

The most famous Kildwickian you've never heard of (well, most of you)

Has there ever been anyone famous come from Kildwick ?

Chances are that any name you care to suggest would only be thought of as truly famous by a very few. But in fact there has been a Kildwickian who surely passes all the criteria required to be considered famous.

We are talking about someone who was a major media celebrity, with a massive following among the youth of his day; who was responsible for over 70 publications – several of which are included in the US Library of Congress; had both a building and a piece of music named after him; was awarded an OBE; and had a charity founded in his memory.

This article is about William Benjamin Appleby – arguably the most famous Kildwickian of the 20th century, and somebody most of you will never have heard of.

The early years

William Benjamin Appleby was born on 14th July 1910 and was baptised a month later in St. Andrew's Church Kildwick. (He was actually baptised Benjamin William but appears always to have been known as William, or affectionately as "Pip").

He was the only child of Thomas and Elizabeth Appleby. Thomas Appleby was the headmaster of Kildwick School, a position he had occupied from 1900. It was a job that came with a school-house, suitable for a small family, and it was there that William lived for the first part of his life.



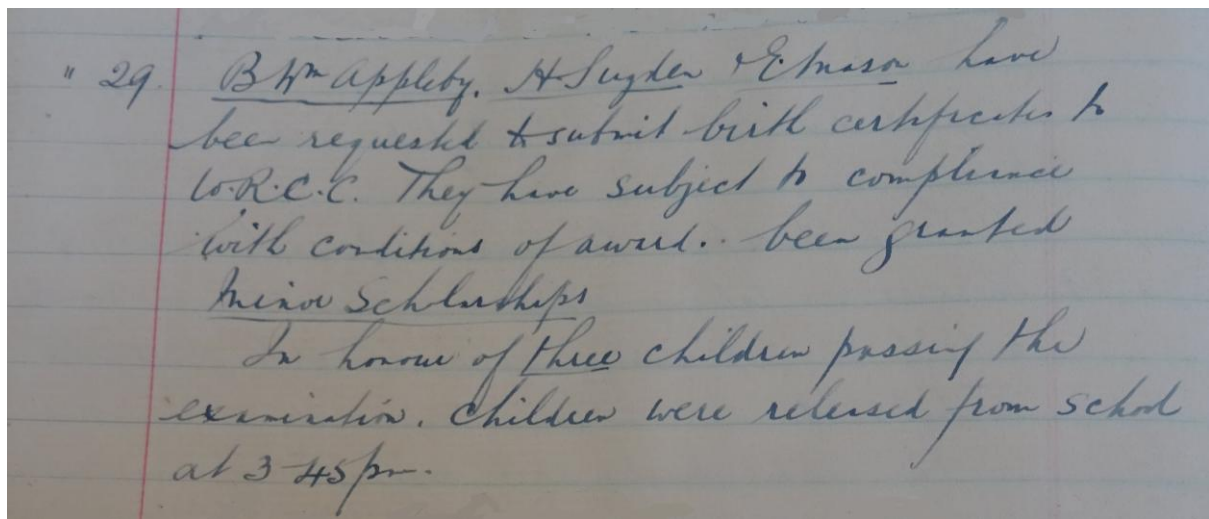
Thomas Appleby with William

Being a pupil at the school where your father is the headmaster cannot have been easy. One of the other teachers at Kildwick School during the time William was a pupil there recalled:

Willie was bright and his father always expected to see him at the top of the class. However, if Mr. Appleby came into the room and saw that Willie was sitting anywhere other than top, he would ask what he was doing there and then send him back to the top immediately.

Whatever problems there were at school didn't seem to affect William's academic record, as he went on to receive a County Minor Scholarship in 1922.

It appears his father was so proud to hear of his son's scholarship award that he closed the school early, as recorded in the Log Book.



Kildwick School log book entry for June 29th 1922
(Closing the school early was a very rare occurrence)

The scholarship enabled him to attend Grammar School; and he later went on to study at Cambridge.

