

MISS ALICE ABADAM'S MEMORIES OF MIDDLETON HALL

The article below, written by Alice Abadam (1856-1940), was first published in 1939 in the book *Llanarthney: the Parish, its People and Places* by the Reverend J. Jenkins.

Alice lived at Middleton Hall as a child; by 1886 she had moved to Picton Terrace in Carmarthen. In 1903 she moved to London with Alice Vowe Johnson, and Alice Abadam became active in the Womens' Suffrage movement; she moved back to Carmarthen (Bryn Myrddin) in ~1938.

Notes, and photos with captions, added by Nancy Jennings, 2024



The Abadam family at Middleton Hall, ca. 1860s. Top left is Lucy, centre is Edward Abadam, with Alice in front of him. The three other young women must include Adah and Edith; the older woman may be Louise.

It was with pleasure that I accepted as a privilege the invitation of the Rev. J. Jenkins to contribute to his monograph on Llanarthney, a description of my old home as I knew it in my childhood and girlhood. In recalling my impressions, I will begin with the Park, which owed its special character and beauty to five sheets of water linked together by waterfalls spanned by bridges, and surrounded by woods. The trees swept their branches to the edge of the water, and were reflected in the dark depths of the 'Black Lake' (Pond du). There were four entrances to the Park, and avenues from these, finely timbered, met at the House.

In the Llanarthney Lodge lived an old woman who, dressed in full Welsh costume, punctually fulfilled her office of lodge-keeper, and opened the iron gates when carriages required it, giving the Welsh curtsy (which included bending of the knees) with considerable pride. Old Hannah was a great character, and faithfully adhered to her national costume, the *pais a gwn bach* (petticoat and little dress) the skirt being cut at the half to show a gay petticoat, over which was a large apron. The

bodice was cut low, with a white 'kerchief tucked into it, and buckled shoes showed her neat Celtic feet. She wore a snowy white cap, goffered around her face, and over this the well-known, tall beaver hat, now very rare. Welsh women used to buy a new one when they married and that lasted them to the end of their days.



Front view of Middleton Hall in 1853. Paxton's Tower is visible in the background on the right. To the left of the main house, and attached to it, is the 'annex' with the staff quarters; the stable building and clock tower can be seen on the far left. This and other similar images are from the headed notepaper provided in bedrooms for the use of guests at Middleton Hall.

The House (Renaissance) had been built by Sir William Paxton, from whom my grandfather, Edward Hamlin Adams, bought it [in ~1825, for £54,700]. Paxton also erected a tower to the memory of Nelson, on a hill bordering the higher ground of the Park, and overlooking the Vale of Towy. This hill had been named by the people in old times Golwg y Byd (the Sight of the World), and on still higher ground there was a spot which they called Llygad y Byd (Eye of the World). The Tower is triple in form, and the narrow windows were filled with stained glass, depicting scenes from Nelson's life. His face is remarkably fine, and may be seen at the Carmarthen Museum, to which the glass was presented by Major William Hughes, Mr. Abadam's grandson.



TOWER TO THE MEMORY OF LORD VISCOUNT NELSON,
IN MIDDLETON HALL PARK CARMARTHENSHIRE.
THE SEAT OF EDWARD ABBAM ESQ 1853

Paxton's Tower.

The reception rooms at Middleton Hall opened each into the other by folding doors, so that when occasion required it, the chain of rooms made an attractive feature. One or two of them call for especial mention.

The Dining Room was of a soft pastel green, and round the walls were fourteen mural paintings in shades of grey and umber, surrounded by raised mouldings of Della Robbia garlands of fruit and flowers, lightly touched with gold. The subjects of these paintings were various. Four were scenes from Druidic life, the human sacrifice being led to some altar, the cutting of the mistletoe with a golden sickle, a banquet and the gathering of the autumn fruits. Besides these there were symbolic human figures of the cardinal virtues, Justice, Temperance, Prudence and Fortitude. The four seasons were represented by the heads of a child, a youth, an adult, and an elder, in medallion form.



The dining room at Middleton Hall. The portraits of the young Edward Hamlin Adams and his wife Amelia Sophia are above the sideboards.

