Gold Badge Citation

Bill Leader

The Gold Badge was presented at a concert, Bill Leader's Gold Folk Show, organised by Bill at The Met Bury on 28 September 2013 and featuring singers and musicians from his local folk session at The Oddfellows in Middleton. Unfortunately, Bill was ill with food poisoning and could not attend. The presentation was made to Bill's son, Tom, by Dave Arthur. **Mike Harding** *wrote and read the citation.*

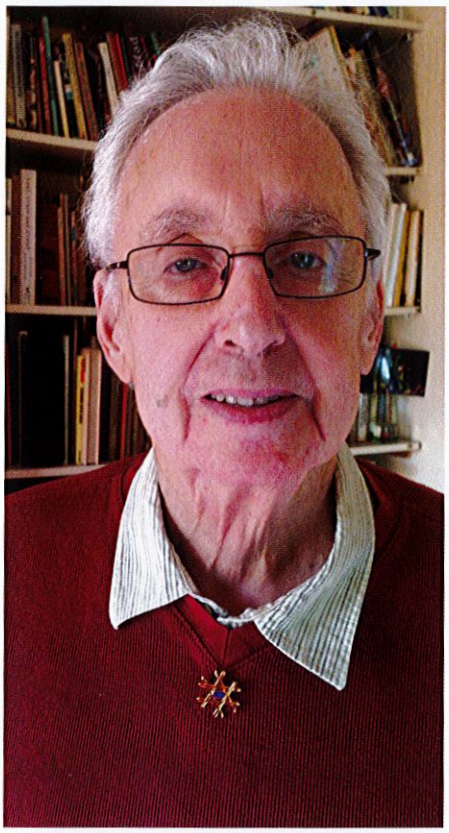


Photo: Lynne Leader

Bill Leader sent me an email with what he described as his 'bullet points'.

Born 1929 in Newark, New Jersey, of London-born working-class parents. The family returned to England within two years. Aged 10, he moved with his family from London to Yorkshire as a result of the London blitz. Aged 17, having failed his school certificate, became an apprentice electrical fitter. Aged 21, conscripted into The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Aged 21 to 25, engaged in youthful political and musical activity in the Bradford area, including starting a branch of the Workers' Music Association with Alex Eaton, a pioneer of the English folk club movement. Aged 25, landed a job in London, which led to involvement in Topic Records, now the longest established independent label in the world. Aged 38, having progressed to freelance producer for several labels, started own folk specialist labels with then wife Helen. Aged 43, moved back north, starting a recording studio in Greetland. Aged 43 to 53, developed the Leader and Trailer labels with continued valuable association with Transatlantic Records. Aged 53, contract with Transatlantic terminated by new owners, leading to eventual loss of Leader and Trailer. Aged 53 to 76, taught recording studio techniques at Salford College of Technology, and later Salford University, finishing as Visiting Professor. Aged 76 to 83, after retirement, encouraged back into active recording by Manchester musician, John Ellis.

Bill says he is now seeking recognition as either a visiting professor with absolutely no academic qualifications, or the oldest functioning record producer, or the deafest functioning recording producer!

I'm a great believer in The Ripple Effect – when you throw a stone in a pond the ripples spread out and on and on.

In or around 1971, Christy Moore was sleeping on our floor in Crumpsall, Manchester. He had released an album called *Paddy On The Road,* but he wanted to make something less commercial – more folkie. I suggested that he give Bill a ring – 'D'you think he would have me on the label?' he asked. I said I reckoned so. He did phone Bill, and then gathered round him a cluster of musicians that included Liam O Flynn, Andy Irvine and Donal Lunny. They spent a few days rehearsing, Bill drove across with his old Revox tape recorder and a couple of AKG D12 microphones and the result was that great album *Prosperous*, named after the big old house in Kildare where the album was recorded. The musicians and Christy stayed together, added Johnny Moynihan to the muster and became Planxty.

The effect of that band on the Irish music scene was phenomenal. In Planxty, the young people of Ireland saw their roots and their music as something alive and exciting – within a few years many other bands followed in their steps. Christy's career has spanned five decades, taking him across the world. He presented Bill with his long-overdue Good Folk Award at the 2012 BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards.

The story illustrates how the work of one extremely talented man, working with a good pair of ears and a nose for great music, has had a massive effect on the world of folk music.

I don't think it is possible to over-estimate the effect Bill Leader has had on the music we love – from his early work recording Ewan MacColl, Isla Cameron and A.L. Lloyd on the Topic label; his work with Nat Joseph of Transatlantic Records which produced the Dubliners, the Ian Campbell Folk Group, Davey Graham, Bert Jansch and Pentangle, through to his own labels Leader and Trailer.

On the Leader label you had traditional Irish musicians like Martin Byrnes, Seamus Ennis and Seamus Tansey, and that great four-album box set by the Coppers, *A Song for Every Season*.

Just a few of the artists of the second wave of the folk revival who found their voice on Trailer included Christy Moore, Nic Jones, Archie Fisher, Barbara Dickson, Tony Rose, Robin and Barry Dransfield, Vin Garbutt, Pete and Chris Coe, Dave Burland, Martin Simpson, Bob and Carole Pegg, Bob Davenport, Martyn Wyndham-Read, Aly Bain, Dave and Toni Arthur, Roy Bailey, Leon Rosselson, John Kirkpatrick, Ray Fisher and many more. And of course there was that seminal release, *Bright Phoebus* by Mike and Lal Waterson.

In the early years, many of the recordings were made, not in a studio, but in Bill and Helen Leader's flat in Camden Town. Robin Dransfield told me that their great album *The Rout of the Blues* was recorded in the bedroom using a couple of microphones, and John Renbourn reckons he recorded one album with the tape machine in the sink and he himself in the broom cupboard. Bill says that's an exaggeration – the flat was too small to have a broom cupboard.

For a while, that flat at North Villas, Camden Town, was part recording studio, part home and part hostel for any visiting folkie who happened to be passing through. I slept on the floor many times and shared the space with Aly Bain, Mike Whellans, Hedy West and that great Border singer Willie Scott – not all at the same time, I must add.

But not only is Bill a great recording engineer and producer, he's also a great cook and a great gourmand.

One last story. When Harry Boardman got a gang of us together to record *Deep Lancashire*, Bill came up with his Revox and his mics to what was then UMIST and set up in one of the lecture halls. He didn't use the stage – which had drapes and a table. He wandered round the hall clapping until he found the exact spot he wanted for the recording. After that, we all lined up – the Oldham Tinkers, Harry, Bob Diehl and the rest of the gang – and we did our bit. *Deep Lancashire* is, I think, still the best-selling album Topic ever had.

So, after more than 400 albums to his credit, the great man is still working with people like John Ellis who produced the two Oddfellows albums and worked with The Woodbine and Ivy Band on that great young label, The Folk Police. The ripples in the water are still spreading…

Mike Harding is a singer, comedian, broadcaster and author. He presented BBC Radio 2's folk programme for 15 years and now has his own internet folk show.