



LANDMARKS  
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DICKENS

BLEAK  
HOUSE

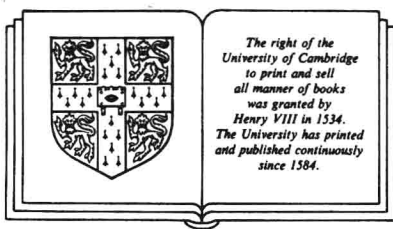
GRAHAM STOREY

CHARLES DICKENS

# Bleak House

GRAHAM STOREY

*Fellow of Trinity Hall and Reader in English, University of  
Cambridge*



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Charles Dickens

BLEAK HOUSE

*Landmarks of world literature*

General Editor: J. P. Stern

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# Chronology 年代學

## *Dickens's life and works*

1811  
1812  
1814  
1815  
1819

Born at 387 Mile End Terrace, Portsea, Hampshire (7 February).

Walter Scott's first novel, *Waverley*.  
Napoleon defeated at Waterloo.  
John Ruskin and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) born.

The 'Peterloo Massacre' (16 August), in which the militia charged a Manchester reform meeting, killing eleven and injuring about 600.  
George IV succeeds to the throne.

1820 At William Giles's 'Classical, Mathematical and Commercial School', Chatham, Kent.  
1824 Works for about four months in Warren's Blacking Factory, Hungerford Stairs, London, during his father's imprisonment for debt in the Marshalsea.  
1824-5 At Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road, London  
1827 Solicitor's clerk in Messrs Ellis & Blackmore, Gray's Inn.

## *Related literary and historical events*

W. M. Thackeray born.

- 1828 Moves to Messrs Charles Molloy, Lincoln's Inn.
- 1829 Reporter in Doctors' Commons.
- 1830-3 Unsuccessful love affair with Maria Beadnell.
- 1832 Reporter on the *True Sun* newspaper (March-July).  
Reporter on his uncle J. H. Barrow's paper, *Mirror of Parliament*.  
First sketch, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', published in the *Monthly Magazine* (December).
- 1833
- 1834 Staff reporter on *Morning Chronicle*; contributes several 'street sketches' to it. *エリザベス*
- 1835 Contributes 'Sketches of London' to *Evening Chronicle*.  
*Sketches by Boz*.  
Marries Catherine Hogarth (2 April).  
*The Strange Gentleman* and *The Village Coquettes* ~~produced~~ *produced* at St James's Theatre, London.  
*Sunday under Three Heads*.  
*The Pickwick Papers*.
- 1836-7
- 1837-9 Edits *Bentley's Miscellany* (magazine). *ボズ*
- Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* begins.  
Robert Peel establishes the Metropolitan Police.  
William IV succeeds to the throne.
- Jeremy Bentham dies.  
Passing of the Reform Bill.  
Sir Walter Scott dies.
- Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.  
First Factory Act makes it illegal for children under nine to work in factories and for children between nine and thirteen to work more than a nine-hour day.  
S. T. Coleridge dies.  
The 'Tolpuddle Martyrs', six Dorsetshire labourers, transported to Australia for taking an illegal oath to a trade union; pardoned after two years.  
Abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

- Dickens's life and works*
- 1837 *Oliver Twist* (published in *Beniley's Miscellany*).  
Mary Hogarth, Catherine's sister, aged seventeen, dies suddenly in the Dickens's home in Doughty Street, London (7 May).  
*Is She His Wife?* produced at St James's Theatre.  
Edits *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi*, the clown.
- 1838
- 1838–9 *Nicholas Nickleby*.
- 1839 Moves to Devonshire Terrace, London.
- 1840
- 1840–1 *Master Humphrey's Clock*, containing *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*.  
Edits *The Pic Nic Papers*.
- 1842 First visit to America, with Catherine (January–June).
- 1842–3 *Martin Chuzzlewit*.
- 1843 *A Christmas Carol*.
- Related literary and historical events*
- Victoria, aged seventeen, succeeds to the throne.  
Carlyle's *The French Revolution*.
- Thackeray's *The Yellowplush Correspondence* (published in *Fraser's Magazine*).  
*The People's Charter* published.
- First Chartist riots, on Parliament's rejection of Chartist Petition.  
Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.  
Carlyle's *Chartism*.
- Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero Worship*.  
*Punch* founded; edited by Mark Lemon.  
Further Chartist riots.  
Lord Shaftesbury's Mines and Collieries Bill, prohibiting the employment of women, and boys under thirteen, in mines and collieries.  
Carlyle's *Past and Present*.