The chandelier, with its tiers of crystal pendants, sent out prismatic colours of ruby, indigo, emerald, and amber, harmonising admirably with the pale green walls and the umbered paintings. At each end of the long room were sideboards, filled with white and green cut glass, silver bowls, wine coolers, and ebony candlesticks, whilst above, hung oil paintings of Edward Hamlin Adams and his wife, Amelia Sophia Macpherson, daughter of Capt. John Macpherson, cousin of Macpherson of Cluny, chief of the clan. My grandfather was in court dress with powdered hair, and his wife in white

muslin and broad blue sash, with her long, fair hair, in ringlets; a fine couple. On their birthdays and at Christmas time special candles were lit beneath their pictures; a never-failing ceremony of homage.



Photographs of the portraits of Edward Hamlin Adams and his wife Sophia Amelia, as a young couple (top) and in later life (below; these portraits are not mentioned in this account but were present at Middleton Hall; photos provided by Charles Pegge, descendant of the Hughes family).

On the walls of the alcoves each side of the fireplace were moulded designs of thyrsi, enclosing a medallion representing, on the one side, Health, in the person of Aesculapius, and on the other, Hygeia, a young girl feeding a temple serpent from a shell. The white marble mantel continued the thyrus design with its pine cone terminals, and beautifully carved garland of vine leaves and bunches of grapes. I have seldom seen a more beautiful room.

The windows opened on a wide balcony, from which the view made a perfect picture. Beyond the terrace, gay with flowers, the ground sloped down to the water's edge, where the trees were reflected. In the middle distance rose the hill, crowned with Nelson's Tower, and beyond the woods could be seen the far banks of the Towy, with further still, the blue hills of the horizon.



The drawing room at Middleton hall. Portraits of Elizabeth Adams (top view) and Lucy (bottom view) are visible.

The Drawing Room, which had windows looking on one side, to the Park, and on the other to the water and the woods, was a long room in pale amethyst colour. Here hung many family portraits, among which, Mrs. Conrade Adams (17th Century), by Lely, held pride of place. Dressed as a Shepherdess, she holds in one hand a crook, whilst with the other she caresses a lamb at her knee. Lely's sitters were always given the beautiful hands for which he was celebrated; the composition is masterly, the colour scheme executed in shades of vandyke brown and pale yellow. The spaces

between the windows had medallions of the Graces. The family portraits have now been distributed by Major William Hughes among members of the family.



Photograph of the portrait of Elizabeth, wife of Conrade Adams, as a shepherdess (provided by Charles Pegge, descendant of the Hughes family).

The Library, which contained a fine collection of books in several languages, was a room of quiet and sturdy, with glass-fronted book-shelves under alphabetical letters to aid the researcher, and a set of broad, tall steps, to enable him to reach the highest shelves. Above the bookshelves were some twenty busts of notabilities, Eve, Newton, Byron, King Alfred, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Chaucer, Wordsworth, Moore, Bacon and others, and in two central alcoves, Seneca and Cicero. The white marble mantelpiece calls for a word. On one side was Hermes (Mercury) with his winged cap and caduceus, on the other Pallas Athene (Minerva), goddess of wisdom, with helmet, aegis, and golden spear. In the centre, in high relief, was Urania, observing the starry heavens and making calculations, with instruments by her side. On a tall mirror over the mantelpiece was a painted scene of the various gods and goddesses assembled on Olympus.

In the Front Hall was a marble bust (now in the Carmarthen Museum) of my grandfather [Edward Hamlin Adams]; it stood on a marble table, and I remember being lifted as a child to kiss it on his birthday [he was born on 30 April 1777]. The Hall was very lofty and ended in a circular glass opening at the top of the house.



The stairs and front hall at Middleton Hall. The bust of Edward Hamlin Adams is visible on the left.

The roof was more or less flat, and the view therefrom was very fine. It showed, on one side, Clearbrook, the Dower House nestling in the woods bordering the Park, and on the other side, the agent's house, Bryn Hawddgar [see Rees, L. A. (ed, 2023) *The Middleman at Middleton Hall: the Letters of Thomas Herbert Cooke, Land Agent in Rebecca's Carmarthenshire, 1841-1847*. South Wales Record Society], and towards Llanarthney, another dependency, Gwynnondale.



