

A Great Tower for London

In 1890 Victorian railway entrepreneur and visionary Sir Edward Watkin launched an open-call architectural competition for a 'Great Tower for London'. Watkins had been inspired by the recently completed Eiffel Tower and was driven by national pride to realise a bigger and greater tower for London. The tower was to be the main attraction of Watkin's Wembley Park and Pleasure Gardens.

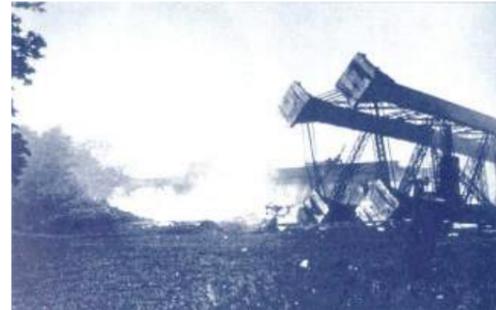


Of the 60 competition entries the winning submission proposed a 358m tall tower containing a hotel, winter garden, Turkish baths, observation decks and an astrological observatory - the entire structure was to be illuminated by electric light.



Work on the tower and surrounding park commenced in 1893 and with construction of the tower well underway, Wembley Park opened to the public in May 1894. By September 1895 the first level of the tower was complete and stood at 47m, sadly this was to be as tall as the tower would ever reach.

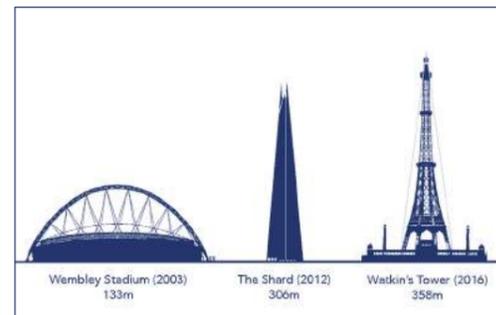
A combination of construction difficulties, fundraising concerns and health problems for Watkin himself resulted in construction ceasing in 1896. Watkin's Great Tower for London quickly became known as the London Stump or Watkin's Folly and the unfinished structure was declared "unsafe" by 1902 and was demolished in 1907.



Had the tower been complete it would still be the tallest structure in London...

A Counter-factual Reality

Our Wembley Park Drive place-making proposal brings to life a counter-factual history in which Watkin's dream is realised and his Great Tower 'complete'.



Employing 4 Spectra Physics lasers the volume of the tower is to be traced out in the sky over Wembley Park Drive (WPD). As Watkin originally intended the tower will be a landmark for the area reflecting the cutting edge of technological capability. The visibility of the tower will vary depending on the time of day and atmospheric conditions. Pedestrians and road users will pass through and around the ephemeral structure, having a subtly different experience each time they do so.



The footprint of the proposed tower is overlaid onto the existing urban condition. The tower is positioned just off the Wembley Way axis, centred over the Wembley Park Drive area. Two of the housings for the four lasers land on traffic islands and the other two in car parks.

A 'Folly' for Everyone

After careful analysis of the area it's our opinion that more subtle interventions will simply be lost in the complex existing urban fabric and as such be relatively ineffective. The WPD environment is a bombardment visual and street clutter with a huge array of signage, traffic fixtures and street furniture. On top of this, when navigating the WPD area on foot a primary concern is avoiding the large volume of traffic orbiting the central petrol station.

Wembley Park has a rich history of bold and celebratory schemes, from Humphry Repton's visionary 18th Century landscaping to The British Empire Exhibition of 1924. Our proposal is in the same ambitious vein and the spirit of Watkin himself.

The proposal doesn't target a specific audience nor does it seek to be overly purposeful. The abstracted tower is a 21st century beacon for the WPD area. Situated adjacent to Wembley Way, first and foremost it is hoped that residents and visitors alike will appreciate the visual spectacle, with the delicate tower viewed as part of a composition incorporating the stadium arch and its surroundings.

Should observers be more intrigued then, not dissimilar to searching for the pot of

gold at the end of the a rainbow, they may attempt to follow the beams of light to their source. In this case the pot of gold is a minimal 4 metre tall cylindrical column formed from seasoned cast iron. These columns are adorned with information in relief text and drawings telling the story of Watkin and the tower that never was.

Technical design & delivery

There is precedent for a for lasers being used in a similar fashion at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich where a laser is used to define the meridian line.



