

## Overview

**Alice, the protagonist of both books, was inspired by the daughter of Henry Liddell, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford. Lewis Carroll told Alice the story while rowing on the river Isis near Godstow.**

Alice



Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) (1832-1898). Photographer unknown (19th-century).

Godstow is a town on the river Isis (upper Thames) just south of the site of Woodstock Castle in Oxfordshire. Henry I had built a hunting lodge on the site, which was extended into a splendid palace by Henry II. When Blenheim Palace, a mansion situated in Woodstock, was built by the Duke of Marlborough between 1705 and about 1724, the remains of Woodstock Castle were demolished.

Lewis Carroll, the author of both *Alice* books, was physically associated with the locale, because Alice's parents would sometimes visit Blenheim Palace, from which the original site of the castle was visible. On one such occasion, John Ruskin (the leading art and architecture critic of the 19th century,

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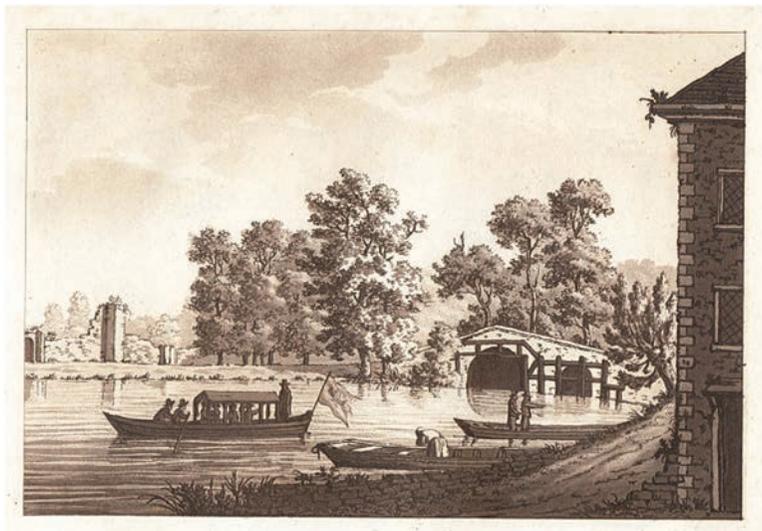
**Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine's long life of 82 years dominated the culture of 12th century Western Europe. But her stepdaughter Alice played a subordinate role in the royal intrigue.**

Eleanor



Effigy of Eleanor of Aquitaine at Fontevault (-1210).

Eleanor, who grew up in the region of southwestern France known as Aquitaine, was granddaughter of the duke who founded the troubadour tradition of knightly chivalry and courtly love. She became Duchess of the region herself at age 15. She soon married the heir to the French throne and almost immediately became Queen of France (and Aquitaine), setting off on a series of adventures with her husband, King Louis VII, to consolidate their power and then on a crusade to recover Jerusalem from the Saracens. In the process, she discovered that Louis was too religious to make a good husband and arranged for the marriage to be annulled on the grounds that they were fourth cousins. Eleanor was now 30.



Godstow bridge & remains of the Nunnery (19th century sepia aquatint).

who happened to be Alice's painting tutor at the time) writes in his memoirs about visiting Alice Liddell that evening:

“For, that evening, the Dean and Mrs. Liddell dined by command at Blenheim: but the girls were not commanded; and as I had been complaining of never getting a sight of them lately, after knowing them from the nursery, Alice said that she thought, perhaps, if I would come round after papa and mama were safe off to Blenheim . . .”

*The Works of John Ruskin, vol 35, p 505-506.*

Dean Liddell, who had been a personal chaplain to Queen Victoria's husband, Albert, often played host in Oxford to members of the royal family, such as Edward, Prince of Wales and Alexandra just after their wedding in 1863, and Princess Alice, the second daughter of Queen Victoria.

