

WORKING LONDON

The Scrooges of London had everything their own way. They could pay their workers what they liked and fire them when they liked. But, any kind of job was better than none. There was no government help for the unemployed. Those who lost their work might even starve.

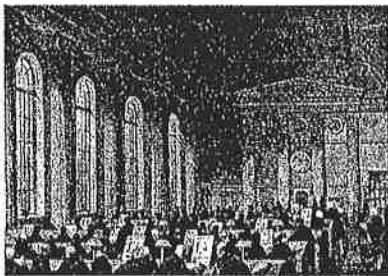


Ebenezer Scrooge
The Royal Exchange, a place for businessmen to meet and trade.



Jobs in London

Many rich businessmen such as Scrooge made their money at the Royal Exchange (above). Their businesses were supported by ever-growing armies of poorly paid clerical workers (below). A typical clerical worker received about £80 (\$130) a year, just enough to support a family and rent a house. Scrooge pays his clerk Bob Cratchit half as much.



Clerks working at the Bank of England.

Ceaseless work

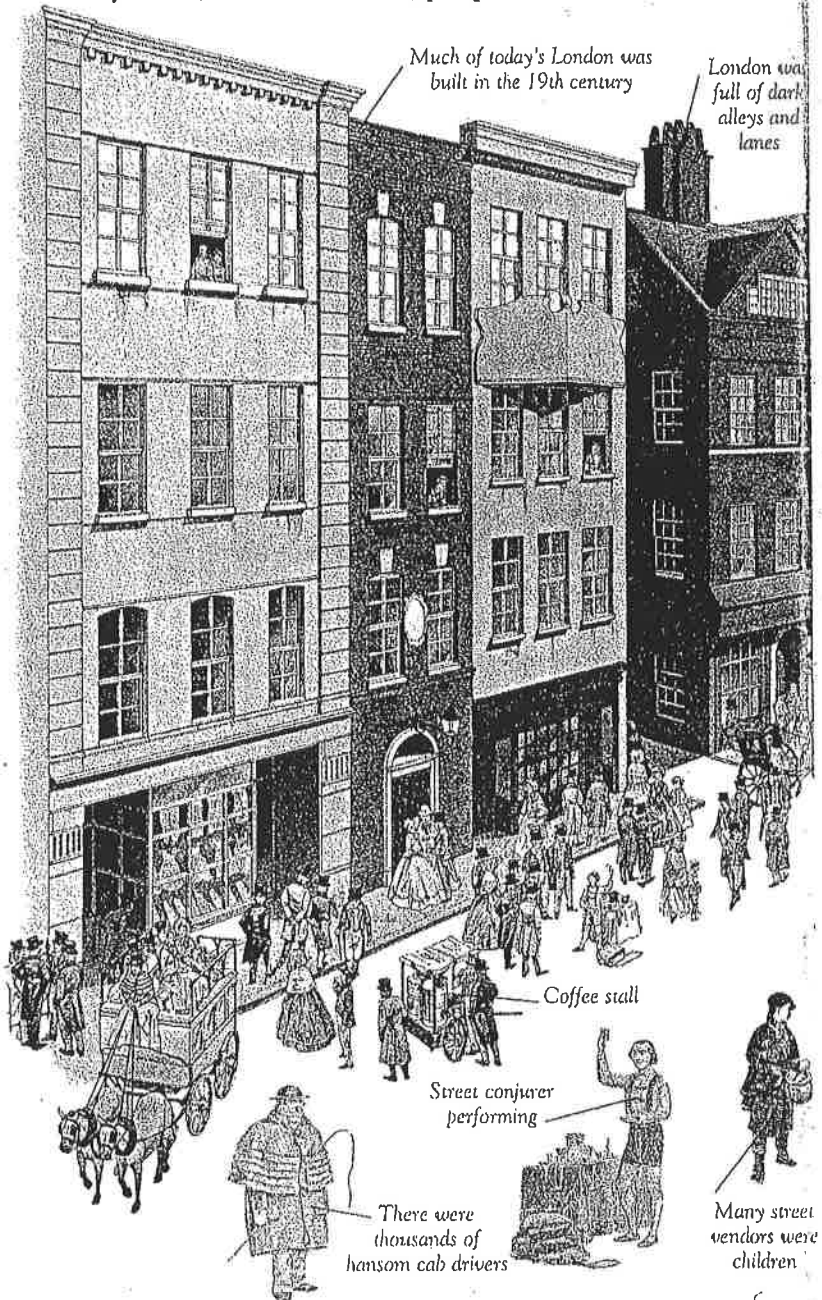
Many people worked twelve hours a day, six days a week. The only days off were Sundays, May Day, and Christmas Day. Employers did not have to let their employees off even for these. Many poor workers – domestic servants and factory workers, for example – had to work on Christmas Day. Scrooge resents giving Bob Cratchit even Christmas Day off.



In the painting *Work* (above), by Ford Madox Brown, different figures represent different forms of work and idleness. Dickens knew that England's wealth was created by the work of poor men and women such as those in this picture.

DICKENS'S LONDON

Few people knew London as well as Dickens. He saw the great wealth that businessmen such as Scrooge were amassing, and he saw the overcrowding, the dirt, the unrelenting toil, and the disease that were the lot of most Londoners. Unfortunately, few other well-off people shared Dickens's concern. In *A Christmas Carol*, and his other books, he tried to make his readers understand how hard life was for the working poor, and how horrible it was for London's vast underclass of jobless, often homeless, people.



Much of today's London was built in the 19th century

London was full of dark alleys and lanes

Coffee stall

Street conjurer performing

There were thousands of hansom cab drivers

Many street vendors were children