

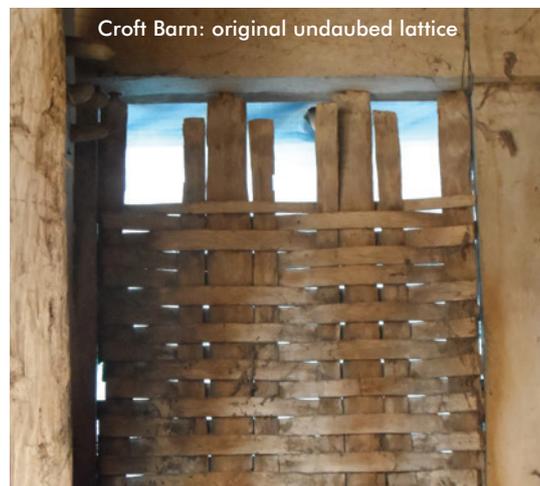
B1 Heritage & History of Croft barn

THE CROFT BARN - a historical record 1581 - 2015

"The buildings that remain are irreplaceable assets that contribute to a sense of place and our understanding of history. Because farming practices continue to change, they have also become a very vulnerable part of the historic environment. But many traditional buildings can still have a useful life; sometimes for their original purpose, and sometimes, after adaptation, for new uses...The best of our traditional buildings are so special that it is worth ensuring...their preservation as an important part of the rural heritage." Cadw: Traditional Agricultural Buildings in Wales: Care and Conservation 2006:4



Croft Barn restored



Croft Barn: original undaubed lattice

Summary

The ownership and status of a barn, irrespective of its size, is often reflected in its architectural character.⁵ The Croft barn, built around 1580 as part of the Great Terhew estate, reflects the pride and woodworking skills of its owner and builder in a time of stable government, settled population and potential economic prosperity in a period when wheat prices were high, following bad harvests. The only major change in the barn's construction over 400 years, has been the insertion of a lofted area with concrete standing for livestock and external steps to an upper door at the western end of the barn. It is thought that these alterations were undertaken

as part of the change of use to a local authority tenanted farm in the 1930s. In the 21st century, the barn is being conserved and given a new lease of life as a learning centre. This phase will interpret and display this rare historic survival to a wider audience through web and digital technology in ways that previous generations could not have imagined. The Village Alive Trust, the owners Robb and Nicola Merchant, and funders: Cadw and the Heritage Lottery Fund, have combined a vision and resources to make this barn an irreplaceable heritage learning space for viticulture, agricultural changes and historic building techniques.

Heritage & History of Croft barn

Description

The Croft Barn, Llanvetherine, Monmouthshire, Wales, stands 150 yards south of the Abergavenny – Skenfrith B4521 road adjacent to the road leading to White Castle (Cadw). The barn was listed⁶ by Cadw in 1953 “highly graded II* as a well preserved and exceptionally rare example of a C16 cruck framed barn with exceptionally fine carpentry”. The listing states that it is “an important timber-framed barn of c.1550, first recorded by Fox and Raglan⁷. The original barn was probably wholly timber-framed and the stone gables added later. The W gable has subsequently been rebuilt and the barn on this side shorted. This barn at Great Trethiw⁸ illustrates a late development in cruck-truss tradition where crucks alternate with framed trusses in the same building. Fox and Raglan suggest that at this late phase crucks are no longer truly functional, the weight of the roof being largely carried on the stout box-framed walls... Gables and lower part of long walls are rubble stone; asbestos tile roof. Upper part of each long wall is timber-framed and has two tiers of large square panels. On N side timber panels are mostly exposed, and include (below eaves) rare-surviving oak stave and lattice panels.”



The barn is aligned approximately NW-SE and consists of four bays with large doors on either side of the long walls. The fourth truss from the west is a cruck, the other trusses being post and tie-beam, with a collar to trusses 2 and 3; the posts are jowelled. There are three tiers of purlins and an angled ridge piece. Within the barn there is a mezzanine floor accessed by an external brick stairway. Fox and Raglan’s survey of 1953 drew attention to the mix of massive cruck and box frame timbers to support the roof and the remnants of undaubed lath panels in place of windows. In the 1960s when the barn was in the ownership of the local authority, one undaubed panel was placed with Monmouthshire museum service for safe keeping, but the ‘panel’ is simply some pieces of weathered wood now and not worthy of display.

