

## Charles Dickens Museum

### Audio transcript: Jo The Crossing Sweeper from 'Bleak House'

Dickens did not hold back in describing the poverty and hardship faced by Jo the crossing sweeper in the novel 'Bleak House'.

Jo sweeps his crossing all day long. He sums up his mental condition when asked a question by replying that he "don't know nothink." He knows that it's hard to keep the mud off the crossing in dirty weather, and harder still to live by doing it. Nobody taught him even that much; he found it out.

Jo lives - that is to say, Jo has not yet died - in a ruinous place known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street,

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avoided by all decent people, where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay were far advanced, by some bold vagrants who after establishing their own possession took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years - though born expressly to do it.