

WATSOC

The Watkin Society

Welcome to Issue 16 of the Watkin Society's Newsletter (August 2026)

*Spreading the word about the amazing Watkin family
and the work of their Society.*

**Absalom
Watkin
(1787-1861)**



**Edward
Watkin
(1819-1901)**



And a special welcome to the new supporters who have just joined our contact list.



The weeks since our last newsletter in April have been among the busiest since the Watkin Society was founded in 2019. So, a lot to report on as well as setting out our plans for the future.

See the details at the end of this newsletter that show how the Society is about to step up a gear.

But let's start with a review of what has been going on in each of our local Watkin groups.....

NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE

Edward Watkin turned Grimsby from a small port into what became the biggest fishing port in the world, and changed the little fishing village of Cleethorpes (population in 1831: 497) into a great family holiday resort. We are delighted to announce that the Grimsby and Cleethorpes Watkin Steering Group has now started on its new programme of working with local schools to 'spread the word' about Watkin's amazing work in both towns.

We had a very special Watkin Day at Littlecoates Primary School in Grimsby. ('We' were the Group's newly-appointed Schools Project Officer, Connor Stannard, professional actor and Watkin enthusiast, Sara Beasley, and WatSoc's chair, Geoff Scargill. A bonus was the personal appearance of Sir Edward himself and his dear wife, Lady Mary.)

We were made very welcome by the headteacher, Nev Wilkinson (finalist in the national TES Awards, also known as the Oscars of Education) and members of the teaching staff, Niki Morgan and Katey Cooper.

Mrs Cooper's terrifically enthusiastic year 5 class worked in groups with us on a variety of mini-projects, showcasing Watkin's local achievements. We were joined at the end of the day by parents.

Niki is a senior member of staff. She wrote, at the end of our visit: "Geoff, Sara and Connor have such a vast knowledge about the life of Sir Edward Watkin and his family. Their infectious enthusiasm guided the children quickly to a time in our local history when huge changes were being made and enabled our learners to gain a better understanding of the man known as 'Mr Grimsby' whilst exploring a range of sources just as Historians do. They tailored the day to suit our curriculum and allowed the children the opportunity to ask questions and develop their own curiosity on this topic. A great day was had by all."

Niki has developed her own Watkin curriculum with great success over the past three years. We are really looking forward to helping her with her work in the next school year.



Littlecoates Watkin Day

NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE

July was a packed month for the Society in North East Lincolnshire. Following closely on the Littlecoates Watkin Day, we visited over two days the Humberston Academy, just south of Cleethorpes. On the first day, the Watkin team, now five in number with the addition of Wendy Trevitt and Dianne Roberts, took part in a special assembly for Year 7 and then in an online presentation to the whole school by Geoff, who set out with images a summary of just what 'Mr Grimsby' and 'Mr Cleethorpes' (aka Edward Watkin) did to establish the two towns. We then took part in a highly original and lively discussion with students interested in enterprise and planning for their own and the UK's future. That very original (unique?) group and the whole day were organised by Mrs Catherine Ashcroft, the Curriculum Leader for History.

But then came the icing on the cake: The Big Sing. Three days after the Watkin Day, which had introduced everyone in the school to the exploits of Edward Watkin, the whole of the Humberston Academy (718 students and 64 staff - too many to get on one photo!) assembled on the school playing fields to sing a song in honour of Edward Watkin - 'Mr Grimsby'. This was based on a poetry competition in the school and had been composed for the occasion by the school's Director of Music, Mr. Richard Sleight. With its catchy chorus: "And Watkin brought the railway to Cleethorpes and Great Grimsby" it was a fantastic achievement.

The Humberston Academy pages on YouTube will fill in the music. Images by kind permission of the Principal of the Humberston Academy.

The full text of the Big Sing is;

In 1858 Mister Grimsby made his move,
building railways and docks in an attempt to
prove
that iron ships and steam trains could
change this little port
into a major fishing-town and holiday
resort.

With iron rails and steadfast hand he helped
transform this eastern land.

The docks grew strong and reached their
height. His vision brought a future bright.

**It opened paths from land to sea for
Watkin brought the railway to Cleethorpes
and Great Grimsby.**

This tiny fishing village became a harbour
town

where the railways and boats could get the
catch straight down

to London and the markets where they
were glad to pay, then they'd get the train
to Cleethorpes and have a holiday.

