

IN ALICE'S SHOES

IN HER SHOES

BY BLOWN FUSE ©

VERBATIM STORIES FROM THE WOMXN OF THURROCK

ALICE

Should you pass through Aveley Village recently, you might notice the Green Thurrock Heritage plaque, erected on the wall opposite Park Lane.

It shows the name of Alice Diehl. On 25th February 1844, Alice Georgina Mangold entered the world in her grandfather's house in Park Lane, Aveley. She was the daughter of Carl and Eliza Mangold. Her maternal grandfather was Charles Vidal, who served as the village doctor. Charles Lewis Vidal was born in Jamaica in 1782 and was persuaded to practice in Aveley by Lord of the Manor Thomas Barrett-Lennard, who provided an estate property known as 'The Cottage'.

The Cottage was located on the west side of Park Lane, the road that led from Aveley Village to the gates of Belhus Park. Alice's father Carl earned his living teaching music and Alice spent many glorious childhood summers at Aveley which, according to her autobiography published in 1908, filled her with many pleasant memories.

Eliza Mangold's social circle as a young woman led her to mix with many of the local landowning families. It was through her friendship with one of these families that Eliza met Carl Mangold, a German musician born in Mannheim. Carl was based in London and, before the railway, he used the steamboat service in order to visit Aveley.

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Alice was their second child. Her grandfather was concerned at Carl's ability to support a family and it was agreed (as her elder sister Etta couldn't do it) that Alice was trained as a pianist in order to make enough money to support them.

Alice was sent by her father to Germany to have lessons with his former student Adolphe Henselt, a remarkably eccentric composer and pianist. Despite the fact that she was living in Queens Square, Finsbury, at the time, her career as a performer was launched in 1861 in Paris as it was thought it would have a better impact on the musical world amidst the glitz, glamour and musical prowess of the French capital.

Her debut as a pianist was attended by none other than composer Hector Berlioz, who wrote about her in glowing terms which was a tremendous boost to her reputation. She debuted in London the following year at the Hanover Square Rooms and became well established in the English music scene.

The Hanover Square Rooms were also known as the Queen's Concert Rooms and were frequented by the Royal Family and such notable persons as twice former Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. Alice's flourishing career in music led her to cross paths with violinist and composer Louis Diehl. They married on 7 December 1863.

In the course of her career she met the 'Swedish Nightingale' Jenny Lind who is said to have admired her playing. In 1871 she was living with her husband in Leighton Grove, St. Pancras. The last performance she gave, as far as we know, was at the Crystal Palace in 1872 at the age of 28. In 1875 she was making a living teaching. She also at this time began to develop her writing career. She began with short stories and moved on to novels.

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From 1864 to 1873, Alice and Louis had six children: Lewis, Henrietta, Henry, Arthur, Theodora and Raphael.

By 1881 she was living at Regents Park Terrace, St. Pancras which was convenient for promoting her work to London publishers. On the 1901 census she is shown as living with her husband at Buena Vista, Paignton, Devon.

Alice's grandfather Charles Vidal died in 1862 and her visits to Aveley became less frequent after this date. It was possibly because of this that in 1864 she wrote her autobiography 'The True Story of My Life'.

Alice wrote some 41 novels the last of which was published in 1914 two years after her death on 13th June 1912 at Ingatestone, Essex. In her will she left an estate worth £92. 6s. 2d. Reprints of Alice's works can still be purchased today.

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