
THE CARROLLIAN

The Lewis Carroll Journal

No. 34

ISSN: 1462 6519



ALICE AND THE CAT.
(*Alice in Wonderland*)

Phoebe Carlo, Lewis Carroll's First Stage Alice
Clare Imholtz

A Previously Unknown Dodgson Brainteaser
Thomas Wright

THE CARROLLIAN: THE LEWIS CARROLL JOURNAL

ISSN: 1462 6519

www.thecarrollian.org.uk

Issue 34, Published December 2020

The Lewis Carroll Society,
9 Hampden Road,
Harrow
HA3 5PP

Editorial Board

Jane Skelly, Editor
Lindsay Fulcher
Bob Cole

© The Lewis Carroll Society and the individual contributors, 2020. Material may not be used without permission. See inside back cover for further information about The Lewis Carroll Society

Cover illustration: Phoebe and the Cat by E. Morant Cox *Dramatic Notes*, December 1886 p121

www.lewiscarrollssociety.org.uk

THE CARROLLIAN
THE LEWIS CARROLL JOURNAL

No. 34

LIST OF CONTENTS

Editorial2

Original Articles

Phoebe Carlo, Lewis Carroll’s First Stage Alice
Clare Imholtz3

A Previously Unknown Dodgson Brainteaser
Thomas Wright.....30

Letter to the Editor
Bob Cole.....51

Editorial

Little Phoebe Carlo was Lewis Carroll's first Alice in 1886. Clare Imholtz's article traces her fortunes from a successful child stage actress to an accomplished music hall performer, and eventually a woman of considerable means.

With Christmas approaching, perhaps this year more than most finds us looking for distractions to fill the long winter evenings. For something to get our teeth into, Thomas Wright introduces a new Carroll brainteaser from a previously unpublished letter, inviting readers to send in their own answers to a logical conundrum about a dinner invitation.

Lastly, we return to what became of the little Alices. In his letter Bob Cole reminds us that Isa Bowman, who took over from Phoebe in Carroll's affections, went on to feature in the 1949 British film comedy 'Vote for Huggett' as one of the three sisters. Follow the YouTube link and spot Isa if you can!

Jane Skelly

Phoebe Carlo, Lewis Carroll's First Stage Alice

Clare Imboltz

Little Phoebe Carlo was Lewis Carroll's first stage Alice—a tremendous opportunity for her but a huge responsibility for a 12-year-old to carry. The story of the plucky little girl who descended into a weird wonderland, and later went through a mirror to the almost equally bizarre looking-glass land was already becoming part of England's national identity when Phoebe took the stage as Alice in December 1886. Twenty-one years after *Wonderland* was first published and fifteen years after *Looking Glass*, about 140,000 copies of the two books together had been sold. The *Alice* books were certainly overdue for portrayal on the professional stage, and there could be no doubt that the lead star would be crucial to a play's success (or failure). Phoebe succeeded brilliantly. As *The Stage* put it on July 29, 1887, "Miss Phoebe Carlo, as Alice, without doubt was the pivot on which the whole play revolved."

Despite her youth, Phoebe Ellen Carlo (1874–1941) (her surname was sometimes spelled Carlow) was an experienced actress when she took the role in the production of Henry Savile Clarke's operetta *Alice in Wonderland*, which ran at the Prince of Wales theatre in London from December 24, 1886 to March 18, 1887, and then continued on a provincial tour. The play included scenes from both *Alice* books: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872).

Phoebe was not only the lead; she had for a time a real friendship with the books' author, Lewis Carroll. In 1888, however, she was replaced both on the boards and in his affections by Isa Bowman. Afterwards, Carroll, and subsequently most Carroll scholars, lost track of Phoebe. It turns out she had a colourful rest of her life.

Carroll first saw Phoebe perform on New Year's Day 1883 when at the age of nine she sang in the pantomime *Whittington and his Cat* at the *Avenue Theatre*. He commented on the performance in his diary, but did not mention Phoebe specifically, being more concerned about "a piece of indecent fun in the harlequinade."

Carroll saw Phoebe again on March 28, 1883, playing the role of Ned in Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman's *The Silver King* (dubbed Carroll's favourite play by *Alice* theatre expert Charlie Lovett) at the *Princess's*. He wrote in his diary, "Little Phoebe Carlo, (who, in the Avenue pantomime sang "They call me such a pretty little thing") *looked* sweet..." Ned has no lines so Phoebe could not do much more in this play than *look* sweet. Evidently Carroll also saw Carlo perform at *The Princess's* on January 12, 1884, in Henry Herman and W.G. Wills' *Claudian*—a play he liked so much he returned to see it again on May 17, 1884. Carlo played Caris, the daughter of the slave girl Serena, which was probably another role without lines, and there is no comment on her performance in his diary. But in Spring 1885, *The Silver King* was revived and this time Phoebe had a speaking part. She was soon to play a large role in his life as well.

On May 15, 1885, Carroll, who frequently went to some lengths to make the acquaintance of child-actresses who impressed him, travelled to London and called on the Carlo family "to make acquaintance with little Phoebe Carlo (who now plays "Cissie" in *The Silver King*)."

He "borrowed Phoebe," and took her to see paintings: *Triumph of the Innocents* by Holman Hunt at the Fine Art Society and paintings of children by William Blake Richmond at The Grosvenor Gallery. In the evening he went to see *The Silver King*, commenting "Phoebe does *very* nicely." *Era*, April 4, agreed: "A hearty word of praise is certainly due to ... Phoebe Carlo".

It seems that the part of the fatherless young girl Cissy (as the name is actually spelled), moved Carroll deeply. When Mary Mallilieu played Cissy in October 1891, he wrote to her: "Every time I've seen it before, I've sent little "Cissie" a book." In Phoebe's case, perhaps he handed the book directly to her instead of sending it. He had a second outing with her in London on June 6, which included a trip to the Royal Academy and a visit to Miss Chreiman's class. Mary Ann Chreiman (1843–1927) was a very popular gymnastics teacher who taught a system of whole body exercises for girls, including marching and dancing, designed to strengthen joints and every muscle in the body, develop the respiratory system, and cultivate attentiveness. (See *British Medical Journal*, 1883; ii :1253.) Carroll often expressed concern about the health of his young friends, but there is no indication that he signed any of them up for lessons with Miss Chreiman.

He wrote to Mrs. Rix (Jemima Bostock Rix, mother of child-friends Lottie and Edith) about this outing: “I borrowed a young friend (only seen once before) at 8 a.m. to go to the R.A. and took her home at 6 p.m. True, she hasn’t yet reached the shy age: being not quite 10 [actually she had just turned 11]: she is a little actress (I may have mentioned her in writing to Edith: I don’t know, and though her parents are “only working people” (as she took care to write me word before I had met her), she has very nice manners, and was a charming companion to take about among my friends. Some of her talk was almost thinking aloud: before one of the pictures I had said something (I forget why) about worshipping idols, and she broke out almost indignantly “I’d *never* be so silly as *that*! I’d always worship God!” Her mother seems to be a good woman, who is trying to bring up her child to be so too.” The 1881 UK census describes Phoebe’s father, William as a packer and factory hand and her mother Phoebe, *née* Rawlings, as an actress. (Despite her working-class background, Phoebe evidently did not drop her h’s—or at least not too badly. Read on!)

Then on June 26, she spent the day with him in Oxford—a typical day for a child-friend visiting him—one which involved calling on several of his married lady friends and seeing the sights. Phoebe’s visit must have included a tennis game with Emily Daniel, the wife of Henry Olive Daniel. On August 21, Carroll wrote to Mr. Daniel from Eastbourne, “Mrs. Daniel’s little Tennis pupil, Phoebe Carlo, is now playing ‘Kit’, (a boy of 5 years old) in ‘Hoodman Blind’ at the Princess’s.” (Maggs catalog No. 427, Autumn 1922, p. 77 item 2211). Later that day, after “my tired little friend had a good nap on my knee,” he took her home to London.

Two weeks later, on July 11 he and Mrs. Carlo discussed a “plan of having Phoebe down to Eastbourne,” the seaside town where Carroll spent so much of his holiday time. Indeed, she visited him there from July 24 to 28. He described the visit in a letter to Edith Rix (July 29?, 1885): “I went up to town and fetched Phoebe down here on Friday in last week; and we spent *most* of Saturday upon the beach—Phoebe wading and digging, and “as happy as a bird upon the wing” (to quote the song she sang when first I saw her). Tuesday evening brought a telegram to say she was wanted at the theatre next morning. So, instead of going to bed, Phoebe packed her things, and we left by the last train, reaching her home by a quarter to 1 a.m. However, even four days of sea-air, and a new kind of happiness, did her

good, I think. I am rather lonely now she is gone. She is a very sweet child, and a thoughtful child, too. It was very touching to see (we had a little Bible-reading every day: I tried to remember that my little friend had a soul to be cared for, as well as a body) the far-away look in her eyes, when we talked of God, and of heaven—as if her angel, who beholds his face continually, were whispering to her. Of course there isn't *much* companionship possible, after all, between an old man's mind and a little child's, but what there is is sweet—and wholesome I think."

He had her photographed while there, probably by William Hardy Kent, a commercial photographer whom he often used when in Eastbourne. Lindsay Smith (*Lewis Carroll: Photography on the Move*, p. 210) says, "It is rare to find surviving examples of those photographs Carroll had made at Kent's" and apparently this photograph has not survived.

Phoebe had been called back to London to begin rehearsals for Henry Arthur Jones' *Hoodman Blind*. Carroll saw the play shortly after it opened, commenting in his diary, "Phoebe, as the little boy 'Kit,' is charming." *The Illustrated London News*, on August 22, said: "Miss Phoebe Carlo...[is] thoroughly deserving of praise." *The Artist*, September 1885, stated that she adds "a good deal to the interest of the performance," while the *St. James Gazette* (August 19) said the child is "very prettily impersonated by Miss Phoebe Carlo."

Was Phoebe the first little girl who had stayed with him at Eastbourne? A letter to Mrs. J. Earle dated August 13, 1885, shortly after Phoebe's visit, hoping she will send her daughter Maggie to stay with him, certainly gives that impression: "I have been having a child-friend from London staying as my guest. The landlady here being a very nice motherly person, and the maid a very efficient "lady's-maid" makes such a plan quite easily managed. And now that I have tested the possibility of it, I want another child-friend (any age short of grown-up, which I *dare* not attempt, for fear of Mrs. Grundy, would do) to take her place."

Five years later (September 7, 1890) when he asked Gertrude Chataway to come for a visit, hoping that she doesn't find the request "outrageous," he wrote: "I never thought of such a thing, myself, until five years ago. Then, feeling I really had accumulated a good lot of years, I ventured to invite a

little girl of 10, who was lent without the least demur.” Clearly he is referring to Phoebe.

In 1886, Phoebe played in provincial performances of *Sister Mary*, a play written by two of the biggest names in Victorian theatre, Wilson Barrett and Clement Scott. She won praise from *Era*, for both the Brighton performance (March 13): “Miss Phœbe Carlo made a pretty and intelligent Harry Reade” and that in Hull (March 27): “Little Phœbe Carlo is also very pleasing as the child Harry.” There is little recorded contact between Carroll and Phoebe during this period, except that his diary notes he called on the Carlos on June 12, 1886.

