

Madgwick, George Alexander Sheridon (1892–1954)



George Madgwick

Photo courtesy of Godfrey K. Sang.

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Dr. George Madgwick was the first full-time missionary physician who began his missionary work in Kenya.

Early Life and Marriage

George Alexander Sheridon Madwick was born on November 4, 1892, in Antigua in the British West Indies. He was educated in England and graduated from medical school in 1916 at the age of 24. In 1919, he married Vera Lelian, who served faithfully at his side for 35 years. On January 21, 1921, they sailed for Africa to take up their first mission appointment. They were given an amount of £75 and instructed to start a medical facility at Kanyadoto in Kenya's South Nyanza region.

Arriving in Africa

He arrived in Kenya and went straight to Kanyadoto, the mission that had been established a decade earlier by South African Adventist businessman H. J. Sparks.¹ The area had developed a reputation for the medical problems among the people there. Alfred Matter, a German national, took charge of the mission station, but at the start of the World War I, he was interned with the other Adventist missionaries at Kaimosi, about 100 miles to the north. Returning to Kanyadoto towards the end of the war, Alfred Matter prioritized medical treatments for the people. In 1917, Carscallen recognized his work and, writing in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, said he did "...more medical work than the rest of us."²

Perhaps taking the cue from Matter's medical work at Kanyadoto, it was decided that a proper doctor would be sent there. In 1921, Dr. G.A.S. Madgwick arrived in Kanyadoto. He had only recently completed an additional course in tropical medicine in London to adequately prepare him for the medical work in Africa.³ The Luo people called him *Bwana Majwek*.

Dr. Madgwick worked in especially difficult circumstances. He found nothing close to a hospital and constructed a grass-thatched hut for his in-patients and another for his surgery. He lived with his family in a similar hut.

To sterilize his surgical instruments, he had to use kerosene tins over an open fire. He then performed surgeries on what was essentially a kitchen table inside the hut with only the seeping sun for his lighting. Despite these conditions, the surgeries were successful. In all the time he did his surgeries (1921-1924), there was not a single time when patients suffered infections nor were there any casualties.

The medical facility at Kanyadoto was open to everyone, and he even conducted surgeries on Europeans under the exact same conditions. Babies born in the facility had a much better chance of survival, and Dr. Madgwick turned the tide on the heavy child mortality at that time.⁴

Moving to Gendia

In 1924, it was decided that the Adventist medical work would have to move to Gendia, the cradle of the Adventist work in Kenya. Dr. Madgwick left for England on furlough in 1924, and in July that year, work began at Kendu to build a new hospital. He returned in January 1925 and went straight to Gendia where the new facility was nearly ready for use.⁵

Moving to Nigeria

In between seeing his patients, he took time off to help with the construction work. The Madgwicks remained at Kendu until 1939 when they moved to Nigeria to start a hospital at Ile-Ife, the ancient Yoruba city in southwestern Nigeria. Shortly after their arrival, World War II began. As soon as the Ethiopian campaigns were over and the Italians had withdrawn, Dr. Madgwick was asked to go to that country to reopen the medical work at Addis Ababa. In 1942, he and his wife were called to South Africa and were appointed to serve at the Nokuphila Hospital in Johannesburg. He served for many years as their superintendent.

In 1953, he fell ill and for the next 18 months, and he struggled to regain his health. He passed away on Monday, October 11, 1954, while being treated at the General Hospital in Johannesburg.⁶ He was survived by his wife, Vera, and their daughter, Muriel. He was laid to rest in Johannesburg, and the funeral service was conducted in the church by pastors D. M. Baird and A. W. Staples and at the graveside by Pastor G. S. Stevenson.⁷

Legacy

Dr. Madgwick's legacy is best summed in this tribute by Spencer Maxwell posted in the *Southern Africa Division Outlook*:

Dr. Madgwick arrived in East Africa in 1921 to find there was no hospital to operate, he nobly began to make brick and lay the foundation of the now famous Kendu Mission Hospital. It was my good fortune to be associated with him during the early years of his work in Kavirondo. There we saw the sterling qualities of this consecrated servant of God. No work was too lowly for "Doc" Madgwick to undertake. He was unfailingly kind and considerate, a true Christian gentleman. As he was a keen student of tropical diseases and always up to date on all medical practice and technique, one felt safe in his consecrated hands. What a life of mission service he leaves behind! Kendu, Addis 'Ababa, Ile-Ife, and Nokuphila hospitals have been enriched by his presence and example. We are the poorer today because "a prince and a great man has fallen" (2 Samuel 3:38). But his example will live on to challenge the younger generation to more self-sacrificing service.⁸

Dr. Madgwick was the first fully credentialed medical missionary to East Africa. His work was felt in East, West, and Southern Africa, including at the Horn of Africa. The hospitals he established continue to serve the people to this day. His pioneering work had a profound and lasting impact on the healthcare landscape of the previously mentioned regions of Africa. The hospitals he established have become essential pillars of Adventist healthcare delivery, providing critical services to countless individuals and communities. Dr. Madgwick gave 33 years of dedicated service to Africa, which not only brought physical healing, but also represented the compassionate and holistic approach of medical missionary work, addressing not only the body but also the spiritual and emotional well-being of the patients. His legacy lives on through the continued service of these medical facilities.

SOURCES

Baird, D. M. *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, November 15, 1954.

Eva, W. D., ed. *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, November 1, 1954.

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Robinson, Virgil E. "Third Angel over Africa," unpublished manuscript, Helderberg College of Higher Education.

NOTES

1. http://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/_site/custom/database/default.asp?a=viewIndividual&pid=2&person=10711, accessed March 30, 2021.

2. Ibid.

3. Virgil E. Robinson, "Third Angel over Africa," unpublished manuscript, Helderberg College of Higher Education.
 4. Anyango Masela, one of the pioneers of Rapedhi Church, formerly Kanyadoto Mission, interview by Isaiah Oyoo at Rapedhi, March 24, 2019.
Masela said, "Many mothers lost their children at infancy at an alarming rate while those at the mission saw their children grow in good health. The people around thus referred to Rapedhi as "a fountain of blessing."
 5. Robinson, 111.
 6. W. D. Eva (ed.), *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, November 1, 1954, 8.
 7. D. M. Baird, *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, November 15, 1954, 8.
 8. Spencer G. Maxwell, *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, November 15, 1954, 7.
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