



The Coracle Society

Journal

Autumn 2016



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Cover montage: BBC Countryfile Live 2016 (Euan Raffel and Mark Dellar)

The Coracle Society Journal - Autumn 2016

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Editorial

Euan Raffel

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Our 2016 season has come to a close and overall, it has been business as usual. The weather this summer has been better than in recent years – notably, the Ironbridge regatta had some sunshine!

We had a couple new events this year. The first – and biggest event ever for the Society – was the inaugural BBC Countryfile Live. We were invited to be a part of the Waterside feature alongside outdoor activities company and zone sponsor LNC Activities and Training. Over 4 days at the start of August we demonstrated two coracle builds, including a traditional Teifi coracle made by Rod Bowen and Mark Dellar, and provided free have a go coracling sessions to over 350 visitors to the show. Other activities in the zone included canoeing, kayaking and fishing demonstrations. All of these activities were provided free of charge to visitors of the show and collectively we had over 5000 members of the public taking part. We were joined at the show by the Teifi Coracle Netsmen Association and Ironbridge Coracle Trust – Mark Dellar of the former has written an article on the show which you can read later in the Journal. Despite the rather woeful publicity the BBC and organisers provided us (nothing on their website, social media or programme; no visits from the Countryfile team and a 5 second clip on their wrap up television programme), we feel the event was very successful for us and we hope to be invited back next year. We will keep you posted on this.

The second new event was not so much a new event, rather a new location for our AGM. We were invited to The Good Life Experience in north Wales in September for our meeting and regatta. It was a lovely event with lots of fellow craftsmen, music, good food and more. Whilst we had a lot of interest from people attending the festival, it was very poorly attended by members of the Society with only a handful of non-committee members at the AGM. There will be, of course, a variety of reasons as to why members couldn't attend and your committee would be grateful if you could take 10 seconds to answer a poll we have set up on the website – www.coraclesociety.org.uk/2016agmsurvey – so we can find out what didn't quite work about this year's AGM and regatta.

Finally – please do keep sending in your content for us to share. Our Facebook page continues to grow with over 250 people 'liking' our page. It's a great way to quickly share photos, videos and more with fellow members and non-members alike. If you want to take a look at what other people have shared, go to www.facebook.com/coraclesociety – no need to sign up for Facebook unless you want to take part. There is also Contribute, our portal for sharing news, articles and event details with us to publish on our website, Facebook page, newsletters and Journal – www.coraclesociety.org.uk/contribute

President's Thoughts

Dr Irving Finkel

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Due to his work commitments at the British Museum, our president Dr Finkel has been unable to write an item for the Journal. Here are a few thoughts he sent in for presentation at the AGM in September.

"I am frankly distraught that I cannot be with you on Sunday. I hereby submit my apology, but it is more heartfelt than apologies to be read out to committees usually are. I am truly sorry.

Left is a photograph which shows a window display in the shop of Arthur Beale, Covent Garden - round the corner from the British Museum - which was still in place up until a week or so ago. The coracle was made by someone in Reading; the girl I am not sure about. I share this because I was keen to show

that awareness of the coracle is still sometimes discoverable in the bleak grimness of at least one of our major cities.

I have written a story for children about the round ark business, entitled 'The Lifeboat that Saved the World'. We are currently negotiating about black and white drawings with the artist, but it will be published by Thames & Hudson hopefully in time to feature prominently in Christmas stockings."

Chair's Chat

Jude Pilgrim

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I have greatly enjoyed my year as chair of The Coracle Society and looking back over the time since we last met at St Fagans, I marvel at how quickly the time has passed.

I had hoped our outing to the Countryfile Live show might have swelled our numbers, but although we gave coracle rides to over 300 people we did not feature more than 5 seconds on the TV coverage, so it may not have the impact we originally hoped. It was a terrific effort by all who attended and a special thanks to Dave, who first picked it up and followed through until he had made it happen. A special thanks to the Cilgerran crew, who turned out in force and whose red t-shirts and skills with the netting demonstration and Teifi coracle building on Saturday and Sunday was amazing to watch.

