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Cover images (from top): Teifi coraclers at the Brest Maritime Festival (Mandy/Len Walters); Finley and Malcolm Rees being interviewed by BBC Radio Wales in Carmarthen (Finley HW)

The Coracle Society Journal - Autumn 2024

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Membership Renewals & Keeping In Touch

Membership renewals are now due for 2025. 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 you have automatic renewal set up, payment will be automatically taken on the anniversary of your last renewal payment. We had a number of members double pay their membership last year, which comes at a cost to the Society. **Please read your membership renewal notice carefully.** If you wish to make an additional payment as a donation to the Society this will be gratefully received, but please contact the Treasurer as we have a separate process for accepting and recording donations.

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.

Please let us know if your contact details have changed. 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. Alternatively email any changes to treasurer@coraclesociety.org.uk, or correct the enclosed 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 2025.

Do you have an email address?

If you have received your renewal notice in with this Journal, it means we don't have an email address for you.

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 will also be able to manage your membership online.

You can opt in to receive emails using our online form at www.coraclesociety.org.uk/membership/newsletter-signup or if renewing by post, simply enter your email address on the form before posting back to us with your payment.

President's Thoughts

Peter Faulkner

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Another AGM has passed, in fact the 34th. The inaugural meeting in Cenarth in 1990 is still very clear. Those present will remember a cloudless blue sky and us sat in Martin Fowler's new coracle centre, which at that time was a breeze block skeleton without a roof.

I have, so far this year, been unable to get afloat on the Teme here in Leintwardine, but with some weeks until the new year I still have hopes that it will happen.

The highlight of the year was attending the Ironbridge Coracle Regatta in August with my wife Vivienne. The turnout was amazing and the expansion of the site to embrace so many side attractions created the feeling of a coracle village. It truly put a beating heart to the occasion, creating a feeling of warmth and togetherness. It was especially pleasing to see so many children getting involved with the coracles; our future members. Well done to all those involved in making it happen. With fine weather and a friendly river, the crowds were obviously having a great time.

Did you see the three barnacled old sirens of the river mingling with the crowd? They certainly stood out with their sunburn wrinkled faces and gravelled arms. Yes of course they were three of the many founding members in 1990, namely myself, Terry Kenny and Gerwyn Lewis.

It is no mean feat to organise and establish an event such as today's and the foundation was laid by Terry and Gerwyn some 30 years ago. Long may the regatta flourish.

My sincere thanks to the officers of the Society for their unstinting support in keeping the Society afloat.

Another year is closing but I am sure that during the winter months there will be much ado about coracling matters, planning events, trips and courses for 2025.

Finally, it was a great bonus to have this year's AGM in the New Coracle Shed. It is an Aladdin's Cave of coracling memorabilia, tools, photos and much more. Many faces of the Rogers family peered down upon us from the walls and it brought to mind that line from Under the Milk Wood – "...and the yellowing dicky bird watching pictures of the dead!" I felt a kind of warmth coming from them as if they were saying "well done for keeping the coracle tradition alive."

I shall leave you with my usual advice – respect the water, and take nothing for granted.

Coracles For Sale

There are a couple of coracles currently listed for sale on our website. Summaries of these are below, for more information please contact Euan Raffel

Towry-style coracle. Used but in good condition. £350, buyer collects from Essex



Ironbridge-style coracle. Well used but in good condition and watertight. Originally built in 1996, has been re-covered many times. Ready to go straight on the water but would benefit from some light repair/restoration. Offers in region of £100 considered, buyer collects from Cheshire



Chair's Chat

Mark Dellar

Welcome to my final article as chair. I have officially stepped down as chair at the recent Annual General Meeting but will be staying on as a committee member.

We all know that nothing gets done without dedication from people behind the scenes. I would like to take the opportunity to extend my thanks to all involved in the Society during my time as chair for their support, but especially for their hard work and commitment to The Coracle Society and ensuring the survival of the coracle in the UK and beyond.

There have been some recent departures from the society's committee. I will not name them all due to fear of missing someone out, but would like to show my appreciation and that of the whole Society for the years of dedication and hard work to keeping The Coracle Society running effectively. Thank you.