“Shortly before the resignation of Dr. Liddell, the Duchess of Albany [Princess Alice] spent a few days at the Deanery. Mr. Dodgson was asked to meet her Royal Highness at luncheon, but was unable to go. Princess Alice and the little Duke of Albany, however, paid him a visit, and were initiated in the art of making paper pistols. He promised to send the Princess a copy of a book called *The Fairies*, and the children, having spent a happy half-hour in his rooms, returned to the Deanery. This was one of the days that he ‘marked with a white stone.’ He sent a copy of *The Nursery ‘Alice’* to the little Princess Alice, and received a



Louis VII marrying Eleanor of Aquitaine and departing on the Second Crusade (14th century).

Heading back to Aquitaine, Eleanor eluded other suitors and met up with the 19-year-old Henry, Duke of Normandy, heir to the English throne, having earlier had a dalliance with his father, Geoffrey of Anjou. She soon married Henry, even though they were third cousins. When his father died of a fever, Henry asserted his claim to the English throne and defeated Stephen, the other claimant, becoming the first monarch to be crowned as King of England at Westminster Abbey, in 1154, where Eleanor was subsequently crowned Queen of England in a separate ceremony.

Eleanor held court at various palaces in England (Oxford, Woodstock, Marlborough, Clarendon, Lambeth, Westminster, Windsor, Winchester, Wallingford, Dover) and France (Poitiers, Bordeaux, Chinon, Saumur, Limoges, Bayeux, Niort, Rouen, Angers, Barfleur, Argentan, Domfront, Falaise, Le Mans). [See Alison Weir and Marion Meade for details]. From 1169, the court included the young princess Alice Capet of France, who was engaged at age 9 to Eleanor's son Richard (the future Lionheart) and travelled with the court as an earnest of their intentions to link the futures of the two kingdoms, as laid out in the Treaty of Montmirail.



The Grand Bridge, Blenheim, near Woodstock (built 1710).

note of thanks from her, and also a letter from her mother, in which she said that the book had taught the Princess to like reading, and to do it out of lesson-time. To the Duke he gave a copy of a book *The Merry Elves*. In his little note of thanks for this gift, the boy said, 'Alice and I want you to love us both. Mr. Dodgson sent Princess Alice a puzzle, promising that if she found it out, he would give her a 'golden chair from Wonderland'.'

*Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, 1898, p. 298.*

Princess Alice's brother was Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany, who had difficulty finding a wife due to his haemophilia. Some have suggested that he considered marrying Alice Liddell, whom he knew as an undergraduate at Christ Church college, Oxford. Indeed, Alice managed to give him a black eye with a blow from a wayward oar when she was rowing with him on a trip to Iffley, which must have been a notable event for a hemophiliac. Leopold was President of the University Chess Club and must have known Lewis Carroll and most likely played chess with Alice herself. (Perhaps, as a chess devotee, he was even the model for the Red King, in whose dream Alice imagined herself before he awoke.) He later became godfather of Alice Liddell's second son, who was named Leopold for him and known as 'Rex' (i.e., 'king'), and Leopold in turn named one of his daughters Alice.



Eleanor of Aquitaine (on the left) with a companion (13th century).

The title Countess of the Princess passed to Alice when her sister Margaret married the King of Hungary in 1186. The Vexin, with its capital Gisors, was the most disputed territory in the struggles between England and France to control the Western provinces of modern France. Alice, the half-sister of king Philip Augustus of France, was successively associated with the English kings Henry II, Richard I and John, and was the major pawn in the power game with king Philip Augustus to recover France's original territory lost to Henry II and Queen Eleanor.

In 1173, Eleanor and her three sons raised an ill-fated rebellion against King Henry II, with the result that Eleanor was imprisoned in England for 15 years, and Alice moved to Henry's court. It was not until well after Henry's death and the abrogation of Alice's engagement to Richard the Lionheart that she was finally married at the age of 35, to William III Talvas of Ponthieu in 1195, and acquired the title Countess of Ponthieu.