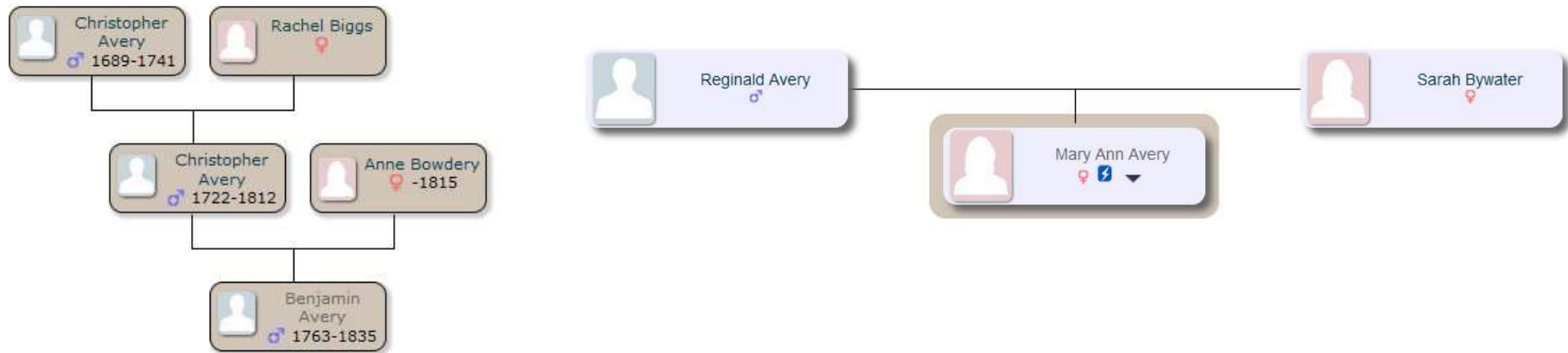
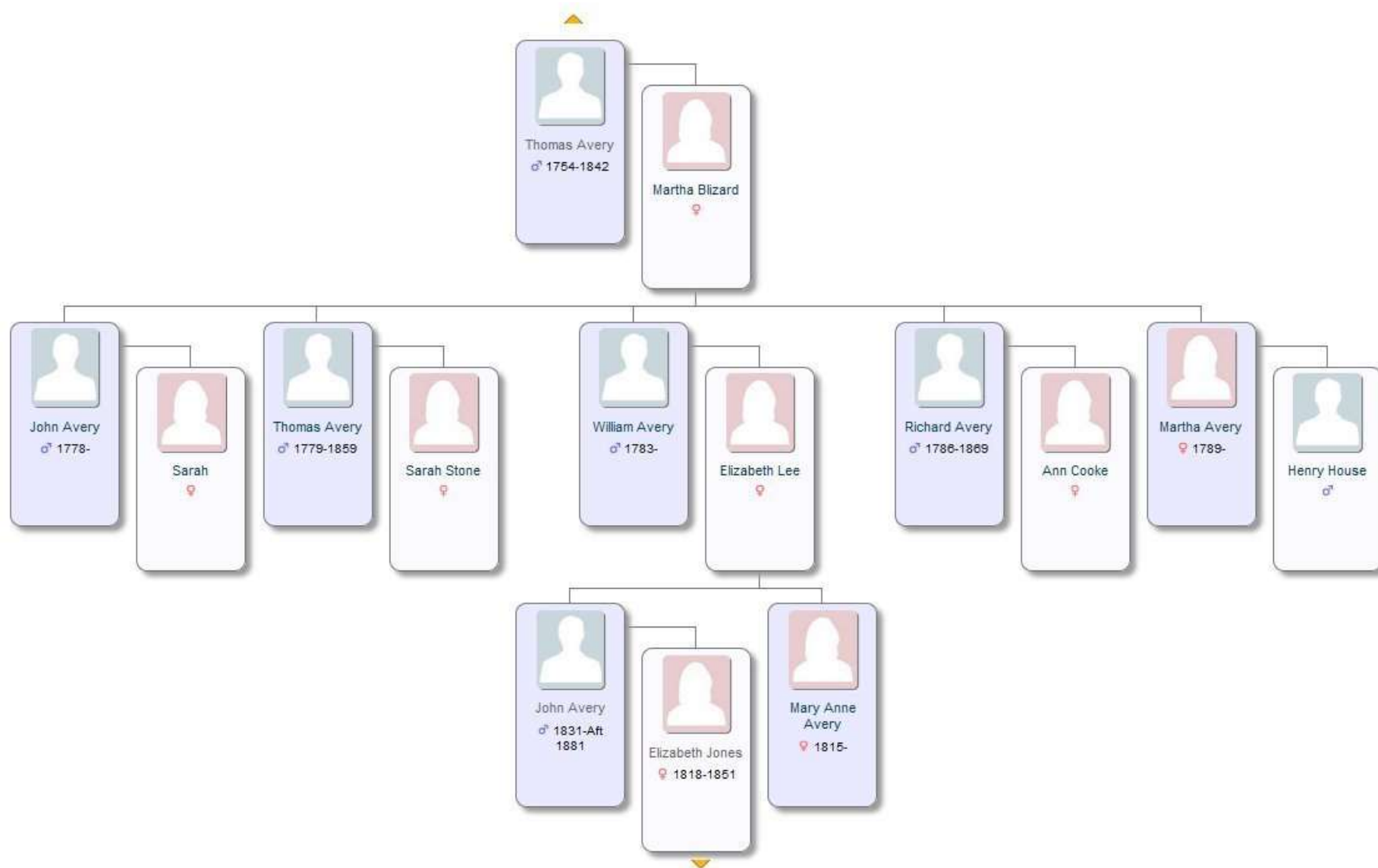


