

25th anniversary 1990-2015



The Coracle Society

www.coraclesociety.org.uk

Journal

Autumn 2015



In this issue

- 4 **President's Thoughts**
Dr Irving Finkel writes his first article as President of the Society
- 5 **A Fond Farewell**
Sir Peter Badge shares some thoughts as he retires as President
- Chair's Chat**
Jude Pilgrim writes her first article as Chair of the Society
- 6 **Executive Committee Changes**
- 7 **Coraclemaking Courses**
- 8 **International Members**
Two of our new members from outside the UK enlighten us about their induction to the world of coracles and coraclemaking
- 10 **Coracle Society 25th Anniversary AGM Weekend**
Dylan Jones recounts our weekend of celebrations at St Fagans
- 12 **Carmarthen River Festival/London Coracle/Inaugural Lake District Meet**
- 13 **Save Our Heritage Huts - Thomas Hut in Cenarth/Ironbridge Regatta**
- 14 **17th Century Description of an East Yorkshire Coracle?**
National Poetry Day prompts Bruce Watson to consider coracles in Yorkshire
- 15 **Coracles in Ancient Literature**
Dylan Jones takes a look at coracle history in Welsh literature
- 16 **Coracles Around The World**
Coracle articles from newspapers around the world
- 18 **Diary of Lizzie Moonlight**
Wendy Gee diarises her coracle expeditions of 2015
- 19 **Cameron Comey Memorial Trust**
- 20 **From The Archives**
A dip into our Journal archives
- 22 **Coracle History In The Press/The Coracle Classic Vehicle Road Run**
- 23 **Bures Coracle Regatta**
Steve Miles reports on this year's regatta at Bures
- 24 **The Coracle Society Officers 2014-15/Contact Us**

Cover photograph: Coraclemaking in North Carolina, USA (Forest Hazel)

The Coracle Society Journal - Autumn 2015

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Editorial

Euan Raffel

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Well, another coracle season comes to a close, as does the year we celebrated 25 years of The Coracle Society. As a final celebration of our silver jubilee, this year's Journal is slightly larger than usual and thanks to the many contributions by our members, is full to overflowing with articles, photos and the like which I hope you will enjoy perusing. I've had a dip into the archives of Society publications and reprinted a couple of items that appeared early on in our history which, again, I hope you will enjoy reading - perhaps a few of you will remember reading them when they were originally published? If you have any feedback on this year's Journal please don't hesitate to get in touch - details on the back cover.

I have been lucky to attend a number of our celebratory events this year. I won't go in to detail about these, as they're discussed later, however I shall mention a couple - firstly, the return of coracles to Welshpool. This was a wonderful day with the weather on our side. A number of members from across the country made their way to the Montgomery canal for the day, and both we and the Ironbridge Coracle Trust were represented. The turn out was good though it would have been nice to have seen a few more members there. We had enough participants for races in the afternoon and many people fresh to coracling tried their hand, including the local Mayor. A local photographer took lots of fantastic photographs, including a step by step of a capsized - you can see these on our Facebook page.

The second event I wanted to mention was our inaugural Lake District meet in partnership with Society member Overwater Boats. This turned out to be a quiet affair with just a handful of us braving the Cumbrian rain. The numbers didn't work for a regatta to be held, but we braved a short break in the rain/wind to get out on Lake Bassenthwaite for a leisurely paddle for an hour or so. We had a variety of coracles to try out including a number of freshly built coracles of multiple styles, a PVC covered Shrewsbury, a Teme and a Cleddau that Dave Purvis has adapted to include a porthole in the floor so you can observe - conditions permitting - what flows underneath. The currach sadly didn't get an outing (I did get a chance to try it out at Ironbridge) but did prompt much interest.

The weather tended to be against us for yet another year, however as we know a bit of rain doesn't stop coraclers at all. Participants and spectators again braved heavy rain at Ironbridge for another year of fun on the water. Fingers crossed we get a bit more sun next year!

Please do keep sending in your content for us to share - our Facebook page, now nearly a year old - is proving a hit and a great way to share photos, videos and more, as well as connecting with other coraclers around the globe. As I write this we have 137 people 'liking' our page - more than our membership! If you have internet access, do take a look - facebook.com/coraclesociety - no Facebook account required.

President's Thoughts

Dr Irving Finkel



Photo: Karl Chattington

For a land-locked, lay-about landlubber of a museum curator slap-bang in the middle of London the coracle is not what you would call a familiar daily proposition. That was certainly true for me for a long time, because up until quite recently my entire knowledge of coracles derived from *Treasure Island*, which informs the impressionable young reader that it is maroons who need them. Thanks to the great courtesy extended to me on the occasion of the last AGM I have with safety negotiated the terrors of initiation, being wetted no part in the process. This is encouraging in its effects, and all will I trust be plain sailing from now on.

