

30th anniversary 1990-2020



The Coracle Society

Journal

Autumn 2019



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Cover images: top, coracles at Ironbridge Coracle Regatta (Gary Fruland); bottom, Teifi coracles under repair (Mark Dellar)

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www.coraclesociety.org.uk

President's Thoughts

Peter Faulkner

I was able to attend both the Committee and Annual General Meetings of our Society at Small Woods, Ironbridge in October. The experience was informative, pleasurable and very worthwhile. The 'business' was dealt with thoughtfully and thoroughly in a convivial atmosphere. On behalf of the Society I would like to thank and congratulate all the officers who give their time freely and unstintingly for the Society's good.

Having spoken over the telephone with Dave Purvis, Terry Kenny, Euan Raffel and Gerwyn Lewis, it was clear that much has been achieved over the past year. Coracles have been present at many events such as the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival in Aberdeenshire, the Deer Shed Festival in North Yorkshire and England's Medieval Festival in Sussex to name but a few. The Ironbridge Regatta drew a large crowd who were entertained by an army of dynamic enthusiasts eager to show their prowess under a cloudless sky.

After Eustace Rogers' death there was a noticable vacuum created in the Ironbridge Gorge. His workshop was emptied, the house sold and it seemed that the coraceling heritage was to fade into oblivion. Did someone wave a magic wand? Whatever happened, the vacuum has been replaced by the Ironbridge Coracle Trust, who will be shortly opening their brand new coracle heritage centre at Small Woods. More about their brilliant work can be found on their website www.coracle-shed.org. Congratulations to all concerned, with a special mention of Jude Pilgrim.



Photo: Peter Faulkner

I was very happy to present Jude with an extensive archive saved from a skip, containing dozens of photographs, letters, press cuttings, fishing statistics and so on, mainly centred on the Rogers family but also embracing the Davies family in Shrewsbury too, I am sure that much of it will feature in upcoming exhibitions.

It was good to talk with Mark Dellar at the AGM, however I am saddened by the attitude to Natural Resources Wales (the Welsh equivalent to the Environment Agency) to the coracle netsmen. There are now only 12 licences on the Teifi and 8 on the Tywi. The tradition of net fishing with coracles is deeply rooted in the rich historic soil of Welsh culture. The tradition is possibly older than any other facet of Welsh life, even the Welsh language itself! The result of the public enquiry was published in the

summer - in short, from January 2020 the coracle fishing season will be reduced by almost half, from five months to three (with no respective cut the the licence fee) and all salmon will become catch and release.

The 'media' generally do us proud but I would ask you all to be ever vigilant when dealing with publicity. The information you offer should be accurate and wherever possible, get a copy of the report before it goes to press. Be firm, be clear, be accurate and don't be bullied!

At the AGM I produced a copy of the first Journal, from 1990, and read the foreword by Sir Peter Badge and the calendar of events from 1990. So, 30 years on? I would say that the Society is very alive and vigourously kicking. Look at the website, take part in the many events taking place each year, read the Journal.

Sir Peter Badge's dream has become a reality and, as a society, we have moved forward dramatically, becoming global with the 'twin aims' at the cutting edge of that dream. Sir Peter made history 30 years ago and we, as individuals, are laying down the history of tomorrow.

Let us continue to work for the good of the Society and the fundamental aims laid down by our founder. Next year is our 30th anniversary, let's make it a bumper one! Enjoy your coracling and remember the RNLI motto: Respect The Water.

Chair's Chat

Mark Dellar

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This year's Chair's Chat will focus on the activities of the coraclemen of the river Teifi (which includes myself). I hope you will permit me to be a little selfish in this regard, focusing on just one topic. It's been a turbulent year for us, and our counterparts on the Tywi, and having looked back through the past few Journals I'm aware that we don't report on our activities as much as we should do.

With the big winter floods and the evidence of major tree movement within the river



Photo: Mark Dellar

system, there was a lot of thought and preparation going into the 2019 season; New and old nets being prepared for potential underwater obstructions, and the coracles had a little touch up to ensure they are waterproof for the first night at least.

The season started without any major obstructions being found

in the main fishing areas, which was a big relief to all the netsmen. All that was needed now was the fish to start running. The fishing proved challenging once again this season, with the fish numbers on the average once again.

With the 2019 season well underway, the outcome of the net limitation order was released.

Alongside this, information began filtering through about the 2020 season and thoughts turned to the reality of a much shorter season and the probable new restrictions on catch and release for various species.



