

Harry Appleton (1891-1967)

Harry Appleton could lay claim to the title "Mr. Shincliffe." Certainly, if he had been made a peer for services to education and public life, we like to think he would have been Lord Appleton of Shincliffe.

He was born in 1891 in Shincliffe Colliery (now High Shincliffe) and the family lived in Pond Row (now Pond Street). His father, John, who was born in Whitwell Colliery, was a clay digger in a nearby brickyard. This is likely to have been either Shincliffe Brick and Tile Works (which we think was owned, amongst others, by Charlton Robson, builder of the houses in Wood View and Robson Terrace, and was located immediately to the east of what is now Shincliffe Mill Nursery), or Sherburn House Brick and Tile Works (which was closer to Sherburn Hospital). In the 1901 Census we find Harry living with his mother, Elizabeth, Mary, his sister, and William, his brother who was a year older. William was killed in Palestine in 1917, and is commemorated in St. Mary's Church. Mary married John Latue, a miner, and lived in 59 Steavenson Street, Bowburn.

Harry also joined up and started out as a private in the Army Service Corps. His first theatre of war was in France, where he arrived in September 1915, not long before the Battle of Loos. In September 1917 he was discharged from the ASC and took up a commission in the Lancashire Fusiliers as a Second Lieutenant.

In November 1918 he was appointed a temporary Captain and seconded while employed as an Education Officer attached to General Staff. In February 1919 a notification appeared in the London Gazette that on ceasing to be an Education Officer he was relinquishing this temporary rank. This was shortly followed in April, however, by a second notice in the Gazette which cancelled the previous one. In between these two dates he was promoted in March 1919 to the rank of Lieutenant.

It must have been shortly after this promotion that Harry left the Army as by November 1919, he had been back in England long enough not only to have taken up a post in Edmondsley but also to have resigned it to accept a teachership in Chester-le-Street C of E School. He was only in Chester-le-Street for two years before being appointed as Headmaster of Shincliffe School as successor to the long-serving J. M. Carr in 1921.

In October 1917 in Chester-le-Street, Harry married Annie (sometimes Anne) Elfrida (sometimes Elfrieda) Brodie. At the time of the 1911 Census, she had been seventeen and a pupil teacher; her father, Frederick William Brodie, was an elementary schoolmaster.

That accommodation was provided with the headship of Shincliffe School must have had a considerable appeal to Harry and Annie who in 1921, then nearly four years into their marriage, were living in her father's household in Chester-le-Street. Along with her father, there was her younger brother, Frederick Vincent Brodie. Like his father, he too was a schoolmaster, and both were then employed at Pelton Fell School. The first of Harry's two children, Roger Brodie Appleton, was born in 1922 and his daughter, Ann Elizabeth Brodie Appleton (known as Beth), in 1925.

Harry had also adopted a nephew, Richard Brodie "Dick" Sisson (sometimes "Sissons"), born in 1920 (Fig. 2). He was the son of Harry's sister-in-law, May Louisa (nee Brodie). Dick's mother had died in 1928 and his father would die in 1943.



Fig. 1 Harry with the other members of staff pictured outside School House at Bank Foot.

On the right of the picture at the back is Lottie Dazley. Lottie had been a classmate of Harry's and she, too, passed her exam to attend a grammar school in Durham. Lottie and Harry were to retire on the same day in 1955 and died in the same year, 1967. See Fig 4.



Fig 2 Dick Sisson, Harry's adopted son.



Fig. 3: Major Harry Appleton

We know that Harry was living in School House in 1939 with Elfrieda, Roger, Beth, Dick, and Mr Brodie Sr. Frederick Vincent Brodie was teaching in Stokesley. Roger married Joan Mary Reed who had been born in Hailsham in Sussex. He died in 1990 and is buried in St. Mary's churchyard.