The year has had a great deal of coracle promotion, one would say getting back to pre-covid levels, with the different groups Showing and exhibiting at fairs, open days and a variety of shows throughout the UK, France and beyond.

But I think the development of the coracle builds in association with the Men's Sheds will take the interest and new coracle builders to a whole new level. A huge thanks to all who have made this project happen and look forward to seeing the results of the next phase.

If you are or know anyone travelling around the country, please share the Society's website with them so you and they can find local coracle activities and events in the area they are travelling through, like the New Coracle Shed in Ironbridge, the National Coracle Museum in Cenarth or the Quay Centre in Carmarthen just to name a few.

Happy Paddling.

Could You Be Our Next Chair?

At this year's AGM, we unfortunately did not have any volunteers for the position of Chair which is now vacant, hopefully only temporarily. In the meantime, our vice chairpersons will assume this responsibility. We remain on the search for our new chairperson. As we are a small organisation it not an onerous role, but we need someone with passion for coracles and the community to help drive the Society forward into its 35th year and beyond. If you are interested, please contact the Secretary.

Insh Coracle Club Update

Raymond Green

Out with the old and in with the new! 2024 has been disappointing for the Club at the Highland Folk Museum. As previously reported, our 'home' there, the Mill Pond, was badly damaged by Storm Arwen in November 2021. We had limited paddling through 2023 but by the start of the 2024 season the Pond had been losing so much water, even through the winter rain and snow, conditions had become such that even our jetty was completely out of the water and had become very dangerous for visitors. It had to be removed.



Photo: Raymond Green

This meant that on health and safety grounds we could not let visitors on to the water. All we could do was give demonstrations on a small area of water and of course talk to folk. It was quite frustrating, especially for visitors who had been in previous years and wanted another paddle. However, our engagement with so many interested visitors has resulted in a number of follow-up requests for more information about coracles – from as far afield as South Africa, the USA, the Netherlands, and within the UK.

Happily, at the beginning of October, after visitor numbers had lessened and the breeding ducks and moorhens had left, what water remaining was drained completely. Diggers were brought in and the whole area around the Pond has been dug out. A new liner has been installed and the Pond refill will be complete, we hope, by the end of the month, water coming from a new borehole. Material for a new floating jetty is now on site and we will build as soon as the water is up to the proper level. Fingers crossed that it all goes well.

Meanwhile, several members have had paddles out on the River Spey and Loch Insh and at least have had some fun. One of our members, Jeremy, has been working all summer on attempting to build a replica of a coracle based on an archaeological description of a Bronze Age burial site found at Barn's Farm at Dalgety Bay in Fife. The site was discovered in 1975 and amidst some stone burial cists were three bowl shaped depressions which were later considered to be coracle burials. One in particular has a hull very close in shape and profile to the Teifi coracle. Unfortunately, the gunwhale is completely missing and construction from the drawings and description we have of the excavation has been a challenge. Watch this space!

Updates From Carmarthen

Julie Rees

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Looking back at past reports, we repeat ourselves by stating it's been the worst season on record - with another drop in catch numbers this year, we find ourselves saying the same thing for 2024. Salmon remains catch & release, while sewin numbers have further reduced. With a licence for the Towy currently almost £700, we can't see the future of coracle fishing continuing as we know it. Possibly it will become a heritage fishery in the not-too-distant future, as enthusiasm amongst the coracle association is very low. Many of the older generation of coracle fishers have now retired from fishing or will be retiring soon.

During the year, we've been working with Carmarthen Together to carry out water testing at well-known pollution locations in our area. The results have been shocking and have been reported in the press and social media - but it continues to happen. Sadly, the Towy is one of many rivers across the country facing this issue but we'll continue to monitor and report.

March 2024 saw the coracle men proudly march in the Carmarthen St David's Day Parade, led by the Mayor of Carmarthen and the Bishop of St David's Dorrien Davies. Both dignitaries spoke of their support of the Carmarthen Coracle and how the town valued the coracles as part of the town's heritage.



Photo: Julie Rees

The annual Carmarthen River Festival with its Coracle Races took place during August. It was another successful event, which saw many taking part in the races and a huge queue of children eagerly awaiting their turn for the coracle pool. Next year's River Festival date has already been announced and will be held on Saturday 19th July.

