

THE WONDERFUL CASE OF ALICE

GERALD DAVIS

If Victoria Anne Alexander has not earned a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's youngest personality to influence philatelic research, I shall give up drinking the stuff.

It happened in this way. Her parents, those intrepid philatelic journalists, well known as authors of "Heads and Tails" were celebrating the year of their child with her issue on, surprisingly enough, 4th July 1979. They were therefore far too preoccupied to locate all the pictures (and conversations) for their feature of that week, so they asked me if I would loan them an example of "The Wonderland Postage-Stamp-Case" invented by Lewis Carroll. This was illustrated in STAMP COLLECTING 2nd August 1979.

In a letter to the Editor of 15th September 1979 Mr. Norman P. Biddle of Guildford said that he did not think that the illustration could possibly be of the "original Postage-Stamp case ... published by Lewis Carroll". Mr. Biddle provided an illustration from the Collector's Book of Children's Books and he pointed out that the type face was different from mine which he explained, could not have been earlier than 1902. Since mine was inscribed MDCCCLXXXIX (or 1889 now that we have gone metric) we had a situation very akin to the mad tea party. "... perhaps," said the Hatter: "but you could keep it [the time] to half past one as long as you liked."

Subsequently Jean Alexander and I laid our cards on the table, together with envelopes and stamp cases. We had three between us which looked at first glance identical. We met in a room frequented exclusively by collectors. Almost every second person as they passed us said, "Oh, a Lewis Carroll Stamp Case, I have one of those." There seemed to be so many people who had one in a space of about twelve minutes that we wondered whether we had in fact got anything which would throw light on the matter. We also had three copies of the little booklet and suddenly Jean noticed that her copy was dated on the cover "1890" - "... which certainly was not there before ...", because she had been looking at my copy which had "first published 1890" on the inside.

"Curiouser and curiouser," cried Jean (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English ... or even Scottish). It seemed we had a problem on our hands and the only thing one can do with a mystery is to solve it.

Lewis Carroll wrote:

"Necessity is the mother of invention"; and it was the constant worry of never having ready to hand, when one wanted it, a postage stamp of the right value for a letter or parcel, which drove me to invent my 'Wonderland Postage-Stamp Case', which contains twelve pockets, marked for stamps of various values and two coloured Pictorial Surprises from 'Alice in Wonderland'. It is accompanied with a small book 'Eight or Nine Wise Words About Letter Writing'."

This appeared in *The Lady* on 7th April 1892 under "SYZYGIES - Things to think about - for all Writers of Letters". It was an advertisement for the items it describes, since the *Diaries*¹ confirm that the Wonderland Postage Stamp Case was invented precisely on 29th October 1888 and it is known that the publication of the booklet "... *Wise Words* ..." was over a year later.

The stamp case itself is in two parts. A stamp holder and an outer case. The holder containing twelve stamp size pockets is formed of two sheets of paper (one with "half moon" shaped cuts) sewn together [Fig. 1]. The horizontal lines of stitching are 30mm between each row. This holder is

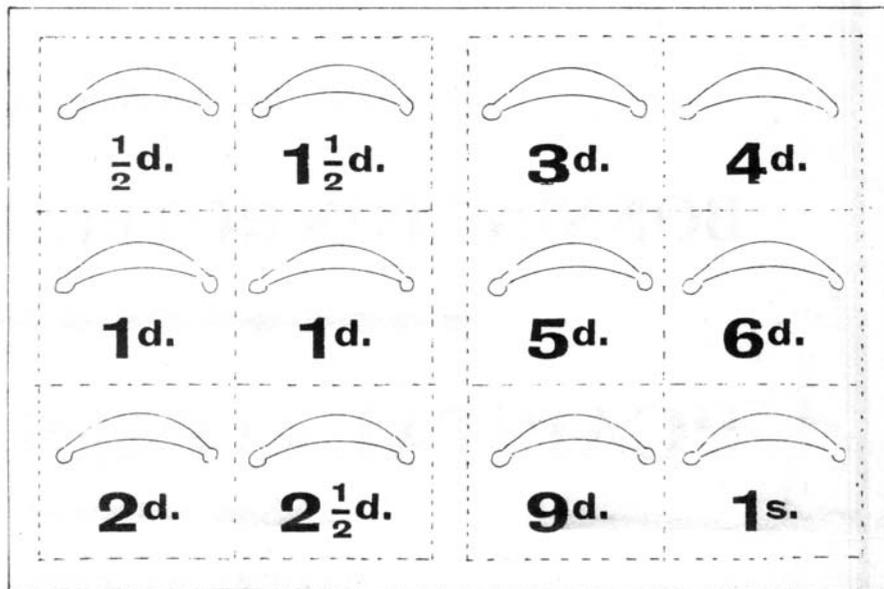


Fig. 1 The stamp holder (actual size 146 x 97mm.)

