

25th anniversary 1990-2015



www.coraclesociety.org.uk

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at St Fagans: National History Museum on 26th July
2015**

PRESENT

Dave Purvis, Dylan Jones, Euan Raffel, Terry Kenny, Jude Walker, Malcolm Rees, Bruce Watson, Andrew Betteridge, Dr Irving Finkel and 10 members of Society

APOLOGIES

Julie Rees, Mark Dellar, Diana Hill, Brian & Jane Pearce, Tim Jones, Wendy Gee, Steve Miles, Peter Faulkner and Martin Baines

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Agree as a correct record. Proposed by Terry Kenny. Seconded by Jude Walker

MATTERS ARISING

None

REPORTS

Chairman

The last three years as your chairperson had flown over very quickly for me, and now has given me time to reflect on what has happened in the fortunes of the Coracle Society over that time.

The most significant thing has been in our membership numbers; although I would have liked to have seen an increase in our membership during my term we have remained static around 100 strong, which has been no mean feat considering the massive downturn which we experienced in the economy over this time, which hopefully we are now well on the way to a recovery, albeit a fragile one...and I hope that members are ever conscious of the need to constantly encourage new blood to join the Society if we are to ensure our growth and survival.

National coracle events over the last three years at Portsoy at the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival on the Moray Firth (22 years), Carmarthen, Cilgerran (65 years), Bures (10years) and Ironbridge have continued to steadily increase numbers of entries and spectators, and I was very pleased to attend the Montgomery Canal Trust's first coracle regatta, with the help of the Ironbridge Coracle Trust members at Welshpool on 27 June - I hope it will become established as an annual event - this revives a coracle tradition there which died out in the 1920s. And there is still to come - the first Cumbrian regatta to be held on Bassenthwaite Lake on 12 September I hope members will continue to give these events their support.

In addition to the netsman Trophy which Martin Fowler donated to the Society some years ago to commemorate the memory of Geraint Jenkins, and used for the overall winner of the Coracle Society

Annual Regatta, we have donated, in association with the National Coracle Centre, netsmen trophies to the annual regattas at Carmarthen, Cilgerran and Ironbridge to be used for the most promising newcomers-and hopefully encouraging them to join the Society.

For members and event organisers we have 3 vinyl banners and a pop-up information banner available on loan, and Euan has information leaflets on the Society available to download for members to use to help us promote the Society.

We also now have coracles on display in several museums in Scotland, namely The National Scottish Fisheries Museum at Anstruther in Fife, the Salmon Bothy at Portsoy on the Moray Firth in Aberdeenshire, and the Highland Folk Museum at Newtonmore in the Cairngorm National Park; we also have an excellent rapport now with Elgin Museum, which houses the last known remaining Spey Coracle –their staff have been down to see us at the Portsoy festival for the last two years and are going to give us some space in their Autumn newsletter to publicise our activities.

It is a little unfortunate that there is just not enough coracles to go around sometimes, we had to turn down invitations to attend the Malvern Show and Founders day celebrations at Dulwich College in June as no members volunteered to attend, but new events which did receive support were the Mawddach Paddlesports in June (Karl) and the Royal Welsh Show this week (Dylan and Carl), I wonder if it would be feasible to start a register of volunteers who would be available to give up one or two days a year to help out at events, and maybe a list of coracle makers who are willing to demonstrate at shows and events-in many cases fees and expenses are available to cover individuals costs-it is a most enjoyable way of spending the odd weekend during the summer and does help spread the word about the work of the Society-what do you think?

Euan has done a brilliant job in setting up and maintaining our web site and has worked hard to keep it fresh and interesting, and the Autumn Journal, which he produced last year, was probably the most professional one we have ever seen. Remember the web site and journal is only as good as the contents and contributions from members, so please keep the reports and stories and articles coming in. These are no substitute for letting members of the public from having physical contact with coracles and coraclers, but are the best way for us to keep in contact with members and spreading the word through the Media.

I must mention our secretary and archivist Dylan –I hope I am not embarrassing him—he really is the Society's unsung hero- apart from his involvement with coracles in his daily work here at St. Fagans, and his own contribution towards attending shows and events on behalf of the Society - he keeps us afloat on the administration side of things, and fields an awful lot of emails from around the world about coracles and currachs, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him and his colleagues for hosting our AGM once again at St Fagans and organising the supporting activities this weekend

Moving on, it is particularly pleasing to see that support from members who contributed towards the Help our Heritage Huts appeal which has played a part in helping fund Martin Fowler's installation of the John Christmas Thomas workshop inside the National Coracle Centre at Cenarth this year, and many congratulations to our members in Ironbridge –Jude Walker, Geraint Lewis, Terry Kenny and Bruce Watson and their colleagues who have inaugurated the Ironbridge Coracle Trust and secured sufficient funding to acquire the Rogers coracle workshop and adjacent land this year-now begins their task to carry out preservation work and repairs and fitting it out as an interpretation centre and visitor attraction-there will be more about this shortly.