Then, on August 28, 1886, he received a letter from Henry Savile Clarke, asking for his blessing on a dramatization of *Alice*. (Unfortunately, none of Clarke’s letters to Carroll have survived, though we do have most of Carroll’s letters to him.) Carroll, a theatre devotee, who had long been hoping for an *Alice* play, thoroughly approved, on condition that no “coarseness, or anything suggestive of coarseness, be admitted.”†

Right from the beginning, Carroll was not reticent to make suggestions. *Alice*, after all, was *his* creation. It probably wasn’t long before he started thinking about Phoebe as the lead. On September 13, he asked Macmillan, his publisher (who often did small favours for him in London), if they could track down the Carlo family (he believed they had moved) to deliver a note. Macmillan failed to find the address, but Carroll must have found them through other means. On October 1 he called to see Phoebe, “but cannot get her for Eastbourne as rehearsals, at Olympic, began on Monday.” (This casual comment makes me wonder if Phoebe had been to Eastbourne other times after her initial visit.)

Then on October 26 in a P.S. to Clarke he suggested that Phoebe play Alice: I shall be much interested to hear the names of any of the company engaged — specially of the “Alice”, whose *age* I should also like to know. I have a dear little friend on the stage — Phœbe Carlo, now playing in “The Governess” — who might do you good service; but possibly the piece she is now in will be running too long to enable you to get her. Whatever you do, *don’t* get an Alice that drops her H’s!

The Governess opened at the *Olympic* on October 21 with Phoebe playing the part of the child Jeanne, and closed on November 5. There is no record of Carroll having seen it, possibly because the reviews were terrible. But Phoebe's performance was often singled out for praise:

Morning Post, October 22: "After the leading character, by far the best was the charmingly natural acting of Miss Phœbe Carlo."

Era, October 23: "Miss Phœbe Carlo won the hearty approval of all by her strikingly clever and natural portraiture of the child Jeanne."

Freemason's Chronicle, October 23: "Little Phoebe Carlo thoroughly realized a difficult part for so young an actress. Bred to the stage from her infancy, this little lady is quick to perceive the value of correct and telling emphasis. She has a splendid delivery, and made a grand success of the part of the child Jeanne."

Lloyds Weekly Newspaper, October 24: "Miss Phœbe Carlo won great favour by her bright and expressive rendering of one of the children."

Reynolds Newspaper, October 24: "the phenomenally clever rendering of the sister Jeanne by Miss Phœbe Carlo."

Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, October 30: "A singularly clever and well-trained child-actress."

Since *The Governess* closed fairly quickly, it did not interfere with Phoebe playing Alice. Carroll notes in his diary on October 30 that Clarke had engaged her—something he must have done almost as soon as he received Carroll's suggestion.

In a long October 31 letter to Clarke, Carroll bombarded him with suggestions about the play, including two or three specifically relating to Phoebe. He had visited the Clarks the day before. The length and detail of this letter shows that his mind had been working overtime since.

"Now please don't reject the following suggestion, till you have well weighed the "pros" I have to urge. It is to have *three* Acts, the middle one being "The Hunting of the Snark". I am a great advocate for giving people *plenty for their money*. Why should 3 hours be too long? You might begin at 2, & get it over by 5. For the *child*-part of the audience, I am quite sure 3 hours wouldn't be a minute too long. I took 2 children to the Brighton Pantomime: it began at 7, & ended at 11, & then I said "Would you like to have it *all* over again?" "Yes!" they cried, & I am quite sure they would have gladly sat up for it. But

my main reason for wishing for this interlude is, to give a *real* rest for Phœbe, in the middle of her hard task. I am greatly afraid of her breaking down *physically*, before the thing has run a fort-night: but you see this Second Act wants nothing but *men*: she needn't come on at all: & if you can make it last (say) 30 minutes, that, with 2 intervals of 10 minutes each, will give her 50 minutes rest: & then she will have *some* chance of being fresh and vigorous for the 3rd Act."

He then continued:

"There are two things I want to be allowed to do as *my* contribution towards the experiment. But I don't understand the etiquette of these matters: so please tell me if I can properly offer them or not.

One is, to *dress* Phœbe at my own expense. I should not *spare* expense, you may be sure: & I would take the best artistic advice, & try to make her as perfect a *picture* as possible (N.B. but I could not undertake this under *restrictions* of any kind such as "the dress must be such a colour". If I undertake it, I must have 'a free hand'. The other is, I would like to procure her some lessons in *singing*, from the best teacher available.

You see, a great deal of the success of the piece must necessarily depend on Phœbe: and it will be well worth while to do all that can be done [to] give her as good a chance as possible.

(Entre nous: I also intend to ask Mrs. Arthur Lewis, as a personal favour to myself, to let Phœbe come & recite to her, & to give her the benefit of her long experience in hints as to action, &c. I shall probably ask the same favour also of Miss Ellen Terry: but I think Mrs. Lewis' advice will be best worth having, as she has had actual experience in such teaching.)" Mrs. Arthur Lewis was Carroll's friend, the former Kate Terry, an actress herself before her marriage.

Because we do not have Clarke's letters to Carroll, we don't know his specific responses but we can glean that Carroll's suggestions did not go over well, for on November 2 Carroll with very good grace wrote to Clarke, "I will now execute that beautiful strategic movement known as "giving way all along the line", & withdraw my suggestions 'en masse', the 'dress' question included. Amateurs have no business to put in their oar: it only spoils things."

The pre-production publicity campaign for the *Alice* operetta touched upon both Phoebe and Carroll's role in procuring her. For example, *The Young Folks Paper*, November 27, noted that "An ideal Alice has been found in the person of Miss Phoebe Carlo, whose suitability for the part has been specially recognized by Mr. Lewis Carroll." *The Morning Post* had used almost exactly the same words (November 15).

The Illustrated London News reported on December 21, 1886 "The day before Christmas Eve we are to see the dramatic version, by Mr. Savile Clarke, of those delightful child romances "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through a Looking-Glass" by Lewis Carroll...Alice is to be personated by Miss Phoebe Carlo, one of the cleverest of child-actresses, who, if I mistake not, will play the part very prettily. She is a little artist."

On December 15, Carroll mentioned in a letter to Clarke, "I am very glad Phœbe is doing so well."

The play opened on December 23, 1886, at the *Prince of Wales* theatre, under the management of Edgar Bruce, but Carroll was not able to see it until December 30. He wrote to Clarke the next day with measured enthusiasm for the overall production and strong praise of Phoebe: "I got a great deal of amusement & pleasure yesterday afternoon in seeing Alice in Wonderland. I think Phœbe *very good indeed*."

On January 8, 1887, having seen the play again the day before, he sent a few new suggestions to Clarke. On February 2, the day after his third viewing, he sent a very long list of suggestions and complaints, concluding however, that "Phœbe, Dorothy, & the Hatter, make up for a good many shortcomings." Dorothy was Dorothy D'Alcourt, who played the Dormouse, while the Hatter was played by Sidney Harcourt.

It seems clear that Lewis Carroll was satisfied with his Alice, that is, with Phoebe, though he had many quibbles about the play. But what did the press think? The newspaper reviews of her performance were glowing, except for a few doubts about her singing, mostly early on. Here is a sampling:

The Morning Post, December 24: "She has succeeded in capturing the precise tone of perfect simplicity which is the very essence of the character, and in

avoiding that air of precocious “knowingness” which is the besetting sin of the average juvenile performer. She sang fairly well yesterday, and will sing better when untrammelled by the nervousness incidental to a first performance. Not the least of her merits is her distinct enunciation.”

Era, December 25: “[She] acted the part of Alice with intelligence but her singing was much inferior.”

Daily News, December 26: [She] “seems to lack something of the sustained vocal power which the part demands but that may have been due only to the nervousness of a first performance. In spirit and vivacity, in intelligent appreciation of the peculiar key of drollery, it would be hard to conceive how her performance could be surpassed...It was amusing to observe this juvenile performer playing now and then the part of a prompter in a whisper or otherwise adroitly helping a comrade of maturer years out of a difficulty.”

The Stage, December 31: [She] “was safe and reliable in the part, and by her acting made up for her not very good singing voice.” This review was reprinted in *Dramatic Notes: A Year-Book of The Stage* (1887) with a drawing of Carlo on p. 121. (See the cover of this issue.)

Fun, January 5, 1887: “Miss Phoebe Carlo is just the Alice of our hearts—she seemed a bit nervous at the first performance, which perhaps accounted for her singing being rather thin; but she’s just the bright-eyed, smooth-haired, sweet-spirited little lassie we have dreamt of.” *Fun* also included a drawing of Phoebe as Alice.

Saturday Review, January 15: “Although her singing voice is not sufficiently matured to be always pleasant, [she] is, considering her age, an experienced actress, always natural and graceful.”

All the other reviews offered unmitigated praise, sometimes so fervent as to be almost beyond crediting.

The Observer, December 26: “The fairy play is capitally acted, especially by Miss Phoebe Carlo, who exactly catches the air of the little heroine’s unaffected wonder, as well as of her amiable desire to make herself at home with her puzzling friends to avoid hurting their feelings.”

The People, December 26: “That daintiest of damsels is impersonated with the seeming artlessness that hides its own art by Miss Phoebe Carlo.”

Reynolds, December 26: “...clear elocution, graceful and natural movements, and frank vivacity made her an altogether ideal Alice.”

Sporting Life, December 26: “Mr. Savile Clarke has been fortunate in securing an excellent Alice in Miss Phoebe Carlo, whose simplicity of manner, and refined, natural acting proved of immense value.”

Ipswich Journal, December 29: “acts well, sings well, and dances well.”

Manchester Courier, December 29: “simply bewitching. The ordinary terms of conventional praise could hardly give any idea of her peculiar charm and talents.”

Pall Mall Budget, December 30: “Much of the success of the performance must be credited to the wonderfully clever performance of Miss Phoebe Carlo as Alice. She is a pretty little child of thirteen or fourteen, with golden hair falling over her shoulders, dressed in a white Satin frock and white stockings. This young lady is a born comedian, and plays with really marvellous appreciation of her part. Every word is audible, every gesture simple and unexaggerated, and every movement natural.”

Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, January 1: “The combination of decision with unaffected simplicity in Miss Phoebe Carlo’s Alice is simply invaluable to the significance of the fable, which would lose half its convincing power if Alice ceased to be a wondering yet confident child.”

Sporting Times, January 1: “the child of the book to the very life.”

Truth, January 13: “Kate and Ellen Terry, Mrs. Bancroft, Mrs. Kendal, and scores of others began their stage careers as precocious children, and I do not see why this little Carlo girl should not follow in their footsteps.”

And finally, warm praise from *The Artist*, February 1: “This little lady, who is on the stage almost continuously for the two hours in which the curtain was up, acted with unflagging energy, and displayed talents of a really high order. Her easy winsome manner, her air of unaffected astonishment at the wonders of fairyland, her clear enunciation, her capital facial expression, and her singing and dancing, combined to make up one of the strongest and most interesting performances ever given by a juvenile performer. Had Mr. Saville [sic] Clarke been able to induce the real Alice to step from the pages of Mr. Carroll’s books, she could have been no more life-like.”