Clearbrook Cottage, the Dower House.



Bryn Hawddgar (left) and the stable block (right) in 1994.

It was one of my pleasures to creep up to the top of the house to watch the sunset, and see the rooks leaving our rookery and winging away to the Cawdor woods for the night; the sound of the many wings made a sort of 'hu hw' in the air, and it has been said that this was the origin of the Welsh name, Hugh. It is notable that the crest of the Hughes family of Tregib shows a raven. There is a story that the bailiff from a neighbouring estate came on business to see our man, there being no love lost between these two of the same trade. The visitor, on leaving, asked to be allowed to see the view from the top of the house. They ascended; 'And now', said the stranger, 'how far does the estate extend?' 'As far as you can see' said our man, with an all-embracing sweep of his arm. The stranger was awed and thus did our man abash a hated rival!

Quite near the house was an annex, in which the household staff were accommodated, as well as the secretary, who kept there his books, files, and estate papers. Over this building swung the great bell, which rang at 6 a.m. to assemble the workmen, who answered to the bailiff's roll-call. The women workers came at 8 a.m., their work being to keep the avenues and pleasure walks free from weeds, and the offices and chicken-houses clean and orderly. This was an opening in the labour market much appreciated by the thrifty widows and unmarried women of the neighbourhood. The big bell also rang at 1 p.m., 2 p.m., and 6 p.m., to warn the workers of the hours which concerned them. It also rang certain numbered clangs to call up the gardener, the stables, the bailiff and others. It had a fine mellow tone and was heard for miles through the countryside, a welcome time-keeper, for those were the days when wrist watches were unknown.



Middleton Hall (front, south-west facing side), 1850s, Edward Abadam standing on the steps.

The front of the house faced south-west, and gave an outlook on the jagged outline of the limestone rocks, making a fine bit of landscape. In the direction of these lime rocks was a lake called 'Llyn Llech Owain Llawgoch' (Lake of the flat stone of Owain of the Red Hand). The name itself gave a hint of its weird history. We children used to ride our ponies the intervening four miles leading to it, and we enjoyed the wild beauty of the place; at the water's edge was silvery white sand, where a heron, in a thoughtful attitude standing on one leg, statue-still, would watch the water playing in wavelets, giving one a feeling of complete solitude. All around was a mass of purple heather, with here and there a bluebell, whilst on the lake there floated beautiful white water-lilies. The good farmer's wife, of the Llyn Farm, would bring us glasses of fresh milk, and tell us the history of the place.



Back view of Middleton Hall. The 'annex' is on the right.

It seems that Owen was one of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table who, after a festive supper, when he had looked too often on the wine when it was red, had ridden away. Coming presently to the Spring, on which was a flat stone, he dismounted in order to water his horse, and forgot to replace the stone. In the morning there was spread out a large lake, of which to this day no one has ever found the source. And what of the Knights of the Round Table? Of course we had heard the saying that King Arthur and his Knights are sleeping under the Black Mountains, and that when the hour strikes he will arise and claim his land.

No picture of Middleton would be complete without a word about two characters who were great favourites with us children. One was the old Antiquary, John Griffiths, bookseller by trade and antique dealer by temperament. He searched the country for ancient objects and brought them in triumph to my father, who put great value on them. His most treasured find was, perhaps, an Ogham Stone about three feet high, with well-marked characters cut across the edges; this attracted many antiquarians, who came to examine it and take rubbings of the characters. Another relic was a Danish hatchet-head of some hard metal, with the Danish raven rudely carved on it. This was found in a field named after a battle that was fought there. From Friar's Park in Carmarthen, a silver medal was dug up, bearing, on one side, a well carved head, with inscription 'Salvator Mundi' and on the other, a beautiful head with the inscription 'Mater Dei'. Cannon balls dug out of the ground at Dryslwyn, used by Cromwell in his destruction of the Castle, were less important items.