During my term of office we have been able to strengthen our association with both the Carmarthen and Cilgerran netsmen, and are very pleased to have Malcolm and Julie Rees to represent the Towi and Mark Dellar to represent the Teifi on our committee, and Terry Kenny still represents the coraclers

on the Severn - I hear the Welsh netmen are in for a tough time next year, I am sure the Society will do our best to support them.

During this time we were also saddened to lose two of our senior Vice presidents and founder members Raymond Rees and Bernard Thomas-I think Peter will probably have more to say about them in his address.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Committee and members for your support and forbearance over the last three years, I have had a most enjoyable experience and am confident under the leadership of a new President and chairman the Society will go from strength to strength-thank you for having me, and I hope I am allowed to continue as a committee member as long as they will put up with me!

Treasurer

- This year's balance sheet is slightly different to in previous years. As our financial year runs in tandem with the membership year – January-December – the full and final accounts I am presenting today are for the 2014 financial year
- Our finances continue to remain healthy. Last year, excluding income/expenditure related to the huts appeal, we had a surplus of approx. £950. This year to date our surplus is currently approximately £450, though of course we have yet to incur expenses for the Journal
- Expenditure is down over this period by approx. £365. This is partly due to certain expenses such as insurance falling outside the bounds of this balance sheet
- Membership income has improved, though this again is partly due to some fees being paid outside the bounds of this balance sheet. Membership today stands at 109
- IWA insurance and membership costs remained the same this year. Our thanks to them for working hard with their insurer to do so. Further to the agreement at last year's AGM we have cancelled our membership of Heritage Crafts Association
- One member has taken advantage of the Society's insurance cover this year. The Society should continue to encourage other members to do so – the insurance cover is available for members to use at events where they are supporting the society and members using our insurance cover for events helps to offset the cost of obtaining the insurance cover
- Finally, with regards to the huts appeal, a payment of £500 was made to the Ironbridge Coracle Trust. The remaining funds await allocation, and we will allocate the remaining funds to the ICT as and when they request it. The hut project at Cenarth has been completed so no more monies are due there

Membership secretary

No report

Secretary/archivist

First of all croeso welcome to St Fagans. As you see parts of the museum is like a battle site at the moment but rest assured all of the building work will be completed in the next two years. Hopefully you will enjoy your visit to Wales and in particular St Fagans.

Thankfully there will be no work involved over on the Castle area where the ponds are located. Hopefully the rain will keep away!

Steady stream of emails/phonecalls/letters regarding coracles from the World and it does surprise me that our numbers have not doubled over the last few years.

A secretary's life is indeed a hard one – it was indeed a great burden in taking time off work recently to help Tomos and Lilford brew our special ale called Cwrwgl – the Welsh word for coracle of course. I sincerely hope you will like it and many thanks to the brewers from Llantwit Major help us celebrated our 25th anniversary. Work commitments meant that only Rob Lilford was here yesterday and his brother Jim today. Pretty sure Rob will become a member of the Society before the weekend is out.

Sadly Karl was unable to join me at the Royal Welsh Show but it does look like we will be invited back next year – must have done something right! Would like to thank Karl for all his work at St Fagans in the past twelve months and it was good for him to revisit the Mawddach again this year. Again his presence was eagerly anticipated! For your information well known Welsh poet and singer Twm Morys has joined the Society and has promised to contribute to the Journal one day.

To finish I hope you enjoy your time at St Fagans and if you need anything please come to me or ask one of my colleagues.

National Coracle Centre

No report

Netsmen representatives

Tywi (Malcolm Rees)

Will be similar report to last year. Several local schools have been invited to workshops. Demonstrations include showing two coracles on dry land with net in between. Children shut their eyes and visualise being in a coracle fishing at night making them aware it is a fair way to catch fish. They have been invited back to schools to give demonstrations during assembly.

Have appeared on various Welsh TV shows including Heno and Iolo Williams has also visited.

A fair and honest article on the Tywi fishermen appeared in the Shooting Times.

There are serious challenges lying ahead with the salmon in the northern hemisphere under enormous threat due to predators and climate change.

No issue with catch and release and cannot argue with it.

All fish are tagged, if not they would be fined.

Authorities contemplating cutting their season therefore will have only a few months to catch the fish. £560 for license.

All fish have been tagged since 2008 and numbers have remained constant.

May need the support of the Coracle Society in the years ahead.

Annual regattas on the Tywi (29th August) and Teifi in August.

There are 8 licenses on the Tywi with four active. Therefore not fishing to capacity. Increased danger therefore in to lose inactive nets.

