

# WATSOC

## *The Watkin Society*

Watsoc News November 2020

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

*Spreading the news about Absalom and Edward Watkin*

The committee of the Watkin Society sends you our best wishes for a healthy and – in the circumstances – happy lockdown!

It's really frustrating not to be able to meet people. After the celebrations last year of EW's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in September, marked by the unveiling of commemorative plaques in one of the Manchester parks that he pioneered and in the concourse of 'his' London station, Marylebone, we went on to hold a terrific open meeting a year ago – the first of several planned and abandoned – where we made many new friends.

So many changes have been forced on us all but we are at least able to keep our supporters up to date through our website (<http://www.friendsofrosehill.org/the-watkin-society-watsoc/>) and our regular newsletter with the Society's plans for progress in spite of the Covid19 crisis and to be ready for whenever some kind of normality is established again.

---

We hope that you will find plenty to interest you here and even take up our standing invitation to join us in exploring some of the different sides to the amazing Watkin Story during what promises sadly to be not the best of winters – before Spring (hopefully) blossoms for us all. (In our business plan – see below - you'll find further information about the terrifically varied projects EW and AW were involved in. We'd love to put you in touch with other supporters who have the same interests.)

The Watkin Society was formed in 2019 so we are now due to hold our first Annual General Meeting. Sadly, this will have to be held courtesy of Zoom but we hope you will be able to join in at 7.30pm on Thursday 26 November for what has to contain the required formal business

(reports, election of officers) but which we intend to make as informal and interesting as possible. As with the AGM of our sister society – the Friends of Rose Hill, who held their AGM via Zoom recently - we are issuing a warm invitation to everyone on our contact list. Please email [gscargill@gmail.com](mailto:gscargill@gmail.com) if you would like to join us for the 'meeting'. We will send you a personal copy of the agenda and Zoom details for the session. We are really looking forward to 'seeing' as many supporters as possible of the campaign to spread the news about the two amazing Watkins. One of the items on the agenda will be elections to the committee. Our constitution does not set a limit to committee numbers so we would be delighted if you wanted to put forward your own name or that of a friend.

## **CAN YOU HELP?**

At its recent meeting the Society's committee decided not to introduce an annual subscription. Instead, we are launching an appeal for funds. In order to establish the society as a national group, as well as strengthening its Manchester base, we need to produce publicity materials, for example an introductory video and leaflets. To attract attention and interest these will have to be of a high standard, professionally produced. In addition, as soon as we are able to, we intend to organise public meetings in several parts of the country (See below for promising links).

## **REACHING OUT**

This time of partial or total lockdown or Tiers 1,2 and 3 has forced us to concentrate on what we can achieve online. There is actually great scope left for development here, including seeking to establish links with other groups where we have some overlapping interests.

- As we reported in an earlier newsletter, The Great Central Railway is a major company, based in Loughborough. It has just received a government grant to help its day-to-day operations during the Covid crisis. It operates as a tourist attraction, including steam locomotives, using the last remaining 17 miles (uniquely double track!) of EW's original line from Manchester Central to Marylebone in London. The GCR chairman is considering holding a Watkin Day in 2021 and the educational lead of the company is particularly interested in working with local schools to promote EW's railway achievements. (Our successful experience with the two Northenden primary schools could be very helpful here.) One of the GCR's exciting plans for 2021 is to open an

Making progress will cost money. Can you help us by making a donation to the Society? If you want to send us a cheque please address it to our Treasurer, George Lea, at 5 St Brannocks Road, Stockport, Cheshire, SK8 7LA. If you prefer to transfer a donation electronically, our bank account details with Santander are: Sort Code 09-01-29 Account 49739873. We would want to thank you for your generosity so if you are using electronic transfer could you please confirm your contact details to George (george888.lea@gmail.com)

audio-visual suite at one of its stations. This would certainly feature EW's work.

- The Museum and Library Service of Grimsby Council want to put on an exhibition and a presentation about EW in spring/summer 2021. They are enthusiastic about this link in itself but also as a taster for a big event the town is planning for 2023, the 175th anniversary of the opening of Grimsby station. (The development of the railway by EW was the key to the town becoming the largest fishing port in the world, so he will figure considerably in the celebrations.)
- Did you know of another 175th anniversary coming up in the New Year? On the 22nd August 1846 the first Parks for the People were opened in Manchester and Salford after a campaign led by Edward Watkin, dubbed last year 'Manchester's Eco-Warrior' by one of the local children after her involvement in the Watkin schools project. Because of the work of the Friends to improve the Rose Hill Woods in front of the former Watkin family home in Northenden, there is a strong relationship with the city's Parks Department including the Parks Lead, Kylie Ward. As a result of the Covid crisis and staycations there has

been a tremendous increase in numbers currently using local parks. We have written to Kylie asking if it might be possible to celebrate Manchester's parks throughout the city in August, including an emphasis on EW's pioneering work! The problem here is of course lack of finance.