At the time of writing your President has just returned from a visit to India, lecturing chiefly on the subject of *The Ark Before Noah*, to much edification and gratification. Talking about the reconstruction, building and ultimately the launch of the World's Greatest Coracle went over well, with exuberant questions from the audience and the press, with the result that there was a good deal of Malabar pride that the great event could not have happened without their skills and hospitality. In Trivandrum I so far forgot my modesty as to reveal the honour that has been done by our Society, whereupon I had to explain that we have coracles in the British Isles, and that they are venerable here, too. They were much taken with the idea of the Society, indeed the owner of the boatyard where the Babylonian Coracle had been built suggested on a rush of enthusiasm that an Indian equivalent should be formed. Perhaps, one day, there will be an Indian chapter with exchange visits, on the way to global domination.

One plan for the coming year is to hold a temporary exhibition in Room 3 in the British Museum in which an Indian coracle in the collection will be exhibited together with pictures and narrative. I am hoping that an Iraqi specimen can be added to our fleet before long.

The only sad news from the Indian end was that the great reconstructed Kerala coracle that was built with such care no longer exists. No authority could be found locally to take it over, and the gradual waterlogged sinking into the mud of some 78 tons of wood and bitumen meant that there was no choice. I assume and indeed hope that there was a good deal of recycling, but such is the fate of man's constructions. The story lives on, however, in the television documentary films, the great archive of photographic documentation that we made, and the *Ark Before Noah* book, which voyages on and will carry the adventure story of the world's

greatest coracle into other languages and communities.

A Fond Farewell

Sir Peter Badge

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I leave office with some sadness but many happy memories and great satisfaction. Sadness, because during my time as Chairman and President the deaths of some great traditional coracle men have occurred, namely: Ronnie Davies of the Teifi (Cenarth); John and Fred Davies of the Severn (Shrewsbury); Edgworth Evans of the Taf; Raymond Rees MBE of the Tywi; Bernard Thomas of the Teifi (Llechryd); and Eustice Rogers of the Severn (Ironbridge). Also we lost my illustrious predecessor Dr Geraint Jenkins. I am singularly fortunate in being able to call them my friends.



Outgoing Chairman Dave Purvis presents Sir Peter Badge with a series of framed prints on his retirement at St Fagans in July 2015

However it gives me great pleasure to know that the Society has never been in better health, particularly as it has in its ranks the present traditional coracle men and others who have contributed so much, for example a creator of a new type of coracle, an instructor of a series of very successful coracle making courses and a distinguished former Chairman (Dave Purvis) who has pioneered the coracle message far and wide.

Finally may I wish every success to my illustrious successor, Dr Irving Finkel, to whom we are most grateful in establishing beyond all doubt the length of our beloved craft's rich heritage, when he translated the inscription in cuneiform script on the "Simmons Tablet", which dealt conclusively with the history of the famous flood.

Chair's Chat

Jude Pilgrim (née Walker)

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It was with some trepidation that I took up Dave Purvis' challenge to take on the Chair of The Coracle Society at the AGM in July – Dave has been such a great Chair over the last 3 years that I will struggle to fill his shoes. Dave has helped membership of the Society grow, largely due to his enthusiasm and his willingness to travel widely round the country. He has supported the start of two new regattas in Cumbria and Welshpool and he has arranged or helped with loans to museums and exhibitions.

My own area of interest is Ironbridge and after the fun of raising funds to purchase Eustace Rogers' coracle shed, the new Ironbridge Coracle Trust (ICT) is now down to its last £200! It's time to develop the conservation plan, which will enable us to raise funds to stabilise the shed and display it to the public. The ICT aims to make

more people aware of Ironbridge's coracle heritage and to run the annual Ironbridge regatta. Due to the rain (for the third year running), the regatta made a loss of £400 this year.

I attended several other regattas this summer and I would particularly like to mention the Bures regatta, at which Quentin Page displayed and used five hide covered coracles. It was lovely to see them in use at such a friendly regatta and I hope that we can re-forge closer ties with the East Anglian coracle contingent in future. Thanks to Steve Miles for his hospitality.

There are concerns elsewhere for the more traditional use of coracles on the Towy, where net fishing for salmon and sewin is under threat. We may need to be prepared to rally round for a march on the Welsh Assembly to make the point that this form of fishing is a heritage based tradition that cannot be allowed to die.

I am keen to support more local groups to become established round the country, as they are often the key to increasing local interest in the coracles of the area, which can then build at a national level. We already have several local groups which do good work, and if you would like to set something up where you are please get in touch and I shall be pleased to help and advise on group structures, fundraising and charitable registration.

