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Chairman's Chat

It is that time of year again when the sap starts rising and memories of the high winds and wet weather turn to more pleasant pursuits in the fine spring weather. The urge to get those coracles out and give them a fresh coat of bitumen ready for another paddling season also comes with the spring weather - they soon come around again, don't they? I am very pleased to see that our membership numbers remain steady, although we can always do with some more members to help us maintain the ability to participate in the many events we are being invited up and down the country, either as exhibitors/demonstrators or regatta organisers.

Membership prices remain unchanged, which we believe is great value and goes to help us support the promotion of this most ancient craft. Can I ask everyone to seek out and recruit one new member each to join the Society? Now we are coming out of the recession (or so the powers that be would have us believe), just think of all those poor souls running about with more money in their pockets, not knowing what to do with themselves. Why not do them a great favour and introduce them to our gentle pursuit!

Although I did not see any coracles about in the news during the winter floods, we still enjoyed publicity from various celebrities last year on television, earning their corn by "discovering" these quaint rural oddities and doing their best to demonstrate how our forbearers would have used them.

The big news of course came in the newly published book by Dr. Irvine Finkle (British Museum) on the phenomena of the Noah's Ark Coracle. Its publication was just in time to coincide with the release of the blockbuster film Noah, starring the well-known Mesopotamian actor Russell Crowe. Just a pity they had not delayed the production until they had read Dr. Finkle's book and got the construction details right to make the plot just a little more credible, perhaps?

Our events listings this year are a bit threadbare. If you know of an event - or are organising one yourself - please do let us know so we can publicise it.

Have a good coracle season, enjoy your paddling and keep your reports coming in for your Journal.

Dave Purvis

2014 Annual General Meeting and Regatta

We shall be returning to Ironbridge for this year's AGM, which will be held on Monday 25th August. Following the AGM, members are invited to participate in the Annual Ironbridge Regatta.

Further details will be published on the website and posted to members nearer the time

Dave Purvis

Obituary: Raymond Rees MBE

On 16th December 2013, one of the greatest coraclemen of his generation died. Raymond's family have, for over two hundred years, practised the art and skill of making coracles and using them on the river Twyi with consummate skill. This fact was recognised by the granting of an MBE to Raymond by the Queen in 2011 for his services to the coracle heritage and inshore fishing in Wales, which replicates many years earlier that of a BEM to his grandfather for similar services.

During his life he was a tireless defender of the right to fish with nets on his beloved Afon Twyi. During that time he passed on his skills as a coracle netsman to many others. He was a most skilled coracle and net maker who whilst being loyal to his family's heritage, was not averse to innovation as witnessed by his use of fibreglass in coracle construction and of cable ties to secure laths one to another in his traditional wooden craft. He was also very happy to discuss coracles with anyone with a genuine interest in them. Raymond was a well educated man who began life, I understand, in the Civil Service which he left to set up and run a very successful fishmonger's business in Carmarthen. The Coracle Society was very fortunate in having Raymond as one of its first honorary Vice Presidents. He was a constant and most respected Vice President of the Society.



Over thirty years ago Raymond made a traditional Twyi coracle with a woven gunwale for me; later making a modern fibreglass craft also. Over the years my wife and I became close friends of Raymond and his late wife Linda, who would have been so proud of his MBE. During this time he gave me an enormous amount of information about coracles for which I am eternally grateful. May I conclude by saying that our great sense of loss is reduced by the knowledge that the Rees family tradition is being maintained by Raymond's son Malcolm, to whom our condolences go.

Sir Peter Badge - President

Photo: Carmarthen Coracle and Netsmen's Association

Save Our Heritage Huts - update

As promised in the 2013 Journal, here is an update on the progress of the Save Our Heritage Huts appeal.

Thomas hut, Cenarth

An initial amount of funding has been released from the appeal to start the process of reconstructing this hut. Unfortunately, the terrible weather this winter has meant that it has not been possible to lay the concrete foundation slab at the National Coracle Centre, where the hut will be reconstructed and restored. With finer weather now with us, work will start shortly

Rogers hut, Ironbridge

The Ironbridge Coracle Trust was formed in April 2014, following a meeting at the start of the year to discuss options and formulate a plan to start the process for this hut. Gerwyn Lewis, Terry Kenny and Judy Walker were appointed as trustees. The aim is to work with the Ironbridge Museums Trust to purchase the hut, stabilise it and restore it for public viewing, with the possibility of it being used as a base for a local craftsman or other related business during the summer months.

Following a meeting with the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust in March, a paper was submitted to the World Heritage Site steering group which was accepted; there is a potential for the Coracle Trust

to be partners in a bid being submitted later this year for the bridge and environs, which of course includes the hut.

The Ironbridge Coracle Trust welcomes support from interested parties, whether to participate in initial maintenance planned for this summer, be a member of the board of trustees or otherwise assist in this project. Please contact Judy Walker (via our Secretary or directly - 01952 275606/ judyawalker@blueyonder.co.uk)

Euan Raffel, Martin Fowler and Judy Walker

Editor's note

This year's newsletter comes to you a little later than usual, for which I apologise. By the time I finished work for the Easter holidays, I had all the material needed to put together the newsletter. However, what I didn't take in to account was the inflexibility of BT when it comes to installing new phone lines! I moved house during the holiday and until my communication links with the 21st century were restored, I have been unable to get this newsletter produced. There is a silver lining to this however - you will notice that this newsletter is twice the usual size. BT not being able to install phone/internet in a timely manner has permitted me to receive and include a few extra articles than is customary at this time of year, which I trust you will enjoy.

