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## Picturing Places

### Accumulating London

Article by: [Matthew Sangster](#)

- Themes: [Transforming topography](#) [[/picturing-places/themes/transforming-topography/](#)], [Town and city](#) [[/picturing-places/themes/town-and-city/](#)]

Advances in print technologies, a growing consumer base and the interventions of clever entrepreneurs led to a burgeoning of prints of London in the 18th and 19th century. Matthew Sangster considers the ways in which these prints represented and organised the city, placing them onto a digital map of London to reveal the geographical and cultural patterns they trace.

The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definitions of topography make it sound like a reasonably objective and straightforward mode. The first definition characterises it as a 'science or practice' – implying an agreed methodological basis – and both the first and the second definition employ the terms 'description' and 'delineation', which connote relatively uncritical kinds of appraisal.<sup>[1]</sup> Topography in this diagnosis is a scrupulous accounting that characterises the entirety of a locality in an uncontroversial manner. It is possible to think of numerous valuable works that for the most part fit this ideal, like the county histories that diligent antiquarians compiled during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in which compendious bodies of provincial lore were collected in a single location. Such publications were designed to be and were generally accepted as being definitive records of the regions that they accounted for. However, not all locations were the subjects of comfortable consensuses. Some areas generated numerous competing topographical accounts, both visual and textual, that sought to advance differing interpretations and that acknowledged each other implicitly and explicitly through competing, appropriating, nuancing, contradicting and supplementing. In accounting for the burgeoning metropolis of London, late 18th and early 19th-century topographical works had to enter into conversation or contention both with a cornucopia of past works and with the profusion of the changing city itself. As versions of the city continued to accumulate, many writers and artists displayed a deep awareness of London topography as being an intrinsically quantitative proposition. Simultaneously, however, the pressures of the city's scale and of past accountings drove them to seek to make their own iterations of the metropolis novel and distinctive.

Perhaps the most impressive single attempt at encompassing the city during this period was Richard Horwood's *PLAN of the Cities of LONDON and WESTMINSTER the Borough of SOUTHWARK. and PARTS adjoining Shewing every HOUSE*

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Horwood produced the *Plan* with great pains for an audience of subscribers between 1790 and 1799. Writing in 1800 to the Secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in an attempt to secure financial recognition for his hard work, he stated that: 'I took every angle; measured almost every line; and after that, plotted and compared the whole work. The engraving, considering the immense mass of work, is, I flatter myself, well done'.<sup>[2]</sup> When assembled, the physical version of Horwood's *Plan* is more than thirteen feet across and seven feet from top to bottom. Its thirty-two printed sheets cover an area stretching from the middle of Hyde Park in the west to Limehouse in the east and from the southern edge of Islington in the north to the southern fringes of Kennington and Walworth in the south. It is an astonishing, unwieldy and peculiarly beautiful piece of work, particularly when seen in its full glory in a coloured copy such as the one held in the British Library's Crace Collection.

Horwood's *Plan* affects to present the whole of London, but it does so in a manner that involves a considerable degree of abstraction. While every house is marked, the majority of the buildings are distinguished only by outlines indicating their approximate sizes and by their street numbers. Some are made distinct with shading and the most prominent buildings are named and – on occasion – described in more detail, as is the case for Chelsea Hospital and performatively not the case for the Tower of London, which is distinguished by a tart note from Horwood stating that the internal parts are not shown as he was 'refused permission to take the survey' (probably due to the Tower's status as a military installation during a time of European war). There are a large number of striking touches in Horwood's composition, like the varying garden patterns in the West End and elsewhere, but these are symbolic conjectures rather than precise depictions. While the *Plan* is not wholly descriptive, its essential purpose was to delineate everything in the city, a purpose that was quite different from those of the producers of topographical illustrations, who generally had more specific and selective Londons in mind.