Thomas Appleby died suddenly in 1926 and, having had to vacate the school house, Lizzie and William moved to Crosshills – first to St. Andrew's Terrace and then to Fieldhead Terrace, which was where Lizzie was living when she died in 1956.

A teacher in Doncaster

After graduating from Cambridge, William became a teacher and early in 1939 took up a post as English master at Doncaster Grammar School. In addition to his formal role in the English department it appears that he also took over the job of training the school's choir, which quickly developed a growing reputation.

Whether William had any formal qualifications in music is unclear, most likely not. However his father, as head of Kildwick School, was involved in many of the social activities in the village and participated in a number of the musical events that were popular in the years after WW1. It's clear that William also took part in some of these.

It is also certain that William became a proficient keyboard player and on occasion deputised for George Spencer, the regular organist at St. Andrew's Church – including for at least one wedding – and during his time in Doncaster, William continued his organ playing at one of the local churches.

In 1946, the Local Education Authority appointed William Appleby as its first music organiser, a post that may have been created especially for him. His role was to develop the teaching of music, both singing and playing, in local schools.



William Appleby tuning a violin

A pupil of Doncaster Grammar School from around this time recalls "Pip" Appleby:

He always auditioned new students to check their musical skills. I didn't play an instrument but I had a fairly good soprano singing voice, and he put me in the school choir. I served in the choir the whole time I was at the school, naturally changing in due course from soprano to baritone.

While I was still a soprano, Pip asked me to join the Doncaster Schools Choir, which drew from a number of schools in the town (girls and boys schools) and I remained in that until I went to University. We rehearsed every Monday evening during term time, and Pip organized a number of concerts for us to perform each year, some of them outside Doncaster and a number of them in churches.

And what was Pip like? He was small of stature, relatively slim and quite neat to look at. He was a very kindly man whom boys took to as soon as they met him. He was a genius at retaining the interest of children in music of all kinds. A bit of a pied piper you might say. He might seem shy and retiring, but he commanded huge respect from all who knew him. I remember that on three or four occasions at the BBC shows, we worked together with a man who was very handsome and had a fabulous high baritone voice. This man (name forgotten I'm afraid) was clearly a well-known soloist whom Pip had persuaded to sing some songs along with us. This man was almost as much in awe of Pip as we always were as kids.

Note: It is possible that this "well known soloist" was the German tenor Richard Tauber who performed at the Doncaster Schools Music Festival in 1947, at Appleby's invitation.

The mention of the BBC introduces this article's section on the next phase of William Appleby's career, and a national audience for his enthusiastic approach to music in schools.

"Singing Together"

