
CAERWENT HISTORIC TRVST

The Midwinter Sunrise

Remember the dense fog which kept many airports closed for three days? Only 6 people set out through this fog on December 22nd but one lesson of Astronomy is never stop hoping. The fog was only 600 feet deep and in line with the Standing Stones at 800 feet the rising sun was easily visible.

This remarkable site on Gray Hill has been strangely neglected in the academic world. It was listed by Prof Alexander Thom in the 1960s as one of 6 alignment sites in Wales (as against 4 in England and 40 on Scotland) and was reported by Fred Hando in the South Wales Argus around the same time. Yet no mention of this alignment is made in the recent County History of Gwent.

Caruth – Bard of Dinham

During the Dark Ages the hamlet of Dinham, now ruined, seems to have been quite a centre of culture. The poems of Caruth are an insight into the thinking of that time. He tells us that the castle was magnificent, though no doubt if he told otherwise he would have gone hungry. He reports that Dinham was the burial place of the hero Caractacus, leader of Celtic resistance to the Romans, though unfortunately we can't find any evidence of it today. Caruth provides some stirring patriotic poetry full of invective against the Romans, which may indicate that he composed it before the Saxons had become a problem. A little light relief is afforded by a poem from a later author:

I sought my love 'mid smiling herbs and flowers
I found her where the murmuring streamlet glides
I gave her of the holy mistletoe
and led her to the cromlech.
We knelt together while the incense flamed

The girl's name was Tina, by the way! The works of Caruth and a couple of other local bards were assembled to make a short book by John Hardwick in 1909. Translation from the original Welsh had been done by a lady a hundred years before and he added a short preface giving an account of Dinham as he knew it. Mr Hardwick was the Headmaster of Caerwent school and a prominent figure in the Caerwent community whilst the excavations of the Roman site were in progress. Only 200 copies of the book were printed, one of which we have recently been able to purchase. We have made a few copies via computer scan which are available for £5.

The Geology of Caerwent *Saturday 17th or 24th February 2.00pm*

The area around Caerwent doesn't have the spectacular scenery of the Wye Valley but many features in our landscape are similar, they're just on a smaller scale. This isn't just a drive or a talk, more a mobile seminar where any of us who are interested can enquire and hopefully explain to some extent why a stream is there or why the place looks like it does. Geological maps will be provided. Meet at the Cadw car park Caerwent.

*** **HAPPY NEW YEAR** ***