The rain of bombs on London compressed into seconds the city's peacetime process of renewal which used to let the masterpieces of Wren and Nash and the brothers Adam go crumbling, year after year, under the wreckers' picks. It seems fitting to mark the end of the bombing by recalling a London that vanished before the dilapidation of the recent city.

Between 1875 and 1886 the short-lived Society for Photographing Relics of Old London issued to its few members 120 photographs of buildings then threatened with destruction. The society sent its photographers to grassy little gardens with hollyhocks and fruit trees espaliered against walls not quite high enough to shut out the roar of the surrounding traffic; to alleys where the wooden booths of old Bartholomew Fair pressed too close to let two men pass easily; to old India Trade warehouses slumped over the soiled Thames; to many odd, forgotten corners that were torn down shortly afterwards, and to some that lingered on until the V-bombs found them out.

By now the sum total of destruction has so changed the city that it is hard to believe that as late as the 1880's a corner of what used to be Grub Street could show an example of the kind of clapboard architecture that vanished from London in the Great Fire of 1666 (ill. p. 223) and that survives in the adaptations built in early New England. Stranger still, within the memory of men yet living St. Paul's cast the shadow of its dome on the verminous timbers of an inn with a galleried courtyard such as Shakespeare used to act in. The photograph on page 222 shows why theaters have "galleries" or "balconies" and why theater boxes were once called "rooms."

London has been called a parasite of the bridge that has spanned the Thames on or near the same site for almost two thousand years. During the first thousand years a London Bridge of wood had to be patched or rebuilt each time it was broken by ice floes or rotted away or burned. The timbers must have been pegged or lashed together loosely in 1014, for the Danes pulled the bridge apart. According to the Olaf Sagas, "King Olaf, and the Northmen's fleet with him, rowed right up under the bridge, laid their cables around the piles which supported it, and then rowed off with all the ships as hard as they could down the stream. Now as the armed troops stood thick upon the bridge, and there were likewise many heaps of stones and other weapons upon it, the bridge, being loosened and shaken, gave way; and a great part of the men upon it fell into the river, and all the others fled." The account ends with a Norse poem beginning:

"London Bridge is broken down,
Gold is won, and bright renown."

At last in the 1170's, the decade in which the Rhône was spanned in stone at Avignon, a London priest organized the great project of bridging the 900-foot river with twenty stone arches of varying width. This work of over thirty years was partly financed by rents from houses—the wonder of the town for 550 years—that were built on the bridge even before it was finished.

In 1597, when the bridge had reached the height of its fortunes, the first and most detailed of all the old engravings of it was drawn and published, though probably not engraved, by John Norden, one of the busiest Elizabethan surveyors and the first Englishman to project a complete series of county histories. The Museum has lately acquired what is said to be one of two known impressions of Norden's view of London Bridge, printed before he reduced the copper to a panoramic strip by cutting off the sky and water.

On the left the print shows the palisade of poles where, beginning as early as 1305, the

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heads of so many great Englishmen made their last appearance in this world. A quarter of Harry Hotspur was shown among them after his death at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. In 1540 Sir Thomas More's "heade, being somewhat perboyled in hot water, was pricked upon a pole, and sett on high upon London bridge." There for a fortnight it attracted crowds dense enough to block traffic because it "grewe daily fresher and fresher, so that in his life time he never looked so well; for his cheekes being bewtifyed with a comly redd, the face looked as though it had beholden the people passinge by, and would have spoken to them."

The bridge piers rested on foundations like islands that blocked four fifths of the river's flow. The tide, thus dammed, rushed through in a five-foot reversing cataract that gave boatmen and their passengers the thrill of "shooting the bridge" and occasioned the saying that "London Bridge was made for wise men to walk over and fools to go under." But drownings like those shown in our engraving and often mentioned by Pepys were hazarded every day by well-dressed people who risked the boat ride rather than trudge ankle deep through the refuse of the streets.

The tide was first harnessed for pumping water up into the city seventeen years before John Norden drew "The Water Wvrke" at the right end of the bridge. In time more undershot wheels were added in other arches until fifty-two pumps were sloshing and thundering as they raised over two thousand gallons a minute. The tide served the bridge dwellers too, for they fished through trap doors in their kitchens and sluiced their floors so clean that the plague and other rat-borne epidemics hardly touched them.
A tide of traffic forced itself through London's only bridge as turbulently as the tide of water below. The press of carts and cattle often crushed pedestrians to death when they could not take refuge in the tiny shops that lined both sides of the bridge. In the early 1600's most of the shops sold gloves, hose, hats, and needles, which were later diversified by chapbooks for simple readers and every kind of small goods except liquor, for which there was no cellarage. This passage, twelve feet wide, was roofed most of the way by overhead galleries that connected opposite houses to keep them from toppling outward into the river. Norden said that the bridge "seemeth not only a contynuall strete but men walke as under a ferme vaute or lofte." Day in and day out, the tunnel resounded to the bleating and lowing of beasts, the shouts of drovers, the rattle of carts over cobbles, the cries of street vendors, and the hydraulic thunder of the pumps and millwheels.

John Norden's view of the bridge shows, at the left center, Nonesuch House, which had been pegged together—supposedly without a nail—twenty years before out of timbers prefabricated in Holland. Gilt and painted carvings encrusted this wonderful cage of window glass right up to its florid false gables, its onion cupolas and weathercocks. When this house was built, London Bridge was one of the desirable dwelling places in the city. And why not? Think of quitting the garbage piled in the blind alleys on shore to enter rooms as snug as ships' cabins, with sunlight spangling the little ceilings, and to gaze from high above the churning waters out onto the reaches of the river, where masts and rigging were for-
ever mingling and shifting in the breeze. But bit by bit the city’s growth destroyed the whole of what Norden had considered the most remarkable building in England, down to the very stones under the river. Bombing would have caused more comment on the disappearance of the bridge but could not have destroyed it more utterly.

The two volumes issued by the Society for Photographing Relics of Old London may be seen in the Museum Library, and Norden’s View of London Bridge in the Print Department.

Most of the information in this article was taken from Gordon Home, Old London Bridge, London, 1931.