If you are contacting me with materials for publication, please do take note of my new address to ensure that I receive it! Email address remains the same.

Euan Raffel

Event listings

Below is a summary of this year's events. If you know any coracle-related events not listed - or are organising one yourself - we would appreciate it if members can send us details so we can help spread the word. Please visit our website coraclesociety.org.uk/events - or contact the Secretary. Our contact details are on the front page.

14-15 Jun - Wonders of Wood Event - Ryedale Folk Museum, Hutton-le-Hole - 01751 417367/
info@ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk

20-22 Jun - Heritage Skills Fair - Tynemouth - 0191 232 9279/admin@nect.org.uk

26 Jun - Inaugural meeting of the North Sea Ring - Portsoy, Aberdeenshire - contact Scottish Traditional Boat Festival

26-28 Jun - Boyne coracle building course - Portsoy, Aberdeenshire - 07729 016850/willowandwood@gmail.com

28-29 Jun - Scottish Traditional Boat Festival - Portsoy, Aberdeenshire - 01261 842951/contact@stbfportsoy.com

6 Jul - Park Made Live - Preston Park Museum, Stockton on Tees - 01642 527375/prestonhall@stockton.gov.uk

20 Jul - Camarthen River Festival - Camarthen, South Wales - 01239 841822/m_dellar@yahoo.co.uk

2 Aug - Bures Coracle Regatta - Bures, Suffolk - 01787 313199/coracles@riverstourtrust.org

7 Aug - Coracle making course - Penrith, Cumbria - 017684 83941/annie@greystokecyclecafe.co.uk

25 Aug - Coracle Society AGM - Ironbridge, Shropshire - 029 2057 3438/info@coraclesociety.org.uk

25 Aug - Ironbridge Coracle Regatta - Ironbridge, Shropshire - 01952 432769/enquiries@smallwoods.org.uk

14 Sep - Guisborough Forest Festival - Guisborough, Teeside - 07876 546592/cath.brason@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

25 Sep - Tay Descent and Paddlefest - Perth - 0131 317 7314/office@canoescotland.org

23 Nov - Coracle making course - Cockermouth, Cumbria - 01768 776276/admin@highamhall.com

Coracles on canvas

I was born in America, because my Welsh grandparents boarded the Aquitania and crossed the Atlantic to New York. Seventy years on, I made the crossing in the opposite direction to come back. Since coming to Wales 5 years ago, I have never built, paddled or fished by coracle. But through my artist's eyes, what I see inspires me - the structures, the shapes, the materials, how they move and the rivers they float on.

I was first introduced to a coracle in 2011, when a friend told me I might like to look up a currach for research I was doing for my upcoming art exhibition at St. Davids Cathedral. That same summer I got my first look at the real thing when my 11 year-old son paddled one during the Medieval Festival in St. Dogmaels. The man who owned the boats said he (my son) was a natural. We were hooked.



Last autumn I was invited to be artist-in-residence at Oriel y Parc, St. Davids. The focus of my work was to create a series of paintings and relief collage, depicting significant journeys across the rivers and seas in and around west Wales. Many artists are inspired by the Pembrokeshire landscape, I am inspired most by what people do in this landscape and that led me to coracles. I certainly couldn't resist the opportunity to include coracle fishing in this new body of work.

There was only time during the residency for me to produce one coracle painting as part of that exhibition so I can't wait to continue. The pieces I make will be my celebration of the art

of coracle fishing, but I would like the river and landscape to feature as well. And that leads me to ask for your help, for June and July, I'm actively seeking invitations to come watch, photograph and sketch coracle fishermen working on the Teifi river.

It's lovely to show your work in the places that inspired it and I will have the opportunity to do just that. This special exhibition, "Coracles on the Teifi", will open at Hammet House, Llechryd, Cardigan on August 14th at 6pm. All are invited! I will be showing work in conjunction with this year's Cilgerran and Ironbridge races, too – if you are attending these please do come and have a look. Finally, my exhibition of a similar sort, "Boats", is showing at The Cloister Gallery, St. Davids Cathedral between 17th and 30th June.

If you can put me in touch with fishermen or events that could help me in my research, please contact me by phone 07970 886228 or email at cheesepicklesstudio@gmail.com and visit both my websites: cheeseandpickles.carbonmade.com and deborah-withey.com. Thank you! Diolch yn fawr!

Deborah Withey

Martin Fowler (National Coracle Centre) recently had a set of model coracles donated to him by Ted Pitman. Ted, who lives near the Somerset Levels, once made his on Teifi coracle with the addition of a seat from willow harvested locally to him.

The collection includes all the Welsh types as well as Ironbridge model. Martin has set up a display of the models, within a full size Conwy coracle at the National Coracle Centre



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