Carroll did not comment on the newspaper reviews though he surely read them. But he did write his own: “Alice on the Stage”, *The Theatre*, April 1, 1887. Carroll’s article was accompanied by the well-known photo of Alice and the Dormouse by professional photographer Herbert Rose Barraud. He wrote, “Of Miss Phoebe Carlo’s performance it would be difficult to speak

too highly. As a mere effort of memory, it was surely a *marvellous feat for so young a child*, to learn no less than two hundred and fifteen speeches—nearly three times as many as Beatrice has in “Much Ado About Nothing.” But what I admired most, as realising most nearly my ideal heroine, was her perfect assumption of the high spirits, and readiness to enjoy *everything*, of a child out for a holiday.”



Tea Party. Image taken from *St Nicholas Magazine*, January 1888, p151

There are other nice pictorial representations of Phoebe as Alice. *St. Nicholas Magazine*, January 1888, provides two drawings and two photographs of Phoebe in a detailed and ecstatic review for children. *The Sphere*, December 22, 1900, printed a photo of Alice (Phoebe) falling asleep with a book in her hand. In addition, “Recollections of Lewis Carroll” by Harry Furniss, in *Strand*, February 1908, contains several wonderful drawings (much better than those he did for *Sylvie & Bruno*) including one of Phoebe on stage.

Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965) in her book, *A Nursery in the Nineties* (Gollanz, 1930, pp. 398–400), relates how her brother Harry (1878–1948) and their unidentified friend “Button,” after seeing two performances of *Alice*, got

into a fistfight over Phoebe, with whom both had fallen in love. It would be lovely to have more child reaction to the play.



Alice/Phoebe has fallen asleep with a book in her lap. *The Sphere* Dec 22 1900

has returned to her old home at the Prince of Wales Theatre, none the worse for her trip, and Miss Phoebe Carlo is once more presiding over a congregation of delighted children."

The play was such a success that although it was originally scheduled to close on Saturday February 19, it was extended to February 26, then to March 2, and eventually until March 18 (with a brief interruption for an engagement in Brighton in early March). *The Illustrated London News* wrote of this break "It is always considered in the theatrical world a very dangerous thing to 'break a run.' There were grave fears that pretty "Alice in Wonderland" would never recover [from] her sudden journey to Brighton, where she proved so wonderfully successful. But the innocent child

A provincial tour with the original cast followed. On March 27, Carroll wrote to Clarke, "You ask if 'the piece' wd 'go at Oxford'. I think, *yes*: I wrote, a while ago, advising you to send it here — but during *Term*, not *Vacation*: everybody is away just now & won't be back till the last week of April. Does Phoebe go with it? If not, I don't care 2^d *where* it goes, or doesn't go: nor

could I advise friends to go & see it with such a wooden ‘Alice’ as Mabel Love would make.” Love was Phoebe’s understudy, but apparently never was called on to play the part.



THE FIRST "ALICE" ON THE STAGE—MISS PHOEBE CARLO, 1887.

Phoebe/Alice with the dormouse.
Drawing by Harry Furniss *Strand Magazine*
February 1908

The tour went from April through most of August (indeed it did *not* go to Oxford). Mrs. Carlo accompanied the troupe, probably serving as matron. Reviews praising Phoebe are found in newspapers in Birmingham, Worcester, Cardiff, Cheltenham, Nottingham, Hastings St. Leonard, Leamington, Liverpool, Brighton, Eastbourne, Bristol, Dover, and elsewhere. A sampling of provincial reviews:

Birmingham Daily Post, April 19, 1887: “the very *Alice* of Carroll and of Tenniel. As a feat of memory alone the performance is a most remarkable one for a child of her years.”

Era, April 30 (in Worcester): “Phoebe Carlo makes a capital Alice and enters into the spirit of the part in a very realistic and vivacious manner.”

Leamington Spa Courier & Warwickshire Standard, May 21: “Perfect embodiment of Alice, and her many songs were sung with refreshing simplicity.”

Era, June 11 (in Nottingham): “It is scarcely possible to imagine a more winsome little heroine...Her vivacity and drollery are unflagging and her performance is instinct with an appreciation of the part.”

Hastings & St. Leonard Observer, July 30: “wonderful ability for so young a little lady. She spoke, sang, and danced well, and in our opinion could hardly be surpassed in any particular in her long part.”

Eastbourne Gazette, August 17: “There is associated with her acting a piquant spirit that many older actresses strive in vain to obtain.”

But the most interesting and informative review of all incorporated an interview with a very self-composed 12-year-old Phoebe, in the *South Wales Echo*, on May 11, 1887:

“... in Cardiff during the present week there is quite a colony of little neophytes in the Thespian art, mere children who during the day amuse themselves with juvenile antics, whilst at night they elicit the admiration of a large audience by their histrionic powers.

My first visit was naturally paid to the talented and gifted child who fills the title role in “Alice in Wonderland.” Miss Phoebe Carlo is only twelve years of age, and she has already had a long theatrical career, for she was carried on the stage as a baby of eighteen months. Those who have seen her in the theatre obtain an accurate idea of her personal appearance, a thing that can be said of very few actresses, for this vivacious young lady is endowed by nature with a beautiful complexion which renders “make-up” unnecessary. She has a very intelligent and animated face, whilst her eyes in themselves are sufficient to constitute her a more than ordinarily pretty child... “Although my first appearance before the footlights was made before I can remember,” she said, “my first genuine part was played when I was four years old, as I appeared in a pantomime at the Elephant and Castle, in London, where I was born. You have no idea how delighted I was to be able to go on the stage, and I did try hard to do my best with my part. Before long Mr Wilson Barrett engaged me to play in ‘The Silver King,’ and after that I went on tour with Miss Lingard in Sister Mary... My first great success was gained when I played with Miss Hawthorne at the Olympic...

“It’s very odd, but I knew the author, Lewis Carroll, long before anyone dreamed of dramatising his book. Perhaps you know he is a very popular Oxford Don, and although unmarried, is very fond of children. When, therefore, his dear little Alice was brought into real life in a London theatre, he was so pleased to find that I was chosen by Mr Edgar Bruce to be the leading lady.”

An involuntary smile crossed my face when I looked at the charming little leading lady, but I asked “Were you trained by someone in your gestures and declamation, or are they the result of your own inventiveness?”

“Oh, I assure you, no one ever told me what to do. You see I know the book well, and I realized that all I had to do was to go on the stage, and be simply a little girl, which came quite natural...”

Carroll saw the play on July 14 in Brighton, and the following day he took Phoebe, her younger sister Lizzie (b. 1876), and Dorothy D’Alcourt around town for visits to his friends, Louie Webb’s underwater performance, and high tea. He wrote a letter to the *St. James Gazette*, published July 19, recounting this day and the buoyant spirits of the three young actresses (Lizzie Carlo had a small non-speaking part), as evidence that stage children were not overworked and worn out—the well-being of young actors was a controversial issue at the time. Carroll bought tickets for the matinee performance on August 17 at the *Devonshire Park* theatre in Eastbourne, but was unable to go when he learned of the death of his cousin Margaret Wilcox.

On September 16 in London, he went to the photographic studio of Henry Herschel Hay Cameron (1852–1911, the youngest son of Julia Margaret Cameron) “and bought some lovely photos of Phoebe, Dorothy, etc. in costume”—only one survives, at Fresno State University, but it is not from the *Alive* play. On January 16, 1888, he bought more photos of “Phoebe, etc” from Cameron. (Interestingly, Cameron had acted in Act I of the play as the Executioner, and went on to appear in several revivals.)

On February 11, 1888, he saw Phoebe on the stage in *The Golden Ladder*—some 6 weeks into its run—but did not comment in his diary on her performance. The newspapers, however, approved. A sampling: *London Standard*, December 24, 1887: “Carlo is very amusing in the child part of Victoria Alexandra.”

Sporting Times, December 24: “Clever little Phoebe Carlo looked sweet and acted capitally.”

St. Stephen’s Review, December 31: “a bright young girl...acts with the self-possession of a maturer artist.”

Phoebe continued to be prominently in the public eye: The *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* of May 19, 1888 featured a handsome full-page engraving of her on the cover, taken from a photograph by H. H. H. Cameron. “The very young lady [on the cover] is comparatively an old actress...Her first

marked success, and it really was an exceptionally good one, was in the piece
Alice in Wonderland cting were



universally admired and praised... [She] has also pleased the public and the critics in *The Golden Ladder* and in the not very sympathetic play *The Governess*.”

But apparently Phoebe had lost her lustre in Carroll’s eyes. In June he wrote to Clarke, “Are you still cherishing any idea of reviving “Alice in Wonderland”? And if so, have you considered, as possible representatives of ‘Alice’, Minnie Terry and Véra Beringer? I have not seen Minnie on the

stage, but from all I hear, I feel certain she would make a charming “Alice”. Véra I have seen, and am absolutely certain in her case. She evidently has remarkable natural powers, but I attribute much of her success to the teaching she has had from Mrs. Kendall [sic]. The result has made me wish you had allowed me to carry out my idea of getting Mrs. Lewis to give Phoebe Carlo a few hints as to her acting of “Alice”. You thought the only result would be to distract the poor child: but I now feel convinced it would not only have done no harm, but would have much improved her, and thus improved the whole piece and would have saved her from some rather bad mistakes in delivery, which, when once she had acquired them, I found to be ineradicable.”

Carroll was obviously disenchanted with Phoebe. His dismissive comments are surprising given the many glowing newspaper reviews of her elocution, not to mention his own earlier approbation of her acting, and obvious fondness for her.

A few months later he was even less complimentary. On August 13 he saw her as Titania in Eastbourne in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. “She spoke too quick and with little expression: I think the part is beyond her powers.” *The Stage* review in June, on the other hand, had said she was “excellent,” and *Era*, July 27, said she was “quite charming as Titania.”

As soon as he knew for certain that Clarke was planning a revival, Carroll went into action. He knew he didn’t want Phoebe as the lead anymore. He had seen Minnie Terry in *Bootsles Baby* on July 2 and was “a little disappointed, particularly with her elocution.” He doesn’t want Minnie anymore. He now suggested Isa Bowman. Isa had appeared in the original *Alice* play as an oyster ghost (and possibly at some point as an understudy to Phoebe). He had first sought out her acquaintance on September 27, 1887, writing in his diary, “I had seen her in the *Alice* company and fancied she looked nice.” Isa had several extended stays with him in Eastbourne and Oxford in 1887 and 1888, and had won a strong place in his affections.

On July 4, he visited Clarke to discuss the revival and suggest that he use either Vera or Isa, definitely steering Clarke away from Phoebe, whom Clarke still may have been considering. Later that day Carroll wrote to Clarke: “One line in addition to what I said this morning about a successor

to Phœbe. I very much *hope* you may find Isa good enough for it. So far as my own wishes are concerned, I would far rather Isa should have it than any other children. Of course I don't expect my wish to have any weight if another child were *distinctly* better. But, 'ceteris paribus', please take Isa! I've never heard her *speak* on the stage: & so have no idea whether she would make a good "Alice" or not. I've only heard her sing, & I am no judge of musical matters."