Members of the Ironbridge Coracle Trust were invited to attend the Ironbridge World War Two event that took place over the May bank holiday weekend in Regatta Field and Dale End Park. There was an excellent turn out in the fine weather and lots of interest from visitors and re-enactors alike. We were able to promote the August bank holiday regatta to those who wanted to try out a coracle.

I was sorry to miss both the Carmarthen and the Cilgerran regattas, but I hear they went very well and the races were well attended. Our newest regatta at Welshpool, was also very successful, with the Welshpool Town Council getting involved and expanding the event from its first year with many stalls from local tradesmen – lots of delicious food stalls in particular!

The Ironbridge regatta had glorious weather for the first time in three years – everyone was so pleased to see the sun that when Jeremy Paxman turned up with a TV crew, no one actually pushed him in! Tern TV were making a series on rivers which will be shown next year – I'll make sure a notice goes on the website when I know when it will be shown.

The Macmillan Shrewsbury regatta took place on Friday 16th September. The event usually raises thousands of pounds for Macmillan Cancer Support and although not usually well attended by members, it is a fun event to raise awareness of the craft.

The Heritage Huts campaign set up by Dave Purvis has achieved what was desired. The Thomas hut can be seen in the National Coracle Centre at Cenarth and the Ironbridge hut project is moving towards submitting a bid to Heritage Lottery Fund, which will not just stabilise and restore the hut, but will interpret the heritage of coracles in Ironbridge and the place of the Rogers' family in the history of the river Severn at Ironbridge. We have at last managed to get Telford Council to take an interest and assist us with structural engineers advice and guidance. I was recently able to interview a member of Eustace's family, who has the shed visitors' book and one of his notebooks, as well as a fund of new stories about him and his father.

I must thank Dave Purvis for his help in getting to grips with the Society and its members. Thanks also to Euan of course, who is always ready to advise and help with technical problems and to help out with events and activities. Dylan has a fund of knowledge about coracles and has been a helpful secretary and archivist during the year.

Finally, we were all sorry to hear of the passing of Irlwyn John, Taf coracleman of St Clears. He passed away in January at age 85.

I have greatly enjoyed my time as chair, but I am going to have to pass on the baton due to the time the bid to HLF will take over the next year.

Thanks to all the committee and members and I hope the Society will continue to

gain members and expand its influence.

Executive Committee Changes

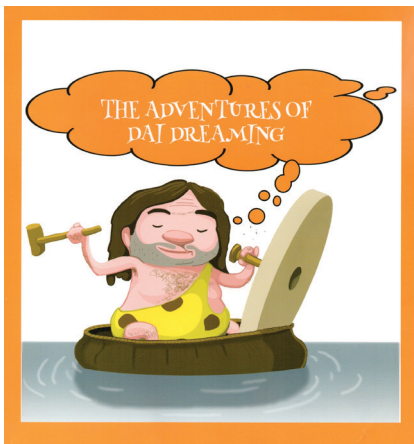
There were a couple of changes to the Executive Committee at the AGM in September,

Jude Pilgrim stepped down from her post as Chair and returned to the committee. Bruce Watson was elected chair of the Society for 2016-17.

All other officers were re-elected. After a five year term, in line with our constitution, the meeting voted that Dylan Jones would be eligible for re-election to the post of Secretary.

Coracle Books For Children

Euan Raffel/Julie Rees

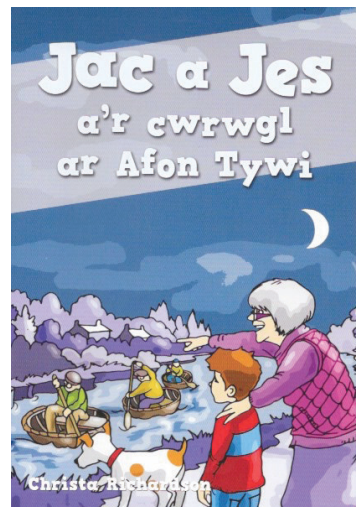


This year has seen the publication of two children's books featuring coracles.

