



The Coracle Society

Journal

Autumn 2018



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Cover images: top, coracles at England's Medieval Festival (Euan Raffel); bottom, on the water at Bures Coracle Regatta (Steve Miles)

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President's Thoughts

Peter Faulkner

31 years ago last July, I launched my hide covered coracle "Teme Dipper". It was, as I believed then, a one-off whim to satisfy my desire to traverse my local river, the Teme, from Felindre to its confluence with the River Severn at Powick – a voyage of some 85 miles. Did it in two stages, finally arriving at Worcester in July 1988, to a reception of champagne and strawberries.

Much has happened in the coracling world since then, as is immediately evident when browsing through my mini mountain of Coracle Society publications accumulated since the Society's inauguration in 1990 at Martin Fowler's - then roofless – coracle centre at Cenarth. I felt very privileged to be invited to join the committee, very much a greenhorn then.

A few years flowed by and I was getting regular orders for coracles, but had also started to exhibit at county shows. Our founder chairman, Sir Peter Badge, eventually persuaded me to take over as chair, a post I held for eight years. During that time, new builders emerged and the Society flourished. A better relationship was established with the media as hitherto coracling tended to be looked upon more with amusement than the deference due to a historic craft. Even though the word 'coracle' has become a household name, I am still amazed to meet people who have never seen or heard of one.

On 15th September I drove to Bewdley for this year's Annual General Meeting of the Society. I sat in on the committee meeting first and was very impressed by the enthusiastic and business-like way the agenda was dealt with. Officers of any organisation are elected to carry out the duties of their respective posts. This was very evident as the meeting progressed. It is well to remind ourselves that we work for the common good of our Society.

The AGM too went smoothly, with a good working atmosphere. Item 6a on the agenda (Election of officers – President and Vice Presidents) was dealt with swiftly and I suddenly realised that I was now the newly appointed President. Despite the shock, I accepted with delight my new elevated position. I now stand in the shadows of past presidents: Geraint Jenkins, Sir Peter Badge and Dr Irving Finkel. Dr Finkel took over from Sir Peter at the 25th AGM at St Fagans. His scholarly book "The Ark Before Noah" was the subject of a major television documentary ("The Real Noah's Ark" – Channel 4 Television, September 2014).

Those who attended the committee meeting in 2015 at the British Museum will remember the enthusiasm of this dynamic man, who – from the decoding of a cuneiform tablet – built a massive coracle and turned the ark story on its head.

For a humble coraclemaker to follow such eminent intellectuals into the office of

President is certainly a challenge, but I shall do my very best to represent the Society whenever and wherever I'm able. With your support and enthusiasm, I feel confident that our Society will continue to flourish and fulfil the aims set out in 1990.

Enjoy your coracling and always remember the RNLI motto – "respect the water".

Chair's Chat

Mark Dellar

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In my opening Chair's Chat, I'd like to briefly talk about the future of coracle fishing. This has been discussed a number of times in newsletters and Journals over the past couple years, but much has changed recently following the start of a public consultation,

My fellow fishermen on the Teifi and I, and our counterparts on the Towy, are awaiting the outcome of National Resource Wales (NRW) proposed changes to net fishing and rod and line bylaws. A soon to be held public inquiry will hear evidence from both the stakeholders (fishermen) and NRW, to determine what (and if any) of the proposed changes will be implemented.

Unfortunately, the traditional uses of the coracle is looking bleak as the proposal by NRW is to dramatically reduce the fishing season from 5 months down to 3 months in addition to making salmon catch and release. If no reduction was to take place, the 2019 coracle fishing season would consist of 110 fishable days over the 5 months from April to August. Current licence regulations only allow licenced coracle fishing to take place Monday to Friday.

If the proposed bylaws are passed, the fishing season would be cut by 2 months - losing April and August and reducing the fishable days by 44, to a total fishable season of 66 days.

Bearing in mind coracle fishing is not free, NRW have no intention in reducing the annual licence fee to reflect the reduction in days lost combined with the proposal of catch and release of all caught salmon. The effect of reducing the catch species in half is a substantial financial loss to the fisherman, not to mention that 44 days of doing something they love and enjoy doing will be forcibly taken away.

If you asked any of the coracle fisherman what was important to them, the answer you would get is "the traditional fishing practice is a sustainable way of catching sewin and salmon and must be protected at any cost. If there is no use for the coracle, the knowledge of making and using them may be lost."