## Avery

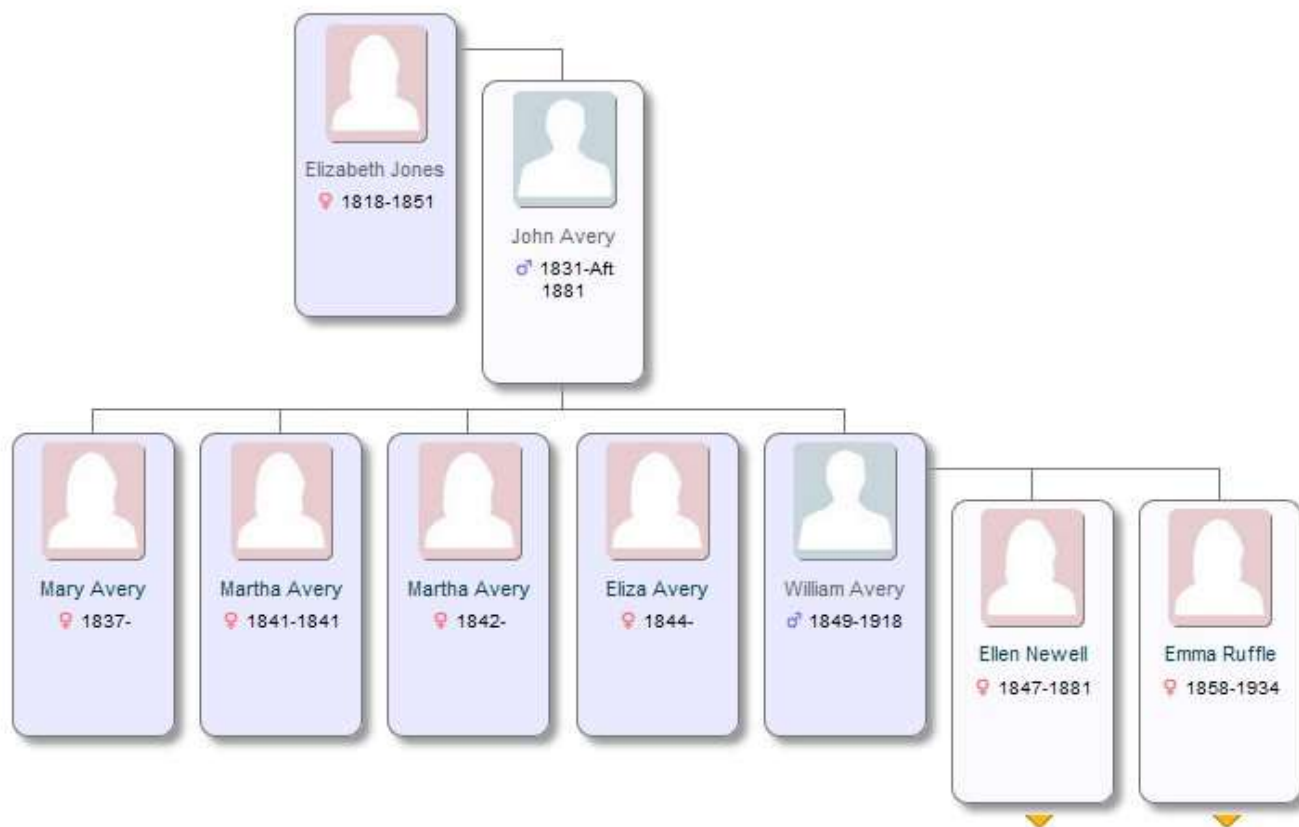
The direct family tree to the sawmill business in Wheatley started life in Radnage, Bucks. with Thomas Avery, born 1754. Another branch starting with two Christophers, father and son born 1689 and 1722, and a third generation of one son (the only one of whom we have knowledge) Benjamin, born in 1763, cannot be linked. These Averys lived in Stokenchurch and Bledlow. There is no information as to where yet another unlinked branch of Reginald Avery, wife Sarah Bywater and daughter Mary Ann Avery lived.



