

One hundred years of the BBC

Dave Andrew's reports ...

In May the Local History Café had an entertaining talk from Dave Andrews of Radio Leicester fame. Despite being so associated with Leicester he told us that, as a student, he couldn't decide where to go to train to be a teacher. He resolved the dilemma by putting all the options in a hat and picking one!

Marconi experimented with radio broadcasts at the end of the 19th C but WW1 speeded up developments and the BBC radio began daily broadcasts in 1922. Originally the 'C' stood for Company and was established by the government of the day. Lord Reith (of 'Inform, Educate and Entertain' fame) soon experienced the limitations of this structure when they were expected to only broadcast government spokesmen – not the opposition. Reith was convinced the BBC must be allowed to pursue an independent line and the 'C' was changed to Corporation, operating under a Royal Charter. However, arguments about the BBC's political neutrality continue to this day!

Government wasn't the only institution which struggled to adjust to the new medium. Dave told us that The Radio Times was launched in 1923 because newspapers refused to publish the radio schedule. They thought that people should read the news, not listen to it!

Many significant broadcasts established the significance of the radio: the first royal Christmas message by George V in 1932 (where it stayed for the next 25 years before moving to TV), the abdication speech of Edward VIII in 1936 and Neville Chamberlain's declaration of war with Germany in 1939. Radio was very important during WWII with many speeches from Churchill and significant war reports from Richard Dimbleby, among others.

Television's development was disrupted by the war, but the 1948 Olympics was available to some and the 1953 Coronation of Elizabeth II provided an important incentive to move to TV. Skipping ahead the 1969 Moon landing was the first overnight broadcast with a live satellite link.

We reminisced over long-gone children's programmes: Listen with – and then watch with mother, Sooty, The Flowerpot Men, Muffin the Mule. Some programmes are amazingly long lived: Desert Island Discs started in 1942 and Women's Hour in 1946. The latter was promoted as for 'intelligent women' but they were clearly not convinced that there were enough of them about as they had only male presenters for the first few years! Other stable formats such as police shows demonstrate changes in society – think Dixon of Dock Green to Z Cars.



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The Local History Café meets on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 10 am. If you would like to join us, contact Sally.lowe@sirjohnmoore.org.uk or on 07789 238945.

As a little girl I often sat on the wide, stone wall of the front garden at Lower Rectory Farm and I watched the birds. I especially enjoyed watching a friendly black crow who frequented the big oak tree behind the front garden privy. This wide, stone wall which surrounded our front garden had originally been part of the Appleby Hall. Appleby Hall first went up for sale in 1889, slowly over the next few decades parts of it were sold and eventually the Hall was taken down. The Appleby Hall stone wall found its way to Lower Rectory Farm, and to surround our front garden. As a young girl I found it a wonderful place to just sit and watch the activities of the farm, the birds, the animals and the work of the farm. The big, black crow had made his home in the big oak tree which grew, well fertilised, beside our privy.

When I first noticed this crow it was because he would dive bomb me as soon as I came out of the house. This scared me a little, but he was such a handsome bird that I was determined to have him as a friend. I started to bring out from the kitchen bread crumbs and lay them on the garden wall. At first I laid them at a distance from me, he picked them up, then I set them closer to where I sat. He must have realised that I wasn't going to harm him and the dive bombing stopped. He seem at last to recognise me. After some time he took crumbs and later seeds from my hand., Watching my friend Mr. Crow made me realise that I too wished I could fly as the birds did. I dreamed that I could flit back and forth to the village, seeing the village from above...my Grandfather told me this would have given me an aerial view of the village.

My friend Mr. Crow had many talents, curiosity was one of his talents. He would sit on the wall waiting for a cart horse to come along our driveway on the way to the barns. He would drop on to the horse's back, then slowly make his way to the horse's head and there he would check the inside of the horse's ears. The horses didn't seem to mind at all, perhaps it felt good to have those tiny feet hopping on their back. Perhaps Mr. Crow was checking out for a place where he could hide bits of food he had taken from the wall or the items found in the dog or cat's bowl at the kitchen door. Mr. Crow liked the farm dogs, they got along well and he sometimes tried to ride on their backs, but that didn't last long, the dogs would shake him off. Cats, Mr. Crow didn't like, they would turn their heads and hiss if he tried to ride on their back. A vigorous shake of their backs and off Mr. Crow flew squawking as he flew.