One such illustrator was Thomas Malton, who produced between 1792 and 1801 *A Picturesque Tour Through the Cities of London and Westminster, illustrated with the most interesting Views, accurately delineated, and executed in Aquatinta*. Malton was well-known as a perspective draughtsman – he exhibited a wide range of topographical works at the Royal Academy, painted scenery for the London theatres and gave drawing classes for aspiring artists. Among these was the young J.M.W. Turner, who, despite the difficulty that he had in assimilating the rigorous perspective techniques that he was taught, stated later in his life that 'my real master was Tom Malton of Long Acre'.<sup>[3]</sup> While Malton was not entirely secure within the upper echelons of the cultural elite, the introduction to the *Picturesque Tour* makes clear that he approached London self-consciously as a practitioner of the arts. His theme was the great strides that artists had made in the course of the 18th century, and he positioned his own work both as part of this 'rapid progress' and as a testament the value of the culture that had fostered it:

*My endeavours will trace the Progress of the Arts from the reign of Henry III. to the present era; and I trust, the choice of subjects, and the*

*correctness and truth of the perspective delineations, will compensate for any deficiencies that may have arisen, in the execution of this extensive and laborious work:—a work, which I hope and flatter myself, will not only convey to posterity a faithful representation of the Capital of the British Empire, at the close of the 18th century; but will also give a true idea of its*  
**RESOURCES, WEALTH, and MAGNIFICENCE.**<sup>[4]</sup>

London, with its central role in the nation's politics, commerce and culture, was a natural location to depict to establish one's profile within that nation, as the resulting plates would sell in part due to buyers' metropolitan aspirations and aspirations for their metropolis. One of the ways in which Malton drew on the artistic progress that he described was through the use of the relatively new technology of aquatint engraving, an intaglio technique that uses corrosives and treated plates to produce distinctive effects that resemble watercolours. The visual differences between aquatint and more traditional techniques can be seen by juxtaposing one of Malton's versions of St Paul's with the plate of the cathedral produced by William Henry Toms for William Maitland's 1739 *History of London*. While Toms' plate is shaded with cross-hatching, Malton's aquatint produces more subtle variations of tone. Aquatints tend to be particularly suited to dramatic skies, a quality that Malton takes many opportunities to demonstrate in his work.

## St Paul's from Ludgate Hill



This view of St Paul's was created and published by Thomas Malton, for his *Picturesque Tour Through the Cities of London and Westminster*

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## The west prospect of St Paul's Cathedral



William Henry Toms' view of St Paul's was published in the 1739 edition of Maitland's *History of London*

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Malton's *Tour* also differed from earlier topographical works in its process of composition. In the words of the great cataloguer of London topography Bernard Adams, it is 'remarkable, if not unique, in that the 100 large plates of which it is composed were all engraved and aquatinted by the artist in person'.<sup>[6]</sup> Most illustrated works were produced collaboratively by groups including writers, artists, print-makers and publishers, so in taking complete control of the process himself, Malton was making an unusual statement about his talents, positioning his work as an authored artistic achievement, rather than as a commercial product.

Putting Malton's version of the city into conversation with Horwood's demonstrates that Malton was genuine when he described his work as a tour, as the image below, with its markers for each of Malton's plates, demonstrates:

## Malton's Picturesque Tour Map



Horwood's *Plan* of London (1792-99) is used as a base map to locate plates from Thomas Malton's *Picturesque Tour* of the city (1792)

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The text that Malton wrote to accompany the plates begins at Westminster Bridge and winds its way around Westminster Abbey, up Whitehall, along the Strand and into the City, taking a quick jaunt to the Tower and Greenwich before looping back through Bloomsbury to curve down through the squares of the West End before finally concluding at the Prince of Wales' residence, Carlton House. The pattern that these plates trace is relatively clear, the majority clustering around the longstanding central spine of activity in the city, which connected Westminster with St Paul's Cathedral and the Bank of England via the Strand and in parallel with the Thames. However, Malton was not interested in noticing everything along his route. He frequently devotes several plates to a single building – seven for Westminster Abbey and Somerset House; nine for St Paul's; four for the Adelphi and the Royal Exchange; and three for the Bank of England and St Martin's in the Fields. This is not a work that purports to show the whole of London, but only the most picturesque parts, with Malton's idea of the picturesque being peculiarly architectural. There are figures in the plates, but the ladies and carriages outside Carlton House, while elegant, are somewhat incidental, and the tiny people in front of St Paul's even more so. Even in the busy Royal Exchange, the light and the shade cast and admitted by the arches dominate Malton's vision. The twin contentions that Malton's book implicitly advances are that London's fabric is an aesthetic work that forms a worthy subject for art and that in seeing it as such he is an artist to be valued.