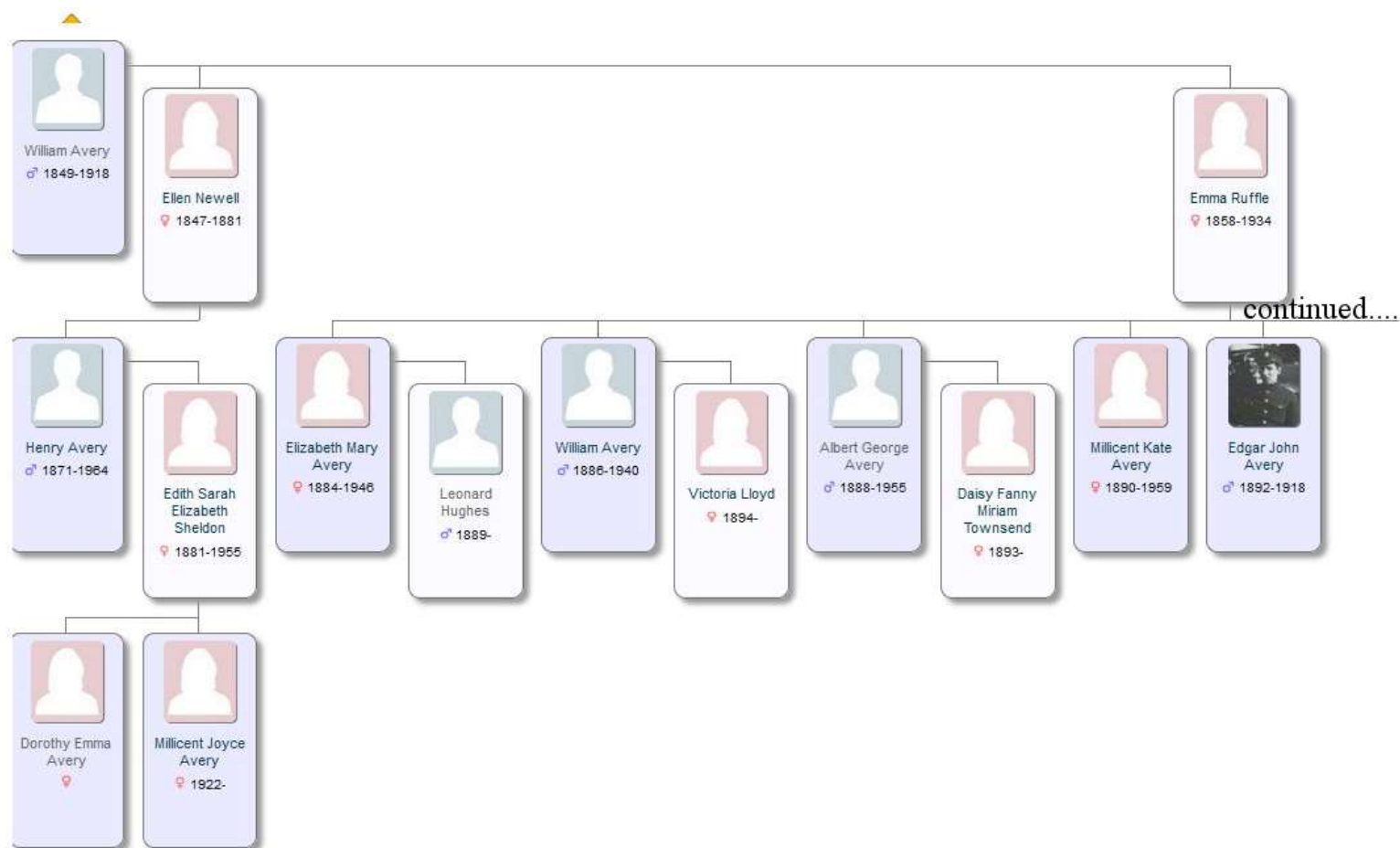
So, the direct ancestor of William Avery, founder of the Wheatley timber business, was Thomas Avery, born 1754 in Radnage. The four sons and one daughter of Thomas and Martha Blizard were born in Bledlow. One of the sons, William, born in 1783, married Elizabeth Lee and had one daughter Mary Anne 1815 and one son John 1831, also both born in Bledlow. John, appears to have been a late addition to William and Elizabeth's family.