With Iron rails and steadfast hand helped
transform this eastern land.

The docks grew strong, trade reached its
height, his vision bought a future bright.

**It opened paths from land to sea for
Watkin brought the railway to Cleethorpes
and Great Grimsby.**

Edward Watkin was his name, better
transport was his aim.

Grimsby would never be the same since the
day he brought the train

With iron rails and steadfast hand he helped
transform this eastern land.

The docks grew strong. Trade reached its
height. His vision brought a future bright.

**It opened paths from land to sea for
Watkin brought the railway to Cleethorpes
and Great Grimsby.**

**For Watkin brought the railway to
Cleethorpes and Great Grimsby.**

NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE

And the finale? The school has its own drone. All the students re-formed themselves to spell out the name of the Academy.

A great ending to our Humberston experience, which has established a relationship which has great potential for the new school year.

(You can find the video of the school's tribute to Edward Watkin on their website: Humberston Academy – Humberston Academy Big Sing. Click onto News and Events – 17 July. It's on YouTube.)



After their success with two local schools, the North East Lincolnshire Watkin Group will move in September to the next stage of their major project: approaching the remaining schools in the area to offer them Watkin packages, shaped to their individual school's needs. In this, they will be led by Connor in his new post. As with our visits to Littlecoates and Humberston, we will be able to offer use of the highly professional Watkin video and audio trail, focused on Grimsby and Cleethorpes. These were commissioned by Heritage Lincolnshire and can be added to the brilliant detailed lesson notes, created by that organisation's Education Officer, Anna Hartley.

THE GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY

As we reported in our last issue, the restored GCR, with its four stations at Loughborough, Quorn, Rothley and Leicester North, is the UK's only double track, main line heritage railway. It was rescued from the Beeching Axe by local enthusiasts, who were determined that the last great mainline of the 20th century must not be allowed to die.

Recently, our link with the line that Edward Watkin built took a step forward when a group of us advertised the Watkin Story on the trains steaming up and down the line during the GCR's History Gala and invited visitors to talks given by the WatSoc chair at the beautifully preserved main station at Loughborough. As at the two schools who invited us to spend days with them, Sir Edward and Lady Watkin put in a personal appearance and had time at the end of the afternoon to enjoy a ride on the footplate of one of the GCR's magnificent locomotives.



