



Journal

Autumn 2021



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Cover images from top: Ironbridge Regatta (Dave Bagnall), Bernard Thomas exhibit at National Coracle Centre (Martin Fowler)

The Coracle Society Journal - Autumn 2021

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Membership Renewals & Keeping In Touch

Membership renewals are now due for 2022. 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. Membership rates are unchanged at £10 for individuals and £15 for joint, family or associate members.

If we have your email address on your membership record AND you've 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 number of occasions where we find members have moved but not 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. Alternatively 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 2022.

Do you have an email address?

Since GDPR came in to force in 2018, about a third of our members have not opted back in to receiving emails from us. This is down from a high of around 90% in 2017. This means our postage costs have increased significantly over the past few years as items such as the spring newsletter and AGM notifications need to be sent by post to members around the world.

If you use email, please opt in to receive emails from us. We only send a handful of messages through the year, so your inbox won't be inundated. You can opt in using our online form at www.coraclesociety.org.uk/gdpr or if renewing by post simply enter your email address on the form before posting back to us with your cheque.

President's Thoughts

Peter Faulkner

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Many logs have gone under the bridge here in Leintwardine during the last year. It has been another period of uncertainty, confusion and frustration for all sectors of society but paddlers have been busy behind the scenes.

One one hand we hear of 60,000 football fans bursting their lungs inside a stadium whilst on the other we are instructed not to sing in places of worship! I do hope that many of you will have coracled and enjoyed that unique feeling of floating effortlessly, wrapped in an euphoric sense of well being and in perfect peace with the world.

After many weeks lay-off I took my hide coracle to the river. It was a beautiful evening bathed in glorious sunshine with not a breath of air. I paddled about for half an hour and returned to my usual entry/exit spot. Then came the big shock! I started the usual sequence of maneuvers for exit but found that my legs were unable to lift my torso into a vertical position prior to stepping out! I tried again but failed... By now my brain was teeming with negative thoughts, the predominant one being "was this the end of my paddling activities?" Recovering from the initial shock I began working on an alternative approach. Thankfully a solution was soon found and with some practice I was able to stand again on terra firma! My advice to all you young and/or supple enthusiasts is to make the most of your gift and get out there on the water whenever you're able. I have also noticed that my coracle has doubled in weight!

Despite the coronavirus, we have had an eventful year as a number of telephone conversations have revealed.

Gerwyn and Mary Lewis hosted a course at their family home and with Terry Kenny aboard 5 coracles were produced over the weekend of 24-26 September. Two coracles went to Sheffield, one to Birmingham and one to Somerset. The test run took in the notorious Jackfield rapids and three enthusiasts were dunked in the Severn with thankfully only pride being bruised. Confidence was fully restored after a few pints in the 'Half Moon'.

Terry Kenny attended the Ironbridge Coracle Regatta on August bank holiday Monday and whilst numbers were noticeably down, it proved very successful and as usual a good shop window for us. (Marion's report on this year's Ironbridge regatta is later in the Journal.)

Dave Purvis said his year has been very quiet and most events and festivals had been cancelled due to coronavirus. He was however optimistic and looks forward to a return to the norm in 2022.

Jude Pilgrim reported that the sculpture of Tommy Rogers had been unveiled in April near to the Museum of the Gorge in Ironbridge. Jude said that the Coracle Drift from Cressage to Ironbridge on 18th September had been great fun, with funds raised going to the Ironbridge Coracle Trust.

Martin Fowler has just closed the National Coracle Centre for the winter and had a reasonable season, welcoming small family groups as opposed to the coachloads of visitors before coronavirus. As reported last year, Martin took time during lockdown to refresh the centre and its exhibits, and we are hopeful for a more prosperous future for the centre.

We can all, I sincerely hope, look forward to more settled times when life will return to some semblance of normality. In the meantime get on the water whenever you can, enjoy this amazing and unique form of water transport, engage with the public. They are hungry for information, especially the young ones, and they will not forget their first encounter.

Finally, my thanks to the Officers of the Society for keeping our vessel watertight and on course. Although the Society doesn't have a motto, I would ask you all to 'Respect the Water!'

Chair's Chat

Mark Dellar

To start off I would like to express my thanks to all the Coracle Society members and committee for sticking with the Society once again this year.

