

WATSOCC

The Watkin Society

WatSoc News April 2020

**Welcome to the second edition of the newsletter of the Watkin Society.
Spreading the news about Absalom and Edward Watkin.**

Such a lot has happened since our first newsletter just before Christmas. The spread of the awful coronavirus is of course dominating our lives, either directly (some of us come in the High Risk grouping!) or indirectly through concerns about our family, friends and neighbours.

Even the most committed Watkin enthusiast has had to put Edward and Absalom to the back of the queue so it might seem strange to be sending out the second edition of our newsletter at this time of crisis. But even in a war ordinary life goes on and we all need something to take our minds off the serious stuff. And anyway, even wars end. We have to be ready for the future, when hopefully we can 'resume trading'.

So we wish you well and hope you will be interested to read what has been going on in the World of Watkin in the last three months and our plans for the future - whenever that arrives.

The Watkin Society Committee & Looking to the Future

The WatSoc committee has been meeting regularly (until recently) and doing the spadework for the next steps.

We want to meet the requests of supporters who would like to follow their interest in a particular side of the Watkin Story.

We are going national! At the same time as we are keeping up our interest in Absalom and Edward's local activities, we intend to publicise to a wider audience the amazing range of Edward's work in Britain and abroad – particularly Canada.

We recognise that if we want to make an impact we have to take a more professional approach. We have commissioned a business plan to set out the guidelines for 'where we go from here'. We think that we can do this

without losing the enthusiasm which has achieved so much.

The plan will be ready in the next few weeks and will then be discussed by the committee, even though face-to-face meetings are out at the time of writing. We can do a lot by email and snail mail post but we are also exploring video and phone conferencing. (Edward, who was always excited by new ideas, would have loved that, though Absalom would have worried about the cost and the possibility of failure.)

When we have agreed on the final details we will email these to you in full. We hope you will be interested and that you will give us your reactions, including your own suggestions.

One feature will definitely be to set up a number of study groups. The first of these had just met for the first time, when all meetings ceased. It is exploring 'The Northenden Connection' of the Watkin Story for both Absalom and Edward. It is

being chaired by Andrew Bradley, the rector of St Wilfrid's Church, where Edward and Absalom are buried and which contains several beautiful stained glass windows commissioned by Edward and two family memorials.

Reaching Out

The past three months have seen some very promising links with other groups, though these are all now on hold for the present.



Photo credit: Great Central Railway/AJM Andrew Morley

- The Great Central Railway (www.gcrailway.co.uk) operates a tourist attraction (with steam!) in the East Midlands, using what remains of Edward's mainline GCR, which was chopped by the Beeching Axe in 1968. (see photo) After a very positive meeting with the chair of the company, Richard Patching, we have been asked to contribute a series of articles about Edward as a railwayman for their quarterly magazine, which has a circulation of 5000. Ian Wilson, the leader of the education team at the railway, is particularly interested in working with us on a project involving young people. He has

written: *"Personally, the more I have learned about Watkin I have become increasingly interested in him, the breadth of his interests beyond railways and his involvement with prominent reformers of the mid Victorian period."* The GCR plan to open an Education and Heritage Centre for displays. Ian wants one to be on 'Who made the Great Central Railway?', comparing the lives of Sir Edward and one of the navvies who built the line. Richard would like to explore the possibility of a Victorian Open Day involving EW.

(Opportunity to dress up?)

- The GCR Historical Society (www.gcrsociety.co.uk) is a separate group, though it has links with the railway. They are interested in setting up a meeting with us as soon as possible to explore 'ideas of mutual interest'.
- The north west secretary of the Railway and Canal Historical Society came to one of our presentations on EW and is considering organising a study day at the Central Reference Library. The morning session would be a presentation by us on Watkin, not just as a railwayman, then after lunch two of the Society's members would speak about aspects of Watkin's railway work in the area. The north west secretary is also the national secretary of the Society, which has over 500 members.
- Brent Council, whose area includes Wembley, have joined with

Quintain, a major property investment and development business, to develop Wembley Park. Investment in the project has already been £1 billion. Quintain's website states: *"Our vision for Wembley Park is founded on a deep respect for the site's rich heritage"* and goes on to describe Sir Edward Watkin as the pioneer who saw the potential in the park. His vision in 1894 was *"To create a parkland with a dedicated station on London Underground's Metropolitan Line, an inspirational destination for London workers that can be enjoyed every day."* After a meeting at Wembley with us and James Moher, the chair of the Wembley Historical Society, Julian Tollast, Quintain's Head of Masterplanning and Design is looking at the possibility of promoting a Watkin day conference about EW's work at Wembley Park.

