

Sir John Tenniel's illustrations for Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*

Sir John Tenniel's illustrations for Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872), are considered to be his finest and most enduring achievement. They must also rank among the world's best-known children's illustrations.

The Brothers Dalziel, master engravers, were commissioned to engrave the boxwood blocks on which Tenniel had made his drawings. However, the engraved blocks could not withstand commercial printing of the volume of books required, and so instead they served as the masters from which electrotypes were made. It was from these electrotypes that all the illustrations in the Alice books were printed. Inevitably, the electrotypes suffered from a loss of definition in comparison to the original woodblocks, and indeed Carroll withdrew the first print run of *Wonderland* on Tenniel's insistence due to the poor quality of the printing. No edition was printed from the original wooden blocks at the time.

In 1985 the original woodblocks were discovered in a bank vault where they had been stored in deed boxes belonging to Macmillan, the original publishers. Jonathan Stephenson at the Rocket Press was given the prestigious job of printing from the blocks for the first time for worldwide distribution. These were published in 1988 in an edition of 250 and are highly prized by collectors. The blocks are now held by the British Library and no further sets will be printed.

Out of the ninety-two original blocks only one has disappeared - 'Alice and the Dodo'. How it came to be missing or when it vanished remains a mystery. The illustration in this collection has been printed from the electrotypes. If any block had to go missing it is not inappropriate that the Dodo should have disappeared once more!

Sir John Tenniel (1820-1914), prominent political cartoonist for the magazine *Punch*, created the definitive visual accompaniment to Lewis Carroll's writing with his illustrations for both Alice in Wonderland books. Sir Noel Paton, the Victorian painter and illustrator was the first to recognise the uniqueness of Tenniel's interpretation of Carroll's stories. In a letter declining the commission to draw what would become *Through the Looking-Glass* he wondered why the author should think 'anybody under the sun save only John Tenniel should be entrusted with the work'. On receipt of Paton's message, Carroll confided in his diary that the painter had urged 'that Tenniel is the man'. History has emphatically endorsed that view.

For many of the illustrations, Tenniel was given precise instructions from Carroll, but many of these interventions apparently infuriated Tenniel who almost turned down the request to illustrate *Through the Looking-Glass* because of this constant interference. The two men even argued about the look of Alice herself: Carroll envisaged Alice as a brunette with short hair but Tenniel preferred to draw her with long blonde hair. In fact, the only illustration that Carroll accepted without comment was that of Humpty Dumpty.

One of their more heated conflicts was over the frontispiece for *Through the Looking-Glass* - the image of the White Knight - who, with his long moustache looked remarkably like John Tenniel himself. Carroll urged Tenniel not to include what was essentially a self-portrait and to remove the moustache from the drawing at the very least, but Tenniel remained firm on this point.