

# WATSOCC

*Spreading the news about Absalom and Edward Watkin*

**Welcome to WatSoc News for May 2022 - the seventh edition of  
the newsletter of the Watkin Society**



*The committee of The Watkin Society wish you and yours -  
after a winter of lockdowns - a Happy and Healthy  
Summer*

## **Breaking news from the National Heritage Lottery**

**Our application for £10,000 funding to promote our aims has been successful. This is a double boost: it's great to have support for our work from a nationally recognised organisation, and the funding means that we can now at last take action on what we could only describe in our earlier newsletters as 'plans'.**

**In our bid we set out our three top priorities:**

## **TO WORK IN OUR NEW TARGET AREA: CLEETHORPES AND GRIMSBY**



**Grimsby Harbour**



**Cleethorpes Beach**

**Through his visionary development of its docks and enormous railway system Edward transformed Grimsby into one of Britain's major trading hubs and the biggest fishing port in the world.**

**And just along the coast from Grimsby he spotted the potential of the tiny village of Cleethorpes and created a national holiday resort with a new station right next to the beach, a sea wall built to save the town's crumbling cliffs from coastal erosion, a pier, a promenade and entertainments.**

**We have now linked up with local residents who were working to promote the heritage of their two towns. They want to use EW's local achievements as a focus for their efforts. The Heritage Lincolnshire organisation have been granted their own lottery funds to launch a project in local schools, built round Watkin's dramatic successes. In its pilot stage the project has generated terrific enthusiasm among the children about 'Mr Grimsby' (EW's nickname in his lifetime – but he should have been called 'Mr Cleethorpes' as well!) and this imaginative project is now moving on to involve more schools.**

**The Grimsby Civic Society has invited us to give a presentation about Edward Watkin in the Town Hall and we are currently building up a contact list of volunteers who are interested in finding out more about the Watkin Story. The local press have already featured our work.**

## **TO CREATE AN ONLINE WATKIN RESOURCE BASE**

**Information about the Watkins is currently held in many separate places, including books, magazines, libraries and private collections of letters between Edward and great figures of the Victorian Era. The sheer scope and variety of sources of Watkin material can be off-putting for someone who would like to know more. Our new digital library will bring information about the Watkins into a single archive. This will be online, free, and easy to find for anyone who has access to a computer - in Britain and abroad.**

**We have two IT specialists, Chris Eccles and Jamie Rennie, currently working on designing our new highly complex system. We are also fortunate in having as our Secretary Angela Rawcliffe, who is a professional archivist with Manchester's Central Reference Library. Angela will supervise the organisation and contents of the new Watkin Archive and will be able to offer research training to anyone who would like to be part of this exciting project. (See below.)**

---

### **Interested in research?**

**Do you enjoy finding things out? Would you like to join us in exploring aspects of the lives of Absalom and Edward in your area or more widely? You could work on your own or with someone else or with a group. Digging out the facts is a great pleasure but the creation of the Society's new archive library will be an added bonus. If you wished, the results of your work could be preserved for others who, like you, are interested in the multi-faceted and fascinating Watkin Story. Just contact us at one of the links at the end of this newsletter.**

# TO LINK UP WITH THE GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY IN THE MIDLANDS ([HTTPS://WWW.GCRAILWAY.CO.UK](https://www.gcrailway.co.uk))



The original GCR, was EW's creation from Manchester to London, opened in 1899. Like so many lines it was axed by Dr Beeching in 1969. But 17 miles, in two sections, recently united by a new bridge, have been preserved and are providing steam and diesel excursions for thousands of visitors a year.

Our link with the railway is now firmly established. We spent a very happy day recently with the Friends of the GCR during one of the highly successful Gala Days at Loughborough Station (our Watkin book 'Victoria's Railway King' sold well!). A new audio-visual suite featuring EW will be opening at Quorn Station in the summer.

We will be dressing up in period costume and running a stall at the GCR's Autumn Steam Gala on Saturday 1 October to advertise the Watkin Society. We are thinking of organising a trip to the gala for anyone, old or young, who would enjoy travelling back in time in period carriages pulled by a wonderful steam locomotive. It would be a great family day out, with exhibitions and ice cream and refreshments at the GCR café. Parking is easy at the stations but if there was enough interest we could hire a coach from the Manchester area. Would you like to join us? (No need to dress up!)

## **News from 'Watkin Country'**

**As we promised, we are nourishing our roots in Northenden, particularly with local schools. Recently a Year 5 class from the Northenden Community School followed up a lesson about the Watkins with a visit to St Wilfrid's Church, where Absalom and Edward worshipped and where they are buried. One of the items on view in the church is the Watkin Banner, which was created, with the help of Jamie Rennie, by children from St Wilfrid's School, who use the Rose Hill Woods, in front of the former Watkin family home, for their Forest School project. (Talking of which, work has just started on repairing the paths in the Woods. This has been made possible by a grant from Manchester City Council to our sister organisation, the Friends of Rose Hill.) At high school level, the Dixons Brooklands Academy (formerly the Manchester Health Academy) is pioneering the Watkin Story in their curriculum. To mark the end of the winter Andrew Bradley, the Society's vice-chair, acting in his capacity as Rector of St Wilfrid's church, organised a walk from the former Watkin family home, Rose Hill, and its lovely woods, to the church, where a large 'congregation' visited the Watkin graves and admired the beautiful interior of the building, with its family memorials to Absalom and Edward and beautiful windows commissioned by Edward in memory of his wife, Mary. Refreshments were organised by Gwyneth Lloyd, a key church worker (and Outreach Officer of the Watkin Society). The afternoon was a great success and seems likely to become an annual event.**



**St Wilfrid's Church**



**Rose Hill**



**The Watkin graves**

# EDWARD WATKIN – FRENCH TV STAR?



Finally, here is proof of the potential in the Watkin Story. We have just had confirmation that the programme about towers that were built around the time of the Eiffel Tower in Paris has been given the go-ahead by French TV. Edward's Wembley Tower will be featured. Directed by one of Gustav Eiffel's descendants, the programme will be broadcast in 2023 on the cultural channel 'Arte', which is transmitted in six languages throughout the EU.

We are going to approach TV and radio companies in the UK to see if they will match the interest in Edward Watkin on the other side of the Channel!

---

**Finally, finally, we'd love to hear from you if you would just like some more information about the Watkins or would be interested in doing some research on your own or with a group or have any suggestions for improving the work of the Watkin Society or if you have any ideas for publicity or have media contacts in the UK – or abroad.**

**Exciting times for the Watkin Society. Would you like to join us?**

**You'll find us at**

**<http://friendsofrosehill.org/the-watkin-society-watsoc/>**

**and on Twitter**

**[@WatkinRoseHill](#)**

