



The Adkin Family

by Miss Mary Adkin,
(first cousin to the three Miss Atkin)

There can be few families who contributed more than the Adkins to the general welfare of the people of Wantage. Charles Duncan Adkin came to Abingdon and Wantage in 1882, and in 1912 he became head of the firm of Adkin, Belcher and Bowen, Auctioneers and Surveyors. In 1883 he married Agnes Craig McArthur and they lived first at the Croft, subsequently in the Market Place over the office, and finally at the Priory. Their first child Margaret died in infancy, but there followed Sarah in 1887 (called Tallie), Agnes Clarinda (Trin) 1888, and Eileen in 1891.

In addition to his professional duties my Uncle Charles led a very active public life. He represented Wantage on the Berkshire County Council; from 1918 until his death in 1924 he was Chairman of the Wantage Urban District Council and became a JP in 1918. He was a member of the governing body of King Alfred's School, and he was an active Freemason.

Uncle Charles travelled over a wide area with his pony and trap, winning the respect of many farmers for his integrity and kindness. When he died at the age of 69 in 1924 his funeral was attended by nearly 1,000 people and there were 111 wreaths. As someone once said of him, he was a friend to everyone except himself. In 1934 his daughters gave the Pavilion in the Recreation Ground in memory of their father.

The daughters were no less public-spirited than their father. Besides being Headmistress of Alton House School, Tallie was elected the first woman Councillor of Wantage UDC and sat on many committees, including that of Housing and the accommodation of evacuees in the Second World War. She was also involved with the NSPCC and the WVS and organized many flag days for various organisations. She was a Girl Guide Captain and Secretary of the local branch of the GG Association. After her death in 1945 her sisters gave a pair of gates for the War Memorial in the Recreation Ground in memory of her. Eileen was the youngest and liveliest of the family. Weighing 22 stone, she had boundless energy, a strong sense of humour, and a buoyant faith; if there was an outdoor function and the morning dawned wet, Eileen would secretly pray and the rain clouds would disappear and the sun come out, whereupon she would chide the "Jeremiahs" and even the Church dignitaries for their lack of faith. Her chief interest was with Girl Guides and she eventually became a Commissioner. Every year she took them to camp, entering into all their activities and games. She was an excellent tennis player, and her forehand stroke was worthy of the centre court at Wimbledon, while she was more nimble about the court than many younger and slimmer players. She also taught drill and other subjects at Alton House School. Trin was somewhat overshadowed between these two sisters and quietly stayed at home as companion to her mother and doing many odd jobs about the house, for they never employed much domestic help. She belonged to a choir but her main outside activity was distributing the monthly Parish Magazines in large quantities. In 1947 she startled everyone and shocked her sister Eileen by marrying the Rev F T Brooks. There were no bridesmaids, but I was asked to be Maid of Honour. Frank was a very delicate man suffering with chronic bronchial asthma and only about two months after their

marriage he died. So Trin returned to the Priory, but she had justified herself and reached a higher stature than either of her two sisters.

The Adkins were never idle even when at home. Aunt Agnes ran the Ladies Needlework Guild for the Hospital and was always making something for that cause or for the old people in the Almshouses. Tallie would be immersed in papers and books; Trin made crochet or knitted goods for the various bazaars; Eileen would come bouncing in at the front door, fling down her hat and set to work on Richelieu embroidery which she did at great speed, talking incessantly all the time. The front door was kept permanently wide open during the days of summer weather so that friends were constantly dropping in.

On Sundays all these activities ceased. The family would exchange their steel rimmed spectacles for those with gold frames, put on their best clothes and go regularly to Church at 11 am, often in the evenings too. Wantage Church was very high Anglican, while the Adkins were very low Protestant and regarded rich vestments, incense and ornaments as Popish, A simple service of Matins was held mainly for their benefit. Trying to ignore the odours left over from the previous Sung Eucharist, they sat in the north aisle and sang lustily, most of them out of tune.

To stay with our relatives at Wantage was a Spartan experience. There was no smoking, no wines or spirits, and my father had to go for frequent walks in order to enjoy a pipe. One was not expected to have a bath more than once a week. and then it was not enjoyable, for the huge bath was at least 6 ft long and about 4 ft deep and the supply of hot water quite inadequate; at other times there was no hot water at all. The bedroom floors were covered with highly polished linoleum, on which a few small mats skidded dangerously. The family had huge appetites and favoured such things as steak and kidney pudding, gooseberry pudding, or outsize apple dumplings. I would ask Aunt Agnes for a small helping, but she would only give me a sweet smile and take no notice whatever of my request. Eventually I would go to bed with violent indigestion. The Priory was close to the Church and every three hours by day and by night the bells played three verses of a hymn. After the midnight peal I prayed fervently that I might get to sleep before the 3 o'clock peal, but if the food was still with me it ensured that I was wide-awake at that hour, and indeed I would be lucky to miss the 6 am recital.

Nevertheless I cherish the memory of those visits and the privilege of having known such people whose steadfast faith in God made them dedicated to the service of their fellow men and women.

This article was donated by Mrs Enid Denly, September 2002.

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