



The
Coracle
Society

Journal

Autumn 2017



In This Issue

.....

- 3** **President's Thoughts**
- 4** **Chair's Chat**
- 5** **Frome Men's Shed At Frome Cheese Show**
The Frome Men's Shed try their hand at coraclemaking
- 7** **Membership Renewals**
Britain Afloat
- 8** **Coracles At England's Medieval Festival**
- 9** **Bures Regatta**
BBC Bargain Hunt Visits The Carmarthen Coracle Sheds
BBC Countryfile Live 2017 Round Up
- 11** **Peter Faulkner - 30 Years Of Coracle Service**
Marking Peter's coracle contribution to the world
- 12** **Insh Coracle Club At STBF Portsoy 2017**
Ironbridge Coracle Regatta
- 14** **Carmarthen River Festival**
The Uncertain Future Of Coracle Fishing
- 15** **Insh Coracle At The Highland Folk Museum**
Year two of the Insh Coracle Club demonstrating in the Highlands
- 16** **The Coracle Society Officers 2017-18**
Contact Us

Cover montage: Behind the scenes of 'Britain Afloat' (images © BBC)

The Coracle Society Journal - Autumn 2017

E&OE. Unless otherwise stated, all content © 2017 The Coracle Society and contributors

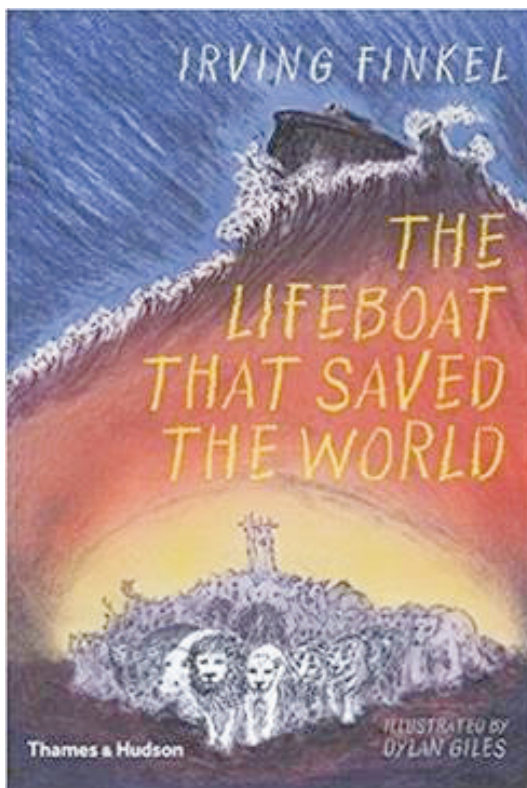
President's Thoughts

Dr Irving Finkel

Shamefacedly I must confess to a long and risk-free interval on dry land, while nurturing every long-range wish for the triumph of the coracle and my determination to come and cause you all trouble soon. Meanwhile, another small move in the right direction. My children's book entitled 'The Lifeboat That Saved The World' has just been published by Thames & Hudson.

This is a retelling for children of the content of 'The Ark Before Noah', using the narrative substance of the original four-thousand year old cuneiform document, but written from the viewpoint of Atra-hasis's youngest son. It is therefore pitched very broadly at the 9-11 age range, but a good number of adults have told me with relief that they much prefer it to the book for grown-ups.

Drawings were specially made by Dylan Giles and children who read the book can watch from the wings as the oldest and most important coracle in the world was built. My editor happened to remark that it is 'an ideal size and expense for a seasonal gift....'



Chair's Chat

Bruce Watson

.....

Greetings, Society members, wherever you are.

Here at Coracle Towers, another year of eccentric boating has passed... rocky bottoms have been scraped over, tricky currents have been navigated, and annoying people on the bank have been verbally dealt with. I hope it has been the same for all of you!

Unfortunately I have not been able to personally attend most of the many events that have taken place up and down the British Isles this year, but I did participate in the Welshpool Regatta - which is going from strength to strength - and I was really pleased to see so many young people happily taking to the water and paddling with enthusiasm. And quite a few adults as well thankfully.

The annual Ironbridge Regatta was lucky again with the weather and attracted a lot of people. I personally felt it had a really nice feel about it. It also ended up making the most amount of money ever, which is a plus for the Ironbridge Coracle Trust. As I am also a Trustee of said Trust, I cannot divulge too much, but at present we remain optimistic about our plans for the Rogers' family hut and the promotion of the history and traditions of coracles on the Severn at Ironbridge. The attendance of a BBC film crew making an episode of "Britain Afloat" greatly added to the event and the presenter was an "absolute natural" when she took to the water in her newly-built coracle (thank you Terry Kenny).

