

## *A Hidden Nineteenth Century Moseley Philanthropist: John Avins*

John Avins was typical of many successful middle-class nineteenth-century Birmingham businessmen and manufacturers who retreated to the suburbs in the nineteenth century to escape the crowded insanitary conditions, smells and smogs, disease and crime in Birmingham. They wanted to live alongside other middle-class people in a countryside setting that reminded them of their rural past and to show off their new financial and social status.

John Avins was born in 1816 in Bridge Street, Birmingham, near where the Hyatt Hotel stands today and lived his early life there. He rose from poverty to wealth, making his money largely in the family timber and japanning businesses in Bridge Street and in and around Worcester Wharf nearby. The Avins family and business relationships were close, complex and inter-related. They were japanners and wood turners in the 1820s and 1830s but in 1830 when John was fourteen years old his father, Charles Avins, late of Bartholomew Street Birmingham, a japanner and woodturner, became an insolvent debtor and was confined to Fleet Prison, London. However, in the 1840s the Avins family, including Charles, were again active in japanning and wood turning and were also sawyers by power, timber and coal merchants, hearth stocks producers, hoop and crate makers, brewers and owners of a public house and a grocery shop. In the 1850s, they were also English timber merchants and converters, brick and tile makers and producers of 'veneers and every description of brushwork, lath hurdles and fencings'. These activities were undertaken in and around Worcester Wharf, a key Birmingham canal junction, Wharf Street, Bartholomew Street, 13 Bridge Street, George Street, Baskerville Road, Baskerville Place and 2 Cumberland Place, whilst the family's brick and tile works were at Gravelly Hill, Erdington. In 1858, all co-partnerships between Thomas and John Avins were dissolved and Avins' businesses at Worcester Wharf disappear from the records.

John Avins 'retired' and moved out to Highfield House, Church Road, Moseley, (now the All Services Club) in 1858 at the age of forty two years, from which time he was referred to as 'gent' in various directories (Fig.1). Moseley at the time was a tiny rural village that, with its cottages, Hall and ancient church, and lack of canals and industry, appeared idyllic (Fig 2). It was close to Birmingham but not too close, safe from Birmingham's fumes, on a hill when height was considered healthy and vistas appreciated and had good clean water supplies. Moseley was just beginning its development as a middle-class suburb. Early incomers like John Avins were wealthy and able to afford their own carriages. As public transport developed – horse omnibuses and then horse trams, steam trams and the railway - Moseley expanded significantly and was opened up to less wealthy members of the middle class (Fig.3). John Avins lived at Highfield House until he died in 1891. He was described as a 'Retired Timber Merchant' in the 1861 and 1871 censuses, a 'Property Owner' in the 1881 census and 'Living on his Own Means' in the 1891 census.

**Fig.1: Highfield House, Church Road, Moseley, c.1900.<sup>1</sup>**



**Fig.2: Moseley Village, 1858.<sup>2</sup>**



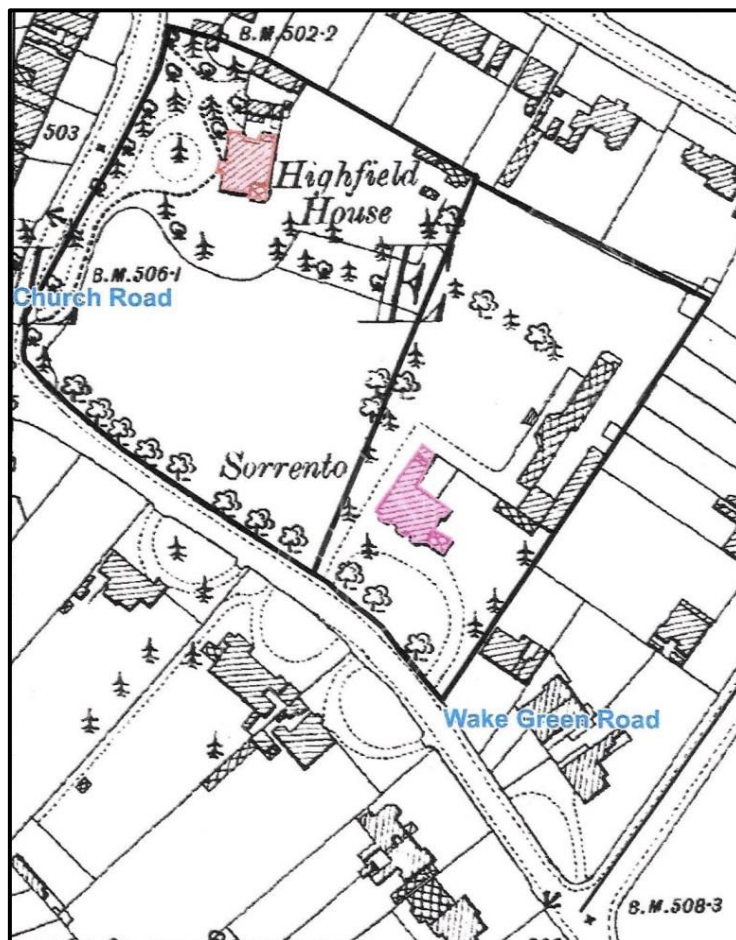
<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of Mike Rhodes, Postcard.

<sup>2</sup> Moseley Society History Group, 'The Collection', The All Services Club, Church Road, Moseley (MSHGC); Personal Collection Roy Cockel (PRC); Personal Collection Joyce Elliot (PJE).

Fig.3: Moseley Village, 1895.<sup>3</sup>



Fig.4: Map of Highfield House and Grounds, Church Road, Moseley, 1900.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>3</sup> MSHGC; PRC & PJE.

<sup>4</sup>This map has been constructed using the 1900s map in *Digimap* by Janet Berry ([digimap.edina.ac.uk](http://digimap.edina.ac.uk)).



