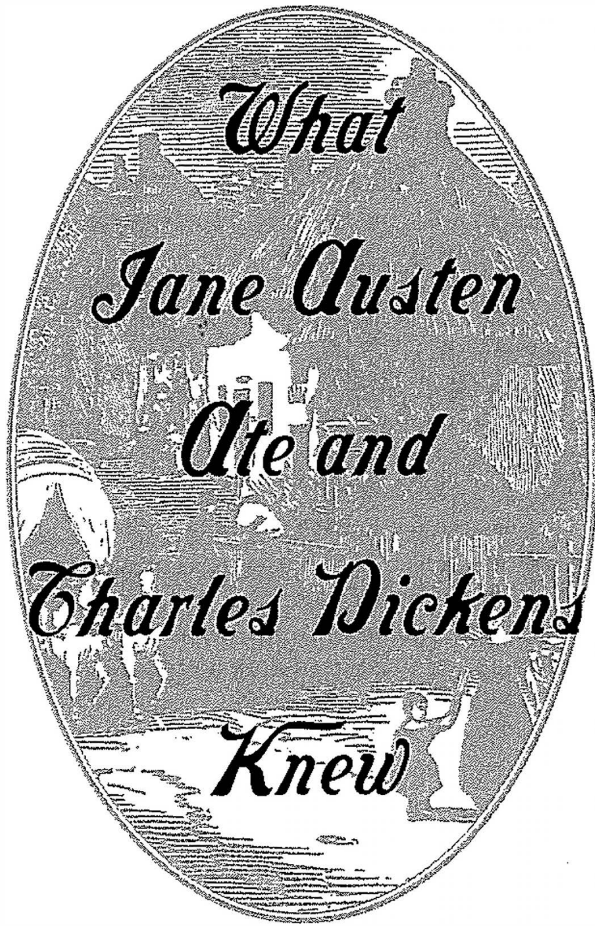


DANIEL POOL



FROM FOX HUNTING TO WHIST—
THE FACTS OF DAILY LIFE
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

C U R R E N C Y

Guineas, shillings, half-pence. You know what they are?" Mr. Dombey asks his little son Paul. Paul, Dickens tells us, knew, but the average reader of today is not always likely to be so knowledgeable.

In the 1800s, British money was calculated in units of pounds, shillings, and pence. These were the units of *value*—like the American mill, cent, and dollar—in which all transactions were reckoned, regardless of whether the value was represented by a bookkeeping entry, by coin, by bank notes, or by notations written on a check. The actual *physical* instruments of currency were paper bank notes and gold, silver, copper, and bronze coins like the sixpence, the crown, the sovereign, the shilling piece, and the penny. Thus, for example, the physical units called pennies were used to measure the value created by an equivalent number of pence. (The guinea, uniquely, was a unit of physical currency that *also* became an abstract measure of value as well; that is, long after the actual guinea coin itself stopped being minted in the early 1800s, prices for luxury items like good horses and expensive clothes continued to be quoted in guineas as if it were some independent unit of value like the pound.)

Sovereigns and half sovereigns were gold; crowns, half crowns, florins, shillings, sixpences, and threepences were silver; pence, ha'pence, and farthings were copper until 1860, after which they were bronze. The coins were issued by the Royal Mint, but the bank notes got their names from the fact that they were not issued by a government agency but by a bank, in fact—after the mid-1800s—only by *the* bank—the Bank of England. Until then banks all over