Old Giovanni, the Italian organ-grinder, was another favourite with us all, including Mr. Abadam, who came out and held long conversations in Italian with this very intelligent man; we

children listened, awe-struck, fascinated by the sonorous music of the language of Dant . Giovanni was short and dark, a man of abounding gestures and mellifluous speech; his hat was tall and large, and presumably had started life black, but had attained by age to a sturdy green. It must have been strong built for he lifted it frequently to emphasise his emotion on every point, especially his devotion to the family. We always received him with great cordiality, and brought him cake and sherry, which he would take sitting on the steps of the porch. When he rose to leave, I was commissioned by my father to give him a hand-full of half-crowns. He would then call down blessings on the 'Signor' and all belonging to him, with glowing words and sweeping gestures, and tramp away, waving his green hat and playing a concluding p  on of thanks. His end was very sad. At an Inn not far from Carmarthen, where he passed a night, he was robbed of his life's savings, and sorrowfully crept back to Carmarthen, where, broken-hearted, he died soon afterward, in the house of his old Italian friends, Mr. and Mrs. Podesta.

Still another hero of our nursery days was the Christmas horse, called 'Mari Llwyd Llawen'. This consisted of the skull of a horse dressed up with flaunting ribbons, and fixed on a pole. The man who held it was entirely enveloped in a long white robe, while a second man led the 'horse', and did most of the singing of an interminable series of verses, first in Welsh, then in English for the unlearned. The whole proceeding is an interesting survival of the pagan worship of Saturn, which was celebrated in December; during the Saturnalia a horse was sacrificed. The horse would be gaily decorated, and the sacrificing Priest clad in white, the long series of verses being the remains of the traditional elegy which was chanted over the victim. In the course of the verses the history of the 'horse' is recounted and at the most pathetic places he would be wire-pulled to clamp his jaws together. Here and there came a deep refrain of 'Poor old horse; let him die', This I think would be an antiphon sung by the crowd of worshippers, to signify their share in the act of worship. It is curious to reflect that this sharing in the worship and sacrifice has a dim reflection in the Christian Liturgy. We were thrilled and a little frightened, especially when the horse's jaws would snap together.

It is a remarkable testimony to the retentive memories of the Welsh people, that this ceremony, carried out by the soldiers of the Roman occupation some two thousand years ago, with its accompanying religious devotion (we were all pagans then), should have so impressed itself on their minds, that to-day, the essential features of it should still be fresh enough to become the basis of a popular repetition such as 'Mari Llwyd Llawen'. Certainly the Welsh have a genius for religious emotion. The air of the elegy is traditional, and I can supply it to anyone who is interested.

Once a year the Guilds and Clubs of working people came, with a brass band, to demonstrate in front of the House. They sang several choral pieces in the usual fine style of our Welsh singers, made one or two speeches, and were given beer from large jugs, and cakes. After this, they produced

two swords, put point to point, to make an arch, beneath which the members passed two and two, saluting as they went, then returning whence they came, with banners and music.

Talking of Christmas reminds me of some of our customs at that season. There was a great influx of 'Duty' turkeys, geese, ducks, and chickens, these being part payment for rent from Tenants. The 'Duty' fowls were packed into gift hampers, together with plum puddings, cakes and mince pies, to be sent to the clergy, the doctors, friends and relatives at a distance, to help their Christmas cheer.



The Abadam family at Middleton Hall, ca. 1865. From left: Mary-Ann Cuffe Adams née Abadam, Miss Waite (a governess?), Edward, Lucy, Edith and Adah Abadam.

I recall a sad event which was a grievous blow to us all. My eldest brother, Edward Hamlin Abadam, caught a fever and died in his early twenties [Edward Hamlin Middleton Abadam was born 3 April 1843 and died 21 March 1866, aged 23]. A brilliant student, giving highest promise, he was a most lovable character and mourned by all who knew him. A room was set aside as a *chapelle ardente*, hung with black from ceiling to floor, the coffin set on a catafalque, and brilliantly lit with large numbers of candles. Men took it in turns to watch until the funeral.

My second brother, Conrade Maxwell Macpherson [Middleton] Abadam [born March 1845, died in Iowa on 3 September 1875 from an accidental gunshot wound], married [in 1868] Miss [Susanna Marcy] Saunders of Court Henry and had three children, two daughters, and a son who died in infancy [Elma Alice Maude was born on 14 May 1869, Geraldine Mabel was born on 7 December 1872, Edward Hamlin Middleton Abadam died in September 1871 aged 5 months]. Elma

married Major Bernard Morland and had one son, Conrade. Mabel married Capt. George Pryse, son of Sir Pryse Pryse, Bart., of Gogerddan, and has one son and one daughter.



