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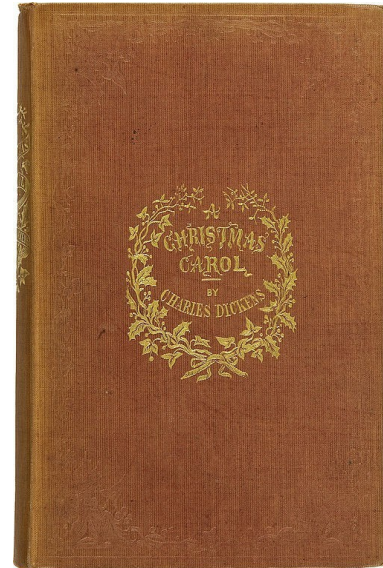
Utrecht
ASK THE EXPERTS

A Christmas Carol: Crafting a First Edition

The art and craft of a classic holiday book



The young Charles Dickens by American artist Francis Alexander, 1842, one year before "A Christmas Carol" was published



Cover with blind embossment and gilding

Charles Dickens' treasured classic A Christmas Carol is among the most familiar stories in English literature. Thanks to countless film and television adaptations, even those who haven't read the original text will surely know Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit and the other principle characters in this timeless holiday ghost story. What's less well known, however, is the story of the artists and artisans behind the first published edition who turned Dickens' manuscript into an edition of beautifully crafted works of art.

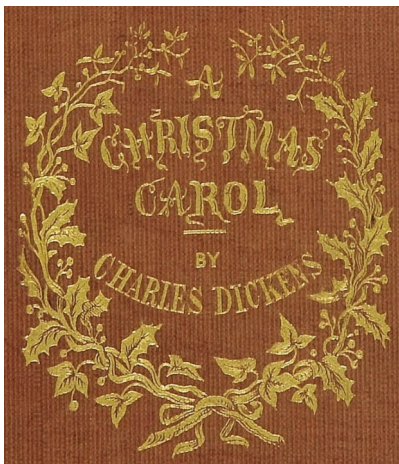
The novella was originally conceived as a seasonal gift, a beautiful book to purchase for family and friends. So concerned was Dickens with the appearance and materials of his 1843 first edition that he realized very little profit from the initial release.

The color scheme was green and red, consistent with the seasonal theme. The book was bound in red cloth, and the end-papers that joined the pages to the cover were originally hand-colored emerald green. The color used on the green end-papers proved not to be durable, however, and as a result, surviving copies have lost much of this original hue, which came off as a powdery residue when handled. Yellow end-papers replaced the green after the original stock was used up.

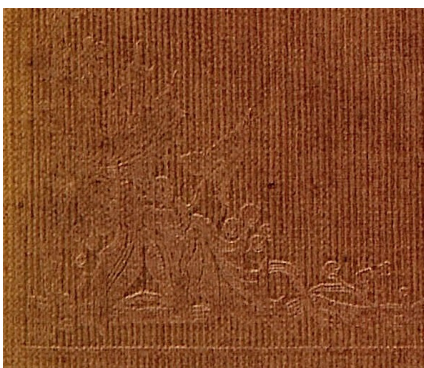


Green end-papers of a first edition copy, with much of the original color lost

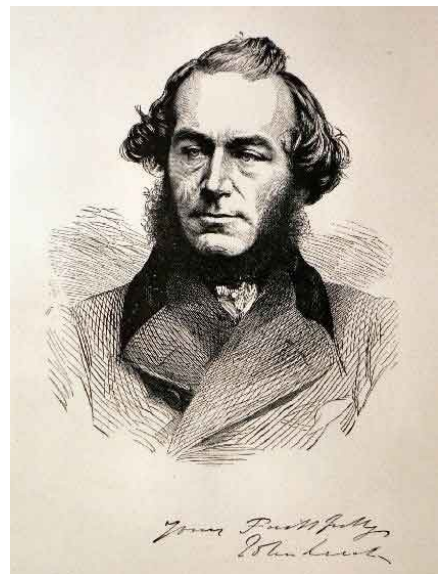
The cover of the first edition was decorated with a "blind embossed" border (stamped without color, gilding or ink). In the center, the title and author's name were embossed in gold, surrounded by a holly wreath of the same color.