John Avins commissioned Highfield House in 1850. It is Moseley's oldest surviving Victorian dwelling. The large plot ran around the eastern corner of Church and Wake Green Roads and included a tennis court and a small meadow (Figs. 4-5). The meadow land was not built on until the 1920s. The land was leased for 120 years at £120 per annum. After John Avins' death, his widow, Eliza Avins, lived in the house until 1901 after which it was rented by A. H. Gibson. By 1930 it had become the St. Francis' Orphanage and was staffed by nuns who added a small chapel (Fig.6). During the 1950s it became the Birmingham Jewish Social Club and since 1972 it has been the Moseley All Services Club (Fig.7). Extensive alterations have taken place, but elements of its previous role as an elegant Victorian home remain.

**Fig 5: The Site of the Tennis Court, Highfield House.**



**Fig.6: The Chapel built during the Period when Franciscan Nuns lived in Highfield House.**



**Fig. 7: The All Services Club, Church Road, Moseley, 2012.**



John Avins brought his second wife, Eliza (1826-1919), with him to Highfield House. His first wife, Hannah, born in 1822, died in 1847 leaving a two-year-old son, Charles Thomas Avins (1845-1915). Eliza and John Avins had a daughter, Eliza Ann Parthania Avins in 1863 at Highfield House when Charles was eighteen years old. They were a local family. John's second wife, Eliza, was born in Kings Norton Parish, Charles in Birmingham and Eliza Ann Parthania Avins in Moseley. John Avins married his first wife in his twenties and his second in his thirties and he was ten years older than his second wife, Eliza. Charles married Alice, youngest daughter of the late Thomas Toon of Sugnall, Staffordshire in 1892, a year after his father's death. He moved house several times and died in 1915 in Battle, East Sussex. Eliza Ann Parthania Avins did not marry, remaining at home and dependent on her parents. After her father's death she lived with her mother, first at Highfield House, then at Glenwood further down Church Road (Fig.8). After her mother's death she moved to Altadore on the corner of Church Road and Wake Green Road opposite Highfield House and then to 28 Reddings Road, where she died in 1955.



**Fig. 8: Glenwood, Church Road, Moseley, 2012.**

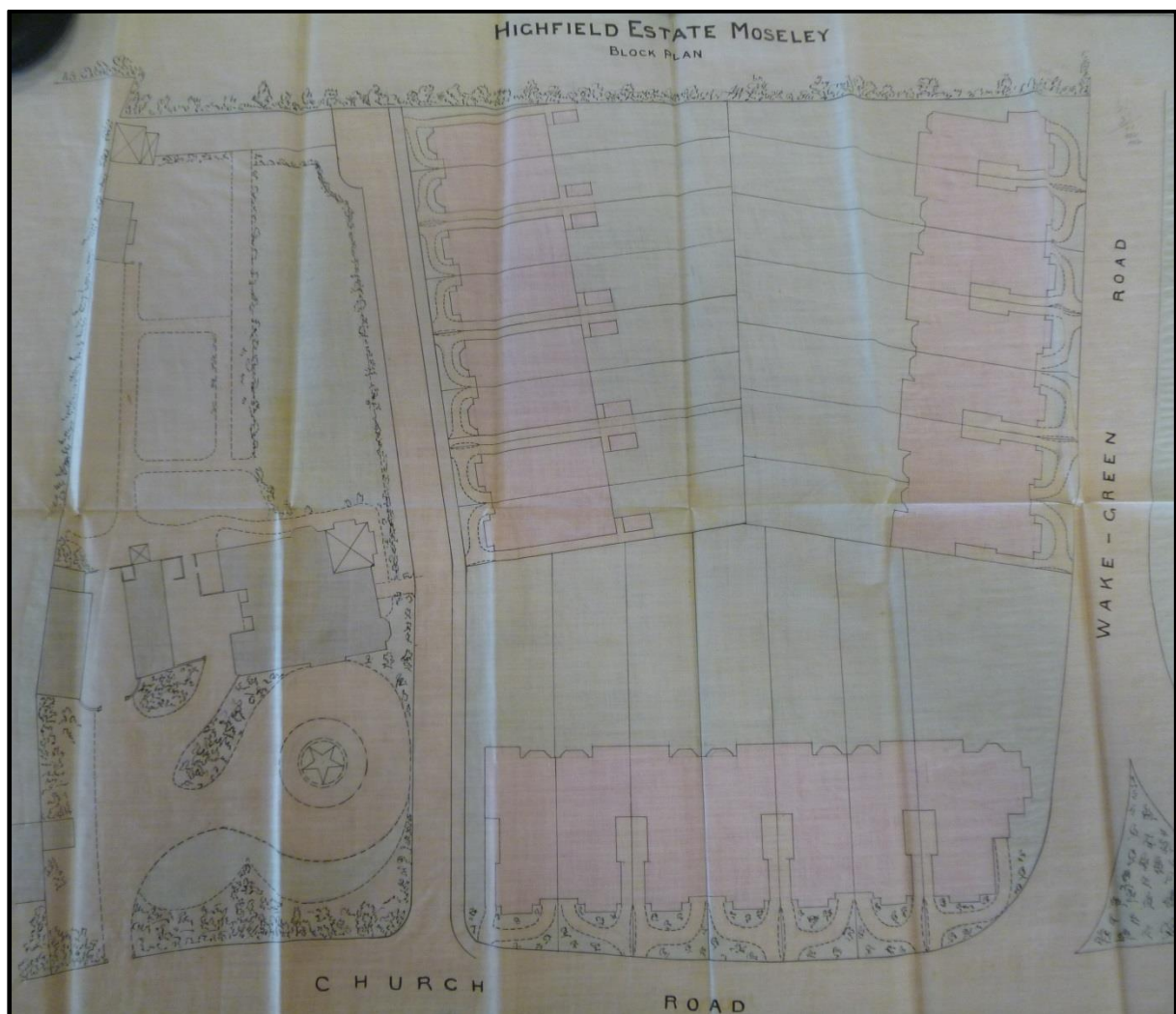


The family needed servants to run Highfield House. They employed three servants in 1861, four in 1871, 1881 and 1891 and five in 1901. They had cooks throughout the period and also, a general domestic and a groom in 1861, a governess for Eliza then aged eight years, a housemaid and a groom-cum-gardener in 1871 and two housemaids and a coachman in 1881. In 1891, there was also a parlour maid, a housemaid and a stable boy-cum-groom and in 1901, a companion for Mrs Avins following her husband's death, a parlour maid, a housemaid and a gardener. The Avins' female servants averaged twenty-eight years of age overall and their male servants twenty-three years. All the Avins' servants were born in the West Midlands area.