John married Elizabeth Jones, born 1818, 23 years his senior and much the age of his sister Mary Anne. While in Bledlow, they had four daughters between 1837 and 1844, one of whom, the first Martha, did not survive a year. Later came the, presumably much-hoped-for son, William, who was born in 1849 and who moved from Walters Ash and Naphill and started the business in Wheatley which was continued by his sons.



William married twice, first to Ellen Newell, with the couple living in Walters Ash, with one son (of whom we have knowledge), Henry and two grand-daughters, Dorothy and Millicent. Ellen died in 1881, possibly in childbirth when she was 34. Soon after this, William married Emma Ruffle, and they had eight children, shown on this page and the next.

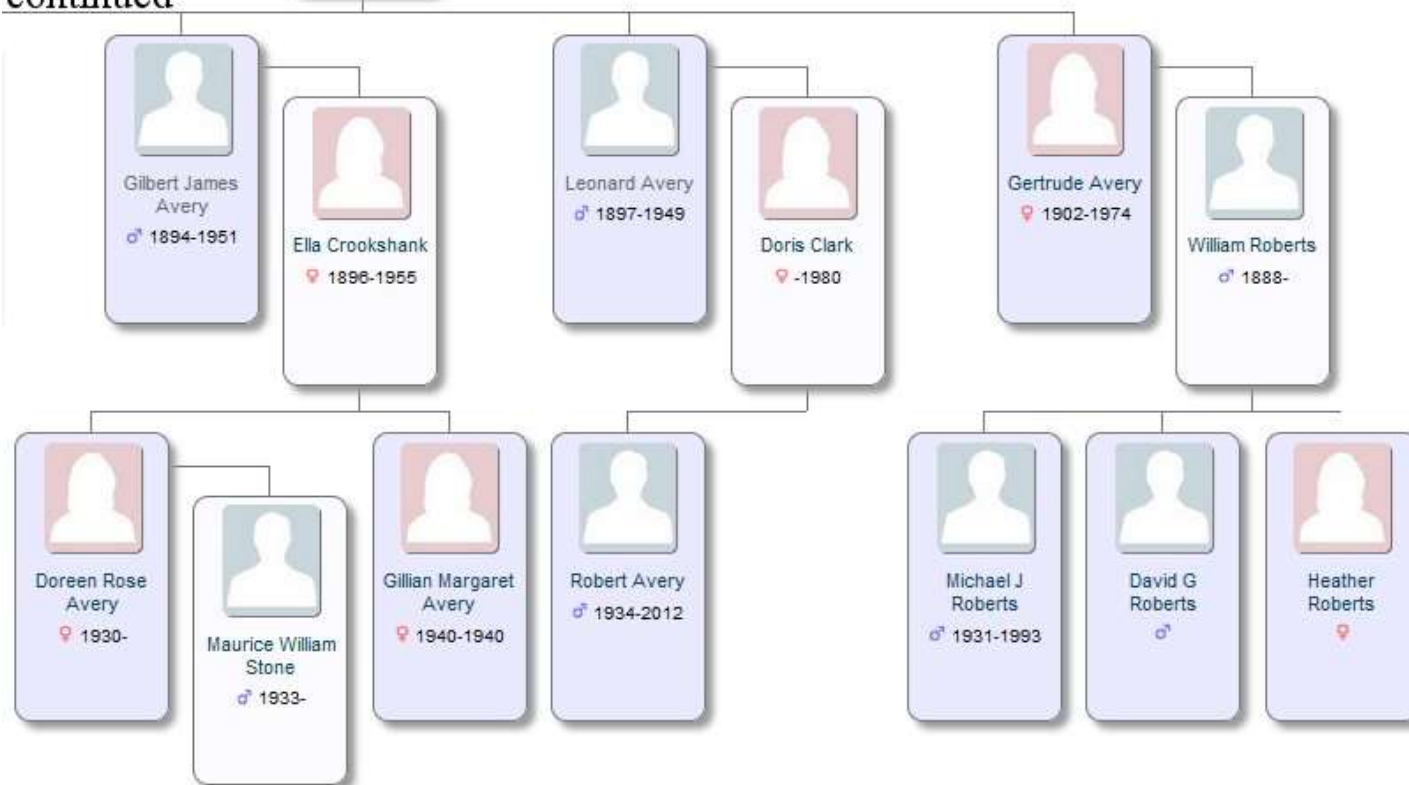


Until the move to Wheatley, William was in the timber trade at Naphill, a village in the beech woods that provided the raw material for the furniture trade in nearby Wycombe, in Buckinghamshire. William was in business with his step brother Henry ('Harry') from his father's first marriage and Albert George from the second, described below.

The 1920 Kelly directory seems to have got ahead of events with Albert Avery (not in 1921 census) at Edgehill, Henry Avery (age 50 and step-brother to the others) at The Orchard, Gilbert James Avery at Windyridge, Leonard Avery (age 24) on Ladder Hill, and William Avery (age 35) at The Lodge, Parkhill, houses which may well have been under construction but not yet inhabited. Instead, Henry, Gilbert James, Leonard and William jnr were living in Roberts House in the High Street. William snr had died on 14 January 1918, age 69, leaving his widow Emma also in Roberts House. Perhaps his will had paved the way for these new houses for the family?



continued



The family tale is that the land for the sawmill was bought following a train journey from Wycombe to Oxford. As the train stood in Wheatley Station, Avery looked from his carriage window and saw the land by the station. He left the train, asked the stationmaster who owned the land, and where he lived. He walked to the village, found the owner and clinched the deal. The business was moved here in 1893 and the result not only brought success to his business but also increased traffic to the Railway. The competitive value of setting up the mill opposite the railway goods yard was to remove entirely cartage rates to and from the railway. With a monopoly, being away from Wycombe, on timbers in East Oxfordshire, the firm's own carriages hauled by steam traction engines by Burrell and Foden brought the trunks into the mill. Dealt with, they were similarly hauled to the station yard - there was a level crossing at the down end of the platforms for this purpose - for dispatch in GWR wagons to the manufacturing trade in London, Birmingham and Bristol. Pit props were also supplied to the coal mines of South Wales and the Midlands. Apparently the sawmill was a favourite – but uncomfortable? – haunt for canoodling couples!