'The Adventures of Dai Dreaming' has been created and written by Martin Fowler. In a part of the world we now call Wales, Dai was dreaming adventurous tales, he sat in his cave on his special chair, a chair that rocked from here to there, as it rocked it made Dai sleep and into his mind strange things would creep. Each time he slept his mind would race to find him some far off place, a time in history still unplanned or roaming in a distant land.

'Jac a Jes a'r cwrwgl ar Afon Tywi' has been published by Aberystwyth University and funded by the Welsh Government. The book is part of a collection which will help teach young children the Welsh language and also the Welsh coracle heritage. The book tells the story of Jac and Jes, who take a walk down by the river Towy one evening and Jac questions his grandmother on 'what are those small boats doing?' The grandmother tells Jac the history of the Towy coracle and how it's made.

These books are available priced £8.99 and £2.50 respectively from www.gwales.com



www.coraclesociety.org.uk

BBC Countryfile Live

Mark Dellar

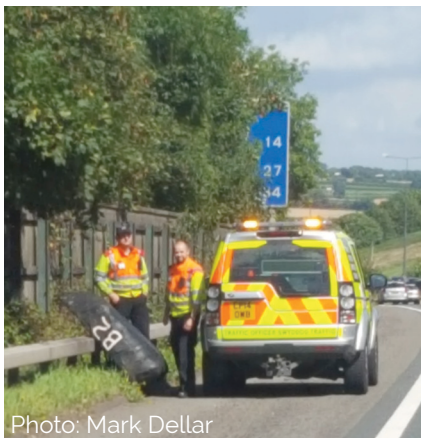


Photo: Mark Dellar

Teifi Coracle Netsmen Association were lucky enough to be invited to take part on the Waterside feature at Countryfile Live 2016 at Blenheim Palace, alongside The Coracle Society and the Ironbridge Coracle Trust.

The team of eleven men, women and four children made the journey from Cilgerran to Blenheim Palace arriving Friday afternoon to prepare for a weekend of demonstrating the fine art of building a Teifi coracle, net fishing and helping with the have a go sessions on the water.

The trip to the show was not without a drama

or two, as one of the coracles slipped its tie down straps and ended up on the hard shoulder of the M4, with the motorway maintenance crew having to secure it before we could retrieve it. Once unloaded at the Waterside feature and the tents pitched at the campsite, it was time to relax and enjoy a drink and barbecue with friends.

Over the next two days, Rod Bowen and Mark Dellar - with the help from other members of the association - showed interested onlookers how a traditional Teifi coracle is built.

Saturday and Sunday saw the Teifi crew help the Society with educating and helping hundreds of complete novices to have a go in one of the many types of coracles on the water.

One of the highlights from our point of view was the ability to show the visitors how the Teifi coracle is still traditionally used. With the application for a special dummy trawl licence granted by Environment Agency, the association members shared the privilege of demonstrating the art of coracle fishing on the river Glyme, which runs through the grounds at Blenheim Palace.



Photo: Mark Dellar

A huge thank you to Dave and Euan for all the hard work before, during and after the event.

Insh Coracle Club

Raymond Green

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Insh is a small, former crofting village in the Cairngorms National Park. Today there are 48 houses, of which 25 are holiday homes. The resident population is about 40 with no school age children.

The village is situated on the south side of the Insh Marshes, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserve, as well as being an RSPB reserve. The north side of the marshes and the parish of Insh is bordered by the river Spey, to the east the river Feshie and to the west the river Tromie. To the south are the Cairngorm mountains.

The Coracle Club formed by accident. I grew up in south Wales and was aware of coracles but do not remember seeing one until a visit to Elgin Museum, home of an original Spey coracle. After a visit to the library in Inverness, I became interested enough to think that building one might be fun. I had no real notion of how to go about it except for some pictures. My first effort didn't really work – too flimsy a frame of willow, and what to cover it with? An old tent and some black paint!



