

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Charles John Huffam Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England on the 7th February, 1812. His family was poor and he had eight brothers and sisters. Charles was often ill as a child, and because his family moved from town to town, he didn't have a proper school education. Instead, Charles read books on his own. He especially enjoyed fairy tales and adventure stories.

Like the characters in many of his stories, Charles Dickens had to go to work when he was a boy. When he was twelve years old, he worked in a shoe polish factory. Throughout his life he worked to stop the suffering of the poor, especially children. He was a great supporter of education and schools for the poor.

Charles Dickens first became a journalist. Then he started to write novels. He became famous at the age of 24 with his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Perhaps his most famous and best-loved novel is *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens died on the 9th of June, 1870. It says on Dickens' grave in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey in London:

'He was a sympathiser to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world.'

Glossary

- **factory:** industry; place where things are made
- **grave:** place where you put a dead person
- **oppressed:** people who are not free or who haven't got the same rights as others
- **proper:** correct
- **shoe polish:** cream for cleaning shoes
- **suffering:** serious pain felt by somebody
- **sympathiser:** supporter; someone who understands

ABOUT THE BOOK

Imagine you are in London at the beginning of the 19th century. It was the largest city in the world, and it was crowded, dirty and dark. There was great poverty in the city, and many adults and children had to work very long hours in very bad conditions.

The author, Charles Dickens, spent most of his life in London. And the descriptions of the city in his books allow readers to experience the sights, sounds and smells of the old city.

The main theme in *A Christmas Carol* is of course Christmas. But at the beginning of the Victorian period nobody really celebrated Christmas. People didn't have time to celebrate it. They had to work hard.

During the Victorian period people began to sing Christmas carols again. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, introduced the tradition of decorating Christmas trees from Germany. And the first Christmas card appeared in the 1840s. But it was the Christmas stories of Charles Dickens, particularly his 1843 story *A Christmas Carol* that brought back the joy of Christmas to Britain and America. People associated the name Charles Dickens with Christmas. On hearing of his death in 1870, a little girl in London said, "Mr Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die, too?"

Today, after more than 170 years, *A Christmas Carol* continues to be relevant. It sends the message that Christmas is a time to think about other people. It's a time to forgive and a time to be generous.

- **brought back:** (v. to bring) returned
- **carol:** a song sung at Christmas time
- **crowded:** with too many people
- **death:** when a person dies
- **forgive:** pardon
- **relevant:** important
- **tradition:** something people have done or believed for a long time