How strongly LC was engaged in promoting Isa! On July 16, after seeing Clarke again, he wrote a long argument for casting Isa rather than Phoebe in the part, rather startling in its vehemence. Clearly Vera was no longer in competition, but Clarke must have still favored Phoebe.

Dear Mr. Savile-Clarke,

After seeing you today, one or two things occurred to me in reference to the question "Phœbe or Isa?", which I would like to put before you. If possible, please don't think me needlessly officious and interfering.

Mainly, of course, it shd be a question of "which is fittest?" As to this: —

(1) Phœbe seems to me too old & too tall for "Alice" now. In my book, "Alice" is supposed to be about 7.

(2) Friends, who saw the play in its latter days, thought Phœbe was beginning to play *mechanically*, & with a want of child-like frankness. This seems a likely result, after repeating the part so often.

(3) Isa's "English" is better than Phœbe's. In one special & important point, the use of 'H,' she is altogether better.

(4) Isa *looks* more of a lady than Phœbe.

I do not know how much weight you would be disposed to give to *other* considerations than mere *fitness*. But I would like to mention that

(5) Isa seems to have, to some extent, a claim to be allowed to take the first part, having been "under-study" so long, with a constantly-deferred hope of having a chance of playing it.

(6) Phœbe has had a very good 'innings' already, & could not fairly complain at some one else having a turn now.

Both children are nice, I think: & both are friends of mine: but on the whole, I, personally, would be glad to hear that you could see your way to engaging *Isa* rather than Phœbe.

Is there any doubt Isa has won his heart, and Phoebe has lost out? By July 20 Clarke had engaged Isa as the new Alice. Phoebe's theatrical career didn't end, of course, but her role in Lewis Carroll's life had. She was never again mentioned in the diaries, nor was there any correspondence with her. Isa Bowman indeed gave a strong and well-reviewed performance as Alice in the 1888 revival. In a letter to Winifred Holiday, February 28, 1889, Carroll said, "I think my little friend, Isa Bowman, was a more refined and intelligent 'Alice' even than Phoebe Carlo, though *she* was a very good one."

Phoebe continued to appear frequently in the theatre and garner positive newspaper notices through 1894, although gradually moving from dramatic parts toward music hall performances as a juvenile dancer and vocalist. She often appeared in burlesques and musical shows, in London and the provinces, usually as part of Arthur Roberts' troupe. Roberts was a well-known musical comedy performer of the time. Between engagements, she advertised herself as "At Liberty," e.g., in *Era*, December 19, 1891: "Wanted, known Little Phoebe Carlo the refined juvenile song and dance artist, premier jig and skipping rope dancer, at Liberty, Monday next. Also for Panto. Permanent address, 7, So-ho Street, Liverpool."

Here is a sampling of her appearances and newspaper notices from 1889–1894:

Era, July 6, 1889: Arthur Roberts' annual matinee at the *Avenue Theatre*, "Miss Phoebe Carlo 'who is getting a big girl now' recited 'The Maniac' with surprising earnestness and effect."

Era, September 14, 1889: "the part of Vivien, in [Roberts' burlesque] *Lancelot the Lovely*, on tour, was undertaken with great success at a few minutes' notice by Miss Phoebe Carlo."

Dart, *The Midland Figaro*, September 27, 1889: "pretty, dark-eyed Miss Phoebe Carlo."

Era, February 22, 1890 [in *Babes in the Woods*, a pantomime]: "prettily played."

The Times, October 1, 1891: "Phoebe has grown and grown more beautiful, and she is a lovely page in 'Joan of Arc'."

Era, October 31, 1891: "Phoebe Carlo sings and dances well, and skips with skill," in a musical revue at the Alhambra Music Hall.

February 6–June 17, 1892 she alternated with another girl in the part of Middy in *Blue-Eyed Susan* at the *Prince of Wales*, but no mentions of her are found.

Era, September 24, 1892: [She is a] “prepossessing little page” in *Cinder-ElLEN, Up Too Late*.

From late 1893 into 1894, Phoebe acted in several venues in *In Town*, a Roberts musical farce (in poor taste in parts), in which, according to *The Artist*, November 1, 1892, “rollicking humor and extravagant incidents are mingled with song and dance.” *Era*, September 16, 1893: “Miss Phoebe Carlo is a fascinating Flo Fanshawe.” *Portsmouth Evening News*, November 13, 1893: [She] “performed some graceful skirt dances in the second act.”

In June 1894, in what may have been a key event in her life, as a member of the Cairns James Company, she went to Cape Town to perform again as “Flo Fanshawe.” Cairns James toured in South Africa and North America, but there is no indication that Phoebe went to North America. In fact, by June 23, she was playing in a variety entertainment in Burnley.

The last theatre notice that I have found for Phoebe is for a variety show in Hartlepool in October 1894, not long after her 20th birthday. Her career as an actress had begun strongly, but after 1888 (age 14 or 15) she had only bit parts in musical revues. She never played adult roles on stage. Nonetheless, she was to have an impressive second act in society. Phoebe came up in the world, beginning it seems around the turn of the century.

The Stage annually noted her birthday (May 30) in its “Chit Chat” pages, but her next substantive appearance in the press was in the December 31, 1898 *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* review of the revival of Savile Clarke’s play at the *Opera Comique*, starring Rose Hersee as Alice. The review notes “The original Alice—now grown into a beautiful woman—looked on from a private box, and had plenty of encouraging applause for her successor.”

There was a similar comment by Frederick Dolman in an article called “Stage Children” in the *English Illustrated Magazine* in May 1899. “Phoebe Carlo is now a married lady and no longer on the stage, but for the sake of auld lang syne she attended the first performance of the dream play at the *Opéra Comique* last Christmas and from her box bestowed a beautiful bouquet on the new Alice, Miss Rose Hersee.”

When did she marry? The 1891 census had shown Phoebe (16), her sister Elizabeth (14), and a two-year-old named Daisy, identified as a granddaughter, living with Phoebe's parents at 102 Kentish Town Rd. We don't know who Daisy's mother was, much less her father. Most likely Phoebe—who had no theatre parts between August 1888 and July 1889—was Daisy's mother, although it's possible Lizzie was. But Phoebe must not have married until later.

In the 1901 census, we see Phoebe Ellen Ben Juta, of private means, living with her mother and two servants at 55 Curzon Street in fashionable Mayfair. Who was "Mr. Ben Juta" and why wasn't he mentioned in the census? Possibly she had met him in 1894 when she went to Cape Town: she ended her stage career very soon thereafter. "Juta" is a name very much associated with South Africa, although it seems clear she did not marry into the family of the famed South African jurist Henry Juta. The name "Ben Juta" (sometimes rendered Benjuta) suggests that Phoebe's husband was Jewish.

It is certain that Phoebe was no longer poor, and that she did not live (or live mainly) in South Africa. In 1903, she won a popular "best-dressed" contest, the "Smartest Lady" competition, sponsored by *Pelican* magazine. (She had finished in second place the year before.)

The Sketch, July 29, 1903, included a photograph of her almost full page seated in a chair, identified as "Miss Carlo, now Mrs. S. Juta of Curzon Street, Mayfair." She won "a handsome brooch worth 200 guineas." The *Chicago*



MISS CARLO, WINNER OF THE PELICAN "SMARTEST LADY" COMPETITION.
Photograph by Thiele, Chancery Lane.

Smartest lady, *Sketch* July 29, 1903 p 47

Tribune, August 16, 1903, reprinted the photo, stating, “She is famous for her smart dresses and graceful carriage.”

I have been unable to find any mention of S. Juta anywhere. Did he (assuming he even existed) remain in South Africa? There is no marriage record of the two in England and no death record for S. Juta. Stanhope Joel, the son of her second husband, said that the South African Juta family into which Phoebe had married was known for “an uncompromising conventionality and a certain stiffness in dispensing hospitality.” But that is all he said.

To further the mystery Phoebe in 1903 had a (second?) daughter, Kathleen (Kitty) Benjuta, although her birth record states her name as Kathleen P. J. Carlo, presumably Kathleen Phoebe Juta Carlo—but why would she not have been given her father’s surname? Twenty-two years later, there is a marriage record for Kathleen P. J. Carlo. (It is worth noting that the marriage notices described Kathleen as Phoebe’s only daughter.)

Kathleen used the surname Benjuta as a young girl, however. *Cassell’s Little Folks* gave Kathleen Benjuta “highly commended” for her response to an essay contest on favorite book animals in June 1915. She was commended as well in *The Quiver*, March 1919, for a Christmas design she had submitted, and she is listed as a new girl in Michaelmas term in 1917 at Heathfield School, Ascot, Berkshire, England.

The Royal Blue Book: Fashionable Directory and Parliamentary Guide, January 1906, lists Mrs Juta at 55 Curzon Street, and there are occasional mentions of Phoebe in the press over the next several years. *The Sphere* (December 29, 1906), on the *Alice* revival starring Marie Studholme, mentions Phoebe, saying, “I wonder what has become of her?” (Phoebe, by the way, attended this opening as well, as was noted in the *Manchester Courier*, December 21, 1906.)

In November 1908, the *Evening Express* reported that a window cleaner was charged with stealing jewellery and curios valued at £50 belonging to Phoebe Ben-Juta, of independent means.

Following a long period with no news of Phoebe, a strange episode was reported in several newspaper articles in March 1918. Phoebe was taken to court on the charge of food hoarding, and fined £75. The *Gloucester Journal* headline reads, “A Lady’s Food Accumulations.” The police evidence showed that on searching the house 200 lb. of sugar were found in seven different places. They also found corn, rice, maize, and semolina. The food filled half the court. There were two ladies and three children in the house (in Hunter’s Vale, Virginia Water in northern Surrey), but no servants. Phoebe was indisposed and unable to appear, but had stated that it was her custom to keep large stores: “I do not consider it hoarding.” She was “kindness herself” to the investigators who visited her and gave every assistance in the search.

On May 30, 1918 Madame P. Benjuta donated pearls to the “Red Cross Pearl Necklace” charity, said *The Times*.

In November 1919 Phoebe married Solomon (“Solly”) Joel, a multimillionaire with interests in diamonds, gold, brewing, railways, and thoroughbred horse racing; a theatre devotee; and one of the richest men in the world. Joel’s first wife, Ellen, from whom he had been estranged, had died in August. He had met Ellen (Nellie) Ridley in Kimberley, South Africa where she, an actress like Phoebe, was on tour. It is possible he met Phoebe in South Africa as well, either in 1894 or later, but we do not know. (Stanley Jackson, in *The Great Barnato*, a biography of Solly’s uncle, says he did, but he may have had Joel’s two wives confused.)