John Avins was very influential in the development of Moseley as a suburb in the second half of the nineteenth century. He was a local Moseley building entrepreneur, buying up land around Highfield House and building large houses with extensive gardens. His houses had long leases and strong covenants to ensure the maintenance of his properties and gardens and secure middle-class residents and high standards. John Avins' will mentions over twenty-three houses in Church, Forest, Coppice and Oakland Roads and many in Queenswood, Anderton Park, Woodstock and Woodhurst Roads. Of the sixty four different owners on a sample of Building Plans accessed, John Avins owned forty-two of the forty-six houses in the 1880s. Sanitary Assessments for Rates show that between 1873 and 1896 his property holdings varied from ten to thirty-seven houses and his land holdings from three to

five plots with rateable values ranging between £582 10s 0d and £1, 292 5s 0d. He received annually just over £90 in ground rent, £180 on 99-year leases and £90, for example, on a house in Coppice Road. George Bayliss was a key Moseley builder, contractor and developer, who acted as owner, architect and builder on many occasions. His son, George Bayliss Junior, was an architect who worked for his father, but also tried his hand as owner, architect and builder on some projects. They operated largely within a small area around Church Road and worked closely with John Avins.

**Fig.9: Proposed Plan of Villas on Highfield Estate, 1877.<sup>5</sup>**



In January / February 1887, John Avins applied for planning permission to build twenty-two villa residences with large gardens on the Highfield Estate (Building Plan 866) that would include a new road (Figs.9-14). His architect was Oliver Essex of Newhall Street, an architect

<sup>5</sup> Library of Birmingham Archives (LBA), Building Plan 866.



who designed and built many houses in Moseley. Documentation shows that the plots varied between 48' and 52' long and 10' and 22' wide. Ventilation, an important aspect in a period when miasma (bad smells) was considered the cause of illness, was via sash windows, ventilating flues and fireplaces, drains were 4" and 6" and at an incline of 1 in 10, walls were 9" thick, water was provided by the Corporation and the width of the street and open space opposite was 65'. The ground floor measured 60' x 24' overall into the bays and there was a scullery, larder, china store, hall, back hall, kitchen (14' x 12'), dining room (24' x 22'), drawing room (16' x 16') and vestibule. At the rear there was a back lobby and outside in the yard a WC and spaces for ashes and coal. On the first floor there were three bedrooms (16' x 16' & 20' x 16'), a dressing room, a WC and a closet. There were three bedrooms on the attic floor, a box room, a bathroom and two closets. There were beer and wine cellars. These villas were never built.

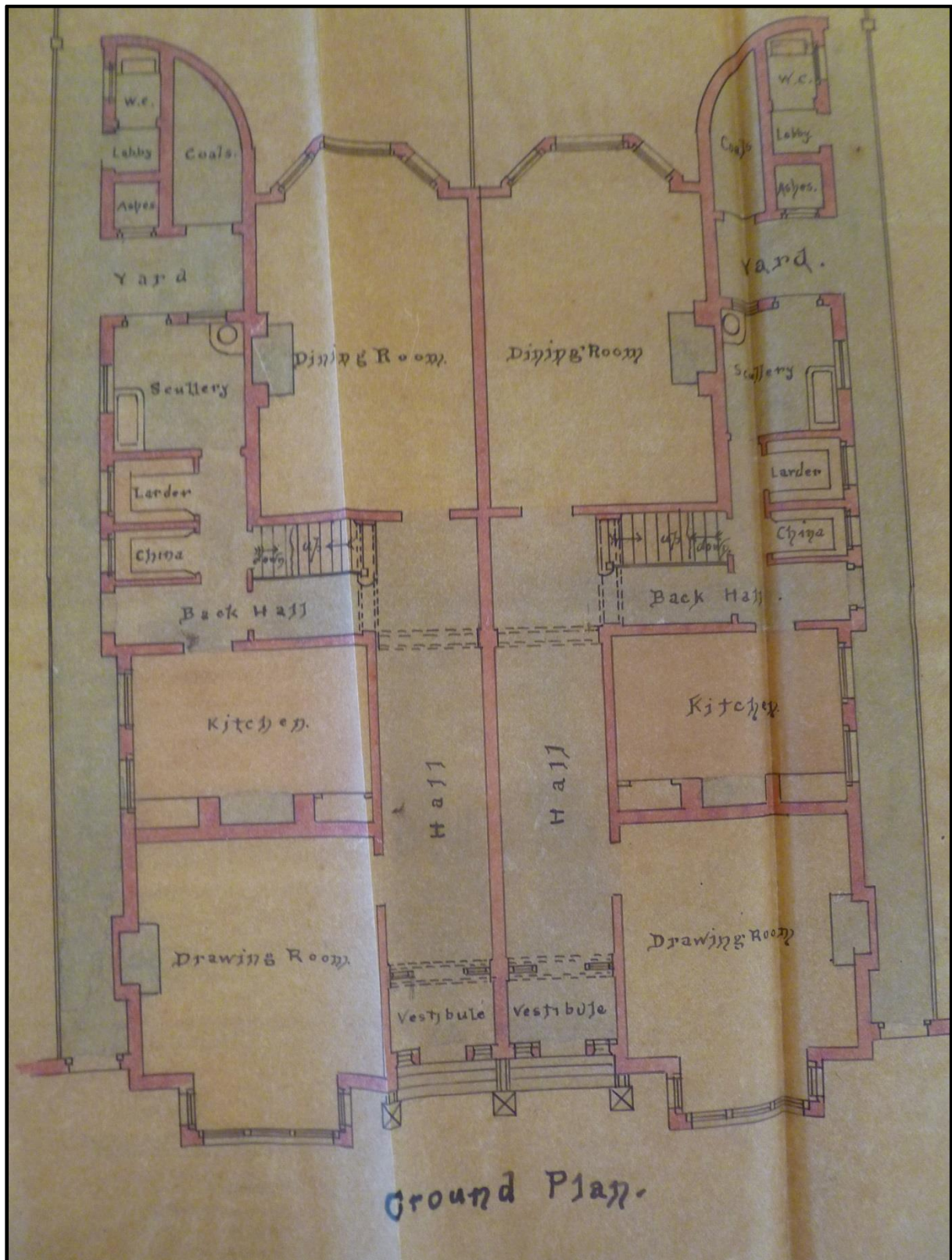
**Fig.10: Front Elevation, Proposed Villas, the Highfield Estate, 1887.<sup>6</sup>**



<sup>6</sup> LBA, Building Plan 866, Semi-detached Villas, Front Elevation.