- 1844 In Italy.  
*The Chimes*.
- 1845 Directs amateur production of Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*.  
*The Cricket on the Hearth*.  
Launches the *Daily News*; his friend John Forster takes over as editor after two and a half weeks.  
In Switzerland and Paris.  
*The Battle of Life*.  
*Dombey and Son*.  
Directs further amateur theatricals.  
*The Haunted Man*.
- 1846–7
- 1847–8
- 1848
- 1848–50
- 1849
- 1849–50
- 1850
- Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby*.  
'Ragged School' Union founded.  
Disraeli's *Sybil, or the Two Nations*.  
Engels's *The Condition of the Working Classes in England*.  
Thackeray's *The Book of Snobs*.  
Lord John Russell Prime Minister, after repeal of Corn Laws.
- Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.  
Revolutions throughout Europe.  
Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*.  
Chartist National Convention in London; soon disperses (10 April).  
Thackeray's *Pendennis*.  
Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*.  
Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke*.
- Establishment in England of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy (September); Wiseman created Archbishop of Westminster and Cardinal.
- David Copperfield*.  
Founds and 'conducts' *Household Words*, a weekly journal.

*Dickens's life and works*

1851

His father dies (31 March).  
Produces Bulwer Lytton's comedy, *Not so Bad as we Seem*, to raise funds for the Guild of Literature and Art, founded by Lytton and himself.  
Writes to Miss Coutts: 'I begin to be pondering afar off, a new book' (17 August).  
Writes to Henry Austin of his 'new book waiting to be born' (7 September).

Moves to Tavistock House, London (November).  
Begins to write *Bleak House* (late November).  
*Bleak House* (19/20 monthly parts, March 1852–September 1853), illustrated by H. K. Browne ('Phiz').

1852

Acknowledges receipt of William Challinor's pamphlet, *The Court of Chancery; Its Inherent Defects as Exhibited in Its System of Written Procedures*, 1849 (March).

Takes *Not so Bad as we Seem* on a provincial tour, to help the Guild of Literature and Art.  
*A Child's History of England* (first published in *Household Words*).

1853

In Boulogne and Italy.  
Gives first public readings from the Christmas Books, to help the Birmingham and Midland Institute.

*Related literary and historical events*

Lord John Russell's government defeated (February); after Lord Derby fails to form a Ministry, Russell returns to office (March).  
The Great Exhibition, promoted by Prince Albert and housed in Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, in Hyde Park, opened by the Queen (1 May).  
Chancery Reform Bill passed (July).  
Lord Shaftesbury's Lodging Houses Bill passed (August).

General election (July). Lord Derby Conservative Prime Minister for five months; Whig coalition, under Lord Aberdeen, takes over in December.  
Thackeray's *History of Henry Esmond*.  
The Duke of Wellington dies.

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (first published in *Household Words*).  
Thackeray's *The Newcomes*.

- 1854 *Hard Times* (first published weekly in *Household Words*). Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*
- 1854-6 The Crimean War.
- 1855 Supports the Administrative Reform Association in its criticism of the conduct of the Crimean War.
- 1855-7 *Little Dorrit*.
- 1856 Buys Gad's Hill Place, near Rochester, Kent.
- 1857 Produces and acts in Wilkie Collins's *The Frozen Deep*, first at Tavistock House; then in Manchester, where Ellen Terman and her sister act in it.
- 1858 Separates from Catherine (May).  
Gives first series of public readings from his works for profit.  
Finds a new weekly journal, *All the Year Round*.  
*A Tale of Two Cities* (first published weekly in *All the Year Round*).  
Moves to Gad's Hill Place.  
*Great Expectations* (first published weekly in *All the Year Round*).
- 1860 Further public readings.
- 1861-2 Prince Albert dies.
- 1861-5 The American Civil War.
- 1862 J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*.  
Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.  
Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.  
John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*.
- Leigh Hunt dies.  
Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.  
J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*.  
Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*.

- |                                 |                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Dickens's life and works</i> | <i>Related literary and historical events</i>                                     |
| 1863                            | Further public readings.                                                          |
| 1864                            | His mother dies (September).                                                      |
| 1864-5                          | <i>Our Mutual Friend</i> .                                                        |
| 1865                            | In the Staplehurst, Kent, railway accident (June).                                |
| 1866                            | Elizabeth Gaskell dies.                                                           |
| 1866-7                          | Sir Joseph Paxton dies.                                                           |
| 1867                            | Assassination of President Lincoln.                                               |
|                                 | Feodor Dostoevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> .                                 |
|                                 | Karl Marx's <i>Das Kapital</i> , vol. I.                                          |
|                                 | Second Reform Bill passed.                                                        |
|                                 | Further Factory Acts.                                                             |
| 1867-8                          | Second visit to America, to give public readings (November 1867-April 1868).      |
| 1868                            | Wilkie Collins's <i>The Moonstone</i> .                                           |
|                                 | Dostoevsky's <i>The Idiot</i> .                                                   |
| 1868-70                         | Imprisonment for debt abolished.                                                  |
| 1869                            | W. E. Forster's Elementary Education Act, setting up a system of state education. |
| 1870                            | Civil Service reformed.                                                           |

**Further history of 'Bleak House'**

- 1853 Published in one volume.  
1857 Translated into French.  
1858 Published in the Cheap Edition of Dickens's Works.  
1860 Translated into German.  
1874 Earliest recorded adaptation for the stage, *Jo*, by J. P. Barnett; first performed in California; performed in London, 1876; followed, before the end of the century, by at least six other adaptations.