Nellie had converted to Judaism upon marrying Solly; we don’t know if Phoebe did the same. At first only a few close friends were aware of their wedding, but it was announced publicly in mid-January, whereupon *Sketch* (January 21, 1920) printed a full-page head and shoulders photo of Phoebe, looking slimmer and far more attractive than the photo of her as the “smartest lady” some 16 years before. After the wedding announcement, the Joels left to party on the Riviera. Phoebe had obviously been well-off before, but from that day forward, she lived a life of extreme opulence and extravagance.

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography says of her second husband: “A born gambler, Joel won enormous sums of money but hated to lose. He

liked to sail in his luxurious yacht *Eileen* to the Riviera and do the annual circuit of the playgrounds of Europe—casinos, racecourses, winter sports, and watering places. His hospitality was legendary. The Joels entertained lavishly at their country estates and at their Great Stanhope Street mansion that housed famous works of art as well as the rarest collection of Chippendale furniture under one roof. His cellars were filled with vintage wines and his libraries with beautifully bound literary classics, which he never read. He was witty and gregarious, with catholic tastes and interests.”

The Solly Joels (Jolly Souls, one wit said) had a second mansion, Maiden Erlegh House, near Reading, where their thoroughbreds were bred and kept. Joel expended vast sums on this house, expanding it to over seventy rooms including fifty bedrooms, and installed a £12,000 swimming pool made of Italian marble and painted with nude frescoes, as well as lakes stuffed with trout, a polo ground, a cricket field, an aviary, and a deer park. Joel was a local legend, with stories of lavish parties and mysterious guests. He was also a generous supporter of local organizations and well-loved in the community.

Solly had a lifelong love of the theatre. It is no coincidence that he married two actresses. He had private interests in the management of several London theatres, including a controlling interest in the *Drury Lane Theatre*. He and Phoebe were frequent hosts on the West End. In April 1928, at the *Drury Lane*, the Joels had constructed a replica of their yacht the *Eileen* on stage, and invited more than 300 guests to celebrate the final performance of *The Desert Song*, one of many musicals Solly had helped underwrite. There was dancing, supper, and “sea effects” at this “unusual party” according to a photo caption in the *Illustrated London News*.

Reputedly, it was Solly Joel who first said: “A diamond is forever” (later the slogan of De Beers, in which he had inherited a large interest from his uncle Barnato). Phoebe was a walking advertisement for diamonds. Time and again we can read about the jewels she wore to West End openings in “Fashions of Stage and Stalls” by Florence Roberts, a regular column in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*.

September 22, 1923: “very handsome, and very happy as usual...and her jewels of course being wonderful.”

June 9, 1928: “happy as usual and even more than ordinarily handsome” wearing “many diamond bracelets and bangles blazing and four graduated ropes of wonderful pearls.”

April 27, 1929: There was “an audible hum of excited and admiring comment” when she entered the theatre. In addition to her Russian ermine stole and black lace gown, she wore black suede gloves which reached above her elbow and a mass of diamond bracelets, but also a necklace of “large and perfect pearls, and a second, almost waist long, of diamonds in a double link design, while lengthy diamond and pearl earrings represented still another fortune.”

June 22, 1929: her long white kid gloves were “covered from the wrist almost to the elbow with diamond bracelets” and her black gown “overhung by ropes of pearls.”

The Tatler reported from the Riviera, where they visited regularly on their yacht, on March 7, 1923, “Mr. and Mrs. Solly Joel were both playing, and, of course, everyone gasping with envy at her pearls. They really are wonderful.”

It is obvious the Joels’ competitive urges were not limited to gambling, horse racing, and business. Solly’s attire was as renowned as were Phoebe’s jewels. He modeled his appearance on Edward VII, and was said to have a different suit for each day of the year. You can imagine the figure they cut together.

Yet while all this extravagant partying was going on, Phoebe was not in good health. Solly’s son Stanhope, in *Ace of Diamonds*, a memoir of his father, said, “Unfortunately Phoebe was ailing and frequent indispositions curtailed her appearance at many a glittering function. In 1924 she underwent a serious operation.” She improved after a stay at the Leeds nursing home of Sir Berkeley Moynihan, a noted abdominal surgeon, but was never strong again. In December 1925, the *Daily Express* reported that she was in poor health and would not return from Cannes but instead would visit her daughter in Rome.

Phoebe’s daughter Kitty had been welcomed into the Joel family, and got on well with her step-siblings; she acquired the nickname “Kittles.” In January 1925 she married Marcello Caracciolo, the impecunious Duke of Laurino. Solly objected, but he gave her a generous allowance thereafter. Phoebe did not attend their small ceremony, probably for health reasons.

In his book, Stanhope told the following anecdote: when visiting Laurino and Kittles his attention was drawn to a mutilated photograph. The face was missing and the effect was somewhat macabre. “Oh,” the Duke explained, “that is your stepmother Phoebe. She is a terrible woman.” We should note that Stanhope had never liked Phoebe; he claimed that she sowed division in the family due to her jealous disposition.

Solly had a weak heart; the worldwide economic depression only made matters worse and he died in 1931 at Moulton Paddocks (a second racing stable he had purchased in 1922). Both Lizzie Carlo (now “Elsie Cox”) and Daisy Leonora Carlo (now Mrs. Arthur Sefton Cohen) received bequests.

In mid-1934, Phoebe was again seriously ill. On July 6, the BBC broadcast an urgent plea: “Will the Duchess of Laurino, who is believed to be touring England, return home at once as one of her family is dangerously ill.” The message found Kathleen within an hour. The society pages reported that Phoebe had to undergo an “internal operation” and was confined to bed in a London nursing home.

From that point, there is no news of her (save for a 1939 donation of £250 pounds to a fund for sick and wounded in the war) until her death on July 23, 1941. Her executors were Arthur Sefton Cohen and her daughter Kathleen. She left an estate of £371,497, of which £500 went to the Actors Orphanage.

Every year on the anniversary of her death, Kathleen honoured her in the “In Memoriam” column in *The Times* from 1942 (“In very loving memory of my mother, Phoebe Joel, who died on July 23, 1941, after a long illness borne with great courage—K.C.”) to 1950 (“Joel, Phoebe Ellen—In ever-fond and grateful memory of my mother, who died on July 23, 1941.—K.”)

One great mystery of Phoebe’s post-Alice life was her first marriage. Who was “S. Juta,” her supposed husband of whom no record can be found in England or South Africa, yet who had enough money to keep Phoebe in comfort and send Kathleen to a good school? Was Stanley Jackson correct that Phoebe and Solly met in South Africa? Why did Phoebe give her daughter her own surname rather than her purported husband’s? Why, moreover, did the *Dictionary of National Biography, 1931–1940 Supplement* state

that Solly and Phoebe had a daughter together—although Phoebe was 45 years old when they wed? (And, by the by, if Daisy *was* Phoebe’s daughter, why was she never publicly acknowledged as such?) Ah, we can only speculate!

But none of that matters, there is a bigger mystery. Phoebe Carlo had one huge claim to fame, worth more than all the diamonds in the world: she was the first Alice on the London stage. She hardly lived in obscurity thereafter, but after she changed her name, her connection to *Alice in Wonderland* was virtually unknown. It was nothing she ever traded on. There are no recollections of Carroll or the play by her. There was no suggestion that she was interested in or involved in the celebrations of Carroll’s centenary in 1932. Did she even read *Alice* to Kathleen? We will probably never know.

† Except where noted, quotations from Carroll’s letters to Henry Savile Clarke are taken directly from the originals at New York University’s Elmer Bobst Library. His spellings and inconsistencies have been reproduced without change. Underscores have been replaced with italics and his use of long low dashes at the ends of sentences with periods.

Clare Imholtz is an enthusiastic Carroll researcher and collector, and has published several articles on Carroll. She was secretary of the Lewis Carroll Society of North America from 2006 to 2014 and an editor of the LCSNA’s journal, the *Knight Letter*. She is currently editing Carroll’s letters to Henry Savile Clarke.

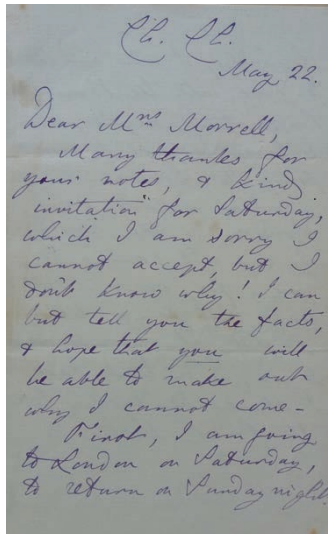
A Previously Unknown Dodgson Brainteaser

Thomas Wright

Introduction

In this essay I discuss a curious brainteaser, which is contained in a previously unpublished Dodgson letter. It may be a legal puzzle, or a logical problem, or something else – I explore the question of what it may be, and consider possible answers to it. I offer a number of tentative theories, and invite readers of *The Carrollian* to send in their own ideas and answers. I examine the brainteaser in the context of other puzzles Dodgson posed in letters to friends and in the books he wrote under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. In an appendix, I provide biographical notes about the people referred to in the letter, and briefly consider its biographical significance.

Reproduction and transcription of the letter



Ch. L.
May 22.
Dear Mrs Morrell,
Many thanks for
your note, & kind
invitation for Saturday,
which I am sorry I
cannot accept, but I
don't know why! I can
but tell you the facts,
& hope that you will
be able to make out
why I cannot come –
Kindly, I am going
to London on Saturday,
to return on Sunday night.

<p>Secondly, I was invited to dine with the Boman Prices, that night, but declined, because I was going to London -</p> <p>Now I can't say London is the cause of my not coming to <u>you</u>, for, even if I were <u>not</u> going there, I still should not come to you, as in that case I should be engaged to the Prices - Neither can</p>	<p>I say I am prevented from coming to you by an invitation elsewhere, which invitation I have declined! I hope Mr. Morrell, as a lawyer, will be able to see his way out of it: I can't.</p> <p>Yours sincerely, L. Dodgson.</p>
--	---

Side one (recto):

Ch[rist]. Ch[urch] College, Oxford].
May 22

Dear Mrs Morrell,
Many thanks for your notes, & kindly invitation for Saturday, which I am sorry I cannot accept, but I don't know why! I can but tell you the facts, & hope that you will be able to make out why I cannot come -

First, I am going to London on Saturday, to return on Sunday night.

Side two (verso):

Secondly, I was invited

to dine with the Bonamy
Prices, that night, but
declined, because I was
going to London –
Now I can't say
London is the cause
of my not coming to
you, for, even if I
were not going there,
I still should not come
to you, as in that case
I should be engaged to
the Prices – Neither can

Side three (recto):

I say I am prevented
from coming to you
by an invitation else-
where, which invitation I
have declined! I
hope Mr Morrell, as a
lawyer, will be able to
see his way out of
it: I can't.