6. Cadw listing statement 19/11/1953

7. Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan, *Monmouthshire Houses*, 1951, Vol.1,p16, 41-2, 62-5, 65.

8. Great Trethiw Barn, Llantilio Crossenny

By the early 21st century, the barn had fallen into disrepair and a condition survey carried out by Morgan and Horowsky⁹ in March 2011 recorded that the west end of the barn was completely covered with ivy, the gable walls required stitching, rainwater goods should be replaced and a considerable amount of timber framing was beyond repair. Most of the undaubed wattle panels were lost but, remarkably, a few original panels remained in situ. The conservation work undertaken in 2015 repaired the roof and masonry, replaced rotten timber framing and flagstones and remade oak lath panels where panels had been lost.



Early history

Dendrochronological dating of the Croft Barn was undertaken by Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory in October 2010 for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales¹⁰ and the Village Alive Trust. Seven samples were taken from various elements of the barn, which contains one cruck truss in the middle of the eastern half. Cross-matching between the timbers was poor, but two timbers were dated independently, and led to a third timber also being dated, all being from the western half of the barn. One of the dated timbers retained complete sapwood and was found to have been felled in spring 1581, the other two timbers have likely felling date ranges that are in agreement with this date, and it seems likely therefore that the barn was constructed in 1581, or within a year or two of this date.

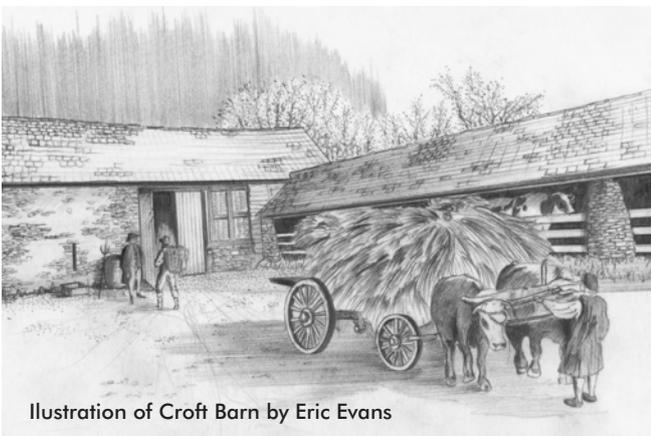


Illustration of Croft Barn by Eric Evans

Until 1930s the Croft Barn formed part of the Great Trehew estate, which adjoins the Croft Farm to the west. Great Trehew has a complex of stone agricultural buildings grouped around a large stone threshing barn (Listed grade II*¹¹).¹¹ Alongside this barn is a range of 19th century animal shelters, which include a series of distinctive rubble stone columns, similar in construction to the pillars of the animal shelters to the east of the Croft Barn.

9. Morgan and Horowsky| *Condition Survey for the Village Alive Trust* 7th March 2011

10. Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory Report 2010/49 *The Dendrochronological Dating of Timbers from Croft Farm Barn* by Dr. M.C.Bridge FSA

11. Great Trehew Barn was conserved by the Village Alive Trust in 2008 with funding from Cadw, Monmouthshire County Council and the Rural Development Fund for Wales.

Heritage & History of Croft barn

Research¹² by Dave Howells, commissioned by the Village Alive Trust, into the history of the barn at Great Trerhew concluded that “although a number of references are at best only suggestive of relating to the Trerhew site (such as the 13th century reference Roderick and Rees 1950:1-46), through a process of elimination it may be shown that the current Trerhew site is the best candidate for early sources for locations such as the ‘farm of the mill’ which served a force garrisoned at nearby White Castle.” The Castle may have been a base for three or four Knights, who together with Men at Arms, grooms, blacksmiths, cooks, armourers and servants would total around 100 people. These knights would patrol the Welsh / English border country and feed themselves and their horses on the estates they patrolled. By 1538 White Castle was abandoned and ruinous, though it could still be a source of stone for building.



White Castle by Gwyn Norrell

The Howells’ study identified a near continuous sequence of individuals or families associated with Trerhew from Howell Gwyn, ‘who is said to have’came frome thence (Carmarthenshire) in the raine of king henrie the ffifte (1413-1422), who married ane heires at Trerewe’. The estate remained with the Gwyn lineage for three generations. It was sold during the reign of King Henry VIII (1509-1547) to Philip William Vaughan, who may have ordered the building of the Croft Barn. William Phillipps was in residence from the early 1600s. The important local figures of John and Mary Price occupied Trerhew from the late 17th to early 18th century.