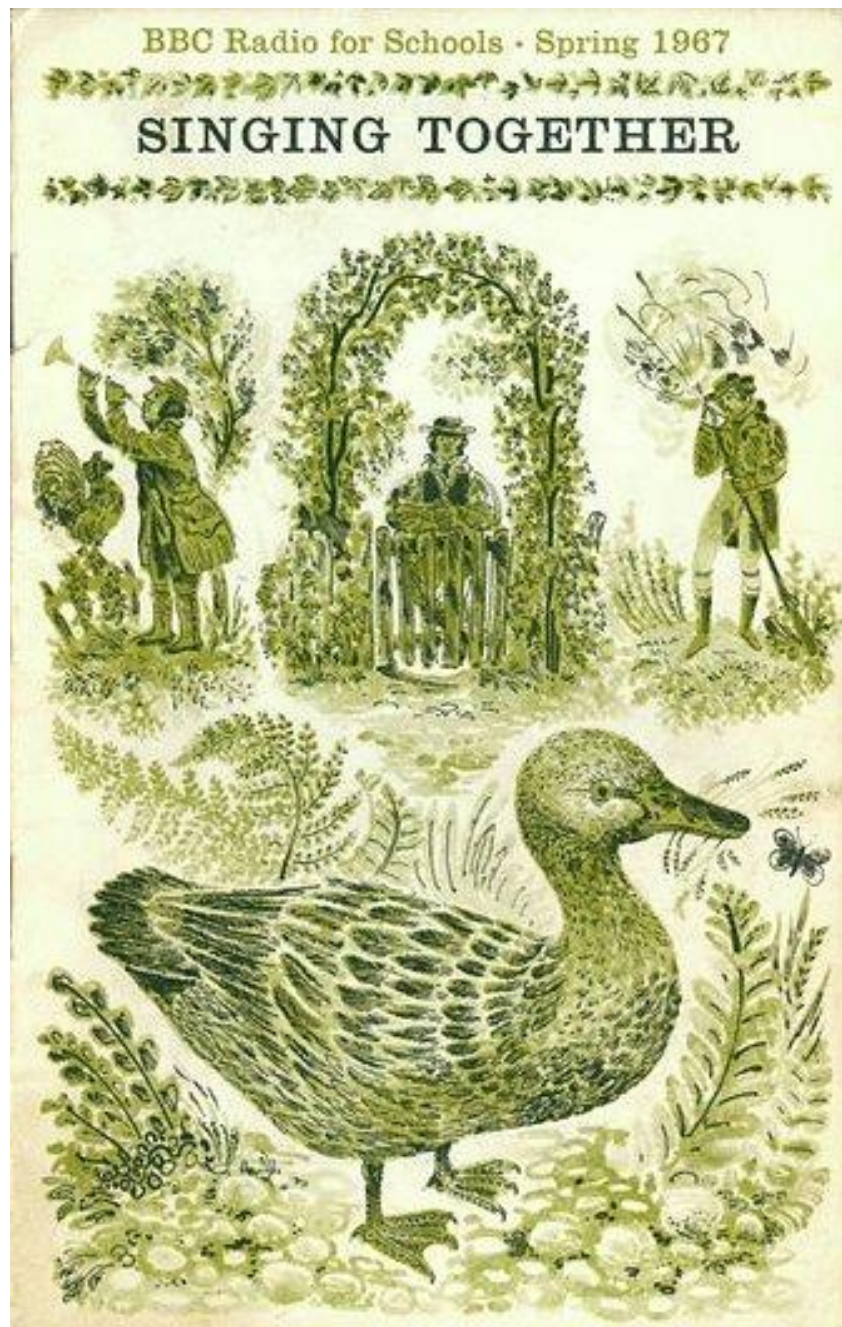
Although the first radio broadcasts to schools were as early as 1924, their role only became important during WW2 when, by 1942, half of all UK schools were tuning-in to listen to 5-minute news broadcasts reporting on the progress of the war.

Following the war and the creation of the Schools Broadcasting Council, in 1947, music teaching formed a significant part of the BBC's output for schools. Its flagship programme in this area was the weekly broadcast "Singing Together", which featured an array of popular, mainly traditional, mostly British songs that pupils would be encouraged to learn.

After having gone through a number of presenters in a very short time, the BBC approached William Appleby. He would occupy the position for the next 22 years.

Each term the Singing Together team would produce an illustrated booklet containing the words and music for about 12 songs. Each week one or more songs would be taught by listening to them being sung, a section at a time, by a choir with piano accompaniment. The broadcast would end with a full run-through introduced by Appleby's exhortation "Now schools, Sing Together !".

At the end of each term schools would vote for their favourite songs, which would then be included in the final broadcast.



One of the Singing Together programme booklets

Appleby pressed members of the Doncaster Schools Choir into service, as a pupil recalls:

I sang in the choir that performed for the Singing Together broadcasts. In 1947 as a Doncaster Grammar boy of 13, I took part in a pilot recording to see how the programme would be received in schools. From about 1949 three out of four programmes were live from London. The [other] one was recorded in Leeds on a Saturday afternoon in order that William Appleby could go into a school on the following Monday morning in order to observe reaction. A special choir, the Danensian Singers made up of girls from Doncaster High School and boys from DGS, sang in all these recordings.

and another:

... he [Appleby] asked me if I would join his small choir which he used for broadcasts on the BBC in the Educational programme "Singing Together". He put out this show every week during term-time, often with soloists. But one week in three we would be shipped to Leeds in a coach to the BBC Studios in Leeds. There he would lecture on the various songs that he wanted to teach the listeners. The latter, of course, were schoolchildren all over the country who would hear it in their classrooms. We would demonstrate singing a few bars at a time of each song, then we would perform the whole song. The BBC studio was a large two-storey room which I think must have been converted from an old Methodist church. Naturally we had rehearsed all these songs back in Doncaster, maybe a couple of times.

