

took part in an excursion to the Isle of Wight, visiting Carisbrooke Castle and Museum, Newtown, Chessel Down and the site of the medieval lighthouse on Chale Down.

About one hundred people participated in the conference and great credit is due to Mr. R. Douch, who acted as local secretary.

D. M. WILSON

THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE GROUP CONFERENCE AT CAERLEON

The fifth annual conference of the Vernacular Architecture Group was held at Caerleon, Monmouthshire, at Easter, 1959. This centre was chosen in order to see some of the houses described in *Monmouthshire Houses*, and to honour the authors, Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan. Two and a half days were spent in the field, and they provided impressive examples of the rich and massive carpentry and joinery found in such features as door-heads, framed staircases and moulded beams, well known from illustrations in *Monmouthshire Houses*.

The papers all dealt with one aspect or another of cruck construction. J. T. Smith, in a paper which it is hoped will soon appear in print, made the case, on distributional grounds, for a prehistoric origin of the cruck method of building, associating it tentatively with the Celtic peoples. V. R. Webster described Leicestershire cruck houses, which are of cruder construction than those further west. He maintained that they appear to be of medieval or sixteenth-century date rather than later. J. G. Dunbar gave a paper on Scottish crucks, in which he pointed out that in Scotland, as in England, they have a westerly distribution and are not found, for example, in the Lothians, an area of intensive Anglian settlement. Scottish crucks are of extremely primitive construction but, since they are found in the houses of lairds, they are certainly carpenters' work.

A paper by T. L. Marsden illustrated the contrast between the eastern method of box-frame and trussed-rafter construction and the western cruck method, and also produced examples from midland counties where elements of both are found in the same building. L. F. J. Walrond discussed the jointed cruck which is common in Dorset, Somerset and Devon, and which he related to the arched-brace construction of the collar-beam roof.

Now that the distribution of this method of building has been clearly plotted,¹⁷ the principal directions in which further research should proceed are becoming apparent. One of them is the publication of documentary references to cruck building, about which E. A. Gee spoke at the conference. The earliest relates to the building of a bakehouse at Harlech Castle in 1278.¹⁸ The Guildhall at Leicester may well be dated 1347-50, and the barn at Church Enstone, Oxon., 1382. The variations in cruck construction, e.g. the straight and curved blades, and upper cruck construction, must be isolated and their relations defined. It is not yet clear whether storied construction is an original feature of any cruck house. The principal need is to separate the instances of crucks of architectural quality from those of inferior technique. Only further investigations on such lines will solve the problems which have been pinpointed by the work of the past twenty years.

M. W. BARLEY

THE COUNCIL FOR BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE AT TRURO

Following the successful conference held at Norwich in April, 1958, for the study of Anglo-Saxon pottery (pp. 1 ff., *supra*), a meeting was arranged to discuss the wares of the Celtic west. This conference, organized by the Migration Period and Early Medieval Research Committee of the Council for British Archaeology, met from 25-27 September,

¹⁷ See J. T. Smith in *Archaeol. J.*, cxv (1958), 139.

¹⁸ L. F. Salzman, *Building in England, down to 1540* (1952), p. 195.