Unfortunately there is very little to report on again this year.

Neither the Cilgerran coracle races or the Towy regatta took place due to the coronavirus restrictions. Fingers crossed for a successful 2022 coracle events season across the UK.

The new coracle net fishing season came into effect this year, restricting the season to three months (May, June, July). Unfortunately most of May was a wash out due to high river levels, rendering the season a lost cause for sewin fishing.

My son Dyfrig and I had the pleasure in attending the Ironbridge regatta this year. We both had a great time on and off the water and commend all of the organisers, volunteers and participants for a great day out.

Ironbridge Coracle Regatta

Marion Blockley

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Two years since the last event, scores of families turned out on August Bank Holiday Monday to celebrate the long awaited return of the Ironbridge Coracle Regatta.

The event, a celebration of the Gorge's long association with coracling, saw a packed riverside enjoying a wide range of fiendish challenges on the water.

There were plenty of capsizing competitors to delight the crowds. It was a welcome return for the event, which was cancelled last year due to the pandemic.

Local community groups and volunteers came together to make it a really fun day out. There was a relaxed and happy atmosphere and thanks to the various precautions taken; visitors said they felt safe to return to the outdoor event.

A number of familiar faces from across the UK coracle community were missing this year because of coronavirus. But we were pleased to welcome back Mark Dellar and his son from the Teifi Coracle and Netsman's Association, along with entrants from Essex, Hertfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Birmingham and Ludlow, to compete against our local teams of experienced and novice coraclers.

Fingers crossed next summer will be back to normal.



Photo: Dave Bagnall



Photo: Dave Bagnall

Insh Coracle Club Update

Raymond Green

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Through the winter of 2019-2020 the Insh Coracle Club built its new boathouse at the Highland Folk Museum. We completed construction just in time for the opening of the 2020 summer season at the Museum, only to be closed immediately because of coronavirus. Along with everyone else we were locked out and did nothing.

However, the boathouse survived and we were allowed to check it several times that winter. Spring 2021 came and with the easing of restrictions, the Museum opened and we offered to 'do something' for visitors. After completion of a risk assessment, we agreed to spend a day a week at the boathouse just talking to visitors about coracles. We were 'fenced off' from visitors to maintain social distancing and we were not permitted to allow visitors in the coracles. (Have you ever tried to sanitise a coracle after use?)

We soon developed a pattern of engagement with visitors that we found surprisingly satisfying for both them and us. We had time to talk about the uses of coracles around the world, drawing on as much literature as we could find for information. Similarly for the history and evolution of coracles, drawing heavily on authors such as Hornell and Herodotus. Questions from visitors we could not answer forced us to research, as much as we could, to find answers. It was a steep learning curve for us. Visitors found our recounting the story of the Finkel ark fascinating, especially as we had a couple of screen grabs of the boat recreated for the Channel 4 programme! It looks bigger than our pond!

We have had a surprisingly wide range of visitors. Chatting to folk familiar with quffahs, curraghs or parasils gave us an insight we would not normally get. We talked about the use of bamboo - our bamboo miniature parasil was made from five foot lengths - which intrigued one family who talked about eighteen foot lengths. Oh envy!

I took great pleasure with a considerable number of American visitors, regaling them with the story of Prince Madog in 1170 and the Mandan and Hidatsa Native Americans! I emphasized it was merely a legend but said I believed it. Many of them took details for their own research!

It was not all talk for us as we were able to paddle ourselves giving demonstrations. We had hoped to spend time building a coracle but were simply too busy to do more than some maintenance on our fleet.

At the end of September we were able to allow a small number of folk out on the water. They were visiting the Museum as part of the EU's Erasmus+ Programme

called Our Way Heritage Lives, where rural heritage partners share good practice. Coronavirus meant that visitors from the Scandinavian Museums involved had to make do with a video presentation, a video that included a section from us at the boathouse. The visitors that came in person, from similar outdoor folk museums throughout Scotland, all had a paddle whilst dressed up for the part, in face masks and rubber gloves. It was a real treat for us to have all of our coracles out and to actually get someone on the water. Clearly our teaching skills had not left us as they all did very well.