Other topographical versions of London had quite different priorities. The 1804 volume *Modern London*, which was published by the erstwhile radical Richard Phillips, grew out of one of the first London guidebooks, *The Picture of London*, anonymously authored by the antiquarian John Feltham and first published in 1802. *Modern London* was sold as a 'large elegant [...] 4to embellished with 54 copper plates thirty-one of which are coloured' at the price of three guineas. In the book's advertisement the plates are described thus:

*They are faithful portraits of the places and scenes represented, and they exhibit the very soul of the Metropolis in a way which has never before been attempted. Most of the busy haunts of the inhabitants, whether for the gratification of ambition, avarice, or pleasure, have been exactly portrayed; and these views convey at once correct ideas of places*

which interest from their celebrity, and of scenes which characterize the manners of the people.<sup>[6]</sup>

Here, the advertisement's author, probably Phillips himself, accurately indicates that *Modern London* was far more interested in depicting the lives of the city than Malton was. There are 22 plates of scenes and landmarks interspersed through the main text of *Modern London*. Twenty of these are taken from designs by Edward Pugh, while the remaining two were drawn by Samuel Rawle. Bernard Adams was not very impressed by these images, believing them to be 'etched in a mechanical and uninspired fashion', but John Barrell has recently made a positive case for Pugh on the grounds both of his artistry and of his unique portrayals of 'untroubled social mixing'.<sup>[7]</sup> St Paul's in *Modern London* is a location of festivities; the great yearly service for the charity schools forms the subject for one print, the Lord Mayor's show another.

## St Paul's Cathedral



This view of St Paul's was published in Phillips' *Modern London*

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## Vauxhall on a Gala Night



Vauxhall Gardens was one of London's most popular entertainment venues and an obvious choice for depiction in Phillips' engraving series, *Modern London*

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Even in the more traditional third plate of St Paul's – one of the two by Rawle – the foot of the cathedral seems more populous and bustling than in the equivalent plate by Malton. *Modern London* also ventures to places of entertainment that are passed over in Malton's works, including Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and the two patent theatres – Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Where Malton sought to show the accrued legacy of London sights, *Modern London* was principally interested in how people lived – and how they ought to live – in the present-day city.

This interest in the interactions between people and places is also apparent in the second set of plates in the volume. While the grey arrows in [this map \[https://uk.sitestat.com/bl/shelvesandspaces/s?uk.sitestat.com/bl/shelvesandspaces.s&ns\\_type=clickout&ns\\_url=https://uk.sitestat.com/bl/shelvesandspaces/s?www.romanticlondon.org/modern-london-1804&ns\\_type=clickout&ns\\_url=http://www.romanticlondon.org/modern-london-1804/\]](https://uk.sitestat.com/bl/shelvesandspaces/s?uk.sitestat.com/bl/shelvesandspaces.s&ns_type=clickout&ns_url=https://uk.sitestat.com/bl/shelvesandspaces/s?www.romanticlondon.org/modern-london-1804&ns_type=clickout&ns_url=http://www.romanticlondon.org/modern-london-1804/), which mark the Pugh/Rawle scenes, are mostly near to the route between Westminster and the Bank of England (with a little cluster out at Greenwich off the edge of the *Plan*), the 31 plates of itinerant traders by William Marshall Craig, whose locations are marked in orange, are distributed in more various locations. Many of these juxtapose some of London's least wealthy tradespeople with some of its most exclusive squares. These plates sometimes depicted particular known figures, like the Hyde Park showman with his squirrel-topped box, and sometimes archetypes, like the chimney sweep, placed pointedly outside the Foundling Hospital.