Yours sincerely,
C L Dodgson.¹

Dodgson's brainteaser

In the letter Dodgson poses a question to his Oxford acquaintance, Mrs Morell (and her husband): what is the real reason he [Dodgson] is forced to

¹ Written in Dodgson's favourite purple ink on a single sheet of ribbed paper, the letter is sixteen cm in length, ten cm in width. Dodgson folded the sheet in half to create four sides to write on, then wrote the letter on three sides and folded the sheet again twice so it would fit inside a small envelope.

decline her invitation to dinner? Is it because of his London trip, or because of a prior engagement to dinner at the Prices? Dodgson sees a difficulty – he ‘can’t say his London trip is the cause of my not coming to you, for, even if I were not going there, I still should not come to you – being engaged elsewhere.’ On the other hand, he cannot ‘say I am prevented from coming to you by an invitation elsewhere’ because he has declined that invitation on account of his London trip. What do Mrs Morrell and her husband make of it?

In simplified form Dodgson’s question can be stated as:

What is the reason I cannot accept the invitation to your dinner party? Is it:

A. Because I am going to London; or

B. Because I have been invited to another dinner in Oxford?

I cannot say the reason is A, because even if I were not going to London, I would still be going to another Oxford dinner party (B). But I cannot say it is B either, because I have already declined that invitation because of (A). What would you – and your husband – say the real reason was?

A pragmatic, empirical or commonsensical approach to this question leads us quickly to conclusion that the answer is (A) because being in London makes it physically impossible for Dodgson to attend Mrs Morrell’s dinner (or, indeed, the Prices’ dinner). This answer could be expressed as a syllogism:

No-one can be in two places at the same time.

I will be in London on Saturday night.

Therefore I cannot be at an Oxford dinner party on Saturday night (either at your party, or at the Prices).

However, Dodgson’s phrase ‘even if I were not going [to London]’ introduces another possibility. If he were not going to London, then he would accept the first dinner invitation (to the Prices) and, in accordance with social convention, decline Mrs Morrell’s invitation because of a prior engagement rather than because of the physical impossibility of attending her dinner.

And yet, because Dodgson tells Mrs Morrell that he ‘is going to London’, the idea of his not going to the capital is purely hypothetical. It is, in effect, a logical sleight of hand, which enables Dodgson to pose the question – a

sort of McGuffin which sets the puzzle in motion. There is a strong whiff of red herring about it, and perhaps Mrs Morrell was supposed to smell it, and to tell Dodgson, in her answer, that she had done so. The correct answer to Dodgson's question in that case could have taken the form: 'the real reason you cannot come is A; B is a red herring because ...'.

On the other hand, again using an empirical perspective, we could see Dodgson's introduction of the hypothetical second reason for declining the invitation in terms of probability. Dodgson says he is going to London but, strictly speaking, one's travel and social plans can never be absolutely certain. There may be problems with the Oxford-London train-line, or his London engagement (assuming he had a fixed engagement) may be cancelled by the other party. It is perhaps because of this slight possibility that Dodgson brings into play his invitation from the Prices (for if he is forced to cancel his London trip the implication is that he will accept their invitation).

Why would Dodgson mention the Prices when there is only a very slight possibility of his attending their dinner party? Perhaps he does so because, as suggested, at the time of writing the letter he cannot say with 100% certainty that the reason for his declining the invitation is A and not B; perhaps it is because he wants to impress upon Mrs Morrell the absolute impossibility of attending her dinner; perhaps it is simply because he wants to set a brainteaser for Mrs (and Mr) Morrell, and the Prices' invitation is his McGuffin; or perhaps it is a combination of two of these reasons, or all three.

If Dodgson introduced the second reason for declining the invitation in the interests of veracity, it may have been to poke fun at Mr Morrell, who, as we know from the letter, is a lawyer (Morrell in fact advised Dodgson in legal matters). The stereotype of a lawyer was (and remains) someone pedantic and punctilious in matters relating to truth, and motivation; Dodgson may be parodying the legal mind in his overly meticulous and elaborate discussion of the reasons why he cannot attend the Morrells' dinner party. His letter applies forensic legal analysis to an everyday matter, and he writes with all the exactness, and commitment to truthfulness, of a man under oath in a court room, perhaps for the humour this creates. The language Dodgson uses in his letter may be an imitation of barrister-speak 'first ... secondly ... neither ... the facts... cause'. This would not have been the only time

Dodgson parodied legal discourse. The *Alice* books (which he wrote under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll) contain several lampoons on legalese – for example in the trial scene at the end of *Wonderland*, and in ‘The Mouse’s Tale’ from the same book.

Then again, the idea that Dodgson introduced the second reason because he wanted to impress upon Mrs Morrell the impossibility of his attending her dinner is consistent with what we know about his dislike of society, and his habit of declining invitations. In this context, it is perhaps noteworthy that Dodgson never articulates the second hypothetical situation implied by his letter, viz. ‘if I were going to neither London nor to the Prices then I would come to your dinner’ – for, strictly speaking, there is always the (extremely slight) possibility that Dodgson will not go to London and that the Prices’ dinner party will be called off, in which case he would be without an excuse for declining the Morrells’ dinner invitation. As Dodgson never mentions this possibility it is more accurate to formulate this second hypothetical as ‘if I were going to neither London nor to the Prices, I might come to your dinner party’.

The notion that Dodgson simply wants to set a brainteaser for Mrs Morrell is also appealing. Dodgson loved setting puzzles for his friends, just as Carroll loved setting puzzles for his readers. In the short stories or ‘knots’ contained in his book *A Tangled Tale* (1885), Carroll ‘embodies... one or more mathematical questions – in Arithmetic, Algebra, or Geometry – for the amusement, and possible edification of ... readers’². Dodgson sometimes posed mathematical or logical questions to the recipients of his letters.

What kind of question might Dodgson be asking in his letter to Mrs Morrell? He may have wanted to set her and her solicitor husband a legal brainteaser relating to causation. Determining the cause (a word used by Dodgson in his letter) in a far from straightforward case constitutes a classic legal puzzle, and Dodgson may have turned his non-acceptance of a dinner invitation into just such a puzzle. The moot point at issue is the cause of his declining the invitation to the Morrells’ dinner party – which is the guilty party here,

² From Carroll’s preface to *A Tangled Tale*. Interestingly knot II in the book poses a mathematical question concerning a dinner party – the reader must work out the number of guests who attended.

Dodgson's London trip or the Prices' dinner invitation? A convincing legal argument could be put in favour of the innocence of both parties, yet one, or both, must be to blame because he *has* declined the Morrells' invitation. In legal terms, we could say that, assuming each engagement constitutes an invitation Dodgson is bound to accept if he is not previously engaged, then each is a sufficient condition for his absence, but neither one is a necessary condition, so we cannot pin the blame on either. The London engagement of course has temporal priority over the dinner invitation from the Prices, but how important is that?³ Dodgson's puzzle is also reminiscent of liability cases in which a party claims that because someone did or did not do something, something else did or did not happen (these cases are common when an injured party claims to have suffered because of neglect from a doctor).⁴

Alternatively, Dodgson's question to the Morrells may be a logical puzzle. Logic – the systematic study of arguments – was a subject Dodgson taught as part of the undergraduate mathematics course he gave at Christ Church, Oxford. Under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, he also wrote two books on Logic for children – *The Game of Logic* and *Symbolic Logic* – as well as two celebrated articles in the journal *Mind* for his fellow professional logicians. An evangelical logician, Dodgson gave numerous lectures and lessons on the subject to young people and children, and initiated his acquaintances into its mysteries by setting them logical puzzles in letters he sent to them. In one missive, he asks his recipient to 'analyse logically [a] piece of reasoning'; in another he urges them to 'strictly' apply 'the rules of Logic' to a particular question.

Dodgson's (March 21) 1886 letter to the nineteen-year-old Charlotte Rix, offers an elaborate example. In it, Dodgson invited 'Lotte' to consider logically the question of who was likely to have sent her an anonymous gift of some pens. Was it more probable, he asks, that the pens were sent by one person or two different people? What, in all likelihood, was the sex, age and character of the giver? And was it probable that the giver was a close friend or a mere acquaintance? With mock seriousness, and palpable relish, Dodgson unpicks and unpacks these questions, before arriving at the

³ I am indebted to Mark Taylor for stating the question in these legal terms.

⁴ I am grateful to Professor Bruce Bashford and his wife for this suggestion.

paradoxical conclusion that the giver was most probably ‘a niggardly man’. A paradox in logic occurs when correct reasoning, from sound premises, leads to a self-contradictory or logically unacceptable argument, or to a conclusion that appears absurd but is in fact demonstrably true. The paradoxical conclusion Dodgson arrives at suggests a further question to him: ‘why should [a niggardly man] give presents at all?’. Dodgson confesses to Lotte that this question is unanswerable, using the conventional tools of logic.

There seems to be a logical flaw in Dodgson’s reasoning here. How else could he arrive at such a paradoxical conclusion? Dodgson, the Socratic logician, may have hoped that his young pupil and disciple Lotte would be able to identify and demonstrate where the mistake in his logic lies. Dodgson believed that logical exercises provided mental recreation and discipline, and taught people how to detect invalid arguments whenever they encountered them – in newspapers, political speeches and from the pulpit, where bad logic was, Dodgson believed, a ‘real danger’ to Christianity. That may be the main reason he wanted to introduce his acquaintances to the subject – he thought it would protect their souls.

Perhaps Dodgson’s letter to Mrs Morrell contains a similar kind of logical puzzle to the one in his letter to Lotte. In asking her (and her husband) to answer the question – which is the correct reason why I cannot attend your dinner, reason A or reason B? – Dodgson may have been hoping they would have applied the rules of logic to it. Had they done so they would have arrived at the answer A, via the syllogism mentioned above, and also identified Dodgson’s red herring (i.e. a deliberate informal fallacy introduced to distract the reader from the key issue) viz. – his introduction of a second hypothetical reason (the Prices’ invitation) for his declining her invitation when there was no logical grounds for doing so. A reply from Mrs Morrell which mentioned such points would surely have gratified Dodgson.

It seems unlikely that Dodgson would have expected Mrs Morrell to take her logical analysis further than this, by expressing and exploring his question in the mathematical terms used by professional logicians. It is not impossible however, given Dodgson’s conviction that anyone could and should master logic (which was why he wrote introductory books on the subject for children). It is also the case that Dodgson’s question to Mrs Morrell can be

stated and analysed formally, using mathematical terms. The following logical analysis has been compiled by Dr Mark Taylor, a fellow in Astrophysics at the University of Bristol, and an erstwhile student of formal logic:

Logical analysis of Dodgson's question by Dr Mark Taylor

Notation:

$\sim x$ - NOT x - x is false
 $x \& y$ - x AND y - both x and y are true
 $x \mid y$ - x OR y - either x or y or both are true
 $x \rightarrow y$ - x IMPLIES y - if x then y [equivalent to $(x \& y) \mid \sim x$]

Consider these propositions (possible states of affairs):

L: accept invitation to London
B: accept invitation to the Bonamy Prices'
M: accept invitation to the Morrells'

You can make the following logical statements about these, because of their semantics:

P1: $\sim(L \& B)$ - can't accept both L and the BPs'
P2: $\sim(L \& M)$ - can't accept both L and Mrs M
P3: $\sim(B \& M)$ - can't accept both the BPs' and Mrs M

Dodgson then asks the question: What is the reason that M is false? (i.e. why am I not accepting your invitation?)

which is equivalent to solving for x the equation

$$x \rightarrow \sim M$$

so we have to identify the value of x in

$$(x \& \sim M) \mid \sim x$$

He raises and dismisses two possible values for x : B and L. I.e. he considers both propositions Q1 and Q2:

Q1: $L \rightarrow \sim M$ - I can't come because I'm going London
Q2: $B \rightarrow \sim M$ - I can't come because I'm going to the BPs'

But in fact neither Q1 nor Q2 is entailed by the givens P1-3, which is why he says he doesn't know why he can't come.