We've taken part in various publicity projects, including a Welsh children's TV programme, also 'Cais Quinell' which sees Wales & British Lions Rugby star Scott Quinell travel around Wales learning the language, ITV Cymru Wales have featured us on their news, award winning photographer Joann Randles has followed Malcolm making coracles for a feature in the Western Mail and we've proudly unveiled our coracle design shopping bags, gift cards and postcards (all proceeds go to Carmarthenshire Water Safety Partnership, a registered charity who promote water safety to our local schools).

Coracles In Sussex

Finley HW

It was late in 2023 that I began my project of building and researching coracles, but the greatest part of it all was in the spring of 2024. I had struggled to find good resources and so it was not until Euan lent me some books on coracles and he introduced me to Julie and Malcolm Rees that I could really get under way. My project was a part of my school's Year 9 curriculum, a self-driven project spanning much of the year - following a personal interest and learning new skills. I chose the coracle. This was mostly because I have always loved the outdoors and being on the water and also because I am really interested in ancient skills and traditional crafts so coming

across the coracle, I immediately wanted to learn more.



Photo: Finley

Although I did a great deal of research about the history, types, fishing etc. and found it very interesting, my absolute favorite part was building the coracle. I had originally planned to build a coracle as ancient or primitive as I could, but talking to Euan and Malcolm made me realise that a hide coracle would be impractical. However, I had already started building the frame with willow rods, so it was too late to begin a lath one.

Through much trial

and error and hour spent kneeling in the mud, I finally finished the frame. When I pulled it out of the ground, it bent slightly outwards and I needed to pull it into shape with ropes for a few days. With a friend we then tightened and re-tightened the calico I had bought for the cover and after sewing the cloth onto the woven edge of the coracle, I eventually painted three layers of bitumen on it.

Throughout the project, Julie and Malcolm were



Photo: Finley



Photo: Finley



Photo: Finley

exceedingly supportive of my project and this came to an awesome climax when I was invited to travel to see them in Carmarthen. I brought along my coracle and Malcolm showed me how to use it. We then added a strap to the seat together, so I could carry it on my back in the traditional manner.

We then set off towards their museum to have a look around at the old coracles and nets and it was there that

we met the BBC news reporter. Julie and Malcolm had arranged for him to come and do a short piece on my project. This was very exciting, and the clip ended up on the radio, BBC Wales and actually on my school's website! I hope that this small bit of publicity has helped bring the coracle even more into people's awareness. I really enjoyed the trip and absolutely loved seeing the old coracles, maybe someday I will visit them again.

I have recently purchased some ash for making a lath coracle (hopefully it will be lighter than the last one!). Overall, I have really enjoyed this project and definitely want to continue my interest and involvement with coracles in the future. Maybe I can come to some of the Society's events, as now that I am a member I would like to become more involved. Lastly, I would also like to thank all the people who have supported me in my project, Euan, Julie and Malcolm, Martin and all the people in my community who helped when I needed it.



Photo: Finley

Thank You Jude!

A notable departure at this year's AGM was Jude Pilgrim. Jude joined the Society in the early 2010s whilst she was Executive Director of the Small Woods Association, Ironbridge. Jude joined the committee in 2013 and aside from a brief period as chair 2015-16, has been a committee member for the past 11 years. In recent years, as well as being an invaluable source of knowledge and support, Jude has played a key part in the creation of the Ironbridge Coracle Trust and the work they have carried out to preserve the old shed by the Iron Bridge, the creation of the New Coracle Shed at the Green Wood Centre and continuing the annual Ironbridge regatta. On behalf of the Society we would like to thank you Jude for your many, many years of service

to the coracle and woodworking communities and a we wish you a very happy retirement!

It certainly isn't goodbye however - Jude will continue to support the Society with her invaluable experience and advice applying for grants and financial support as our coracle preservation project continues into the next phase, and I'm sure we will continue to see her at the Ironbridge regatta.

Men's Sheds Meet Coracles

Rachel Meadows



At the end of June the UK Men's Sheds Association and the Coracle Society teamed up to embark on a special venture... to help a new generation of people learn the ways of coracle making!

