



Bob Cratchit and his family live in an area of greater London known as Camden Town. It is northwest of the "City of London," where Cratchit works at the office of Scrooge & Marley.

Dickens published "A Christmas Carol" in 1843. This image depicts an area of Camden as it appeared in 1839. The illustration, by Thomas Roscoe, reveals that a mixture of industrial (the Camden Town engine works and engine chimneys) and pastoral (note the hills and trees) characterized Camden not long before Dickens created the Cratchit family. Dickens himself once lived in Camden Town.

Since Cratchit lives more than two miles from his office, perhaps he takes the train to and from work. If that's true, where did he board the train every morning?

From Thomas Roscoe's book (published, in 1839, by Charles Tilt), entitled *The London and Birmingham Railway with the Home and Country Scenes on Each Side of the Line*, we learn that the train station at Camden Town was used for goods and parcels. Passengers boarded the train at Euston Square:

*From Euston Square to Camden Town the Railway is formed by a wide cutting or trench, about eighteen or twenty feet deep, the sides of which are composed of beautifully executed brick work, having an iron balustrade at top, which, when the trees and shrubs of the adjoining gardens have sprung up, will form a pleasing subject.*

*The land being on a considerable rise outwards from London is worked...by endless ropes passing over pulleys in the middle of the tracks, which ropes are set in motion by the stationary steam-engines at Camden Town. Great precaution is required in attaching the carriages to the rope; and this is generally done by one man, who is trained for that purpose.*

*The way in which he effects the fastening is by means of a small rope, called a messenger, having a slip knot at one end, which he passes over the rope, and holds the other in his hand as he stands on the foremost carriage, in order to release the train when it reaches Camden Town, or in case of accident. By a signal given to the engineer, the engines are stopped in an instant...*

*...When the train arrives at the Iron Bridge which carries the line over the Regent's Canal, the carriages are detached from the rope, and allowed to run along the line till they meet the locomotive engine by which it is afterwards propelled.*

*...When it is considered that the mighty impulse which bears hundreds of human beings at the speed of from twenty to forty miles in an hour, is given without a breath of animated life - that not one effort is made except by blind inanimate matter, rushing over the land at the mere dictum of its master mind - the effect of the whole is indescribably strange and impressive, and calculated to raise a new train of thought and reflection.*

*...The Camden Town Depot forms a Station for the carrying department of goods, while that at Euston-square is set apart for passengers...At this [Camden] Station is a very extensive locomotive engine house...several ovens for making coke for the use of the engines; a repository for cattle brought by the railway to supply the London market; stabling for fifty horses; a manufactory for carriages; and offices for a large establishment of clerks ...*

*...Here, also, are the stationary engines for working the ropes, but they are under ground, immediately below the Railway; their situation is marked by two very elegant chimneys, which belong to the boilers; these rise to an height of 133 feet above the rails, and are twelve feet diameter at bottom and six at the top.*

*In the engine house is an organ-pipe or whistle, which communicates with the passenger station at Euston-square by a tube, along which a signal can be conveyed to the Engineer in four seconds.*

(Pages 41-44 of *The London and Birmingham Railway*.)

From this passage, we learn a bit more about the area in which the Cratchit family lived. Like hundreds of thousands of people today, Cratchit worked in the City of London but lived in an area of Greater London.

Click on the image for a much-larger view.

Credits:

"The Excavation near Camden Town," engraved by H. Griffith and included in Thomas Roscoe's book (published, in 1839, by Charles Tilt) entitled *The London and Birmingham Railway with the Home and Country Scenes on Each Side of the Line* (at page 44). Online, courtesy Google Books.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Camden-Town-Home-of-Bob-Cratchit>

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