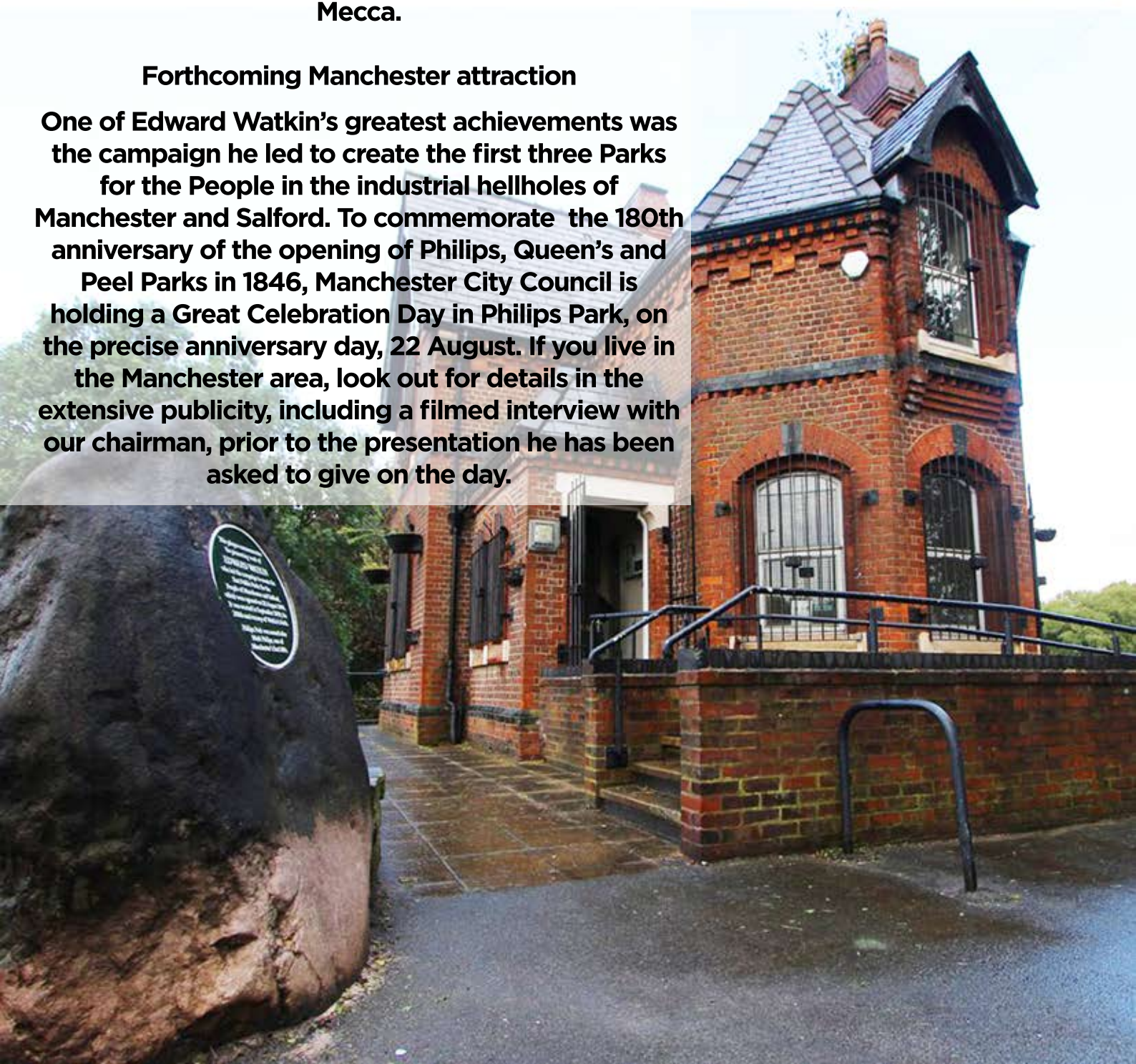
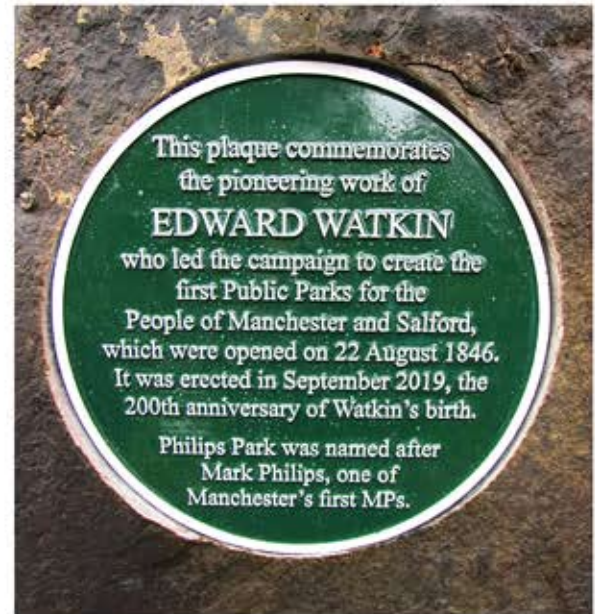
NORTHENDEN AND GREATER MANCHESTER

There aren't many perks in being a volunteer for the Watkin Society but recently the Manchester Watkin group invited its fellow members from Cleethorpes and Grimsby to a day out viewing the Watkin family home, Rose Hill, the church where Edward and Absalom worshipped and are buried, and finally to visit the unique Chetham's academic library, with its Watkin archive, including the only two remaining diaries of Edward Watkin (the others were burned by a relative in 1944, probably fearing the scandal if its racy contents were ever revealed!)

It was a great experience for members who have spent many hours publicising Edward Watkin 'from afar'. One of the group said it was like going to Mecca.

Forthcoming Manchester attraction

One of Edward Watkin's greatest achievements was the campaign he led to create the first three Parks for the People in the industrial hellholes of Manchester and Salford. To commemorate the 180th anniversary of the opening of Philips, Queen's and Peel Parks in 1846, Manchester City Council is holding a Great Celebration Day in Philips Park, on the precise anniversary day, 22 August. If you live in the Manchester area, look out for details in the extensive publicity, including a filmed interview with our chairman, prior to the presentation he has been asked to give on the day.



THE UNKNOWN WATKIN STORY

Don't forget that we are trying to establish a research wing to the Watkin Society.

