

## James (Jemmy) Wood

Known as 'The Gloucester Miser', legend has it that Jemmy Wood may have been the inspiration for Charles Dickens' character Ebenezer Scrooge in 'A Christmas Carol'.

Born in 1756, Wood inherited the Gloucester Old Bank from his Grandfather who had founded it in 1716. The Bank was said to have been one of the oldest private banks in Britain and operated by Wood's drapery shop at 22 Westgate Street, Gloucester. His practice was to offer no interest on deposits of less than one year. He also owned an undertakers business and owned land in and around Gloucester. Wood also served as a City Sheriff and as an Alderman.

Wood had a vast personal fortune and was known as '*the richest commoner in His Majesty's dominions*'<sup>1</sup>. Many stories circulate about his meanness, but it is not known how many are true. For example, it was said that he visited Gloucester Docks to fill his pockets with small pieces of coal that fell off the boats being unloaded there, and wore the same old clothes for years on end. He was renowned for walking everywhere rather than paying the cost of a carriage.

It has been suggested that the interminable court case Jarndyce vs Jarndyce in Dickens' 'Bleak House' may have been based on that which arose following irregularities in Wood's will, absorbing most of his estate.

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<sup>1</sup> "Jemmy Wood's Journal" by Irvine Grey in *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, Vol. 90, 1971, pp.158–177.