

# London Bridge Listening Exercise - a free resource from Businessballs.com

## section 1

The first London Bridge was built by Romans sometime after AD43 and some of its wooden remains have been uncovered on the north side of the river. During its life the wooden structure was renewed several times, and it was probably to this earliest bridge that the nursery rhyme 'London Bridge is falling down' refers. Indeed, at one time, one of these structures was washed away by a flood, and another was torn down by invading Vikings, led by Olaf the Norseman in 1014.

The wooden structure was eventually replaced with a stone bridge, which commenced building in 1176 and featured twenty arches and stone piers with a drawbridge. This took thirty years to complete and houses and shops were incorporated to help pay for the upkeep of the bridge.

It would have been this bridge that was in place during Charles Dickens' youth and he remembered it in *Great Expectations*, when Pip crossed it in great despair, having recently learned that Estella was to be married to Drummle. It also featured in his book *David Copperfield*, who spoke fondly of sitting in one of the stone recesses of the bridge, watching the people go by, or looking at the sun shining in the water and lighting up the golden flame on top of the Monument. One of these stone recesses has been preserved in the grounds of Guy's Hospital.

**questions:** What was the original structure of the bridge? (Wooden)  
Who was Estelle going to marry? (Drummle)

## section 2

In 1825 a new bridge designed by John Rennie was opened, as the old one could no longer cope with the increasing traffic. This bridge was widened in 1902, and this bridge featured in Dickens' book *Oliver Twist*. In fact the steps that used to lead down to the river to the west of the bridge were known as Nancy's Steps. This was due to the fateful conversation overheard by Noah Claypole between Nancy and Mr Brownlow on a flight of steps on the Surrey bank, on the same side of the bridge as St Saviour's Church, which is now Southwark Cathedral. Dickens' knowledge of this bridge enabled him to explain that Noah Claypole could conceal himself, yet still hear what was being said.

**questions:** Why was a new bridge opened in 1825? (The old one couldn't cope with increasing traffic)  
What did Southwark Cathedral used to be called? (St Saviour's Church)

## section 3

The stairs that are part of the bridge consist of three flights. Just below the end of the second, going down, the stone wall on the left terminates in an ornamental pilaster facing towards the Thames. At this point the lower steps widen so that a person turning the angle of the wall is necessarily unseen by any others on the stairs who chance to be above him, if only a step. It was in this way that Claypole was able to overhear the conversation which eventually led to the death of Nancy at the hands of Bill Sykes.

In 1970, this bridge was sold to Lake Havasu City, Arizona, because a larger bridge was needed, and the bridge that we see today was finally opened in 1973. It is sometimes suggested by mischievous folk that the Americans thought they were buying the far more dramatic Tower Bridge, but no proof of this notion has ever been found.

**questions:** When was the bridge sold to Lake Havasu City? (1970)  
Who overheard the conversation? (Claypole)