One of our biggest frustrations was the disappointment by some visitors who had come back from visits in previous years. They all understood the problems and promised to come again. Indeed, one school party viewing us from behind the fence included a girl who had been with her own family in 2019 and was able to tell her friends how much fun it was. Even more frustrating for her colleagues. So there is a silver lining.

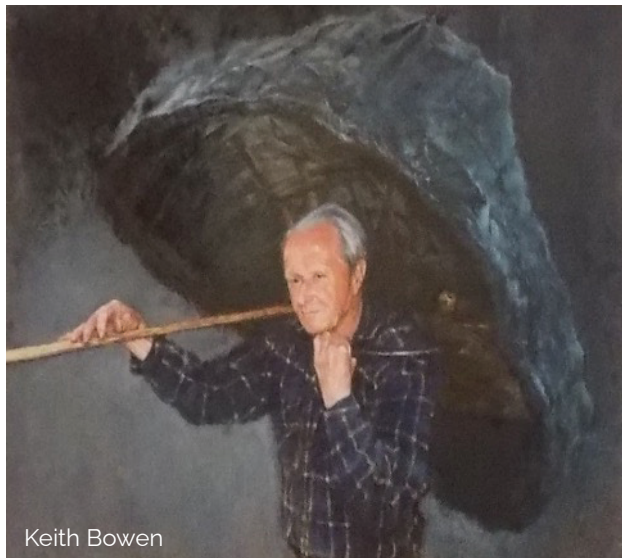
New Arrivals At The Museum

Martin Fowler

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When you run a museum, it appears that even the new exhibits are old! The past two years have been very different for obvious reasons, but even after thirty years when you think that you have as much information on coracles that people could possibly want to know, a new item arrives and you manage to fit it in somewhere.

During the first lockdown in 2020 I rearranged the museum to make it easier for me



Keith Bowen

to deal with small groups of visitors rather than coach-loads of thirty plus or school groups.

The year before all this happened, I was donated a painting of Bernard Thomas, the coracle maker and fisherman from Llechryd who died in 2014. Keith Bowen from north Wales painted his portrait in 2004 and exhibited it for many years around Wales. Out of the blue he phoned me and asked if I would like to have the painting, and he even said he would bring it down in his car. What I didn't expect

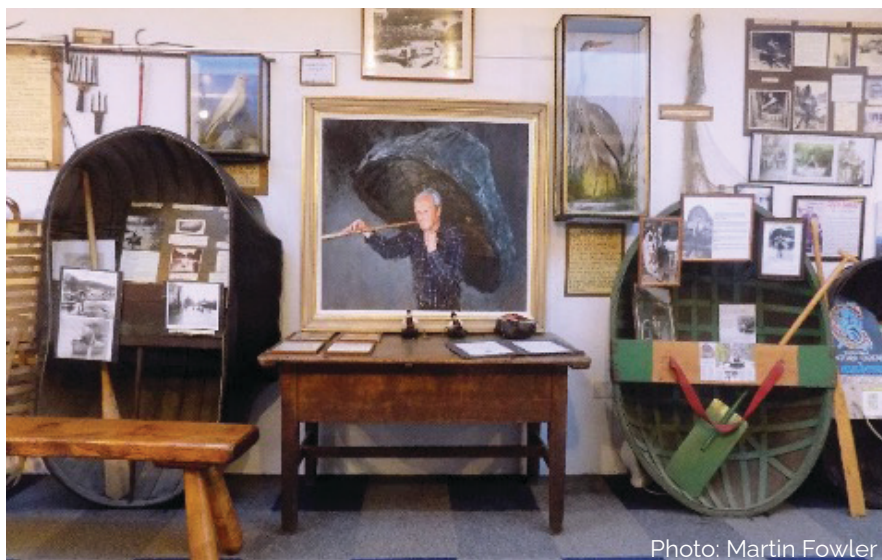
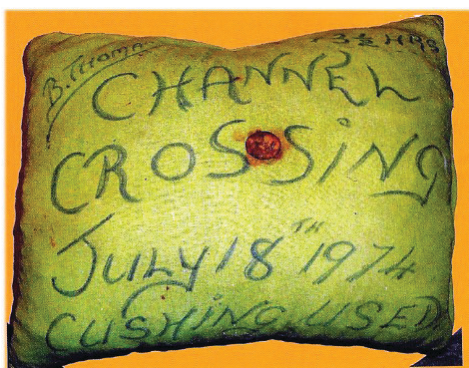


Photo: Martin Fowler

was a frame that is almost four feet square and now dominates the far end of the museum.