However, they all play into Phillips' expressed intention that his book be of service to those who 'cannot find in [the histories by] Stowe, Maitland, or Pennant, those facts relative to the actual present state of their Metropolis'.<sup>[8]</sup> *Modern London* sought to represent the living city, claiming a niche for itself within the burgeoning topographical marketplace by moving away from architecture and antiquarianism and towards a more sociologically-inflected view of the city's topographical potential.

The most famous London topographical work from this period is the *Microcosm of London* [[collection-items/covent-garden-westminster-election](#)], which we might see as combining Malton's architectural interests with *Modern London's* concern with people, although in doing so, it also ventures into new representational territories. The *Microcosm* was a collaborative effort masterminded by the German-born impresario Rudolph Ackermann from his Repository of Arts at 101 The Strand. The 104 hand-coloured aquatint plates were based on architectural drawings by the French émigré Auguste Charles Pugin, who had moved to London early in the 1790s, trained at the Royal Academy Schools and worked as a draughtsman for the architect John Nash. Ackermann noted in his introduction that in similar productions 'the figures have generally been neglected, or are of a very inferior cast'; to address this purported issue, he employed the famous caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson to add in the bright, rumbustious men and women who populate Pugin's elegantly-executed buildings and vistas.<sup>191</sup> Once Pugin and Rowlandson had prepared the images, they were engraved variously by John Bluck (who engraved 54), Joseph Constantine Stadler (29), Thomas Sunderland and John Hill (10 each), and Richard Bankes Harraden (one). The printing and the hand-colouring were done by Ackermann's extensive staff – the latter process could produce striking variations in different copies. The writer, illustrator and watercolour specialist William Henry Pyne provided the text for the first two volumes; he was replaced for the third volume by William Combe, who later found fame as the author of the satirical tours of Dr Syntax. This was an expensive process and the *Microcosm* was a luxury production – its individual numbers, which included four plates and their texts, were 10 shillings and sixpence, and the complete *Microcosm* cost 15 guineas. Currency conversions across centuries are difficult, but this might be around £1,600 in modern terms.

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## Covent Garden Market, Westminster Election



This *Microcosm of London* print depicts political hustings taking place in the Piazza of Covent Garden

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It also included a range of more esoteric and original locations, including a synagogue, a Quaker meeting house, the chapel of the Magdalen Hospital for penitent prostitutes, St Luke's Hospital for Lunatics and the Board Room of the Admiralty. While Malton was concerned with art and architecture and *Modern London* with people, the *Microcosm* gloried in metropolitan variety. 'To expiate on the general utility of a work of this description', began the introduction to its first volume, 'is hardly necessary; it embraces such a variety of subjects (dissimilar, it must be acknowledged, to each other), that some of them must be interesting to almost every man; and as the plates will be arranged alphabetically, the whole will form a sort of dictionary, that may be referred to for any particular subject'.<sup>[10]</sup> As its title indicated, the *Microcosm* sought to represent in comprehensive miniature the city's profusion, and its reception indicates that this wide remit has continued to convince.

Ackermann also published less lavish London-focused works, including an 1816 book of *Select Views*, priced at £3. 13s. 6d. – still the equivalent of three hundred pounds or so in modern money, but less than a quarter of the cost of the *Microcosm*. The vast majority of the plates included were originally published in Ackermann's magazine the *Repository of Arts*. They were brought together in the *Select Views* by a text by the architect John Buanarotti Papworth. The *Select Views* features some interesting time-specific plates, such as this image of the bridge and pagoda erected in St James's Park in 1814, which in Papworth's words had been put up 'for the purpose of contributing to the amusement of the public, on the celebration of our national success and the return of the peace'.<sup>[11]</sup>