But if we try $x = (L \mid B)$, we get Q3:

Q3: $(L \mid B) \rightarrow \sim M$ - can't come because either I'm going to London or I'm going to the BPs'

You can prove that Q3 is true if you add the additional postulate:

P4: $L \mid B \mid M$ - will accept at least one of the invites

since then $\sim M = L \mid B$, so

Q3: $(L \mid B) \rightarrow \sim M$
= $((L \mid B) \& \sim M) \mid \sim(L \mid B)$
= $(\sim M \& \sim M) \mid \sim(\sim M)$
= $\sim M \mid M$
= true QED [excluded middle]

This means that, given P4, the answer to 'why can't I accept your invitation' is neither London (L) nor the Bonamy Prices' invitation (B), but the disjunction of the two: London or the Bonamy Prices' ($L \mid B$).

Note that if you don't introduce P4, which is not explicitly stated in the text, you don't even get that – the interpretation there is that given Dodgson has the option to stay home, neither London nor the Bonamy Prices are probably to blame for his absence from Mrs. Morrell's.

The Morrell letter and the *Alice* books

Lewis Carroll enjoyed setting logical puzzles for his fictional characters (and his readers) just as much as Dodgson enjoyed setting them for his friends. The eponymous heroine of the *Alice* books sometimes tries to detect flawed logic in the arguments of the characters who populate Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land. In *Alice's Adventures*, a pigeon sees Alice and concludes that she is a serpent because her neck is long and because she is looking for eggs. 'I'm a little girl' she contradicts him, 'little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents'. 'I don't believe it,' the pigeon responds, 'but if they do they are a kind of serpent.' As the philosopher Peter Alexander remarks, the pigeon

is making a logical fallacy here known as ‘the fallacy of affirming the consequent’, which is revealed when the argument is restated as: ‘If this is a serpent it will eat eggs / It does eat eggs / Therefore it is a serpent’. This is an example of what Carroll referred to in his novel *Sylvie and Bruno* as a ‘sillygism’, where a ‘delusion’ is ‘produced by two prim misses’. It is invalid because ‘the premises do not warrant the conclusion that only serpents eat eggs’.⁵

Alice lacks the training in logic to identify and demonstrate logical errors, such as the one made by the pigeon (the books that bear her name constitute a sort of crash course in logic for both Alice and the reader). The arguments of the inhabitants of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land consequently leave her in ‘great perplexity’. She senses there is a ‘mistake’ in many of them but can rarely put her finger on it. She struggles to ‘put things more clearly’; her refrain in the books is ‘I don’t know ... I can’t understand’.

In his letter to Mrs Morrell Dodgson echoes Alice. Apparently unable to see his ‘way out’ of the problem of explaining why he cannot accept the Morrells’ dinner invitation, he remarks: ‘I don’t know why ... [I can’t] make out why I can’t come ... I hope Mr Morrell ... will be able to see his way out of it: I can’t.’ Reading these words we think of Carroll’s hapless heroine lost in Looking-glass Land, unable to find ‘a way out’ of the wood where things have no names, or incapable of following the path that ‘leads straight to’ the top of a hill and a ‘clear view’ of the whole country.⁶

Alice occasionally succeeds in identifying flawed logic by testing a statement empirically. In *Looking-Glass*, she considers the real-life implications of the Red Queen’s rule of etiquette ‘speak when you’re spoken to’, and finds it absurd because if everybody obeyed the rule nobody would ever say

⁵ Peter Alexander, ‘Logic and the Humour of Lewis Carroll’, *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society*, 6, 1951, p. 559. Sometimes it is Alice herself who employs flawed reasoning, and in these cases the reader is left to detect it: ‘If I eat one of these cakes it will produce some change’, she thinks at the start of *Alice’s Adventures*, ‘and as I can’t get bigger I will get smaller’. This, as Peter Heath remarks in *The Philosopher’s Alice*, is a syllogism which seems formally valid but has dubious premises (see *The Philosopher’s Alice: Alice’s adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-glass by Lewis Carroll*; introduction and notes by Peter Heath (New York, 1974)).

⁶ In his letter Dodgson also echoes one of the authorial asides in *Looking-Glass*: ‘I hope you understand what thinking in chorus means’, Carroll says to the reader ‘– for I must confess that I don’t.’

anything. On occasion, the narrator of the *Alice* books also adopts an empirical and commonsensical approach to logical questions. In *Wonderland* Carroll writes ‘And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to herself, in a dreamy sort of way, “Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?” and sometimes, “Do bats eat cats?” for, you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't much matter which way she put it’. The implication is that if a question cannot be tested empirically it is meaningless. In a similar way Mrs Morrell could work out the answer to Dodgson’s question by testing it empirically – only then will she be able to identify reason A as the true reason Dodgson is declining her invitation and reason B as a red herring.

There are other similarities between Dodgson’s letter and Carroll’s *Alice* books. It is impossible to read either text without the suspicion that the author is mocking social etiquette. Politeness required Dodgson to explain, in his letter to Mrs Morrell, why he could not come to dinner, sincerely, simply and with an expression of regret. Yet his elaborate and playful explanation, and his characteristically deadpan delivery, leave the reader with serious doubts about his seriousness and sincerity. In treating the matter as one of grave seriousness, requiring convoluted explanation and justification, he exposes etiquette as mildly absurd. While Dodgson does say he is ‘sorry’ he ‘cannot accept’ the invitation, his main regret seems to be that he cannot explain why.

In a similar way, the author of the *Alice* books makes fun of propriety and social protocol. The reader laughs when Alice worries over the question of whether to shake Tweedledum or Tweedledee’s hand first, for fear of giving offence to the party she does not choose; in the end, she takes hold of both their hands at once and dances with them. After their dance she agonises over the question of how she can start a conversation ‘with people she had just been dancing with. “It would never do to say ‘How d’ye do?’ now ... we seem to have gone beyond that somehow”’.⁷

Propriety is one of the threads from which the fabric of social reality is woven. In the *Alice* books and in his letter Carroll/Dodgson enjoys

⁷ Here social protocol is revealed as mildly absurd, but the laws of etiquette laid down by the autocratic Red Queen of Looking-Glass Land are oppressive – ‘Speak when you’re spoken to!’ being, as Alice rightly sees, tantamount to telling everyone to ‘shut up’.

unstitching this thread, and we enjoy watching the spectacle, though some of us may also find it disturbing (a world without etiquette and rules might be anarchic and nightmare-ish). Carroll/Dodgson may have felt compelled to poke fun at social protocol because Dodgson found it oppressive in his daily life: one acquaintance called him ‘propriety-stricken’.

The similarities between Dodgson’s missive to Mrs Morrell and the *Alice* books demonstrate that it is the letter of a great writer, and not merely a letter which bears a great writer’s signature. In it, Dodgson/Carroll’s intellectual, imaginative and linguistic ingenuity and exuberance are on display, as is his rare gift for transforming banal episodes from everyday life into opportunities for fun, fantasy, intellectual recreation and social satire. The letter was written by an author who considered everything curiously, from a looking-glass point of view, and who wrote in an amused, provocative and anxious voice, that is instantly recognisable and impossible to forget. In the letter we hear that voice loud and clear, though what it says is far from straightforward.⁸

Appendix: Biographical notes on the people referred to in the letter

Mr Morrell was the solicitor Frederick Parker Morrell (1839-1908), the eldest of the nine children of Frederick Joseph Morrell and Elizabeth Maria Parker. Having graduated from St John’s College Oxford, Frederick Parker worked in his father’s solicitor’s office at 1 St Giles’ Street. He was solicitor to Oxford University, Steward of St John’s College from 1863-1882, and Mayor of Oxford from 1899-1900, the first graduate of the University to hold that office.

By 1861, Frederick Parker and his siblings lived with their parents at Black Hall at 21 St Giles, an ancient stone farmhouse which had belonged to his

⁸ I am enormously grateful to the following people for helping me in my attempt to elucidate Dodgson’s letter: Paul Kinsella, Bruce Bashford and his wife, Anna-Maria Biavasco, Iain Ross, and David Rose. I am especially indebted to Mark Taylor, without whose help this article could not have been written. This article is dedicated to Julia Rosenthal, a fellow Carroll-addict, who gave me the unpublished letter that is its subject, and so set me off on an amusing and enjoyable quest to understand it.

mother's family. In 1867 he married Harriette Anne Wynter, daughter of the President of St John's College, who became the Mrs Morrell Dodgson addressed in his letter. The couple lived in Black Hall, and brought up their four children in the house: Margaret Cecil Louisa (baptised 1868), Frederica Harriett (baptised 1869), Philip Edward (baptised 1870) and Hugh St John (baptised 1872).

Dodgson knew the Morrells for more than 20 years, meeting members of the family, on various occasions, between 1873 and 1893. He dined with the Morrells at least five times over that period, invited some of the family over to his rooms at Christ Church for tea, and called on them at Black Hall.⁹ Dodgson was on friendly terms with Frederick Parker, whom he consulted on legal matters¹⁰, but he appears to have been chiefly the friend of Mrs Morrell, and of her two daughters 'Margie' and Frederica, who were around five and four years old when he first met them. Dodgson's relationship with the two young girls followed the pattern of many of his child friendships – he photographed them as children, invited them to his rooms for tea and visited their family in order to see them. When the two girls became adolescents Dodgson's contact with the Morrell family became intermittent.

⁹ Dodgson's surviving diaries record dinners with the Morrells on the following dates: 29 November 1873, 12 February 1874, 3 May 1876, 9 November 1876, 27 November 1878. He also called on the family on 4 March 1879 and 1 November 1883, and had tea with Mrs Morrell and Margie in his rooms on 25 Mar 1893. *Lewis Carroll's Diaries: The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)*, ed. E. Wakeling, E. (Luton, 1993-2007) 10 volumes.

¹⁰ In a diary entry for 22 January 1877 Dodgson mentions speaking to Frederick about to a possible legal action to recover a debt.

Dodgson met Mrs Morrell at an Oxford dinner party on 29 April 1873¹¹; on the following day, he ‘called on Mrs F. Morrell and saw the little Margaret’.¹² Over the next three months he invited the three female Morrells to tea in his rooms in Christ Church, where he photographed them. On 3 May he took the following photograph of Margie in his Tom Quad rooftop studio¹³:



On 11 July 1873 he again photographed Margie in the Tom Quad rooftop studio:¹⁴

¹¹ *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, ed. Cohen, M. N. & Green, R. L. (London, 1979), p. 206 ft 4.

¹² *Lewis Carroll's Diaries* Vol 6, p. 275.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 276 note 451. E. Wakeling, *The Photographs of Lewis Carroll: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Austin, 2015), image 2123.

