

Robert Avery's Talk to Wheatley Society on Thursday 19th February 2009
'Growing up on Ladder Hill'

Robert Avery was born in September 1934, in the house where he lives today. His Uncle Henry (known as Harry) owned and ran the successful sawmill next to the railway station.

This family business was originally situated in Naphill in Buckinghamshire but, in 1893, Robert's Grandfather, William Avery, moved his business to Wheatley. He did this in order to establish himself away from his competitors in the Wycombe area, and he saw his opportunity in buying land and founding his factory next to the GWR at Wheatley.

Robert was an only child who thoroughly enjoyed exploring in the local neighbourhood, and talking to the village people. But Wheatley was not a 'chocolate box village' at that time - in fact, it was a dirty and rather smelly place. Percy Trinder ran (Ladder) Hill Farm, whose buildings were situated on the west side of Ladder Hill, (now Howe Close) and the cows were turned out in the fields on the east side of the hill. These cows, therefore, crossed the road four times every day leaving a trail of dung behind them. The road was not, by today's standards, very busy, and boys used to chalk up a wicket on the doors of Cullum's workshop at the corner of Bell Lane. The bowler's run up started in Station Road. The only people in Wheatley who owned a car at that time were the three, wealthy, Miss Briggs, who lived next to Combe Wood, and the local doctor, Dr Orchard. But Wheatley station was no dreamy Adlestrop. Two steam traction engines were employed to draw whole tree trunks in to the mill yard, and a succession of horse drawn carts brought farm produce in from the surrounding villages and carried goods of all kinds, including sawn timber, back again. Everywhere there was a smell of freshly cut wood and the dung from horses and cattle.

The only house on the left side of the hill was the Station Master's house - until you came to Ladder Hill House, built by Rev. Blomfield.

As you went up the hill on the right-hand side, the first house was 'Green Hedges', then came the Howe allotments, and then, just before Windmill Lane, 'Chiltern View' - a terrace of three redbrick houses, built c. 1910.

After the junction with Windmill Lane came the two Avery houses: **Edge Hill**, where Uncle Bert and Aunt Ella lived with their daughter Doreen; and **High Ridge** where Robert lived with his parents. He was born in that house, and still he lives there today. Uncle Henry and Aunt Edith (nee Sheldon) lived with their daughters, Dorothy and Joyce, at **Orchard House**, on Park Hill.

Robert went first to a preparatory school in Headington and then to Magdalen College School in Oxford. He had to make an early start each day to catch the 7.25 am bus into Oxford from the King's Arms. If he went to the next stop, further west, there might not be a seat.