

THE WORLD OF SIR EDWARD WATKIN
JACK'S STORY

INTRODUCTION

Jack's Story, which is intended for the enjoyment of nine to twelve year-old young people, had its origins in April 2016 in Wythenshawe, Manchester. A group drawn from local schools came together in their own time (including school holidays) to explore what one of them called The World of Watkin. This became over the next nine months the WOW project. Funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery and working with a team of teachers and a professional artist, Jamie Rennie, their aim was to raise awareness locally of the life and achievements of a forgotten great man, Sir Edward Watkin MP, who lived in their area of Manchester.

The project culminated in a Grand Victorian Tea Party in January 2017, which showcased their work in front of the Lord Mayor of Manchester, the local MP, Mike Kane, parents and staff of the schools.

In the course of the project the group studied original material at the library near Wembley Stadium (where Watkin tried to build an 'Eiffel Tower') and interviewed by video link the curator of the Museum of Fine Art in Dallas, Texas, which houses the masterpiece painting The Icebergs, which Watkin bought in 1863 and which was 'lost' for over a century. Two interviewed the lady who discovered the painting in 1979. It was hanging forgotten at the top of some stairs in the former Watkin family home.

The young people developed a range of skills throughout the project, such as teamwork, initiative, communication, archive and library research and taking responsibility for planning and organisation. Working with Jamie Rennie they created through street art the cover of the present book. 'Jack's Story' was written by Elizabeth Kennedy, who was starting out in her career as a children's author and incorporated ideas arising from her many discussions with the group. The illustrations are by one of the young people, Adrianna Gasiorowska-Bialowas.

'Jack's Story' has proved such a success that its original issue has sold out, leading to this updated and expanded version. The WOW project played a significant part in the establishment of The Watkin Society (watkinsociety.org), which is spreading the word about the amazing Edward Watkin not only in Manchester but in other parts of the UK, where he left a lasting impression.

I hope new readers will enjoy Mark Two of Jack's Story.

Geoff Scargill
Chair of The Watkin Society

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www.watkinsociety.org.uk



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Front cover art:

Sir Edward Watkin Portrait reproduced by WOW young people with the support of artist, Jamie Rennie.

Back cover art:

'The Icebergs' painting reproduced by WOW young people with the support of artist, Jamie Rennie.

"Stop thief!"

he bellowed at me."

Whilst on the run from the law, a young boy named Jack stumbles into a stranger's garden not knowing his life is about to change.

The stranger is none other than the Railway King, Sir Edward Watkin, who, now old and lonely, wants to share his memories with someone who wants to listen.

This is Jack's story,
told for the first time.



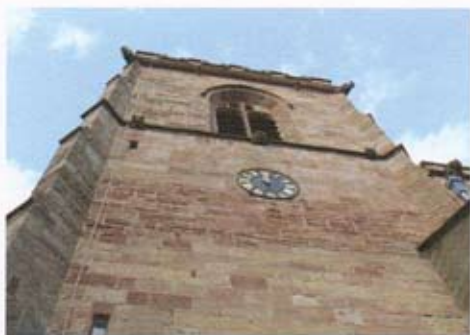
PROLOGUE

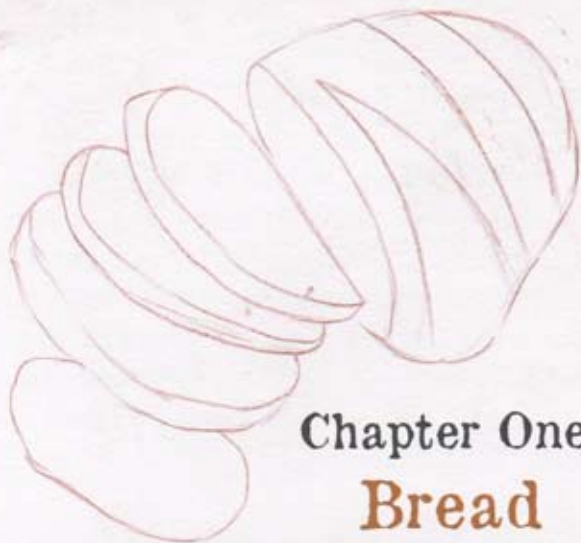
Today is April 20th, 1901 and I have just returned from St Wilfrid's Church, Northenden. I was there for the funeral of Sir Edward Watkin, a man I first met about two years ago when I was 12 years old. Sir Edward was an interesting man, and until today I didn't quite realise how important he was. 100 people came to his funeral; I don't think I have ever seen so many people in one place at the same time.