As Society members and the general public have seen, the interest in the use of the coracle for pleasure across the UK is growing and it is now more than ever important to keep the traditional uses going so we, as a coracling nation, can still see and

partake in a part of the historical trade if we choose to.

The Society will report back to members when we learn the final outcome of the inquiry.

A Year In Review: Carmarthen Coracle & Netsmen's Association

Julie Rees

The extreme weather conditions added to various other factors meant we had a very poor and slow fishing season in 2018. Not wanting to dwell on the negative, here is some positive coracle news from the Towy.

Last September, we welcomed the National Association of City and Town Sheriffs of England and Wales to the Carmarthen Coracle. The day saw many distinguished visitors, who were all keen to learn about our history.



Photo: Carmarthen Coracle & Netsmen's Association

Television viewers would have seen us take part in the BBC One programme 'Britain Afloat' alongside the Teifi and Ironbridge coracles.

October saw the opening of Specsavers opticians in our hometown and the coracle featured in the day's celebrations, when a miniature coracle was presented to two very proud Welshmen – Specsavers' founder Doug Perkins and designer Jeff Banks.

The interest in coracles always increases come March and this year was no exception. We worked with Carmarthen Town Council to

produce a 'Coracle Trail' as part of the St David's Day and Welsh Week celebrations in Carmarthen town. Six coracles were placed around the town, each with a history of an old coracle fishing family – visitors were given a map of the town to follow the trail.

Later that month, one of our miniature Towy coracles was travelling with Team Wales to the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, ready for the Welcoming Ceremony in April. Pictured is Team Wales representative Nicola Phillips presenting our coracle to the Yugembah people in



Photo: Carmarthen Coracle & Netsmen's Association



Photo: Carmarthen Coracle & Netsmen's Association

the Gold Coast Fire Ceremony. It was given in exchange for a Fire Stick – both representing their country's ancient cultures.

Probably our most important news of the year was our additional home – we have joined various local river users and taken over an empty building on the Quayside. It's warm, dry and an ideal place for visitors to come and see our collection and us. We've welcomed local schools, Cubs, Beavers, our local special needs school and adult groups – it's been a very busy time. Our lease finishes at the end of March and our council want to knock the building down to make offices – so we're making hay while the sun shines and using the time we have to welcome as many visitors as possible.

For those who are too young to visit, I've been taking the coracles around local nurseries. My initial feeling was that they were too young to understand, but when there are cries and tantrums because they don't want to get out of the coracle, you know you've done something right!

The summer saw our popular Carmarthen River Festival take place on the Quayside – it attracted a record crowd of over 2000 people. It was great to welcome Frome Men's Shed and their coracle collection again this year and an added nice surprise was receiving support from Black Rock Lave Netsmen – we will return the support soon! We used the River Festival to unveil our new fibre-glass coracle, which was kindly donated by The Coracle Society. We named our coracle 'Logan' after Towy coracle man Matthew Dagnall's son, who suffers from mitochondrial disease. Ten year old Logan came to cut the ribbon on the new coracle and set sail on its maiden voyage with his dad to enter the Coracle Race. Pictured is Logan with his dad when he just realised he won the coracle race.



Photo: Carmarthen Coracle & Netsmen's Association

Lastly, we have been contacted by a gentleman who is well known locally for his heritage work and story-telling. He has offered to work with us in promoting the story of the coracle to local schools, produce an education pack and also capture the old coracle stories on film. Last week we were advised that the grant application had been successful... so just when we thought it was getting quiet!

Self Rescue In A Coracle

Pete Sullivan

A while back I was paddling on Lyttelton Harbour (over the hill from Christchurch in NZ) and decided I'd better try to capsize my coracle (PV Gloria). I started throwing my weight around and found that by leaning forward about 50mm more than usual the



Photo: Pete Sullivan

hull sort of 'unstuck' from the water and wham, I was catapulted forwards into the briny. My coracle just righted herself and bobbed along as though nothing had happened, so – I attempted to get back on board but no way was it going to happen. I guess you've all been in this predicament at some stage.

I started to play around with some ideas from my kayaking (a paddle float attached to one paddle end and the other end attached to the

kayak if a roll didn't work) and my waka experiences, where a capsize is called a huli. The craft (waka) is righted and one hops back on board using the outrigger support (kiato) and the outrigger float (ama) to support the arms, as the torso is lifted back over the side, legs first with chest upwards.

