

# WATSOC

## *The Watkin Society*

Watsoc News April 2023

Welcome to the ninth edition of the newsletter of the Watkin Society

*Spreading the news about Absalom and Edward Watkin*

The New Year saw a burst of activity for the Society after the Christmas break. Our plans (all supported by the award of £10,000 from The National Heritage Lottery Fund) were set out in our last newsletter but here is an update on the progress we have made since then.

A link has been established with the Great Central Railway ([gcrailway.co.uk](http://gcrailway.co.uk)), the thriving preserved section of Edward Watkin's mainline through the Midlands (the line that could have been reopened to provide the benefits of HS2 at a fraction of the cost!). It is hoped that working with Ian Wilson, the Education Lead of the GCR, the Society will explore the creation of schools material at secondary level, to interest older students in not only the amazing achievements of Watkin's career but in his fascinating character. The GCR is planning to open a Video Suite at one of its stations. Watkin will figure prominently in the permanent display. The railway also has a brilliant museum and archive that contains material which we will publicise in our digital library.

The Cleethorpes/Grimsby link is now firmly established. 'The Watkin Group North East Lincolnshire' is meeting regularly and had a stand at the recent Heritage Afternoon held in Grimsby and an interview on the local Clee TV network. The current Mayor, Cllr Stephen Beasant, is its patron and has said he does not intend to be just a figurehead. Several members have started their own Watkin research projects. The Society's Archivist, Angela Rawcliffe, and its Creative Consultant, Jamie Rennie, will be holding an 'Introduction to Research' training session' in Grimsby. Although this will have a Watkin slant, it will be open to the general public. The local members are planning to hold a Watkin Day on 22 July, the same date as the opening in 1889 by the future King Edward VII of Watkin's Great Union Dock, which marked the transformation of Grimsby from a small port into what eventually became the biggest fishing port in the world. On the same day the statue of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, was unveiled in the Grimsby Docks area (The cost of the statue was met by Watkin.)

Look out for the Watkin Day programme, which will be published in our next newsletter.

This year also marks significant anniversaries for three iconic buildings: Grimsby Town Station, opened in 1848, Cleethorpes Station (1863) and Cleethorpes Pier (1873). All three will be commemorated in the towns but we have been asked to provide Watkin material as part of an exhibition to be held from 8 September to the end of the year in the Muriel Barker Gallery of Grimsby's award-winning Fishing Heritage Centre.

Great news! An ambitious bid for lottery money put in by the Heritage Lincolnshire group has been approved. Its aim is to use the events in Watkin's life to encourage young people in the

area to discover for themselves just what a great heritage Grimsby and Cleethorpes possess and what a fantastic part Watkin played in it. The Society is proud to have been asked to become an official consultancy partner in this exciting scheme.

Since we published our last newsletter the Manchester Watkin Group has been set up and is flourishing. They are planning to hold the first Watkin Week from 16 to 24 April (which is actually more than a week but Watkin Nine Days is not such a snappy title!)

The poster for The Watkin Week is below.

**WATKIN SOC**  
**The Watkin Society**  
Spreading the news about the amazing Edward and Absalom Watkin,  
two of the greatest reforming visionaries of 19th century Britain.

**THE WATKIN WEEK**  
Celebrating the amazing Watkins and their impact on Victorian Manchester

Sun 16th April 2.00pm, Bronington Close Northenden M22 4ZQ  
Public Walk from the Watkin Woods to St. Wilfrid's Church, followed  
by a short commemoration service.

Weds 19th April 7.00pm, Station South Levenshulme M19 3NP  
Heritage Evening- Learn about 'The Man who built the Station and the  
Fallowfield Loop', followed by a relaxing drink in the bar.

Thurs 20th April 2pm and 7.30pm,  
Northenden Players Theatre Company M22 4NN  
'The Watkin Story'- dramatic presentations from the theatre company  
and local schools. Booking required (FREE).

Sat 22nd April 8.00pm, The Crown Inn Northenden M22 4WE  
Fun and informative Quiz Night.

Sun 23rd April 2.00-5.00pm,  
St. Wilfrid's Church Northenden M22 4WE  
Open Day featuring Watkin-themed tours, archives, and research  
workshops.

Mon 24th April 6.00pm, Performance Space,  
Manchester Central Library M2 5PD  
Public Lecture- 'The Amazing Watkins: Manchester's Forgotten Stars'

•All are welcome!  
•Free entry (except on 22nd)  
•Free refreshments available (except on 19th and 22nd)

To find out more search "The Watkin Society"  
Email: [admin@watkinsociety.org.uk](mailto:admin@watkinsociety.org.uk)  
Facebook: The Watkin Society  
Twitter: @WatkinSociety

Made possible with  
**Heritage Fund**

We are delighted that this new enterprise will build on our partnerships with St Wilfrid's Church, the Crown Inn, the St Wilfrid's and Northenden Community Schools, and the Northenden Players. These are all working to build a stronger local community and The Watkin Society is proud to be playing its part.

