

Old London Bridge: London's Lost Landmark [B2]

Per oltre seicento anni, Londra si è potuta vantare di un elemento urbanistico unico: il ponte abitato più lungo al mondo. La caotica espansione demografica di Londra lo rese un luogo impraticabile, così che il ponte venne smantellato.



The city of London once had an iconic [landmark](#), famous around Europe for more than six hundred years, which disappeared almost two hundred years ago. Old London Bridge, dating from 1209, and [lined](#) with insecure-looking wooden houses [providing](#) homes for more than five hundred people above the waters of the River Thames, was the longest [inhabited](#) bridge in Europe.

ROMAN BRIDGE

The first bridge over the Thames, made of wood, appeared in Roman times. Bridges were regularly rebuilt over the next thousand years, destroyed by fires and even a tornado. Then, in 1176, work began on a new, revolutionary, stone bridge connecting the City to [Southwark](#), which was completed in 1209. A miracle of engineering, the bridge crossed a [wide](#), powerful

[tidal river](#) . It served as a [gateway](#) to the City and was a place of religious [pilgrimage](#) and royal [pageantry](#). The bridge quickly became an important commercial crossing and prestigious business and residential area. Shops appeared on both sides of the roadway built in the middle. Houses were constructed above the shops, and rooms were built over the road in the middle, creating a pedestrian tunnel. Danger was never far away. In 1212, a huge fire destroyed all the buildings and killed three thousand people. In 1481, one of the [multi-seated latrines](#) fell into the river, and five men [drowned](#).

BLOODY ROLE

Old London Bridge played a role in England's affairs of state. Those protesting or rebelling against the state, so-called 'traitors', could end up with their heads on [spikes](#) on the bridge. The [Keeper](#) of the Heads — a great job title — would first of all [parboil](#) the decapitated heads and then cover them in [tar](#) to preserve them.

CHAOTIC TRAFFIC

Over the centuries the bridge's traffic became more and more intense and chaotic. In the 1670s, attempts were made to keep the traffic in each direction to one side, through a keep-right policy, and then, from 1722, through a keep-left policy — a possible origin for traffic in the UK driving on the left!

LONG DECLINE

A few years later, the bridge began a long decline. London's West End [overtook](#) the bridge as a shopping centre, the property market [slumped](#), and a new bridge opened at Westminster in 1750. Inhabitants began to leave the bridge. The final house was demolished in 1761. Plans [started](#) for a new bridge.

LOST TO HISTORY

Demolition of Old London Bridge began in 1831 and the historic medieval [landmark](#) disappeared totally in 1832. One year before, the new London Bridge had opened. The new bridge, however, did not last. Less than 140 years later, it also disappeared. Its stone structure was dismantled and sent across the Atlantic Ocean to Arizona, where it served as one of the strangest tourist attractions in the world.

Glossary

- **providing** = fornire, offrire
- **inhabited** = abitato
- **pilgrimage** = pellegrinaggio
- **spikes** = spuntoni, punte
- **Southwark** = quartiere del sud di Londra
- **tidal river** = fiume soggetto a maree
- **gateway** = via d'accesso
- **multi-seated latrines** = latrine multiposto
- **tar** = catrame
- **overtook** = to overtake
- **wide** = ampio
- **Keeper** = guardiano
- **parboil** = sbollentare
- **landmark** = punto di riferimento, attrazione
- **lined** = occupare, riempire
- **pageantry** = sfarzo, fasto
- **drowned** = affogare
- **slumped** = crollare