



The extraordinary story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* came into being on an entirely normal day. It was just a bit of make-believe concocted by Oxford University mathematics lecturer Charles Lutwidge Dodgson on a summer jaunt to Godstow from Oxford on the River Isis. Dodgson's only purpose was to entertain the three young Liddell sisters under his care, one of whom was named Alice, but now the story and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, are known the world over as *Alice in Wonderland* – and its creator is famous under his pseudonym, Lewis Carroll.

Alice Liddell first heard the tale in 1862 and begged for it to be written down for her, which Carroll dutifully did, presenting it to her as a gift. He was eventually persuaded to publish the manuscript of *Alice's Adventures in*

*Wonderland* in 1865 and it was an instant hit. Now, 155 years later, it has become a franchise of monstrous proportions, spawning hundreds of editions – illustrated by more than 150 different artists – and several film and TV adaptations. It's a never-ending rabbit's hole that has just got "curiouser and curiouser" to quote Alice in the story – a phrase that has been borrowed for the title of the Victoria and Albert Museum's (V&A) new blockbuster exhibition, *Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser*, which looks at the book and its adaptations, and opens on 27 June.

Despite its international reach, the seeds of Wonderland were sown on British shores. The real places that inspired Carroll may be a little more mundane, but they are also far more accessible: you don't need to nibble on a piece of enchanted cake to get to the northwest of England, but an umbrella and a warm coat might come in handy... ➤

# Finding Wonderland

As a new V&A exhibition showcases the evolution of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, **Jenny Rowe** visits the real places that inspired this whimsical imaginary world



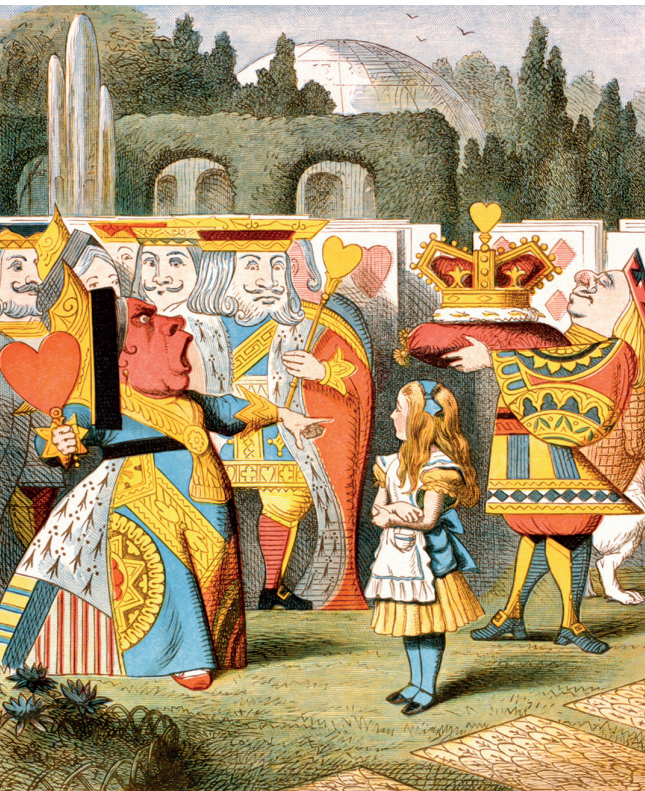
This image: Lewis Carroll's story of Alice came into being on a River Isis boat trip from Oxford to Godstow  
Left: John Tenniel's 1865 illustration of the Mad Hatter's tea party, part of a new V&A show

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This image: The White Rabbit in Llandudno; John Tenniel's illustration of Alice and the Queen of Hearts



This image: Oxford University Museum of Natural History  
Opposite page: Julia Margaret Cameron's 1872 photo of the 'real' Alice Liddell

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For this is where the story really begins. On 27 January 1832, Carroll was born Charles Lutwidge Dodgson as one of 11 children in the small village of Daresbury near Warrington, Cheshire. The National Trust now looks after the parsonage where he was brought up (his father was the local parson), yet, save for a well in the garden that could have prompted a lifetime fascination with deep holes, most of the Wonderland associations have been added retrospectively and the actual building was destroyed by a fire.

Instead, let's fast forward to Lewis Carroll's Oxford days. Carroll enrolled at the historic university aged 18. He studied mathematics at Christ Church college, later becoming a teacher there in the same subject. Christ Church is where he met the 'real' Alice.

Alice Liddell was one of the daughters of the college's dean, Henry Liddell, which meant he was responsible for keeping the college's pupils under control. A bachelor himself, Carroll became a kind of honorary uncle to the Liddell children, who in turn enjoyed listening to his hilarious stories. Alice and two of her sisters, Lorina and Edith, accompanied him on that momentous boat trip.