- We are also pursuing what had been a very promising link before Covid: A Watkin Day organised with the

Wembley History Society and Quintain, a major property company, involved in a multi-million-pound development of the Wembley area. At the time the three parties met (in another era!) the suggestion was 31st March 2021, the 125th anniversary of the opening of EW's Wembley Park and his 'Eiffel Tower'. Even if this project is still 'on' we may have to settle for the anniversary year rather than the precise date.

A last word for now about links with other special interest groups.....We are very glad to include here an article about the Great Central Railway Society, specially written for this newsletter by one of that society's members., Bill Turner:

#### **An Overlap: What Sir Edward Watkin means to the Great Central Railway Society**

*Sir Edward Watkin was the energetic Chairman of the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway Company (MSLR) for 30 years until 1894. Despite ill-health, he stayed on as a Director and lived long enough to witness his ambitious project, the MSLR 'London Extension' which ran for 150 miles from north of Nottingham to Marylebone, officially opened and the company aptly renamed the Great Central Railway (GCR). Without Sir Edward there would have been no Great Central.*

*The Great Central Railway Society (GCRS) was founded in 1974 with the aim of promoting interest in GCR history. Society members are spread across the UK and overseas and include railwaymen, authors and collectors. A wide-ranging and well-illustrated quarterly journal 'Forward' is sent to all members and typically contains 45 pages, its title echoing the GCR motto.*

*GCRS membership is open to anyone interested in any aspect of the GCR, its predecessors and successors, as well as jointly owned lines such as the Cheshire Lines Committee which connected Manchester to Chester, Liverpool and Southport. Many members are railway modellers and the Society supports local railway societies, including ones at Northwich, Sheffield, Leicester and Cleethorpes, while also attending exhibitions (pre-Covid!) and producing rolling stock model kits.*

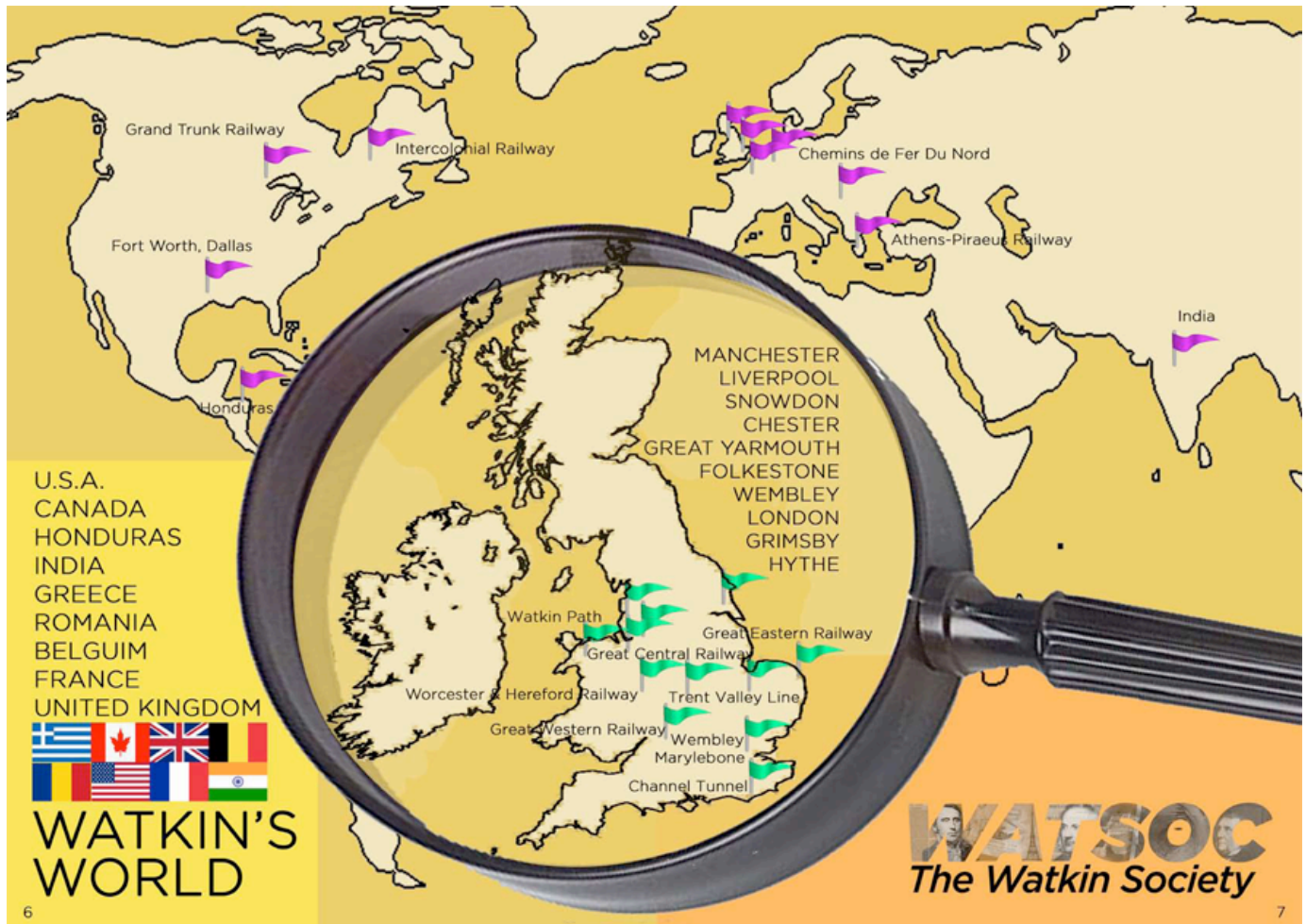
*Society archives provide a forum for answering questions and is actively maintained and updated as part of a museum at Immingham, a busy port which owes its creation entirely to the GCR. Also on the initiative of the Society, the GCR War Memorial was restored and repositioned outside the Sheffield Victoria Hotel and a Roll of Honour has been comprehensively researched.*