These pictures sort of show how I've setup my coracle. I couldn't do any wet trials as I didn't have a photographer on shore so a rescue out on the lawn will have to suffice – but – it works well.

I've heard there are apparently a few coracles in the South Island, but they are quite elusive beasts and I've never actually seen one yet so I paddle solo on the harbour and at times in some quite rough conditions. I've always wanted to venture a little further off shore than I currently do and this setup now gives me a bit of confidence that if I flip (huli) I can get back on board.



Photo: Pete Sullivan

Update From The Ironbridge Coracle Trust

Marion Blockley

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We have had a busy few months since April and the start of the Development Phase for the Heritage Lottery Fund project. During this time we consulted widely on our plans, across the whole of the Gorge and at events throughout Telford and Shropshire. Thank you to everybody who took the time to complete one of our questionnaires or leave detailed comments.

We are delighted with the overwhelming support we received and the number of people who came forward with new memories and insights, to help shape our project. A number of people gave us new information about Jack Gear, who made the famous flying witches that flew across the river in front of the Iron Bridge and the water-powered working model foundrymen.



Photo: Tom Blockley

Valuable ideas came from our consultations including the need for water safety training for local schools and children's groups; coracle world heritage; netmaking and a dementia café. We hope to use the fascinating items in the collection, including archive photos of Ironbridge, archive film footage and memories from others to inspire reminiscence and creativity both in our new coracle centre and at local community centres across the Gorge and Telford.

Photo: Tom Blockley



The HLF investment enabled us to try out a number of new activities at the Coracle

Regatta on August Bank Holiday Monday and despite the cool weather, it was widely agreed to be the best so far.

We are delighted to report that we passed our mid-term HLF review with flying colours and will have submitted our detailed final bid and supporting documents to the Heritage Lottery Fund in November.

We now have to wait until the next committee meeting on March 2019 to hear whether or not we have finally been successful with our bid.

In the mean time we have also had funding from the Arts Council England/Visit England Cultural Destinations project to develop our exciting interpretation ideas.

At the original coracle shed we will have a Victorian Pepper's Ghost effect where visitors can peer through holes in the shed wall and see ghostly apparitions of Coracle Men floating in mid-air.

There will be a coracle trail leading down to the Green Wood Centre highlighting places of interest connected to coracles and Ironbridge social history over the last 100 years. At the Green Wood Centre we will be creating a new free to enter Coracle Centre to house and tell the story of the coracle collection.



Ironbridge Coracle Regatta

Steve Miles

Every year I take part in this regatta and I am always surprised at the huge crowds that turn up just to watch. This must be helped by the small market that gives up their Bank Holiday Monday to help make this the large local attraction it is. There was even live music from a ukulele band. Just goes to show how much organisation goes into this regatta.

There was a new race this year - the Fusseller Potts Trophy - which appeared to be a relay race involving local teams. For the first heat of the experts race, I decided to use my Cleddau just to see how fast I could move it against the others in their Ironbridge coracles. It was hard work, but I did come first in the heat. For the final experts race, as per usual, I borrowed an Ironbridge as I knew for this event I was up against stiff competition. I was leading until I fluffed it going around the last buoy. The sprint finish was almost neck to neck, with Nicky Charlton coming first, Simon Harper second and myself third, but there was only a few feet in it.

My thanks, as always, go to the organisers and volunteers who make this great event what it is.

Insh Coracle At The Highland Folk Museum 2018

Raymond Green

Our season at the museum started with Vintage Day on 27 May, when we had six freshly painted coracles ready for action. These included our two newly constructed - but untested - willow coracles. One hundred paddlers kept us busy all day in perfect conditions for fun.

A very different day at Outlander Day on 9 June. An horrendous thunderstorm just before lunch forced us to abandon paddling for the day after just nineteen paddlers

had a go. We were soaked, the coracles flooded and our misery was complete when we damaged two in our rush to clear away.

From then on, we looked forward to the six Heritage in Action Days. Unfortunately, the very hot weather caused the millpond to dry up very quickly - so much so that by the middle of July we had lost half of the usable water area. We had to move our 'jetty' into deeper water so we could actually launch. The water being so low, we also stirred up a lot of mud while paddling. We were restricted to three coracles to begin with, then down to two at a time for the remainder of the summer. Nevertheless, we still had over six hundred paddlers by dint of going well past our finishing time each day. We didn't want to disappoint visitors, but it was very hard work meeting the demand.

