

# Lewis Carroll in the Museum

The Oxford mathematician Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was a regular visitor to the Museum. Specimens he saw there inspired some of the characters in his famous stories of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which he wrote under the more familiar name Lewis Carroll.



## *The Deserted Parks*, Lewis Carroll

*Museum! Loveliest building of the plain  
Where Cherwell winds towards the distant main;  
How often have I loitered o'er your green,  
Where humble happiness endeared the scene!*



The Museum in the 1800s

Charles Dodgson often visited the Museum; the building inspired his poem *The Deserted Parks*, and the specimens he saw on display featured in his stories of Alice's adventures.

## What is 'Learning more'?

'Learning more' presents a series of articles about the Museum and its collections. It is designed for older students, teachers, researchers, and anyone who wants to find out more about particular aspects of the Museum's work and its history.

This article introduces the special connection the Museum holds with Charles Dodgson and the real Alice.

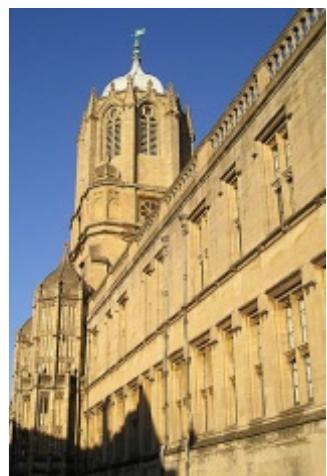
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## Dodgson's early life

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was a shy, retiring lecturer in mathematics at Christ Church. Born in 1832, he was the eldest in a family of thirteen, and grew up inventing games and stories to amuse his siblings. Dodgson's imagination and respect for children continued into adulthood, and in 1856 he befriended Alice Liddell, daughter of the Dean of Christ Church, and her sisters, Edith and Lorina.



Alice Liddell (above) at the age of ten. Her father was Dean of Christ Church (right), where Dodgson was a lecturer; the Dean had been a keen supporter of the project to build the Museum



## Visits to the Museum

Dodgson often visited the Museum accompanied by the young Alice Liddell and her two sisters. The animals they saw there, their friends, and familiar places around Oxford often became incorporated into the stories Carroll created for his young friends. The dodo was a favourite for Dodgson and some believe that Jan Savery's painting of a dodo, which hangs in the Museum, was the original inspiration for the character of the dodo in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.



The Oxford dodo  
Jan Savery's painting now hangs on the western wall of the Museum. The Oxford dodo was a favourite for Dodgson who had a stammer: Do-do-dodgson.

## A boating trip on the Thames

On July 4th 1862, Dodgson headed a rowing expedition on the Thames; his party included the three girls and fellow don, the Reverend Robinson Duckworth. During the afternoon, Dodgson spun out a series of fantastic yarns incorporating friends and familiar places in Oxford, mathematical riddles, literary allusions and countless references to natural history. By the end of the trip, the famous story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was born.



*...the rabbit actually took a watch out of his pocket...*

The Alice display in the central aisle of the main court contains many of the animals featured in Dodgson's stories.

Dodgson wove his tale around the party. The characters included an eaglet (Edith), a lory (Lorina), a duck (Duckworth), and, typically self deprecatingly, a dodo for the stammering Dodgson himself. Alice begged him to write the story down. Two years later, he gave her a hand-written, green leather notebook containing the story of *Alice's Adventures Underground*, and Dodgson's own sketches.

### Dodgson's sketches

Although Tenniel's images are now world famous, Dodgson's original drawings also survive, and were published as a facsimile of his handwritten manuscript.



There are some differences between the artwork of Dodgson and Tenniel; here, Alice is using an ostrich as a croquet mallet and not the more familiar flamingo.

## Publishing *Alice*

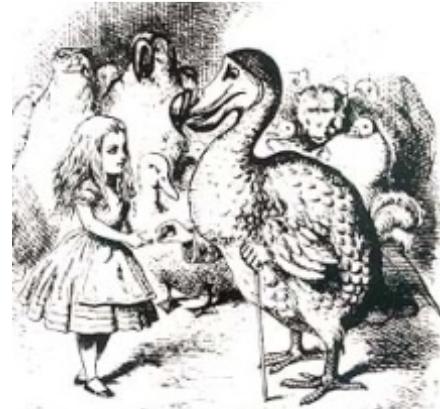
In 1865, Dodgson published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* under the name Lewis Carroll. His name change can be traced quite logically, in typical Dodgsonian style, to its root: *Carolus* is the Latin for Charles, and *Ludovic* for Lutwidge, and then, Lewis.

Having received criticism of his own drawings, Dodgson commissioned John Tenniel to illustrate *Alice's Adventures* and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*, with a series of woodcuts. He and Tenniel were in constant communication whilst the series was produced; Dodgson often encouraged Tenniel to use a model, but Tenniel retorted that he needed a model about as much as Dodgson needed a multiplication table!

During Dodgson's lifetime his books sold 160,000 copies and provided him with such a comfortable income that he asked Christ Church to reduce his salary.

One of Tenniel's woodcuts, showing the original party: Alice, the dodo, an eaglet, a lory and a duck.

Deeply religious, Dodgson refused to allow work on any of the figures to be done on Sundays.



### Dodgson's life after *Alice*

Dodgson remained at Oxford until 1881, and continued to lecture in mathematics and logic at Christ Church. He had many other interests and was a noteworthy photographer, experimenting with various subjects including some specimens from the Museum. Dodgson was also a lover of logic puzzles, writing many of his own. The Museum has a small collection of these games and other memorabilia, copies of which are in a display in the lower gallery. The curators of the Museum would like to thank Mrs S. Scourfield for the loan of material on display in the Dodgson exhibit.