If I was working on a school project which involved paper and paints, it was safer for me to do so at the large, kitchen table indoors. If I tried to work outside the kitchen door or on the stone wall, Mr. Crow was sure to come and inspect what I was doing. Mr. Crow could and would make off with tiny pieces of paper, paper clips and sometimes even

thumb tacks. Just anything he could manage to lift. Up into the sky above the farm house he flew and where he hid those items I never knew. Once when I was trying to paint a picture for school, one which I was sure I might receive a good mark for, but with help from Mr. Crow I failed miserably because he walked across the page spreading paint everywhere. His tiny foot prints covered my painting while making it quite artistic, but this was not what my teacher had asked us to do. Mr. Crow ripped the labels off my tiny bottles of paint and then managed to tip a couple of those bottles of paint across my school project.



One day he just flew away and never returned and I think I know why. There was to be a costume party in the village of Appleby with a bonfire one November evening. A costume party was rare and my Uncle and his friend John being teenagers were keen to dress up and go and have a good time. Uncle decided to go dressed as a pirate. Out came some old, black clothes and a big black hat. At the last minute Uncle fashioned a black moustache from items in Grandma's sewing basket. They stood in the yard as we all admired them, as they prepared to leave on their bicycles. Mr. Crow had been watching all this excitement and he must have spied the black moustache which was semi-glued to Uncle's upper lip. With a swoop Mr. Crow was on Uncle's shoulder and 'ouch' the moustache was pulled off. For that Mr. Crow received a swot to his body and he flew off into the sky carrying that moustache. He disappeared from sight. That was the last time I saw my friend Mr. Crow, I missed him for a while, but I am happy he went to a different life, perhaps he found a mate who was more fun than I had been.

When I thought about Mr. Crow after he had gone I still felt a deep connection to him because he seemed to see the world the way people do, he seemed to be intelligent, a problem solver and he recognized me from others at our farm. He was a social and complex bird who would swoop down from the oak tree if he saw the little girl he had befriended, or did he fly down to protect a nest, I never knew for sure.

Andrew Moore investigates the mysterious Crowman

What are his roots and legends?

Throughout England's agrarian past, the figure known as the "Crowman" has occupied a curious place between myth and memory. Far from a documented monarch or military leader, the Crowman belongs to the world of folklore, a symbolic guardian of fields whose presence influenced village life, seasonal rites, and—even in subtle ways—land management over centuries.



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The roots of the Crowman legend reach deep into pre-Christian farming culture. In many rural communities, crows and ravens were both feared and respected: scavengers that could strip a field bare, yet also harbingers of fertility when they fed off insects and grubs. Over time, villagers began to personify this dual nature in the Crowman—a spirit or minor deity said to dwell at hedgerows and field edges, wearing a cloak of glossy black feathers and wielding a long, crooked staff. During spring sowing, small offerings—scraps of grain or earthenware cups of milk—might be left by dawn to propitiate him, ensuring healthy seedlings and protection from blight.

By the High Middle Ages, as Christianity spread across England, church authorities grew suspicious of these rustic practices. Some clerics labeled the Crowman a "demon of the fields," warning parishioners that such forest-dwelling spirits were

instruments of Satan. Nevertheless, the core agricultural rites proved remarkably resilient. While public church doctrine discouraged offerings to any spirit but the Christian God, farmers often maintained their secret tribute at dusk, scattering seed in discreet circles or whispering short benedictions that blended local dialect with petitions to both saint and spectre.

In Tudor and Stuart England, crop failures and epidemic disease sometimes triggered renewed appeals to every protective force imaginable. Journals and local records from the 16th and 17th centuries occasionally mention a county "Crowman" figure invoked during drought or cattle-murrain. More frequently, however, the Crowman was simply woven into cautionary tales told at harvest suppers: a traveler who ignored the watchful bird-spirit might find his harvest stalks turned to ash overnight, a stark reminder of nature's latent power.

