

CROWN LANE BY JOHN ALDRIDGE

Now, with a change of direction, we explore **Crown Lane**. Next to the car body work shop (which used to be Halliday's Garage) is 'Orwell'. This is an early c.19 house and was Benson's first Police House, occupied by PC Jakeman in 1915, followed by PC Bond in 1924 and PC Gray in 1928 until the 'new' police house was built in Old London Road, which is now a private house.

No 3 is c.18 brick, ragstone and clay tile house with recent alterations and extensions. An outbuilding (since demolished) in the garden was used for the storage and preparation of wet fish by the Witney family for many years. Fish was delivered in boxes by passenger train to Wallingford Station from Billingsgate Market at a pre-arranged time and collected by the Witney family by horse and cart. House to house sales were undertaken with the same transport throughout Benson, Roke, Berrick and Ewelme.

On the front portion of land, now occupied by **Nos 15-21 Crown Lane**, was a triangular plot owned by my Grandmother, Sarah Aldridge. Here, in 1932 she paid my father, William Aldridge, to design and build a Gospel Mission Hall and a small Sunday School. The garden site was beautifully maintained by my Grandfather. 'Little Granny' as she was affectionately known, died in 1957. In her Will she left the freehold to the Gospel Mission Authorities, who promptly closed the doors and sold the land for residential development. She lived for this mission, and it is sad that her epitaph is no longer there.

Buckners Close Crown Lane, is a new development of twenty houses and bungalows all built on the 'Home Paddock' of Walter Bennett's Dairy Farm with milking parlour, calf pens and pig sties in the west corner. The farmhouse adjoining the Lane is c.18 ragstone and brick with stucco finish and clay tile roof. The wooden building in the triangular walled garden was used from about 1923 to the late 1940s as a dairy for the retail of milk, cream, eggs and table chicken. I have one of the half-pint ladles Mrs Bennett used to dispense milk to customers in their own jugs, before cartons and bottles were available.

No.30 Crown Lane is a detached house built about 1910 in grounds of about 1.5 acres. The wooden building clad in corrugated iron to the right of the drive was purchased from the auction sale of goods and chattels after the death of William Henry Dines of Colne House (now surrounded by Observatory Close) who was renowned for his upper air observations of weather patterns. My father was at this auction and wanted this portable building but was outbid by Bert

Biggs who lived here. This building was used by Dennis Bloomfield for many years to store pre-bottled milk for his doorstep deliveries in the village. Chiltern Close, a modern development of 12 bungalows, has been built on part of the grounds.