Executive Committee Changes

Our 25th anniversary AGM at St Fagans saw a number of changes to our Executive Committee.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, Sir Peter Badge retired as President of the Society. We wish him a long and happy retirement. He is succeeded by Dr Irving Finkel. Peter Faulkner and Martin Fowler, in recognition of their service to the Society and the coracle movement, were made Vice Presidents.

After a longer than planned term, Dave Purvis retired the post of Chairperson. He is succeeded by Jude Pilgrim (née Walker). Dave remains an active part of the Society, returning to the Committee. Andrew Betteridge stepped down as Vice Chairperson and is succeeded by Bruce Watson.

Vacancies in the Committee were filled by Andrew Betteridge, Gerwyn Lewis, June Lewis and Dave Purvis.



Photo: Euan Raffel

From left: outgoing Chair Dave Purvis, incoming Chair Jude Pilgrim, incoming President Dr Irving Finkel and outgoing President Sir Peter Badge

Coraclemaking Courses

As always, there were a number of coraclemaking courses during 2015. Here are some photos of courses held at Middle Ninfa Farm, Abergavenny, and in Henley on Thames (Photos: Richard Lewis and Alistair Phillips)



International Members

We have always had a small number of members outside the UK. This year we welcomed two new international members - Pete from New Zealand and Forest from the United States. Here they enlighten us about their induction to the world of coracles and coraclemaking. Forest's article has been edited to fit in the Journal - you can read it in full at coraclesociety.org.uk/uscoracle

Coracles in New Zealand

Pete Sullivan

A partly completed Severn on Christchurch, Avon River (NZ) style coracle. The material used is Kauri Marine Ply in 30 mm strips. The laths are almost ready to glue to the gunwhale and I intend placing glue between each junction of the lattice weave to stiffen it up even more than just having the fabric doing this.

There is currently no seat as I intend incorporating a flotation filled cavity beneath it and having the whole unit detachable, in case it ever needs a new skin.



Photo: Pete Sullivan



Photos: Pete Sullivan

Here is my finished paddle which is based on a Teifi blade. It's made from laminated cedar with a Matai hardwood tip. I've covered it in fine glass cloth and coated it with epoxy to stiffen it a bit and also to make it more durable.

I've modelled the handle on a waka paddle I use, but made it slightly narrower so that it tucks comfortably into my armpit for that time I have to paddle one handed and wrestle with a net!

Coraclemaking in North Carolina

Forest Hazel

As a child, I spent a great deal of time with my maternal grandfather, William Morgan, whose parents had come over from the Vale of Glamorgan. He was always proud of his Welsh background and passed that pride along to me. Having had the opportunity to visit Wales a couple times, I observed the coracles on display at St Fagans, and having a long time interest for hunting and fishing, thought that they would be an ideal craft for fishing in the broad, slow rivers of North Carolina.

I decided to try my hand at making one myself. I read everything I could find on the topic and found that while there were several good books on the history of coracles, there were few on the actual building process. And here in North Carolina, it's not like I could just pick up the phone and call a neighbour for advice. However, I decided to give it a try anyway.

At a local hardwood supply store I was able to buy a large plank of ash which a friend from church sawed up into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch laths, roughly 9' long. After soaking the laths I began the slow process of bending them to the desired shape.

I used a heat gun (usually used to remove wallpaper) to heat the damp laths and after much deliberation I ended up tacking the bent laths to my workbench, tying them with bailing twine at the proper angle to hold them in place until they dried. While waiting for the laths to dry I worked on the seat and the paddle, both constructed out of cypress wood, a common wood in eastern North Carolina formerly used to make dug out canoes by the Native people and the early settlers.

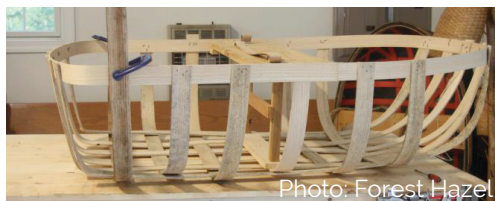


Photo: Forest Hazel

I then attached the rim to the seat and put in the longitudinal laths. These went in easily enough, but I found that weaving the transverse laths in was more difficult. One thing I did notice, in examining many of the photos of older coracles, was that they were not always perfect, which was rather encouraging. I used a double layer of canvas as a covering, stretched it as tight as possible and stapled it to the rim, stitched the corners and waterproofed the canvas with a coat of bituminous paint. This is hard to find over here and rather expensive, so the second and third coats were applied using a product called Flex-Shield, a liquid rubber substance used here for waterproofing and sealing cracks and holes. This seems to work pretty well.