Photo: Raymond Green

Later, while working on a local history project, I read some 19th century accounts of coracles on the Spey and was re-inspired. Then, broadband came to Insh. In October

2011 I found several websites with construction ideas so I decided to try again with plywood strips. Getting an 8ft by 4ft sheet of three ply the 40 miles home from Inverness was not easy – cut in half at the merchants – but cutting in to 1.5 inch strips at home was easy. It took me about a week of experimenting to figure out how to bend the lathes without cracking them. The finished frame looked OK and I covered it with an old double duvet cover, scrounged from my wife. I had some black roofing paint so three coats later, applied liberally with a sponge and a week for it all to dry, I was ready except... No paddle! A curtain pole and a plywood blade saved the day.

The Insh Marshes are criss-crossed with 18th century drainage ditches up to 10 feet wide and between two and three feet deep in summer. The marshes flood over completely each winter and often freeze solid for weeks. However, although by now it was early winter, the water levels were low enough for me to venture out on the nearest 'canal'. No-one else was in sight for my first tentative launch. It floated. I got in without capsizing. I paddled, sort of, and moved. It didn't leak! But I had been seen carrying the thing on my



Photo: Raymond Green

back and within five minutes I had an audience of three, then five, then a whole gaggle of neighbours and friends coming to see a crazy man on the water. I was most embarrassed but became less so when several of them wanted a 'shot' and did no better than me.

From then on interest grew. The floods arrived a few days later and there was a mass paddle, with just one fragile coracle. I built a stronger version with a tarp cover but that was unsatisfactory – it felt too flimsy – but an off-cut from a neighbour's pond liner came to hand and I was ready to venture further.

Another villager decided to try his hand at building and by the arrival of the usual late autumn floods in 2012, we had started to explore the vast area of water over the marshes. Once again we were seen and everyone wanted a go. So the 'club' was born.

When does a club become a Club? Not sure, but one day another neighbour asked if he could join The Coracle Club. So here we are with eleven members, over 25% of the total population of Insh - beat that! We have now made seven coracles between us. Most



are made from plywood as it is the only suitable material we have at our disposal. Most of the millions of trees around us are pine or birch and none bend very well. My biggest failure was a smaller bamboo model, but the flat bottom rapidly returned to a very round one. An early willow one collapsed inward at launch as the ribs progressively snapped. The plywood is fragile too, so we do have to do lot of repairs, but we are learning how and where to strengthen it.

We went public in 2015. Newtonmore, a larger village about eight miles from here,

is home to the Highland Folk Museum. It is an outdoor museum, free to visit, with a large indoor collection not yet on public display. My wife and I often visit and took advantage of an Open Day, whereby we could see some of those indoor collections. Sitting there amidst a glory of objects was - A CORACLE - a Spey replica which I learned had been donated by The Coracle Society - a Society I had never heard of.

I mentioned to the Collections Curator that we had coracles in Insh and she was quite interested. A few weeks later she phoned me to ask if we would be willing to bring a coracle to the museum at a Vintage Day, where all manner of vintage transport is brought in – ancient tractors, traction engines, bicycles, vans, buses etc. Of course we agreed, planning to paddle on the curling pond water.

It was too shallow, so we moved to the adjacent Mill Pond which was perfect for us - not too big to be intimidating and not too deep to be dangerous. That day we had two coracles and worked non-stop from 10.30 to 5, letting visitors have a try. It went so well that we were invited back for three Heritage in Action Days in 2015. They were all brilliant with about 200 folk trying their hand over the three days.

At the Vintage Day this year we had four coracles, including a visiting coracle (Charlie Quinnell) and are booked for six Heritage in Action days. We also participated with two coracles at the Portsoy regatta, thanks to an invite from Dave Purvis.

So there you have it. We are planning - hoping - to build a coracle using hazel withies later this year as we have found a small stand so wish us luck!



Photo: Raymond Green

Birthday Coracle Course

Michael Beverly

Last winter as a 60th birthday present, we three brothers made three coracles at Overwater Boats. This was their first get together on the river Great Ouse at Newport Pagnell over the August bank holiday weekend. None of them sank!



