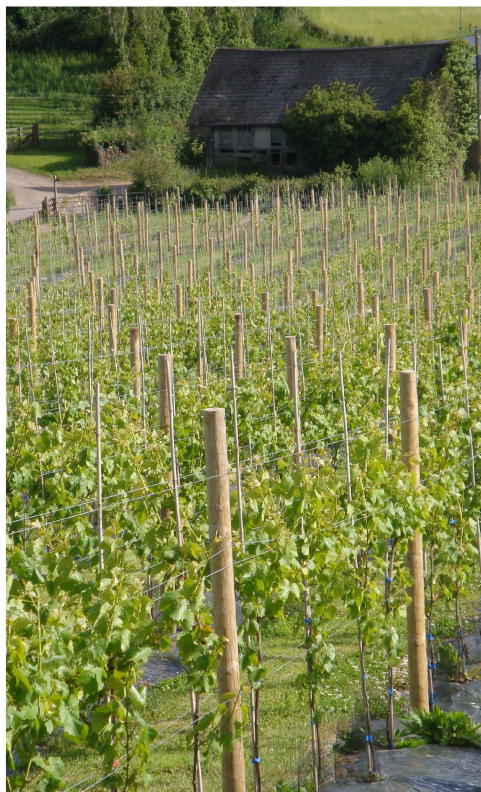


### White Castle Vineyard

White Castle Vineyard, owned by Robb and Nicola Merchant, is situated in the beautiful rolling countryside of Monmouthshire in the village of Llanvetherine close to the town of Abergavenny. The family-run 5 acre vineyard is planted on a gentle south-facing slope that is ideal for growing vines and ripening grapes for Welsh wine. Having been Nicola's dream for many years, that dream became a reality in 2009 when the first vines were planted.

Since the first harvest in 2011, White Castle Vineyard is very pleased to have received a number of awards. To date, the pinnacle of success is White Castle Vineyard Gwin Gwyn [white wine] being served in the Locarno suite of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to showcase Welsh Business, Education and Tourism in 2014. Attendees included The Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM First Minister and The Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP Secretary of State for Wales.

Robb and Nicola are passionate about growing grapes and believe that quality wine-making starts in the vineyard, with carefully selected varieties that will grow in this soil and micro climate of the vineyard. The grapes are hand picked and pressed the same day at the Three Choirs winery in Newent, producing red, white and rose wines for sale in the White Castle Vineyard Shop - see [www.whitecastlevineyard.com](http://www.whitecastlevineyard.com) for sales and opening times.



#### Acknowledgements:

Morgan & Horowskyj, Architects, Abergavenny

"Monmouthshire Houses" by Fox and Raglan, Merton Priory Press (ISBN 0 9520009 7 0) and National Museum of Wales (ISBN 0 7200 0396 2)

"The Historic Architecture of Wales" by John B Hilling, University of Wales Press (ISBN 0 7083 06268)

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# The Croft Farm Barn

Llanvetherine, Monmouthshire NP7 8RA

A restoration project by the **Village Alive Trust**  
**Ymddiriedolaeth Y Pentre Byw**



The Grade II\* Listed **Croft Barn**, which was built in the early 1580s as a five-bay corn barn, has seen remarkably few changes over the years. The fine carpentry of the cruck trusses can still be seen today along with several pieces of the original un-daubed oak splitlath panels which fill the window spaces. But more than 400 years of use and of weather took a toll, and by 2012 when *The Village Alive Trust* was approached by its owners, the barn was nearly derelict. A leaking roof, cracks in the masonry, heavy overgrowth and loss of wattle panels gave rise to grave concerns for the future of the structure. The Trust commissioned a conservation architect, *Morgan & Horowskyj*, Abergavenny, to undertake a structural survey and the *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW)* offered a dendrochronology survey to ascertain the date of the barn's construction.

The Village Alive Trust, in partnership with the barn's owners Nicola and Robb Merchant, then developed the **WHAM! - Wine and Heritage Alive in Monmouthshire** - project with ambitious proposals for restoration of the barn, upgrading the facilities to enable community use and a learning programme in heritage and viticulture for children and adults. **WHAM!** became a reality early in 2015 when the *Heritage Lottery Fund* awarded grant to match-fund grants from *Cadw* and the *Trust* and work started to preserve this unique building. This partnership and work by the contractor, *Nigel Sobik & Son*, has stabilised the walls, repaired the roof and timber structure, restored wattle panels, floors and doors, installed an accessible toilet and servery and landscaped around the barn.

**WHAM!** welcomes young and old of all abilities to this learning space which gives a new lease of life to a fascinating barn now again functioning at the heart of the community.

