

## UNBUILT BRITAIN PART II – A REVIEW

August 23, 2013 · by Kat Martindale · in *Architecture, City Guide, Review, Transport* · [Leave a comment](#)

With the inevitable rain closing in on this bank holiday weekend, some of the best distractions will be on BBC iPlayer, including [Unbuilt Britain](#).

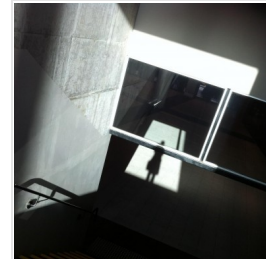
Beyond my [previously declared](#) fascination with the unbuilt, the second installment of Olivia Horsfall Turner's Unbuilt Britain was as compelling as the first. This episode 'Making Connections' focused on the plans motivated by international relations and "beset by xenophobia".

The first project under review was the Channel Tunnel. Before the current 31 mile long 'Tunnel Sous-Marin' that opened in 1994 and now carries an average of 27,000 people a day, there were three earlier attempts to join England to continental Europe.

The first plan, conceived in 1802 during a break in the war with Napoleon, French engineer Albert Mathieu Favier proposed a single tunnel for horse drawn carriages with tall ventilation shafts rising up through the Channel, opening above the water level. The plan is warmly received during what turns out to be a lull in the fighting that resumes the following year.

Louis Joseph Aimé Thomé de Gamond was next in line with blue prints under his arm. de Gamond proposed eight plans including laying cast iron tubes along which trains would travel but settled on a tunnel. The plans evolved into a life-long passion to build the

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survey of channel himself. The results of this survey formed the basis for future geological work for the existing Eurotunnel.



The White Cliffs of Dover from the sea-sickness-inducing cross Channel ferry.

A sufferer of sea sickness, Queen Victoria approved of the plans as did Napoleon III, whom de Gamond had met in his formative years. However, whilst travelling through the streets of Paris to attend the opera in January 1858, an assassination attempt was made on the life of the French Head of State by a Italian revolutionary Felice Orsini using

British made bombs. Napoleon III decided that the British needed no further assistance in launching future attacks and cancelled de Gamond's project.

Scotsman William Low presented the third plan in 1868, comprising two main tunnels linked by a service tunnel and similar to the current layout. Low found political support and money in the 'Railway King' Edward Watkin and tunneling started at Abbots Cliff in 1880. Security concerns were raised, this time by the British War Office, and digging ended two years later.

The idea that the seas around Britain afforded the nation's security was the starting block for the second scheme reviewed in the show; a battleship canal separating England from Scotland. This was not a renewed England-Scotland tussle but Horsfall Turner suggests that it was the expansion of the Kiel Canal that launched the country into panic planning. This coincided with the launch of the innovative battleship HMS Dreadnought and a period of massive shipbuilding ensued aimed at maintaining the Royal British Navy's image of maritime supremacy.

The proposed canal, of a similar scale to Suez and Panama, would cut through Loch Lomond, allowing ships to avoid travelling through treacherous waters to the north of Scotland. Scottish merchants had already made such plans known as the Direct Route and the Loch Lomond Route. Being 20 miles shorter, the Loch Lomond Route was preferred but with ships increasing in size, so too would the canal and costs started to escalate to a

current equivalent of £6 billion. Despite growing concerns over

Germany's seafaring capacity, the costs were considered too great to find out more, including how to control cookies, see here: [Cookie Policy](#)

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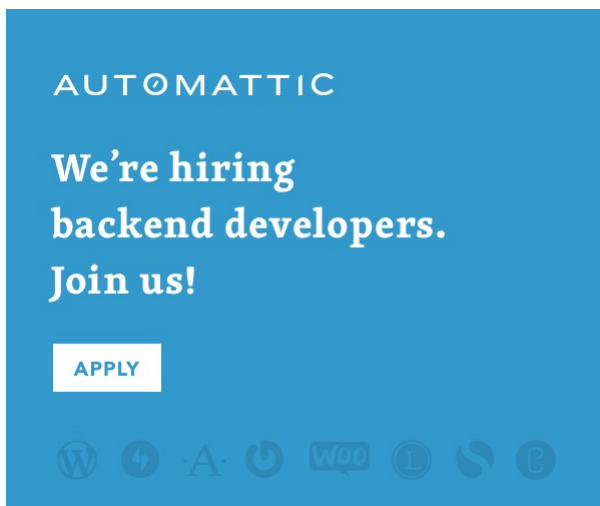
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Succinct presentation by Olivia Horsfall Turner along with a finely curated collection of experts, graphics, original documents, and library and site visits, with a tightly focused theme keeps this show moving faster than any history or economic development lesson in the classroom.

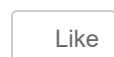
The final episode in this all too brief series (I think future series on Utopian housing plans and another on international projects should be up next) will be shown at 10pm on BBC4 on Monday night, repeated on Wednesday night and available on BBC iPlayer.

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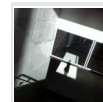
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