Photos: Michael Beverly



Flying The Flag For The Little Welsh Coracle

Julie Rees

Two national magazines, 'Britain' and 'Country Life' have both dedicated a few pages to the Towy coracle and included some amazing photographs of the old tradition of coracle fishing. The future of coracle fishing has a huge question mark hanging over it, but we hope with all the work we're putting into safeguarding its future, it will around for future generations to see.



Bures Coracle Regatta

Steve Miles

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Due to heavy rain, a 6" branch had lodged itself under the weir at Bures mill. So the river was only 1ft deep with access only from the other bank after wading through thick silt. Not ideal. So we decided the sensible thing was to cancel, especially as there wasn't any guarantee that the water levels could be restored by the Saturday.



Photo: Steve Miles

Well, blow me down with a feather! We turned up on the Saturday and everything was back to normal. The sun was shining, a perfect day for the regatta. Hope to see you next year on Saturday 5th August 2017.

We are also looking for volunteers to help with our event, teas etc. Please contact coracles@riverstourtrust.org - we'd love to hear from you.

Teifi Coracle Netsmen's Report

Mark Dellar

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The 2016 coracle fishing season on the river Teifi saw the retirement of a coracle fisherman and the issue of a new license to a new licensee. We welcome Paul Williams and his fishing partner Wayne Phillips. It was another average season with a low catch return for the start of April - the sewin started to move with a few good size and numbers being caught. Early salmon numbers being caught and returned showed signs of a good season to come. As the season unfolded it proved to be a tale of two halves, as the sewin run slowed and we awaited the salmon/grilse run to begin, they were sparse to say the least.

Some theories for the falling numbers of salmon being bandied around are predation at sea being the main culprit, disturbance of the spawning beds and pollution of the waterways. However throughout this season and past years, the illegal netting on the lower reaches of the river Teifi have had a devastating effect on current and future stock levels, with illegal nets regularly blocking the waterways catching unimaginable quantities of fish. Unfortunately the authorities have not been successful in apprehending the culprits.

To sum up the 2016 coracle fishing season it has been an average year for catch returns, however the thrill and excitement of fishing from this ancient craft in the dark on one of the nicest stretches of river is priceless.

Scottish Traditional Boat Festival

Dave Purvis

The 23rd Scottish Traditional Boat Festival was held at Portsoy, Aberdeenshire on the weekend of 25-26 June 2016. Thanks to amazing hot summer weather, the small harbour and town was packed with more than twenty-two thousand visitors over the two days of the ever growing festival.

Intrepid travellers Dave Purvis and Mike Gough made the 350 mile journey once again to use and display coracles from both their collection and that of the local Scout group. Over the years we have built up quite a fan club of people who keep coming back to have a hands on session in the coracles in the old harbour, which we have been using for the last thirteen years. More than 100 people took to the water this year and kept us busy most of the weekend.



Photo: Dave Purvis

We were pleased to welcome back again Charlie Quinnell (of Tay Descent fame). Charlie is a Gaelic speaker Society member - an avid and fearless coracler, who appeared unannounced in his coracle at the mouth of the old harbour on

the first morning, after paddling across the quarter mile or so of open sea from the new harbour.

We were also delighted to see Raymond Green and a colleague with their wives, who had travelled across from Insh, a small village in the Cairngorms National Park, where they have recently formed the Insh Coracle Club. So far they had only done relatively sedentary paddling in the loch in their village and demonstrated at the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore, and were totally unprepared for the rough and tumble of the Portsoy coracle regatta. However despite the ducking, they said they had thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and hoped to get back again next year. We wish them all the very best in their endeavours to spread the "coracle gospel" in the Highlands.