The idea was dreamt up by veteran coracle maker Dave Purvis who, although an experienced coracle maker, only made his first 22 years ago when the longboat course he actually wanted to take part in was full up! Dave is an active member of Ripon Men's Shed and a committee member from The Coracle Society and was passionate about the UKMSA joining forces to promote the craft. For the last few years Dave

and the guys from Ripon Men's Shed have been kindly supporting the UKMSA at the North of England Woodwork and Power Tool Show, which takes place in Harrogate each year. Last year at the show Dave approached me with an idea about Men's Sheds learning how to build coracles in order to preserve the traditional craft, and Sheds then teaching others in their communities to do the same.

Coracles are not a new concept to Men's Sheds with several Sheds having built (and launched!) coracles in the past. In fact, it was only in 2017 that Frome Men's Shed accepted a challenge from Men's Sheds Cymru to build their own coracle... and compete in a race!

Dave's idea was to approach a small number of Men's Sheds and offer them the chance to take part in a two-day



workshop hosted by The Coracle Society, that would show them how to build a coracle from scratch. The Sheds might invite people from their community to join, or teach others at a later date. I had a think about Sheds that may be open to taking on the project and reached out to a few to float (no pun intended) the idea.

The project kicked off with Shrewsbury Men's Shed who, located practically on the banks of the Severn and led by Chair Simon Rouse, are generally an exciting bunch that are up for anything. With their historic coracle connection and even their own model of traditional coracle (The Shrewsbury Coracle with its squarer shape and flatter base) they seemed like the perfect place to start.



The weather was on our side as I made my way to the Shed, a good thing really as the build was taking place outside and we were at the mercy of the elements. The would-be coracle makers assembled for an introduction by Dave who gave some useful background and outlined the plan for the next two days. Joining me for the build were not only Sheddiers, but other members of the community who ranged in age, gender and skill sets. We had some members of different Young Farmers Clubs from the Shropshire area, representatives from the Shrewsbury Repair Café and

Food Hub, a local boat club, and the Men Walking and Talking group in Shrewsbury all take part in the build.



The coracles consist of ash laths that are bent to form a rough frame, then laid across lengthways and widthways (and diagonally!) with more laths to make the structure sturdy. Pieces are laid in for a floor and the whole thing is covered in

canvas or calico, then painted with bitumen to ensure the coracle is waterproof. Over the two days we bent, wet and shaped laths, screwed many, many screws (both steel and copper), did a lot of hammering and even some sewing in order to make our final piece. Due to time constraints, we were only painting one coracle up as ideally they need to dry overnight.

As with any activity at a Men's Shed there was plenty of chatting, getting to know each other over the odd cup of tea and even some drama on day two when the wind blew one of our gazebos away! Shrewsbury Men's Shed also put on an

amazing lunch using food from the local Food Hub (that would have otherwise gone to waste), with a chilli for the meat eaters and a huge vegetarian paella cooked outside by chef Aaran. We even received a special visit from representatives from Shrewsbury Football Club, complete with their mascot Lenny the Lion. The football club also have a coracle connection with local legend Fred Davies being the man that would retrieve lost footballs from the river in his coracle on match days.

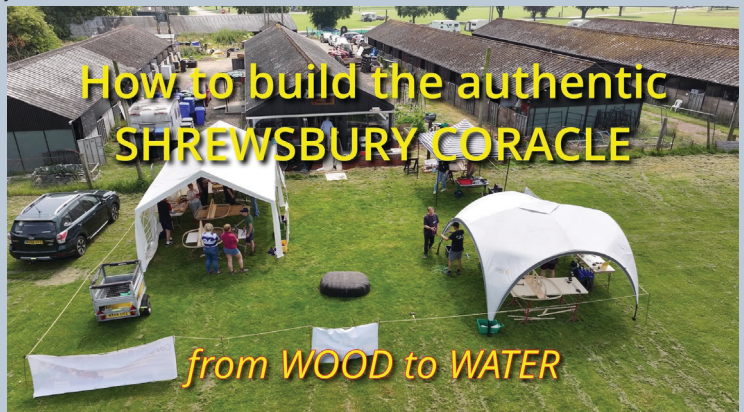
Our build concluded with an exciting voyage on the Severn from a small bank in the West Mid Showground (which houses the Shed) with some of the build crew volunteering to have a paddle in some fibreglass coracles which had been loaned to us for the occasion. Most people got the hang of it quite quickly and apart from Ruth taking a quick dunk in the water and Simon paddling off into the distance out of sight it all went swimmingly (pun intended)!

