

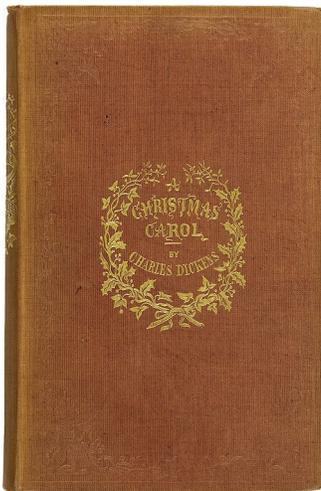


Utrecht Art Supplies

A Christmas Carol: Crafting a First Edition

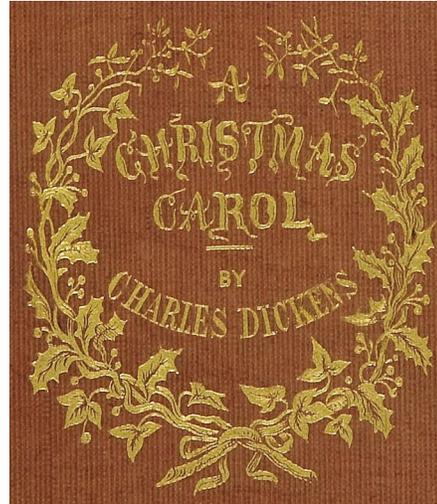


Charles Dickens' treasured classic *A Christmas Carol* is among the most familiar stories in English literature. Thanks to countless film and television adaptations, even those who haven't read the original text will surely know Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit and the other principle characters of this 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 a beautifully crafted work of art.



The novella was originally conceived as a seasonal gift, a beautiful book to purchase for family and friends. In fact, so concerned was Dickens with the

appearance and materials of his first edition that he realized very little profit from the initial release.

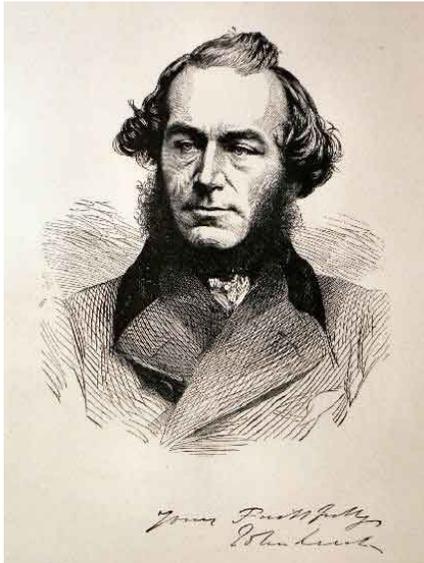


The cover of the first edition was bound in red cloth, decorated with a blind embossed border. ('Blind embossment' refers to stamping without color, gilding or ink.) In the center, the title and author's name are embossed in gold, surrounded by a holly wreath of the same color.



The endpapers that join the pages to the inside cover were originally hand-colored "Paris" green. The ink used on this stock proved not to be durable, and as a result endpapers of surviving copies have lost much

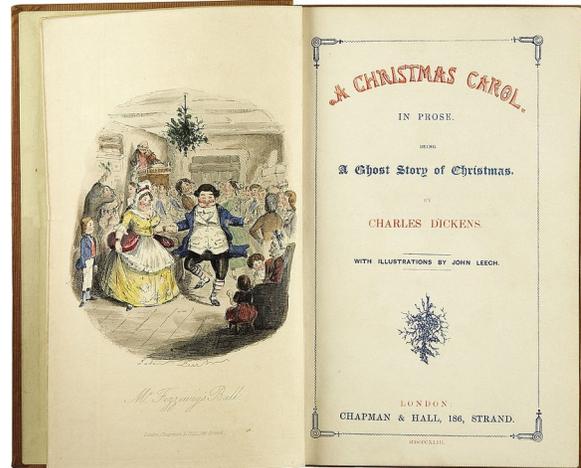
color. Yellow endpapers soon replaced the green after the original stock was used up.



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.



He produced eight illustrations for A Christmas Carol: four by wood engraving (a complex relief process) and the remaining four by metal plate etching.



The metal plates were executed in a delicate style intended to support hand-coloring per the author's specifications. A team of skilled watercolorists was assembled to execute the tinting of each page.



The expense of this painstaking and laborious work, along with Leech's compensation, cut significantly into Dickens' profits, further reduced by luxurious touches like gilt-edged pages. 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.