BASIC UNITS	Value	Coin	Paper	Slang Term
	1,000 pounds		1,000-pound note	
	500 pounds		500-pound note	
	200 pounds		200-pound note	
	100 pounds		100-pound note	
	50 pounds		50-pound note	
	20 pounds		20-pound note	
	10 pounds		10-pound note	tenner
	5 pounds		5-pound note	fiver
One Pound	21 shillings	guinea		
	20 shillings	sovereign	1-pound note	quid
	10 shillings	half sovereign	½-pound note	
	5 shillings	crown		bull
	2½ shillings	half crown	half a crown	
One Shilling	2 shillings	florin		
	12 pence	shilling		bob, hog
	6 pence	sixpence		tanner, bender
	4 pence	groat		
	3 pence	threepence		thruppence
	2 pence	twopence		tuppence
	1 pence	penny		copper
	½ pence	halfpenny		ha'pence
	¼ pence	farthing		
	⅛ pence	half farthing		

the country issued their own bank notes (or promises to pay), which circulated more or less like money. Private banks in the provinces are by one estimate believed to have cranked out about £20,000,000 worth of notes between 1810 and 1815. With the Bank Charter Act of 1844, however, the government gave the Bank of England a monopoly on the issuance of bank notes. As the currency of other banks subsequently disappeared from circulation, "bank note" or "note" in consequence became synonymous with the paper issued by the Bank of England.

To abbreviate their money, Britons used the symbol £ for pound, *s.* for shilling, and *d.* for pence, although five pounds, ten shillings, sixpence could be written £5.10.6. "Five and six" meant five shillings and sixpence, and it would have been written "5/6."

It is very difficult to know what a pound or shilling from 1800 to 1859 is worth in 1990s America, and, as any economist will volubly inform you, the fact that the Victorians had no Hondas and we have

no candles, i.e., we don't buy the same goods and don't have the same economic needs, makes the purchasing power of the two currencies fundamentally incommensurable. Nonetheless, intrepid estimates in the last ten years have put the pound's worth in the neighborhood of \$20, \$50 or \$200.

THE CALENDAR

*L*ondon. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. . . . Fog everywhere."

Yes.

And fog enveloping the reader of *Bleak House* trying to make out when on earth Michaelmas Term was—to say nothing of Boxing Day, Lady Day, Hilary Term, Whitsunday, Twelfth Night, and all the rest of those nettlesome English holidays. Yes. Well—church feasts, folk festivals, law terms, and academic terms at Oxford and Cambridge—here they all are:

Twelfth Night	January 5
Epiphany	January 6
Plough Monday	First Monday after Epiphany
Hilary Term (law courts)	Begins in January
Hilary Term (Cambridge)	Begins in January
Hilary Term (Oxford)	Begins in January
Candlemas	February 2
Lady Day (a quarter day)	March 25
Easter Term (Oxford)	
Easter Term (Cambridge)	
Easter	In March or April
Easter Term (law courts)	Begins after Easter
Ascension	40 days after Easter
Whitsunday (Pentecost)	50 days after Easter
May Day	May 1
Midsummer (a quarter day)	June 24
Trinity Term (law term)	Begins after Whitsunday
Trinity Term (Oxford)	Begins in June
Lammas (Loaf Mass)	August 1
Michaelmas (a quarter day)	September 29
Michaelmas Term	Begins in October
Michaelmas Term	Begins in October

Michaelmas Term	Begins in November
All Hallows, All Saints	November 1
All Souls	November 2
Guy Fawkes Day	November 5
Martinmas	November 11
Christmas (a quarter day)	December 25
Boxing Day	Generally, first weekday after Christmas

A few words of explanation:

1. The word *term* designated alike the academic sessions of Oxford and Cambridge and the periods during which the high courts (King's Bench, Exchequer, and Common Pleas) sat; *vacation* the time when they were not in session. The academic terms appear to have lacked fixed dates from year to year, and Cambridge, as the calendar indicates, had one less term than Oxford. Beginning in 1831, the law terms were fixed at January 11–31 for Hilary Term, April 15–May 8 for Easter, May 22–June 12 for Trinity, and November 2–25 for Michaelmas. The law terms were abolished in favor of sessions in 1873.
2. In 1752 the British joined the rest of Europe by switching from the Julian (thereafter called Old Style) to the Gregorian calendar. This meant going from Wednesday, September 2, 1752, directly to Thursday, September 14, 1752, and dropping eleven days permanently. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, we are thus told that "Lady Day was at hand, and would soon be followed by Old Lady Day, the end of her term here," the incidence of the same quarter day being calculated differently under the two systems of figuring.
3. Quarter days marked off three-month periods of the year on which rents were traditionally due, servants might be hired to begin a term of labor, and so on, as the passage above from *Tess* indicates. Dickens in *The Pickwick Papers* describes the renters in Southwark as "migratory, usually disappearing the verge of quarter-day."
4. Since there are occasional, sometimes rather knowing, references to the reigning monarch in some of the novels, it may be helpful to be reminded of the dates of their reigns.

The reform of 1826 introduced the quarter, which weighed 28 pounds—one quarter of a hundredweight. (Not to be confused with a quartern—"quartern" with an "n" on the end being a more general term referring to a quarter measurement of an ounce, a stone, a peck, or a pint. A quartern loaf was a sort of standard bread size equal to a four-pound loaf.) More significantly, the Imperial system standardized the measurement of volume for both liquid and dry goods. 8.655 cubic inches constituted a gill, of which four made a pint. As in the United States, there were two pints to a quart and four quarts to a gallon (except that the English gallon was somewhat larger than that of the United States) and then came pecks, bushels, and so on. (288 gallons = 144 pecks = 36 bushels = 4.5 quarters.)

Notwithstanding the advent of the new system, many goods continued to be measured in their own peculiar units even after 1826. Cloth, for example, was often measured in ells, each $1\frac{1}{4}$ yards long. Port and madeira wines were measured in pipes (about 100 gallons a pipe) and other wines were measured in hogsheads, as was ale, the hogshead being the equivalent of $1\frac{1}{2}$ barrels or 54 gallons. The practice of measuring wine by butts and tuns seems to have faded by the century's end.

A minor note: the dram was a unit of weight equivalent to one-sixteenth of an ounce. When, however, Abel Magwitch confesses to the soldiers who catch him on the marshes in *Great Expectations* that he stole "some broken wittles—that's what it was—and a dram of liquor, and a pie," he is referring not to this minuscule portion but to the amount of liquor one can down in one swallow.

E N G L A N D

England and Wales were divided into fifty-two counties, units of both governmental and residential significance to the average English person. Many of the counties had names ending in "—shire"; the counties were *called* shires until William the Conqueror changed the name of the old regional designation. Much of Jane Austen's novels was set in the counties not far north and south of London. George Eliot's novels are often set in the Midlands, the area of fox hunting and enclosures north of London. Dickens, of course, cen-



England and Wales.

tered most of his books in London itself; often, however, their locale may wander, as in *Pickwick*, *Great Expectations*, and *David Copperfield*, southeast of London to the coastal region of Rochester and Chatham, where Dickens spent part of his childhood. A good portion of *Vanity Fair* is set in and around "Queen's Crawley, Hants.," the latter being an abbreviation for Hampshire county, not far southwest of London.

In the far north, there was Yorkshire, where a good part of the second half of *Jane Eyre* takes place. *Wuthering Heights*, of course, is set in western Yorkshire in the area of the county known as the "west riding." And lastly, there was the Wessex of the great Hardy novels, a region in the southwest of England whose name the novelist borrowed from the old Saxon kingdom that had once occupied the area, territory Hardy described as "bounded on the north by the Thames, on the south by the English Channel, on the east by a line running from Hayling Island to Windsor Forest, and on the west by the Cornish coast," of which Dorset was the heart.