The boat festival is a great experience for the families who come to Portsoy to sample the delights of the port, the music and food fare, and the organisers spend



Photo: Dave Purvis



Photo: Dave Purvis

all year planning the events. This year they had recruited North Link Ferries to take a large marquee on the harbourside. North Link ferries provide regular sailings from the Scottish mainland to Orkney and Shetland and brought with them some members of the famous Up Helly Aa Viking Jarl Squad from Shetland - complete with full ceremonial costumes and swords, shields and spears. Despite their fierce appearance and habit of giving their battle cries every time anyone wanted to take their photograph, once you

got to know them they were more like big pussycats - more like something from a Walt Disney movie!

Mike and I were a little disappointed that we could not entice them into the coracles for a paddle around the harbour. As they pointed out, each costume is made from red velvet and costs around £3000 to make and they were afraid if any of them got wet the "bling" would tarnish very quickly in the salty water - a change from the days of their Scandinavian ancestors who were not quite so fussy when their raiding parties ravaged our islands in the days of Bede and Cuthbert!

BBC Bargain Hunt Visits Carmarthen Coracle Sheds

Julie Rees

It was a surprise to welcome the Blue Team from BBC's Bargain Hunt to the coracle sheds in April.

They were filming at a local auction house and saw us repairing an old coracle by the river. The Blue Team were keen to learn more about its history.

Luckily they had already chosen their bargains to auction, otherwise we could have been one coracle down!



Photo: Julie Rees

Ironbridge Coracle Regatta

Steve Miles

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It wasn't raining! Maybe that was something to do with Mr Paxman and company. Things were a bit slow due to filming but they weren't too intrusive and if the footage gets used it can only be a good thing. The producer did put the camera right in the middle of the coracle, where you paddle which made it even more difficult. Still he had Wendy to show him across the river.



Simon Harper won the experts race. Unfortunately I couldn't compete this year as I had chipped a rib a couple of weeks before, so Dave Wright came second and Ivor James third. Barnaby Harper won the intermediate sprint and Shirley Hancock won the beginners race.



The whirling dervishes race was won by Ivor with Wendy second - I think she got to 25 rpm if memory serves me right.

Total confusion with the fish kabab race, trying to remember whose team you're on, where the fish

are and who won what, where, how or even why. Great fun and a good way of getting to know everyone.

For me the highlight is always the polo. Fortunately I was on the team not wearing the flower head gear. My plan was to take it easy by being in goal. That was until I let one in then the red mist fell and I was off. I'll worry about the rib later. Checking the results my team won, although we did have more members.

Welshpool Regatta

Euan Raffel

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Despite the weather, which couldn't decide whether to be wet or sunny, a good day was had at the second Welshpool coracle regatta which took place on Saturday 2nd July. There was a good turn out for the event with plenty of newcomers

participating in the beginners race - one beginner took to coracling like a duck to water and ended up participating in the intermediates and experts races too!

Thanks to Welshpool Town Council and Pat Ward for organising this year's event and we look forward to joining you again next year.



Celebrating The Hide Coracle

Martin Baines

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Heritage Open Day used to be an event where historic buildings were opened freely to the public. Now it has evolved into a four day nationwide extravaganza on all kinds of heritage themes, which encouraged me to believe that people might be interested to see a Herefordshire coracle in action.

Our idea had been to set up a small exhibition alongside the river Lugg in Leominster (though called the Kenwater at this point for reasons I won't attempt to explain), talk to visitors about the history of the craft and demonstrate its handling in my Teme coracle on the river.

But several things went wrong with this plan. When we took the boat down to the river a couple of weeks before the advertised date, we found the water was moving so fast that considerable effort was required just to stay in one place. It was also fuller than it had been and much of the gravel beach had disappeared. As far as the Kenwater was concerned, we were up the creek.



The second problem was the gazebo. We set it up in our garden to try out the exhibition but a sudden gust of wind hurled it into a wall and broke off one of the legs.

At that point things started going better. Peter Faulkner contributed several panels and some lovely half-scale models of Teme and Boyne coracles and a quarter scale curragh which were almost too valuable to exhibit in the open air anyway, so we moved the whole event into an empty office property in the town centre. Euan Raffel supplied us with Society artwork and membership forms.