The whole build was documented by a film crew that are producing a 'how to' video about the process of making a coracle. This will be a valuable resource that will educate others about the craft.

We do still have a few other Sheds who are lined up to complete a build; if you are one of the Sheds waiting, thank you for your patience and things are moving ahead with getting yours organised! Thank you also to Shrewsbury Men's Shed for their hosting skills and enthusiasm in bringing the right people together for this build, to

How To Videos And Guides

Fancy a winter project? Our website now has three guides/videos on how to build a coracle: the 'original' guide on how to make an Ironbridge Coracle by Terry Kenny; a how to video by the late Raymond Rees MBE on how to build a Towy coracle (thank you to Carmarthen Coracle and Netsmen's Association for digitising this and making it freely available); and the above mentioned how to make a Shrewsbury coracle video featuring the Shrewsbury Mens Shed, filmed this spring thanks to funding received from the Heritage Crafts Association. All these are available at www.coraclesociety.org.uk/coracles/building



everyone that took part in the workshop, and of course to Dave Purvis who works very hard at protecting this traditional skill, and did a great job of leading us all through the two days.

Brest Maritime Festival

Mandy and Len Walters

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Photo: Mandy/Len Walters

On 9th July, two coracles travelled to Brest, France to the largest maritime festival. It is usually held every four years, however due to covid this year's celebrations would be the first in eight years, making it an extra special celebration.

Mandy and Len Walters travelled from St Dogmaels in Pembrokeshire to Brest with two coracles, nets, paddles and as much information as they could fit into their vehicle, along with some amazing

mini coracles made by Worden Owens from Cilgerran. The coracles were invited to be part of the Celtic Village, to exhibit and promote the heritage of coracles and their traditional fishing method.

Over nine hundred thousand tickets were sold during the event and the interest shown by the ticket holders was amazing, especially from the people from Brittany as their saint had reportedly arrived by coracle.

After six long and rewarding days exhibiting the coracles and the fishing method from the river Teifi, the last day had arrived and seeing over eleven hundred tall ships and vessels of all sizes departing together was truly an amazing sight.



Photo: Mandy/Len Walters

With the event closing and the coracles packed away for the long trip home, we had a chance to reflect on all the positive comments and interest shown by the visitors to our section. Overall the vibe was amazement that such a long tradition is in such decline and shock that the pressures to remove it from the rivers and that we had to pay each year for the privilege. One stand out comment

was "they should be paying you to keep this amazing fishing method alive".

We would like to extend a big thank you to the organisers and groups that help make our trip happen: Mike Smiley the herring man for getting us there and back in one piece; The Coracle Society for generously covering the costs of our new pop-up

From The Archives

1994's Journal contained a transcript of a 1930 recording of a conversation with Michael O'Brien on how to make a Boyne coracle, and an article by Shelagh Wynter on how to make a Spey currach

HOW TO MAKE A BOYNE CURRACH - a transcript of a 1930 recording of a conversation with MICHAEL O'BRIEN, one of the great currach men.

Kindly provided by Gervyn Lewis of the Greenwood Trust

(Peter Faulkner, the Teme coracle maker is now making an excellent Boyne coracle. - Ed.)

Ediphone Record, taken 16.6.30 with Mr. O'Brien by Mr. John Delargy, M.A., 7 St. Devin's Gardens, Dublin

I'm Michael O'Brien of Oldridge and I'm goin' to give a description of coracle makin'.

I commence to cut the hazel rods for coracle makin' immediately after the leaf goes off. I cut all the rods suitable for the purpose, some of them 2 inches and a half in circumference and the remainder of them half that size, from nine to ten feet long - between nine an' ten feet long; takes them home an' cuts them along the facing sun to season. An' when they're seasoned a bit, for a fortnight or so, tie them up again an' puts them up until the coracle-makin' commences in the month o' January. When they are seasoned properly I commence to make the frame of the coracle, on the ground an' puts down the sticks in their proper places after I have the circle made. The makin' of the circle is simply done by two sticks with loops on them, leave one stick lyin' in the ground an' you go round with your other one an' forms the circle. An' when you go round half-ways you make it oval from that to the tail o' the coracle to the length you want.