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## *Bleak House*: the background

### **Historical context**

As John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson showed many years ago, in *Dickens at Work* (1957), *Bleak House* is a remarkably topical novel. No less than five of the major targets of its anger, as they show in detail, were public issues in 1851, the year in which Dickens began to write it: the abuses of the court of Chancery; the establishment the year before of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England; political misgovernment (for a period, no government at all); the London slums; and what Dickens calls 'Telescopic philanthropy', the ignoring of crying social needs at home for the spurious excitement of sending out missions abroad.

It is true that neither the appalling conditions of the London poor nor the abuses of Chancery were new subjects for Dickens. Jacob's Island in *Oliver Twist* is the first of his London slums; Want and Ignorance are the children who, in a vision, convert Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, his first Christmas book; a long passage in *Dombey and Son* cries out against the horrifying effects of bad sanitation. The most serious and pathetic point (as Dickens described it in a letter of December 1852) that he had tried to make in *Pickwick* was the lingering death of a Chancery prisoner. What makes *Bleak House* a landmark, the first of Dickens's 'dark period' novels, is that, for the first time, he has created a whole world out of such and similar evils. It is the whole of contemporary society that he anatomizes. Of his peculiar gift for seeing

## 2 BLEAK HOUSE

connexions between things not glimpsed by most people he was fully aware: 'I think', he wrote to his friend Lord Lytton in 1865, with a touch of irony, 'it is my infirmity to fancy or perceive relations in things which are not apparent generally'.

These five major issues, then, constitute the true historical background to *Bleak House*. Together they form what Thomas Carlyle, the most powerful intellectual influence on Dickens, had called, in *Chartism* (1840), the 'Condition-of-England question'; and, more vehemently in *Past and Present* (1843), where he analyses the consequences of failing to solve it, 'universal social gangrene'. To understand the novel's impact on its first readers we must grasp the immediacy of each of these issues and the precision – and intensity – with which Dickens deals with them. In a novel pervaded by irony, the title *Bleak House* itself is surely a parody of the major English event of 1851, the Great Exhibition: the grim reality beneath the materialistic complacency, the boasted 'commerce of all nations'.

The opening chapter, 'In Chancery', brilliantly suggests the novel's universal blight; its centre, the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, being heard, as it has been for many years, by the Lord Chancellor in the High Court of Chancery, was highly topical too. Chancery abuse had been a target for reformers for several decades; but in 1851 it had become a major national issue. 'Trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration . . . false pretences of all sorts . . . Shirking and sharking, in all their many varieties', as John Jarndyce puts it, are the fruits of Jarndyce and Jarndyce; almost all had been anticipated in leading anti-Chancery articles in *The Times* during 1851.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce was itself based on a notorious Chancery case, begun in 1834 and still proceeding; a



similar case in Staffordshire was the model for what drove Gridley all but mad. National demands procured some reform in an Act of August 1851; for Dickens only the burning away of the Court 'in a great funeral pyre' could accomplish what he wanted and in his way achieved in 'Chancellor' Krook's spontaneous combustion.

But the language of the final paragraph describing Krook's death (ch. 32: 'The Appointed Time') goes far beyond legal reform:

[Krook] has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done.

In *Past and Present*, Carlyle had painted the treatment and despair of a disappointed Chancery client as an example of general administrative futility. Dickens has gone further in both directions: he has made the most of the topical appeal of Chancery abuse to his readers; he has also made of it a symbol of universal corruption.

Even more widely discussed than Chancery abuse in 1851 was the religious crisis caused by the establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England the year before – freely referred to as 'Papal Aggression'. For Dickens, who hated the Roman Catholic Church, the Oxford Movement, the party within the Anglican Church that aimed to restore it to its primitive 'Catholic' roots, and in particular E. B. Pusey, its new Oxford leader (the 'Pusey and Newman Corporation', as Carlyle called it in a letter), were directly responsible; and they were deeply distasteful to him. In *Bleak House* he derides them. Mrs Pardiggle is not only distinguished for her 'rapacious benevolence', but is clearly a Puseyite as well: her five sons are named after saints and heroes of the primitive Church; they are taken to Matins '(very prettily done)' at 6.30 a.m. all the year round; and the little book she gives to the