Photo: Martin Baines

The Heritage Open Day people were very good about changing the venue in their publicity and we put up signs round the town. A hectic couple of days of hoovering, dusting, replacing dud light bulbs and hanging panels ensued, but finally all was ready. The exhibition opened half an hour early on September 9th.

We weren't exactly swamped with visitors to the event, but those that came were fascinated and we were talking more or

less non-stop all day. So thanks to Peter, Euan and to all our enthusiastic helpers on the day.

2016 AGM And Regatta At The Good Life Experience

Euan Raffel

For our AGM and regatta this year, we were invited to The Good Life Experience in Flintshire. Founded by Cerys Matthews, Steve Abbott and Charlie & Caroline Gladstone in 2014, The Good Life Experience is a family and dog friendly event. Its aim is to reconnect people with a life that is fulfilling, filled with fun and values the things that matter - family, friends, a real connection with The Great Outdoors, books, proper food and drink, discovery, music that comes from the soul, great books, craft. All the things that don't cost a great deal but that make life richer, more rewarding and better fun. It is a weekend of fun and discovery with music, books, food and the great outdoors.

We are very grateful for those members who attended the weekend, some of whom travelled great distances to be a part of it. We were provided with a small lake just outside the main festival site, where members who attended along with the general public were offered the chance to have a go at coracling on the water. A small regatta was held on both the Saturday and Sunday afternoons, with the usual selection of events. The visitors to the festival filled the banks of the lake and cheered on the competitors.



Photo: Euan Raffel

Thanks to Dylan Jones for organising the weekend with the event organisers.

Preserving And Promoting Coracle History

Karl Chattington

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This year I was asked to participate in two unique and historically significant events.

First, I was asked to build a traditional coracle to commemorate the discovery of the Dan Yr Ogof caves by the Morgan brothers in 1912, by their owner and descendant Winford Price and to coincide with National Tourism Week in Wales. On initial exploration their way was blocked when they encountered a large lake and later three others. They crossed these a Tywi coracle using only candles, rope and a revolver as they did not know what they would find. The original coracle no longer exists.

The coracle was duly built, tested and delivered on 29 February by my partner Gaynor and myself. Taking part was the Welsh Conservative leader and shadow tourism minister, Andrew RT Davies AM, and Suzy Davies, Conservative AM for south West Wales. Despite driving from North Wales straight from milking, Andrew donned a pair of wellingtons and readily pitched in getting the coracle and associated equipment into the caves. Both had the chance of putting the coracle on and said they had particularly looked forward to this. They had both seen coracles but had never had the chance to get up close and personal with one. After press interviews and photographs we set off into the caves, which was not easy as the they were not built with coracles in mind.

Setting off, authentically equipped with candles, rope and revolver (Winford swore it was a replica!), we eventually arrived at the launch point. There was no way that I was going to miss the opportunity to be the man to put a coracle in a cave in Wales for only the second known time, so I tested whether it was suitable and safe before putting the others on the water. When the lights were extinguished and on the water only with a candle, it was an experience none of us, especially me, will never forget. We were aware of the importance of the occasion and of the bravery and significance of the Morgans' achievement. Both Andrew and Suzy got out on the water and fully entered into the spirit of things. After several photographs were taken, we went back outside for refreshments and after explaining to Winford how to look after and store the coracle it was left there, where it will be on display and used for educational purposes. To see what the Morgans discovered it is worth looking at the Dan Yr Ogof website.



Photo: Karl Chattington

Secondly, I was asked by Pat Gravell to build a coracle in memory of her late husband Geoff, both of whom have a long fascination with coracles. The significance of this is that the church where the coracle will reside is St Arvans - named after St Arvan, a 9th century monk and hermit. He lived by fishing for salmon with a coracle on the river Wye and died when a salmon capsized the coracle. The last time a traditional Wye coracle was built and used on the Wye was about 1908.