Photo: Mark Dellar

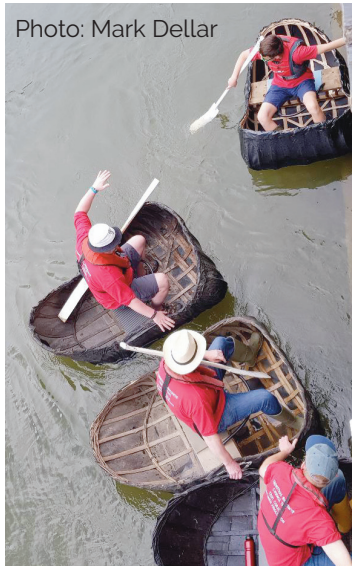


Photo: Mark Dellar

Unfortunately the tradition of coracle fishing hangs in the balance for the first time in probably the history of the craft's existence, with the new limitations reducing the season from five months to three months of the year and the restriction of only landing sewin (sea trout). With Natural Resources Wales (the Welsh Environment Agency) not reducing the annual licence fee to reflect the changes, it is becoming an ever increasingly expensive hobby. (There is more on this later in the Journal).

Turning to more positive news, the netsmen took part in a few local events throughout 2019 and also featured on television and in magazine articles, which is helping us to spread information about the uses of the Teifi coracle to the wider public.

If anyone is interested in seeing the coracles in action, you can wander down to the river bank at Dolbaddau from 1 May 2020 at dusk, or get in contact with us via our Facebook page if you fancy joining us next season – facebook.com/teificoracle. If you're not online, please feel free to make contact via the Society secretary.

Coracle For Sale

Lovely Boyne-style coracle for sale. Canvas and bitumen covered. Enquiries to Rachel: rachel.hannan@hotmail.co.uk or contact the Secretary



Three Decades Of The Coracle Society

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In 2020, The Coracle Society will celebrate its 30th anniversary. In advance of the festivities, we've taken a look into the archives and pulled articles from the Journals published in 1990, 2000 and 2010 which we hope will be of interest to you. Don't forget you can access the full archive of our publications by logging in to your account on our website.

1990

FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

Peter Badge.

Project 2000: The Millennium Coracle

As part of their continuing efforts to promote coracling Graham Fisher and Dave Darby have departed from their usual style of recreating historic vessels based on old plans and have instead constructed a radical new shape of coracle.

Project 2000: The Millennium Coracle is a twin hulled catamaran style vessel with reportedly excellent handling characteristics (designed to hold one person it in fact comfortably accommodates two) and capable of being powered either by the traditional paddle or a small outboard motor. It was completed in under three days at their latest public demonstration held at Bewdley Museum (25th - 27th October 1999). Although planning and research into the build had been conducted for months beforehand into what the builders believe is a unique step forward in coracle development.

“We have taken all the positive features from our previous builds and put them together in a style which is stable and portable with a large carrying capacity” said Graham, who is seeking to register the design with the Patent Office.

“But we have managed to retain the traditional building methods of construction using ash lathes covered with cloth and made waterproof” added Dave.

The pair explained that coracling is an increasingly rare activity and this latest project is an experiment in identifying how coracles could have developed into the 21st century had their use not been increasingly stymied throughout the 20th century.

Project 2000: The Millennium Coracle will be on display at Bewdley plus various waterways shows throughout this year and, following satisfactory trials, Graham and Dave hope to expand their theme by constructing their next vessel from space age materials such as carbon fibre and acrylics.

“Dave and I believe the development of coracles has always been ongoing” said Graham “and although the purists may sometimes balk at our methods we like to think our efforts may help these intriguing little vessels survive well into the next millennium”.

This project is a joint initiative between G Fisher Enterprises and the Leisure Services Department of Wyre Forest District Council. A video, Coracles On The Severn, which has been partly sponsored by Canal and Riverboat magazine and Bewdley Museum / Wyre Forest District Council, is currently on general release at various outlets including Bewdley Museum.

Picture: Dave Clapp



Graham Fisher and Dave Darby high and dry in their twin-hulled coracle.

All aboard for twin look

2010

From our French Member

Dear Alan

As I was visiting a museum called Musée Albert Kahn, I was amazed to see a beautiful colour reproduction of a coracle.

These may be one of the first colour photos of a coracle. These autochromes were taken in June 1913 by one of the photographers a French millionaire had sent around the world to take colour pictures of traditional skills, people and monuments.

Maybe you have already seen these amazing pictures, if not, it would be great to reveal one of them in the 20th anniversary edition of the journal.

Best wishes

Charles-Henry Groult

7 Rue Saint Laurent

14400 Bayeux

France



Courtesy "Archives de la Planète.

The Aftermath Of The Public Inquiry

Julie Rees

.....

In January this year, an inquiry was held on behalf of the Welsh Government to examine the All Wales Salmon and Sea Trout Byelaws.

On 16th July 2019, Lesley Griffiths - the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs - published her report, which can be viewed online (link available on the Society website).