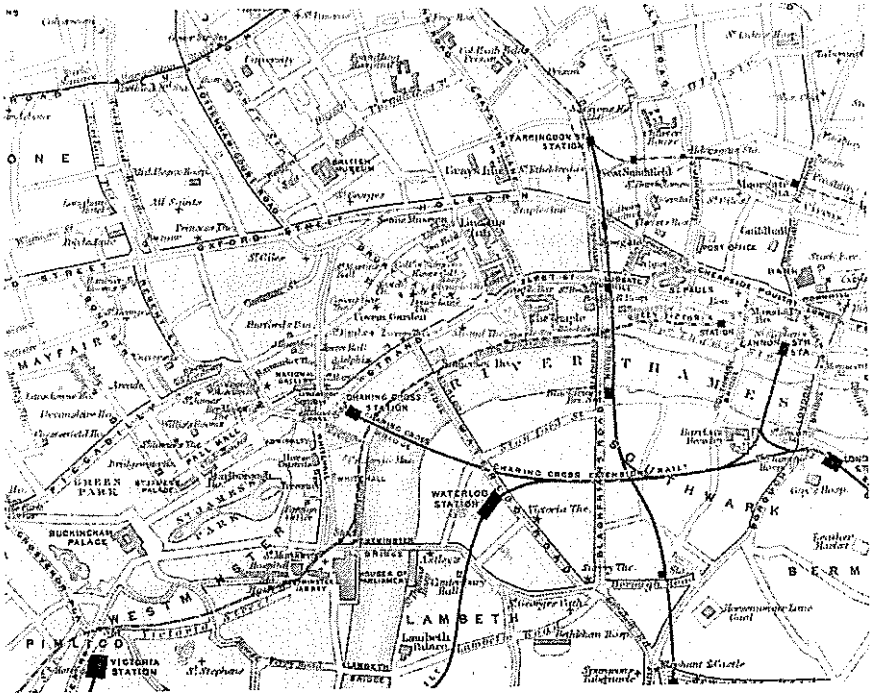
The names of certain cities would also have conjured up vivid associations for the nineteenth-century Englishman. Industry, of course, was centered in the north. Thus, Birmingham (sometimes "Brummagem") was the center of metal manufacturing; Manchester of the cotton industry; Newcastle, of course, supplied coal to the country; and Bath was a social center that developed to meet the needs of rich, gouty invalids who came there to take the waters. Liverpool, where Mr. Earnshaw finds and takes pity on the boy Heathcliff, "starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets," was the main port of connection in northern England with the Atlantic and the West Indies. Portsmouth, on the southern coast and important in *Mansfield Park*, was a major naval base.

And then there was London. . . .

L O N D O N

London geography was determined by the Thames. The great river ran from west to east through the city after a dogleg north past Westminster—so, too, did the city itself, its two great thoroughfares being the Strand—Fleet Street and Oxford Street—Holborn—Cheapside.

At its core was the old City of London—known as "the City" as the century wore on—an entity consisting of the roughly square mile making up the area that had once been inside the old walls of the medieval city of London, bounded by the Thames on the south, the Inns of Court and Temple Bar on the west, and the Tower in the



Sketch plan of London.

east, with its seven gates (Newgate of prison fame being one), which had all been torn down save for "that leaden-headed old obstruction," as Dickens calls it at the beginning of *Bleak House*, "appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed corporation, Temple Bar."

Within the City lay the Royal Exchange (the 'Change upon which Scrooge's word in *A Christmas Carol* is said to be so good), which was a gathering place for merchants in different trades, and the Bank of England, the financial nucleus of the nation, together with the financial offices and activities that naturally clustered around them. In fact, the term "the City" was also used to denote the financial heart of England in the way that "Wall Street" is used to describe the financial heart of the United States. In Jane Austen's day, it was still customary for some merchants to live in the City, but as railroads were thrust through it and commuting became more feasible, even poor clerks began commuting to work from fringe or suburban areas the way we are told that Bob Cratchit does from Camdentown. In the first eighty years of the nineteenth century, in

fact, the resident population in the City dropped from 128,000 to 50,000, while greater London as a whole mushroomed from a million to more than 4.5 million people.

