



## **The world Charles Dickens (1812-1870)**

Charles Dickens was born in a world of horses. It was a world in which there were a very small number of rich people and millions of very poor people. There were very few people in the middle: between the rich and the poor.

In 1812, most people did not live in cities. They lived and worked in the countryside. They worked on farms, in forests or went fishing in the sea. They were always cold, hungry and usually sick as well.

### **The changing world**

When Charles Dickens was two years old, George Stephenson fitted wheels to a steam engine and made the first steam locomotive, “the Puffing Billy”. In 1825, the first steam train was used to carry passengers. When Charles Dickens was an old man, there were many steam trains in Britain and across Europe. In America, the first steam trains were travelling from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast. In London, there were steam trains in the London Underground.

Charles Dickens only lived for 58 years, but, during his life, the world changed enormously. When he was three years old, a newly discovered continent in the south was given the name “Australia”. In North America, settlers were beginning to move from the Atlantic coast across the country. In South America, Simon Bolivar was leading revolutions and creating new countries. In Europe, Napoleon Bonaparte was leading the French army to invade more and more countries. The Turkish, Ottoman Empire controlled many parts of the Mediterranean and North Africa.

### **Freedom, Nationalism and Revolution**

All over the world, the working population were protesting against their masters. It had started with the French Revolution in 1789, which is described in Dickens’ book *A Tale of Two Cities*. Mexico became a republic in 1824. Later, in Britain the 1832 parliament act extended voting rights to more of the (male) population. A year later there were uprisings against the Royal family in Spain. In 1834, slavery was made illegal in British colonies. In 1861, Victor Emanuelle was made the first King of a united Italy and the American Civil War between northern and southern states began. *Das Kapital*, by Karl Marx was published in 1867.

### **Science, Medicine, Transport, Communication**

In the world of science, Michael Faraday produced the first electric motor in 1821, when Dickens was 9 years old. In 1833, Braille, in France, invented a system which allowed blind people to read. Three years later, also in France, Daguerre was showing the first photographs. In 1842, Charles Babbage invented the first computer. It was made of wood, but it could calculate mathematically.



In medicine, many new discoveries were made. When Dickens was a child, the disease, cholera, killed many people. In 1849, it was discovered that cholera was transmitted by dirty water and people began to understand the need for clean water. The disease, tuberculosis, also killed many people. In 1856 Louis Pasteur discovered how milk could be heated to prevent the transmission of tuberculosis. In Dickens' time, hospitals were dangerous places because they were very dirty. In 1860, Florence Nightingale started a school for nurses. She insisted that hospitals should be cleaned every day. In 1867, three years before the death of Charles Dickens, Joseph Lister introduced the use of carbolic acid to kill germs. This saved many lives.

The world of transport also changed. The *Savannah*, a steam ship took 26 days to cross the Atlantic in 1819, but by 1838, there were regular steamships travelling from Europe to North America. As we know, Charles Dickens and his wife travelled to America on one of these ships in 1842.

Communication became easier. In 1812 messages could be sent but they were very slow because they were carried by horses. The person who received the message had to pay for the postage. In 1840, the first postage stamp, the *Penny Black* was introduced. This could be used to send a letter anywhere in Britain. Letters travelled faster because they were carried on the new network of railway lines which were being built across Britain. The electric telegraph, which had been invented in 1839 was used for sending fast messages using Morse code. In 1866, there was a transatlantic cable for messages from and to North America.

## **1870**

When Charles Dickens died in 1870, the world was very different from the world of 1812. Charles Darwin had published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Ships were exploring Antarctica and the planet Neptune had been discovered in 1846. The Suez Canal had opened in 1869. Steam ships crossed the world's oceans carrying the books of Charles Dickens. He was famous all over the world.