

Alice's House

Kazuhito Komiya

My American friend and an old colleague from Cambridge, who was in the process of moving to an American university, sent me a book titled 'Singing Line' last week from the United States and said, 'Your house has been featured in this book'. In the book sent by my friend, the British political journalist Alice Thomson narrates the story of her great-grandfather, Sir Charles Todd, who had successfully installed a long-

distance telegraph spanning the expanse from Adelaide to Darwin, Australia. This achievement eventually emerged as the cornerstone of the telegraph network connecting London and Sydney.

Sir Charles was transferred from Greenwich to the University of Cambridge as a researcher in the allied fields of astronomical, meteorological and electronic engineering in 1848, just 150 years before I started working at the University of Cambridge. In 1855, he moved to British Australia, where he served as a government postmaster. Shortly before migrating to British Australia, Sir Charles had married Alice Gillam Bell, whom he had met at Cambridge. Following their wedding, Alice moved to Australia with Todd. (The author of the book carries the same name as her great-grandmother.) Sir Charles had a very successful career in Australia and has been recognised as a British aristocrat having pioneered in the long-distance telegraph and submarine cable technologies. A testimony to his fame is the fact that Sir

Charles and his wife's city of residence, which boasted of the largest telegram station, was named 'Alice Springs' after his wife.

The house I inhabited during my tenure at Cambridge University was Alice's family home, where she was born and raised until her marriage to Charles. The house was constructed in late 16th century and granted Grade II listed building status in 1950. Every weekend, following their visit to the Cavendish Laboratory next door, flocks of tourists would halt before the house I occupied. I would hear the tour guides describe the building rather loudly; as a result, I have known Charles and Alice from those days. Even though it is not to my credit, I feel somewhat satisfied to find that the house that I used to inhabit is now featured in a book.

22nd November 2021