

Alice Liddell

(Alice Pleasance Liddell Hargreaves)

May 4, 1852 (Westminster, UK) – Nov 16, 1934 (Westerham, UK)

WHEN MRS. REGINALD HARGREAVES of Hampshire, England, passed away in 1934, the marker for her burial place in the graveyard of the Church of St. Michael and All Angels, makes an interesting claim:

*THE GRAVE OF MRS. REGINALD HARGREAVES
THE "ALICE" IN LEWIS CARROLL'S
"ALICE IN WONDERLAND."*

Many believe that Alice Hargreaves was the inspiration for the little girl who followed the flustered White Rabbit down the rabbit hole and into Wonderland.

And do you know what?

There is poetic evidence, hidden in plain sight by Lewis Carroll, that Mrs. Reginald Hargreaves was indeed, "Alice," as the marker at her gravesite proclaims.

When Alice Pleasance Liddell was born, her father, Henry Liddell, was Headmaster of the Westminster School in London.

Three years later, he became the Dean of Christ Church College, a satellite facility of the University of Oxford. It was an excellent career opportunity and one that required a family move.

Also at Oxford during the mid-1850s was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a student who was at the top of the list of those graduating from Oxford's School of Mathematics.

In addition to being a mathematically gifted student, Dodgson was an excellent photographer, a talented artist, a deacon in the Anglican Church, and an excellent writer. It would be for the last gift that he would become famous using the pen name, "Lewis Carroll."

The path that Dodgson took to choose a pen name will only confirm your already biased view regarding the twisted minds of mathematicians, but here's how he did it.

Charles Lutwidge, when translated into Latin, becomes *Carolus Ludovicus*. When turned back into English, however,

it can be translated as *Carroll Lewis*, a perfectly good pen name by itself.

But, the mathematician Lutwidge, like others of his ilk, couldn't leave well enough alone, and for reasons known only to himself (and perhaps a time-conscious white rabbit), he reversed the word order, liked the result, and thus wrote under the pen name of *Lewis Carroll*.

There is no reasoning with mathematicians, male or female, as any conversation with one will only leave you curiouser and curiouser.

Dodgson, as noted, was an excellent photographer, and many of his photographs have survived to the present day.

Roughly half of his surviving photographs are of young girls; the other half are of boys, men, women, landscapes, trees, statues, dogs, posed skeletons, and portraits of notables such as Michael Faraday, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and others.

When Henry Liddell, the new College Dean and his family moved to Oxford, Dodgson found himself watching the Liddell children play beneath his office window.

Then, in April of 1856, while photographing a local Cathedral, four-year-old Alice innocently wandered into the frame of the photograph he was about to take – and into his life. This led to Dodgson's friendship with the Liddell family and of his taking numerous pictures of the children, especially Alice.

By 1863, Dodgson was taking Alice (now eleven years old) and her two sisters on picnics and boating excursions around Oxford, entertaining them with fantastic stories about, well, we really don't know what his stories were about because we weren't there, but we do know that in 1863 a rift occurred between the Liddell family and Dodgson.

Speculation suggests that Dodgson's interest in young Alice may have grown into something more than platonic.

Dodgson (as Lewis Carroll) went on to write several children's books, the first of which was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*.

The following untitled poem appears on the last page of *Through the Looking Glass*, and it's central to the reason why Mrs. Reginald (Alice Liddell) Hargreaves may very well be Charles Dodgson's "Alice."¹

Unless you're very good at solving acrostic puzzles, you will likely not discover Dodgson's reference to Alice Liddell within the following verse.² After all, no one discovered it until sometime after he wrote it, but it will be revealed to you when you are finished.

*A boat beneath a sunny sky,
Lingering onward dreamily
In an evening of July –*

*Children three that nestle near,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Pleased a simple tale to hear –*

*Long has faded that sunny sky:
Echos fade and memories die.
Autumn frosts have slain July.*

*Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under the skies
Never seen by waking eyes.*

*Children yet, the tale to hear,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Lovingly shall nestle near.*

*In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die:*

*Ever drifting down the stream –
Lingering in the golden gleam –
Life, what is it but a dream?*

Years after *Through the Looking Glass* was published, the above verse was discovered to be an “acrostic verse,” meaning that a word or phrase lies hidden somewhere within the lines of poetry.

In this case, the key is the first letter of each line. Try it, and you'll find that the first letter of each line, reading downward, spells out "Alice Pleasance Liddell," who later in life became Mrs. Reginald Hargreaves.

It's apparent that during the writing of *Through the Looking Glass*, that "Alice," the little girl that the mathematician-writer Charles Lutwidge Dodgson took on picnics and photographed numerous times at locations around Oxford, was someone who was never far from Lewis Carroll's mind.

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1. Lewis Carroll's untitled poem that appears at the end of his second book, *Through the Looking Glass*, is sometimes informally referred to by the poem's first line, *A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky*.
 2. Acrostics can be found in the text of Valentines, in farewell speeches, in eulogies, on tombstones, and even within books like Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*.

Note: An acrostic is a series of lines or verses in which the first, last, or other particular letters, when taken in order, spell out a word or phrase. For example, a single acrostic is formed by the initial letters of each line, as done in Lewis Carroll's acrostic. A double acrostic uses the initial and final letters of each line, and there are other, more complicated forms. In Edgar Allan Poe's acrostic poem, *A Valentine*, he uses the first letter of the first line, the second letter of the second line, the third letter of the third line, etc.

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Which form of proverb do you prefer?
"Better late than never," or "Better never than late."
 Lewis Carroll (1832–1898) author