## View of the Bridge & Pagoda, St James's Park



The oriental bridge and pagoda at St James's Park were erected to celebrate a short spell of peace between Britain and France. The structures were depicted in numerous commemorative prints, including this one published in Ackermann's *Select Views of London*

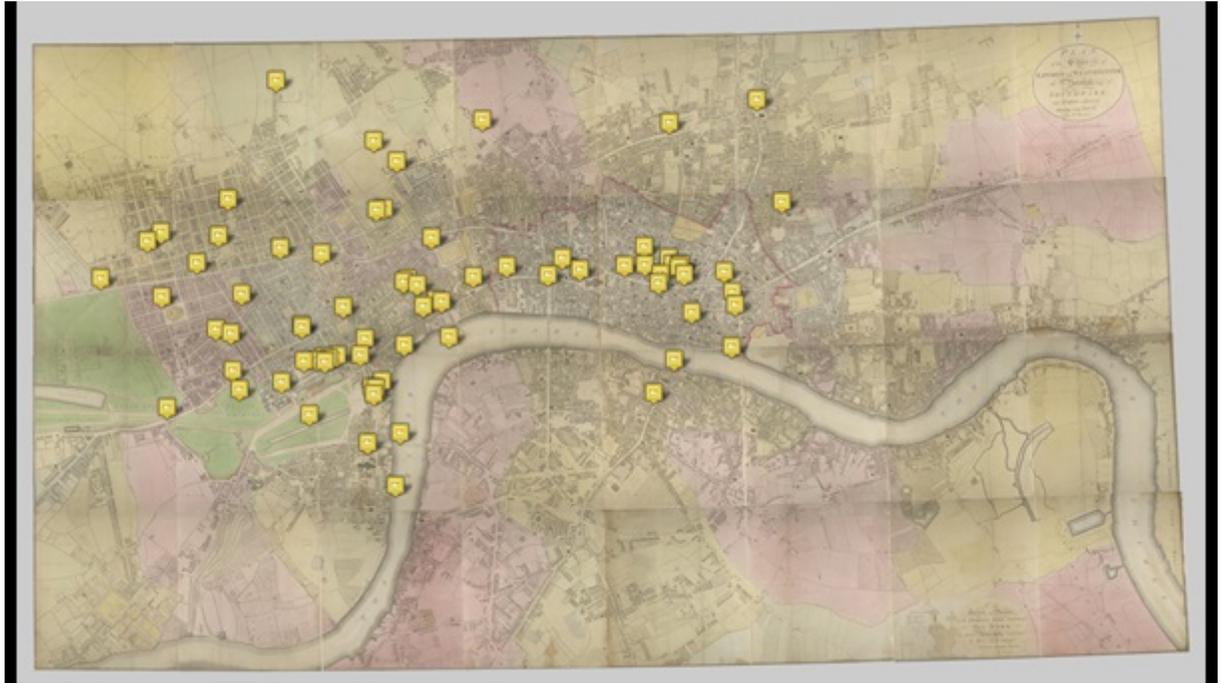
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Papworth's pitch in the introduction also rests on national ideals:

*THE Metropolis of a Country so distinguished for its opulence, for the munificence of its public bodies, and the liberality of its individuals, must be interesting in all its features.— The portraits of its palaces, churches, public buildings and squares, are useful commentaries of its history—they present documentary evidence of our national character, and record the progressive advancement of our commerce, sciences and arts.*  
[12]

Just as this introduction in part resembles Malton, so the location profile for the *Select Views* is surprisingly similar to his. While the collection is called *Select Views*, many of its views had been selected before.

## Papworth's Select Views Map



Horwood's *Plan* of London (1792-99) is used as a base map for markers locating sites depicted in J.B. Papworth's *Select Views* of the city (1816)

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There are some interesting novelties in the *Select Views* – it gives a surprisingly bucolic version of the city, including a number of plates focused on the greenery in the squares and a series of images of the turnpikes leading into the city. It also finds some new things to depict along the main drag, including the Royal Menagerie at the Exeter Change on the Strand. When looking at the topographical history of the city chronologically, though, the *Select Views* appears a more minor and derivative publication than some of those that I've mentioned previously. However, wide-ranging perspectives on the topographical record were not necessarily readily available in the early 19th century. While some works on London fought for a particular niche, others functioned for audiences for whom they were the principal illustrated account.