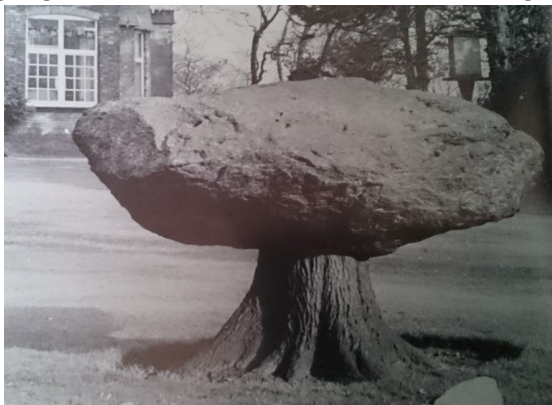


The proposed Wembley Park with Watkin's Tower at full height!

□ Based on our experience as members of the Friends of Rose Hill with schoolchildren in Northenden we are preparing a schools package designed to interest schools outside the immediate area. The Principal and senior staff of one of Manchester's high schools, the Manchester Health Academy, are very enthusiastic about the Watkin Story. As soon as schools reopen they have asked us to meet them to help plan how Edward and Absalom's achievements can best be introduced into the school's curriculum.

□ On 9 December 1890 the Transactions of the Manchester Geological Society contained a report on what they called 'The Cheshire Boulder': "*Mr. Stirrup (Honorary Secretary) exhibited a photograph of the large boulder now lying in a field near the road leading*

from Ringway to Northenden, and read the following communication: Large Boulder near Ringway. This boulder lies at the margin of a field close to the road from Northenden to Ringway, about half a mile from Ringway Church. It is at the present time being cleared from the surrounding soil, previous to conveyance to Sir Edward Watkin's grounds at Northenden. The boulder ...is a hard volcanic rock...and has probably come from the Lake District, borne to its present place by ice." The boulder is now known as The Sharstone and is still in place in front of what remains of Rose Hill House. The rumour at the time was that EW had buried a time capsule under its stem. The staff and students of the Archaeology Department of Manchester University are interested in finding if the rumour is true. Their portable X-ray equipment may help!



The Sharstone in the 1950's and 2019 (top) with a panorama of the rear of Rose Hill House and the entrance to the Woods to the right (bottom).

- **Damian O'Doherty, a professor from Manchester University, and a Northenden resident is particularly interested in Absalom's cultivation of the land at Rose Hill.**
- **The first presentation of the annual Manchester City Council's Edward Watkin Award, to the volunteer who has done most to support community involvement in one of**

Manchester's parks, was made at the Gorton Monastery just before the coronavirus axe fell. It went to Lyn Blinkhorn from The Friends of Clayton Park/Hall, shown here at the ceremony in the Monastery with Ann Taylor, the chair of the Friends of the Rose Hill Woods.



- The Society has been contacted by David McKie, former deputy editor and leader writer of The Guardian. David is researching for a book on Herbert Ingram, who was the first editor of The Illustrated London News, the most successful national 'picture' magazine in nineteenth century Britain. Ingram was a personal friend of EW. Four years after the death of his first wife, Mary, Edward married Ingram's widow, Ann. We were able to supply David with new information about the Ingram-Watkin connection and are looking forward to the publication of his book.
- Which leads nicely to the news that Geoff's book about EW has been accepted for publication by the Pen and Sword company and is planned to appear later in the year. He wanted it to be called 'Nimble Ned,

the amazing story of Manchester's forgotten star'. The publishers say that 'forgotten' is an off-putting word and since nobody has heard of Nimble Ned casual browsers in bookshops wouldn't be attracted to buying the book. They will choose their own title. The book should be a publicity boost for the Society, which will receive all proceeds from sales. The Landmark, one of London's biggest hotels, are fascinated by EW (he built Marylebone Station and the hotel next to it). Andrew Batchelor, the General Manager of the hotel, hosted a reception in the hotel after the unveiling of the Watkin plaque in the station concourse on EW's 200th birthday last September. He has now kindly promised to host a book launch in London. (Any ideas for one in Manchester?)

Watch this space!

Well, that's all the Watkin news. Let's hope that the whole country will be able to return to something like normal life before too long. In the meantime, it would be great to hear from you if you have any ideas for developing the Society or news items or just to let us know your special requests. Our expert design man, Jamie Rennie, has now set up our new web pages and will be developing them further. Please keep up to date with our activities through the website or if you prefer by email through gscargill@gmail.com

We'd love to hear from you.

We are keen to hear your ideas!

You can keep up to date on the web through our website shared with

Friends Of Rose Hill.

The Watkin Society page can be found at

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

or you can follow our twitter feed

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

*All the best for a healthy summer for you and yours from the
committee of The Watkin Society.*