The fancy area of London was the West End, which lay west of Temple Bar and London's center, Charing Cross. (Bloomsbury, site of the Russell Square where the Sedleys live in *Vanity Fair*, became increasingly less fashionable after the 1820s.) At the historic core of the West End lay what had once been the royal city of Westminster, with its palaces of St. James and Whitehall, along with Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. The Treasury building was here, along with Downing Street, the Foreign Office and the Horse Guards (army headquarters). These had now become part of the larger, expanded London, and adjacent to this nerve center of government and royalty the ultrafashionable West End residential area of Mayfair (and, later, Belgrave Square and the nonfashionable Chelsea farther south) grew up. Mayfair was the location of the posh men's clubs on Pall Mall, the exclusive shops on Bond Street and the fancy houses on the ritziest residential street in the city, Park Lane, overlooking the great greensward of Hyde Park on Mayfair's western border. All were within a short distance of the new royal residence, Buckingham Palace.

Predictably, the rest of the city became less fashionable and to the east, in particular, degenerated into slums, the East End along the docks beyond the area of the Tower becoming synonymous by the end of the century with poverty and misery. There were other areas as desperately poor, however; the notorious St. Giles and Seven Dials that sheltered Fagin's gang were located not far from Charing Cross. Across the Thames lay Southwark, sometimes referred to as "the Borough" but part of London, where Little Dorrit's father was imprisoned in the Marshalsea. The pleasure grounds of the Vauxhall Gardens where Joe Sedley was too drunk to pop the question to Becky Sharp lay here, and on the area's west bank was Lambeth Palace, the official residence of the archbishop of Canterbury. Greenwich, with its royal hospital for old sailors, lay downstream to the southeast, as did Woolwich, one of the army's two main arsenals. West were Kensington, Fulham, and Hammersmith; Whitechapel and Bethnal Green were to the city's east; and north were St. Pancras, Islington, Clerkenwell, and Hampstead, where the distracted Sikes wandered after murdering Nancy.

As they swelled in population, many of these areas also became terminals for the great railroads coming in from all over England.

The reader of Victorian fiction will recognize the names of some of the big stations a mile or so northwest of the city's center that connected London with the north, Marylebone (1899) being farthest west, and then, in increasing proximity, Euston Station (1838), St. Pancras (1867), and King's Cross (1852). A bit north of Hyde Park was Paddington Station (1854), which connected London with the west. Victoria Station (1862), a few blocks southwest of Buckingham Palace, ran to the south and southwest, and across the Thames River near the bridge of the same name Waterloo Station (1848) also brought in southerly traffic.

The Thames was some 800 to 1,500 feet wide as it flowed through the city. Originating far upstream from London, it flowed down past Henley and Windsor as clear water, and, although the Thames was a tidal river, it was seldom brackish in London unless tides were unusually high and the wind had been from the east for a long time. In 1800, one could travel from the "Middlesex" (county) or London side to the "Surrey" side (Southwark) via London Bridge, the ancient stone bridge just west of the Tower, via Blackfriars Bridge near the Temple, or by way of Westminster Bridge near the great Abbey. "It was Old London Bridge in those days," says Pip in *Great Expectations*, "and at certain states of the tide there was a race and a fall of water there which gave it a bad reputation." Pip masters the trick of negotiating its waters, but the bridge's architecture made the current sufficiently dangerous to be a factor in its replacement later in the century. In 1819, Southwark Bridge, the "Iron Bridge," as Dickens calls it in contrast to London Bridge, was built between London Bridge and Blackfriars, and in 1817 Waterloo Bridge was constructed between the Blackfriars and Westminster bridges. We are occasionally reminded that in those days even foot passengers had to pay to cross the river. In a visit to the "Patriarchal Tent," Dickens tells us, Little Dorrit "went by the Iron Bridge, though it cost her a penny." (The wherries of the watermen and, later, the short-distance steamers might have taken her up or down the river for a fee as well.)