Photo: Forest Hazel

The last step, which I am working on as I write this, is to finish staining and attaching the gunwales. Due to the size of the finished craft and the double layer of canvas, the total weight comes to roughly 35lbs. A bit more than I had planned, but I'm not planning to take it on any five mile hikes, just from the

truck to the shoreline. I had hoped to finish it and send photos of it on the water in time for the Journal, but I was called out of town to work and so I will have to wait a few more days to try it out. If nothing else, I have learned that making a coracle is much like cooking North Carolina barbeque; it is not a process that can be rushed, but will be done when it's done.

Coracle Society 25th Anniversary AGM Weekend

Dylan Jones

It was appropriate this year that The Coracle Society's 25th anniversary would be held at St Fagans: National History Museum (previously the Welsh Folk Museum), as it was here the concept of forming such a Society was discussed and thankfully implemented. We will be forever grateful for those founding members to have the foresight in creating a unique and enterprising society! Long may we continue to promote and preserve the use and knowledge of coracles, curraghs and allied craft into the 21st century.

The AGM coincided with the museum's annual Fishing Weekend which grows in stature every year. To mark the Society's anniversary, local brewers Tomos a Lilford were asked to produce a special ale. They certainly succeeded with much aplomb and many thanks to Rob & Jim Lilford and

Photo: National Museum Wales



- an overwhelming number of volunteers wanted to be assigned to this area. As you can imagine many staff were upset when they were posted somewhere else!

Across the weekend, members of the

Society were given the opportunity to visit our new Collections Centre at St Fagans. It is here our reserve collections are kept and it was good to see so many members taking advantage of this opportunity. Coracles not on display were inspected - the Cleddau, Shrewsbury and Ironbridge



Photo: National Museum Wales

to name but a few. It is thanks to Sir Peter Badge that we have recently acquired a Tywi fibreglass coracle and I sincerely hope it will be on display one day. The tour also consisted of seeing the fishing collection, comprising of unique objects such as the putts and putchers which were still in use on the Severn Estuary until quite recently. Any members who visit St Fagans and wish to see our reserve collection please ring me or drop me an email.

To many of us the highlight of the weekend was the inspirational talk given by Dr Irving Finkel on 'Building the Biggest Coracle in the World'. Due to construction work at St Fagans it was decided to hold the talk at the marquee on site which turned out to be a far from ideal location; we are indebted to Irving in giving a masterpiece of a talk in such trying circumstances!

Later, it was good to see our new President being given his first outing in a coracle

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Photo: National Museum Wales

under the expert tuition of Karl Chattington. I am sure this will not be the last time we see Dr Finkel in a coracle! I was later told by Karl that our President is a natural. Who knows maybe we shall see a coracle exhibition at the British Museum one day?

Being such a lovely sunny day, the visitor figures for the Saturday were 4,274 and it was good to see so many of the public taking a keen interest in the activities on the ponds. It is thanks to Karl Chattington that quite a few of the primary children of Ysgol Iolo Morganwg were given their first opportunity in a coracle. Hopefully their parents will buy them a coracle for Christmas! It surprises me so many children are unaware of the existence of coracles but thankfully The Coracle Society has made great strides to rectify this over the last 25 years.



Photo: National Museum Wales

The member's dinner was held on the Saturday evening at The Plymouth Arms in St Fagans, a well attended event affording a wonderful opportunity for members to make new acquaintances and catch up with old friends over hearty food. The evening concluded with a gesture of thanks to the retiring Sir Peter Badge, with

Martin Fowler delivering a speech and Dave Purvis presenting Sir Peter with a series of framed coracle prints.

The AGM was held on the Sunday at the Castle. In hindsight this is where Dr Finkel's talk should have been held but unfortunately it had been booked for a wedding. Sadly we were unable to get the bride or groom out on the coracle! With formalities over it was time to have a photo session and it was good to see so many founding members present on the day. Sadly, the weather put a halt to any prospect of having a regatta - the rain was near torrential - but this did not deter a few hardy coraclers going out onto the ponds, which included the brewer Jim Lilford. As



Photo: Euan Raffel

with our new President, Jim was a natural in the water but not to be outdone, his brother Rob later joined the Society and has acquired a coracle - brotherly competition! We look forward to seeing him on the water before long. It was a shame the rain intervened and our visitor numbers were certainly down to the previous day with only 641 coming to the museum. For those who turned up they had an opportunity to see an ancient craft that has largely been unaltered for thousands of years. Long may we see coracles on our waters! For many members it was an opportunity to catch up with old friends over coffee or a 'Cwrwgl' beer.

I sincerely hope everyone enjoyed the AGM at St Fagans and if you are ever in the vicinity please get in touch. Looking forward for the 50th anniversary!

