

25th anniversary 1990-2015



# *The Coracle Society*

[www.coraclesociety.org.uk](http://www.coraclesociety.org.uk)

## Newsletter

Spring 2015

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# Editorial

Euan Raffel

I hope this newsletter finds you well. This year marks the Society's silver anniversary, 25 years since our formation in May 1990. In the past 25 years there has been a lot of work put in by so many people to make sure that coracles and their history continues to be known by the current and future generations.

Whilst the coracle is still used as a day-to-day craft in many parts of the world, here in the UK their use is not so frequent, for many reasons including the passing of important coraclemen such as Bernard Thomas and Raymond Rees, and the reduction of net licences for coracle fishermen. But thanks to the work of people such as Sir Peter Badge, Terry Kenny, Malcolm and Julie Rees, Dave Purvis, Peter Faulkner and Martin Fowler to name a few, the 'word' of the coracle continues to be spread today - even thriving in recent years - and long may this continue.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and please keep sending in your news, photographs, updates and events.

## Chairman's Chat

Dave Purvis

Hello and greetings for 2015. Spring appears to have finally sprung and if the Easter weather is anything to go by we are in for a spell of decent weather, so now is the time to get out those coracles and currachs and give them a lick of bitumen/lanolin ready for this year's

season - a great way to relax during the rigours of election fever.

As you know, this year the Society is celebrating its 25th anniversary. The committee have decided to return to our "spiritual home" of St Fagans for our AGM and regatta. Those who attended the 20th anniversary celebrations will remember what a wonderful weekend it was; we're planning something similar for our silver jubilee celebrations - more on this later in the newsletter.

Looking at the events calendar, a few of the regular events have disappeared off the radar for several reasons, but I am pleased to report there are two new regattas this year: the first will be in June at Welshpool, courtesy of the Montgomery Canal Trust. Once a thriving area for netsmen, Welshpool coracles disappeared shortly after the imposition of the 1923 Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act, which spelt the doom of coracle netting on the Severn. Ironbridge and Shrewsbury were similarly affected, but thanks to the Rogers and Davies families the coracle building tradition survived there; it is particularly pleasing therefore to see the Welshpool revival this year.

The second will be in the Lake District at the end of the summer. I am not aware of any coracle tradition in Cumbria but the Society are very pleased to support Mark Aplin of Overwater Boats, who will be running his first coracle regatta on Bassenthwaite Lake in the beautiful Lake District. Mark has been running coracle and paddle making courses in Cumbria for several years and has provided us with a steady supply of new members. More details later in the newsletter.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who generously contributed to our heritage huts appeal. I'm sure you have been keeping up to date with the aftermath of the fundraiser through updates on the website and in the Journal. I'm pleased to report that Martin Fowler of the National Coracle Centre in Cenarth has, over the winter, rebuilt the Thomas workshop inside the centre and is currently fitting it out as it would have originally been. We look forward to being able to share photographs of this with you but in the mean time if you're in the area, please do pop in and see Martin – he would be delighted to see you. Over in Ironbridge, the Ironbridge Coracle Trust are currently in the process of purchasing the Rogers hut and land, launching a website and starting the necessary work on restoring the hut. The Society has made an initial contribution from our appeal to the Trust and will make further contributions in the near future.

I do hope that everyone will make a special effort to support as many events as you can this year to ensure their success and secure the future of the Society – here's to our silver jubilee year and I look forward to meeting more of you at events this year.

## 2015 AGM and Regatta

This year, our AGM and regatta returns to St Fagan's: National History Museum near Cardiff, hosted by Dylan Jones. The dates to put in your diary is the weekend of 25-26 July. It will run in conjunction with the museum's fishing weekend. We are finalising details of the weekend, but

like the 20th anniversary celebrations in 2010, it will include a dinner which all members and their guests are welcome to attend.

The timetable for the weekend should be available in the next few weeks - if you have access to the internet, visit our AGM webpage [coraclesociety.org.uk/agm](http://coraclesociety.org.uk/agm). Don't worry if you don't have internet access though, we'll send you details about the weekend in the post nearer the time.