MR. WILLIAM AVERY.

The photograph of William Avery and his work force was taken c. 1903, The one of William Avery is undated,



The workforce was also taken in 1903,



**1 = William Avery (senior) 2 = Harry Avery (from 1st marriage)**  
**3 = William Avery (junior)**

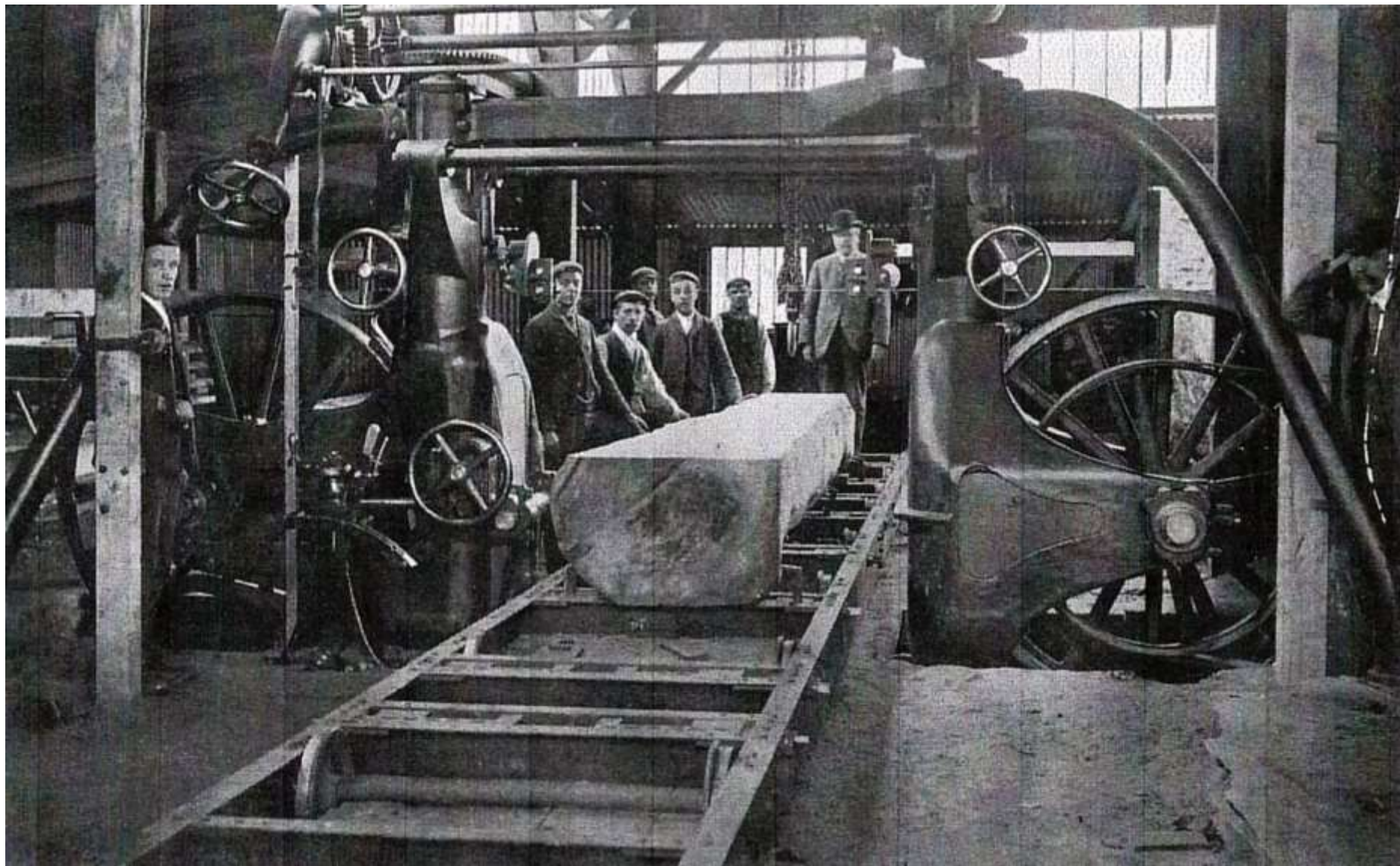


The aerial view about 1910,





and an undated one inside the saw-mill,



a later one of the workforce, also undated.



