

# Charles Dickens and his trip to Cornwall

HOW CORNWALL COULD HAVE HELPED TO INSPIRE THE MOST FAMOUS CHRISTMAS STORY...



Christopher Marley (L) and Barry West (R)

**Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol is arguably the most famous and much-loved Christmas story, with countless film adaptations and its powerful message carried through to each festive period since its release in 1843.**

But did you know Cornwall may have played a vital role in inspiring the Victorian writer to pen A Christmas Carol, plus one man in particular is thought to have helped shape one of the story's most important characters?

Barry West is a historian from St Austell who travels the lengths and breadths of Cornwall to uncover historical mysteries and reveal the county's past. A few years ago, he started following the journey of Charles Dickens, who visited Cornwall in 1842 after stating he wanted to see 'the very dreariest and most desolate portion' of the Cornish coast.



On the 180th anniversary of Dickens' trip to Cornwall, we look at how his adventure through the most rugged parts of the county, and a gentleman who lived his final days in Port Isaac and is buried in St Endellion, could have inspired A Christmas Carol.

On a Saturday in October 1842, Dr Southwood Smith in Cornwall received a letter from Dickens. He was setting off to St Michael's Mount, the first leg of his trip, that Thursday and asked for the doctor's knowledge on 'the next best bleak and barren part'. He also asked if the doctor would help him down a mine!

In reply, Dr Southwood wrote: "I do not think you will find St Michael's Mount particularly desolate, but it is nevertheless a very remarkable and interesting place. The coast about Land's End, I am told, is incomparably more dreary and presents a fine specimen of wrecken scenery. But the place above all others for dreariness is Tintagel (King Arthur's) castle, near Camelford. There shall you see nothing but bleak looking rocks and an everlastingly boisterous sea, both in much the same state as when good King Arthur reigned."

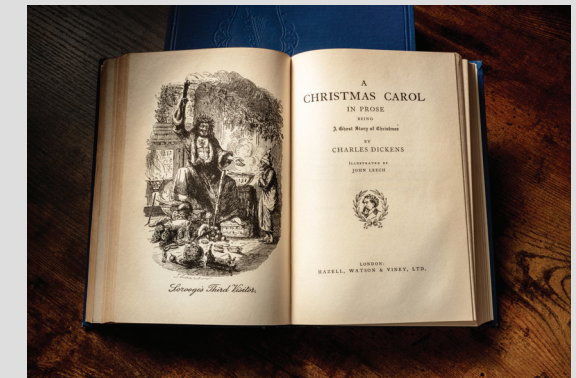
On 27th October 1842, Dickens embarked on his Cornish adventure with two artists and his biographer, arriving in Exeter by train and then likely crossing the Tamar via steam-powered ferry to reach Cornwall.

During the trip, they visited St Michael's Mount, Tintagel, St Nectan's Glen, the Logan stone at Treen, the mine at Botallack and Land's End, which appears in A Christmas Carol.

But Barry West, who has heavily researched Dickens' associations with Cornwall, believes that one of the most notable characters in the famous novel, A Christmas Carol, which was published in 1843 - just a year after his Cornish trip - may have been based on a doctor he met in London, who later moved to Port Isaac.

Jacob Marley is the distasteful business partner of the greedy, mean and selfish Ebenezer Scrooge, who encounters a terrifying night on Christmas Eve seven years after Marley's death, when he is visited by four ghosts. The first ghost is that of his long-dead business partner Marley, who brings the warning that he will be visited by three ghosts - the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future - to show him the error of his ways.

Barry came across a Dr Miles Marley while researching Dickens and after visiting the Pickwick Inn in St Issey. He was told that a Dr Frederick Marley, born 1831, had lived and practiced in Padstow for 50 years up until his death in 1908 at St Issey, who was revealed to be Dr Miles Marley's son.



It's recorded that Dickens attended a party on St Patrick's Day hosted by Dr Miles Marley in Piccadilly, who remarked on the unusual name of the author and claimed it would become 'a household word' - and it certainly did. Dr Marley later moved to Port Isaac, died in 1854 and is buried in St Endellion Church. His relative, Christopher Marley, visited his grave last year.

Dickens' stories have a recurring theme running throughout, that of poverty and the harsh times that Victorian folk faced every day. A Christmas Carol represents this entirely, and enforces that the simple acts of kindness and generosity can overcome some of these difficulties - perhaps something we should all try and bring through to our modern world.