The 19th-century boom in antiquarian studies saw antiquaries like William Hone and Christina Hole collect variants of the Crowman story across rural England. They often described him less as a deity and more as a "mystic guardian," one who could appear as an old man covered in soot and feathers. Poetry anthologies of the era cast him in a romantic light: part wild hermit, part wise overseer of the land's hidden rhythms.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, neo-pagan and ecological movements have occasionally invoked the Crowman in celebrations of earth magic and seasonal festivals. Contemporary novelists and poets—particularly those drawn to the mythic past of the British Isles—have featured him as a symbol of the delicate balance between human ambition and the living soil beneath our feet. In local festivals across counties like Devon and Lincolnshire, you can still find costumed "Crowmen" parading at the autumn equinox, reminding participants that respect for the land's unseen forces lies at the heart of any truly sustainable harvest.

Though never enshrined in official annals, the Crowman's enduring presence in English folklore and ritual speaks to a deeper historical truth: that, for countless generations, rural communities recognised their dependence on forces both palpable and mysterious. In honouring the Crowman—whether with grain offerings or tales told by firelight—farmers and villagers asserted a humble partnership with nature, a lesson still resonant in modern efforts to live in harmony with the earth.

Its summertime !

and holiday excursions are in the air ...

For the residents of Appleby Magna in the Victorian era, the concept of a "holiday" was undergoing a quiet revolution. While the rhythm of rural life, dictated by the agricultural calendar, remained strong, the advent of the railway began to unlock new possibilities for leisure and escape. For agricultural labourers, shopkeepers, and servants, extended leisure time was scarce. A full week's holiday was a luxury few could afford. More common were day trips or perhaps a rare long weekend, often tied to local feast days or after the intense work of harvest when Harvest Home celebrations were key. Farmers, professionals, and the gentry naturally had more flexibility and resources. They could contemplate longer breaks, perhaps visiting family, taking spa cures, or even embarking on tours.

The biggest change came with the railway. Whilst Appleby Magna didn't have a station, stations at nearby towns like Ashby-de-la-Zouch or Tamworth became accessible by cart or carrier. This connection was transformative: The most significant impact was the rise of the seaside excursion. Specially arranged, cheap train tickets made a day at the coast possible for working families for the first time.



Popular destinations for Leicestershire folk included the burgeoning resorts of Skegness and Mablethorpe on the Lincolnshire coast. The promise of "bracing" sea air, donkey rides, paddling, and fish and chips was a powerful draw. For Appleby folk making the journey, the seaside was a sensory explosion: the vastness of

the sea, the novelty of piers and promenades, the colourful bathing machines, and the sheer number of other holidaymakers. It was a complete contrast to the quiet lanes and fields of home. Some might venture further afield on these excursion trains – perhaps to the industrial exhibitions in cities like Birmingham or even London, though the seaside remained the quintessential escape.



Holidays often meant simply travelling (by train or carriage) to stay with family in other villages or towns, reinforcing kinship ties. For those with more means and time, traditional spa towns like Buxton or Matlock in Derbyshire offered a more sedate holiday, focused on health and genteel society. For many, especially those who couldn't travel far, holidays might simply mean a rare day free from work spent enjoying local fairs, cricket matches, or simply relaxing at home.

Even an excursion train ticket represented a significant outlay for a labouring family, requiring careful saving. Servants and farm workers couldn't simply down tools. Farmers needed essential staff year-round. Getting away required permission and careful timing. Excursion trains and seaside resorts were notoriously packed, especially on bank holidays. The journey itself could be long and tiring.

For Victorians in Appleby Magna, the holiday was a privilege, not a right. Yet, the railway undeniably democratised travel. That thrilling day trip to Skegness, experienced amidst the noise and crowds, became a cherished memory for many families, a brief escape from the demanding routines of rural life and a glimpse of a wider, more leisurely world beyond the parish boundaries. It marked the beginning of the modern British seaside holiday tradition, even for those in quiet Leicestershire villages.