"He used to tell me stories about life and even then I thought he was impressive"
- Jack

When I knew Sir Edward I worked for him as an errand boy, when he came back to Rose Hill Mansion for a little while. He was a kind man, I always felt like he was a little bit lonely though. I liked to stay with him for a while if I could when I went up to the house. He used to tell me stories about life and even then I thought he was impressive. Today, hearing about all of those things again and more, has made me realise just how important he was.

My name is Jack William Leigh and I want to share with you some of my favourite stories about Sir Edward Watkin. Hopefully you will find him as interesting as I do.





Chapter One:

Bread

I was starving, absolutely starving! I'm not a thief and I know stealing is wrong, but when you're that hungry it makes you do silly things. I'm telling you this because otherwise you might get the wrong idea. You see, when I first met Sir Edward I was on the run from the law...

Don't worry though, I only stole a loaf of bread, which I know is still bad but it wasn't money and I didn't hurt anybody. As I said before, I worked as an errand boy at the time. I was the only son left in my house; my brothers got ill and eventually died. My father went not too long after Harry died (he was the youngest of us all). It was really sad, but I still have my mother and my sisters; Mary, Viola, Grace and Mollie. It's my job to look after them now.

Well, the incident happened when I was on my way back from a job and I was sick with hunger. I had a couple of shillings in my pocket, but I had promised to give them to my mother when I got home. The baker wasn't looking, the loaf of bread was just staring at me and it smelt so good! I couldn't help myself, I quickly grabbed it and shoved it into my bag, but I didn't see the policeman standing across the street.

'Stop thief!' He bellowed at me. I panicked and ran off down the side street and he took off after me. I'm not sure how long I was running for, but I lost him after turning down a quiet lane and running into a little

bit of woodland. This is where I met Sir Edward.

I heard a man talking in the distance and when I turned a corner I saw Sir Edward sitting on a bench talking. Not to a person of flesh and blood, but to a block of stone that was in front of him. I thought he was a mad old man at first, sitting there with his white hair and rambling to nobody. Later he told me that the block of stone was actually a memorial to his father and that he liked to talk to him sometimes, even though he knew no one was going to talk back. He missed his father a lot I guess, but I understood that.

A twig broke under my foot and that's when he saw me. He jumped a little at the noise, but when he saw that it was only me he called out to me.

'Hello, what are you doing in my garden?'

'I'm sorry, Sir. I got lost on my way home.' I lied, I've never got lost around here.

'You realise that you're trespassing?' He crossed his arms and leant back on the bench, staring at me curiously.

'Please don't get the police, Sir. I'm really sorry! I'll get out of here now. I don't want any trouble. It's just a mistake, honest!' I was terrified, I didn't want to get caught with the stolen loaf of bread and get in trouble for trespassing too! But he just smiled at me.

'What's your name?' he asked.

'Jack. Jack William Leigh, Sir.'

'Come here, Jack.'

I slowly walked over to him, I was nervous about getting in trouble but he just held out his hand for me to shake it.

'I'm Edward Watkin, pleased to meet you.'

'Edward Watkin? Sir Edward Watkin?'

'You know who I am?'

'I've heard your name before, Sir.'

'That's nice; I thought everyone had forgotten about me.'



All of a sudden my stomach made a loud growl. I tried to stop it but I was so hungry I couldn't.

'Have you not had your lunch today, Jack?' Sir Edward smiled kindly at me.

'No Sir, I didn't have breakfast either.'

'But you have some bread in your bag?' he pointed at the loaf that was poking out of the top of my bag.

'Yes, Sir.' I didn't know if he could guess I hadn't bought it, but he didn't let on if he did.

'Well then, you had better eat. Besides, my friends and I didn't work as hard as we did for your belly to rumble.'

I remember Sir Edward looking a little concerned as he said this, but I didn't know why.

'What do you mean, Sir?'

'Well I suppose it was a little before your time, but your father will remember it. We did a lot to make sure that families could afford to eat.'