From the standpoint of the riverfront, London Bridge really marked the entrance to the city; indeed, directions on the river were frequently given with reference to it as "above bridge" or "below bridge." Large ships found London Bridge impassable so the great companies constructed several hundred acres' worth of "the Docks," as they were called (that of the East India Company alone covered 250 acres) to its south. "The Docks" were inshore from the

Pool, the stretch of water south of the bridge where the colliers and other shipping massed, waiting for the signal to come in and unload their cargo.

From there it was south some fifty miles—past Gravesend and the long, flat marshy stretches of Kent and Essex—to the river's entrance at the Channel. "The river below," wrote the author of a London guidebook in the 1870s, "and nearly all the way to the mouth, lies between flat marshes, over which the ships appear sailing across the grass, as in a Dutch picture."

Such was London.

But what was it like to live in?

The fog in London was very real. Just why it was the color it was no one has ever been able to ascertain for sure, but at a certain time of the year—it was worst in November—a great yellowness reigned everywhere, and lamps were lit inside even during the day. In November, December, and January the yellow fog extended out some three or four miles from the heart of the city, causing "pain in the lungs" and "uneasy sensations" in the head. It has been blamed in part on the coal stoves. At eight o'clock in the morning on an average day over London, an observer reported the sky began to turn black with the smoke from thousands of coal fires, presumably for morning fires to warm dining rooms and bedrooms and to cook breakfast. Ladies going to the opera at night with white shawls returned with them gray. It has been suggested that the black umbrella put in its appearance because it did not show the effects of these London atmospheric. The fog was so thick, observed a foreigner at mid-century, that you could take a man by the hand and not be able to see his face, and people literally lost their way and drowned in the Thames. In a very bad week in 1873 more than 700 people above the normal average for the period died in the city, and cattle at an exhibition suffocated to death.

There were problems underfoot as well as in the air. One hundred tons of horse manure dropped on the streets of London each day, and a report to Parliament said that "strangers coming from the country frequently describe the streets of London as smelling of dung like a stable-yard." Originally, many streets were not paved; by mid-century, however, the dust from the pulverized stone with which London streets were paved coated furniture in good weather and turned to mud when it rained. An etiquette book advised gentle-

men to walk on the outside of the pavement when accompanying a lady to ensure that they walked on the filthiest part of it, and every major street had a crossing sweeper like Jo in *Bleak House*, who for a penny swept the street before you made your way across it on rainy days so your boots did not become impossibly filthy. Nor was the Thames any better. London sewage, some 278,000 tons *daily* at mid-century, as well as pollutants from the factories along the river's banks, was dumped untreated into the water, presumably helping to fuel the cholera epidemics that swept the city in the early part of the century. The smell was bad enough in the summer of 1858 to cause Parliament to end its session early.

There was what we would surely call noise pollution, too—the incessant sound of wheels and horses' hooves clacking over the pavement, the click of women's pattens on the sidewalks in the rain, the bell of the muffin man, and the cries of the street peddlers selling such items as dolls, matchès, books, knives, eels, pens, rat poison, key rings, eggs, and china, to say nothing of the German bands, the itinerant clarinet players, and the hurdy-gurdies.

The children who added their din to that of the costermongers remind us that London was an overwhelmingly young city, as we are apt to realize when we read, say, *Oliver Twist*, a city of multitudinous street arabs, young costermongers, crossing sweepers like Jo, or the mud larks who scavenged the bed of the Thames—all playing in the streets or crying their wares, holding horses for gentlemen, fetching cabs for theatergoers on rainy nights, carrying packages or opening cab doors or doing cartwheels or handstands in the street in the hope of earning a ha'penny or penny. There was no compulsory school until 1880, and children under fourteen made up 30 to 40 percent of the population. A girl like Lizzie Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend* was thus free all day to help her father drag for lost items—or bodies—in the Thames.