As many of you may know by now, The National Coracle Centre at Cenarth may cease to exist in the near future. I had a phone chat with Martin Fowler and it seems he is retiring, possibly moving east into England. Many conversations have ensued as to what should happen to this unique collection. Personally, I would like to see it kept together in a suitable location, rather than have all the contents dispersed to the four winds. I appreciate this is a tricky problem, and also raises issues around curatorship and conservation. May I ask you all to give this some thought, and if you have any suggestions as to possible locations, ways and means etc. then please let the Society know.

Happy paddling!

Ed: at the end of November, the Ironbridge Coracle Trust received news that their bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been successful. This award of £80,000 will allow the Trust to finalise plans and the scope of work for stabilising the hut, producing the interpretation, providing training and community engagement related to the Rogers' coracle hut in Ironbridge. Congratulations to the Trust on this achievement. If you would like to learn more about the project, or offer your support, visit coracleshed.org

Frome Men's Shed At Frome Cheese Show

Patrick Abrahams

.....

All aboard! The guys from Frome Men's shed made an appearance at the Cheese Show earlier this month – showcasing their handmade, oar powered flotation device – the almighty coracle. It was made for a race which took place in July – after the Welsh Men's Sheds Association threw down the gauntlet late last year.

Patrick Abrahams of the Shed explains, "The Frome Shed coracle was made by shedders Tony Hopkins and Steve Grey from strips of plywood bent into shape after soaking for over a week. The underside was covered in calico cloth and lastly coated in layers of heavy bitumen paint to seal it. It may sound simple, but it was a labour of love. On completion, the Shedders came to a decision that it should be named Glennis, after Tony's late wife.



Photo: Patrick Abrahams

"It may look small and humble, but it holds its own on the river. Onlookers saw it in action in the Country Pursuits area at the Cheese Show, and they also got a chance to see us making a second coracle, demonstrating the same traditional methods, only this time with wicker.

"What is Frome Men's Shed all about? On the surface it's a workshop, decked out with tools and materials and open on Thursday mornings to anyone who wants to attend. It's an organisation which began in Australia and strives to alleviate social isolation. So far so good – the first UK Men's shed was set up in 2009 and they are now all over the country. You may have seen the bird boxes the guys have made for some of Frome's parks, or perhaps you read the story in the paper about the scooter rack built for the local school.



Photo: Patrick Abrahams

"People come to the shed with their own skills and they share them. Everyone has the opportunity to socialise and learn something new, and the community benefits.

Following on from the success of the first coracle, Frome Sheddars are currently working on two more - one from woven willow and one hi-tech version made from thin strips of mahogany veneer with epoxy, cold moulded. We are hoping to field three coracles at the next Carmarthen River Festival and hopefully to the coracle festival in Cilgerran in August 2018. We are challenging any Men's Sheds across the UK to join us at these festivals!

"It's clear that the Men's Shed provides a much-needed sense of belonging to all who attend and to some it's a lifeline. Some people have little else to bring them out of the house.



Photo: Patrick Abrahams

The name was born from the original aim – to tackle a societal problem which typically affects men, however anyone over the age of 18 is welcome, male or female. Shedder Tony, aged 76, describes a sense of isolation felt by many men, who unlike women are often discouraged from seeking emotional support. Tony came to Frome Men's Shed six months ago after losing his wife. 'Socialising becomes difficult when you get older, you start to lose the people close to you, friends and

family, there's less community spirit with your neighbours. Men aren't encouraged to sit and talk to each other, we've only got the pub or the shed.'

Another Shedder, Steve Gray said "Men have got an image to uphold. This is a male bonding thing, most men won't admit to it – but we need things like this."



Photo: Patrick Abrahams

Frome Men's Shed has over 70 members and it's still growing. It is open every Thursday 9am – 1pm at the Welshmill Hub. If you think it might be for you, pop in to discover the opportunities or call 07932 760585.

To find out more about the Frome Men's Shed visit our website www.fromeshed.org.uk

Membership Renewals

Membership renewals are now due for 2018. Membership rates are unchanged at £10 individuals/£15 joint/family/associate members. You can renew online with your debit or credit card, or send a cheque to the Membership Secretary.

If we have your email address on your membership record, you will receive your membership renewal details by email. Otherwise, please find enclosed your personalised membership renewal form. In both cases, please carefully check your details **BEFORE** renewing! We had a couple occasions last year where people had moved some time ago, but hadn't informed us and queried why they weren't receiving post from us!

