

# CAERWENT HISTORIC TRUST

## Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be on Monday January 21<sup>st</sup> 2008 at 7.30pm. We didn't have an AGM in 2007 but it's only been postponed by two months. The venue will be Cadw's Westgate Barns, Caerwent. When our main business has been completed Brian Stephens, discoverer of the Llanvaches Coin Hoard, will tell us about his pastime of metal detecting. He won't be bringing his hoard but can show us photographs and various lesser finds.



## The Mari Llwyd

Householders would have been startled to see a horse's skull appearing at their door or window on a dark winter's night. She was once prominent in the festivities of Christmas and New Year in South Wales. *Mari Llwyd* could mean Holy Mary but this can hardly be a Christian reference: here *Llwyd* means spirit = spooky = grey, as in Gray Hill.

The skull was mounted on a pole and via an arrangement of rods the jaw could be opened and closed by the person hidden under a blanket. She was led from house to house at the head of a procession of revellers, who would sing Welsh songs in exchange for gifts of coins, cakes and beer.

To gain entry to a house the Mari Llwyd had to exchange rhymes and witty repartee with the occupants. Once inside, her supporters sang, ate drank, and swept through every room to drive out evil spirits. One can imagine that some housewives would have preferred to keep their evil spirits!

The custom was particularly strong in the Caerleon area, surviving up until the 1930s. The revellers would walk as far as Newbridge on Usk and Goldcliff in the course of their celebrations. Interest has revived recently and for the last three years Chepstow has had its own Mari Llwyd. She will be stalking the town on Saturday January 19<sup>th</sup>. She is likely to be in the Bridge Inn about 6.30 and the Castle Dell 7.30pm. Preliminary to this, pupils of Ysgol y Ffin will take their own Mari Llwyd to the Bandstand at 3.00pm

## Some publications available to order

The Megalithic Alignment on Gray Hill	free
The Llanvaches Hoard	£2
The Geology of Caerwent	£2

## The Midwinter Sunrise

The morning of the Winter Solstice was cloudy. On 23<sup>rd</sup> December there was a mist which shrouded only low lying areas. The sun duly rose in the notch on the far horizon and from Gray Hill the view was spectacular. The first volume of the County History, printed two years ago, makes no mention of the alignment in spite of some of us pointing it out to the authors. Considering that it was reported long ago by Fred Hando (drawing 1939) this seems to be a strange omission.

\*\*\* **HAPPY NEW YEAR !** \*\*\*

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Acknowledgements: Mari Llwyd from material produced by Mark Williams of Newport, Fred Hando drawing by permission of Chris Barber