We sang near a grand piano on the ground floor with Pip conducting from the piano. On the upper floor of the Studio the BBC operatives could see and hear us through a glass window. The programme was broadcast through Post Office landlines to the BBC in London where the show was actually recorded. The big event of the day for us, of course, was not just the singing but the huge tea party with large sugary cakes afterwards, courtesy of the BBC.

The impact of Singing Together may be judged by the number of people who can still recall, with some affection, the broadcasts and the songs that were taught. This is undoubtedly due to William Appleby's enthusiasm for traditional singing, together with his Yorkshire accent – at a time when almost all BBC programmes featured only "proper" pronunciation.

Here are some extracts from comments posted about the programme on the website "Mudcat Cafe" – a community of musicians, historians and enthusiasts that collect and discuss traditional folk and blues songs, folklore, lyrics, instruments, ...

Certainly when you discovered Martin Carthy some years later, you had already come across some of his songs like High Germany in Singing Together. Mr Appleby must have been pretty well up on the folk scene for his time - acquainted as he seemed to be with Scots, Irish, English, Welsh, Jamaican and American folksongs.

We used to have about 4 or 5 classes get together in the fifties, to sing with the radio. AHHHH memories.

Before tape recorders were popular, we all sat cross-legged in front of the radio in the school hall and sang with it.

Each term there were 10 or 11 songs, which we learned. Some of them would repeat every few years, it seems, but it gave you a fairly large "vocabulary" of folk songs in common - as well as the ones you knew from other sources.

Whilst Singing Together was not the only source of Folk Music I came across in my formative years it was an important one.

I know more than one person who, whilst not a folkie, still retain affection for the songs they learnt that way.

My friend has a pretty large collection of the Singing Together books ('pamphlets', we called them) and we were looking through them recently.

The memories, as they say, came flooding back when we came to songs like 'Riding On A Donkey', 'Dashing Away With A Smoothing Iron' and, especially, an extraordinary song called 'Old Zip Coon'. What was that all about?

In our school, two classes came together: . us and the B class. The programme was repeated in the week, and because we had the nature programme, we sometimes caught the fag end of the repeat, and started singing spontaneously to it.

The big old wooden radio was kept on a special high shelf (out of our reach) in the corner of the room. The teacher's pet was entrusted with the great honour of turning the radio on and off every week, when the order came.

The pamphlets were given out at the start of every singing lesson. The lessons weren't popular as we were squashed three in a desk that was designed for two..... someone always got in trouble for pushing someone else so they landed on the floor. I remember also the smug smiles of satisfaction from some girls at being squashed in a desk next to lad that was generally fancied by the other girls. There were [only] enough pamphlets for two between three - although when one or two kids were standing in the corner, for larking about and squabbling - you sometimes got your own book. Quite often, there were the kids from poorer backgrounds who ended up taking these booklets home. The teacher would be looking for some little present he could give the poorer kids for Christmas and he would give them last year's book.

At the end of the term, the show would encourage schools to let the kids vote for their favourite song, and then send in the votes cast for each song in the pamphlet. Our school always participated in this. As I recall we were allowed to vote for 3 songs.

The last 'Singing Together' of each term then involved a 'Pick of the Pops' or 'Eurovision Song Contest' style show with a rundown of the songs. The songs with the lowest votes were broadcast first, and with the tension mounting we then got to the winning song. I've tried to work out which were the winning songs from the various terms, and I've come up with the list below.