As you have shown your support to the Carmarthen Coracle and Netsmen's Association, we would like to keep you updated with the outcome of the Inquiry and what impact it has on the Carmarthen Coracle.

In her report, the Minister has decided to make all salmon catch and release. Also, the coracle season for the Towy/Carmarthen has been reduced from 5 months to 3 months (previously 1st March to the 31st July - as of next year it will be 1st May to the 31st July).

We agree that our Welsh rivers are in a worryingly poor condition and fast, appropriate action needs to be taken before fish stock vanishes completely. With two slurry spills in the River Towy over the past week alone, this doesn't bode well for the environment and little wonder why the river faces its lowest ever stock of fish.

Carmarthen Coracle and Netsmen's Association have always abided by the strict regulations set out by Natural Resources Wales (NRW). We, as an Association, can only hope NRW police and enforce even stricter regulations, penalties and legal action on those who continue to pollute our rivers.

The restrictions implemented on all river fishermen are understandable. However, until issues are resolved with commercial trawling on fish feeding grounds and agricultural and industrial pollution on the rivers and tributaries, the restrictions announced yesterday will have little impact.

Needless to say, we are also deeply concerned what effect this will have on our heritage. Coracle fishing will no longer become viable as each year we have fewer participants to ensure our legacy survives.

Insh Coracle Club At STBF 2019

Raymond Green

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Jeremy and I left Insh very early taking with us two of our new fibreglass coracles, the Teifi and an Ironbridge, in our newly adapted trailer. The trailer is too narrow to carry them flat and the shape of the Teifi required extra padding to protect the side as it cannot rest on the gunwhale.

Traffic is not allowed down to the harbour on Festival days because of the crowds but we blagged our way past several checkpoints to drive down to the harbour, thus avoiding a long walk with our trolleys (converted golf trolleys), to find Dave and two Mikes already set up on the little beach at 10.30.



Photo: Mike Gough

The tide was completely out but we could not wait to get our coracles on the water so off we went. We had not realized that proceedings were not scheduled to start until around 2.00ish and I think we got a couple of dirty looks. Nevertheless, ignorance is bliss and, after a paddle on our own to see how they handled in salt water, we began to offering visitors a go.

Then, we persuaded Dave to try out the Teifi. He did not need much persuasion and I think was really taken with the boat which is very stable. There was not much water in the harbour at this time but he took full advantage and seemed somewhat reluctant to come back to shore.

Mike 2 had never been in a coracle but we coerced him on to the water ignoring his cries of fear. He did not take long to get the hang of paddling and in the afternoon spent nearly three hours acting as a safety boat!!

Proceedings proper commenced at about 1.30 on a flow tide and we became very busy. We had up to thirteen coracles at a time with everyone having about thirty minutes on the water. There was the usual mix of those who were very quick to pick up the idea of paddling and others not so good. One young boy was clearly quite frightened once on the water so I offered him one of the safety lines we use at Insh. That gave him confidence but he did not wish to paddle so Jeremy took the line and gave him a tow around the harbour several times. He was a very happy customer.

High tide was around 3.00 and in perfect weather made for a great afternoon. We were so pleased to have been invited to Portsoy again this year and hope they will let us back in 2020.

Membership Renewals

Membership renewals are now due for 2020. 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 consented to receiving emails from us, 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 2020.

News From Carmarthen Coracle And Netsmen's Association

Julie Rees

Coracles @ The Big Cwtch

August 2019 saw the Towy coracle join forces with many local groups and trade stalls, all raising money and awareness for a local charity, Ski4AllWales. The charity provide equipment and access to facilities to enable adults, with physical, neurological or visual deficit, to ski. Many of the visitors took up the unique opportunity to have a go in a coracle - it was a great day out for such a good cause with so much enthusiasm for the coracles on the water.

Carmarthen River Festival 2019 - Coracle Races

The event seems to be growing from strength to strength, with bumper crowds flocking to Carmarthen's Quayside. This year, we utilised the fibreglass coracle (kindly donated by The Coracle Society) in our 'coracle pool'. Youngsters were able to have a go in a coracle on dry land in the handmade pool - it was a huge success with a constant and very long queue of eager future coracle boys and girls all waiting patiently for their turn. Needless to say this will hopefully become an attraction at all

our future River Festivals.

The main coracle races were also well attended and we again thank the Teifi boys for making the journey to support us. We also had a few new faces racing - a local radio presenter and two Llanelli Scarlets rugby players. The day was a huge success and plans are underway for Carmarthen River Festival 2020.

The Quay Centre, Carmarthen

Many of you will know that we still make coracles at Towyside in Carmarthen, a place where they've been made in Malcolm's family for generations.