Carroll was also the sub-librarian at the college, and his office window overlooked the Dean's garden, where the Liddell children played. It was reached from the Cathedral Green via a tiny door in a stone wall, very much like the one that Alice finds in the hallway at the beginning of the story: "She knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw."

Carroll was a regular visitor to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. The 1860 building even inspired his poem *The Deserted Parks* ("Museum! Loveliest building of the plain/ Where Cherwell winds towards the distant main"), and many of the specimens kept there feature in Alice's adventures. The dodo was obviously a favourite, and some believe that Jan Savery's painting of the extinct bird, which hangs in the museum, was the original inspiration for the preposterous and illogical character in *Alice's Adventures*.

Alice and Carroll's real-life adventures were not confined to the university city, though. Outside of term time, the Liddells spent many happy holidays in Llandudno, a coastal town in north Wales. The family first visited in 1861 when Alice was eight years old.

They stayed at St Tudno Hotel and later the St George's Hotel too – Carroll was rumoured to have written at the latter and both still operate today. The family loved Llandudno enough to build a holiday home, Penmorfa, which later became the Gogarth Abbey Hotel. It is situated on the West Shore beneath the Great Orme, a hill behind the town. Elsewhere the town is loud and proud about its Wonderland connections: A statue of the White Rabbit, the hapless and endearing character that opens the story, was unveiled in Llandudno in 1933 by the prime minister of the time, David Lloyd George.

Yet it is in the northeast of England that Carroll is most likely to have dreamt up the waistcoat and pocket-watch-adorned rabbit who is always in a hurry. Carroll regularly visited his cousins in Whitburn, a small village on south



Tyneside, where the Liddells also had strong connections. Sir Hedworth Williamson of Whitburn Hall was a relation of theirs, and it has been suggested that Williamson introduced white rabbits into the grounds of his home where Carroll also liked to play croquet. Carroll's poem *Jabberwocky* is said to have been completed in Whitburn, but this experience was also surely the inspiration behind chapter 13 of *Alice's Adventures*. Titled "The Queen's Croquet-Ground", it sees Alice play a game in which "the balls were live hedgehogs, the mallets live flamingos, and the soldiers had to double themselves up and stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches."

### Christ Church is where Lewis Carroll met the 'real' Alice... She was the daughter of the college's dean, Henry Liddell

A little further south of Whitburn, Roker Beach was another favourite haunt of the Liddell crew. Carroll sketched Alice's sister Frederika here and it is believed that Spottie's Hole in Holey Rock was the

entrance to an underground passage that led to the ruins of Hylton Castle. The hole was later bricked up and Holey Rock demolished by authorities, but the beach is still popular with tourists who fancy this as another key ingredient in the melting pot of Wonderland origins.

The nonsense poem *The Walrus and the Carpenter*, as recited by Tweedledum and Tweedledee in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, likely originated in this area too. Carroll is said to have met a carpenter on the beach, while rumours abound about him seeing a stuffed walrus either at his sister's home in Southwick or across the River Wear estuary in Sunderland Museum. Whatever the truth is, the northeast city has since embraced the story, with a bronze walrus sculpture placed in Mowbray Park. ➤





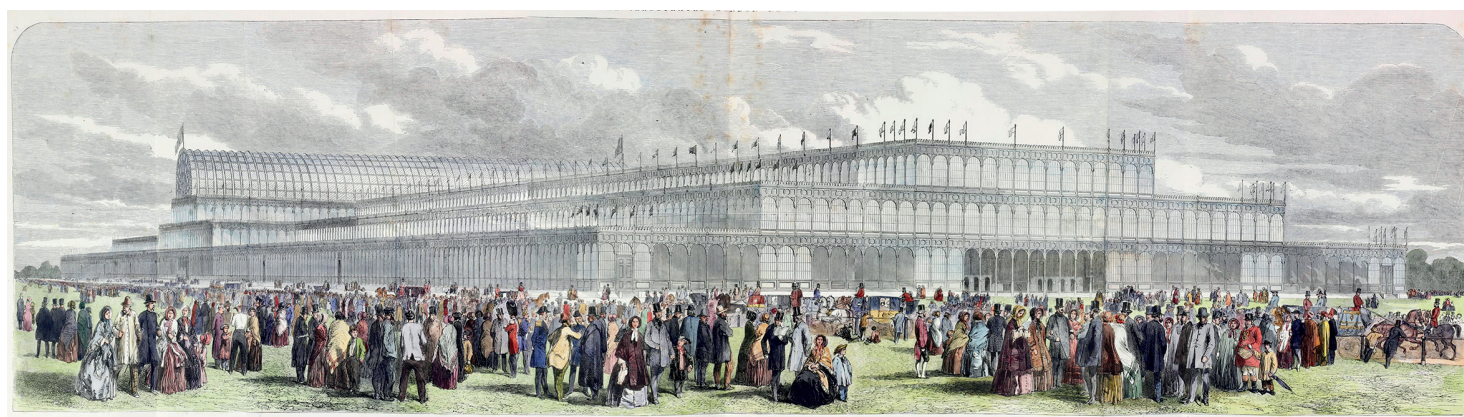
**Above:** The Great Orme Tramway climbs the hill above the West Shore in Llandudno  
**Top:** The Crystal Palace was erected in Hyde Park in 1851