## Selfridges Coracle

Martin Fowler

During January and February, a Teifi coracle from the National Coracle Centre, made by Peter Davies of Cenarth was on show at Selfridges department store in Oxford Street, London. An artist formerly from Pembrokeshire was one of fourteen people selected to create a display within the store. He chose a theme based on boats and asked if I could lend him a coracle. The coracle was suspended from an anchor over one of the escalators in the store.

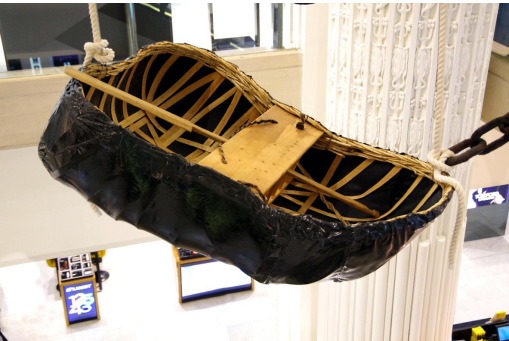
## Bright Old Things

Michael Lisle-Taylor

In a twist to Selfridges annual showcase of up and coming new talent, this year's campaign celebrates a retirement renaissance. Fourteen artists and designers who have embraced a new vocation later in life have each given a window to exhibit their work. They were also asked to name an object that inspires them for a large installation inside the Oxford Street building's central

atrium. Michael Lisle-Taylor a former Fleet Air Arm aircraft engineer turned sculptor proposed a coracle.

The coracle/currach has figured regularly in his art practice over the years. A familiar object from his childhood in Pembrokeshire, its simple construction is globally synonymous



Martin's coracle on display at Selfridges

with the first maritime vessels. He sees it as an icon of the pioneering spirit of sailors, their craft and relationship with the sea. The several years spent on Cold War patrols in the Arctic and North Atlantic ignited a deep adoration for the early Atlantic seafarers. The legacy of the coracle remains a great interest from pre-history, through the Celtic/Norse voyages to the collapsible special operations boats of the military.

Martin Fowler of the National Coracle Centre at Cenarth Falls generously loaned the coracle to the exhibition. A tour of the displays and exhibits in his museum immediately dispels any notion of the coracle being a localized folk craft. The coracle has been a fundamental tool for negotiating bodies of water, be it cultural purposes, fishing, migrating, escaping or exploring. This genre of vessel could well have existed in near all

societies for all history.

As part of Lisle-Taylor's concept a huge chain connects the coracle to an equally large ships anchor. The assemblage is hung alongside an interesting yet random selection of the other artists' objects. His window contains the sculpture 'Ginnungagap' which draws from coracle construction, Norse mythology and our geological past. The show ran through January and February 2015 in Selfridges Oxford Street, London.

## Welshpool coracles

As part of Making Waves 2015, coracles are making a return to Welshpool! On June 27th a day-long regatta will take place on the Town Wharf, split into two sessions - the morning session will be a team-based regatta, raising funds for Macmillan Cancer Support. The afternoon session will be an open regatta, suitable for all, with coracle displays, races and games, and the chance for all to try their hand at coracling.

For more information visit [coraclesociety.org.uk/welshpool2015](http://coraclesociety.org.uk/welshpool2015) or ring Pat Ward - his phone number is in the events listings.

## 2015 Macmillan Coracle World Championships

The Macmillan World Championship Coracle Relay Race returns for its 7th year on Friday 11th September 2015 in Shrewsbury, in support of Macmillan Cancer Support. 48 teams of four will

race in coracles across the River Severn, with the races commencing 2pm

Entry costs £100 per team and teams need to raise minimum £300 in sponsorship. Spectators are very welcome (and encouraged!) - a bar and barbeque will take place, and children's activities will also be running. More details are available on our website [coraclesociety.org.uk/cwc2015](http://coraclesociety.org.uk/cwc2015) or from our Secretary, Dylan Jones (details on back cover). Please also contact Dylan if you're interested in being part of a Coracle Society team

## Wanted: London coraclemaking demo

We have received an email from Mike Ross, head of Design Technology at Dulwich College, London. On Saturday 27th June they will be having a fete as part of their Founders Day celebrations and this year's theme is 'Discovery and Endurance', marking the centenary of Dulwich old boy Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial trans-Antarctica expedition.