Our final day was an extra autumn Heritage in Action day on 18 October. The pond had completely re-filled and looked great. Unfortunately for us we had forgotten to re-tie the jetty tether and it was afloat in the middle of the pond. Coracles to the rescue and it was soon towed back to the shore. We did not expect the day to be busy and it wasn't - during the morning. We took out just two coracles which by lunchtime was a big mistake - by the time we closed at 4pm, over sixty had been on the water. Five minutes from the end, a gust of wind blew a coracle on to the corner of the jetty causing a large gash in the cover. ARGH! So we finished the season with just one serviceable coracle left at year's end.



Photo: Raymond Green

It was all worth it though as we had nearly seven hundred people, from the very young to the very old and from around the world, have a go in a coracle. It was very satisfying to greet several repeat visitors who have continued interest in the coracle world and came back especially. One family have now visited for their third year. We feel the water is safe, more so this year, and we allow young children to have a go - the half size coracle is very popular. In addition to this we have been watching carefully the reaction of children with various disabilities, such as autism. Just allowing the children to float, sit, and rock, without a paddle, has appeared to be very calming and commented on by parents. I wonder about the therapeutic benefits of this more widely. Out of the hundreds of people who took to the water this year, there were only two capsizes! One was a teenager who ignored instructions and the other a gentleman who leaned too far backward, watching a passing Typhoon fighter, whilst getting out.

Our really good news is that with the help of Dave Purvis raising money at Portsoy and Herstmonceux, we will soon be purchasing a number of fibreglass coracles from Arrowcraft Engineering. We are hoping to purchase one of each of the three types they have on offer - Ironbridge, Teifi and Towy. With these fibreglass coracles, we will

hopefully spend less time on repairs and be able to take even more people out on the water next year!

Ed: The Society committee recently approved a grant of £500 to the Insh Coracle Club, to assist them in their purchase of fibreglass coracles from Arrowcraft. The purpose of this grant is similar to the grants awarded earlier this year to the Teifi and Carmarthen Coracle Netsmen's Associations - to enable the Insh Coracle Club to purchase durable craft suited for heavy public use and to keep some of their homemade coracles for display and demonstration purposes.

1987 And All That

Peter Faulkner

Diary entry for February 12th 1987: "Visit Eustace Rogers at Ironbridge, coracle builder. 10am'. This was that first magical encounter with the 'living legend' and was the culmination of many weeks delving into the world of coracles; a world I knew nothing of! My sudden interest in these most ancient of water craft had been sparked off by a house move from Kingsland to Leintwardine, a village nine miles north, in February 1985. I had returned to the village of my childhood where I grew up (1948-1963). It was a very happy and carefree childhood where, with my three brothers, we enjoyed the surrounding countryside. The river Teme was the key that opened up a whole new world that lay ahead. I learnt to swim in its waters (in the Brockley Meadow) and floated down on logs left after the winter floods. We were familiar with the elven pike, crayfish, herons, kingfishers – aquatic life in abundance. We once watched a young osprey eating a salmon on the banks, followed by other hounds up river to Parson Pole bridge near Brampton Bryan. Yes, the river was my first love and was poised to become an intimate mistress. So here again, in February 1985, the Teme was to fashion my life for at least the next 30 years.

After watching the television series 'Great River Journeys' I thought it would be a challenge to traverse the Teme's 55 miles from its source above Felindre to its confluence with the River Severn at Powick, below Worcester. Then came the initial question – what would be my mode of transport? Somewhere from deep in my subconscious, the word 'coracle' bubbled up. I was soon hot on the trail of Eustace Rogers and then, as if by magic, I was walking along sunlit Severnside under the famous Iron Bridge, past a long, corrugated iron building into the garden of Mr Eustace Rogers. I had arrived!

Various structures were scattered about the well-trodden area. I identified a large rim made from two lengths of hazel, an old flat door sported the beginnings of a circular, hazel framework – some of the ribs had already been bent up and at the top, ends secured to an iron bar on the opposite side of the 'table' (Eustace and I obviously had a shared admiration for Heath Robinson). My instinctive curiosity reared up on its hind legs, but my 'Damascus moment' was waiting in the wings – at least, inside that long, corrugated building – Eustace's workshop.