Both Edward and Absalom were famous in their lifetimes. But there are fascinating aspects of their lives that would reward research. We hope that those of you who have always had an interest in research, even if you have never taken it up, may be interested enough to explore part of the fascinating Watkin Story, on your own, or as part of a group, with our support if you wish. Face to face work is always possible but Zoom would be great if geography separates you from someone who shares your interest. We cannot promise payment but we can guarantee that the results would be preserved in the Society's online archive, which is freely accessible to anyone looking into the Watkin story in this country – or abroad!

Here are some possibles. Can you add to them?

- **Edward Watkin's work as an MP.**
- **Edward Watkin role in creating Canada.**
- **Edward Watkin, the family man, including the difficult personal relationship between him and his father.**
- **Absalom Watkin – pioneer for the poorest people in Manchester, terrified before every public appearance.**
- **The successful fight by Absalom and Edward to bring down the price of bread- the staple diet of the working classes – by repealing the dreadful Corn Laws.**
- **The campaign to provide industrial Manchester with 'Parks for the People' at a time when there wasn't a single public open space where ordinary Mancunians could relax among trees, flowers, lakes and lawns.**

Contact gscargill@gmail.com for more information

FACEBOOK

Did you know that the new Watkin Society's Facebook Is now up and running again? All contributions welcome.

Share a thought...



The Watkin Society

175 followers • 37 following

The amazing story of Edward Watkin - Victoria's Railway King - Nimble Ned

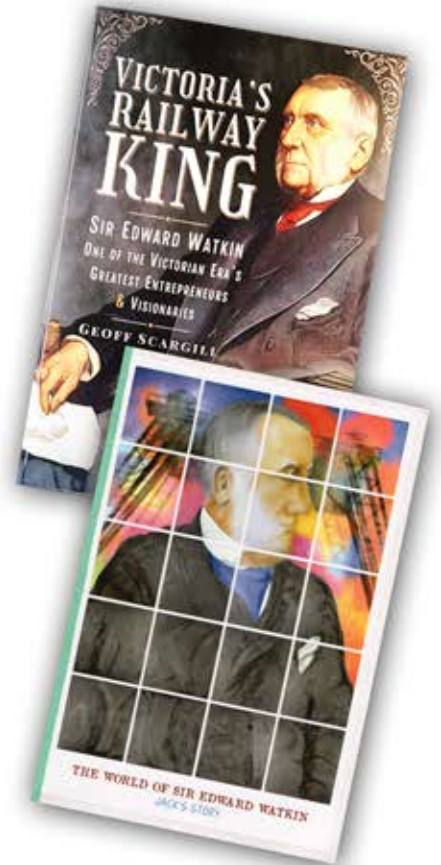
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TWO MAJOR STEPS FORWARD IN WATSOC'S DEVELOPMENT

The Watkin Society must move up a stage in order to establish itself as a national force. We are lucky to have two skilled and experienced members: Jamie Rennie, our Creative Consultant, and Steve Bluck, our Treasurer. Over the past months they have been working to create two essential formal documents: the Society's Business Plan and its application for lottery funding. Steve has now completed the final draft of the plan, which will be published as a document valuable in itself, improving our street credibility as we look to attract new support. Jamie will also incorporate the plan in our application through the National Heritage Lottery for the funding essential for the development of the Watkin Society. Watch this space!

Finally, if you would like to know more about the fascinating Watkin Story, here are four sources:

- 'Victoria's Railway King', describes Edward Watkin as one of the Victorian Era's greatest characters. It retails at £19.95 in all good bookshops (though less on Amazon!) and has just been reprinted as a paperback, selling at £10.49. The Kindle version costs £9.70. The publishers, Pen and Sword, have just announced that they will soon be publishing an audio version.
- 'Jack's Story' is a great version of the Watkin Story, brilliantly written by a specialist children's author.
- The Watkin Society Website contains articles and information about both Edward and his father, Absalom. head to watkinsociety.org.uk
- The chairman of the Society, Geoff Scargill, gives talks about Edward and Absalom Watkin. All proceeds go the Society. If you are interested in making a booking for your group please contact Geoff at gscargill@gmail.com



We hope you have enjoyed discovering something about the current activities and plans of the Watkin Society.

The lives of Absalom and Edward Watkin make a great story but telling it to a wider public is definitely a work in progress.

So we are grateful for any ideas, including improvements, that you can suggest. Please contact us on our website: watkinsociety.org.uk

Thanks for your interest and support!