

Introduction

A *Christmas Carol* is the first of five 'Christmas Books' published during the Christmas season in Victorian England. It is seen as a celebration of Christmas.

At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, the celebration of Christmas was in decline. The Industrial Revolution meant that workers had little time to celebrate Christmas. The Queen's husband, Prince Albert, brought the German custom of decorating a Christmas tree to England. The singing of Christmas carols became popular, and the first Christmas card appeared in the 1840s. But it was the Christmas stories of Charles Dickens, particularly *A Christmas Carol*, that made people want to celebrate and enjoy Christmas. With *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens gave Christmas a new status. Many tried to celebrate Christmas in the same way as in the story.

When people think of Dickens, they think of Christmas. There is a story that when Dickens died in 1870, a little girl asked, 'Mr Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?'

A Christmas Carol tells the story of Christmas in England, but how is Christmas celebrated in other countries? In Australia, Christmas comes in the middle of summer. Instead of a dinner of roast goose in snowy winter, Australians might be celebrating their Christmas on the beach, with a barbecue and salad! In Spain, Christmas Eve is the time for a big family dinner. Instead of Christmas Day, the big celebration is on 6 January. This is the twelfth night after Christmas or 'The Festival of the Three Kings'. It celebrates the

time when the three wise men or kings brought gifts to the baby Jesus. The Spanish open their presents on this day.

About Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, England. He enjoyed a happy early childhood until his family moved to London in 1823, and the family didn't have much money. At the age of twelve, he had to work with other child workers pasting labels on bottles of shoe polish in a factory. This experience had a great effect on him and can be seen in his work. Dickens was always concerned for the suffering of the poor and the disadvantaged.

Dickens worked as a lawyer's clerk and a journalist before he became famous as the greatest English novelist of the Victorian era. Besides *A Christmas Carol*, his best-loved works include *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*.

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Scrooge of 'Scrooge and Marley'

When our story begins, Jacob Marley was dead. He had been dead for a long time. Of course Scrooge knew he was dead. Scrooge had worked with Marley for many years, and Scrooge was his only friend. Marley's death was sad, but Scrooge was not unhappy for long. On the day of Marley's funeral, Scrooge was working hard in his office. 5

SCROOGE AND MARLEY was painted on the front door of Scrooge's office. That was the name of the business. 10

Although Marley had died years ago, Scrooge never painted out Marley's name. People who did not know Scrooge sometimes called him 'Scrooge', and sometimes they called him 'Marley'. Scrooge answered to both names. It was all the same to him. 15

Scrooge never gave away any money. He never told anyone anything. He was as secret as a fish. He had a cold heart and an unkind face, a pointed nose, red eyes and thin blue lips. When he was young he had had dark hair, but now it was all white. People said there was snow on his head and over his eyes and on his mouth. He carried bad weather about with him. 20

Nobody ever came to him in the street, saying with a happy face, 'My dear Ebenezer' (that was Scrooge's first name), 'how are you? When will you come to my home to see my wife and me?' No beggar ever asked him for money. No children ever asked him what time it was. No man or woman ever asked Scrooge the way to any place. Even the dogs seemed afraid of him. 25