Carmarthen River Festival

Julie Rees

During August, Carmarthen held its first Vintage Festival. This saw a brass band with local dignitaries lead the parade down to the River Towy for an action packed afternoon at the annual River Festival.

Pictured is Malcolm Rees with his 10 year old daughter Mia Rees, who proudly carried her coracle made by her late grandfather and coraclemaker Raymond Rees.



Photo: Julie Rees

London Coracle

We were recently contacted by the Natural History Museum in London, asking for some advice. They have a Peter Faulkner Boyne-style coracle which, before falling in to disrepair, was used on their Wildlife Pond



Photo: National History Museum

Inaugural Lake District Coracle Meet

Mark Aplin



Photo: Mark Aplin

A terrible weather forecast for the first Overwater Boats/Coracle Society Lake District Meet meant a small turn out for the first ever coracle meet in the Lake District.

But there was a bit of a lull in the weather in the morning so we got out on the water and made the best of the conditions - lovely and calm to start

with - but sure enough at about lunch time the strong winds arrived and forced a retreat.

Many thanks to everyone who turned out, particularly to Euan and Dave who travelled furthest and particularly to Dave for bringing a trailer loaded with coracles and a currach.

Save Our Heritage Huts - Thomas Hut in Cenarth

Martin Fowler has completed the restoration and reinterpretation of the John Christmas Thomas hut at the National Coracle Centre in Cenarth. Here are a couple photos of the completed project. If you are visiting South Wales, please do pop in to the National Coracle Centre in Cenarth - Martin will be delighted to see you.



Photo: Martin Fowler



Photo: Martin Fowler

Ironbridge Coracle Regatta

Steve Miles/Euan Raffel

The good news was that it wasn't raining as much as last year! The regatta is always held on August Bank Holiday Monday and has a large group of regulars who come from far and wide to attend, as well as locals. The day consists of a variety of races and competitions with something for everyone - the novice race for those who have just built their first coracle over the weekend at Small Woods, to the fiercely contested experts race, whirling dervishes, fish kebabs and of course water polo - guaranteed to have at least one swimmer!

New this year was a currach race - Dave brought his currach down from Yorkshire, raced by Bruce Watson and Euan Raffel, while Terry Kenny and Gerwyn Lewis took charge of Gerwyn's currach. It was a close sprint with a tricky U-turn half way, but Bruce and Euan just edged the win.



Photo: Steve Miles

Many thanks to the Ironbridge Coracle Trust for organising this year's regatta.

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17th Century Description of an East Yorkshire Coracle?

Bruce Watson

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I hope this won't sound like a seminar by an Oxbridge don, nor that I am teaching readers to suck eggs!

On 8th October it was National Poetry Day, which naturally meant blanket coverage on Radio 4. Listening while I worked, my ears pricked up at the reading of a poem by Andrew Marvell. Who is he I hear you ask?

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) was a friend and colleague of John Milton – the author of "Paradise Lost". He was born in a village near Hull, educated at Hull Grammar School and later in life was Member of Parliament for Hull.

These days he is probably best remembered for his poem of sexual frustration "To His Coy Mistress":

*Had we but world enough, and time
This coyness, Lady, were no crime...*

In 1651 Marvell was working as a tutor to Mary Fairfax, daughter of Sir Thomas Fairfax, the retired general of the New Model Army. Fairfax lived at Appleton House, which is between Tadcaster and Selby - not far from Hull.

Whilst there, Marvell wrote a long poem entitled "Upon Appleton House, to my Lord Fairfax". It runs to 97 verses in all, but it is the final verse that provoked me to write, and is as follows:

*But now the salmon-fishers moist
Their leathern boats begin to hoist;
And, like Antipodes in shoes
Have shod their heads in their canoos.
How tortoiselike, but not so slow,
These rational amphibii go?
Let's in: for the dark hemisphere
Does now like one of them appear.*

Is that not an accurate description of coracles being carried?

And as we all know, before calico there was woolen cloth (gwlan in Welsh) and before that there was leather, or rawhide as Peter Faulkner might prefer.

Coracles in Ancient Literature

Dylan Jones

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Coracles are mentioned in Welsh literature and 'corygeu' are named in the Mabinogi. The Gododdin poem written by Aneirin dates back to the seventh century whereupon one line reads:

'ef lledi bysc yng corwc'

Translated would mean to kill a fish in his coracle. The medieval Welsh laws gave the value of a coracle at eight pence:

'corwc with keinhawc kyfreith'

It is through our cywyddau, Welsh poems in a special metre, that we are able to have a better idea of the shape and design of coracles. In this case in north east Wales we have Ifan Fychan ab Ifan ab Adda soliciting a coracle from one Sion Eutun in the 15th century:

*Am gwrwgl i ymuriaw
Am y pysg drud cyn y Pasg draw
Crair lleder, croyw air Lladin
Codrwyn du, caeadrwym din
Cod groenddu da, ceidw grinddellt
Y gerwyn deg o groen du
Bwyled sad, ble cela" son
Bas ydyw o bais eidion
Padell ar ddŵr ni'm pydra
O groen cu edion du da*

*For a coracle to beat about
For the valuable fish before next Easter
A leather relic, pure Latin word
Black covering enclosing its bottom
A bag of black skin, preserves dry laths
A fair vat of black skin
A firm buckler (why should I conceal it)
It is shallow, made of bullock's tunic
A pan which will not cause me rot in water
Made from the fair skin of a good black bullock*

Coracles Around The World

Here we share a couple of coracle articles found in the media around the world

Coracle Operators Want Ban Lifted

This article is from Indian newspaper The Hindu and was published 14 October 2015.

"The coracle operators in Hogenakkal observed a fast demanding lifting of the ban on coracle operations. The ban was imposed when a coracle capsized recently claiming six lives. There are 414 coracle operators and 3,000 families dependent on this business. "We are like traditional coastal fisher folks. We do not know any other business and this is what we have been doing since the time of our grandfathers," says Kempuraj, an office-bearer of Hogenakkal Coracle Operators association. There are 216 coracles and the boatmen here operate coracles on a rotational basis.

"Since it is not possible for all boatmen to operate, we plan in such a manner that no one boatman operates the second day. This way, everybody gets 15 earning days a month. The education of our wards and everyday sustenance is dependent on this," he says. On a normal day, a boatman makes Rs.200 to Rs.500 and on weekends between Rs.500 to Rs.1,000.

According to the coracle operators, tourism in Hogenakkal depends largely on coracle operations and there are ancillary petty occupations that depended on livelihood sustenance from coracle operations.

However, the ban has put the entire local service industry in a state of limbo.

The past one month proved to be a sort of test of truth both for the administration and coracle operators, as every safety protocol came under intense scrutiny.

After the mishap, all 416 coracle operators were put to a 10-day intensified training in Hogenakkal for test of swimming, rescue and first aid skills. In addition, all 216 coracles were subject to safety standards and of these, 40 coracles were declared unfit for operation. The inspecting team had also certified the coracles with the fitness/expiry dates up to which they could be operated.

"We are careful about not operating coracles when the water level crosses 10,000 cusecs. Our livelihood depends on the safety of the tourists. That was a terrible tragedy and it was the first in a long time. But, now, coracle operators have accepted



Photo: The Hindu

every safety standard that has been put forth, yet permission has been withheld,' says Mr. Kempuraj.

While a coracle can sustain weight up to 1 tonne, earlier, a coracle was allowed to carry 6-plus-1 persons. But, now after the tragedy, the number has been reduced to 4-plus-1 persons. "When we petitioned the Collector, we were told to ensure that each coracle is also equipped with floats. We have agreed to all terms and conditions."

Buried Prison Relics Get New Life

This article is from Australian newspaper The West Australian and was published 29 January 2014. Many thanks to Martin Fowler for sharing this.

"Deep below the foundations of Fremantle Prison more than 125 years ago, criminals toiled to excavate more than 1km of tunnels by hand.

It was backbreaking work, but the tunnels were critical for the supply of water to a new colony.

And they used round metal boats known as coracles to carry their tools and materials.

From next week, a complex operation will begin to painstakingly remove two



Photo: The West Australian

coracles from muddy earth where they were abandoned more than a century ago.

"As far as we know, these are the only coracles ever used in WA," prison curator Olimpia Cullity said. "That makes them unique items and worth saving.

"These objects are 125 years old and slowly corroding away. Their removal will be technically difficult as they are large and fragile, semi-submerged in water and mud and deep underground."

Traditionally made of wood and animal hide, coracles were popular in west England, Scotland and Wales where they were used for fishing for centuries.

Ms Cullity said prison and WA Museum staff would begin extracting the coracles on Monday.

They would be treated to halt deterioration and later put on display at the jail. The prison tunnels opened for public tours by foot and boat in 2005."

Diary of Lizzie Moonlight

Wendy Gee

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My first outing this year was the Montgomery canals triathlon on 9th May. I only did the paddle part - a 7.5 miles stretch this year. It took me just over 3 and a half hours to complete, including portaging round 4 locks - not a bad time for a 72 year old. The winning time for the 35 miles, 17 cycling, 10.5 walking/running and the paddle - if you're mad enough to complete the whole triathlon - was 5 hours 35 minutes. I was the only coracle there as usual.

