

# WATSOOC

## *The Watkin Society*

Watsoc News August 2020

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

*Spreading the news about Absalom and Edward Watkin*

At the end of the period of total lockdown but with some anxious times still ahead, the committee of The Watkin Society hope that you have come safely through the most difficult summer we (hopefully) will ever have. We send you our best wishes for a 'new normal' that contains some of the best features of the 'old normal'.

The four months that have passed since we sent you our second newsletter have put a (hopefully!) temporary stop to some of our plans for the Society. But we are delighted to report progress on several fronts. We hope you will enjoy reading about what has been happening and what is to come.

In Newsletter Two we reported that we were commissioning a Business Plan to give us a structure for future developments. This is now finished and adopted, with thanks to Jamie Rennie (JME DZYNZ) for his terrific work on it. It is a highly professional document, running to 15 pages, and will be available mid-August on <http://friendsofrosehills.org/the-watkin-society-watsoc/> for everyone who is interested in our history and our future.

The Plan sets out the details of Absalom and Edward's activities that are going to be the focus for our publicity and research in the next five years.

This is just a selection:

- The Northenden and the St Wilfrid's Stories.
- Creating the first public parks in Manchester and Salford.
- The Railway King.
- The first Channel Tunnel.
- Canada – railways and building a new country
- The lost masterpiece – The Icebergs painting.
- The Watkin Path up Snowdon.
- The Wembley 'Eiffel' Tower and Wembley Park.
- Edward as an MP.
- Famous friends.
- Watkin Walks and organised visits.
- Edward Watkin – the visionary.

One key plan: to bring together the most dramatic features of the Watkin Story into attractive school/student resource packs for teachers.

Would you be interested in learning more about any of Absalom and Edward's achievements or would you enjoy helping to research them? We'd love to hear from you and because we think a great deal of our activity in a Covid age will be online, we'd not only want to make contact with you if you want to come to meetings and visits to places of Watkin interest (when these can start up again) but we'd be interested if you wanted to work on your own from home or in a small group. Please contact us on [thewatkinsociety@gmail.com](mailto:thewatkinsociety@gmail.com) for some suggestions. We'd also love to hear your comments and ideas.

## MONEY! MONEY! MONEY!

(With apologies to Abba)

We are proud of our foundations in Northenden, where Absalom and Edward lived and died, and intend to build on them. But at the same time, we want the amazing Watkin Story to have an impact beyond Northenden. Edward's world took in London, the English Channel, France, Grimsby, Wales - and Canada. After our experience with projects funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, including working with over a hundred local schoolchildren, we know we have a terrific story to tell. But establishing a national and even international Watkin Society means creating publicity materials, including leaflets, posters and display boards, funding specialist research, organising meetings. They all cost money. We are looking for individual, group and company donations to fund our work. Can you help, either by making a personal donation or by suggesting who might be willing to support us? Please write to us at [thewatkinsociety@gmail.com](mailto:thewatkinsociety@gmail.com)

## News Just In

- The BBC Look North correspondent for south Yorkshire, Tom Ingall, has a special interest in railways. In his spare time (!) he sees to the publicity of the Great Central Railway. He has just created a brilliant video about Edward Watkin. It's called [The story of Sir Edward Watkin, visionary, entrepreneur and magnate behind the Great Central Railway](#) and you can find it on You Tube. It's had nearly a thousand views in the first two weeks.



Sir EDWARD WATKIN

The forgotten  
entrepreneur

- While on the subject of YouTube, if you click on “[Bachmann Class 6672 'Sir Edward Watkin' unboxing](#)” you’ll find a brief video about a new edition to the world of model railway engines, named after the great man. An ideal Christmas or birthday present for enthusiasts?

