



In 1843, before he began writing "A Christmas Carol," Charles Dickens visited the industrialized town of Manchester, England. He was appalled by the conditions in which poor people lived.

The nearby town of Sheffield also had slums. This image depicts an area of that town in the 1840s.

The Sheffield General Cemetery Trust tells us more about conditions at that time:

Sheffield had suffered badly during the war [with Napoleon] because many of the European countries had stopped buying its goods. This caused terrible poverty in the town. Out of a population of 31,000 there were over 10,000 people in need of help from the parish.

When the European trade started again the population of Sheffield grew rapidly, mainly because of its steel industry. By 1841 there would be 110,000 people within its boundaries, and hardly any sanitation.

For thousands and thousands of people, there were no toilets, no clean water. All household rubbish from these overcrowded dwellings, including excrement, was dumped in the street and flowed through an open sewer.

These living conditions meant that disease was common and people did not live long. At this time the citizens of Sheffield died at an average age of just 27.

It was conditions like these which Dickens had in mind when he wrote his tale about Scrooge and the Three Spirits.

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Image, described above, online courtesy Sheffield General Cemetery Trust.

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