



THE OLD MILL HOUSE by Ian Welland

The Old Mill House stood as it had always done since the Glorious Revolution, creaking with the seasons and providing nesting boxes in its eaves. High up on gable end facing the millpond was a small window where many a rambler recalled seeing the ghostly image of Mavis the Witch who was believed to have cast spells in the house.

In the years before the war, the house had only one occupant, an old woodman called Richard Wren. Wren was a loner, but every Guy Fawkes night, would provide generous amounts of dead tree wood for our village bonfire and for a few hours would tell haunting tales to us children of Mavis. Wren also gave us carved animals as a gift; I still have a squirrel that sits on my desk in my study. As soon as the hot soup and bread had all been eaten, Wren would bid us all farewell and another year would pass before we saw him again.

One Guy Fawkes evening in 1938, Wren did not appear. Having checked the house, father led a search in nearby woods. After an hour or so, father stumbled across a small cemetery and there covered in ivy was a stone tablet saying, *'Here lies Richard Wren, died 5 November 1702, with his beloved wife Mavis, died 7 February 1695.'*

The tractors pulled up short of the house from a makeshift track leading from Hempstead Road. Within minutes, beams split screaming to the ground. Birds fled with their infants and birdsong from their once secure nests was no more.

A funeral pyre was assembled from the beams and lit unceremoniously. No readings, no singing, no congregation. This was the saddest day of my life.

A few days later, I strolled to the site of the Old Mill House for a final time. The burnt embers had cooled. As light snow flurries descended this early morning, there laying in the charred remains was an old chisel. I removed my scarf and wrapped up the tool. The chisel is mounted on a board next to the squirrel on my desk.

Author's Note:

The Glorious Revolution took place in England between November 1688 and May 1689. It involved forcing the abdication of the Catholic King, James II, and the restoration of Protestant monarchy in form of Mary II (daughter of James II) and her husband William of Orange (a nephew of James II).