Photo: Peter Faulkner



My knocks on the back door were soon answered. Before me stood the dapper figure of a slightly built man, very trim and attired in clean working clothes topped with a cloth cap, from beneath which two twinkling eyes were shrewdly giving me the once over. We exchanged pleasantries and talk of coracles quickly averted any tension that might have been lurking. "Yes, I would like to build a coracle to travel down the River Teme this summer"

I said. Eustace in a distinctive

local accent explained what the various hazel structures were for. He led me on to the workshop which we entered through a narrow doorway at the east, abutting the public footpath. The door opened inwards to the left. The absence of windows in the north wall gave the interior an air of Dickensian gloom, enclosed by shelves filled with valuable and necessary clutter – tools, potions, etc. No glint of Aladdin's precious treasures here, but treasures nonetheless to this gentleman of the river, that enabled him to create that wonderfully water-worthy craft – the Ironbridge coracle. Eustace proudly showed me a finished coracle in pristine condition. The slightly oval framework of ash laths had been painted green and the tight fitting, black calico 'skin' gleamed in the pale light from the dust coated south windows. This was my first encounter with a real coracle, but somehow the craft before me didn't produce that spontaneous tingle factor that perhaps I'd anticipated; then it happened! Turning around to make my exit I saw, in the shadows on my left, what I'd missed to see coming in – another coracle propped up against the wall. For a few moments I stared in disbelief but soon realised that this too was a coracle, but constructed from hazel and willow and covered with a cow hide – yes, a cow hide!

Love at first sight? Without question! Eustace explained that he sometimes made these hide coracles, mainly for the American market. He could see how animated I was but endeavoured to quench my consuming fire, explaining some of the many difficulties involved, but in vein. I was hooked – nothing but a hide coracle would do now. I was not to be persuaded otherwise!

The next couple of sunlit hours were spent chatting with Eustace, listening intently as he explained the finer points of construction. He was quite happy to give me free range to record all the information I needed. Armed with my notebook, pencil and tape measure, I recorded as much information as I could to enable me to construct my very one hide boat.

Back at home, the table was constructed first and the various components soon followed. My second visit to see Eustace was on 4th May to obtain information about

cleaning and curing cow hide. Again, Eustace was very cooperative. The following week I collected my first cowhide from the village butcher, Douglas Griffiths, price £35. This was fleshed (scraped to remove unwanted fat, etc) on my mother-in-law's lawn, a very crude attempt and a long, tedious process – not very satisfying, but acceptable (nowadays, fleshing a hide of 7ft x 8ft takes around 90 minutes).

Diary entry: 'Cut off big patches of fat, etc, finally put the skin into a bath of salts around 8pm, cleaned up and had 2 pints at The Sun Inn.' The latter being the famous parlour pub run by Miss Flossie Lane.

At the end of July in 1987, after christening my first hide coracle 'Teme Dipper' with a bottle of brown ale at 'Flossies', my son Adam launched the craft on the River Teme below the weir pool. The coracle clock had started to tick for me. (This hide creation still lives in my 'Teme' coracles, as the basic framework construction hasn't been changed).

Now, some 31 years and nearly 300 coracles later, that clock is still ticking and all because of that first meeting with Eustace at his home in the shadow of Thomas Telford's Iron Bridge!

Membership Renewals

Membership renewals are now due for 2019. Membership rates are unchanged at £10 for individuals/£15 for joint/family/associate members. You can renew online with your debit or credit card, or send a cheque to the Treasurer with the member's name and postcode written on the reverse.

If we have your email address on your membership record AND you opted back in to receiving emails from us following the implementation of GDPR, you will receive your membership renewal details by email. Otherwise, please find enclosed your personalised membership renewal form. Whatever way you receive your renewal notice, **please carefully check your details BEFORE renewing!** Every year we have a few occasions where we find members had moved, 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 treasurer@coraclesociety.org.uk or correct the renewal form and return to the Treasurer.

Don't forget 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 2019.

Bures Coracle Regatta

Steve Miles

As we had fine summer weather the recreation ground was busy with people enjoying the river and the picnic area, which meant we had plenty of punters already there. After advising some of the children to keep away from the paddling area, all went well.



Many people tried coracling for the first time and it was pleasing to see some of the kids take to it like ducks to water and kept coming back for more.

We only managed two races. I say "we", I was looking at the chiller drive bearing housing and oil levels on the ice cream van and missed them. I have no idea what the races were, or who won. We do say it is a laid back affair. As it was one of the hottest days of the year we decided to call off the racing altogether as most of the regatta was in the water swimming to cool off.

