

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in November 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were found residing or working in various homes for Fallen Women in the census returns.

Avery Pettifer Mawby's Story

In 1881 Avery Mawby, aged 22, was recorded as a cook, employed by The Edgbaston Refuge for Fallen and Destitute Women at 14 Noel Road, Edgbaston.¹ Avery Pettifer Mawby was baptised on 6 March 1859, the fourth child of Samuel and Mary Mawby. Samuel was an agricultural labourer and the family lived in the village of Eydon in Northamptonshire.

When the census was taken on 7 April 1861, Avery was recorded as a visitor, aged 2, in the household of George and Emma Wills, who were also resident in Eydon. George was an agricultural labourer, as was Avery's father Samuel, and George's wife Emma was a lacemaker. They had three children in their family,

all under five years of age: George born 1858, Edith Anne born 1860 and Constance born 1861.²

On that date in April 1861 the head of the Mawby family was Samuel's wife, Mary aged 29, with the occupation of charwoman and listed with her three older children: Solomon aged 8, Ann aged 7 and Judith aged 4, all born in Eydon.³ With Samuel away from home at the time, perhaps Mary was finding the care of four children too much for her, hence the youngest, Avery, being cared for by a neighbouring family?

Whatever the reason for Avery's absence from the family home, ten years later at the census of 1871, she was still residing with George and Emma at the age of 12, in Laurel Lane, Eydon, and described as a lodger.⁴ Another three children had been born to her parents in those ten years: William aged 8, Elizabeth aged 6 and Stephen aged 4; yet Avery had not returned to her parents' home. Samuel had possibly returned within a short period following the 1861 census, son William having been conceived within a year or so afterwards.⁵ It has been difficult to verify the births of the Mawby offspring; it is possible that not all were registered.

The census for the year 1881 made a distinction between the employees and the inmates of the Edgbaston Refuge for Fallen and Destitute Women and Avery was listed as an employee so presumably applied for the post of cook in response to an advertisement. It is not known how long Avery was working at the Refuge prior to 1881, but she must have moved north at some point during the next two years because on 22 May 1883 she married John Rawlinson at the

Parish Church in Lytham, Lancashire.⁶ John, a coachman, was born in Lytham in 1853 and had lived there all his life.

Eight years later in 1891 Avery and her husband John appeared on the census record for Bradford Yorkshire, although, for some unknown reason, Avery at that point was using the name Elizabeth. They were living at Pollard Old Lodge, where John was employed as a groom.⁷

It is assumed that John Rawlinson died in the years between 1896 - 1901 because on 29 June 1897 Avery Pettifer Rawlinson was before the Buxton magistrate having been found drunk, and again on 16 April 1898 Avery Rawlinson, of no fixed abode, was charged with drunkenness and assault.⁸

In November 1899 she was an inmate of the Leicester Union Workhouse, and was charged with damaging two panes of glass and also with assault on the porter at the Casual Ward. Avery was sentenced to seven days hard labour on that occasion.⁹

When the census was taken on 31 March 1901, Elizabeth Rawlinson was back in Bradford aged 42, where she and husband John had lived ten years earlier in 1891, where John was employed as a groom. Now she was living at 24 Sydenham Place, a widow, whose occupation was laundress.¹⁰ She had reverted to the use of 'Elizabeth' again, having been known as Avery during those uncomfortable years in the late 1890s. It is my contention that John died between 1896 and 1901, although I can find no trace of a death for a John Rawlinson of the right age within that time frame. Or another explanation

might be that the couple separated; either event would to some extent account for Avery's descent into drunkenness and unlawful behaviour.

There were two possible entries for Elizabeth Rawlinson in the Electoral Registers for Bradford in 1910 and 1911 when an Elizabeth Rawlinson was living at 6 Summerset Place, Undercliffe in 1910, and at 549 Killinghall Road, Undercliffe in 1911, though she was not found on the census return for 1911, so neither the age nor the place of birth of this Elizabeth Rawlinson could be confirmed.¹¹

In 1916 Elizabeth had reverted to using the name Avery Rawlinson by the time she was married to William Thomas West in Daventry. William was a widower, having been married three times previously. So Avery returned to her home county of Northamptonshire for her second marriage to William, also a native of Northamptonshire, who was a house painter/decorator and had been working in that trade for over forty years.

In 1921 Avery, then aged 62, and William, aged 67, were living in West Haddon where William was still working as a house decorator on his own account.¹²



The couple continued their lives living on Guilsborough Road in the village of West Haddon, Northamptonshire, until William's death on 5 November 1935. Probate was awarded to Avery Pettifer West, widow, a legacy which amounted to £215.6s.6d.

In 1925 the Contributory Pensions Act (Widows', Orphans', and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act) was passed which provided for 'the widow of an insured man a pension at the rate of ten shillings per week [50p in today's currency], with an additional allowance in respect of children while under the age of fourteen'.¹³

Four years later when the 1939 Register was compiled to record the population of England and Wales in preparation for WW2, Avery P West was

listed as a widow, and a pensioner, born on 25 December 1859. She was living alone in Guilsborough Road, West Haddon. The date of birth quoted by Avery is in conflict with her baptism date which was recorded in March 1859, but Avery's unorthodox childhood could account for the confusion.

Avery Pettifer West died on 10 March 1950 at Danetree Hospital Daventry, having survived fifteen years beyond her husband. Her will named Wilfred West, decorator (son of William T West) as beneficiary, her Effects £15.

Whilst Avery inherited a little more than £200 from William when he died in 1935, the Widow's Pension Act allotted just ten shillings a week to old age pensioners, so it is likely that Avery needed to supplement her pension on a regular basis from the legacy William left.

Though Avery was an employee of the Edgbaston Refuge for Fallen and Destitute Women rather than an inmate, her early life was somewhat irregular until adulthood and her marriage to John Rawlinson with whom she appeared to have a stable relationship. Following his death or disappearance, Avery's life was severely disrupted and she seemed to plunge into drunkenness and destitution for a period, until in late middle-age she made a second marriage to William Thomas West and seemed to enjoy a stable lifestyle in Guilsborough Road, West Haddon, where she remained until the end of her life.

¹ RG11; Piece: 2955; Folio: 90; Accessed via Ancestry 30.11.2024

² RG9; Piece: 923; Folio: 46; Accessed via Ancestry 30.11.2024

³ RG9; Piece: 923; Folio: 39; Accessed via Ancestry 30.11.2024

⁴ RG10; Piece: 1469; Folio: 40; Accessed via Ancestry 30.11.2024

⁵ RG10; Piece: 1469; Folio: 48; Accessed via Ancestry 30.11.2024

⁶ Lancashire Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1936 Accessed via Ancestry 01.12.2024

⁷ RG12; Piece: 3625; Folio: 24; Accessed via Ancestry 02.12.2024

⁸ *Buxton Advertiser, Buxton, Accessed via Findmypast 02.12.2024*

⁹ *Leicester Chronicle , Leicester Accessed via Findmypast 02.02.2024*

¹⁰ *RG13; Piece: 4153/12; Accessed via Ancestry 02.02.2024*

¹¹ *SPR.Mic.P.240/BL.B.99 Polling district or place Eccleshill Record set
England & Wales, Electoral Registers 1910-1932 Accessed via Findmypast 02.02.2024*

¹² *RG15 07674/42 1921 Census of England and Wales Accessed via Findmypast 02.02.2024*

¹³ <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/twenties-britain-part-one/pensions-for-widows/>
Accessed via internet 12.12.2024