

Exploding city

Throughout the 1800s London grew very rapidly. The map shows London in 1843; the red line shows the edge of the city in 1812, the year of Dickens's birth.

The Thames

Camden, where the Cratchits live, a poor but respectable district

This is the business district, called the City, where Scrooge lives and works

The worst slums were in the center of London.

Dickens's city

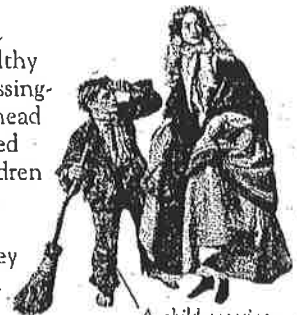
Dickens is forever linked with London. All his life he loved to explore the city. By the time he was 15 years old he knew it well, both rich areas and poor. He continued to wander through it, by day and night, until the end of his life. London was his inspiration, his stories are full of its restless energy, and he made his city live in words as no one else has done.



London's Fleet Street in 1848

Working children

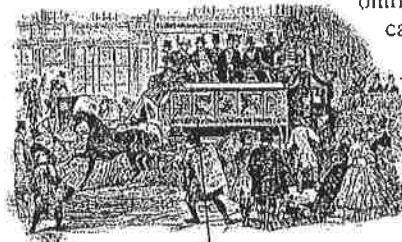
The streets were so filthy that people paid "crossing-sweepers" to sweep ahead of them as they crossed the street. Many children worked in such harsh jobs. Some children started work when they were as young as five.



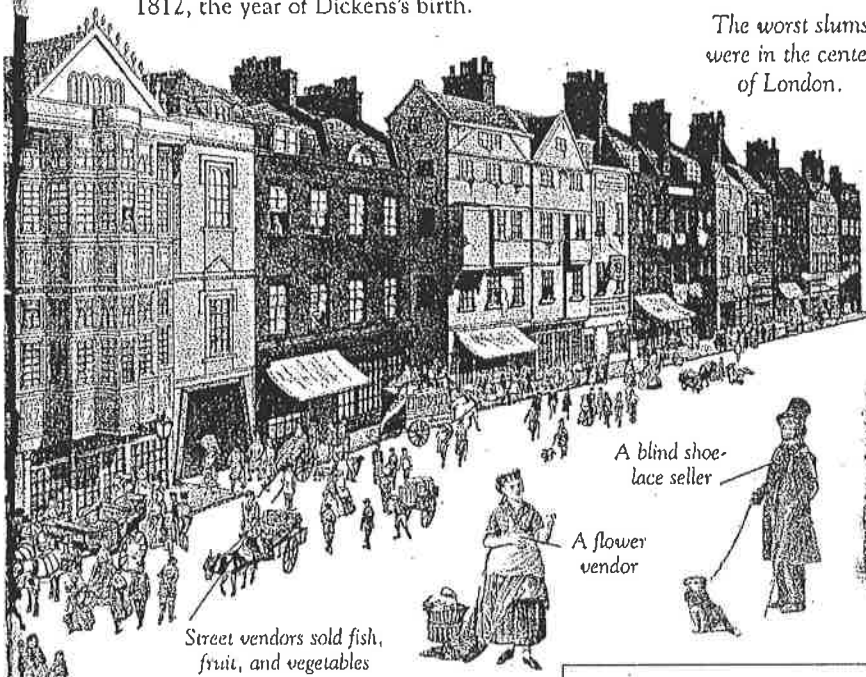
A child crossing-sweeper

The smells of the city

Many foreign visitors to London commented that the overpowering smell was the smell of horse dung. There were thousands of horse-drawn omnibuses, cabs, carriages, and carts, but poor folk like Bob Cratchit and the young Dickens had to walk to work.



An 1847 horse-drawn omnibus



Street vendors sold fish, fruit, and vegetables

A blind shoe-lace seller

A flower vendor

The London streets

London's streets were crowded, noisy, and very dirty. Almost anything was bought and sold, from pies and coffee to birds' nests and used clothing. There were street musicians, artists, conjurers, actors, and trained animals. The atmosphere of the streets, with buyers and sellers and entertainers and rich and poor all jumbled together, was perhaps more like some modern third-world cities than modern London.



A crippled bird-seller

INDUSTRIAL CITY

London was known as "the Fever Patch." It was the first big industrial city in the world, and it was extremely polluted and unhealthy. Diseases spread very quickly. There were four cholera epidemics in Dickens's lifetime, and regular outbreaks of typhoid, scarlet fever, and other illnesses. The Thames River was very busy and very polluted, and it smelled terrible. Two hundred open sewers ran into it, and half the population of London took their water straight out of it, for cooking, washing, and drinking.