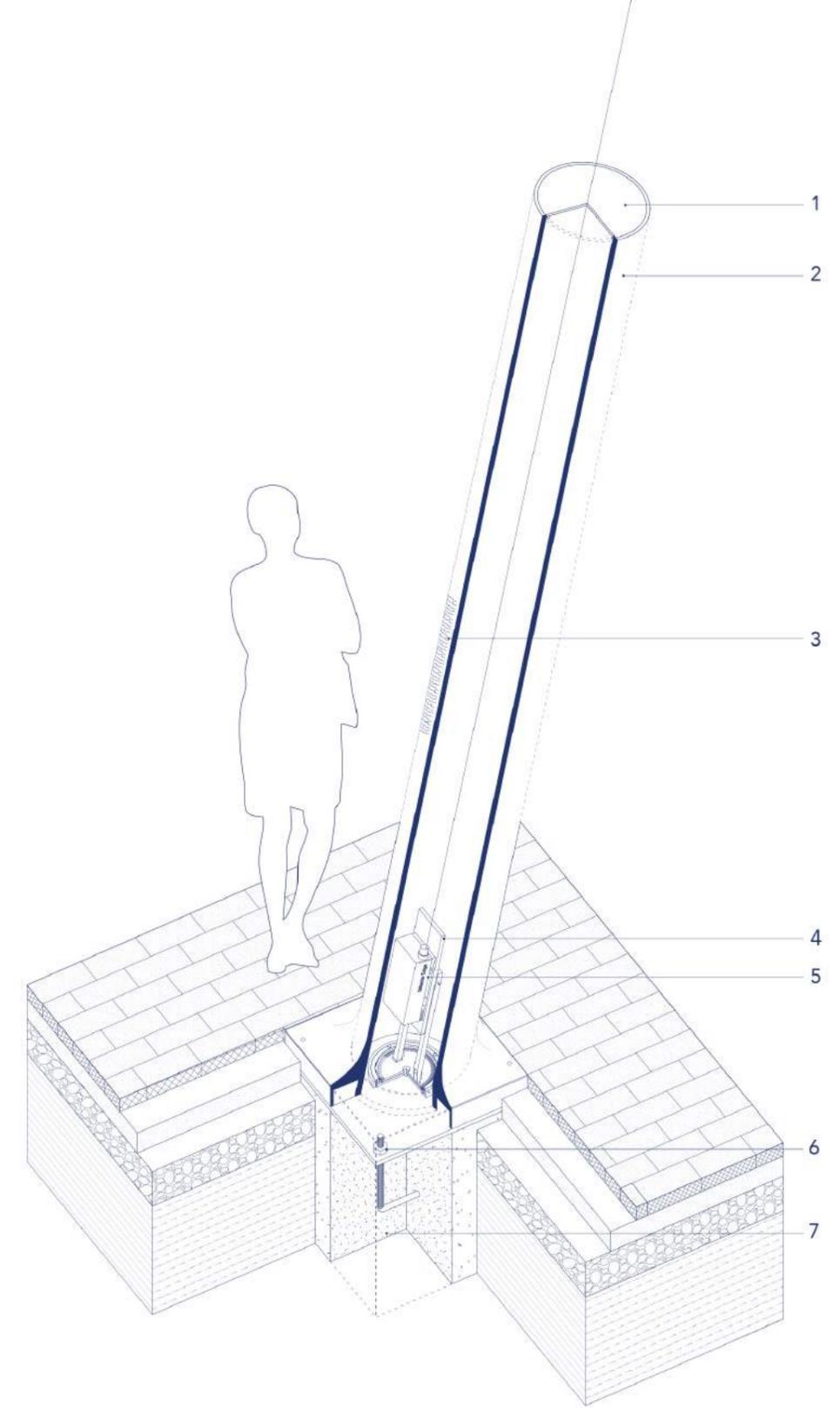
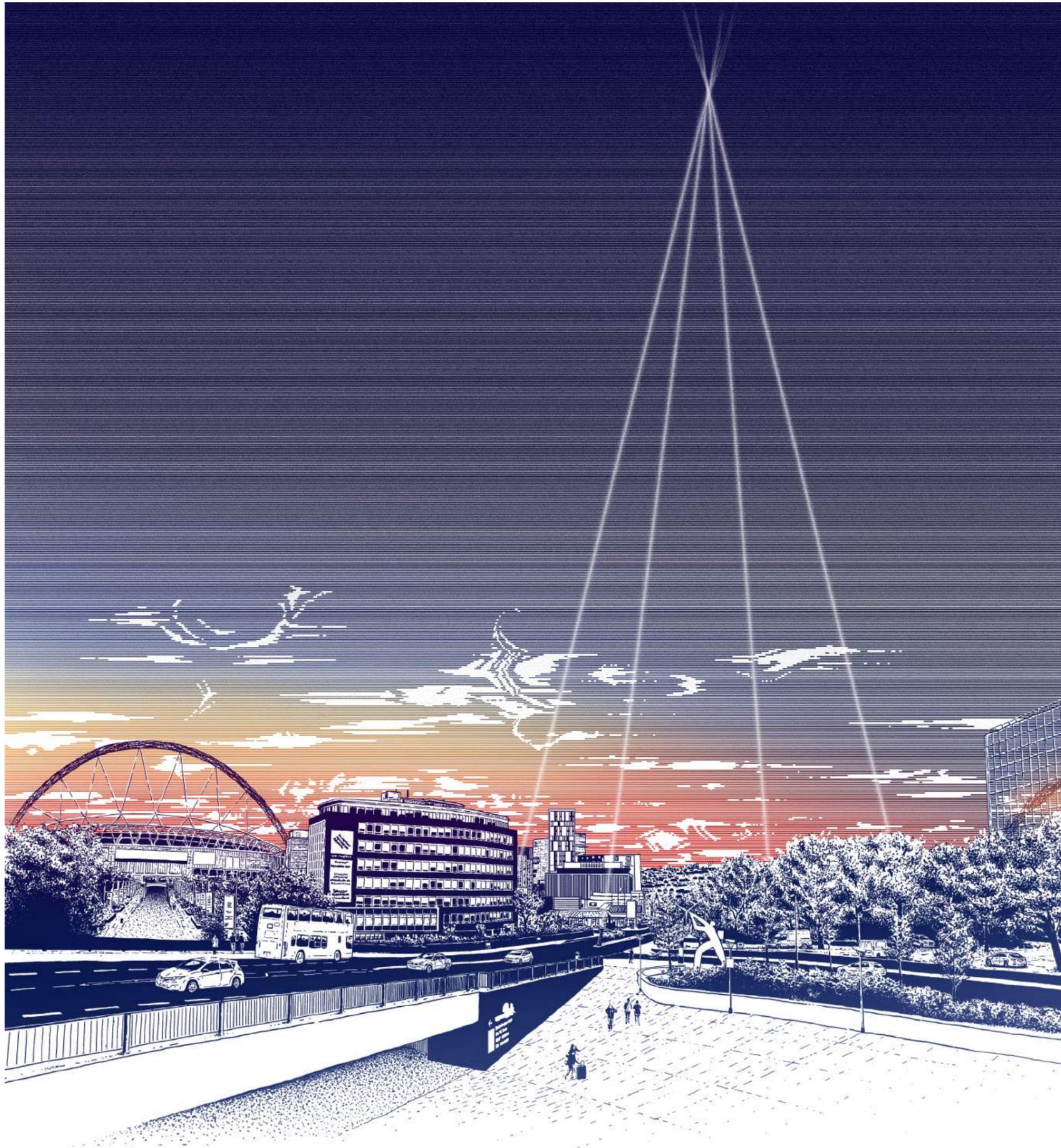
The lasers required for our proposal are the Spectra Physics Millennia Edge CW 532 - air cooled, low power model. These state of the art lasers have adjustable power outputs so beam length can be controlled so as not to interfere with aviation traffic. The lasers are mounted onto finely calibrated adjustable and dampened stands.



We are fully aware that realising this proposal would cost more than the available £17,000 but after much deliberation we asked ourselves the simple question; what would Sir Edward Watkin have done?

**Surman
Weston**

Maël Comte Fournier



1. 8mm self-cleaning toughened glass cover
2. Seasoned cast iron laser housing - 4000mm tall
3. Cast text and drawings explaining the history of Watkin's competition and tower
4. Dual axis micro-calibrated laser mount
5. Spectra-physics millenia edge laser
6. 4 x M20 threaded L bar fixing - stainless steel
7. 600 x 600 x 1000 fibre-reinforced concrete foundation

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