided to drape the seat with a fur to hide the makers mark, the paddle was wrapped in leather thongs to make it look the part. The following morning I reported for hair and make-up and was transformed into Mesolithic woman- resplendent in skin leggings and tunic with braided, backcombed hair and make-up to make me look grubby.

The first days filming was in Ayrmore Cove on the South Devon coast and I spent the morning being filmed collecting shellfish along the rocky shoreline with my two young actress 'daughters'. The coracle made her debut in the afternoon camp scene, in the back of shot, while we sat around the fire preparing our fishy dinner and listening to ancient pipe music.

In the morning of the second day I was filmed carrying the coracle along the riverbank beside my skin clad friend, both of us chatting away in made up Mesolithic type language - which had to sound a bit like Finnish! I don't think the Director realised how heavy a hide coracle is as he made me carry it up and down endlessly for the best part of an hour!

Sore shoulders aside, the afternoon filming was great fun. I spent an hour or so paddling the coracle gently downstream on a beautiful and quiet stretch of the river while they filmed me from various angles, including picturesque shots of the coracle emerging from under weeping willow branches etc.

They even put the Assistant Cameraman in the river to push me back upstream to reset after each shot - they didn't want me to get tired! I had to be rather brave for the last shots - I paddled round to a fish trap and they emptied the basket from the fish trap into the bottom of the coracle - a dozen or so rather slimy wriggly eels tipped straight over my bare feet. Quite a challenge to sit still and quiet while they filmed close-ups!

It was lovely that the film crew seemed genuinely excited by the coracle and how it was paddled, and the whole experience was wonderful if slightly surreal. I, of course, offered my services anytime they need a 'coracle handler with very amateur acting talents' in the future. I am still waiting excitedly to receive a copy of the edited programme which, unfortunately, is only to be broadcast in Europe.

Rosie Colley

Carmarthen Coracle Happening 2005

Conwy Richards is in touch with Mike Elias (coracle nets man) and a recent communication from him is published here in full:-

Conwy,

Just a word to tell you we're hoping to have a river festival in Carmarthen next summer (2005) although we haven't decided on a date, the local and county councils are backing it so society members will be welcome, we're also trying to establish links with curragh makers as there is European money available but only if they live or work in Wicklow, Wexford, Waterford or Kilkenny. So far we've only found people from Cork or Galway but we'd be grateful for any assistance as I'm sure grants could be found to bring them over for the do. We recently had a meeting with Carwyn Jones - Assembly Minister and he showed an interest in keeping the coracle tradition going, he's looking into a possible teaching licence where beginners and apprentices can experience the actual fishing during the daytime or in front of visitors without cost. We've also got backing for planting willows along the banks and hope to have that underway between November and March. Plenty of raw materials then as the type we're after will grow 10 feet in the first year and will produce 10 wands per planting!

I'll keep you informed of progress.

Mike Elias

Calico - A Very Good Source

Our President reports as follows:

Wolfen Textiles Ltd - 359, Uxbridge Road, Hatch End, Middlesex - HA5 4JN.

I have used them twice recently. I ring them, tell them the type of calico and amounts I require, give them a credit card number and the calico arrives in the next day's post. The type I use is as follows, 'Qty: 987 Heavy Calico, width 75' (190cm). They have many other calicos and canvasses but I have found the type 987 to be ideal.

Sir Peter Badge

SPRING FLYER 2005

Please let me have full details of your coracling events/activities by March 23rd.

Failure to do so may result in disappointment.



Hans Weehuizen afloat in Enkhuizen



Original Dwyrdd coracle alongside replica