My thanks go to all who turned up and mucked in with safety boats lending coracles and enjoying themselves. All in all, we decided it was possibly the best regatta we've ever had from a pure fun point of view.

Motorising The Coracle

Euan Raffel



We were recently contacted by engineering students at University of Nottingham, who had been given an interesting project by their lecturer - motorising the coracle. This project isn't as simple as strapping an outboard to the back of a coracle - they have to recreate the paddle stroke.

Having never been in a coracle, I was more than happy to get them acquainted to the water, taking them out on the Trent and Mersey canal just over the fields behind my house. Armed with this first hand knowledge, they have gone back to Nottingham to see what they can come up with. They've promised to keep me up to date with their endeavours - we shall find out in the spring how they've done!

Coracles At England's Medieval Festival

Euan Raffel

Following the success of our first year at Herstmonceux Castle last year, we were invited back to provide more fun on the water.

A slightly bigger contingent travelled down from Yorkshire and the Midlands this time - myself and Dave were joined by my brothers, Zach and Ben, their dad Peter and Ben's partner Calista. We travelled down in convoy, enjoying an unusually brisk jaunt round the M25 (I never knew it could flow so freely!) and arriving in plenty time to get accustomed to the accommodation provided to us in the halls of residence on site (the castle is an outpost of Canadian university, Queen's).



Photo: Euan Raffel

We had been given a new pitch this year - closer to the action near the jousting arena and the main public entrance. The organisers outdid themselves in clearing a path through the woods to the moat and building a much more substantial jetty, which made a big difference!

The weather was, mostly, the same as that experienced throughout the UK this summer - hot, sunny days with clear blue skies. This did cause us some issues - namely the thick film of green algae across the moat (thankfully, we had no swimmers!) and the long, hot spell of weather had taken a lot of water out of the moat. There was just enough depth to paddle, but it made the underwater obstacles (namely the heating and cooling pipes for the castle, which run in a loop through the moat) more of a challenge to avoid and not get beached on.

Unfortunately on the Saturday the heavens opened and the rain didn't stop. We managed to get a few punters out on the water in the morning, but come noon the stream of visitors dried up and the market traders starting shutting up shop for the day. We battled on through the afternoon with our coraclemaking, barely protected from the elements by our events shelter, before calling it a day at about 4pm. Thankfully, that was the only low point of the whole weekend.



Photo: Euan Raffel

In total we had 90 people out on the water over the three days - on par with last year - and not bad given that we lost a day to the weather. We look forward to returning in 2019!

The Adventure Of An Ironbridge Coracle

Heather Berry

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In late summer 2015, I built my first Ironbridge coracle on a course with Jude Pilgrim. On the morning of 4th October 2018, Jude drove the coracle and I to Llanidloes in Wales. We carried the boat down to the River Severn which runs under a stone bridge there and loaded two bags of camping equipment, a spare paddle and a throw-rope under its seat. The water there was fast flowing, so once I pushed off from the bank with the paddle, Jude waved me off on my solo adventure and I was plunged in at the deep end of a very steep learning curve, dodging threatening shallows, sharp rocks, rapids and overhanging trees as the coracle raced along on its first adventure.

My goal was to paddle from a site close to the source of the Severn to the Gloucester Docks, just as our (now) President, Peter Faulkner, had done back in September 1987. Admittedly everybody, myself included, had serious doubts that I would make it through the first day, let alone the ten days it had taken Peter Faulkner. I fully expected to return home that same evening; cold, wet and paddle-less. "It was a nice idea Heather, but it was never really going to happen" would be the conciliatory chorus friends and family would sing. Except that somehow, thirteen paddling days later, the coracle delivered me into the choppy embrace of the Gloucester Docks.



Photo: Heather Berry

A group of women in Shrewsbury - 'The Scoffing Scullers' as I like to call them - were quite vocal about their doubts that the coracle could make it to the Docks. But taking each stretch of rapids, blocked meander, fording herd, angry swan, weir, lock, headwind and camouflaged angler in turn, the coracle gradually took me along the 165 scenic river miles.

Three days into the journey I swapped my ash lath and cordura coracle for a fibreglass one (modelled on the Ironbridge design). Mine was still river-worthy, but I was worried that it wouldn't be for much longer. Almost everybody I met along the river was excited to see the coracle and dumfounded to hear about the journey it was making. "Well, I haven't seen a coracle along this part of the river for years!"; "What a beautiful boat!"; "What's that, an oil drum?!"; "Did you nick it from McDonalds?" (not 'Lovin' It!); "They're called 'Oracles', aren't they?"; "Where'd you get that from?"; "What's it worth?"; "Is it made from wood? They used to make 'em from

reeds, didn't they?". And so I conversed my way down the Sabrina.