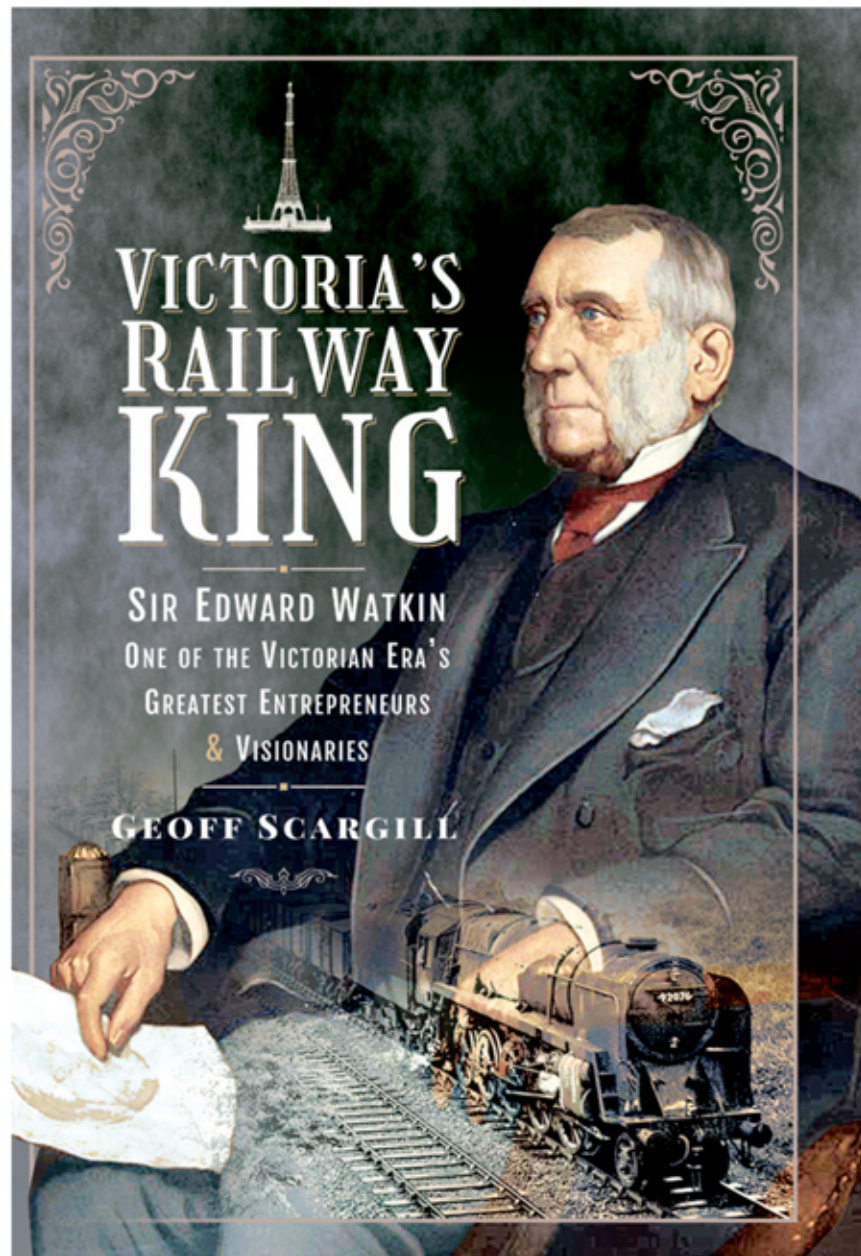


- The Icebergs painting, bought by EW in 1862 and lost for over a century until it was discovered at the top of the main staircase in Rose Hill, now hangs in the Museum of Art in Dallas, Texas. The Society has been asked to tell the story of what is now acknowledged to be a masterpiece (the museum call it their 'Mona Lisa') to form part of the commentary for visitors. We have also provided material for a lecture on The Icebergs which was given by one of the Museum’s senior curators.



Dallas Museum Of Art

- We have just been sent an advance copy of the cover of the new book about Edward Watkin. Look out for 'Victoria's Railway King', to be published at the end of March in 2021. The proceeds from every copy sold (£2 per copy) will go to the Society. Available from all good booksellers!



### Reaching Out

The links with other groups that we mentioned in the last newsletter are looking good. As we all know, work and planning in schools has been seriously disrupted by Covid-19. Against that background it is great that the Principal of the Manchester Health Academy, Kevin Green, has been in touch to confirm that as soon as possible he and his senior staff want to meet us to plan the introduction of the Watkin Story into the curriculum of the school. Kevin is personally enthusiastic about the man he always calls Ned Watkin!

We have set up a link via Zoom with representatives from other societies to explore the interest we share in Watkin's railway activities. The Railway and Canal Historical Society

(<https://rchs.org.uk/membership>) is the largest society for railway and canal enthusiasts in Britain. The Great Central Railway in the Midlands operates a terrific heritage attraction with stations and a shop – and a regular stream train timetable. Its name preserves the history of EW's mainline railway from Manchester to London and their trains use what remains of his track.

Here is part of the cover of the latest edition of the GCR's quarterly magazine, Rail Mail. It contained the welcome news that the GCR opened up to the public after Covid-19 on 25 July. How about a day out? More details on <https://www.gcrailway.co.uk/the-railway/>



### Northenden's Doctor Who?

Did Sir Edward bury a time capsule under the Sharstone at the front of Rose Hill house? That was what people said in 1890 when he had the massive boulder, now called The Sharstone, dragged three miles from one of his farms in rural Woodhouse Park. (Another story was that it had been cut off the top of

Snowdon when Watkin opened the Watkin Path to the summit.) When Manchester University starts up again for business we are hoping that their Archaeology students and staff may be able to shed some light on this fascinating rumour. Their portable X-Ray equipment might help!



The Sharstone and Rose Hill House

## The Friends of Rose Hill Woods

Our sister group report that the Woods have survived the winter floods and the early spring drought and are a haven of green, away from the world of coronavirus. More and more local families and dog-lovers are finding just how beautiful this oasis of calm is. All three information lecterns are now back in business to show the history of the place and its natural treasures. If you haven't visited the Woods, go along Longley Lane and into Bronington Close. At the T-junction in front of the house (look for the Sharstone, currently half-covered in ivy) it's a ten-pace walk to the right along the railings into the Woods. Look out for the Watkin memorial in the Woods and enjoy the two benches the Friends have installed for you to sit and relax.

And finally.....

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

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

PS When one of the local schoolchildren heard that Edward led the campaign to create the first public parks in Manchester and Salford, he said he was bang up-to-date, the first Eco-Warrior!

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://friendsofrosehill.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.*