An extraordinary digital collection bringing to life the teeming streets of Victorian London, and inviting students and scholars to explore the gin palaces, brothels and East End slums of the nineteenth century’s greatest city.
This wonderful digital collection brings to life the teeming streets of Victorian London, inviting students and scholars to explore the gin palaces, brothels and East End slums of the nineteenth century’s greatest city.

From salacious ‘swell’s guides’ to scandalous broadsides and subversive posters, the material sold and exchanged on London’s bustling thoroughfares offers an unparalleled insight into the dark underworld of the nineteenth century city. Children’s chapbooks, street cries, slang dictionaries and ballads were all part of a vibrant culture of street literature.

London Low Life is also an incredible visual resource for students and scholars of London, depicting in full colour maps, cartoons, song sheets, street cries and a full set of the essential John Tallis’s Street Views of London – a unique resource for the study of London architecture and commerce.

We also include the celebrated Gissing ‘Scrapbook’ from the renowned Pforzheimer Collection, which includes clippings, ephemera and notes from the author of London novels New Grub Street and The Nether World.

Material includes:
- Fast literature
- Street ephemera – posters, advertising, playbills, ballads and broadsides
- Penny fiction
- Cartoons
- Chapbooks
- Street Cries
- Swell’s guides to London prostitution, gambling and drinking dens
- Reform literature
- Maps and views of London

This collection, drawn from the holdings of the Lilly Library, will be of interest to 19th century scholars researching: working-class culture, street literature, popular music, urban topography, ‘slumming’, prostitution, the Contagious Diseases Act, the Temperance Movement, social reform, Toynbee Hall, police and criminality.

London Low Life features revolutionary new interactive mapping, using the latest technology to bring the social geography of Victorian London to life.

Using the intuitive layered map interface, users will be able to:
- Overlay Victorian cartography over a modern, searchable base map, allowing comparison of the Victorian city with present-day London.
- Visualise core data about Victorian London, including the boundaries of local government; population size, density and growth; and crime and poverty data.
- Locate and read about key institutions relating to the social history of Victorian London:
  - Workhouses
  - Orphanages
  - Asylums
  - Prisons
  - University settlements
  - Women’s refuges
  - Religious Missions
- See images of Victorian additions to the city including engineering feats such as the Thames Embankment and the London Underground, and tourist attractions including the Crystal Palace and the South Kensington Museum.
- ‘Walk’ through London’s main streets, using our 3D versions of the remarkable Tallis Street Views.

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