What surprised me most was that, as someone who doesn't particularly like talking, I thoroughly enjoyed my encounters with the 'land-folk' and their enjoyment of the 'spectacle' of the coracle. Anyone I approached for help or advice along the way was more than happy to help, pointing out the best places to camp, where to get out of the coracle on the approach to bridges or weirs, where to find an affordable room for the night while I tended to any injuries, which pubs served the best beer...

On a typical day I would wake around 6am, pack up the tent and sleeping bag, pocket the day's ration of water and energy bars and launch the coracle by around 7.30am. Above Welshpool there was no need to take planned breaks because the sheer number of shallow stretches, blocked meanders and impossible rapids forced me out of the boat on a regular basis. Following my OS maps, I would simply travel as far down river as possible and by around 5pm, I would re-pitch and write up the day's diary. Below Welshpool the Severn widens, obstacles were less persistent and it was easy to paddle for hours without realising where the time had gone, so I tried to adhere to a schedule of hourly breaks, when I would get out of the coracle and stretch my arms and legs.

Peter Faulkner joined me with his hide Boyne at Pool Quay. Prior to launching, I had a very useful lesson in the art of tying clove hitch and reef knots. We made good progress to Llandrinio, but overshot our planned exit point. Neither of us was amused to have to drag our coracle and kit (on lengths of rope) over a mile stretch of the Offa's Dyke path! When we paused for a rest and I turned to check on my coracle;

it was crowded by dairy cows which inquisitively sniffed and nuzzled the coracle. I laughed, but admittedly my feelings were more confused when they did the same to Peter's hide boat.



Photo: Heather Berry

When I arrived at the Gloucester Docks, Peter Faulkner, who had very generously offered me a lift back to Shropshire, was there to congratulate me on my

achievement. The Gloucestershire Echo interviewed me and took my photo in the same place its reporters had taken Peter's photo when he completed his journey over thirty years ago. Everyone was pleased that I had achieved what I had set out to do. But I knew that I was going to miss the world of the river - the sickly smell of Himalayan Balsam which perfumed the miles, waking up in the arms of the countryside, the day-long rushes of adrenaline. I'm chomping at the bit to tackle the next river, spot the next otter, kingfisher or leaping fish. Roll on summer 2019!

Coracles - A Poem

Dylan Jones

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Whilst leading a walking tour above Brecon a few months ago, I got talking to a poet and he told me he'd written a poem on coracles. The author is Gareth Writer-Davies and this was included in his book 'Cry Baby', published last year by Indigo Dreams

CORACLES

after my Father
had slipped the farmer a bob

I sat midstream
an inch or two above the deep fish pools of the River Teifi
as ticked sheep were bellowed from one county to the other

we ducked the reluctant ewes
with the long paddle
and watched the field bugs float away

I was a happy ferryman
impressed that my Father had spoken to the farmer in his native
tongue

and did not think that sheep could drown
as we carved upon the waters and skewed under the bridge
in our nutshell boats

my Father bought the grieving farmer a pint and a whiskey
to chase it down
and agreed that the child was a Jonah

News From The Teifi Coracle Netsmans' Association

Mark Dellar

The Teifi Coracle Netsmans' Association has been promoting the heritage and cultural aspect of coracles and the traditional side of fishing over the recent years, travelling near and far. It was quickly becoming clear that during the events, the traditional coracles were taking some damage and therefore we had to come up with another way for interested people to have a go without the potential of breakage.

The idea was put forward to have a fibreglass coracle made. A traditional coracle was donated by Rod Bowen so a template mould could be produced. Once the template was finished, the netsmen's association put requests into local groups, The Coracle Society and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, for funding to purchase coracles for the ongoing education classes with the local school and demonstration days. We have been fortunate enough to have three coracles donated to the association by the Language and Heritage Committee, The Coracle Society and recently Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water Community Fund.

We all would like to extend a big thanks to the associations for their kind donations and support. If anyone would like a taster session in one of the coracles please get in touch with us through our Facebook page 'Teifi Coracle Netsmans' Association' – facebook.com/teificoracle



Photos: Mark Dellar

The Coracle Society Officers 2018-19

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

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