folded down the centre so that there are six pockets each side. Two of them are labelled "1d" because the ten pence stamp of the so-called "Jubilee" set was not issued until 24th February 1890, and the penny value was used more frequently than the others.

It has been suggested that the holder was the prototype of the familiar article we all now know as a stock book but I doubt it,

because I have a folding pocket chess set stitched on the same principle with pockets exactly the same size, made of paper covered in celluloid which was almost certainly made before 1887.

When the holder is closed it shows a picture of Alice holding the pig [Fig. 2]. It should now be slid, fold first, to protect the stamps, into the outer case made of linen-backed paper with, on the front², a picture of Alice holding the baby [Fig. 3]. On turning the outer case over, there is on the reverse, the Cheshire Cat [Fig. 4] and on withdrawing the holder only the Cat's grin can be seen [Fig. 5]. The apparent quick changes were what Lewis Carroll called his "Two Coloured Pictorial Surprises". Tame as this may seem to us it was in character with the inventor's whimsical personality. Only Alice holding the baby is new; the other three illustrations appear in the book *Alice in Wonderland*.

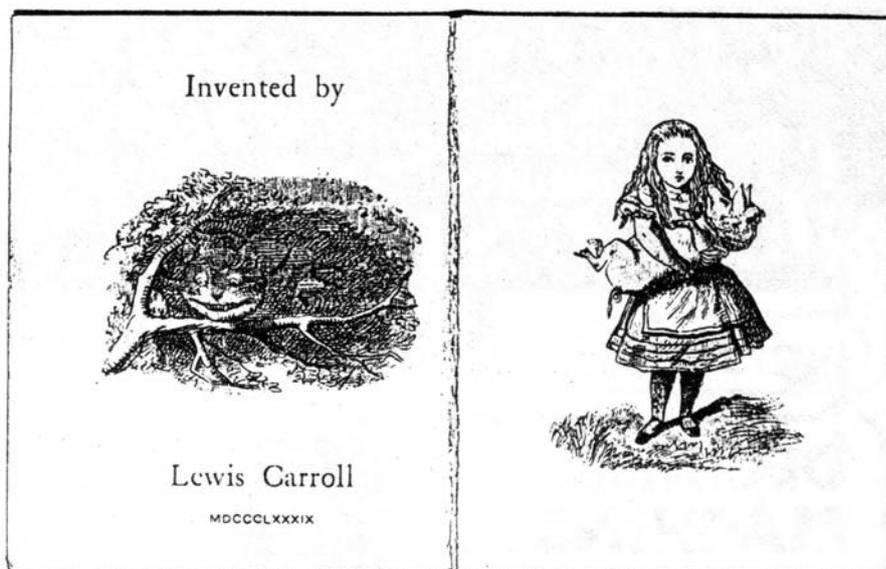


Fig. 5 (left) and Fig. 2 (right). (Actual overall size 155 x 98mm).

The *Wise Words* are connected with and are in some sense an advertisement for the Wonderland Postage-Stamp Case: copies of the *Wise Words* as a booklet were given without the Stamp Case when there was occasion but sometimes the two items were circulated in a pink envelope containing both. Unfortunately in some descriptions the outer case is called an envelope - which causes confusion.

The Stamp Case (both parts) is the oldest of the three items. There is a presentation copy dated March 1890 in the Parrish Collection³. The earliest known presentation of the *Wise Words* was 18th June 1890. The Envelope, which could not have been made until it was decided to combine the Stamp Case with the booklet, makes up the set of three, of which the earliest known presentation was 31st July 1890 (the Kern Copy).