This was clearly a time of prosperity when John Price was able to extend Great Trerhew Barn with a Cider House and Stabling in 1696. In Bradney’s (1924)¹³ discussion of the history of The Free Grammar School of Llantilio Crossenny (1654), both William Barry and William Prichard are identified as being ‘of Trerewe.’ The free grammar school of King Henry VIII at Abergavenny was founded in 1543 and the Haberdashers School at Monmouth in 1615, so the establishment of a school at Llantilio Crossenny was a considerable achievement. The Monmouthshire school master, James Davies, writing in 1847 reports to his niece: ‘I have been to Llangattock [Lingoed] with Bibles and Testaments and Prayer-books, to give to the poor of that place, and I believe there is no place to be found where the inhabitants have less means of religious instruction. There is no person of education and fortune in the parish, no resident clergyman, no school, nor Sunday-school.’¹⁴

12. Howells 2007 *A Report of a Survey of historical and archaeological research on the Corn Barn of Great Trerhew farm.*

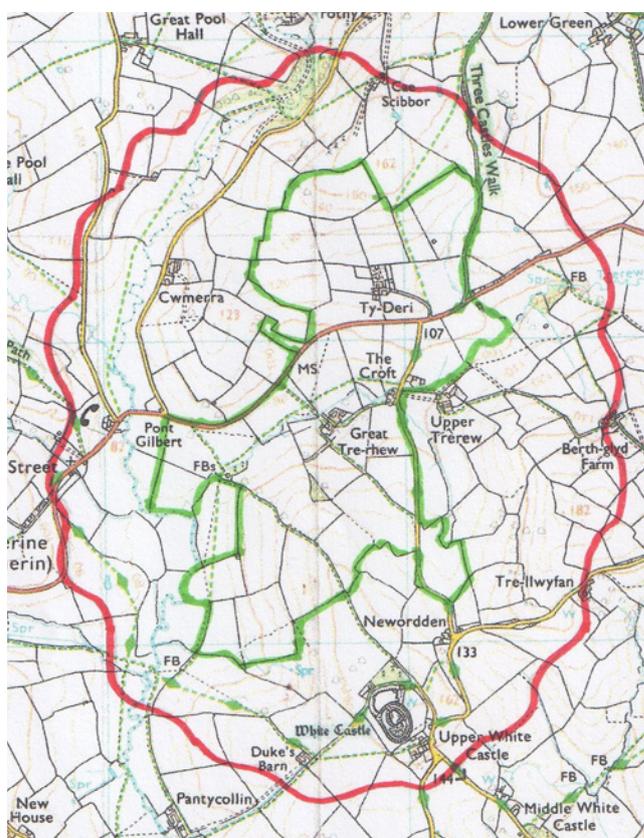
13. Sir Joseph Bradney 1924 *A History of The Free Grammar School in the Parish of Llantilio-Crossenny in the County of Monmouth*

14. Sir Thomas Phillips 1852 *The Life of James Davies A Village Schoolmaster* p.101

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Trethew estate had many occupants, including owners and tenants, though how this relates to the various sites now known as Great Trethew Farm, the Croft Farm and Upper Trethew Farm is difficult to determine. The Yarworth family were owners in the first half of the 19th century. The 1843 Tithe Map identified the Great Trethew farm complex, including the Corn Barn, Corn Mill and the Croft barn. The holding at that time was a mixture of pastoral grass and arable with orchards close to the main house. When James Yarworth sold Great Trethew in 1847, the sale particulars list:

“A substantial and respectable DWELLING-HOUSE, with lawn and excellent garden adjoining, a four stabled hackney Stable, a Coachhouse and Saddleroom, and all necessary farm building conveniently arranged and in good repair, and 239 acres, 2roods, 28 perch of ARABLE MEADOW PASTURE & ORCHARD LAND, and also AN EXCELLENT CORN MILL, in perfect order, working two pair of Stones, with a comfortable COTTAGE attached.”¹⁵

The sale particulars added,
“The Grounds and Corn Mill are well supplied with Water, having a constant stream, on which the Mill is standing, running through the middle of the Estate. There are capital Trout streams in the neighbourhood, and the Monmouthshire Hounds hunt in the immediate vicinity. The Land Tax is redeemed, and the Parish rates are very moderate.”