Spring 68 - Men Of Harlech

Summer 68 - the awesome 'Marianina'

Autumn 68 - Football Crazy

Spring 69 - Oh Marlborough's Gone To War Sir

Autumn 69 - Charlie Is My Darling

Spring 70 - Mango Walk or Old Zip Coon

Summer 70 - Linstead Market (overwhelming winner in our school, despite my attempts to get The Yellow Sheepskin as the winner)

Autumn 70 - The Twelve Days of Christmas or This Old Man

Summer 71 - The Meadowlands (a total shock winner as I recall)

"Singing together" was always my favourite lesson. We'd go into the hall and sit cross legged on the floor, and Miss Prime would turn the radio on. I loved the songs, but it was 10 years later I discovered they were folk songs.

"The Keeper" sticks in my memory. Cleaned up for us children, though!!

We both remember ... the radio on a high shelf above the teacher's desk in the corner at the front of the room. The pamphlets. I remember a bunch of the songs still ... and sometimes the songs from new-to-me folk bands rekindle memories. "Soldier Soldier won't you marry me?" "The Mermaid". Something about a valley.

I now realise that many of those songs were censored ... the verses about Polly's apron hanging down low, or Polly finally giving in to the soldier's charms and going into the sentry box and wrapping herself in his cloak, and then ... and then the 9 month consequences ...all deleted! But I remember enjoying these lessons hugely.

I remember when Singing Together began it was a huge innovation. It was I believe 1948 and we'd never had a radio in the classroom before. What fun it all was. I have to concur with the writers who feel the programme gave them a lasting interest in folk music ... it certainly did for me.

At the time (in the sixties) I was also buying the Record Song Book which had the lyrics of chart music. I remember experiencing a conflict between the way I sang those songs, and the way we were expected to sing in "Singing Together". I guess there were kind of blue-note slurs in all the pop songs, whereas the "folk" songs as delivered by William Appleby were squarely on the notes. The folk songs I later came to appreciate are usually spiced with ornamental lead-in notes and jumps (can't remember what to call them - in guitar playing I would call them hammers and pull-offs). The Singing Together style must have been somehow cleaned up or simplified - or was it because they weren't being sung by folk singers as such?

And of course Singing Together was very much a firm favourite at Kildwick school, where lessons were scheduled to allow pupils to listen each Monday morning at 11.00am.

Throughout his time on Singing Together, Appleby continued his job working with schools in Doncaster:

I was a Doncaster school pupil during the fifties and sixties and had the privilege of knowing 'Pip' Appleby personally.

He was a great friend of my secondary school Headmistress, Miss Woollett and together they ran a Thursday lunchtime 'Listeners Club' where we heard recordings of the great classics and followed the music on miniature scores.

Thanks to 'Pip' I was invited to join the Danensian Singers group and went to Leeds to record Singing Together programmes.

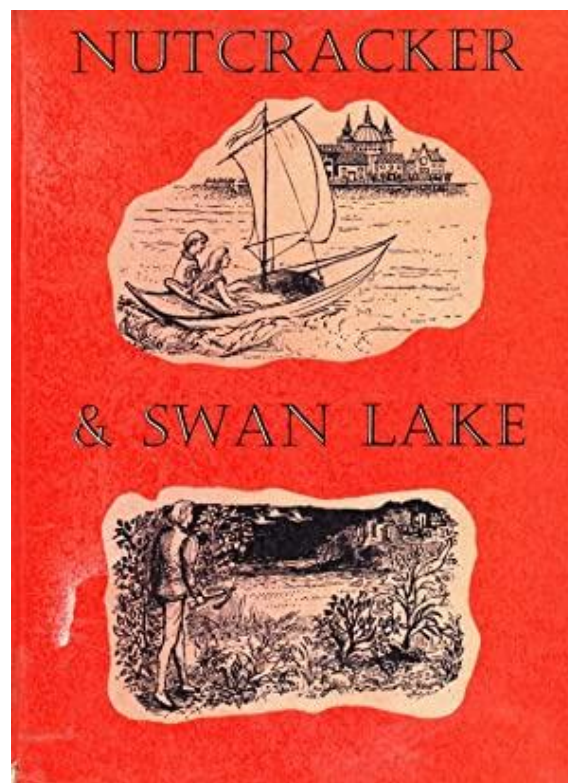
He also used us to record hymns for the BBC Daily service for which we were paid the princely sum of £9... a small fortune to a 16 year old in those days.