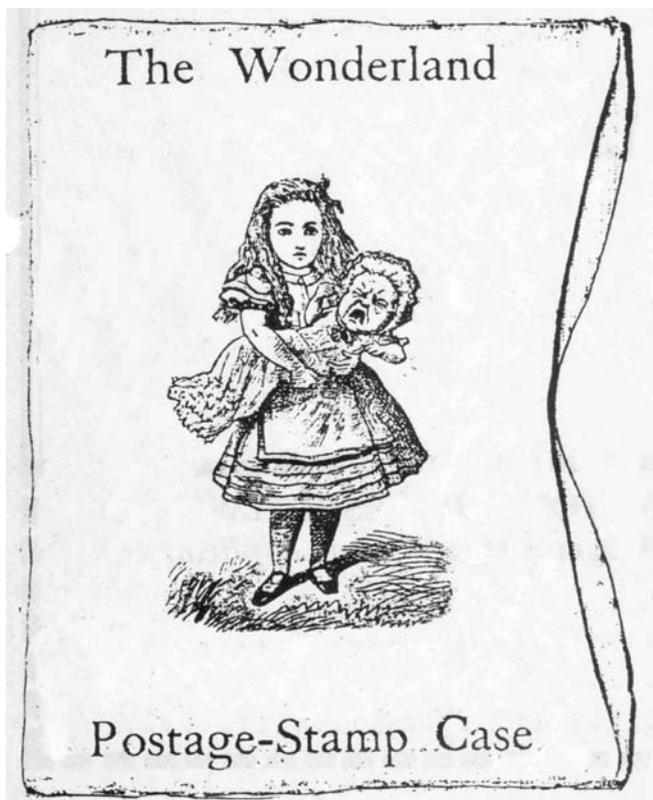


Fig. 3

acceptance over years of use within the world of stamps. Thus some authorities on the works of Lewis Carroll who can classify exactly the booklet *Wise Words* and the *Envelope* by the type differences find it hard to regard an item reproduced by photolithography such as the Stamp Case, which exhibits very minor differences, with the same significance as do stamp collectors, who lack a precise terminology.

The *Lewis Carroll Handbook* by S. H. Williams and Falconer Madon, edited by Roger Lancelyn Green in 1962, described and listed various editions and reprints of all four items [i.e. Stamp Holder, Outer Case, Booklet and Envelope]. The whole matter had become complicated as some items had become separated and some 'sets' are known made up from various sources. When Denis Crutch revised the *Handbook* in the 1979 Edition he succeeded in eliminating errors and

It appears from the *Diaries* that on 2nd July 1890 Messrs Emberlin "began the sale after receiving 75 Stamp Cases 150 *Wise Words* and 950 Envelopes". These numbers are themselves curious. Such a round figure as 150 *Wise Words* does not include the presentation copy of a fortnight earlier and similarly the number of Stamp Cases cannot include that presented in March of the same year. Surely the author would have kept a copy or two at least for himself by this date. One might wonder why so many Envelopes were printed with only so few Stamp Cases, the popularity of which could not then have been anticipated. It is possible that a standard existing envelope was available and it was simpler to run off the whole batch while at the press.

Bibliophiles who talk of "editions" and "impressions" (of printed type) use a different yardstick from philatelists. The latter have for long made up their own rules and vocabulary, much of which is illogical yet has found