**1 Laurence Crick**  
**2 Maurice Ashfield**  
**3 John Avery**  
**4 Jack Ashfield**

**5 Henry (Harry) Avery**  
**6 Donald Crick**  
**7 Laurence Ray's father**  
**8 Will Shepherd**

**9 Will Goodlake**  
**10 Lockey**  
**11 Alf Preston**

The *Village Without a Green* describes an interview with Harry, then nearly 84 and Albert, who was celebrating his sixty-seventh birthday.<sup>1</sup>

‘I’ve spent sixty-two years in the sawmill,’ said Harry Avery. ‘I remember those bobbins for fishing nets about thirty years ago but they transferred the trade to some place up in the Chilterns.’

He took me off to see the furnace where they were burning the sweet-smelling sawdust and then into the engine house. ‘We’ve had that engine for forty years and she’s as good today as the day we bought her.’

Outside I noticed a crystal clear fast-flowing stream running beside the mill (shown on current OS map as a thin blue line crossing from south to north over the ‘W’ of Wheatley. ‘That comes,’ said the old man, ‘from Betty Brown’s Spring and it’s never failed or dried up in my lifetime, and they do say that it has never known to fail in all the history of Wheatley.’

‘Where,’ I asked, ‘do you get your timber?’ There were massive tree trunks lying about in hundreds. ‘We never use any foreign timber,’ said Harry, ‘we rely mainly on elm and the other mixed hard woods, oak and ash. There used to be a wonderful lot of elm all round Wheatley, in Shotover Park, and on Forest Hill, but it’s disappearing far too fast. We buy from a radius of about forty miles, but we sometimes have to go farther.’

‘In spite of being by the side of the railway line,’ I said, ‘I see you use lorries.’ ‘We use nothing else. Lorries save loading and unloading twice, they’re quicker in time and cheaper in money. We’ve finished with the railway. It’s a thing of the past. We used to handle the biggest lot of timber in England.’

Albert George here took up the tale. ‘Let me show you what we do.’ He took me first to a wonderful saw which was cutting up a thick trunk of elm into neat thin slices, with the ease of a ham-cutter or a bread-slicer. ‘Those are for coffin-boards,’ said Albert George, ‘our biggest trade.’ They were piled up in hundreds. ‘It certainly looks like a big demand,’ I said. ‘There’s no end to it. We can’t keep up with it. We can get the timber but we can’t get the labour. All the lads go straight into the factories where they earn ten, twelve, fourteen and sixteen pounds a week straight away without training or skill. We keep our men all their lives, but we can’t compete with those wages.’ ‘Are the coffins always of elm?’ I asked. ‘They mainly have to be these days. The undertaker’s charges are so high that people can no longer afford oak which is of course dearer.’

He led me along to more piled blocks of wood. ‘Here,’ he said, ‘are chair seats, arm-chair seats, and stool tops.’ In another section: ‘This is timber for the farm. Stakes, rails, props and so on.’

Outside I watched men loading a lorry. ‘That’s going to the Nottinghamshire coal mines. Those are covering boards for the coal ceilings and blocks of what are called “chocks,” cut into two and three-foot lengths. We also do the floors of railway wagon trucks and ash planks for the bodies of motor cars.’

He fondled the sawn blocks of timber as he was talking. ‘Oak, ash and elm,’ he said. ‘Those are the good woods of Old England and they’re dying out fast. They added beauty to the countryside which is more than you can say for the Forestry Commissioners’ idea of planting spruce and conifers as thick and dense as a regiment of soldiers. Trees are like people. If they’re to grow properly they must have room to breathe and expand. There’s no beauty in all these larches and firs.’



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<sup>1</sup> 'Wheatley the Village without a Green', written by P B Mais and published in 1956. The chapter is found in record 2234, with the interview from 1955/6.