Teifi

No report

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

President: Dr Irving Finkel

Proposed Jude Walker, seconded Bruce Watson, carried

Vice Presidents: Rod Bowen, John Davies, Peter Faulkner, Martin Fowler, Terry Kenny

Proposed Dave Purvis, seconded Euan Raffel, carried

Chairperson: Jude Walker

Proposed Bruce Watson, seconded Terry Kenny, carried

Vice chairmen: Malcolm Rees, Bruce Watson

Proposed Dave Purvis, seconded Euan Raffel, carried

Secretary/archivist: Dylan Jones; Treasurer: Euan Raffel; Membership Secretary: Brian Pearce;

Committee: Andrew Betteridge, Gerwyn Lewis, June Lewis, Brian Pearce, Dave Purvis, Julie Rees, Mark

Dellar; Teifi netsmen's representative: Mark Dellar; Tywi netsmen's representative: Malcolm Rees;

Ironbridge representative: Terry Kenny

Elected en bloc

Signatories for the bank accounts to be Euan Raffel and Jude Walker.

OUTGOING PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

When The Coracle Society was formed we had three main objectives, namely:

1. To support and assist the traditional makers and users of coracles

Over the years we successfully lobbied the Welsh Assembly and its appropriate members. Our distinguished member, Martin Fowler, set up single handed the National Coracle Centre and its wonderful and varied collection of coracles and allied craft. He has also acquired the shed of the great Cenarth coracleman John Christmas Thomas, which is matched by the acquisition of the late Eustace Rogers' shed in Ironbridge. All the best-known coraclemakers agreed to be our honorary Vice Presidents and have given us great support

2. To attempt to revive an interest in areas which have lost their traditional coracle heritage

This has not been successfully achieved until this year when Pat Ward organised a very successful regatta in Welshpool

3. To encourage the making and use of coracles and allied craft for leisure purposes

This has been massively achieved in East Anglia, Northern England and Scotland where our outgoing Chairman, Dave, and his grandson, Euan, have worked wonders. But we are also very grateful to the Green Wood Centre and Bewdley Museum for their pioneering coraclemaking courses, and particularly for Gerwyn Lewis and Terry Kenny for leading them so very well at Green Wood Centre, and Charles Fogg at Bewdley.

When I was a schoolboy in North Wales in the 1940's, I saw a coracle being used for net fishing on the Dee in the Llandollen area for the first time. Thereafter my interest waned until my wife, Mary, asked Bernard Thomas to make me one of his Teifi coracles for my fiftieth birthday, which he did, and from then on I was hooked.

Soon after this I saw an article in the Telegraph setting out the problems of the Tywi coraclemen with the authorities. I wrote in support, which prompted a number of replies. About the same time I had the very good fortune to meet Geriant Jenkins, our first President, and John Williams Davies, both of the Welsh Folk Museum (St Fagans), amongst others. We decided to set up a coracle society and the rest

as they say is history. Our connection with the museum has been admirably continued by our secretary and archivist.

Over the years I have met and become friends with Raymond Rees MBE, Bernard Thomas, Edgworth Evans of the Taf, Ronnie Davies of Cenarth and Eustace Rogers of Ironbridge, all of whom, sadly, have died. Most of who, however, have made coracles for me and have been generous in sharing their vast experience which helped me greatly in writing my book.

It has been my good fortune to have known well the Davies family of Shrewsbury, of whom John E. is the last traditional English coracleman; his father Jack and uncle Fred having died.

Mention must be made of our committee member Peter Faulkner who has created his own type of hide craft, the Teme coracle, in which he has made very long journeys in rivers all over the UK and Ireland.

May I now thank the members and officers of the Society, past and present, for all their dedication and loyalty, which has ensured our Society's ever increasing success. Before I finish, I am sure you will allow me to mention two people whose contributions have been immense; namely our outgoing chairman, Dave, who has travelled unbelievable distances from his native Yorkshire promoting coracle and those who make and use them; and his grandson, Euan, who has not only created and maintained our excellent website, but has also carried out the duties of honorary Treasurer and Journal Editor so very well

Any personal sadness I may have in leaving office as President is greatly outweighed by my realisation of how very strong today's Coracle Society is.

INCOMING PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

A few words from Dr Irving Finkel:

Thanked Karl Chattington for teaching him how to paddle.

Exploring the possibility of having a coracle demonstration at the British Museum. An Indian coracle will be on display in Room 3, British Museum and hoping for an Iraqi one as well.

Has written children's books on Noah and hoping children will become interested in coracles.

Coracle is mentioned in the book Treasure Island where Ben Gunn is marooned and makes a coracle. Is it a brand to explore? Sir Peter Badge suggested the bull coracle. Will have to explore the possibility.