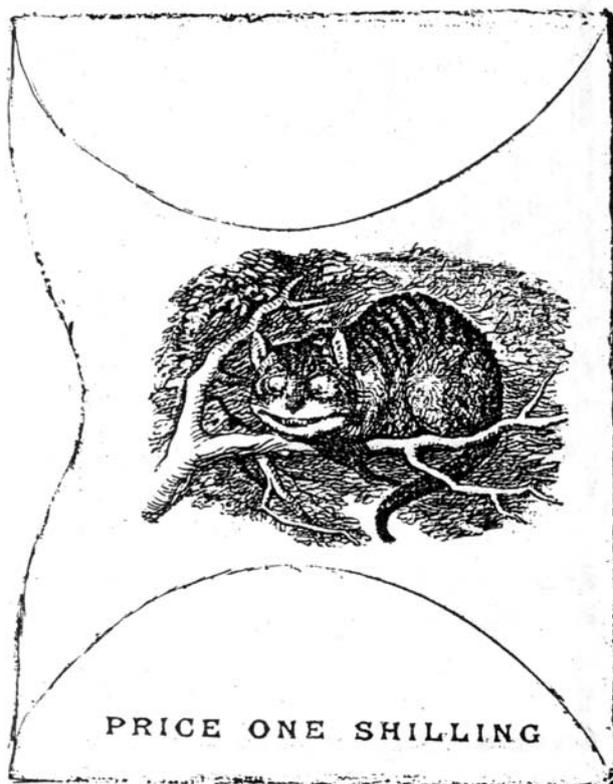


Fig. 4

ambiguities and added much new material in the entire book (340 pp.). However he was not able to deal with, the Stamp Case in as much minute detail as philatelists would wish, partly because it was far too minor an item within the major work and partly because of the differences between printed versions and photolithographic reprints. In the following list I have adopted the terminology of Mr. Crutch with his descriptions where they apply and have called subsequent findings “issues” to distinguish them from the “editions” in the 1979 version of the *Handbook*. Readers should be aware that almost any item from early editions are of the greatest rarity and many things offered for sale described as “...in the original envelope...” may not be contemporary.

THE STAMP CASE

The Stamp Holder

This is the **First Edition** (Fig. 2 and Fig. 5) in the Parrish Catalogue⁴ reproduced by courtesy of the Princeton University Library. It is opened out flat and in spite of a ridge caused by the fold it is worth noting the relative positions of the illustrations. An horizontal line drawn across the top edge of the tree would almost cut Alice directly in the mouth. A similar line across the lower edge of the tree would cut Alice squarely on the shins.

Second Edition (Fig. 6) This is reproduced by the courtesy of the Curator of the Bodleian Library. The upper horizontal line through the outer edge of the tree would pass through Alice well below the chin while the lower line almost coincides with the straps on her shoes.

Third Edition (Fig. 7) This is the one most frequently seen. The date is in Roman letters [not sans serif] as the previous two

editions and the lines of type measure approximately 23.5mm and 26mm respectively whilst on both earlier editions the same lines measure roughly 27.5mm and 31.5mm respectively. The horizontal lines of stitching are now 28.5mm between each row and before any reader complains that stitching can vary I should explain that the measurements refer to the printed guide lines with which the stitching should coincide.

The Outer Case

[Reverse] **First Edition** (Fig. 4) This is in the Parrish Collection reproduced here by courtesy of the Princeton University Library. In the Parrish Catalogue this side is described as the “front” but as the face of any cover which shows flaps is called the reverse the writer believes that to call it the “back” will be more widely understood in future. The only wording is “PRICE ONE SHILLING”.

[Obverse] (Fig. 3)

Second Edition [Reverse] (Fig. 8) This now has the publisher’s name and address above the cat and “(POST-FREE 13d.)” below the price. This is reproduced here by the courtesy of the Bodleian library and has been dated as 1891 [Ref 247928g.4].

[Obverse] (Fig. 9) This is virtually identical to Fig. 3.

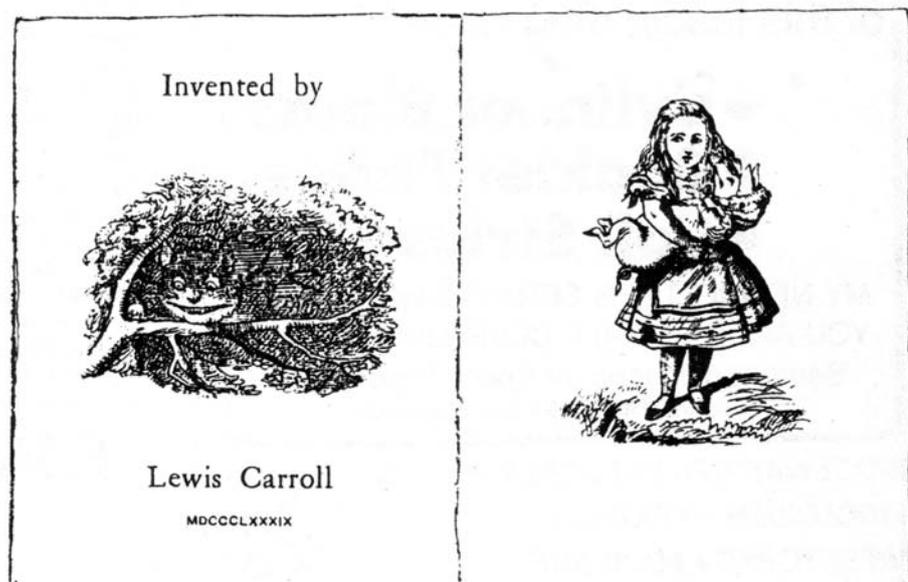


Fig. 6 (actual size overall 155 x 98mm).