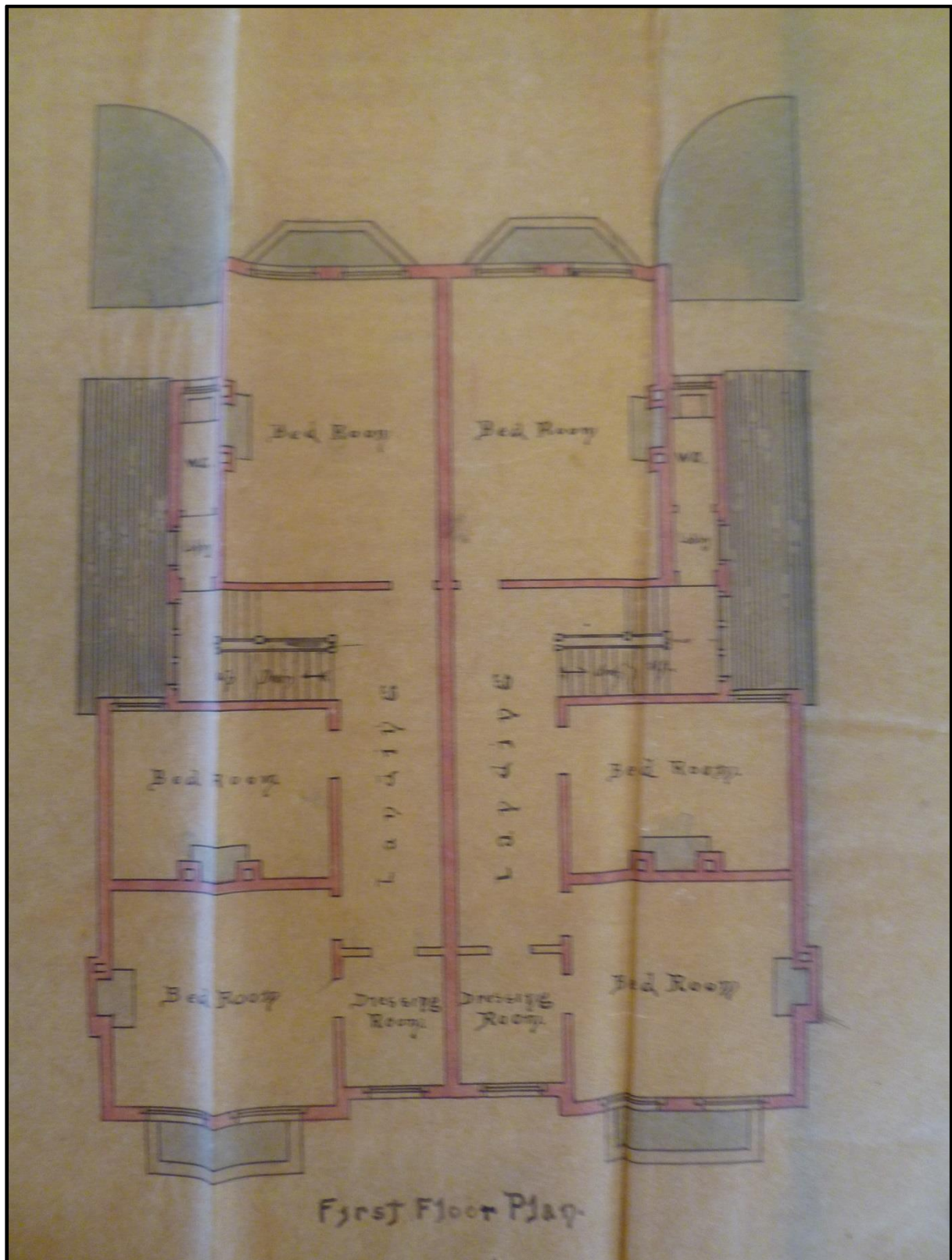
Fig.11: Ground Plan, Proposed Villas, the Highfield Estate, 1887.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> LBA, Building Plan 866, Semi-detached Villas, Front Elevation.



