

At 800 feet above sea level, high on the edge of Oxenhope's Black Moor whose heathery height was enclosed in 1771, lies the small ruin of Crock House. Set amidst green pastures at the limit of cultivatable land, the low stone walls are all that remains of a 17th century *laithe* house (a house with barn attached).

Crock House is however of some considerable significance in the Worth Valley and mid Airedale area of West Yorkshire. The very name "Crock" gives evidence of the survival into modern times of an earlier, simple structure built of *crucks*.

Few cruck buildings now survive in the Pennines though they were once common. Crucks are timber trusses made up of two long lengths of wood called *blades*. These reached from the ground to the roof ridge with a *tie beam* spanning between them to form an A-shaped truss. Several pairs of crucks were used in a row to make the length of the building and the space between each provided a bay of about 12 feet.

Unlike modern timber or stone structures, the crucks alone supported the weight of the roof, while the walls were built independently around them. At Crock House there were once two pairs of crucks forming three bays. The large gritstone *padstones* on which the crucks stood to prevent them rotting are still to be seen as evidence.

In 1948, the surviving pair of crucks at Crock House, still standing on their padstones which projected from the flaggy stone walls, were removed and given to the Keighley Borough Museum (now Bradford Museums Service).

Many will remember this pair of crucks standing outside the museum exhibiting the roughly hewn, knotted wood; probably all that was available in the Worth Valley by about 1600. The gently curved blades crossed over at the apex with a simple lap joint and were held apart by the large oak tie beam notched into them with halved joints. Under the beam there was over seven feet of headroom and mortices cut into the beam indicate that there was once a floor, perhaps for hay storage. A large hole at the base of each blade allowed the truss to be lifted into position on the padstones.

This cruck is still the only complete standing truss known from the Bradford Metropolitan District although others are to be seen in the Pennines.

Piecing Together The Past

Alison Armstrong looking out for cruck buildings in the Pennines.

At present the Crock House crucks are not on display in the Bradford Museums as they have recently received conservation treatment. Most surviving examples are privately owned but an excellent example of a cruck built barn can be viewed at **Pendle Heritage Centre**, Barrowford, in Pendle. A lane passes close by the roofless

remains of another barn at Upper Oldfield near Honley, Holmfirth and at Drebley, near Bolton Abbey the steep roof pitches of formerly thatched barns near the footpath are indications of the cruck structures within.

The fascination of cruck buildings in the Pennines lies in the simplicity and

sometimes massiveness of the structure, illustrated by the well known barn at Thorpe, Almondbury. Cruck building has its origins in pre Norman times and is found both in Europe and Britain. There is little information and some debate as to how or why the ancient construction style continued to be used in the Pennines.

Around Huddersfield, where wood was plentiful cruck buildings had timber framed walls. Around Bradford and the Worth Valley cruck buildings like Crock House had stone walls. Cruck buildings were replaced in late

medieval times in the wealthier areas of the Pennines, such as Upper Calderdale, by the more advanced box framed construction. (Shibden Hall Museum, Halifax, dating from the 15th century, is one such example, characterised by its vertical posts and horizontal beams.)

Recent studies of cruck timbers reused in later buildings in the mid Aire valley area indicate that cruck built barns, if not houses, were common well into the 18th century when they were replaced by large, stone, multi purpose barns. Such barns with their

large cart entrance leading to the threshing floor, smaller door to the cattle mistals and stone slate roof supported on strong roof trusses, are familiar landscape features.

Many barns are now being converted but look carefully at the roof purlins, tie beams or door lintels and you may well spot the diagonal notch or halved joint characteristic of a reused cruck. (Not far from Crock House for example is a house dated 1742 where four cruck blades are reused as purlins.)

