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we may never know. What we do know, however, from the parish and census records, is that the earlier John was Mary Prickett's four-times-great grandfather, and that she was James Prickett's third child, baptised at St Clement's in Oxford on January 29, 1832, at which time her father described himself as a 'gentleman' living in Cowley Road.

By the time of the 1841 Census, James Prickett was living with his 85-year-old mother, Martha, a woman of independent means, in one of the grand terraced townhouses of Beaumont Street in central Oxford. He called himself a 'college servant' at the time, and remained in this employment all his working life, specifically as a butler of Trinity College in 1861.

But by this time the family was living in very much more modest accommodation (now demolished) in Floyd's Row, a few minutes' walk from Christ Church, where his daughter looked after Alice and her sisters.

So while it is not impossible that some blood connection existed between the Pricketts of Binsey and Thame, it seems dubious at best.

Nor can it be said with certainty that Alice ever visited the Binsey 'treacle well' herself — although it does seem likely, if only because of the village's connection with her father's college of Christ Church.

The Christ Church connection seems much more likely to hold the key to Lewis Carroll's familiarity with the well.

From 1857 until 1891, the curate was Thomas Prout, a Christ Church colleague and friend (and possibly the origin of the Dormouse, who actually tells the tale of the treacle well at the Mad Hatter's Tea Party). Prout restored St Margaret's well in 1874, perhaps in response to the new interest which the publication of *Looking-Glass* in 1872 must have generated.

Mary Prickett left service with the Liddells to

Above, Mia Wasikowska as Alice in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*

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marry, at the age of 40, a wealthy Oxford wine merchant called Charles Foster. The ceremony was held at St Aldate's Church, immediately opposite Christ Church, on March 22, 1871. Almost simultaneously, Charles and Mary Foster took over Oxford's most prestigious coaching inn, The Mitre, in the High Street. It was to be Mary's home for the rest of her life. Surviving her husband by more than 30 years, she continued to run The Mitre until her death in 1920 — a tenancy of very nearly half a century!

Evidently Mrs Mary Foster remembered with fondness her years as governess to the many Liddell children.

Caryl Hargreaves, Alice's son, recalled in 1932 that when Lord Rosebury, a friend of the Liddells, was permitted to stay in Mary's own quarters at The Mitre one year, he had been bemused to discover that the rooms were full of photographs of Alice and the rest of the family (many no doubt taken by that pioneering photographer Lewis Carroll himself).

Unaware of their earlier connection, Alice's famous phrase 'curiouser and curiouser' might well have crossed his mind!

■ *Mark Davies is a local historian, author, guide, and speaker with a particular interest in the history and literature of Oxford's waterways and adjacent suburbs. His forthcoming book *Alice in Waterland: Lewis Carroll and the River Thames in Oxford traces the all-important role of the river between Godstow and Nuneham in the creation of the stories and as inspiration for some of the best-known episodes.**

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Above, Charles Dodgson's photograph of Alice Liddell. Below, The Mitre, which Mary Foster ran until her death in 1920

