

PRESTON CROWMARSH BY JOHN ALDRIDGE

Continuing on the **Preston Crowmarsh Road** are 5 modern houses each in good size plots with river frontages. These are built on an area once known as Whinchmead, so named because it used to be the site of the Winch to pull barges through the flash lock which had existed from 1314 and probably earlier until the first pound lock was built in 1788.

Then came some low lying swampy land which has been cleared and filled. This was known as **The Ruddock** and was completely overgrown with reeds, rushes and pollarded willows. This could well have been the source of materials required by the basket makers who lived and worked here in the Posting days.

Crowmarsh Mill is mentioned in the Domesday Book and was used at varying times dependent on the state of the old weirs which were built with wooden posts supporting faggots (bundles of willow twigs and rushes) to stem the flow and raise the river level. Most of the original structure was rebuilt in 1798 after the pound lock was built. It was used as a corn mill until about 1900 when Crowmarsh Mill Wool Company used it for flock and hair preparation until 1922. Wallingford & District Electric Supply Co then introduced machinery and storage batteries to produce an electricity supply for Preston Crowmarsh and Benson. My father was one of the first in the village to be connected to this supply in 1924 and my mother has often told of how at 3yrs I used to play 'magic' by switching the lights on! When renovating her house in 1979 I removed the last of the original wiring and I have preserved some of this lead-cased wire and the main switches.

The Wessex Electric Co purchased the Mill in 1930 and closed it down so that our supply had to be obtained through their network. The batteries were in glass containers about 1ft (0.3m) square and 2ft (0.6m) high which, when emptied of their acid and lead cells, were sold for fish containers. The premises were purchased by Mr EJ Williams in 1933 who very carefully converted the stone-built portion into the present house. Part of one very old wheel still exists. The other later one would probably turn if the sluices were opened.

Opposite is a house that used to be **The Swan Inn**. c18 colourwashed with clay tile roof, now no.25. Recorded landlords include James Hughes 1828-1864, Richard Garrett to 1887, Henry Worley to 1902, Benjamin Beisley to 1910, Harry Hewett to 1937 and Mary Hewett to late 1940. In Kelly's Directory of

Oxfordshire appears an advertisement in each issue from 1924-1939 “The Swan Public House, good accommodation for boating men and fishermen”.

The **Old Mill House** to the south is c18 with later restorations and embellishments, mainly brick with part stone and clay tile roof. It has a large garden to the rear and paddock over the road with frontage to the mill-race backwater.