## Royal Menagerie, Exeter 'Change, Strand



This curious menagerie, located on the second floor of a building on The Strand, is depicted by Rowlandson for Rudolph Ackermann's popular print series, *Select Views of London*

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I've concentrated in this essay on topographical series that sought to give an idea of London as a whole, trying to stress their particular points of specialisation in doing so. However, it is worth mentioning that other works went a lot further in presenting particular aspects of the city.

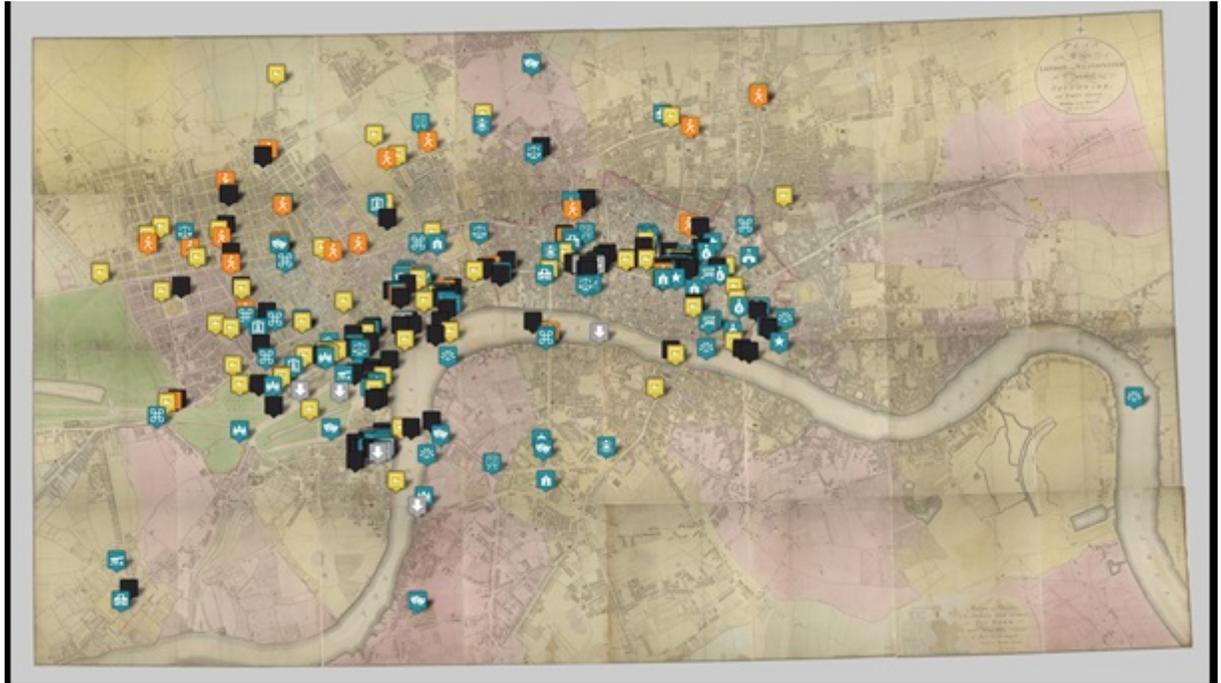
Thomas Hosmer Shepherd and James Elmes' *Metropolitan Improvements*