'My father died, Sir. I don't think I know about it, no.' I shrugged.

'Oh I'm sorry to hear that. Well would you like me to tell you about it?' he asked.

To be honest I wasn't interested in things that happened a long time ago, but Sir Edward looked so eager to tell me about it. I thought it couldn't hurt to stay a while, especially if that policeman was still looking for me. He called to a lady named Ellen from his house and she brought us out some butter and jam for our bread which was delicious.

'So,' Sir Edward began, 'I suppose I should start by telling you about the Anti-Corn Law League...'

He told me that in 1815, before even he was born, Parliament introduced Corn Laws that protected the profits of the landowners in Britain. There was a war on between France and Britain and we couldn't get foreign wheat here in England, which meant we were using more of our own wheat at home. This made the cost of bread higher.

A few years after these wars we could get wheat from other countries again that was cheaper than the wheat grown at home. The landowners didn't like this and so Parliament made a law that stopped Britain being able to buy cheap wheat from other countries. This is what caused the bread prices to rise again, making it harder for people who didn't have a lot of money, like my family, to buy themselves bread to eat. You might think 'it's only a loaf of bread', but bread is all my family eats really, and other families too. It's all we can afford.



In the summer of 1819, there was a big protest in the city of Manchester. Thousands of people gathered in St Peter's Square to protest because they weren't allowed to vote. People were very, very upset about what was going on at the time and it's easy to see why; we weren't being treated fairly at all.



The protest ended in tragedy after soldiers on horses charged into protesters. A lot of people got hurt, including women and children, and some even died. I had heard my mother and father talk about 'Peterloo' sometimes and how my grandfather had been there when he was about my age, but I didn't realise they were talking about this. It made me feel quite sad.

In 1838, Mr Richard Cobden started the Anti-Corn Law League here in Manchester to change the law and make bread cheaper; Sir Edward's father Absalom Watkin was one of the first members.

The Anti-Corn Law League went all over the place campaigning for the laws to be changed so bread was cheaper. They spoke at meetings

at factory gates. It was Mr Cobden who asked Sir Edward to get involved and that's just what Sir Edward did.

Finally Sir Robert Peel (the Prime Minister at the time) agreed to change the Corn Laws by making the wheat from abroad cheaper and the masses could eat once again! Sir Edward went on to do a lot more than just being involved in the Corn Laws, I'll tell you about it all later.

Finally Sir Robert Peel (the Prime Minister at the time) agreed to change the Corn Laws by making the wheat from abroad cheaper and the masses could eat once again!

After we finished eating our bread and jam, and Sir Edward had finished explaining to me what had happened during those years, I got up to go home. Before I left, Sir Edward asked me to run some errands for him over the next two weeks whilst he was in Northenden, before he returned to Folkestone. I agreed of course, not only did it mean I had some paid work over those weeks, but I also really wanted to learn more about Sir Edward Watkin.





Chapter Two:

Sir Edward's Gift

I have always liked where I live. Northenden has all this fantastic space around it that I loved to explore when I was younger. It is only a small village and it's surrounded by farms, so it might not sound as exciting as a city but it is a better way of life. At least it is for a family like mine who doesn't have much money or many fancy things.

My father's friend Nicolas decided to move his family to Manchester from Northenden when I was eight. He thought he would find more opportunity for work in the city because of all the factories there, which was true in a way I suppose. Nicolas tried to talk my father into moving us there too, but my father refused to do it. He told Nicolas that he had heard terrible things about how people lived in the city, and he didn't want to make my mother or any of us live that way. I didn't know much about it at all at the time, but since then I have learnt that my father was right.

I had returned to Rose Hill Mansion to collect some letters Sir Edward had asked me to take to the post office for him. Ellen, his housemaid, had walked me upstairs to his study, where I found him sitting at his desk as he read something intently. When he had finished the passage he was reading he greeted me properly with a big warm smile and a handshake. It made me feel very grown up and I liked that. During this visit he told me about his great gift to the people of Manchester, but not before he told me about the terrible way the working classes lived in the city.



'Jack, the conditions these people lived in is quite possibly one of the most terrible things I have seen in my life,' he began over a cup of tea, 'I cannot tell you how sick it made me feel to see it!'

'Surely it couldn't have been that bad?' I responded.