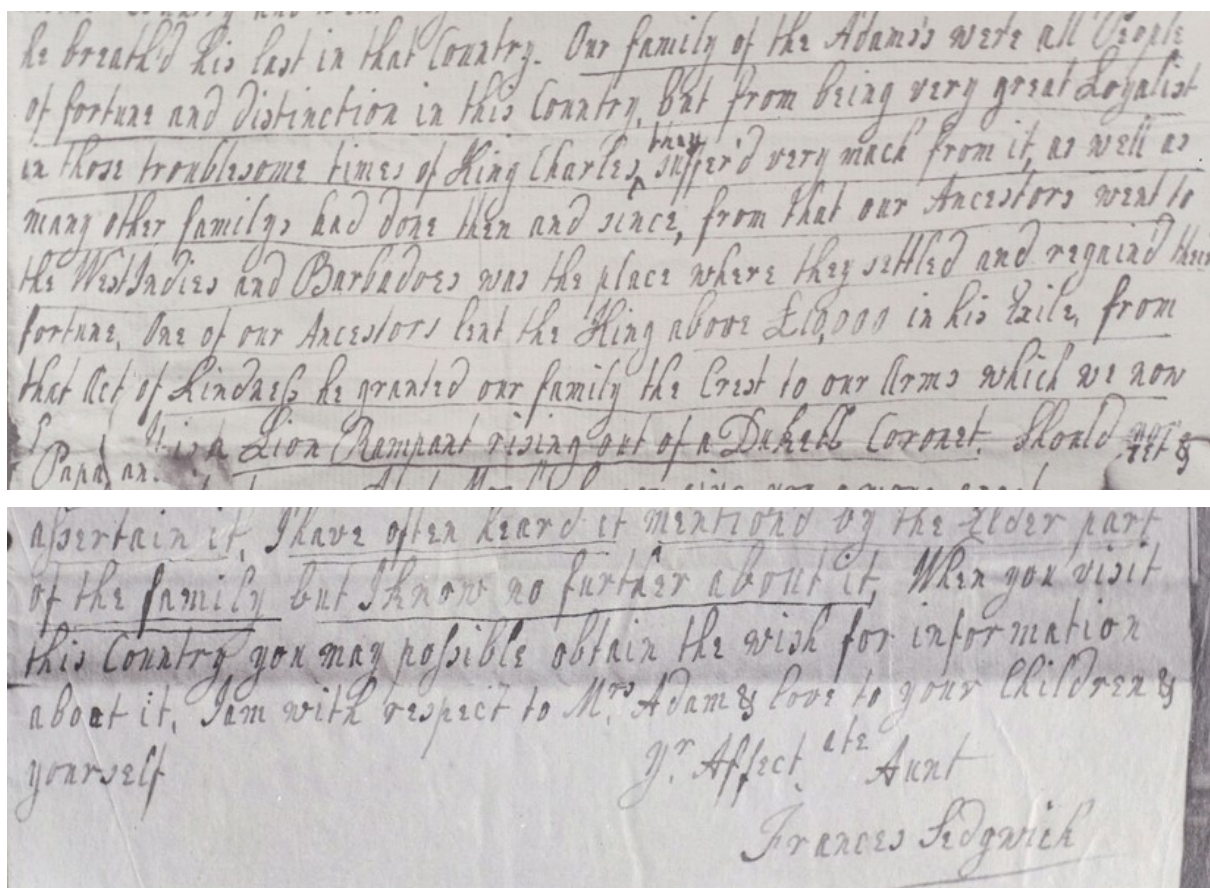
The 7 children of Edward and Louise Abadam, from left to right: Hamlin (born 1843), Conrade (1845), Francis (1846; top); Lucy (1840), Adah (1841), Edith (1846) and Alice (1856; bottom).