My next outing was the Welshpool coracle regatta in June, where I was on the water for about 5 hours, only getting out to get some lunch. I was useful for towing beginners back to shore and taking part in the races in the afternoon, good fun was had by all apart from one young man who did a spectacularly slow capsize much to everyone's amusement. It would be good if they ran it again next year. I was sure I'd not be able to beat the youngsters in the races, but it's fun trying.

Next it was down to Suffolk as I'd finally been able to persuade her brother,

Photo: Wendy Gee



Dave, who lives down there (and has Alzheimer's) that if I did all the organising he could still paddle. So off we went on the 22nd and 23rd of August to the river Stour and had 3 hours and 2.5 hours paddling upstream from the Granary at Sudbury, starting from a different place each day. The second day it was more being pulled through weeds than paddling for some of it, as we explored an overgrown back water. It was all new to me as I'd only ever been downstream when doing the Sudbury to the Sea, 24 miles over

two days. This year it wasn't possible as when it was on, I had to look after 2 of my grandchildren instead, shame! Still it was nice to see somewhere different and we had a great time - my brother thoroughly enjoyed it and found that he could still physically paddle in "the Shrew", his Shrewsbury coracle.

Next it was a great favourite of mine - the Ironbridge regatta on 31st August. I managed the whirling dervishes without falling out this year, which was great as I like to keep my inside dry. The polo there is always great, bit one sided this year but fun nevertheless. It's the taking part that matters not winning, but I was very pleased to receive a bottle of the Coracle Society's anniversary brew for my part helping a team win the fish kebab race final.

My final outing was on 19th October - an impromptu outing on the Shropshire Union canal for an hour, I think the short time was because I had Bess with me as a passenger - she's not been in since 2013. Luckily Bess remembered how to get in and out and was really very well behaved; only one slightly hairy moment when she decided to have a drink and I didn't have much freeboard. It was lovely to be out on a lovely sunny wind free day and nothing to do but enjoy it.



Photo: Wendy Gee

Cameron Comey Memorial Trust

Julie Rees



Photo: Julie Rees

Splat Cymru, who are a non profit social enterprise organisation for art, made a giant coracle structure for the River Festival.

The giant coracle has been made from recycled material and houses solar lights to light up at night.

It has been made to house personal messages for Cameron Comey, Kieran Bennett-Leefe and others who have sadly lost their lives on our river.

(Pictured right: Jameson Barker of Splat Cymru)

Young Cameron Comey was tragically lost to the River Towy during February 2015. After months of searches by the Rescue Services, he has sadly never been returned to his family.

The Towy coracle has stood as a symbol of hope on Pont King Morgan Bridge in the town. With the approval of Cameron's family, The Carmarthen River Festival went ahead and took place over the August bank holiday.



Photo: Julie Rees

From The Archives

Euan Raffel

As we conclude our silver jubilee year, I felt it would be a good opportunity to reflect on our history. With that in mind, I've dipped into our archives and reprinted a couple of items. Firstly, the foreword from Geriant Jenkins and Peter Badge - then President and Chairman respectively - in our first Journal from 1990. The second item is an article that was originally published in our 1994 Journal. You can access our archive of Journals on our website - go to coraclesociety.org.uk/membership/journals and log in to access. Those not online can contact the Secretary and request reprints to be sent to you, free of charge.

Foreword

Peter Badge

When James Hornell wrote his classic treatise "Water Transport" in 1946 he recorded that Coracles were only to be found in use on the rivers TEIFI, TOWY, TAF, CLEDDAU, DEE and SEVERN and also within living memory on the USK, WYE, MONNOW and BOYNE. Sadly, today this tradition is only continued on the TEIFI, TOWY, TAF and SEVERN in Britain.

Moreover, on the 1st December 1987, the Times wrote that the TOWY Coracle net fishermen were ready to abandon their centuries old pursuit if proposals were passed which, in effect, would have doubled their net licence fees over the following two years. Happily, no doubt due in some measure to vocal and disparate public concern, this did not come about. It did, however, alert people to how close they had come to losing a precious and irreplaceable part of our national heritage because, of course, Coracles have an unbroken line of descent from pre Roman times to the present day. It was this principally which led to the formation of the Coracle Society in June of this year.

All is not gloom, however. Coracles are still being made and used for net fishing in West Wales and Eustace Rogers and John Davies continue their families' Coracle making traditions at Ironbridge and Shrewsbury on the Severn. Coracles are now being made by an increasing number of people as a result of the pioneering courses run by the Bewdley Museum, and the Green Wood Trust at Ironbridge. They have also revived Coracle regattas in their areas. This year the Basket Makers' Association successfully made a replica of the basket-like Spey Curragh in conjunction with a member of the Coracle Society. This Coracle like craft was last used over 150 years ago.