William lived in what is now Roberts House (named after his son-in-law), 94 High Street with his youngest daughter Gertrude and son-in-law William Roberts. The youngest son, Leonard, born 28 November 1896, was involved in the management of what became known as Avery and Sons. In 1911, There were 9 other sawmill workers identified in the census. Service number F23168 and with his home address as that of his father, he served in HMS President II from 3 November 1916. His ill health led to the business being sold, and he died in 1949 leaving 14 year old Robert, born in 1934 and an only child, to be brought up by his mother Doris at Longside, their fine house at the top of Ladder Hill. After initial preparatory education at Headington he went to Magdalen College School in Oxford from 1947 to 1953. While at Magdalen College School, he would walk to and from the bus stop, which meant that he had to pass the station twice each day, and trains and everything to do with them, became a consuming interest. He enjoyed spending time in Wheatley signal box watching and learning about the operation of railways. later at Marlborough College.

Robert went up to University at Trinity College Dublin and graduated in English and French. This was followed by studying for a Diploma of Education at Oriel College, Oxford. Following University he became a school master at Magdalen College School teaching English & French. He remained at MCS from 1958 to 1965. There followed a brief period lecturing at Westminster College in Oxford before his first encounter with Marlborough School where he became acting Head of English for a year between 1968 & 1969, leaving to take up a post as Head of English at St Edwards School in Oxford. John Dancy the Master at Marlborough lured him back a year later to take up the post of Head of Drama in 1970. How and why will be remembered? Perhaps it will be his connections with Marlborough and his exceptional drama productions, or teaching English or as House Master of Elmhurst (a junior house) from 1981 to 1988. Perhaps it will be his love of railways - of all sizes, or maybe it could be Rolls Royce motor cars or sport, playing cricket or as a rugby referee..He stayed at Marlborough until retirement in 1990 He was a gifted person and although trains were always his great interest he was an accomplished artist and expert photographer. He enjoyed cricket, amateur dramatics, music and opera; and he took great pride in his garden. Robert never married, but he was not without companions. He had good friends and his beloved dachshund Sam (there were four of these over the years) went everywhere with him, including being driven around the village in his master's beautiful Rolls Royce.



After leaving Marlborough he returned to life full-time in Wheatley in the family home "Longside" and whilst he found the development and urbanisation of Wheatley at times puzzling he loved "Home". He maintained the large garden single handed, wrote poetry, read widely, painted, built and developed various model railways and of course built the unique "Ladder Hill Railway".



This was the culmination of a passion for railways in general and steam locomotives in particular. I feel that it is again the drama of a steam express that so captivated him. His first love was undoubtedly the GWR and many happy hours were spent watching and photographing the trains. As steam disappeared from the GWR he went further afield, the North, basing himself in Sedburgh to photograph the S&C and trains on Shap and the Southern Region to witness some of the last steam hauled express trains on BR. He then travelled further afield to Northern France where steam lived on.

Model railways became an early fascination and the Bassett Lowke O gauge railway circling the sitting room was started as a boy with his father and was added to, adjusted and modified throughout the rest of his life.



Devoted to his mother, Robert cared for her in the years prior to her death in 1980, thereafter making Longside his home for the rest of his life. Robert told a wonderful story of the three Miss Briggs who lived in Coombe House at the top of Ladder Hill. They would telephone London stores like Harrods and Fortnum and Mason, to order delicacies for their lunch: asparagus, strawberries and foie gras, for example, and ask to have them put on the train at Paddington to be dropped off at Wheatley. It was the lad-porter's job to take them up the hill and deliver them to the Misses Briggs in time for lunch! The date of this is not recorded but it may well have been the mid 1920s - they were still living here in 1939.

Robert's hospitality was always gentle, warm & distinctive and were perhaps epitomised by the railway days he held in aid of charity. Beautiful summer weather (for they nearly always were) tea on the lawn with home-made Avery fruit cake with the garden looking at its best. Trains running in the background, maybe a number of visiting Rolls Royces on the drive and Robert with Sam on a lead or under his arm, all slightly eccentric and quintessentially English!