My third brother, Francis Walrond Abadam [1846-1888], married Miss Helen Ramsey Schultz, and had four daughters, and one son who died in infancy. My sister, Lucy Caroline [1840-1902], married the Rev. Richard Gwynne Lawrence, but died without children. Adah Constance [1842-1914] married Capt. John Hughes, and had two sons and one daughter, William, Charles and Evodie; Major William Hughes inherited Middleton Hall. Edith married Edward Harold Morris of Bryn Myrddin, and had two sons and two daughters, the eldest, David, died in childhood. The second son, Ryle, married the Countess Alice Margit, daughter of Count and Countess Hoyos of Castle Soos in Austria; they have three daughters, Elaine, Margaret and Mary Agnes. Of the two daughters of Edith and Edward Morris, Mary Edith is unmarried and Vida Emily is a Nun. The writer of this little article is Alice, the youngest daughter of Edward Abadam.

I have been asked to add a few words in explanation of my father's change of name from Adams to Abadam. It is said that an English Judge, who found the 'ap' and 'ab' before Welsh names tiresome and confusing, gave an order that this prefix should be abrogated and the names simplified. Hence ab Evan became Evans (the 's' standing for 'son of') ap Rhys, Pryse; ap Rosser, Prosser; ap Howel, Powell; ab Owen, Bowen; ap Harry, Parry; ab Adam, Adams; ap John, Jones; ap Richard,

Prichard; ap Stephen, Stephens; (the 'ab' is taken before a vowel, the 'ap' before a consonant). John Ab Adam, who married Clara Powell, another victim of the Judge, had to effect the required change, and his descendants were called Adams, until my father, Edward Abadam, resumed the old prefix 'Ab' by legal deed [in 1851].

Some names that were unpronounceable to an English tongue, such as Lloyd, formerly spelt Llwyd, in the case of the Lloyds of Mostyn Hall, were ordered to drop the Lloyd altogether and to assume the name of their residence. The Mostyns have later resumed the Lloyd, and joined it to Mostyn, making Lloyd Mostyn. There is a passage in a letter from Mrs. Frances Sedgwick, daughter of Judge Thomas Adams, in which she shows that the original name of the family was Ab Adam. She was great-aunt to Edward Abadam, and wrote on February 1st, 1808: "The Adams family were of a Welsh family in South Wales, Adam Ap Adam, and great friends of King Charles the First in his troubles. One of our ancestors lent the King above £10,000 in his exile, from which act of kindness he granted our family the crest to our arms, which we now have. It is a lion rampant rising out of a Ducal Coronet, and I have often heard it mentioned by the elder part of my family."



Parts of the letter to Edward Abadam from his great-aunt Mrs Frances Sedgwick (photo provided by Charles Pegge, descendant of the Hughes family).

I must not forget to mention the stables, which were at a little distance from the house, and had a very large clock over the iron gates. Horses played a considerable part in our daily life, as we each had our riding horse; the carriage horses were always *de riguer* bright bay with black points. They were housed with some degree of luxury, and each horse had hanging over its head in the stall a wooden label setting forth his name, height, birthdate, and parentage. When any tenant, cottager, or workman was ill or had met with an accident, he could always rely on it that a groom on horseback would be sent *post haste* to Carmarthen to fetch our family doctor, a matter of grave necessity in the days before telegrams and telephones. We had special ponies, which fetched our posts from Llandilo, our nearest post town, and later in the day took our post bag with the letters. When our horses ended their lives of service they were given honourable burial in a part of the Park called 'Waunlas' (Blue Meadow), because of the masses of wild blue hyacinths that grew there.

My memory carries me back to an incident that may be of interest to many who cannot count as many years into the past as I can. I was quite a small child when I was called up to join my elders, assembled at the top of the house to observe a rare and beautiful phenomenon, the Aurora Borealis. There was a broad band of colour stretching across the heavens from the north-east to south-west, and forming over our heads an exact circle, in which light, fleecy clouds moved restlessly. The whole of the rest of the sky, although it was night, was a lovely bright rose colour, and I can still see, in my mind's eye, the effect of the Pleiades, sparkling like diamonds in that rosy setting. These are a few of the impressions of my early life, spent amongst the unforgettable beauty of my old, beloved home.



Abadam crest (including the 'lion rampant rising out of a Ducal Coronet' as described by Mrs Sedgwick) and motto: 'Aspire, Persevere and Indulge Not' (left); Alice Abadam's 1861 'ex libris' paper (right).