If you have an online account, you can make any necessary changes to your address, phone number or email address yourself. Simply log in and follow the link to My account at the top of the page. Otherwise email any changes to membership@coraclesociety.org.uk or correct the renewal form and return to the Membership Secretary.

Finally, remember you need to renew your membership by 31st January to maintain a full year's membership. This is regardless of the date you joined the Society; our membership year runs 1st January - 31st December.

We look forward to welcoming you to another year of membership in 2018.

Britain Afloat

Steve Miles

How wonderful, a telly series on historic inland/inshore craft. First in the series was on the Thames sailing barges. Being from Essex, this brought back fond childhood memories of trips to Maldon to see them... I'm sure that's why we went, nothing to do with shopping. They are also the reason I love being on the water now, especially in a coracle as it is the most affordable, historic craft there is.

The half hour programme on coracles was truly brilliant as it showed the serious side that you can't show at the regattas. Touching on the history, present day fishing in Wales, modern makers and of course the Ironbridge regatta. It also brought across the passion we have for these craft. In fact, the whole series was pure quality.

So thank you, Mary-Ann Ochota and team, for a sympathetic look at what we are about.

Ed: the episode is also a feature article in November's BBC Countryfile Magazine. You may be able to access this online for free or in branch through your county council's

library service.

Sir Peter Badge and his wife Mary sent the following letter to the Society following the broadcast of Britain Afloat:

"We were strongly of the view that it was the best we have ever seen and that every member of the Society who took part, without exception, acquitted themselves brilliantly"

Coracles At England's Medieval Festival

Euan Raffel

.....

The Society were invited to the 25th anniversary of England's Medieval Festival, at Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex over the August bank holiday weekend. Members Dave Purvis and Euan Raffel made the trek from 't North to showcase - to the visitors, exhibitors and organisers - the art of coraclemaking and give people the opportunity to try their hand at paddling a coracle on the Castle's moat.

A weekend of glorious weather kept the punters coming, with over 90 people getting out on the water. The coracles that were made weren't strictly of medieval construction - with the task of building two coracles to be used that weekend, they were covered with pond liner rather than the usual calico/bitumen (or even hide - more appropriate to medieval times!) so they could be built and in action in just a few hours. There was a steady stream of visitors to the stand, interested in all things coracle.

The two coracles that were made have been left at the castle. Herstmonceux Castle is an international outpost of Queen's University, Ontario (Canada) and the idea is that the students returning from their summer break - or starting as freshers - will get the chance to try their hand at coraceling in the unique surroundings they are lucky to live and study in



Photo: Euan Raffel

Many thanks to the organisers of the festival for inviting the Society along and for their hospitality.

More photos and videos from the weekend can be found on our Facebook page

Bures Regatta

Steve Miles



Photo: Steve Miles

This year, things didn't quite go to plan. The cricket club had a charity match on the same day. Due to a change of booking officer and messages not being passed on, we had a choice of hiring portaloos or cancelling our event, because the club were worried that the huge crowds attending the regatta would be too much for the drains to cope with. I did try to explain that it really wouldn't be a problem, but such is life. Then as Dick and I were setting up, we found out one of

our volunteers and a regular were ill and couldn't make it. About an hour in we had torrential rain and most went home. They say things happen in threes.

We had couple of regulars and one family stay on with their newly made coracles. After a couple of hours, the rain cleared up leaving time for some of our races. Unfortunately, I can't remember who won what as I was in the safety boat keeping an eye out for the swimmers. Still, it was a good day with the few that stayed and we made new friends.

BBC Bargain Hunt Visits The 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!

BBC Countryfile Live 2017 Round Up

Euan Raffel

The Society, along with our friends from the Teifi Coracle Netsmen Association and The Ironbridge Coracle Trust had a fantastic time at BBC Countryfile Live in August. The weather didn't start too promising - the show was halted for an hour whilst a



Photo: Euan Raffel



Photo: Euan Raffel

thunderstorm passed on the Saturday. But the sun soon broke through and we had lots of interest from members of the public. This year we added a children's pond on the shore, so our younger guests could have a go in a coracle. We had over 850

visitors try their hand at coracling - more than double last year's number! One quartet of visitors were particularly special and welcomed, as Countryfile's very own Tom Heap brought his family along to learn about the coracle and coracle fishing, and to have a go out on the water.