Upon the outbreak of WW2, Harry would have been forty-eight. Fig. 3 shows him dressed in his army uniform. He belonged to the Officers' Reserve and in March 1940 he was recommissioned and assigned to the 8th Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment at the rank of Second Lieutenant. Although this was a lower rank than he had reached at the end of the Great War, from October 1941 until at least January 1945 he also held the ranks of War Substantive Captain and temporary Major. These were regular army emergency commissions, intended to last for the duration of the war.

The titles by which Harry was known in the military carried over into post-war civilian life. In the early 1920s he was Captain Appleton. Newspaper accounts of the annual Pelton Fell Show (to give it its full and rather splendid name, the Pelton Fell Feather, Fur and Industrial Society Show) list among its judges in 1921-23 a Captain H. Appleton. That he was judging the school's section and in the 1922 account was expressly linked to Shincliffe leaves no doubt that this is our Harry Appleton. It may have been his in-laws' connection to Pelton Fell through the school there that led Harry to take on this role for several years, despite having left the Chester-le-Street area for Shincliffe.

Immediately after the Second World War he was no longer Captain but Colonel, an often-honorary title (and one of the officer ranks he does not appear ever to have held, temporarily or otherwise), when he appeared in newspaper announcements of his daughter's wedding early in 1946 as Colonel H. Appleton. Anecdotal evidence suggests that he was most commonly known after World War II as Major Appleton.



Fig. 4 Lottie Dazley and Harry Appleton on their final day at Shincliffe C of E School, 1955

The children, from L-R, are as follows: Christine Chapelle, Lorna Dawson, Veronica Duell (tall girl at the back), Joan Watson (girl next to Lorna), Adrian ? (boy next to Lottie Dazeley), Sylvia Williamson (more prominent girl next to Adrian), George Wallage (tall lad at the back), Joan Corbett (standing in front of George), (two boys unknown and hidden), Irene Syson, John Syson at the back, Mary Pragnell (immediately behind HA), Mark ? (curly-haired lad), Rosalind Ord, Anne Bradley (gingham dress), David Parry, Margaret Coates

As one would expect, he was a kind and considerate man towards the children even if, as was common at the time, he was not averse to administering a dose or two of corporal punishment for various transgressions. The demographic of the village would have been quite different in Harry's time. Despite the fine houses and, no doubt, some fine incomes for those lucky enough to be in receipt of them, life could be difficult for poorer families in Shincliffe. Harry was astute enough to keep a store of shoes in a cupboard ready to be brought out when a child and a family were in need.

Our final picture (Fig. 5 below) shows Harry towards the end of his life. It is a newspaper clipping, probably taken from *The Northern Echo* in 1962. The expansion of housing in the village must have come as a bit of a shock to Harry and his contemporaries. What were once green and pleasant spaces were soon occupied by new housing as developers saw an opportunity to attract a growing population after the austerity of the 1950s. The minimum cost of a house in St. Mary's Close was £3,500. A keen sports enthusiast all his life (he was a supporter of Yorkshire Cricket Club) Harry was suitably fulminating at his beloved village cricket green being built on in the name of progress.



Fig. 5: From a press cutting of Harry in St. Mary's Close in 1962

"I protested to the rector at the time it happened," Harry told the reporter. "I think it's a damned bad show. I was singing in that church choir when I was six and I am a former churchwarden and secretary of the parochial church council." He had been the organiser of the village cricket team and probably captain at one point. St Mary's Close was one of the first new developments in Shincliffe. It had been church land but was sold off and in 1962 the residents had taken possession of their brand-new homes. What he would make of the subsequent developments is anyone's guess, but we doubt that he would have given his whole-hearted approval. Harry's standing in the community was not enough to halt construction and we wonder if his relationship with the Reverend Sam Moore ever recovered.

As always, we would be delighted to know if there are any descendants/relatives out there who could share more memories/pictures with us of Harry's life and times. Please use: contact@slhs.uk if you wish to get in touch. Equally, there may well be some who have memories of being taught by Harry or his lifelong friend, Lottie Dazley. We would also welcome the names of the children in Fig. 4.

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