Mike is keen on a Society member or members attending and putting on a display of coracles and coraclemaking for the over 3000 attendees. The coraclemaking element is important to them, not only as Mike heads the Design Technology department, but also to share traditional skills with both students and visitors. There is some funding available to make the event possible and needless to say this is an excellent opportunity for the Society.

If you would like more information or to discuss the event, please contact Mike

directly - phone him on 07973 393929 or email him at [RossMJ@dulwich.org.uk](mailto:RossMJ@dulwich.org.uk). If anyone does go ahead with this please contact Dylan to arrange loan of publicity materials.

## Coracle Society/Overwater Boats inaugural regatta

This inaugural coracle regatta in the Lake District, hosted by Mark Aplin of Overwater Boats in association with The Coracle Society as part of our 25th anniversary celebrations, is currently scheduled to take place on 12th September on Bassenthwaite Lake near Penrith. This event will be open to all who wish to attend; a small entry fee will apply. We hope to have a fun day of coracling, with an open paddle session and some skills demonstrations/coaching in the morning, and the usual range of fun events and competitions in the afternoon.

The arrangements for this event are still being finalised and some details - including the date - may change. For the latest information visit [coraclesociety.org.uk/lakedistrictregatta](http://coraclesociety.org.uk/lakedistrictregatta) or contact Mark directly - his details are on the event listings

Mark plans to run coraclemaking and paddle making courses in the week leading up to the event - please register your interest with Mark directly and check our online events calendar [coraclesociety.org.uk/events](http://coraclesociety.org.uk/events) for the details.

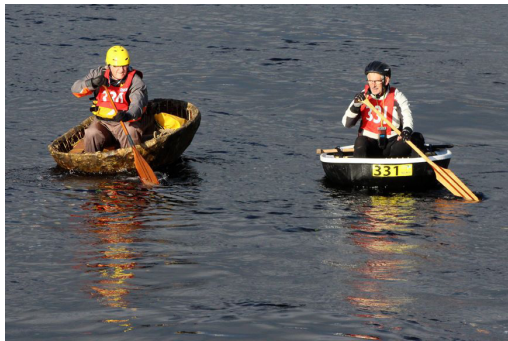
If you are interested in helping out with the running of the event, or wish to RSVP, please contact Mark directly.

## Tay Descent wrap up

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In the Journal we mentioned the Tay Descent, an annual event on the River Tay in Scotland, at which members Charlie Quinnell, Tim Jones and Bruce Watson were to attempt in coracles, for the first time in Tay Descent history. Unfortunately the Journal went to print just as they were taking on the Descent so we weren't able to update you on their progress.

For the first time in the five year history of the Tay Descent, three members of the Coracle Society successfully completed this course, much to the delight of the Descent organisers and their fellow competitors.



Bruce Watson and Tim Jones taking on the Descent

Charlie Quinnell of Inverness started the gruelling long course from Dunkeld to Perth, a total of 24 miles at 8.20am, accompanied by members Jane and Derry Wilkinson in an open Canadian canoe - taking a total of 7 hours and 10 minutes of hard and punishing paddling through the many obstacles on this white water section of the river.

Bruce Watson from Ironbridge and Tim

Jones from Hove began the shorter course below Thistlebrigg rapids at



Charlie Quinnell taking on the Descent Stanley Mill, a seven mile run in fast water, completing the section in a respectable time of under two hours.

In total £350 was raised for Elgin Museum, home of a Spey coracle thought to be the oldest coracle in existence in the world. Heather Townsend, curator at Elgin said "I would again like to thank Charles Quinnell, Bruce Watson and Tim Jones of the Coracle Society for their efforts in raising £350 towards conservation and redisplay of the Spey currach. Thank you gentleman – I understand the weather conditions were rather fierce!"

In total over 350 paddlers participated in a great variety of canoes, kayaks and wave boards. 230 competitors completed the long course and 120 on the short course, with plenty of thrills and spills as would be expected along the way and most entrants were able to complete the day in good spirits.

Many congratulations to the intrepid Charlie, Bruce and Tim for their tremendous achievement and their great courage in rising to the challenge!