Photo: Euan Raffel

The Teifi Coracle Netsmen Association performed a number of netting demonstrations on the water, made possible thanks to a special licence granted by the Environment Agency. They also demonstrated how to make a traditional Teifi coracle, paddle and net, which drew plenty of interest from the show's visitors.

Many thanks go to the organisers of BBC Countryfile Live and our friends at LNC Activities and Training, who led the organisational, logistical support and hospitality for The Waterside. We are hoping to be invited back in 2018 - we will of course let you know when details emerge!



Photo: Euan Raffel

More photos and videos - including archived live broadcasts of the netting demonstrations - from the weekend can be found on our Facebook page.

Peter Faulkner - 30 Years Of Coracle Service

Euan Raffel

A lot of people know of Peter Faulkner, or the coracles he's made over the past 30 years. The coracles he makes have been featured in television and films around the world; you can spot one of his coracles a mile away. The reason why? He's one of the last coraclemakers still making them the traditional way, using hazel and cow hide.

His journey into coracling started in the late 1980s, when he visited none other than Eustace Rogers of Ironbridge, who was making a hide coracle at that time, to find out how to build a coracle. Peter was keen to explore the river Teme and decided that the coracle was the best way to do so. (When Sir Peter Badge was writing his book *Coracles of the World*, Peter Faulkner talked about his grandfather using a coracle on the river at Ludlow, and on hearing a story of coracle usage at Leintwardine in the 1920s.) Peter had a ready supply of locally coppiced hazel, and ready supply of cow hide from long time friends at the local butcher.

From that first coracle, Peter was hooked. He has run coracle making courses, built coracles to order and worked with Hollywood film studios and broadcasters far and wide. He introduced a very successful series of coracle regattas to the Teme in Leintwardine. Peter was chairman of the Society for a decade - the longest period of time a single person has held the post, and a sign of the respect he'd earned from the rest of the coracle community. And if that wasn't enough, he has also travelled by coracle along the



Photo: Steve Miles

Severn, Wye, Thames, Shannon and Spey rivers.

Peter has started to wind down towards retirement the past couple years, but before he retires the Society wanted to mark 30 dedicated years of service. Peter was presented with a specially commissioned trophy at this year's Ironbridge Regatta.

Insh Coracle Club At STBF Portsoy 2017

Raymond Green

.....

Six members of our club, together with two coracles, joined forces with Dave Purvis at Portsoy on Sunday 25 June. We had built a trolley specially to transport the coracles from the car park to the harbour and back specially as it a long walk



up quite a steep grade.

OK, we chickened out on carrying them on our backs. Unfortunately we could not go on the Saturday and missed a great deal.

Dave and his team started building a coracle for later auction and was well on in construction by the time we arrived. It was very pleasing to

note that Dave had copied our idea from last year of covering it with pond liner! We also missed any chance of a paddle as unlike Saturday when the weather was fine allowing a large number to try a coracle, the wind was so strong that all water activity was cancelled on safety grounds. We managed just one launch when Jeremy, one of our members, simply had to try out his brand new coracle.

The Vikings came over for a photo shoot and guess who had to get in on the act in front of the Coracle Society stand? We did see the final completion of Dave's coracle which looked rather splendid - not the Insh ones in the photo. We will be back next year, hopefully for both days as we still enjoyed ourselves so much.

Ironbridge Coracle Regatta

Steve Miles

.....

This year's regatta was well attended by both the public and coraclers alike. Having a sunny day helped. The have-a-go session was particularly busy without too many swimmers. All helped by the local canoe club volunteers acting as safety boats. As usual we had some newcomers from coracle making course at Small Woods, with varying abilities.



Photo: Steve Miles

Ironbridge coracle.

The novice sprint was won by Damien Campbell with Sally Woolhouse taking second place. The intermediate sprint was won by Pete Reading with Nicky Charlton coming second. The expert sprint was won by Alistair Philips, with Simon Harper second and myself coming third. I should have barged through on the first buoy and let Simon fall in!



Photo: Steve Miles

During the day we had a film crew doing their thing. They were unobtrusive and actually added to the whole regatta atmosphere. It was also good to see the presenter could actually paddle the coracle with some proficiency. My feeling at the time was "this could be a serious piece of documentary footage" as opposed to the usual "let's make a fool of the presenter and show how silly these boats are."



Photo: Steve Miles

My thanks go to the organisers and volunteers for a great day out.

Ed: the film crew were the production company for BBC's recent series

'Britain Afloat'. Also present on the day was a press photographer; photographs from the day were featured, and can be viewed, on The Guardian's website

Carmarthen River Festival

Julie Rees

Although the main races did not take place at this year's Carmarthen River Festival (not enough entries sadly), enough volunteers were found to run The Coracle Society Novice Race.