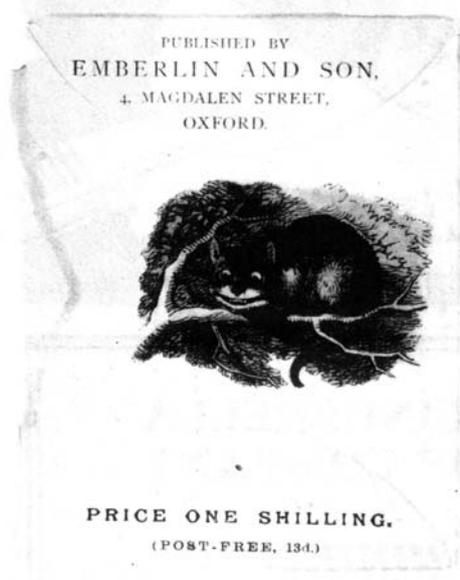


Fig. 8 (left) and Fig. 9 (right) (Each actual size 80 x 106mm).

Fourth Issue [Reverse] (Fig. 11) Reproduced here by courtesy of Mr. Ian Crane. Substantially the same as the Third Edition but the figures '4' and '13d' are from a different type face.

Fifth Issue [Reverse and Obverse] This is a photographic reprint and is therefore identical to the Third Edition. From a collector's point of view only a set of the four items is a complete entity and unless this is accompanied by a copy of the *Wise Words* of the Fifth Edition or earlier it should be seen for what it is.

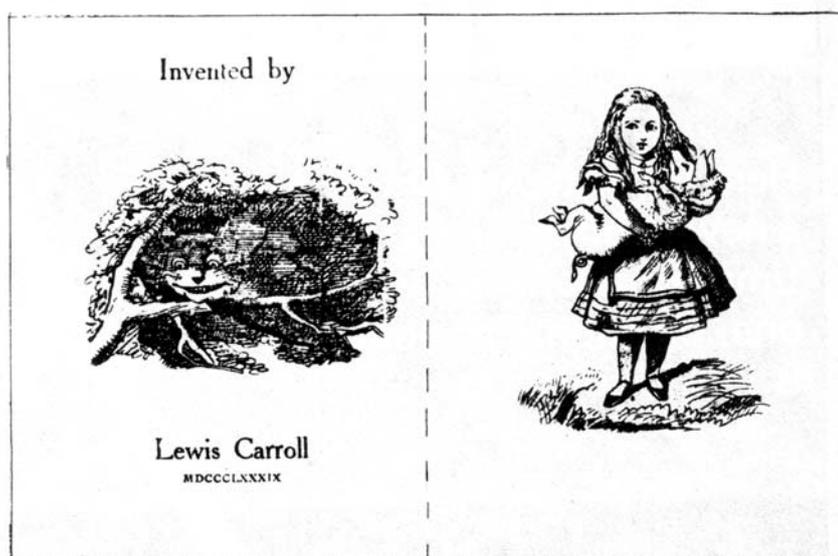


Fig. 7 3rd Edition Stamp Holder (actual size overall 145 x 97mm).

The Booklet

EIGHT OR NINE/WISE

WORDS/ABOUT/LETTER

WRITING//BY//LEWIS CARROLL//

Emberlin and Son, 4 Magdalen Street, Oxford: 1890: (98mm x 75mm) pp. 40 not counting the covers. CONTENTS: p.1 title, within double lines intersecting at the corners, 1-2 forming the front cover: 2, "Oxford: Printed by George Sheppard": 3, the contents, in 5 sections: 5-33, the *Wise Words*: 35-40, Macmillan's advertisements of Lewis Carroll's works, with two notes about discount, &c., and two Cautions to Readers: 40, "Sheppard, Printer Oxford": A stitched pamphlet.

First Edition As described above.

Second Edition (on the title) with date 1890, otherwise almost as First Edition, except that in p.3 the contents are only 4 sections, p.4 has an advertisement of the Stamp Case, and the text ends on p.34; on p. 35 is "[Turn over]", and on pp. 36-41 advertisements &c.

