

WATSOCC

The Watkin Society

WatSoc News December 2019

Welcome to the first edition of the newsletter of the Watkin Society – spreading the news about Absalom and Edward Watkin.

Our first task is to wish all our members and friends a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We will be getting in touch with you all in the New Year as we start to form teams to look at all the aspects of the lives of the Watkins. Many of you expressed an interest in getting involved and we want to make sure that everyone gets a chance to take part!

Autumn 2019 has been a great time for everyone interested in the Watkin Story. Our Society was formed on 10 September and on 26 September we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Edward's birth with the unveiling of a plaque in his honour in the concourse of Marylebone Station, the London terminus of his Great Central Railway from Manchester. Afterwards, the Landmark Hotel, which EW planned as the last and the most magnificent of the railway hotels of the Victorian Age, hosted a reception for us in the Great Central Bar of their hotel. Richenda

Goffin, Absalom's great-great-great granddaughter, joined us from Norwich. Richenda's mother was Magdalen Goffin, who published THE book about Absalom: 'The Diaries of Absalom Watkin'. A great read! Finn, the youngest of the family, a direct descendant of Edward (add another 'great' and 'grandson' to Richenda's list!) and his father, Hamish, travelled from Edinburgh for the celebration. Members of the local St Marylebone Society also joined us at the station and for the reception.





Back in Northenden, the Rector of St Wilfrid's conducted a short ceremony at the Watkin graves and one of our members, Gwyneth Lloyd, who is a Lay Minister of the church, laid a wreath at the family memorial to EW in the church.

Philips Park in Manchester, Queen's Park and Peel Park in Salford were the first three Parks for the People in the cities.

EW spearheaded the campaign to raise the money for the land and on the 28th September at a ceremony in Philips Park, sponsored by Manchester City Council and led by the Council's Executive Member for Leisure, Councillor Luthfur Rahman, four of the Watkin family descendants unveiled a plaque honouring EW's pioneering work.



We then went on to the launch of a new craft beer, the Watkin Special 200, in the Crown Inn, Northenden, Absalom and Edward's 'local' since it is only a few yards from their last resting place in St Wilfrid's churchyard. John, the landlord, was the host and his lounge bar was packed with well wishers – perhaps encouraged by the first drinks being free!



All proceeds are being kindly donated by John to the Society.

It was a happy end to a memorable day – as you can see from the photo in the Crown Inn (below), which shows Fiona, Finn McNeil's mother, EW's great-great-great granddaughter, John Mouncey of the City Parks Department, who organised the whole day, and Geoff Scargill, chair of the Friends of Rose Hill.