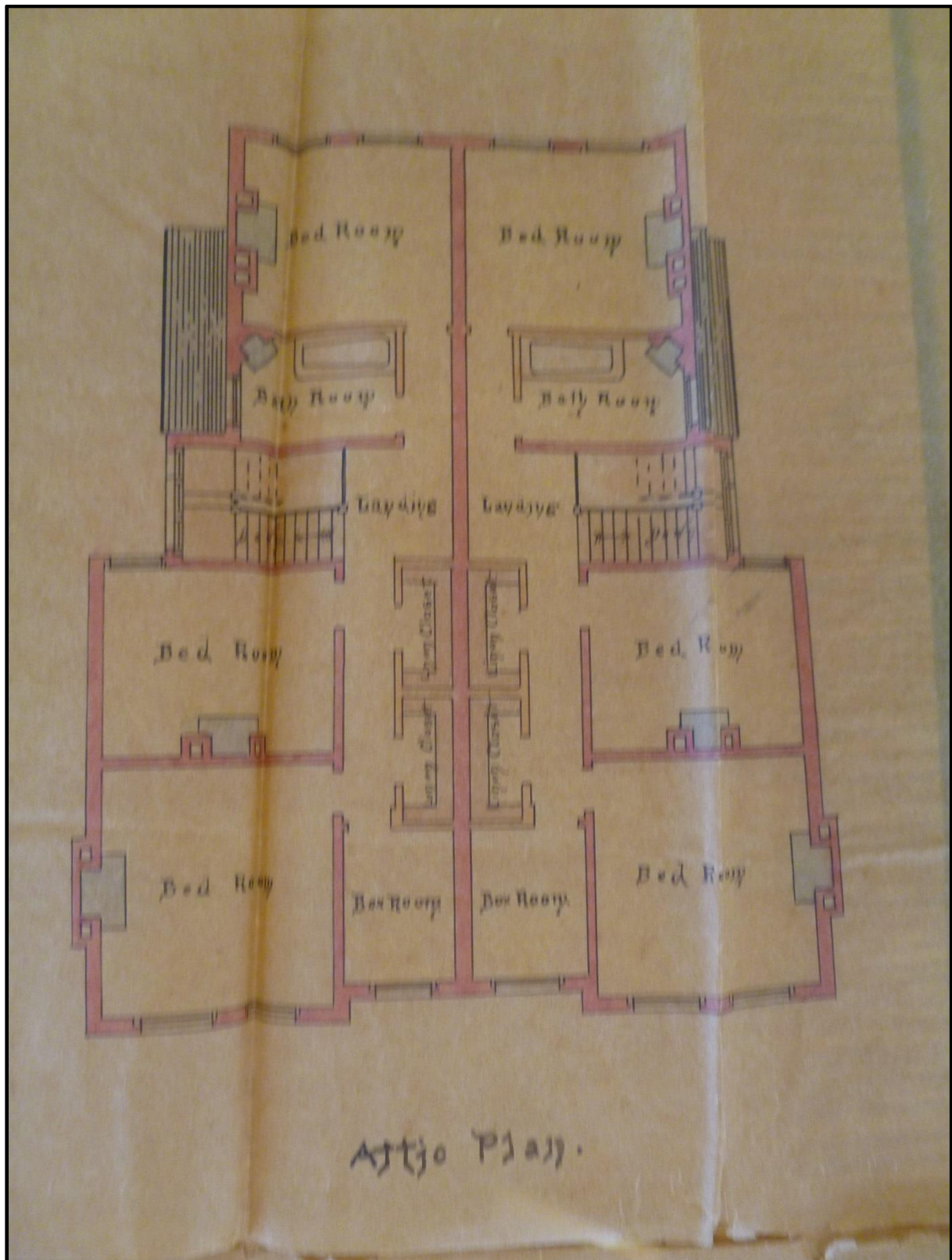
Fig.12: First Floor Plan, Proposed Villas, the Highfield Estate, 1887.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> LBA, Building Plan 866, Semi-detached Villas, Front Elevation.

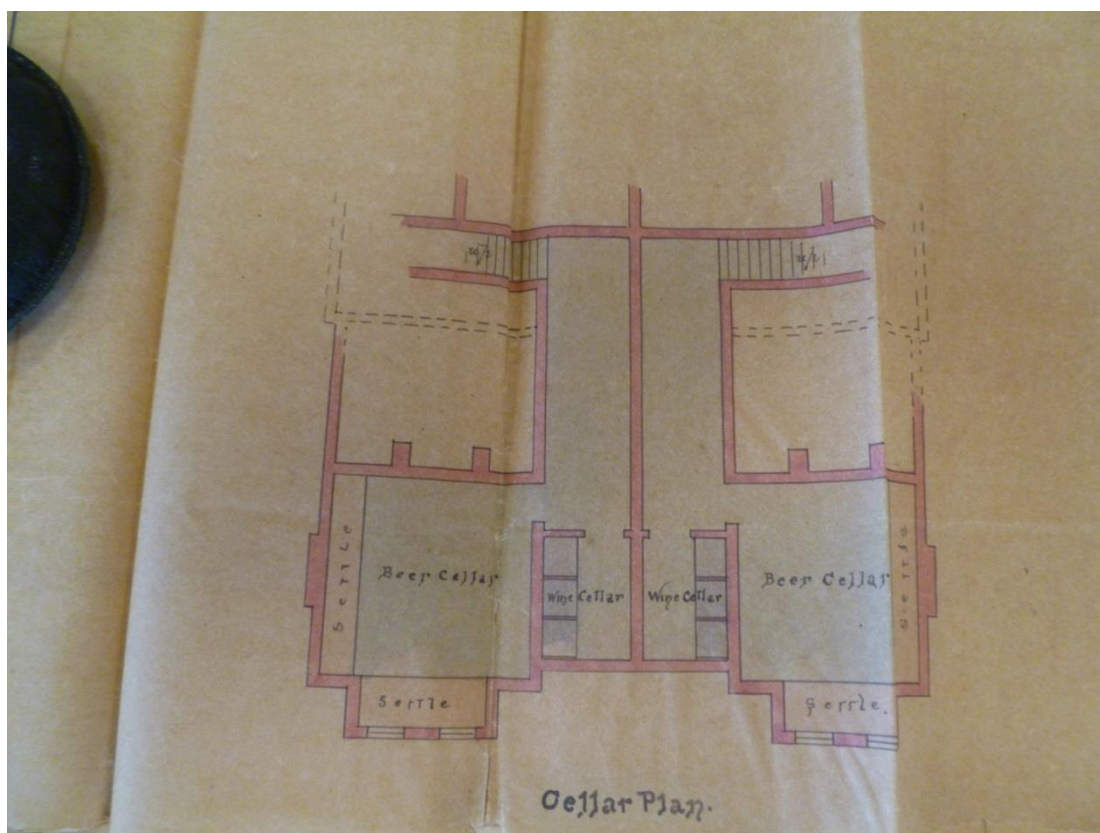


Fig.13: Attic Plan, Proposed Villas, the Highfield Estate, 1887.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> LBA, Building Plan 866, Semi-detached Villas, Front Elevation.

**Fig.14: Cellar Plan, Proposed Villas, the Highfield Estate, 1887.<sup>10</sup>**



John Avins remained extensively involved in business. He speculated in industrial and commercial land and property both locally and in Birmingham. He bought and sold shares energetically in a range of firms, including steamship companies, railways, canals and tramways, but also banks, mining companies, construction firms, various manufactories and insurance companies. He was chairman and Director of many companies, for example Cannock and Huntingdon Colliery Company and Birmingham Financial Company, and he was part of the provisional directorate launching a campaign for Sutton Coldfield Crystal Palace Aquarium and Skating Rink Co. in Cole's Royal Promenade Gardens adjoining Sutton Park. He used his particular expertise in the timber trade to return financial stability and fairness to a number of firms. For example, he was a committee member investigating the timber accounts and affairs of the Metropolitan Railway Carriage & Waggon Co., Ltd., the assignee to John Vigrass, a Walsall Timber merchant, in an annulment bankruptcy and treasurer to a group petitioning against paying auctioneers' fees when buying timber.