Modern history

During the 1930s the Croft Farm became a tenanted agricultural holding managed by the local authority, Monmouthshire County Council. Following the first World War (1914-1918) there was a national feeling that a man who had fought for his country should be entitled to retire to a small-holding that would provide a livelihood. Various government initiatives, collectively called Homes for Heroes, enabled local councils to compulsory purchase land to be let as small-holdings. By 1926, the law had become openly distributive in favour of ex-servicemen, who became preferred tenants. A tenant could buy the land and ask the County Council to lend the money to fund his purchase as a mortgage.

Heritage & History of Croft barn

Monmouthshire County Council at first proposed requisitioning land for three small-holdings, known as County Farms, at Llanvetherine, but settled for two holdings: Ty Deri and Croft Farm. The Croft farm was allocated 40 acres and equipped by the council for a dairy herd of 40 cows. MCC provided a farmhouse, now independently owned, and a dairy built alongside Croft barn. It is thought that the barn was also altered to accommodate cows with the insertion of the loft, concrete standing and external stairs at the western end. The concrete has now been removed and the external stairs refurbished. The first Council tenant was Hugh Jones.¹⁶ The Croft dairy was converted into a dwelling in 1996.



In 1999, the Croft Farm was bought by Nicola and Robb Merchant, who over the next few years established a vineyard on 6 acres north of the barn. The vineyard produces high quality white, rose and red wine. White Castle Vineyard is part of the South Wales Wine Association and the South Wales Wine Trail.

Changes in agriculture 16th - 20th centuries

When the Croft barn was erected, we assume that the owner of the Great Trerhew estate saw the need for another threshing barn in addition to the great barn at Great Trerhew and a larger barn at Upper Trerhew. Built in the traditional manner, the Croft barn has double facing doors large enough to accommodate a loaded hay cart. It should be remembered that crop growing remained an important part of Welsh agriculture until about 1870: after that date there was a change to keeping dairy cattle. As at Croft barn, there was normally a central threshing floor with large doors able to let in plenty of light to facilitate the work of the threshers, fresh air and the draught necessary to winnow the crop.

In bad weather, carts could be brought in overnight and unloaded on the following day. The primary function of the barn was to keep the crop dry, letting in plenty of fresh air at the same time. Towards this end, several devices were resorted to including panels of undaubed wattle as at Croft barn. Timber framed barns with wattle panels were common in East Wales until the 18th century, though most have now disappeared.

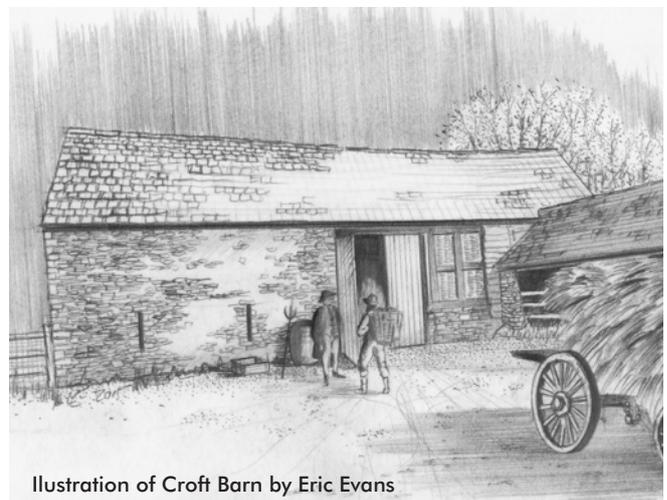


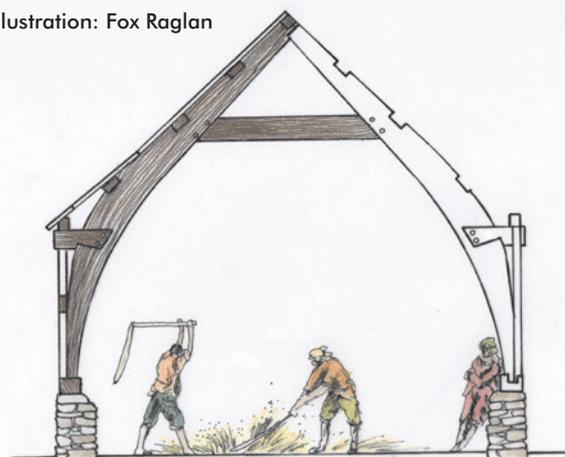
Illustration of Croft Barn by Eric Evans