Third Edition (on the title) with date 1891. As second edition except that on p.2 Sheppard adds his address, "1, Walton Crescent".

Fourth Edition (on the title) with date 1891. As Third Edition.

Fifth Edition (on the title) with date 1897. As Third Edition.

Third Edition

[Reverse] (Fig. 10) This now has the "(POST FREE 13d)" above the price. That illustrated here is reproduced by the courtesy of the Curator of the Bodleian Library and has been dated as "c. 1910". [Obverse] has the "W" of "Wonderland" as two Linked "V"s and was the tell-tale characteristic which attracted Mr. Biddle's notice in September 1979.

Subsequently there were various issues, which were all reprints from the First Edition (with the contents in *five* sections) accompanied by a Stamp Case which is described as a Fourth Issue and in an Envelope also described as a Fourth Issue (in which the second line of description ends: “Pictorial”). These may be classified as:

1. dated “1 890”, but having advertisements referring to works published later, e.g. *Feeding the Mind* (1907);
2. dated 1908, with the joint imprint of Simpkin, Marshall; and
3. undated, and “probably issued about 1910 to 1915”.

All these reprints have “First published 1890” or some such wording on the reverse of the title page, which has of course added to the confusion.

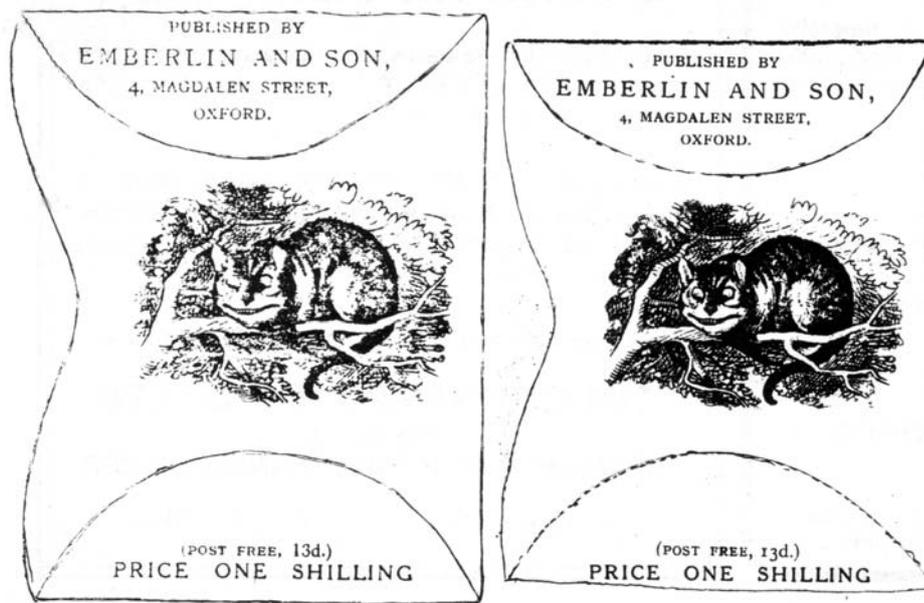


Fig. 10 (left) and Fig 11 (right) (Each actual size 80 x 106mm).

These reprints can be distinguished from the First and Second Editions (which have “1890” on the cover) because the words “Letter-Writing” measure approximately 39mm long whereas in the earlier editions the same words are 32mm. There are various other minor differences in lettering.

The Envelope

First Edition (Fig. 12) This is in the Guildford Museum and is reproduced by the courtesy of the owner Mr. Philip Dodgson Jaques (a great nephew of Lewis Carroll) the flap is on the long side and carries the publisher’s name and address.

Second Edition has the format of the text the opposite way so that the words “POSTAGE STAMP CASE” now measure approximately 58mm. In the description the second line ends “PIC-” The prices are now for 1 copy, 2-3, 4, 5-15 and every subsequent 15.

Third Edition Similar in format to the Second. In the description the second line ends in “Pictorial” and the prices are now for 1-4 copies, 8, 15 and every subsequent 15. There is an illustration of it in the Parrish Catalogue and the upper and lower frame lines are 89mm apart. There is a photolithographic reprint which is identical except that the frame lines are approximately 85mm apart. The widths are the same in both cases. These are usually the envelopes beloved of philatelic auctioneers when they use a phrase such as “...the original envelope...”.