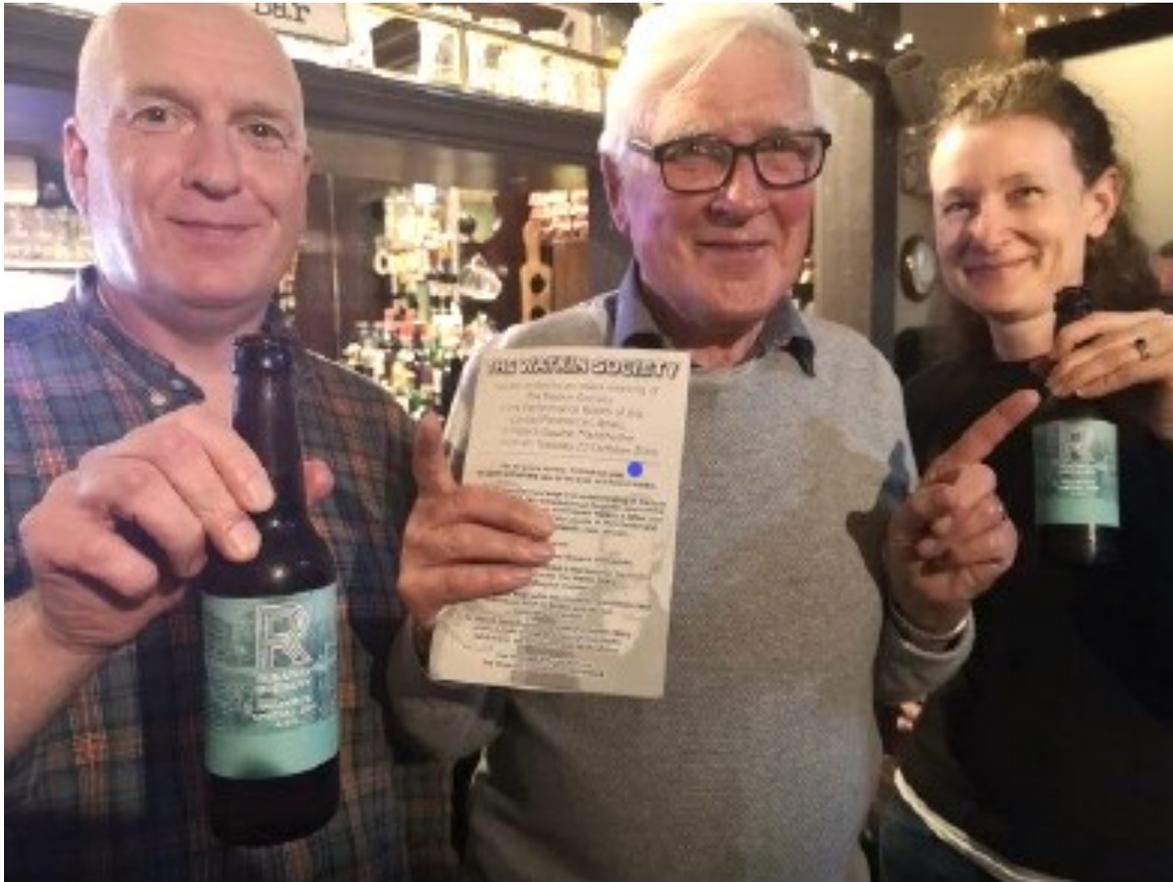


Photo credit: Your Local Voice newspaper

Please note that the Watkin Special 200 is now on sale EXCLUSIVELY at John's bar just opened: Northenden Untapped on Church Road Northenden

Looking to the future

We held our first open meeting in October at the Central Reference Library in Manchester. The room was full, with plenty of new contacts, including one supporter who had travelled specially from Milton Keynes! Those present all said they would like to attend further meetings about the Watkins and to have visits to places of Watkin interest. We intend to arrange both in the new year. Members of the committee have contacted individually everyone who told us about their special interests.

After discussing ways forward since the October meeting we have identified six

areas that we are going to focus on in the coming year:

EW and the railways; liaison with schools; EW's activity in the South East (including his years as an MP, the Channel Tunnel, the Wembley Tower); the Northenden connection; the Green Agenda (with EW's work to create public parks being seen as very relevant today); Canada.

In addition, we can offer basic training in research. Our secretary is employed in the Archives+ Section of the Central Reference Library in Manchester.

There's a lot else going on in the World of Watkin!

- Kevin Green, the Principal of the Manchester Health Academy, one of Manchester's secondary schools, has decided to include the Watkin Story as a permanent section of the curriculum of Year 8. Watch this space for more news of this!
- The children of St Wilfrid's Primary School are working with their teachers on the Watkin Story. They are being led by Lauren Smith, the school's Environment Officer, who is keen on introducing the children to Absalom's beautiful Rose Hill Woods, next to Rose Hill. Ann Walker, the chair of our sister group – the Woods Group - within the Friends of Rose Hill, and Carolyn McDonald, who is a governor of the school, are working with the children on the 'Watkins in Northenden Story'. Three classes have already started to look at Absalom and Edward's history. (By the way, congratulations to the Woods Group, who have just received an 'Outstanding' award from Britain in Bloom for their work in the Rose Hill Woods.)
- How about an unusual Christmas present for someone who has everything? We have a CD of Geoff's talk on Edward Watkin (price £3) and sales of our booklet 'Nimble Ned – the amazing story of Manchester's forgotten star' are going so well (at £5) that it has just gone into a reprint. Buy now while stocks last!
- A book published in Canada has identified Watkin as a "powerful force" in the creation of Canada and a review names him as one of the "founders of the Dominion". Lots of research to chase there.
- Did you hear the two recent interviews about Edward Watkin on Radio Manchester and Wythenshawe FM Radio? (We have been given copies of two radio programmes about EW, first broadcast in 2002.)
- Stop press: John, the landlord of the Crown Inn, thinks 'Absalom' would be a great name for a new craft beer and is thinking of creating one.

For your information, the Society's committee members are:

Chair: Geoff Scargill

Vice-chair: Revd Andrew Bradley, Rector of St Wilfrid's

Secretary: Angela Rawcliffe, Schools Learning Officer at Central Library, Manchester

Treasurer: George Lea

Minutes Secretary: Pam Scargill

Creative and IT Consultant: Jamie Rennie

Gwyneth Lloyd and Tony Lyons

URGENT 1: Do you have any contacts in the media who may be interested in news items about the Watkins? Several people who have heard the talk on EW have said it would make a great programme on Radio 4 or TV. We would not disagree!

URGENT 2: In order to establish the Watkin Society nationally (and internationally, through his activities in Canada – the Canadian Embassy in London have supplied us with possible contacts) we must look for grants to finance our work. Have you any ideas or contacts?

Finally, the following ‘conversation’ happened a few weeks ago. (“AB” had been receiving emails from us by mistake. “WS” is from the Watkin Society.)

AB: I’m glad you’re having a fun time but please remove me from this email list. I am not your AB.

WS: Apologies.

AB: No worries. Your messages made me wish I was the right AB.

WS: Thanks for your reply. I am sure you are a 'right' AB but I assume you do not live in the Manchester area. I would of course be happy to put you back on our mailing list in case we hold a meeting somewhere near you as we expand (hopefully!). Of course, with the wonders of emails, I suppose you could be in Australia!

AB: California actually. Darn.

WS: Well, one day we hope to make it to Canada since Edward Watkin helped to create that country in the 1860's. We might not reach California but one of our aims for 2020 is to build on our contacts in the Greater Manchester area and spread the word about the Watkins throughout the UK – and beyond!

AB: Well, keep my email in case you ever get this way.

We’d love to hear from you.

**While we are setting up our social media contacts please get in touch with us through
gscargill@gmail.com or 07970877636.**

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

or you can follow our twitter feed

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

Here’s to another great Watkin year in 2020!