Many medieval barns (and houses) were cruck built, that is, their roofs rested on large curved timbers rising from floor level and meeting at the apex to form an 'A'. The Croft barn uses both cruck and box-framed trusses, which is a transitional form of building and an innovation in its time. This was clearly not undertaken because of a lack of carpentry expertise as the exceptional wood working in the cruck trusses shows. As the use of stone buildings expanded into the early 19th century, good quality timber became scarcer and decaying buildings were rebuilt with stone walls. One of the most common problems with timber framed barns was the deterioration of the gable ends which led to instability and the rotting of the timber sole plate, leading to the 'rolling over' of the vertical studs. At Croft barn, this was remedied with stone gables, but the timber sole plates were not replaced and have suffered wet rot following the loss of the oak wattle panels. These have been replaced with air-dried oak wattle, where necessary, and repaired where possible in the current restoration.

One vertical arrow slit opening exists on the south side of the barn, similar to the apertures in the Corn barn at Great Trehew. The later insertion of a loft and division at one end served both to keep the straw in place and to pen sheep at shearing time, when the barn would be almost empty. This is still practised in the barn at Great Trehew.



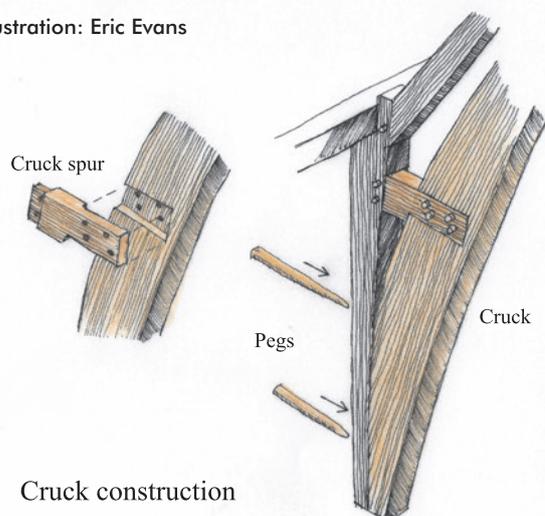
Illustration: Fox Raglan



Corn Barn at Croft Farm

Cross-section showing cruck-truss 'A' on plan

Illustration: Eric Evans



Cruck construction

Heritage & History of Croft barn

Changes in the building over 400 years

The original barn was probably entirely timber-framed with the stone gables added at a later date. One stone gable is 17th century, whereas the other has been rebuilt in modern times. The barn is currently four bay, but it is likely that one of the original bays has been lost so that during the 17th century the barn had five bays. There is evidence of a blocked window or door on the north end of the barn. This end of the barn was also lost in a flood in the past. The barn was previously roofed with stone tiles with hanging eaves; these have been replaced in modern times with asbestos cement slates and rainwater gutters. An upper floor was inserted in the west end of the barn in modern times with an outside staircase for access through an upper door. The barn was covered with flagstones laid on a beaten earth floor when Fox and Raglan surveyed the building in 1951, these subsequently disappeared and have been replaced in the current restoration. Also in modern times, concrete standing for animals was inserted under the mezzanine floor; this has been removed in the current restoration. The timber barn doors have been re-instated in place of corrugated zinc doors and missing wattle panels have been made as the originals.

New uses

Faced with the deterioration of the barn, the owners approached the Village Alive Trust (a buildings preservation trust) in 2012, with a request for help to conserve this important building. The owners had established a vineyard on the site and were keen to preserve and showcase the barn, while keeping it in agricultural use. The Trust, established in 2003 following the Foot and Mouth epidemic in Monmouthshire, was already experienced in working with owners to preserve vernacular buildings in north Monmouthshire and providing interpretation, events and access for the public to appreciate and understand our agricultural heritage. In 2013, the Trust was awarded funding from Cadw Welsh Heritage towards conservation of the barn and in 2015, the Heritage Lottery Fund approved grant aid to conserve the barn, and provide facilities to enable the barn to be used as a learning space for viticulture and heritage skills. The new programme launched on 20th June 2015.

Resources:

Visit to Croft barn

Exercise about harvesting tools

AR (Augmented Reality) of farmer saying how barn was used in English and Welsh.

