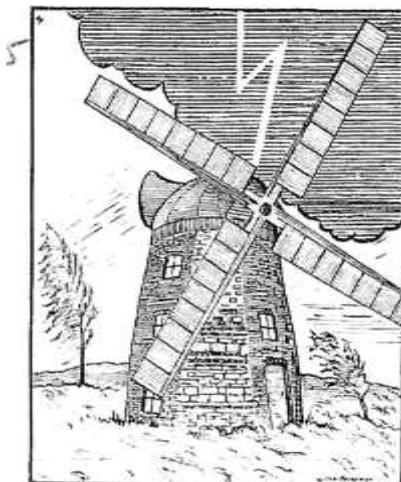


*Around the
Cowley Countryside No.1*

**WINDMILL
WITH A P.S.C. LINK**

by *Th' Linkman*



*Struck by lightning ! An impression by
Mr. Leslie Messenger, Cowley.*

British industry, although its methods have changed out of all recognition during the last few centuries, has always been characterised by one outstanding feature—pride in craftsmanship—which can be found wherever British goods are produced. It can be found in the Company’s main plant at Cowley; and not so far away it can be found in a humble little cottage near the remains of another “ factory ”—Wheatley Windmill—symbolic of one of the earliest developments of industry known to mankind. Here, pride in the millwright’s craft still endures in the stout heart of eighty-four-year-old Ezra Cripps, the owner of the Mill.

I visited Wheatley Mill after having a chat with Ezra’s son, Len, who is a chargehand in D.R.F. Len, who was born and spent the first twenty-odd years of his life in the “ cottage with a windmill in its back garden,” assured me that I should receive a friendly welcome from his parents. How right he was! At the doorway of Mill Cottage, which stands a few yards from the Mill, overlooking Wheatley on the one side and Cowley on the other, I was met by Mrs. Rosina Cripps, an extremely youthful eighty-two-year-old. The down-to-earth sincerity of her welcome was repeated when she introduced me to her husband.

For the last few years Ezra has been confined to bed, but it would be difficult to find an octogenarian with a readier wit or a more cheerful outlook on life. In no time at all the three of us were chatting away like old friends. Ezra told me that the Mill was dated 1784, and had belonged to the Cripps family for more than a century. It was in regular use until 1914 and was used occasionally until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Rosina took up the story to explain how, at three o’clock on an October morning in 1939, they were awakened by what sounded like an enemy bomb explosion in their garden. The Mill had been struck by lightning, which tore off a topsail, scattering the fragments in a wide area around the cottage, and shattering their bedroom window. After that the Mill went into “retirement.” The Oxford Preservation Trust wanted to take it over, and to appoint Mrs. Cripps caretaker. Ezra didn’t take kindly to this idea; he was most reluctant to part with what he regarded affectionately as a family heirloom. And Rosina didn’t take kindly to the idea of being caretaker of a mill she had been mistress of for fifty-odd years. So Wheatley Mill, a well-known landmark which has been made the subject of picture postcards, remains the property of the Cripps family.

There’s not much that Ezra Cripps doesn’t know about mills. For many years he worked at the old Castle Mill, in Oxford, as a stone-dresser, an ancient craft that is now

almost extinct. The fifteen-hundredweight millstones had to be regularly and expertly “dressed” to keep them in efficient working order. Ezra still looks back on his long working life with pride. To him, things are not quite the same nowadays.

“Up till 1914 the cost of milling corn was a shilling a sack,” he told me. “And it was good flour, too! What they put in the bread these days I can’t imagine!”

Rosina Cripps, too, has lived a busy life . . . still does, in fact, for she has never lost her interest in amateur theatricals, and is a popular entertainer at the local Old People’s Club. She is also an active member of the Wheatley Old Time Dancing Club. Her greatest thrill, as she readily admits, came when she was elected Coronation “Queen” of Wheatley and toured the village wearing a delightful costume, much of which she had made herself, and which also included a hundred-year-old wedding dress given to her by a friend. But first and foremost in Rosina’s life comes her husband. On Christmas Day they will celebrate their fifty-ninth wedding anniversary, but the years have left their happiness undimmed.

The Cripps family at one time owned another windmill, a wooden post-mill, nearby. This was burnt down when Ezra was two years old. “But I got the blame for it,” he said, with a characteristic chuckle, “and I wasn’t old enough to deny it!”

Wheatley Mill, being built of stone, still survives to cast its shadow alongside the picturesque cottage where, although almost within sight of the Cowley factory chimneys—symbolising the might of modern industry—this charming old couple live quietly and contentedly in an atmosphere of rural peacefulness that seems to belong to a bygone age.



Memento of his Naval service!

A Brittany harbour painted by Mr. W'. Crawford (inspection Dept., Cowley.