Pip also encouraged me to play the 'cello' and arranged for me to have free lessons and the loan of an instrument for the remainder of my school days.

In 1960, largely as a result of his work on Singing Together, Appleby was awarded an OBE in the Birthday Honours list.

In addition to the Singing Together programme booklets, William Appleby also wrote a large number of music education books, most co-authored with Frederick Fowler. Several of these are included in the collection held by the US Library of Congress. His publications included:

- The Sleeping Beauty and The Firebird, by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler (illustrated by Alan Clark); pub. Oxford University Press (1964)
- Nutcracker and Swan Lake; stories of the ballets, by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler (illustrated by Audrey Walker); pub. Oxford University Press (1961)



- Sing in Harmony, by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler; pub. Oxford University Press (1960)
- Sing Together – 100 songs for unison singing, by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler; pub. Oxford University Press (1967)
- The Oxford Book of Recorder Music – in two volumes, by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler; pub. Oxford University Press (1958)
- Songs for Choirs – A Collection for Mixed Voices, by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler; pub. Oxford University Press (1972)
- Firsts and Seconds – An Introduction to Two-Part Singing (two volumes), by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler; pub. Oxford University Press (1964)
- Christmas Suite in 4 Movements – for Descant Recorder and Piano, by William Appleby and Frederick Fowler; pub. Oxford University Press
- Sing at Sight, , by William Appleby; pub. Oxford University Press (1960)

Legacy

William Appleby suffered a mild heart-attack in 1970 and retired from both the BBC and his job with Doncaster schools in 1971. He died in October 1973 and was buried in the new graveyard in Kildwick, in the same plot as his father and mother.



Singing Together continued, with a range of presenters. The last programmes were made in the mid-1990s and despite an attempted relaunch in 2000, Singing Together finally stopped being broadcast in 2004.

In 2014 the BBC Magazine published an article on Singing Together, which included a short audio clip of William Appleby (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30210485>). This coincided with a programme, introduced by Jarvis Cocker and broadcast as part of the “Archive on 4” strand on BBC Radio 4. In this programme Cocker examined the history and impact of the programme – particularly on those who heard the programme as children and subsequently went on to become involved in singing as both as amateurs or professionals. He also talked to a number of people who went on to become music teachers in schools. (A recording of the programme is held in the History Group archive.)

In Doncaster, William Appleby’s legacy takes the form of a building – the “William Appleby Music Centre” – the hub for all music education carried out by Doncaster Music Service.



Students of the centre have celebrated it, by composing a number of pieces of music, including “Appleby Rag” and “Appleby Drive”, as well as one called “Singing Together”.

In 2007, celebrations of the 75th anniversary of Doncaster Music Service included a recreation of Singing Together in which pupils of all Doncaster schools were invited to participate, and which was broadcast on BBC Radio Sheffield.

More recently, in an introduction to yet another incarnation of Gareth Malone’s “The Choir” series, a Radio 3 article referenced its earlier predecessor (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio3/2009/09/another-series-of-the-choir.shtml>):

The messages of the series are clear ...

Gareth isn't curing cancer - he's getting people who've become completely alienated from singing back into the groove of understanding that it's a completely natural and enjoyable activity with pronounced social and health benefits. But how did they (we) get like this? The answer must lie in primary schools: at my Scottish primary, we had one teacher who could play the piano and another who could only play one left hand chord - but they both got us singing, with or without the help of the BBC's Singing Together ('with William Appleby') blaring out of the school radio. In many schools nowadays, everyday singing has evidently been banished or dropped away because teachers either lack the training, the self-confidence, or the knowledge of suitable repertoire to lead it. Surely anyone could draw inspiration from The Choir - happily,