<sup>10</sup> LBA, Building Plan 866, Semi-detached Villas, Front Elevation.



He was active in St Mary's Church, Moseley. He was a Warden at St Mary's from 1862 and mentioned forty eight times between 1862 and 1887 in the lists of Church, People or Parish Wardens. He served for six successive years from 1862 to 1868. He gave generously to St Mary's Church, including a guinea to the Mayor's Fund for the restoration of the bells, clock and chimes in 1858 and £20 to the New Vestry Fund in 1890. John Avins was described as 'the moving spirit' behind improvements. He organised the laying on of gas and lighting in 1866 and in 1869 and the fencing off of footpaths from the churchyard and he raised money through voluntary subscriptions in 1870 to meet a liability of £70. In 1873, along with T.C. Sneyd-Kynnersley, he invested £360.15.1 produced by the burial fees fund in the East India Railway Stock and in 1874 the balance in a similar security. In 1875 his Report on Investments was accepted. In 1878 a committee purchased land from Dyke Wilkinson for the extension of the graveyard at 7/- per yard and raised the money by £50 shares at a rate 5% p.a. Along with Mr Kynnersley he supervised a new access roadway in 1878 alongside the Bulls Head, and helped negotiate with Mr Hadley about purchasing land for further extensions of the graveyard @ 15/- per yard in 1882. John Avins was on the committee that from 1872 solicited subscriptions for church extensions. He contributed five guineas annually for the building of a new church in Sparkbrook. In 1863, he organised £21 from Moseley Church to go to the General Hospital, one of his preferred medical charities.

John Avins was also a leading light in local civic philanthropy. He persuaded the Midland Railway Company to provide more trains to Moseley and sat on committees for Public Lighting in Moseley and the Moseley Village Green Trust. He promoted leisure by leasing land in 1867 in Church Road, Moseley for Moseley Quoits and Bowling Club at a peppercorn rent to Francis Corder Clayton. He was appointed overseer and surveyor at Kings Heath Petty Session, Guardian for Kings Norton Union Parish, to the Grand Jury at Kings Norton and as surveyor for Kings Norton. Along with John Padmore he oversaw the Moseley Charity Estate. He attended meetings concerning a proposed new railway to Halesowen along with other Moseley men. He was amongst the many Moseley men who subscribed in 1882 to the fund for a dedicated building for the Moseley and Balsall Heath Institute, a fund which realised £994.19s.6d., from 123 subscribers.

John Avins was typical of Moseley residents in contributing generously to a range of charities. He contributed to a fund that supplied cheap dinners for poorer children specifically in Moseley and District. He also gave £200 to Moseley Medical Institute for a Provident Medical Institute for the poor of Moseley and surrounding districts. He gave two guineas to the 'Chicago Fire Daily Post Fund' in 1871, £10 to the 'Special Fund for the Unemployed' in 1886 and amounts to 'Birmingham Schools Cheap Dinner Fund'.

John Avins and other Moseley residents contributed financially through subscriptions, donations and legacies to Birmingham voluntary hospitals, disabled children's institutions and charity schools and took on management roles. The Victorian Period became a philanthropic 'Golden Age'. People believed philanthropy was the answer to all the distress and social ills arising from urban overcrowding and industrialisation. The Queen's Hospital

annual reports carried the statement 'Charity never faileth'. Contributors were inspired by mixed motives, both altruistic and more self-serving, including religious convictions, status, power and prestige. The middle class frequently equated poverty with personal inadequacy and moral failure and voluntary hospitals were open only to the 'deserving poor', those unable to pay for medical treatment but who were above the level of paupers who were treated in Poor Law establishments. Admittance to Voluntary hospitals required a ticket or recommendation from a credited subscriber.

John Avins initially gave to charity through his family's firms at Worcester Wharf where he lived and worked. Between 1852 and 1889, Avins & Sons, Avins C. & Co., Charles Avins and Avins & Thomas subscribed to the Birmingham Blind Institute and Queen's Hospital in total some thirty guineas from Worcester Wharf (about £2, 462 at 1900 values in 2017). In 1857 and 1858, John Avins of Worcester Wharf donated a guinea to the Blue Coat Charity School (about £62 in 2017) and two guineas to the local Eye Hospital. Twice in 1859, Thomas Avins of Worcester Wharf was singled out for delivering cart-loads of firewood to the Queen's Hospital, and also for collecting 360 stamps for 'The One Million Penny Stamps Club', a novel form of fundraising introduced at the Queens' Hospital.

Following his retirement to Moseley, John Avins continued to support these charities, but also added others. He subscribed six guineas to the Blind Institute in 1858 and from 1865 until 1869, and two guineas to the Eye Hospital in 1862. He subscribed a guinea to Blue Coat School from 1861 until his death and donated £25 in 1867 and 1868. He gave £21 to the Queen's Hospital in 1861 and was singled out for a special vote of thanks for presenting the hospital with bottles in 1864, a welcome contribution since outpatients had to supply their own bottles when collecting medicine from the dispensary. He was singled out again in 1882, this time for donating a box of oranges for the Christmas festivities. He donated £21 to the General Hospital in 1863, thereby becoming a Life Governor, a role he held until his death in 1891. The first available annual report for The Orthopaedic Hospital (1864-5) shows he subscribed a guinea, which would have made him a Governor. He subscribed another guinea the following year, then increased this to two guineas from 1879-80 to 1889-90. He subscribed a guinea annually to the Children's Hospital from 1864 to 1890. In 1871 he donated ten guineas to the Women's Hospital, which made him a Life Governor. He donated £5 in 1876 to the Deaf and Dumb Institution and ten guineas to the Jaffray Convalescent Hospital in 1887 in response to a general appeal. He donated two guineas annually to the Jaffray from 1887 to 1891 and ten guineas the year he died. In 1887 he began subscribing to the Middlemore, a children's emigration home, giving a guinea in 1886 and 1887 and, as the late John Avins, two guineas in 1891. No subscription lists are available for the Skin and Lock Hospital before 1891, but a newspaper report reveals Avins subscribed a guinea in 1887, which suggests he might have been a regular subscriber. In 1890 he donated ten guineas to the Ear and Throat Hospital for its advertised Extension Fund. John Avins' subscriptions and donations between 1858 and 1891 totalled £269 (c. £19, 233.46 in 2017 based on an average of the value of £1 from 1850-1900), an average of about £8 per year (c. £581.92 in 2017). Only seven other Moseley residents gave more than John Avins to these hospitals and institutions.