The Society is extending its publicity material. A new edition of our popular Manchester Watkin Walk leaflet is about to be published. Our children's book about Edward Watkin, 'Jack's Story', is sold out and is being enlarged. Jamie has created two terrific roll-up banners to bang the Watkin Drum at any public meetings.

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Spreading the news about the amazing Edward and Absalom Watkin, two of the greatest reforming visionaries of 19th century Britain.

<p><b>Absalom Watkin (1787-1861)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exposed the horror of the Peterloo Massacre</li> <li>campaigning to extend the right of ordinary people to vote</li> <li>fought for better living and working conditions for the poorest people in the industrial hellholes cities of Britain</li> <li>refused to trade cotton goods produced by slave labour in America</li> </ul> <p><b>Absalom and Edward Watkin</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>together fought to repeal the dreadful Corn Laws that had led to families starving because they could not afford to buy bread</li> </ul> <p>WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS AMAZING FATHER AND SON? Search for "The Watkin Society" Email: <a href="mailto:thewatkinsociety@gmail.com">thewatkinsociety@gmail.com</a> Twitter: @watkinsociety</p>	<p><b>Edward Watkin (1819-1901)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pioneered the first Parks for the People in Manchester and Salford</li> <li>dubbed the Railway King - he built the Great Central Railway - the last mainline into London for 100 years</li> <li>started to build an Eiffel Tower in London that became the site of Wembley Stadium</li> <li>was a Member of Parliament for over 30 years and tried to give women the vote 61 years before the law was changed</li> <li>dug two miles of a Channel Tunnel in 1880 before the Government panicked and stopped him</li> <li>helped to create the Dominion of Canada and was knighted for his work there</li> <li>changed Grimsby into what became the greatest fishing port in the world</li> <li>turned tiny Cleethorpes into a national holiday resort</li> </ul>
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**WAT SOC**  
The Watkin Society

in partnership with

**Watkin, Grimsby and Cleethorpes**

**Mr. Grimsby and Mr. Cleethorpes**  
The Amazing Edward Watkin, who created the vast docks at Grimsby and turned Cleethorpes into a family holiday resort

Edward's Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway (later the Great Central) laid the foundations for Grimsby to be the biggest fishing port in the world.

In 1863 Watkin extended his railway to a little fishing village called Cleethorpes.

He bought 33 acres of land along the front between Grimsby and Cleethorpes and spent the equivalent of £1 million pounds on a mile-long defensive sea wall, Ross Castle (named after the MSLR secretary), pleasure gardens, a swimming pool and a pier.

By the end of the century Cleethorpes had become a major holiday resort (On a single day in 1890 Cleethorpes had 30,000 visitors.)

In 1877 Edward Watkin's son was elected as MP for Great Grimsby leading to the Election Riot at The Royal Hotel.

Edward paid for and erected a statue of Prince Albert in 1879 to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone of the docks in 1849 (the statue now resides at Custom Docks.)

1848 Arrival of the first train in Grimsby on the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway

Steam trawlers on strike in dock from 1901

1850 NEWSPAPER CLIPPING AND QUOTATIONS

Poster and stone from the Election Riot

Prince Albert Statue

WANT TO KNOW MORE? Search for "The Watkin Society"  
Email: [admin@watkinsociety.org.uk](mailto:admin@watkinsociety.org.uk) Twitter: @watkinsociety Facebook: The Watkin Society

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In partnership with

The Watkin Group for North East Lincolnshire and

Our two banners for use at events and meetings

Finally, we have just had confirmation that the Franco-German TV production about towers built at the time of the Eiffel Tower in Paris has reached

the editing stage. It will be broadcast at the end of the year on the Arte Channel and will include an interview about Edward Watkin!

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## **THE WATKIN SOCIETY'S NEW WEBSITE** **AND DIGITAL ARCHIVE**

Our new website is up and running. There are further improvements to make and the Archive will be a work in progress for many moons to come as we update, collate and research the Watkin story in all its guises. We recently held archiving and research workshops at Manchester Central Library and started the research ball rolling for some of our volunteers and members. Hopefully they will find the time and energy to delve into their particular area of interest and return with some gems to include in the Watkin Archive.

If you do have an item, article or clip that relates to the Watkin story that you feel we should be included in the archive then use the simple submission form on the website under "Archive" (or link below) to start the process of inclusion. It can be as obtuse as you like, we will definitely consider it!

<https://watkinsociety.org.uk/submit-to-archive.html>

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We hope you have enjoyed this edition of the WatSoc newsletter. If you'd like to know more or would like to get involved with our plans to make the Watkins known not only locally but nationally and even abroad you will find us on our new website shared with Friends Of Rose Hill.

The Watkin Society page can be found at

<https://watkinsociety.org.uk/>

or you can follow our twitter feed

[@WatkinRoseHill](https://twitter.com/WatkinRoseHill)

*All the best from the committee of the Watkin Society*