The winner, with a little help, was 12 year old Bethany Martin. She was presented with her trophy and £25 prize, the latter she generously donated to Dr Mz Carmarthen Youth Project. Bethany is looking forward to participating in next year's Carmarthen coracle races.



The Uncertain Future Of Coracle Fishing

Euan Raffel

Whilst the start of the year brought great news regarding EU PGI status for West Wales Coracle Caught salmon and sewin (which should survive Brexit), unfortunately our coracle fishermen face ever increasing pressures on their livelihoods and traditions. A number of pollution events, combined with other factors, over the past 12-24 months have caused immense damage to the fish stocks. The problem is so serious that earlier this year, the Teifi Coracle Netsmen's Association voluntarily moved to catch and release for all salmon they caught during this year's season.

A consultation was launched during the summer with a view to potentially amending fishing bylaws to restrict all fishing on affected rivers in Wales to mandatory catch and release, or worst case scenario, cease all fishing. History tells us that when coracle fishing licences get revoked, they don't get replaced.

Lets hope that in these 'Brexit' times, some sense will prevail and we won't lose this wonderful tradition. The coracle fishermen continue to do all they can to work with the government to protect their rivers, and demonstrations such those at Countryfile Live help to raise the profile of coracle fishing. Finally, it's wonderful to see the tradition still being passed down the generations; 12 year old Dyfig had his first season on the Teifi this year and led one of the fishing demonstrations at Countryfile Live in August. You can watch the recording of the live broadcasts of these fishing demonstrations on our Facebook page.

Insh Coracle At The Highland Folk Museum

Raymond Green

Our 2017 season at the museum ended on Saturday 26 August - Outlander Day. Three members of the Club spent all day at the millpond while others visited through the day. We had four coracles on the water and one for visitors to handle onshore. On the day 84 visitors had a go, making a total throughout the season of 658 people experiencing the pleasure of being in a coracle. That number includes children, some too small to paddle, sometimes 'doubled up', sometimes with a paddling parent. The millpond is artificial with a flat bottom and just deep enough to paddle so we feel it is very safe for them.

The coracles have taken a battering with all this use. Three are made from plywood lathes, many of which have cracked. The willow frames have coped marginally better but have suffered too. The covers are a different problem. In particular, the pond liner cover on one has abraided on the sandy pond bottom and is now perforated with many small holes so it leaks. The duvet-covered coracles are less worn but will need



Photo: Raymond Green

re-painting to seal several leaks. To minimise the damage caused by dragging them to flotation, we have formed a 'jetty' from two pallets, allowing visitors to step in, with our help, while the coracles are floating. This of course can contribute to broken lathes unless we help them step into the coracles but it also helps visitors to the museum avoid getting wet, muddy feet. (Why do some people wear high heels to an outdoor living museum?)

We think it is well worth the effort on our part. We have been asked to go back again next year and are preparing already. We have acquired some ash lathes for a new build and one with willow lathes is under construction. This one will be slightly bigger and stronger, we hope, to cope with some of our larger visitors. One of the most gratifying things to arise from this has been the intense level of interest in coracles shown by many of our visitors and we hope some at least will follow it up. The museum has a very international feel and we have had visitors from China, Syria, most European countries including Russia and Romania, and the Americas. We even had a Canadian champion Pumpkin Boat paddler. I had never heard of Pumpkin Boats but they handle just like a coracle, apparently. They look great on YouTube. We have had immense fun.

The Coracle Society Officers 2017-18

President	Dr Irving Finkel
Vice Presidents	Rod Bowen John Davies Peter Faulkner Martin Fowler Terry Kenny
Honorary Chairperson	Bruce Watson
Honorary Vice Chairperson	Malcolm Rees
Secretary/Archivist	Dylan Jones
Treasurer	Euan Raffel
Membership Secretary	Brian Pearce
Committee	Mark Dellar Gerwyn Lewis June Lewis Darren Male Jude Pilgrim Julie Rees
Teifi netsmen's representative	Mark Dellar
Tywi netsmen's representative	Malcolm Rees
Ironbridge representative	Terry Kenny

Contact Us

Secretary

Dylan Jones, 14 Duffryn Close, St Nicholas, Cardiff, CF5 6SS
Email: info@coraclesociety.org.uk | Telephone: 07796 097202

Membership enquiries

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: ewan@coraclesociety.org.uk | Telephone: 01332 988334

Find us on Facebook - www.facebook.com/coraclesociety