Gold embossed cover, detail

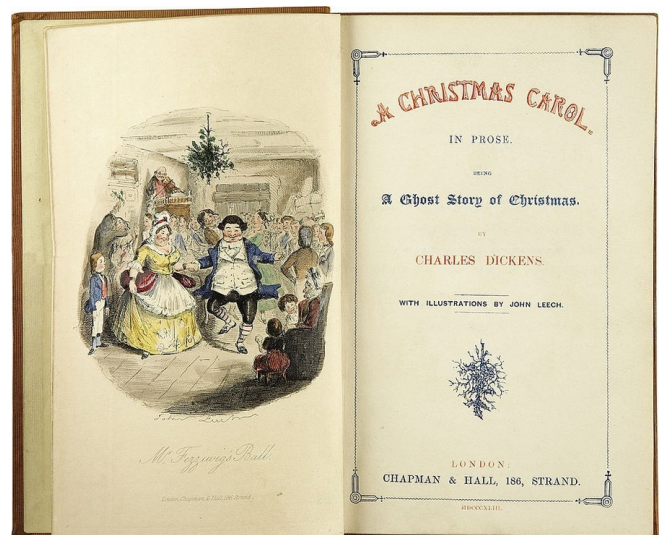


Blind embossed cover, detail



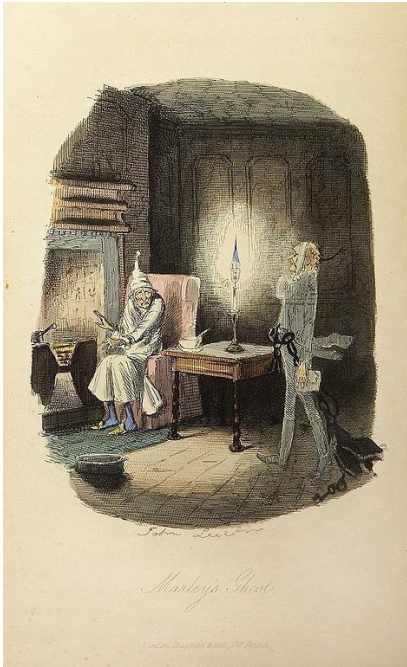
Portrait of John Leech published in Punch Magazine

Artist John Leech was selected to illustrate the novella. Several years earlier Leech had unsuccessfully submitted his work for Dickens' "The Pickwick Papers". By the time *A Christmas Carol* was written, Leech was an accomplished, sought-after illustrator and caricaturist.



Hand colored pages, first edition

John Leech produced eight illustrations for *A Christmas Carol*: four by wood engraving (a complex relief process introduced to publishing in the 1780s) and the remaining four by metal plate etching, which had become popular during the 1820s.



"Marley's Ghost", hand-tinted engraving

Leech's metal plates were executed in a delicate style of line art designed for subsequent hand-coloring to the author's specifications. A team of skilled watercolorists manually executed the tinting of each illustrated page of every book.



"Scrooge's Third Visitor", hand colored engraving

Because Dickens personally assumed the production expenses for this book, Leech's illustration fees, the cost of painstaking hand-coloring, and other luxurious touches like gilt-edged pages cut significantly into the author's profits.



Charles Dickens, 1858, at a time when the author toured extensively, giving public readings.

Over time, *A Christmas Carol* sold spectacularly well, and through subsequent editions, international tours and public readings, Dickens eventually realized handsome returns on his investment. Despite eventual success, however, it would be the last time Charles Dickens ever undertook to produce such a lavishly crafted book.

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