After extensive research, the coracle was built using traditional methods and materials, including wood from the nearby Forest of Dean, which borders the Wye. The dimensions were adjusted to accommodate the area on the wall of the church where the coracle will rest. Poor weather conditions, including frost and prolonged rain, made building difficult. The final frame adjustments were made and calico applied in my living room, although I was not allowed to varnish and pitch the coracle indoors - I can't think for the life of me why not!

Even if a coracle is used for display purposes, I always put a coracle on the water out



Photo: Karl Chattington

of respect for the coracle and to ensure it floats, even for only once in its life - otherwise it is not a coracle. I did this even when as a participant of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC in 2009. I put the Tywi coracle I built for the Smithsonian Museum on the pools adjacent to the Reflecting Pools. We had waited for permission from the then Secretary of State, a certain Hilary Clinton, and a waiver from the US Coast Guard. Though by the time it arrived it was too late - I was already out on the water and

had got some of the Smithsonian staff out as well! The Wye coracle was duly tested and floated well with no leaks and although a traditionalist and keen to maintain authenticity, I declined to re-enact St Arvan drowning.

The coracle was delivered to Chepstow where Pat Gravell can now admire it in her living room, while preparations are being made to affix it on the church wall and its dedication service. I have been fortunate to have taken part in several coracle firsts, but I have taken special pleasure in these significant projects which maintain the awareness of the coracle to a wider audience. My living room is now empty, so it is time for another project.

Thoughts From A Coracle Convert

Paul Binks

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I'm in my second year of membership with the Society and have managed this year

to attend the Welshpool regatta and the AGM weekend at the Good Life Experience. I have thoroughly enjoyed myself! Everyone I've met has been very welcoming and knowledgeable about all things coracle related. Taking part in the regattas has been great fun and a good way of getting to know people and try out different craft. Though it's made me realise my coracle is too small for me and I need another one. Don't tell the Mrs - she's under the impression I'm meant to be getting rid of things out the garage, not adding to them!

When I purchased my first coracle off eBay, my wife asked me "Why do you want a coracle?" Very good question. She also asked "Why do you want another coracle?" when I bought my second! So, why do I want to coracle? I've always been drawn to be by, and often in, water. I have a whole range of boats: canoes, kayaks and a paddleboard. So adding another type to my stable seems like a natural progression. I also like bush craft and I am intrigued about how early people lived in and moved round our landscape. I've yet to make my own coracle, but I feel that'll be one of my next projects.

Doing a journey in a coracle intrigues me. I've done some small journeys on Coniston in Cumbria and on Llyn Padarn, Llanberis. I've also been on the river Lune near Lancaster. I'm interested in what it'd be like to paddle down a river in a coracle or over a longer distance of open water. As far as I'm aware there isn't any documented history of coracles in Lancashire or Cumbria, but if anyone knows any different or how I can find out I'd be interested to know. Next year I'd like to propose an informal meet in the Lake District to paddle a short journey on Windermere, Coniston or Derwent Water. Fellow paddlers from Ribble Canoe Club have agreed to accompany us to supply additional support. Hopefully you'll see something in on the website or Facebook page.

Carmarthen River Festival

Julie Rees

It seems like years ago, but our coracle races were enjoyed by hundreds of spectators who joined the Carmarthen River Festival in July this year. The Towy gave a warm welcome to the Teifi coracle men who came to take part in the races. It's great to see the two rivers join forces and support each other's coracle event - even though they sometimes take our trophies! There were several coracle races: The Mayor's Cup (winner: Malcolm Rees), The King of The Towy (winner: Ian Harries), Relay Race (winners: Malcolm Rees, Joe Woodhead) and The Coracle Society Novice Race (winner: Dana Rees).



Photo: Mike Walters

The Coracle Society Officers 2016-17

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Contact us

Secretary

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

Membership Secretary

Brian Pearce, 5 Cedar Close, Teignmouth, Devon, TQ14 8UZ
Email membership@coraclesociety.org.uk | Telephone 01626 774844

Treasurer/Editor

Euan Raffel, Apartment A Coppice House, Yates Avenue, Aston on Trent, DE72 2BG
Email euan@coraclesociety.org.uk | Telephone 01332 988334