**Fig.15: John Avins' Memorial, St Mary's Churchyard, Moseley.<sup>11</sup>**



John Avins died in 1891 at Highfield House. His memorial in St Mary's Churchyard is very prominent. It is large, alongside the main path and of red granite, a very long-lasting material (Fig.15). The inscription notes his contribution to the community and society and it was raised by the John Avins Trust he set up in his will. His wife, Eliza, and his daughter are buried there too (Fig.16).

---

<sup>11</sup> Berry, Janet, Photograph, 2013.

**Fig.16: The Dedication on John Avins' Headstone. <sup>12</sup>**

**ERECTED  
IN LOVE AND DEVOTION  
TO THE MEMORY OF  
JOHN AVINS  
DIED JULY 29<sup>TH</sup> 1891  
AGED 75 YEARS**

**LEAVING HIM TO SLEEP IN TRUST  
TILL THE RESURRECTION DAY**

**ALSO OF  
ELIZA AVINS  
WIFE OF THE ABOVE  
WHO DIED OCTOBER 11<sup>TH</sup> 1919 AGED 93 YEARS**

**AT REST  
IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
ELIZA ANN  
PARTHENA AVINS  
DIED 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1955  
AGED 92 YEARS**

I reckon that the sufferings  
Of this present time are not  
Worthy to be compared with  
The glory which shall be  
Revealed in us  
Rom. viii 18

---

<sup>12</sup> Berry, Janet, Photograph, 2013.

HIS TRUSTEES  
DESIRE TO PERPETUATE  
(BY PERMISSION OF THE FAMILY)  
THE MEMORY OF JOHN AVINS  
AS THE FOUNDER OF THE  
JOHN AVINS TRUST  
FOR THE BENEFIT OF CERTAIN  
CHARITIES OF THE CITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

John Avins left an estate valued at £80, 000 (£6, 563, 944 in 2017) and, after securing his immediate family's financial security and bequeathing several legacies to the wider family and servants, he donated £22, 000 (c. £1, 805, 085 in 2017) to the Orthopaedic Hospital plus an extra £2, 000 (c. £164, 099 in 2017) and £1, 000 to the General Hospital Building Fund. The bulk of his money went to The John Avins Trust through which certain charities were to be supported as long as they were in existence and deemed appropriate, with any remaining money to be distributed to medical and quasi- medical charities at the discretion of the Trustees. The charities listed were Days Home Deritend, Middlemore Emigration Home, Birmingham Blue Coat Charity School, Birmingham Royal School for Deaf Children, Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind, Royal Wanstead School (an orphanage near London) and The Fund for Supplying Cheap Dinners to poorer children in Moseley and District.

However, there were problems in distributing the legacies and grants and it was not until 1921 that the money began being paid out. In 1921, £11, 200 (c. £325,446 in 2017) was paid to Birmingham Orthopaedic Hospital. In 1923 The Science Scholarship to the University and the Music Scholarship were given £500 each (c. £2, 529 in 2017) and in the same year the Orthopaedic Hospital applied for £5, 000 (c. £205, 294.50 in 2017) to purchase a former training home on the corner of Vicarage Road, Edgbaston to convert into 30-bed, open-air wards, which was refused. The hospital applied for £10, 000 (c. £410, 589) to buy the site of the old Children's Hospital in Broad Street for an outdoor clinic and land alongside for nurses' lodgings, which was granted and a further £5, 000 for the land and equipment was also granted. Before the NHS, the focus for annual grants was on hospitals and subsequently five of the seven decreed charities and new charities were supported, such as the General Dispensary, Friends of Dudley Road Hospital, various Homes and Institutions for the physically and mentally handicapped and the elderly, Charities for specific diseases, The Red Cross, St John's Ambulance, Drug rehabilitation schemes and a research unit. The Trust distributed £18, 975 (c. £674, 590 at 1945 values in 2017) between 1927 and 1947 and £151, 500 (c. £591,532 at 1980 values in 2017) between 1948 and 1978, a total of just £170,475 (c. £665, 620 at 1980 values in 2017) and average of £3, 343 per year (c. £13, 053 at 1980 values in 2017). Overall the largest grants went to the General Hospital (£4, 000), the Royal School for the Deaf (£2,190), Blue Coat School (£10, 440) and the Royal Institute for the Blind (£14, 000). This Trust still operates along the same lines today.



**Fig 17: *Finding Moses*, Paolo Veronese, Sixteenth-century Venetian artist.<sup>13</sup>**



John Avins left money and goods to other causes in his will. He left £500 to St Mary's Church and £200 to the recently erected Moseley Baptist Church for stained-glass windows, based on *Pharaoh's Daughter* after a painting he saw at an 1887 Liverpool Exhibition. This was not illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, but *Finding Moses* by the sixteenth-century Venetian artist, Paolo Veronese, has been suggested as the likely inspiration (Fig.17). The painting was then in the Liverpool Royal Institution collection and was later presented to the Walker Art Gallery. Sadly, the John Avins' window in St Mary's Church, *Moses in the Bulrushes*, was destroyed by bombing in the Second World War and only a fragment survives (Fig.18). He gave £50 for a John Avins Science Scholarship to Birmingham University and £50 for an Eliza Avins Music Scholarship for girls. He left £1, 000 to the *Royal National Lifeboat Institution* for two boats, the 'John Avins', (1895-1905), a 34-foot, ten-oared, self-righting lifeboat, which was the first RNLI Lifeboat for winter service in Wick, and the 'Eliza Avins', (1888-1920) stationed at Plymouth (Fig.19). He offered ten oil paintings, two bronzes of Columbus and Galileo and a timepiece featuring Lucrecia to Birmingham Art Gallery. Mr Whitworth Wallis, the first Director of Birmingham Art Gallery, visited Highfield House to view them, but decided they were not suitable for permanent exhibition and could not be accepted as gallery storage space was limited. John Avins left £250 to the Moseley Bowling and Quoit Club along with £10 for prizes and £10 for the Turners Institution Annual Prize. A 1958 photograph shows the John Avins Cups still in use (Fig 20).

