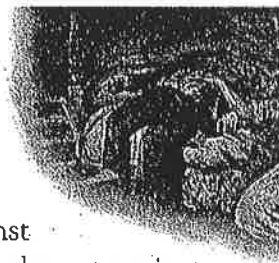


Charles Dickens's signature

CHARLES DICKENS



Dickens was one of the greatest of all English writers, and *A Christmas Carol* shows his writing at its best. His books combine humor, unforgettable characters, dramatic stories, anger against injustice and suffering, and a fierce compassion for the poor. In all of them, he spoke out against the Scrooges of the world, and for the Cratchits, the downtrodden people he saw around him. He used his books to show his readers the dark side of their country, and inspired them to change it for the better. He was immensely popular, and had a great influence for good on British society.

DICKENS'S LIFE

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, in 1812. When he was 10, his family moved to London, the city which was his great inspiration. His family experienced great poverty, so they could not provide him with a good education, but he read widely.



Dickens's childhood

When Dickens was 12, his father was sent to prison for debt. Charles had to work in a filthy factory, and was haunted by the memory for the rest of his life. He later worked as a solicitor's clerk, doing the same kind of work as Bob Cratchit.

An artist's impression of Dickens working in the factory.

Fame comes swiftly

Dickens began to have stories published in magazines in 1833.



Dickens's wife, Catherine

He was married in 1836, and in the same year he started *The Pickwick Papers*, a serialized novel completed in 1837. It was a huge success and he was suddenly very famous.

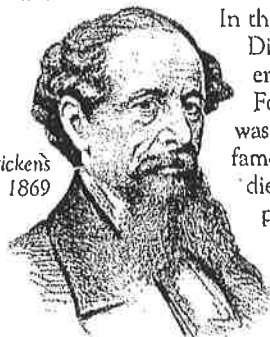


Dickens in 1842

The living legend

In the next seven years, Dickens wrote five more enormously successful novels. For the rest of his life he was probably the world's most famous living writer. When he died, thousands lined up to file past his coffin. Across the Atlantic, the American poet Longfellow noted: "This whole country is stricken with grief."

Dickens in 1869



Dickens and charities

Dickens's childhood poverty, and his many wanderings through the poorer parts of London, had showed him the immense misery and suffering that scarred Britain. He made speeches, wrote articles, and used his novels to fight these evils, and to support schools for poor children, education for adult working people, better sanitation and public health in London, and many other causes.

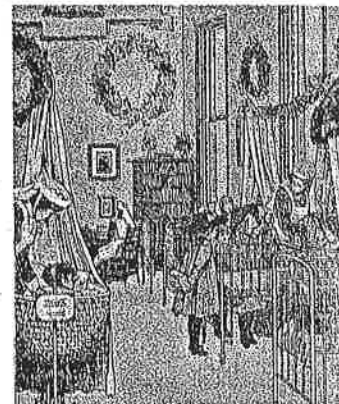
A view of London in 1823, when Dickens was a boy

Public readings

Dickens's first public reading was of *A Christmas Carol*, to raise funds for a new Industrial and Literary Institute, in Birmingham, UK. He wanted poor people to be admitted free, or at least very cheaply. He also gave a number of readings of this book to raise funds for the Hospital for Sick Children at Great Ormond Street in London.



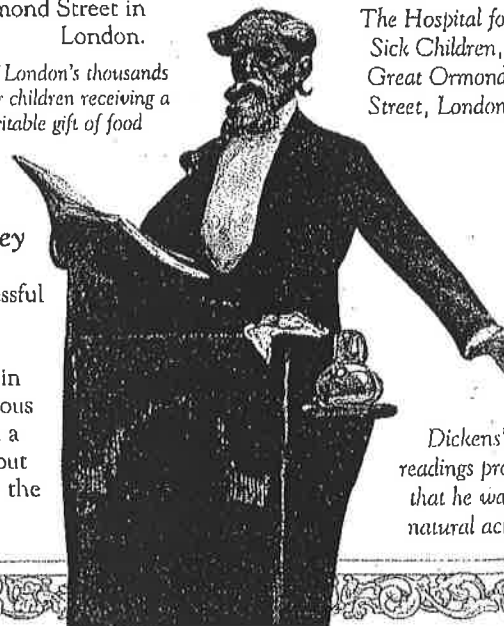
One of London's thousands of poor children receiving a charitable gift of food



The Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London

Readings for money

Dickens's charitable readings were so successful that he began doing commercial readings, traveling around Britain and the US, to enormous acclaim. He read from a number of his books, but *A Christmas Carol* was the favorite.



Dickens's readings prove that he was a natural actor