On the subject of Bernard Thomas, I also acquired from his family the frame of the coracle that he used to cross the English Channel in 1974, so this is a real museum piece. This small coracle made the journey that took thirteen and a half hours of which the final mile took four hours because the tide was against him. After Bernard died, the people who bought his house found a green cushion in his airing cupboard and was probably the only thing of comfort he had on his journey.



Photos: Martin Fowler

In July this year another new arrival. This iron sculpture of a man carrying a river Teifi coracle, which was made for Sir Peter Badge and then donated to the Ironbridge Coracle Trust, was very kindly delivered to my doorstep as an onward donation from them to me after Sir Peter died.

Luckily it was far too large to go inside the museum and has pride of place outside the entrance and is now a photo shoot opportunity for some of my visitors. My thanks to the Ironbridge Coracle Trust.

So, some new exhibits that have found a new home. They all have a history and after all that is what every museum is about!



Photo: Martin Fowler

Bures Regatta

Steve Miles

With coronavirus and Dick Mundy's passing, I was unsure whether to go ahead this year. As the whole event now relies on me being able to turn up coronavirus-free, it wouldn't be much of a regatta with out coracles!

My main worry was huge "lockdown" crowds decending with total chaos with just Catherine and I to control it. Then someone helpfully put it on Facebook...

This year the ladies from the River Stour Trust came to help with a refreshment and goodies stand. So there we are all set for a noon start with storms forecast thinking perhaps no one will turn up. What actually happened was a pleasant day was had by all.

The people who had a go were genuinely interested in making their own so advice was given and types explained. Having both a Cleddau and an Ironbridge helps indemonstrating hull shapes, stability and speed through water etc.

For me it was good to be able to spend more time to encourage people to try both types so they could see for themselves.

Thankfully Carol, a regular, turned up half way through and is always keen to share her coracle with others.

So my thanks go to Catherine and the River Stour Trust who make this event possible, and to those who participated who made it worthwhile.



Coracle Making Courses

Pippa Scott

2 day coracle making courses in glorious mid-Wales. Build your own Boyne-style coracle with willow frame and waterproofed calico cover.

Dates: 2/3 April, 23/24 April and 7/8 May 2022. Dates subject to any change in local coronavirus restrictions

Cost: £350 - for one or two people to build one boat. Includes tuition, materials, lunch and snacks. Camping available on site, self catering accommodation may be available.

For more information or to book your place contact Pippa and Rob
 - email pippa.gorfanc@gmail.com, phone 01686 420423 or visit
www.the-gorfanc-hideaway.co.uk

From The Archives

We've dipped into the archives and found this item from the 2001 Journal - some coracle trivia you may not know

CORACLE TRIVIA

1863 (The marriage of the Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward the Seventh)

At 9 o'clock old Carmarthen Bridge, the Quay and the embankment a gay appearance, each place being thronged by thousands of persons all attired in holiday attire and decorated with a variety of description of wedding favours, to witness several boat races.

The first was a coracle race from Carmarthen Bridge, round a boat moored off the Pothouse Quay and back to the bridge. Eoght coracles came to scratch and on signal being given off they went and kept like a group of partridges, each man being quite at home in his one oared boat. However on their return the receding tide took its tale on these primitive vessels and the strongest arm and muscle would best. The winners were as follows William Thomas (Dan-y banc) Griff Lewis (Dan-y banc) David Lewis (Dan-y banc) and William Lewis (Dan-y banc).

1188 (Giraldus Cambrensis on his journey through Wales)

The boats which they employ in fishing or in crossing rivers are made of twigs, not oblong, nor pointed, but almost round or rather triangular, covered both within and without with raw hides: when a salmon thrown into one of these boats strike it hard with its tail, he often oversets it, and endangers both the vessel and it's navigator.