<sup>13</sup> By email from Brooke, Xanthe, Curator European Fine Art, National Museums, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 7/8/2012, [Xanthe.Brooke@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](mailto:Xanthe.Brooke@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk).

Fig.18: Fragment of the Avins Window, *Moses in the Bulrushes*, St Mary's Church, Moseley.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>14</sup> Berry, Janet, Photograph, 2015. Access courtesy Rob Brown, Volunteer Archivist, St Mary's Church, Moseley.

**Fig.19: The Lifeboat, 'John Avins', at Wick in Scotland**



**Fig.20: The John Avins Cup, Moseley United Quoit and Bowls Club, 1958.<sup>15</sup>**



<sup>15</sup> Moseley Society History Group, 'The Collection', (MSHG), (C3/D1/F8/3/3).



The possessions identified in John Avins' will illustrate the standard of living and lifestyle of a suburban gentleman and his household. The list included, for example, jewellery, clothes, furniture and objects, horses, carriages and their paraphernalia, stables, stock, wines, liquors and provisions.

After John Avins' death, his wife, Eliza Avins, subscribed and donated significant amounts to the institutions that her husband had supported. She donated £1, 000 to the General Hospital Building Fund, subscribed and donated significant amounts to the Orthopaedic (£16,867), the Women's (£12,053) and the General Hospitals (£3, 100), generously to the Ear and Throat Hospital (£936) and the Middlemore Home (£140) and smaller amounts to the Eye Hospital (£21) and the Blue Coat School (£61). This totalled £34, 178 (c.£2,671,769.45 in 2017 when taken at 1900 values). Miss Avins favoured the Orthopaedic (£14, 594) and the Women's Hospitals (£101) and the Middlemore Home (£71), a total of £14, 766 (£1, 154, 290. 71 in 2017 when taken at 1900 values). By 1919, John Avins' immediate family had given almost £49, 000 (c. £1, 422, 200. 07 when taken at 1920 values). Mrs and Miss Avins also gave quantities of clothing to the Middlemore Home, some 270 items between 1894 and 1904. They donated other items, including two bibles and two prayer books.

Mrs Eliza Avins continued to look out for Highfield House after John Avins' death. She was on the trust that managed the finances and the portfolio of houses. She complained in 1913 about plans to widen Wake Green Road, suggesting that, since shrubs had been removed, occupants would be exposed to passers-by. She objected to the field alongside Highfield House being used for food production under the Corporation Cultivation of Lands Order of 1916, insisting the land be returned to turf after the war. She remained at Highfield House with her daughter, Eliza Ann Parthania Avins, until 1901, giving forty-three years of occupation by the same family, and then they moved further down Church Road to Glenwood (Fig.8) and lived there until her death in 1919 at ninety three years of age.

John Avins was a philanthropist during his lifetime and a benefactor after his death. Like others, he was inspired by a myriad of motives and determinants, but clearly status, reputation and prestige were crucial to him both in life and in death. The creation of the John Avins Trust elevated John Avins into a league on a par with celebrated Birmingham citizens, but he remains a 'hidden philanthropist' deserving of recognition and is perhaps representative of many other city inhabitants who played a role in the development of civic society locally but remain unfamiliar to modern audiences. He was supported in his philanthropic endeavours during and after his lifetime by his second wife, Eliza, and his daughter, Eliza Ann Parthania.

**Janet Berry**

## **Primary Sources:**

### **The Library of Birmingham Archives (LBA):**

MS 1672 (Add I)(Acc 1991/137), 1927-79, MS 1672/087/8/9/90, MS 1272 (Acc 1995/027), John Avins Archive, including the John Avins Trust Minute Books 1-3, the John Avins Trust Ledger, John and Eliza Avins' wills and various legal papers.

BPKNU, BCK/MC/7/3/1 & BCK/MC/7/3/2, Kings Norton Union Building Plans (BPKNU), Building Register for Kings Norton.

BCKJ/MB/6/13/1-26, Sanitary Assessments, 1873-1896.

EP 77/5/2/1 (Acc. 92/92) DRO 77/39, St Mary's Church, Moseley, Vestry Minutes Book, 1853-1940.

### **Hospital & Institution Annual Reports:**

GHB4/14 and HC/GH/1/3/1 (General Hospital); HC/GH/1/3/1/ and L46.21 (General and Jaffray Hospitals); HC/QU/1/8/1-15 (Queen's Hospital); WH/1/10/1-4 (Women's Hospital); HC/BC/1/14/1 (Children's Hospital); HC/RO/A/ 10-15 (Orthopaedic Hospital); L46.315 (Ear and Throat Hospital); HC/EY/2/1/3/1 (Eye Hospital); L41.31/19-45 222 (Middlemore Charity Home); MS/622/1/5/1-39, L48.113 (Blue Coat Charity School); L48.62 (Deaf and Dumb Institute); L.4861 (Blind Institution)

### **The Library of Birmingham Local History (LBLH)**

Trade Directories: Various

### **The Moseley Society History Group, 'The Collection' (MSHGC):**

Postcard Collection

### **St Mary's Church, Moseley (SMCA):**

Canon Colmore's Diary, 1876-1893.

## **Online Sources**

Censuses / Family History: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

Historic maps of Moseley: [www.digimap.edina.ac.uk](http://www.digimap.edina.ac.uk)

History of Blue Coat School: [www.thebluecoatschool.com](http://www.thebluecoatschool.com)

The Royal Wanstead School: [www.avocaberks](http://www.avocaberks)