That said, some of Wonderland's creatures and features were figments of another man's imagination. John Tenniel, the original illustrator of the Alice books, was employed by Carroll after the author's own drawings were criticised. Tenniel was already a dab hand at grotesque-style cartoons having worked as the principal political illustrator at *Punch* magazine for 50 years; he was the perfect man for the job. Preferring to draw from memory, London-born Tenniel once said that "he no more needed [a model] than [Carroll] should need a multiplication table to work a mathematical problem."

While learning, however, he had studied costumes and armour at the British Museum, and animals at London Zoo in Regent's Park, which was first opened to the public

in 1847. Tenniel exercised a degree of artistic licence while working for Carroll (some say it was his idea to make the walrus' companion a carpenter), and recognisable landmarks from the capital crept into Wonderland. For example, a large hemispherical glass building shown behind the Queen of Hearts as she turns puce while declaring Alice's beheading is probably a reference to the huge glasshouses that were built during Tenniel's lifetime. The Crystal Palace (incidentally named by *Punch* magazine) was designed to house the Great Exhibition in London's Hyde Park in 1851.

With Tenniel's help, *Alice's Adventures* transformed from dawdling daydream to success story; a sequel was soon in the making. Carroll became so rich from his







### AT A GLANCE...

Experience a mind-bending journey into Wonderland at the V&A's **Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser** (opens 27 June). Featuring original illustrations and photographs as well as all manner of other Alice-inspired multimedia, this immersive and theatrical show promises to do proper justice to creative geniuses the world over. [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

The **Alice Town Trails** in Llandudno will tell you about the 'real' Alice's holidays to the Welsh seaside town. Narrated as if by Lewis Carroll, with the help of witty quips by the Mad Hatter, there are two 'augmented reality' tours and an origins app available to download for smartphones, or you can buy a paper map in the town. [www.alicetowntrail.co.uk](http://www.alicetowntrail.co.uk)

Mark Davies, author of *Alice in Waterland* and *Alice's Oxford on Foot*, is the only Oxford guide endorsed by the Lewis Carroll Society. His **Alice in Waterland** tours are offered to small groups and can be tailored to your interests. Walks vary in length but usually follow paths through Christ Church Meadow that Carroll would have walked on many occasions. [www.oxfordwaterwalks.co.uk](http://www.oxfordwaterwalks.co.uk)



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writing that he would eventually ask the college to lower his salary. Six out of seven of his sisters, meanwhile, remained unmarried (like him) and in 1868 – three years after the first book was published – Carroll leased them a home: The Chestnuts, a large Georgian house neighbouring Guildford Castle. Carroll is thought to have visited them and written *Through the Looking-Glass* while staying there in 1871. Today the house remains privately owned but there are statues of Alice in the castle grounds and next to the river.

In 1880, Alice Liddell married Reginald Hargreaves at Westminster Abbey and moved into his Cuffnells estate near the village of Lyndhurst in Hampshire. She lived

there until her death in 1934 and was buried in the local St Michael and All Angels church, where her grave is marked simply Mrs Reginald Hargreaves. Alice loved her Cuffnells home, however, describing it as “Wonderland come true at last.”

In truth though, the magic of Wonderland is that it is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere; simply the ‘real’ world seen through a child’s eyes. In the first book, when Alice asks the impertinent Cheshire Cat for directions home, it replies: “That depends a good deal on where you want to go.” Before setting off on a wild goose chase across Britain to find the ‘real’ Wonderland, we might heed its advice and just follow our noses. ■

**Top left:** Guildford Castle in Surrey, next door to The Chestnuts

**Top:** Peter Blake’s 1970 illustration of *Through the Looking-Glass* and *What Alice Found There*, part of the V&A’s new show