What I have written fortifies the Society in its twin aims of both preserving our precious Coracle past and encouraging their increased use and future development.

On the River Teifi no new licences for the non-tidal section of the river have been issued since 1935 and as a consequence the use of coracles has declined year by year, so that today the most famous of all Teifside coracle villages, Cenarth, has no coracle fishermen at all. A little over a hundred years ago a contemporary observer could write of Cenarth, "there is scarcely a cottage in the neighbourhood without a coracle hanging by the door"; by 1972 that tradition of two thousand years was dead.

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Harry Rogers Remembered

Nick Freeman

As a woodland crafts instructor, demonstrating at various venues in the south of England, I often get into conversation with those members of the public commonly referred to as "old boys". At a large agricultural show this summer, I was busily setting up a variety of traditional tools and finished products. This included my Mark I Greenwood Trust coracle. As a consequence I got into a fascinating conversation with a man who had lived for many years at Ironbridge and could remember the renowned Harry Rogers - coraclemaker.

I was "all ears" and did what I always do - when I got home I wrote down everything I had been told in a notebook kept for the purpose. Here is the gist of what I learnt:

Harry Rogers poached for rabbits in his coracle and was often challenged by the local police. He overcame the problem by getting the permission of a local farmer to clear his land of rabbits. Thereafter, all the rabbits he was queried about always came from this particular site.

The man telling me the story thought for a little bit and added "It's a shame the police pestered Harry. He was a kind man and took hot soup, in his coracle, to the people stranded in their houses during the floods".

Again, speaking of the poaching, he said "Harry would have so many rabbits in his coracle that the gunwhale was barely out of the water". Finally he related that he could remember Harry Rogers "catching" and tethering flood driftwater which he towed and tied to the bank. This became his winter firewood.

It was these small but lively details, from a first hand witness, that put blood and flesh on someone that I had only heard of through photographs and distant hearsay.

The moral is: flaunt your coracle and live in hope that someone at some show will come forward and reminisce.

Coracle History in the Press



This clipping is from the Newport Advertiser. It accompanied an article about one Kevin Brady who recently swam the length of the Severn to raise money for Superhero Foundation.

However it was this picture, dated 1934, that caught the attention of Terry Kenny. You can just see the end of the Rogers' slipway on the right and Harry Rogers in the coracle, steadying the punt for local butcher Billy Jones, who completed a similar swim.

Image copyright 2015 Newport Advertiser

The Coracle Classic Vehicle Road Run

Julie Rees

In June of this year, Carmarthen town welcomed 'The Coracle Classic Vehicle Road Run' - the streets were transformed into an amazing display with hundreds of vehicles from bygone years and our boys were there to welcome them.



Photo: Julie Rees

Bures Coracle Regatta

Steve Miles

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This year I arrived at Rushbanks Farm campsite at Friday lunchtime, as I wanted to spend all afternoon brushing up on my rowing skills in the new dinghy (safety boat). Trying to row with reeds either side is challenging - sculling over the back is better - but there's a knack, which I haven't yet mastered. Dick Mundy arrived late afternoon so once dinner was cleared away we had a trip down to Wissington mill and back by coracle.



Photo: Steve Miles

For the regatta we could not have asked for better weather this year. Nice and sunny but not scorching hot. Teas were ordered as soon as our friends from Stour Valley Lavender got the kettle on, so soon we were all set. Jude Pilgrim from Ironbridge arrived early, so she was press-ganged into putting up the sign posters with Dick.

Most of our day is spent letting the public try our coracles with the emphasis on paddling and getting in/out by themselves. We had our first ladies only race, won by Anne - a Bures regular. Jude was second and newcomer Carole was third. I say newcomer - she's a recent convert from canoes. We also had a group of canoeists from the Tower Hamlets canoe club who, after having a go, were persuaded to have our second ladies only race.

Quentin brought a group of friends along who provided live music as well as their own hide coracles. This inspired our first hide coracle only race. Mr Q won, surprise, surprise, followed by Martin and Jim. Conwy had a brilliant idea for the poachers run.



Photo: Steve Miles

Three go up stream three down turn around and charge forward for the fish. What could possibly go wrong? All too soon it was time to pack up and head back to the campsite and the home brewed cider I had brought with me.

First thing Sunday morning, Dick and I decided to have a paddle up stream in the early morning mist and discuss the previous day's regatta. For me, there's nothing better than to be on a river first thing in the morning, especially with the long drive home ahead.

Next year's regatta is on Saturday 6th August at Bures Recreation Ground. We hope you'll be able to join us.

The Coracle Society Officers 2015/16

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Honorary Chairperson	Jude Pilgrim (née Walker)
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Tywi netsmen's representative	Malcolm Rees
Ironbridge representative	Terry Kenny

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