Messrs Emberlin were still selling these reprints which were “probably issued about 1910 to 1915” in 1944 at the original price of a shilling. A search had been made a year or so earlier at the request of Roger Lancelyn Green and a number were found in the cellar, some with envelopes and some without.

In *The Stamp Collector’s Bulletin* of Jan/Feb 1948 the well known stamp dealer and philatelic writer F. Hugh Valloucy advertised that he had bought up remaining stocks and offered the complete stamp case, booklet and envelope for 2/9 or 5/3 for two. He mentioned two versions of the booklet one dated “1890” and the other “First printed 1890”.

THE "WONDERLAND"
POSTAGE-STAMP-CASE.

Invented by LEWIS CARROLL,
Oct. 29, 1888.

This Case contains 12 separate pockets
for Stamps of different values, and 2 Coloured
Pictorial Surprises taken from "Alice in Won-
derland" It is accompanied with 8 or 9 Wise
Words about Letter-Writing.

Price 1s. Post-free, 13d.

EIGHT OR NINE
WISE WORDS
ABOUT
Letter-Writing

BY
LEWIS CARROLL

EMBERLIN AND SON
4, MAGDALEN STREET
OXFORD

EIGHT OR NINE
WISE WORDS
ABOUT
Letter-Writing

BY
LEWIS CARROLL

EMBERLIN AND SON
4, MAGDALEN STREET
OXFORD
1890



Fig.12
Title page of reprint
(left) and title page in
Guildford Museum

Two years later in 1950 Mr. R. L. Green went to Emberlins new shop in the Turl and he was offered two for £5 but there is no record which these were.

And to think that all these stamp cases and booklets and envelopes and cats and grins were only one of the results of that famous “Golden Afternoon” when the Reverend Dodgson took the three little Liddell girls on that memorable boating trip.

And when do you suppose that was?

It was the 4th July - one hundred and eighteen years ago to the day.

“So Victoria Anne’s birthday was Alice’s anniversary” said Jean.

“Well it IS curious I agree,
and sounds perhaps like fibbs;
But still it’s true as true can be
...”
L.C. 1869

The writer would like to acknowledge the help he has received from Mr. Philip Dodgson Jacques (a great nephew of Lewis Carroll), Mr. Dents Clutch, Editor of “Lewis Carroll Handbook”, the staffs of the Guildford Museum, The Victoria and Albert Museum, Princeton University and the Bodleian Library as well as encouragement from Dr. Jean Alexander.

¹ *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll* Edited by Roger Lancelyn Green. 2 vols. Cassell & Co. 1953.

² See note after “Outer Case”.

³ The most comprehensive collection of the works of Lewis Carroll now in the Library of Princeton University.

⁴ There is *A List of the Writings of Lewis Carroll collected by M. L. Parrish* known as the Parrish Catalogue of which 66 copies were privately printed. One is in the British Library.

The above article first appeared in the British philatelic magazine *Stamp Collecting* on 12th June 1980. The magazine is no longer published.

THE WONDERLAND POSTAGE-STAMP CASE				
	STAMP HOLDER	OUTER CASE	BOOKLET	ENVELOPE
FIRST EDITION	A horizontal line drawn across the top edge of the tree would almost cut Alice directly in the mouth. A similar line across the lower edge of the tree would cut Alice squarely on the shins. Date sans serif. Lines of type measure approximately 27.5mm and 31.5mm.	Only wording is "PRICE ONE SHILLING".	Date 1890. Contents on p3 in 5 sections. Text ends p33.	Flap on the long side and carries the publisher's name and address.
SECOND EDITION	The upper horizontal line through the outer edge of the tree would pass through Alice well below the chin while the lower line almost coincides with the straps on her shoes. Date sans serif. Lines of type measure approximately 27.5mm and 31.5mm.	Publisher's name and address above the cat and "(POST-FREE 13d.)" below the price.	Date 1890. Contents on p3 in 4 sections. Text ends p34.	The format of the text the opposite way. Prices for 1 copy, 2-3, 4, 5-15 and every subsequent 15.
THIRD EDITION	Date not sans serif. Lines of type measure approximately 23.5mm and 26mm.	"(POST FREE 13d)" above the price. "W" of "Wonderland" is two Linked "V"s	As second edition except that on p.2 Sheppard adds his address, "1, Walton Crescent".	Similar to Second Edition. Prices for 1-4 copies, 8, 15 and every subsequent 15.
FOURTH ISSUE/ EDITION		As Third Edition except the figures '4' and "13d" are from a different type face.	As Third Edition except date 1891.	
FIFTH ISSUE/ EDITION		Photographic reprint identical to the Third Edition.	As Third Edition except date 1897.	
SUBSEQUENT ISSUES 1, 2 & 3			Reprinted from the First Edition. Words "Letter-Writing" measure approximately 39mm (earlier editions 32mm). 1 - dated "1 890", but having advertisements referring to works published later, e.g. Feeding the Mind (1907). 2 - dated 1908, with the joint imprint of Simpkin, Marshall. 3 - undated, probably issued about 1910 to 1915.	