*The Society is sometimes confused with the heritage railway based on the GCR 'London Extension' at Loughborough but that body is completely separate. If you would like to know more about the GCR and the GCRS, please explore the website at <http://www.gcrsociety.co.uk> or e-mail the Membership Secretary, Eric Latusek, at [ericlatusek@btinternet.com](mailto:ericlatusek@btinternet.com).*

Bill has also mentioned that the Society has its own archives for enthusiasts.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE!

We are delighted to announce the publication of the Society's new Business Plan, created by our visuals and publications guru, Jamie Rennie ([jmedzynz.wordpress.com](http://jmedzynz.wordpress.com)). The booklet is attractively illustrated, as you can see here, and is available online at the Society's website - [CLICK HERE](#)



It shows just how firmly based the Society is and – in detail - how ambitious we are for the future. It describes the origins of the Society in the Friends of Rose Hill and just how much successful experience we have gained since the Friends was founded in 2015.

If you would like to have a printed copy (£2) please contact [gscargill@gmail.com](mailto:gscargill@gmail.com). We would also be grateful if you could suggest who might like to receive a copy, including potential donors and the media.

One of our aims in producing such a detailed plan for the future is to establish our 'street cred' when we are looking to contact potential donors and media outlets. At its recent meeting the committee considered applying for full charitable status. This would however involve setting up a considerable administrative and financial structure and is only recommended for organisations with an income of over £5000. The committee has decided therefore to keep that channel open for now but to apply to become a Community Interest Company (CIC). This involves a simpler structure but has the advantage of showing we are a serious and reputable organisation. Some potential donors will – understandably – not grant funds only to groups that have at least CIC status.

## News Just In

We are delighted to say that the activities of the Friends of Rose Hill and the Watkin Society have led to nomination for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The local assessor has made contact to discuss the details which have already been supplied by Councillor Sarah Russell, who submitted the nomination.

*We are very sorry to report the death of Norman Armstrong-Kersh, the founder and director of the charity A Life for a Life. Those of you who were involved in the start of the Friends of Rose Hill will remember that Norman was one of our biggest supporters in the early years, along with Emma and Philip. A service to commemorate Norman's life was held in Manchester Cathedral.*

## 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 behind the railings) 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.

## A SPECI-ALE JOURNEY

Do you remember The Watkin Special Ale – brewed for EW's 200th birthday in 2019? It went down well at a packed out party in the Crown Inn in Northenden, next to St Wilfrid's Church, courtesy of John, the genial landlord and keen Watkin fan. A nice memento of the night has arrived in the shape of a photo taken by Fiona, Edward's great (times 3) granddaughter when she was visiting her cousin, Henrietta in Australia. Fiona wrote: "The photo shows Henrietta, her son David and her grandson Owen (great-great granddaughter, great-great-great grandson and great-great-great-great grandson of Edward respectively) enjoying the Watkin beer I took out to Australia for them at Broken Hill!" (For those not too familiar with the geography of Australia, Broken Hill is a city in the outback, 720 miles west of Sydney, so really just a local suburb in that vast country/continent!)

Here is the photo is that Fiona took on a cold winter's day in August after the Watkin Special's journey of 10,104 miles from Northenden.



And here for comparison is a photo, first published in our December newsletter, taken at the EW party in Northenden. It shows Fiona, John Mouncey of the Manchester Parks section, who organised the beer, and the Society's chairman, Geoff Scargill. The link is the bottle!



But it will take more than a bottle of beer to establish the Watkin Society abroad (we haven't started on EW's secret work which led to the founding of the Dominion of Canada!) but it's a start and Henrietta is now on our list as our first Antipodean contact. We have sent her three back numbers of the newsletter for her to enjoy on those long December days on the beach.

While we are in international mood, we must mention our first member from Germany: Wolfgang Armin-Rittmeier. He's now on our contact list as well!

---

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 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 from the committee of the Watkin Society for Christmas (whatever that means this year) and sincere good wishes for something like a normal New Year.*