

0. CHRISTMAS in BRITAIN before SCROOGE - Story Preface

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**2. CHRISTMAS in BRITAIN before SCROOGE**

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5. THE FIRST of the THREE SPIRITS

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James Pollard, a British painter and engraver, was born in the London (in the borough we know today as Islington). He created the original basis of this image, known as "[The Approach to Christmas](#)," c. 1849. It depicts a stage coach (the Norwich "Times") which is traveling along the Mile End Road to London (from Norwich). Its final destination is Bull Inn at Aldgate (in the City of London). The coach contains goods to sell and parcels to deliver. The trees have no roots, have been sawn clean and are likely intended for Christmas-decoration purposes.

What was Christmas like, for people in Britain, during the first half of the 19th century? The answer depends on whether a person was from a wealthy or a poor family.

In any given year, some of Britain's national newspapers didn't even mention Christmas. Wealthy families exchanged presents, played games, enjoyed music and held gatherings (featuring special meals and Christmas puddings), but poor families were fortunate just to have the day off.

If they scrimped and saved, poor families could afford to share a Christmas meal, but no one was thinking about giving or receiving presents. There wasn't enough money for such things at a time when [young children worked long hours](#) to help support their families.

Even wealthy families, in England, did not have Christmas trees or send holiday cards during the first part of the 19th Century. [England's first Christmas cards](#) were produced by Henry Cole and John Horsley in 1843, the year in which Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol."

England's early Christmas trees may have first appeared when Queen Charlotte (the German-born wife of George III) decorated (and lit) fir trees during the 1780s and 1790s. But Christmas trees in Britain didn't become popular until Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, made them a part of the royal Christmas. (The pair married in 1840.)

The Prince Consort carried-over such traditions from his native country (Germany) to the land of his new wife. In 1848, the *Illustrated London News* published a picture of the [royal family around their Christmas tree](#). That image did much to popularize Christmas trees in England. In its 23 December 1848 issue, *The Times* described the beautiful tree with these words:

*The tree employed ... is a young fir, about eight feet high, and has six tiers of branches. On each branch are arranged a dozen wax tapers. Pendant from the branches are elegant trays, baskets, and bonbonniers, and other placements for sweetmeats of the most varied kind, and all forms, colours, and degrees of beauty.*

No one in England, however, was thinking about Santa Claus (or "Father Christmas") during that time frame, since those customs were not-yet part of British culture. It wasn't until the 1870s that Saint Nicholas became popular in England.

England did have a tradition of a jolly figure who represented the "[Spirit of Christmas](#)." Dickens borrowed from that tradition when he created the second of his Three Spirits.

Dickens finished his story by the end of November, 1843, just in time to publish it for Christmas that year. Not only was the story popular, it actually changed the culture, helping people to remember that it was the time of year to share with others less-fortunate.

Shall we listen to a dramatization of the story itself, in abridged format?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CHRISTMAS-in-BRITAIN-before-SCROOGE-A-Christmas-Carol>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CHRISTMAS-in-BRITAIN-before-SCROOGE-A-Christmas-Carol>

## Media Stream



### Spirit of Christmas - 1843

Illustration, by Alfred Crowquill, appearing in the 23 December 1843 edition of the *Illustrated London News*. Image was scanned from a copy of the newspaper at the Robarts Library, University of Toronto, by Philip V. Allingham with corrections by George P. Landow. Online, courtesy [Victorian Web](#).

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