* This Appendix was not part of the original article but has been added in an attempt to clarify the various Editions.
Comments and/or corrections will be welcomed at webmaster@stampbox.info

POSTSCRIPT

An extract from: *Lewis Carroll, An Illustrated Biography* by Derek Hudson

The nineties began propitiously with the publication on July 2nd, 1890, of one of Dodgson's most charming inventions – “The Wonderland Postage - Stamp Case”. This is a practical joke in the best sense. It consists of an interior holder with pockets for stamps of eleven different values between a halfpenny and a shilling. Thus far its purpose is strictly utilitarian; but the holder slips into a cover, and both are decorated with coloured pictures after Tenniel – so that Alice holding the baby is transformed, by pulling out the holder, into Alice holding the pig, and on the other side the Cheshire Cat (complete) turns into the Cheshire Cat's valedictory grin. It is Lewis Carroll's innocent little gift to the naughty nineties, and has kept its freshness while parts of the *Yellow Book* have gone sour.

Accompanying it was a miniature pamphlet: “Eight or Nine Wise Words about Letter-Writing”. Dodgson wrote so many letters that he had plenty of advice to give, and all of it is useful and entertaining. The envelope should be addressed and stamped first of all, he urged. ““What! Before writing the letter?” Most certainly.’ He considered this a form of insurance against ‘the hurried wind-up — the wildly-scrawled signature — the hastily-fastened envelope, which comes open in the post — the address, a mere hieroglyphic — the horrible discovery that you've forgotten to replenish your Stamp-Case — the frantic appeal, to every one in the house, to lend you a Stamp — the headlong rush to the Post-Office, arriving, hot and gasping, just after the box had closed — and finally, a week afterwards, the return of the Letter, from the Dead-Letter Office, marked “address illegible”!’

The inventor obviously enjoyed everything to do with his Stamp-Case and wrote about it gaily: ‘Postage-Stamp-Cases may be divided into one species, the “Wonderland”. The title is entered at Stationers' Hall: the two Pictorial Surprises, and the “Wise Words”, are copyright.’ He took pains to explain how it worked and to ensure that no purchaser could fail to realise that the baby turned into a pig: ‘If *that* doesn't surprise you, why, I suppose you wouldn't be surprised if your own Mother-in-law suddenly turned into a Gyroscope!’ The Case, he emphasised, was not intended to be carried about in the pocket. Many people seldom used any stamps except ‘Penny Stamps for Letters, Sixpenny-Stamps for Telegrams, and a bit of Stamp-edging for cut fingers,’ and for them a purse or pocket-book sufficed. No, he had designed his Case for those, like himself, who wanted extra stamps for parcels and foreign letters, and it was meant to be kept at home with the writing-materials. He gently mocked the Pears' Soap advertisements (a great source of amusement in the nineties): ‘Since I have possessed a “Wonderland Stamp-Case”, Life has been bright and peaceful, and I have used no other. I believe the Queen's Laundress uses no other.’

POST-POSTSCRIPT

An extract from: *Looking Glass Logic* an article by Mavis Batey

Oxford only severed its connections with Carroll's child friends when Ruth Butler died in 1981, aged 100. It was fitting that two days before she died she astounded her companions at Sobell House by reciting ‘You are old Father William’ faultlessly from beginning to end. Ruth, Violet and Olive, daughters of the Revd A Butler of Oriel, who lived 14 Norham Gardens, received signed copies of Carroll's books, Looking Glass biscuit tins and Wonderland stamp cases. A board game was inscribed ‘from the White Knight’, showing that it was not only Alice who was escorted through to adolescence by a devoted don friend.