In 2018, we relocated some of our old photos to the safe haven of The Quay Centre and this is where we also welcome local groups and schools. The building is owned by Carmarthenshire County Council and the plans were to knock it down to build office blocks. We've been working hard over the past year, alongside Carmarthenshire Water Safety Partnership and other river user groups, to promote our work and offer the building as a river community hub - which it has now become.

The building was due to be demolished in 2020 - but as of last week, we received some fantastic news that the Council have taken a U-turn in their decision to demolish the building and have decided to keep it for the use of the river users.

This is amazing news and goes to show what can be achieved when you work as a team!

Photo: Gary Fruland



Editor: One of our US members, Gary Fruland, was able to visit the Ironbridge Coracle Regatta this year, snapped this photo of the festivities and had a chance to have a paddle. Good luck with your coraclemaking back home in Illinois!

Opportunity To Demonstrate In France

We have been contacted asking if anyone would be interested in demonstrating coraclemaking as part of a British Village in Brest, north west France, in July 2020. Expenses will be paid and you are welcome to sell your work.

If you are interested, please contact Euan Raffel (contact details on back cover) for more information.

Insh Coracle Club At The Highland Folk Museum - 2019 Season

Raymond Green

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Our season at the Museum ended on 15 August 2019. During that time we had one thousand, one hundred and five people afloat on the millpond. We introduce them to coracles in a gentle and unhurried way, explaining as best we can about the uses and building methods around the world. We tend to focus on Welsh coracles and of course our own Spey coracle.

As we believe the water to be very safe we cater to a very wide age range of people - very little people, including one baby being breastfed (the baby didn't paddle) and the elderly including an 80 year old lady in a wheelchair (not with the wheelchair of course - how about a roll-on roll-off coracle?) Not a single capsized this year.

The Museum built a new much improved jetty for us and created a direct access to the water from the storage shed (the sawmill). Our lives were much easier as a result. We now have an agreement in principle to building a boathouse immediately adjacent to the water. Does anyone have any good suggestions about design etc.?

Our three new fibreglass coracles have been of inestimable value to us enabling the much greater visitor experience at the same time as saving on damage to our own-build boats. The big Teifi is so stable that we have not had any size limits or parents paddling children.

We promote the Society all the time but we have no idea whether any visitors join or build their own boats. We do know that we had folk back from previous years and repeat visits from this year. For some visitors this could be difficult as they have hailed from China, India, Australia, Brazil, USA, Israel, Canada, Sri Lanka, Ireland, and Namibia. We also had a lot of EU folk and an occasional UK citizen!

Conditions on the water have been perfect - lots of water with a much bigger surface area. The weather has been on our side too with Thursdays seemingly the dry day in wet weeks...

All in all, a very good year for us.

Pearl Fishing On The Spey

Article from The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News - December 1937. Copyright Illustrated London News Group

722—THE ILLUSTRATED SPORTING AND
DRAMATIC NEWS—December 31, 1937



CONSTRUCTING A CORACLE from the body of an old dog-cart covered by a piece of tarred sacking. Bunches of broom bushes, seen in left-hand corner, are tied in the sacking to help keep the good ship afloat.



THE SPEY IS SWIFT FLOWING, especially at the head and tail of the pools, and a mate is needed to control the boat by a rope from the bank.



OUR FISHERMAN'S ROD is fashioned from a strong branch of rowan or hazel, with a cleft cut in one end so that the mussel-shell can be picked up from the bottom of the river.

Pearl-Fishing on the Spey

A Strange Livelihood

THE river pearl-fisher's equipment is simple: a cleft stick, an oblong wooden box, open at one end and fitted with a pane of thin glass at the other, and a coracle. With his box the fisherman can see into the depths and, from experience, he generally knows the mussel-shells likely to contain pearls. Other shells brought to the bank, where there is no evidence of a pearl or where the pearl is expected to be too small, are not opened but returned to the river bed to mature. It is indeed a precarious livelihood, but the intelligent pearl-fisher has unique opportunities of studying wild life.

The last photograph of this set is of a fisher who has had fifty years' experience on most of the Scottish streams, and he sits with one leg tucked back below him. He loved the quiet places of our land, and his knowledge of natural history was amazing. He knew nothing of the housing problem and had never heard of such a thing as Income Tax.



IN SWIFT-FLOWING shallows the fisher wades with box and rod.



IN SO SMALL A CRAFT it is a delicate job; an incautious move and the fisher gets a ducking and loses his catch.



WHEN THE SHELLS ARE BROUGHT to the bank an experienced fisher will immediately detect a pearl-bearing shell.

The Coracle Society Officers 2019-20

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	June Lewis Jude Pilgrim Dave Purvis Julie Rees Peter Stanyon Bruce Watson
Teifi netsmen's representative	Mark Dellar
Tywi netsmen's representative	Malcolm Rees
Ironbridge representative	Terry Kenny

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