49 b.c. (Julius Caesar cut off in Lerida because of the collapse of the bridges over the River Sicoris wrote

When Caesars affairs were in this unfavourable position, and all the passes guarded by soldiers and horse of Afranius, and the bridges could not be repaired, Caesar ordered his soldiers to make boats of the kind that his knowledge of Britain a few years ago had taught him (55-54 b.c.) First the ribs with light timber, then the rest of the hull of the boats was wrought with wickerwork and covered with hides.

Carmarthen Coracle & Netsmen's Association Update

Julie Rees

Update from the Towy

The 2021 coracle fishing season on the River Towy was probably the worst on record!

The heavy rain we experienced in May meant we couldn't venture anywhere near the river.

After having floods and the plague to deal with, we waited for the locusts to arrive - thankfully they didn't, but the seals did arrive in June. As seals require approx. 35-52lbs of food daily, it was a constant battle - one which we could never win on their hunting ground.

As soon as we moved into July, all the salmon we caught were catch-and-release and the sewin had previously travelled up river during the wet weather.

With Towy coracle licences currently set at £555 per year, I think I'm confident in saying the coracle fishermen made a huge loss this year, which doesn't bode well for the future of the Towy coracle

Robson Green Visits the Carmarthen Coracle

Actor and television presenter Robson Green paid a visit to Carmarthen back in June.

The exact reason for the star's visit is being kept under wraps until a later date, but he spent time learning all about the ancient craft of coracle fishing from the Carmarthen Coracle and Netsmen's Association.

No stranger to water, Green has fronted television shows such as Extreme Fishing, Extreme Fishing Challenge and Tales from Northumberland. He currently plays Detective Inspector Geordie Keating on ITV's Grantchester and he was one half of the singing duo Robson and Jerome, along with fellow Soldier Soldier actor Jerome Flynn, who had several chart-topping singles in the 1990s.



Photo: Julie Rees

Carmarthen coracle man Malcolm Rees (pictured left) welcomed him to Towyside, a picturesque area close to the River Towy, where his family has made coracles for generations.



Photo: Julie Rees

Here Green was shown how traditional coracles are constructed and also the painstaking craft of net making.

The presenter was given a miniature replica of a Carmarthen coracle, which had been made especially for him by myself. I was taught the art of miniature coracle making by her late father-in-law Raymond Rees.

He was delighted with his unique gift, as he had been looking for a special reminder of his visit to Carmarthen. Having heard so much about the tradition, later the same day the fishing enthusiast was eager to meet up with the Carmarthen coracle men.

As the night shift workers patiently waited on the quayside for the daylight to dim, he shared many fishing stories and was keen to know more about the heritage of this dying Welsh tradition.

Watch this space for more on Robson Green's visit to Carmarthen later in the year.

Gordon Ramsey's Top Secret Visit

British chef, television personality and writer, Gordon Ramsey, visited the coracles in Carmarthen during 2021.

We're not able to say anything about his visit or what the chef got up to, but more information will become available during the New Year – we promise!

A New Mural for Carmarthen

The coracles are lucky enough to utilize the amazing space at the Quay Centre in Carmarthen. Not only does it house our collection of coracles and old memorabilia, but it also acts as a base to educate local groups on the importance of water safety. So, along with Carmarthenshire Water Safety Partnership, we decided to brighten the area up (not that the blue building wasn't bright enough already!).

Adorning one side of the building is a spray-painted image of Raymond Rees with a coracle on his back and the word 'Croeso' (the Welsh word for 'Welcome') above it in the form of a rope design.

The bottom right corner of the wall features a life buoy with a blue heart through it



Photo: Julie Rees

representing the incredible work of the Carmarthenshire Water Safety Partnership and those who have lost their lives to the river.

The coracle association is proud of its links with work of the CWSP and have enjoyed working with the hugely talented local spray paint artist Steve Jenkins to produce this work of art.

To be a part of this amazing community project not only fills us with pride that our tradition has been acknowledged, but gives our amazing town a well deserved uplift.

It's a wonderful representation of the old port and creates a welcoming gateway for visitors.



Photo: Julie Rees

Save The Date

Our 2022 Annual General Meeting will take place on Monday 29th August at the Ironbridge Coracle Regatta. More details will follow nearer the time

The Coracle Society Officers 2021-22

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	Gary Fruland 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

Contact Us

Secretary

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

Treasurer, editor, membership enquiries

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

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