

# A Welsh mid-winter tradition as Mari Lwyd takes to the streets

PHOTOGRAPHS by  
MIKE WILCOCK



ABOVE: Vale MP Alun Cairns meets the Mari Lwyd group in the Edmondes Arms.

MARI LWYD was out on the streets of Cowbridge last Friday (January 11) touring the local hostelries...

In fact, there were rival groups out on the night, with a Cowbridge group calling on several public houses and bars, including the Duke of Wellington and Bar 44, and a group from Cardiff was also out and about.

The Mari Lwyd is an ancient tradition in which people of Glamorgan and Gwent, in particular, marked the passing of the darkest days of midwinter.

The Mari Lwyd is the name applied to the horse-figure carried from door to door by wassail-singing groups during the Christmas and New Year period.

The Mari Lwyd is said to be unique to this part of Wales and the tradition involves the arrival of the horse and its party at the door of the house or pub, where they sing several introductory verses.

perse English-language verses with the Welsh-language rhymes.

The Vale MP, Alun Cairns, was introduced to the Mari Lwyd at the Edmondes Arms in Cowbridge.

He joined regulars who welcomed the Mari Lwyd party and were all challenged to sing – handy song sheets were at hand!

Mr Cairns said: "It was wonderful to welcome the Mari Lwyd to the Edmondes in Cowbridge."

"It's great to see that the Glamorgan tradition continues."

"Regulars and visitors to the Edmondes Arms were keen to take part in the tradition, with many joining in the singing challenge with gusto."

"The Mari Lwyd entourage entertained all with their musical talents before delivering a farewell song, as they moved on to other venues in the town."



ABOVE: The Cowbridge Mari Lwyd in Bar 44.

Then comes a verbal battle of wits (known as *pwnco*) in which the people inside the door and the Mari party outside, exchange challenges and insults in rhyme.

At the end of the battle, which can last as long as the creativity of the two parties holds out, the Mari Lwyd party enters with another song.

In some places, such as Llantrisant, the *pwnco* gradually disappeared and the Mari party sang only their arrival verses, adding Christmas carols to the repertoire.

In other areas, such as Cowbridge and across the Vale, the parties would inter-

# "Mari Llwyd" hits screen

Picture by Andrew Jeffery



What is it they say about working with animals?: Cowbridge Mari Llwyd, before they became media megastars. One of these individuals harbours a secret ambition to take part in The Grand National.

THANKS TO a recent article in The GEM, Cowbridge residents who took part in the Mari Llwyd musical procession recently are to be featured on television on Sunday January 21.

Regular GEM readers may remember that our issue for January 6 reported that a motley crew of locals intended to revive the ancient Welsh tradition of 'Mari Llwyd' earlier this month.

A sharp-eyed researcher for S4C's 'Hel Straeon' programme spotted our announcement, and followed up by arranging for a television film crew to record the proceedings.

This involved filming the Mari Llwyd as it called at various pubs in

the Vale, singing in an ancient 'call and response' manner, collecting donations for charity, and downing a few throat-warmers.

"It was marevellous!" says an irrepressible Mr. Bill Lewis, who spent the evening dressed up as a horse, according to the bizarre dictates of the ancient melodic rituals.

"We started at 'The Bush Inn' in Aberthin, and took in several more pubs afterwards, including The Farmers Arms, The Duke, The Eastgate Inn, The Edmond's Arms, The Hare and Hounds, The Masons Arms and The Bear Hotel in Cowbridge" he adds.

Highlights of the evening, which will be broadcast on S4C on Sunday January 21 at 8pm, included traditional broom dancing by Steve Harkett, excellent fiddle-playing by Gareth Whelan, and a surprise donation to the Mari Llwyd's Ethiopian Appeal.

So impressed were the television crew that they gave £100 to the group's collection, raising the total to an impressive £216 so far.

If you missed the live action, you have a second chance.

Spare a thought for the horse too: "By the end of the night I was knackered!" says Mr. Lewis, who luckily had access to one or two water troughs en route.

2009



ABOVE: The Mari Llwyd troupe pictured outside the Duke of Wellington in Cowbridge by MIKE WILCOCK (See story and more pictures on Page 5)

2013

# 'KNOCK, KNOCK, WHO'S THERE?'



**ABOVE:** The Fari Lwyd visits Ysgol Iolo Morganwg.

**THEY** had been warned to be on the lookout, so the pupils at Ysgol Iolo Morganwg in Cowbridge were being extra vigilant!

The Fari Lwyd paid a special visit to the school to wish all the pupils and staff a Happy New Year. Led traditionally by the sergeant, wearing a top hat, the Fari knocked on the door of the school hall, and in verse asked permission to sing.

The children then responded to the request and a dialogue began between the Fari Lwyd and the children

of Ysgol Iolo Morganwg.

Some residents of Cowbridge might well have come across the Fari Lwyd around Cowbridge.

Teacher, Alun Roberts, who was part of the new year celebrations in the town, commented: "The tradition dates back to pagan times, and it is important for such Welsh traditions to be noted and celebrated.

"The children at Ysgol Iolo Morganwg certainly responded to the Mari in good spirit, and even out-performed the revellers at the Edmunds Arms on Friday evening!"



# Y Fari

# Lwyd

Wel, dyma ni'n dwad  
gyfeillion diniwad  
I ofyn am gennad  
I ganu...



2014

# DATHLU'R HEN GALAN



Dewch i gwrdd  
â'r Fari Lwyd

Canolfan Addysg Oedolion Palmerston  
Cadoc Crescent, Barri CF63 2NT

☎ 01446 733762

Nos Lun, 12 Ionawr 2015  
6 to 8pm

AM DDIM - Addas i'r teulu i gyd

Ymunwch mewn dosbarth canu a dysgu'r pennillion  
yn barod i ateb.

Addurnwch geffyl eich hun i fynd adre.

Dysgwch am ein hen draddodiadau Calan.

Mwynhewch arddangosfa goginio.

VALE of GLAMORGAN  
Community Learning Partnership  
Partneriaeth Dysgu Cymunedol

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BRO MORGANNWG