# 2015 events calendar

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Here is a summary of events taking place in 2015. If you know of any coracle-related events not listed, or are organising one yourself, please get in touch so we can spread the word - visit [coraclesociety.org.uk/contribute](http://coraclesociety.org.uk/contribute) or contact the Secretary. If you do not have internet access and would like more information about these events please contact us.

## **Welshpool coracle regatta - Saturday 27th June**

Welshpool Town Wharf. Contact Pat Ward - 07801 288388 or email [patward@intonet.co.uk](mailto:patward@intonet.co.uk)

## **Scottish Traditional Boat Festival - Saturday 4th-Sunday 5th July**

With coracle demonstrations from Dave Purvis. Portsoy, Aberdeenshire. Contact STBF Portsoy 01261 842951 or email [contact@stbfportsoy.com](mailto:contact@stbfportsoy.com), or Dave Purvis - 01765 690318

## **2015 Coracle Society AGM and regatta - Saturday 25th-Sunday 26th July**

Full details will be posted to you nearer the time. St Fagans National History Museum, Cardiff. Contact Dylan Jones - 029 2057 3438 or email [info@coraclesociety.org.uk](mailto:info@coraclesociety.org.uk)

## **Bures coracle regatta - Saturday 1st August**

Camping Friday night, regatta Saturday. Bures, Suffolk. Contact River Stour Trust - 01787 313199 or email [coracles@riverstourtrust.org](mailto:coracles@riverstourtrust.org)

## **64th Cilgerran coracle regatta - Saturday 22nd August**

Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire. Contact Mark Dellar - 07964 361665 or email [m\\_dellar@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:m_dellar@yahoo.co.uk)

## **Ironbridge coracle regatta - Monday 31st August**

Ironbridge, Telford & Wrekin. Contact Jude Walker - 01952 275606/07780 952583 or email [judyawalker@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:judyawalker@blueyonder.co.uk)

## **Guisborough Forest Festival - Saturday 6th September**

Coracle demonstrations by Dave Purvis. Contact Friends of Guisborough Forest - 01287 631132

## **2015 Macmillan Coracle World Championships - Friday 11th September**

Shrewsbury, Shropshire. Contact Macmillan Coracle World Championships committee - [coracleworldchampionships@gmail.com](mailto:coracleworldchampionships@gmail.com) (or contact our Secretary Dylan Jones - 029 2057 3438 - and we will relay your message)

## **Coracle Society/Overwater Boats Lake District coracle regatta - Saturday 12th September**

Bassenthwaite Lake, near Penrith, Cumbria. Details subject to change - please check before attending. Contact Mark Aplin - 07966 631335 or email [mark@overwaterboats.co.uk](mailto:mark@overwaterboats.co.uk)

## **Coracle making course at Higham Hall - Friday 13th-Sunday 15th November**

Course run by Mark Aplin, Overwater Boats. Contact Mark Aplin - 07966 631335 or email [mark@overwaterboats.co.uk](mailto:mark@overwaterboats.co.uk)

# The Coracle Society Officers 2014/15

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|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| President                      | Sir Peter Badge                                                                             |
| Vice Presidents                | Rod Bowen<br>John Davies<br>Terry Kenny                                                     |
| Honorary Chairman              | Dave Purvis                                                                                 |
| Honorary Vice Chairmen         | Andrew Betteridge<br>Malcolm Rees                                                           |
| Secretary/Archivist            | Dylan Jones: St Fagans National History Museum                                              |
| Treasurer                      | Euan Raffel                                                                                 |
| Membership Secretary           | Brian Pearce                                                                                |
| Committee                      | Mark Dellar<br>Peter Faulkner<br>Martin Fowler<br>Julie Rees<br>Bruce Watson<br>Jude Walker |
| Teifi netsmen's representative | Mark Dellar                                                                                 |
| Tywi netsmen's representative  | Malcolm Rees                                                                                |
| Ironbridge representative      | Terry Kenny                                                                                 |

## Contact us

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### Secretary

Dylan Jones, St Fagans: National History Museum, St Fagans, Cardiff, CF5 6XB  
Email [info@coraclesociety.org.uk](mailto:info@coraclesociety.org.uk) | Telephone 029 2057 3438

### Membership Secretary

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### Treasurer/Editor

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