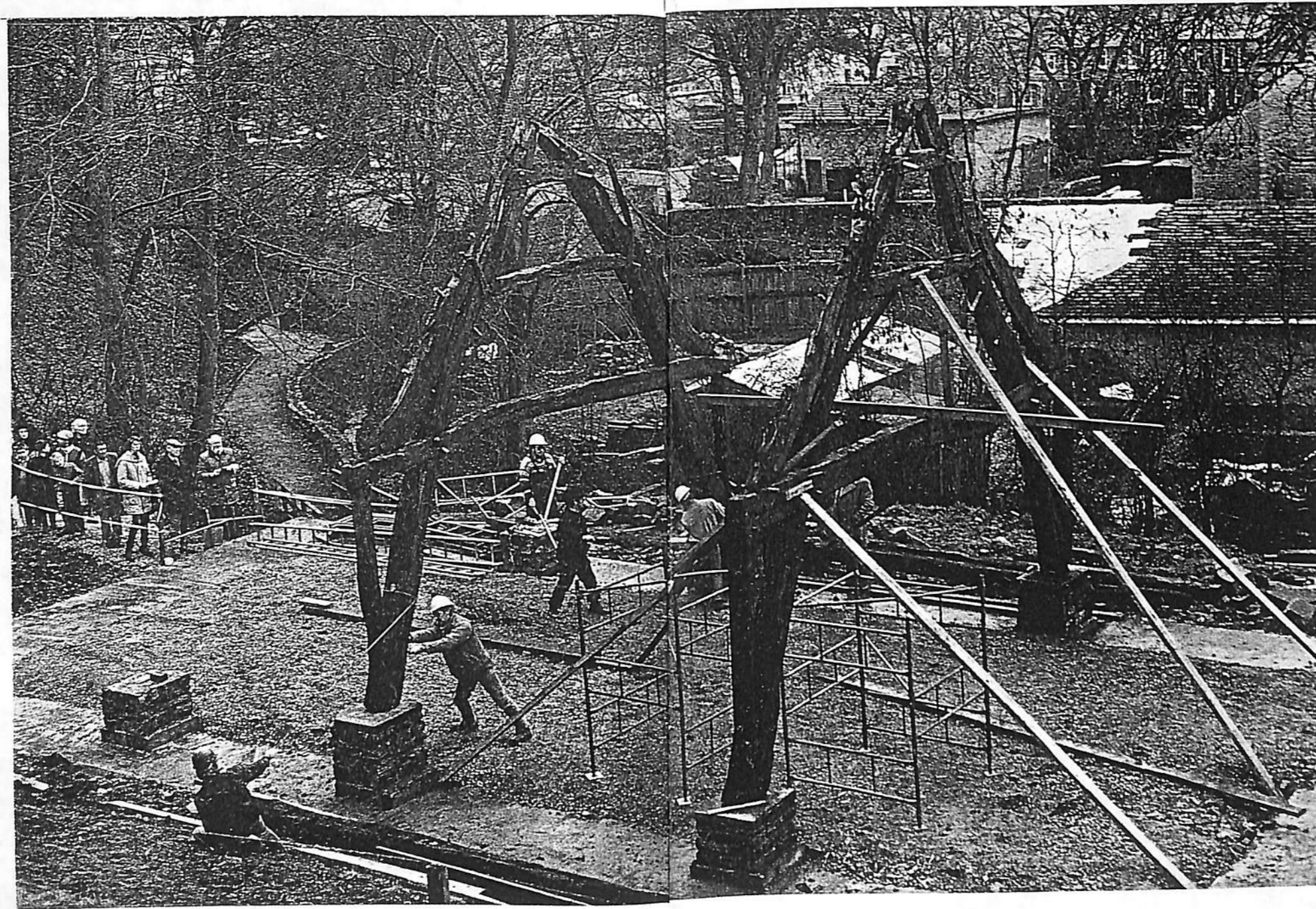
Crock House like most old buildings has seen many changes. It may originally have been erected as a three bay barn but the upper end was converted to a house in the 17th century. Certainly the adjoining field names of Little House field and Laithe End field indicate a barn and house on the site since the field walls were built. In the late 18th century the property was "modernised"; the floor was lowered to give more headroom, an extra room was added and the barn at the low end was rebuilt and enlarged to accommodate threshing floor, crop storage and cattle stalls.

Crock House may be about to undergo another stage in its history for Historic Building Services of Horbury, whose craftsmen manufacture a range of fittings suitable for building constructed before 1700, are hoping to rebuild the structure, on behalf of the private owner, complete with reconstructed crooks!

Unravelling the history and development of such buildings by recording architectural features is a fascinating hobby for members of the **Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group** who rely on the good will of householders for their surveys.

The interest is not just in looking at old structures or the thrill of rediscovering some fine 17th century oak in a roof space. It's about piecing together information which tells us how the average folk of the Pennines, unrecorded in history books, lived and worked in this hilly landscape in bygone times. Many of the buildings are not grand though there are always some surprises. A lot has gone forever but these buildings are part of a Pennine heritage of which there is still much to be learned.

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The formal ceremonial 'raising of the cruck barn' at Pendle Heritage Centre, 16th December 1985.

Photo: Richard Fox.