[\[http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc\\_000000002430#c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&z=-2408.4664%2C-140.2222%2C6334.9328%2C2804.4444\]](http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_000000002430#c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&z=-2408.4664%2C-140.2222%2C6334.9328%2C2804.4444), published

in the 1820s, focused specifically on 19th-century buildings and sites, particularly the developments in and around Regent's Park. There were also series produced on specific locations, like Westminster Abbey and St Paul's, and series produced for particular groups of readers. The creators of works in these subgenres could vary widely in their approaches. Priscilla Wakefield's *Perambulations in London* (1809), written for children and designed to be cheaply available, only includes a small number of fairly traditional visual elements, reducing the city to the Monument, the Guild Hall, the Mansion House, Royal Exchange, St Paul's, the India House, the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey and the House of Lords – a commonly-employed set of views. By contrast, *London Scenes, or, A Visit to Uncle William in Town* (first issued under a slightly different title in 1818, but expanded to its fullest version in 1824) makes more of an effort to pitch its images specifically to a juvenile audience, with dramatic scenes of river rescues and stampeding bulls alongside more traditional topographical and antiquarian choices.

Rather than focusing explicitly on this specialisation, though, I want to conclude this essay with a final map that juxtaposes the locations depicted in the four main works that I've discussed, showing both the consonances and the points of departure:

## Topography Juxtaposed Map



Using Horwood's *Plan of London* as a base map, Matthew Sangster plots London locations depicted in four major print series of the late 18th and early 19th centuries

Usage terms: : Matthew Sangster, *Romantic London* (<http://www.romanticlondon.org>)  
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By mapping Malton's *Picturesque Tour*, *Modern London*, the *Microcosm* and the *Select Views* together, we can see the points within the city that they all agree were important – these include Westminster Abbey, Whitehall, the theatres at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, the Bank of England and the Royal Exchange. We can also see very clearly their shared tendency to direct their readers and viewers towards the central spine of activity that I've mentioned several times previously. However, the map demonstrates plainly that each work has particular concerns of its own – for example, the *Microcosm* makes at least some effort to represent the main points of interest south of the river, and the *Select Views*' selection testifies to a growing interest in the fashionable squares of the West End. Also striking are the areas into which none of the guides venture – the rookeries around St Giles; Wapping and Bermondsey to the east; and the new developments north of Holborn and in what is now Bloomsbury do not seem to play a role in the visions of the city that these four examples of relatively high-end topography seek to promote. For the visual histories of these areas, we must look elsewhere.

As these shared consonances and blind spots of these works demonstrate, London's topographical heritage is not a vast morass of separate pictures, but an ordered accumulation that is structured in discursive, idealistic, pragmatic, quotidian and surprising ways. In reading this legacy, we can learn not only from individual topographical images, but also from the entangled social histories that become evident when we put different images and sets of images into conversation with each other.

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## Footnotes

[1] 'Topography', *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2016 (accessed 9 February 2017) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203423?redirectedFrom=topography>  
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[2] *Transactions of the Society Instituted at London for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, Vol. 21 (London: C. Spilsbury for the Society, 1803), pp. 311-3.

[3] Walter Thornbury, *The Life of J.M.W. Turner, R.A.*, 2 vols (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), I, 47.

[4] Thomas Malton, *A Picturesque Tour Through the Cities of London and Westminster, illustrated with the most interesting Views, accurately delineated, and executed in Aquatinta* (London: Thomas Malton, 1792-1801), p. iv.

[5] Bernard Adams, *London Illustrated, 1601-1851* (London: Library Association, 1983), p. 171.

[6] [Richard Phillips], *Modern London; being the History and Present State of the British Metropolis* (London: Richard Phillips, 1804), pp. v-vi.

[7] John Barrell, 'Edward Pugh in Modern London', *The London Journal*, 37.3 (November 2012), 174-95 (p. 193).

[8] Phillips, *Modern London*, n.p.

[9] [Rudolph Ackermann], *The Microcosm of London*, 3 vols (London: Ackermann, 1808-10), I, ix.

[10] Ackermann, *Microcosm*, I, ix.

[11] John B. Papworth, *Select Views of London; with Historical and Descriptive Sketches of some of the most interest of its Public Buildings* (London: R. Ackermann, 1816), p. 13.

[12] Papworth, *Select Views*, p. 2.

- Written by Matthew Sangster

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