**WHAM!** events can be found on

[www.wineandheritage.org.uk](http://www.wineandheritage.org.uk)

Book places for day schools, tours and courses on the website or by

email: [wham.villagealive@btinternet.com](mailto:wham.villagealive@btinternet.com)



### Traditional timber framed buildings

The traditional buildings of Wales relied heavily on the use of timber as a building material with the dominant form of construction being the cruck-truss. The cruck-truss consists of a pair of curved oak crucks set in the shape of an 'A' and crossed at the apex to form forks to support the ridge-piece. In Wales we have over 800 surviving cruck buildings. However, they are relatively rare in south-east Wales.

Cruck-truss construction was gradually superseded by the box-frame, built up from a grid of vertical posts connected by horizontal tie-beams. The frame then supported the triangular roof trusses, made up from separate pieces of timber.

Croft Farm Barn is noted as illustrating the introduction of framed principals in a cruck-trussed structure, a development that had already been utilized in wooden houses, “gradually changing from an old-fashioned to a new-fashioned technique.”

### Barns

For the construction of a barn, where the primary function was to keep the crop dry but to let in plenty of fresh air, undaubed wattle was often used. Oak framed barns with wattle panels were common in east Wales until about the eighteenth century, after which good quality timber became scarce and the use of stone became an alternative. A common problem with timber framed barns was the deterioration of the gable ends, constantly exposed to the weather, and many gables were indeed eventually rebuilt in stone.

The traditional layout of a corn barn consisted of a central threshing floor with two high doorways at either side facing each other. These openings let in plenty of light to assist the work of the threshers, fresh air and the draught necessary to winnow in the barn. In bad weather during the harvest, carts could be brought in overnight and unloaded the following day. Most barns had two bays on either side of the threshing floor. Sometimes one bay would be lofted and used for keeping straw. A low partition would serve to separate sheep at shearing time, when the barn would be almost empty.



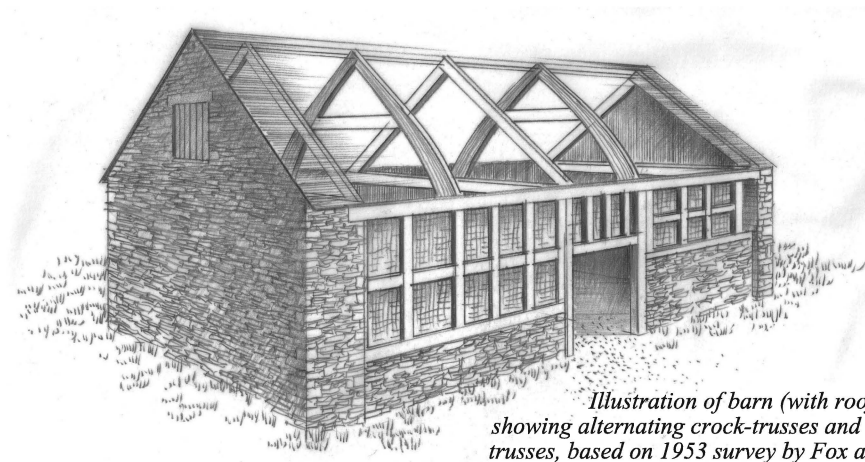
*Above: original wattle panel intact in north wall  
Below: detail of sixteenth century carpentry on eastern cruck-truss.*



### The Croft Barn

The barn at Croft Farm followed the traditional layout of 5 bays, the central bay used as the threshing floor, two high doorways and undaubed wattle panels in the walls. The grade II\* listing statement dates the barn as circa 1550. However, a recent dendrochronological report claims the timber used for the the frame was felled in the Spring of 1581 and it is likely that the barn was constructed later that year.

The original barn was probably completely timber framed. The eastern gable (road side) was rebuilt in stone during the seventeenth century. The barn is currently four bays - it is likely that the original western bay has been lost, probably undermined by a stream that runs close by, and the gable has been rebuilt in more recent times.



*Illustration of barn (with roof removed)  
showing alternating cruck-trusses and box- frame  
trusses, based on 1953 survey by Fox and Raglan.*

The Croft Farm Barn was originally recorded in “Monmouthshire Houses” (1951-54), a study of the county's vernacular architecture by Fox and Raglan, which includes a floor plan, elevation and photograph of the building. At that time the barn was known as the Barn at Great Trerhiw, Llantilio Crossenny. The photograph of the barn (the north elevation) clearly shows a low stone wall with horizontal timber boarding to the middle height, and wattle panels above.

It was also noted that this barn is the only cruck-trussed barn showing the original framing of the entry and that, even though the uprights are substantial, they are comparatively thin. Fox and Raglan suggested that doors were not originally hung on either jamb, raising speculation as to how the floor was kept dry in medieval times. They also noted that stone roofing tiles had been replaced with Welsh slate. However, the original roof would probably have been thatched.

Croft Farm Barn is an historically important structure. There is clear evidence of its sixteenth century origins and the cruck-trusses show important examples of superior carpentry. It is also remarkable that some of the oak wattle infill panels have survived.