I commence then an' puts down the 32 rods for the basket of the coracle, an' immediately I have that done I commence an' makes the rim. When I have the rim plaited I commence layin' eight off the side rods across an' goes opposite an' puts the other eight with the points o' them at the butts of the ones I done first, an' when that is done I go to the front of the coracle and puts down the 7 front ones to the tail, an' goes an' puts the tail 7 on with the tops o' them to the front, an' after that's done I put a board, (1) on with some

(1) larch or date

HOW TO MAKE A SPEY CURRACH

by Shelagh Wynter

(Shelagh, like Olivia Elton Barrett, is a Coracle Society member but also a basketmaker of considerable skill and experience, who is off to work in Bangladesh where she hopes to find a local coracle. There are 'parisals' in Tamil Nadu, S. India, so why not!)

(The Spey currach because of its very different construction from other coracles and currachs is particularly suitable for basketmakers. - Ed.)

Reproduction Spey Coracle - Currach

Materials:

¾ bolt 8'-9' brown willow rods (two-thirds of these are split)
Preformed gunwale of 4 stout hazel rods lashed into an oval 45" x 50"
Horsehair rope
Wooden seat 45" x 11" x ¾"

Method:

Cut 7 50" sticks from the butts of whole rods. Put 3 through the other 4. Put a fourth through the smile with the 3 and tie the slath with its tip and a matching rod slyped and slipped in. Open out the 15 sticks with the pairing that now continues throughout. After 2 rounds a stake made of the hilt of a split rod 30" long is inserted beside each stick, tip towards the centre. Pairing continues using whole rods for 4 more rounds. Sticks and stakes are now opened into 30 singles. Complete centre with two more rounds of whole rods.

A further 30" split rod is inserted beside each of the 30 stakes. Continue pairing with split rods - skins on the underside - for about 12 rounds. Add extras on opposite sides to form the oval. The base is now flat and about 30" x 35". Replace any broken or short stakes. The stakes must now be turned up to form the bowl shape as pairing continues. Use whole rods where necessary to help with the shaping.

Continue pairing with split rods checking from time to time that the aimed for top size is going to be accomplished. Finish with 2 or 3 whole rod rounds. The depth at the centre 14", sides 45" x 50".

The gunwale is placed inside the stakes and lashed very firmly onto the whole rod pairing all round. (We used split willow or cord instead of horsehair). Cut off the stakes close to the gunwale.

Fit seat across the short side and lash firmly to the gunwale. The carrying rope is made of 2 large rods roped and fixed through the holes in the seat.

The coracle is covered with a cowhide the ends of which come over the gunwale and are lashed into place. (It can be covered with canvas, but a wooden brace needs to be fixed with struts under the seat for stability).

2004's Journal contained a unique wedding memory - two newly weds in a hide coracle, pictured in front of the famous Iron Bridge

A Memory To Treasure



The 2002 AGM report mentions a wedding party at Ironbridge. Here is the happy couple, Stephen and Karen Urbisick. The photo was sent to me by Stephen's aunt Jenny Gurney, who lives near Wigan; three miles down the road. Small world isn't it!

You can read these editions - and indeed all our Journals and newsletters published since our formation in 1990 - on our website. Visit www.coraclesociety.org.uk/membership/benefits and log in to your account to access

and wall banners; Brittany ferries for their sponsorship of the ferry crossings and accommodation. Finally we would like to thank the people of Brest for their lovely hospitality and interest in our unique heritage craft.

The Coracle Society Officers 2024-25

President	Peter Faulkner
Vice Presidents	Rod Bowen John Davies Martin Fowler Terry Kenny
Honorary Chairperson	<i>Position vacant</i>
Honorary Vice Chairperson	Malcolm Rees Charlie Quinnell
Secretary	Peter Stanyon
Treasurer	Euan Raffel
Committee	Mark Dellar Gary Fruland June Lewis Steve Miles Dave Purvis Pete Redding Julie Rees
Teifi netsmen's representative	Mark Dellar
Tywi netsmen's representative	Malcolm Rees
Ironbridge representative	Terry Kenny

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