¹⁴ *Lewis Carroll's Diaries* Vol 6, p. 275, note 449; *The photographs of Lewis Carroll*, image 2154.



The following image of Mrs Morrell may have been taken during the same photograph session, or very soon after:¹⁵



In May 1874 Dodgson took the following photograph of Frederica:¹⁶

¹⁵ *Sotheby's Belgravia: Photographic Images and Related Material*, Wednesday 28 October, 1981, lot 380. This is image 2158 in *The photographs of Lewis Carroll*.

¹⁶ *The Photographs of Lewis Carroll*, image 2240.



Between 1873 and 1878 Dodgson dined with the Morrells at Black Hall on at least five occasions, and declined two other social invitations from them. Black Hall is a medieval farmhouse, but most of the stone building dates from the 1660s, when it was rebuilt after a fire. The house is now part of St John's College.

Mrs Morrell was a renowned figure in Oxford's intellectual and artistic circles. According to her *Times* obituary, she turned Black Hall into 'a centre of delightful hospitality alike for older and younger guests.' She apparently had the perfect qualifications for an Oxford hostess: a 'gay, youthful spirit', 'artistic and intellectual gifts of a very high order', 'beauty and dignity of appearance', and charming conversation.¹⁷ An artist herself, celebrated for her flower paintings, Mrs Morrell was the friend and host of numerous artists, as well as famous writers such as Walter Pater. Lady Ottoline Morrell, who married Mrs Morrell's son Philip, would remember her mother-in-law

¹⁷ *The Times*, 11 November, 1924.

as ‘a most gifted and unusually charming person, lively, witty, critical ... an important figure in Oxford, very much more remarkable in taste and entertaining than any other woman there. She had gathered round her in [her] beautiful house many interesting people who found her a delightful and witty friend and hostess. Indeed, Henry James, it is said, took from her the inspiration for *The Spoils of Poynton*.’¹⁸

Henry James’ novel features the widow Mrs. Gereth who amasses an unparalleled collection of furniture and other art objects at Poynton, her home. “There isn’t one of them I don’t know and love”, she says, “... Blindfold, in the dark, with the brush of a finger, I could tell one from another. They’re living things to me; they know me, they return the touch of my hand.” There are certain similarities between Poynton and Black Hall, which James visited in the summer of 1894. Mrs Morrell had an impressive collection of antique furniture, as well as tapestries and paintings. ‘Year after year’, according to *The Times* ‘she added to [Black Hall’s] treasures’, with acquisitions and art works of her own creation, ‘till it became under her spell, a dwelling of exceptional beauty’.¹⁹

Black Hall provided the setting for Dodgson’s 1870s dinners with the Morrells, and he seems to have enjoyed his visits there. He passed ‘a very pleasant evening’ with the family on one occasion; on another, ‘he dined with Mr and Mrs F Morrell and Miss Wynter [Mrs Morrell’s sister] and heard some delightful singing’.²⁰ Following that dinner he sent Mrs Morrell a number of Russian and nursery songs which ‘your sister may like to sing and Margie to listen to’, along with the music for the stage version of *Alice*.²¹

When the two Morrell girls grew up Dodgson saw much less of their family, ostensibly because it would have seemed improper for a middle-aged bachelor to entertain girls of a marriageable-age (girls and boys could legally marry at 12), but also because he was less interested in adolescents than in children. His last encounter with one of the girls as children was in March 1879 when he ‘called at the Morrells, and found Margie at home’.²²

¹⁸ *The Early Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell*, Gathorne-Hardy. R. (ed.) (London, 1963), p. 125.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 11 November, 1924.

²⁰ 12 February 1874 (*Diaries*, Vol 6, p. 323 & 29 November, 1873 (*Ibid.*, pp. 304–5).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 305 note 504. The letter is dated 1 December 1873.

²² 4 March, 1879, *Ibid.*, Vol 7., p. 163.

Dodgson re-established contact with Margie when she was in her twenties and he was an 'elderly bachelor' (the same thing occurred with other child friends). He invited Margie and her mother to tea in 1893 ('I have almost lost sight of the daughters', he wrote after that visit, 'since they came to be photographed 20 years ago!').²³ Dodgson would see Margie again that year. That may have been the last time he saw a member of the Morrell family.

The other Oxford character mentioned in Dodgson's letter is Bonamy Price (1807-1888) who (fittingly, given his surname) was Drummond Professor of Political Economy at Oxford from 1868 until his death. Price had been a Mathematics teacher at Rugby School during Dodgson's time as a student there. The pair were re-acquainted at Oxford in 1856, and met frequently in the 1870s and early 1880s. Dodgson's surviving diaries reveal that he dined with the Prices seven times between 1874 and 1884.²⁴ Dodgson regarded Bonamy Price as an 'excellent host' and after one dinner stayed chatting with the family and their guests 'till nearly 12'.²⁵ Dodgson knew the extended Price family too, and photographed Bonamy Price's grandchildren.

Dating the letter

In dating his letter 'May 22' Dodgson broke one of the golden rules of letter writing he laid down in his pamphlet 'Eight or Nine Wise Words about Letter-Writing' (1889): 'put the date in full. It is another aggravating thing, when you wish, years afterwards, to arrange a series of letters, to find them dated " Feb. 17 ", " Aug. 2 ", without any year to guide you as to which comes first.' And so, aggravatingly, we must guess the year in which the letter was written.

Dodgson's surviving diaries show that he dined with the Morrells over the period 1873-1878 and with the Prices between 1874-1884. As the letter mentions an invitation to dine from both families it seems likely Dodgson

²³ 25 Mar 1893, *Ibid.*, Vol 9., p. 59.

²⁴ On 2 February 1874, 20 October 1876, 1 November 1877, 18 November 1881, 29 May 1882, 21 May 1883 and 28 November 1884.

²⁵ On 18 November 1881 *Ibid.*, Vol 7., p 377; 2 Feb 1874, *Ibid.*, Vol 6., p. 320.

would have written it during the period when he dined with them both – at some point in the 1870s or the 1880s. As Bonamy Price died in 1888 Dodgson's letter must have been written before that year since it is unlikely he would have referred to the professor's family as 'the Bonamy Prices' after his decease.

At least six other letters from Dodgson to Mrs Morrell have survived. Two of these were published in *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*²⁶, and three of them were printed in *The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*.²⁷ A further letter, sold at Bonhams in 2015, was partially published in the catalogue for the auction.²⁸ These six letters are all written in the friendly and frank tone that characterises the Dodgson letter under discussion, and so confirm the cordiality of his friendship with the Morrells. None of the six letters, however, appears to bear any obvious relationship to this Dodgson letter (they do not, for instance, contain any further references to the 'notes' Dodgson thanks Mrs Morrell for) nor do they shed any light on its date.

Biographical significance of the letter

This letter offers an insight into Dodgson's social life, confirming his close links with the Morrell and Price families. It shows he spent some of his free time at the heart of Oxford's intellectual and artistic social life, receiving invitations from the 'excellent host' Bonamy Price, and from Mrs Morrell, one of the most renowned hostesses in Oxford in the late-Victorian period. Dodgson's reference to a London visit, with a Saturday night stopover, reminds us how frequently he made brief weekend visits to the capital by train, often to see a play at a West End theatre.

The letter also offers an example of Dodgson's habit of refusing dinner invitations. In his 1898 biography of Dodgson, his nephew S.D. Collingwood commented:

²⁶ They are dated Jan 30, 1874 and February 12, 1874 and appear in *Letters* on pages 206 & 208.

²⁷ The letters are dated 1 December 1873, 30 May 1890, and 9 June 1893. They are published in *Diaries* in vol 6., p. 305 note 504; Vol 8., pp.509-10, note 820; and Vol 9., p. 74 note 136.

²⁸ *Fine Books and Manuscripts including the Autograph Collection of Harry E. Gould, JR*, Bonhams, 9 Dec 2015, NEW YORK. Parts of the letter, which is dated November 5, 1892, can be read here: <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/22509/lot/30/>

... he always refused invitations to dinner; accordingly his friends who knew of this peculiarity, and wished to secure him for a special evening, dared not actually invite him, but wrote him little notes stating that on such and such days they would be dining at home. Thus there is an entry in his Journal for February 10th: 'Dined with Mrs. G (She had not sent an "invitation" — only "information.")'.²⁹

In the light of this, one wonders what sort of 'invitation' Mrs Morrell sent Dodgson, and also whether he would have attended the dinner even if he had been free on the Saturday evening in question. On at least two other occasions he declined an invitation from the Morrells — in 1874, when he said he had to travel to Guildford to vote in an election, and in 1890 when he protested he was 'too much of a Hermit now' to attend dinner parties.³⁰ The fact that Dodgson did not, in the letter under discussion, decline the invitation by making a similar remark about his dislike of social engagements, supports the idea that it was written before 1890. By that time Dodgson saw himself as an elderly man, entitled to turn down invitations on the grounds of his venerable age.

Thomas Wright is the author of *Circulation* (Chatto, 2012), the Wellcome-Book-Prize-winning work on William Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood, and *Oscar's Books* (Chatto, 2008), an exploration of Oscar Wilde's library, and its influence on his life (Wilde was an admirer of Carroll, and the 'Alice' books helped him create the 'looking-glass' world of 'The Importance of Being Earnest'). Thomas lives in Mantova, Italy, where he teaches English.

²⁹ S.D. Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll (Rev. C.L. Dodgson)* (London, 1898), pp. 335–6.

³⁰ *Letters*, p. 206 & *Diaries*, Vol 6., pp 509-510, ft 820.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Isa Bowman in film

Dear Editor,

According to Wikipedia, Isa Bowman (1874-1958) was an actress all her life but she appeared only once in a film. I thought I would look into this to see if there were any existing images of her. She appeared in the British light comedy 'Vote for Huggett' in 1949. This was the second in the series starring Jack Warner (most famous as Dixon of Dock Green), Kathleen Harrison and a very young Petula Clark.

Isa appears with two of her sisters, Empsie and Nellie and they play three eccentric old ladies. They are not separately billed in the cast so you have to make up your own mind which is Isa. The film can be seen on YouTube <https://youtu.be/Y0TZH7Cytt8>. The Bowman sisters appear with a very young David Tomlinson at 55 minutes 30 secs through the film and again at 1 hour 16 m and 30 secs. They are also listed in the end credits at 1hr 20. 47 where the middle one of the bracketed 'Three Old Ladies' is Isa.

Yours truly,

Bob Cole



THE LEWIS CARROLL SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 1187658

www.lewiscarrollsociety.org.uk

The Lewis Carroll Society was founded in 1969 to promote interest in the life of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson and the study of the works published under his real name and under his famous pseudonym, Lewis Carroll. The Society's large international membership includes representatives of the Dodgson family and the world's leading Carroll authorities as well as major libraries and institutions. Members receive issues of the *Carrollian* as well as *Lewis Carroll Review* (containing reviews of new books, plays, exhibitions, etc) and *Bandersnatch* the Society's newsletter. The Society also engages in a number of activities including organising conferences, meetings and publishing major works such as Lewis Carroll's diaries.