At the time I was admiring his maps of railways in different parts of the world that were scattered around his study, they were amazing - but I'll tell you about all that later.

'Your father was a very wise man not to move your family to that awful place.' Sir Edward continued to describe to me how those poor people lived, and it did sound very, very horrible.

**"It was completely filthy,
even the people were filthy"
- Sir Edward Watkin**

In Manchester the families that worked in those factories lived in houses that were squashed right up next to each other. Inside there were only a few rooms, definitely not big enough to hold a whole family! But that is how they had to live. Sewage used to run through the streets

and the smell was so bad it might make you sick. It was completely filthy, even the people were filthy. Imagine pigs in their pig sties, rolling around in all the mud and the muck on the floor - that's how these people lived too. Even the factories they worked in were bad, it was so hot in there and packed full of people, everyone was constantly covered in sweat and breathing in dirt and dust. Diseases and sickness would spread in these areas and quite a lot of people died because of this. Sir Edward told me of a place called Angel Meadow. He said when he visited it to see what it was like, the people reminded him of maggots

crawling in and out of dung. It was in Angel Meadow that the first outbreak of cholera in Manchester happened. Sir Edward said his father managed to move to Northenden and out of Manchester just before that happened, which was very lucky.



'It was a dreadful place, but this is why I wanted to create the public parks. People needed a pleasant place to be and to escape from their miserable conditions. It was a lot of hard work, but it was worth every stress. It was one of my greatest achievements.'

Sir Edward smiled as he spoke of his mission to create the three parks. It was a truly great thing he did, and I am proud to have known the man who gave the people such a gift.

In Manchester there are two parks that Sir Edward helped to create: Philip's Park and Queen's Park, and Peel Park in Salford. After seeing the disgusting conditions people lived in he decided he must do something to make things better. He met with the Mayor of Manchester to talk about the importance of having these open and clean spaces in

the city. The Mayor made Sir Edward a secretary of the new Committee on Public Parks and so his work began. He made a speech at the Free Trade Hall in front of nearly six thousand men and said.



"What we want is to let more daylight into our towns; to give Manchester more health-giving lungs. It is a disgrace to Manchester that it has been so long without such places. It is said that the working classes would not use the places if they had them. Our reply is: 'Just give them the opportunity.'"

The speech was so good that the Guardian newspaper in Manchester reported on it. It was interesting, seeing it there in black and white. Sir Edward then went to see the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, to ask for some money to build the parks. When he met with Sir Robert he was surrounded by books in his office and looked very serious and important, but it didn't make Sir Edward nervous. He spoke with him for forty minutes and in the end he only offered them £3,000. I know it sounds like a lot, but they really wanted £80,000! I have to say I'm not surprised they didn't get it. But Sir Robert still offered them a donation of £1,000 of his own money, which I think was good of him.

In the end they managed to raise £19,000 and a lot of the money actually came from working class people. It was clear that the ordinary people wanted these parks and all the hard work paid off. The day the parks opened there was a huge celebration that went on all day and all night! Sir Edward told me he was there from ten o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. He must have been exhausted!



'It was wonderful, Jack. I really felt proud of all I had achieved, like I had finally done something of use. I still feel that way when I look back on it.'

Sir Edward sat gazing out of his window as he said that to me. I could tell he was happy when he thought about what he had done and it made me feel really happy too. I think that was the moment I realised how thoughtful and kind Sir Edward really was.

He walked me down the hallway to the staircase where a huge painting of icebergs hung on the wall.

He saw me looking at it and said, 'I find icebergs quite magnificent.'

I just smiled back at him, they just looked like big white splodges to me but I didn't want to be rude. We said our goodbyes at his door and he sent me on my way with his letters, but not before he asked me to come back the following week to carry out more errands for him. It was on that visit that I'd learn about my favourite thing he worked on, the railways!





Chapter Three: King of the Railway

I found myself back in Sir Edward's study and once again I was looking at his maps of the railways around the room. He was checking the last of some papers he wanted me to take for him.

'That all looks in order. Remember, Jack, it's important that these go out in the post straight away.' He handed the papers to me over his desk.

'I'll remember, don't worry Sir.' I was still half looking at the maps and Sir Edward could tell I wasn't giving him my full attention.

'Is something on your mind, Jack?'

'Sorry Sir, I have just been looking at some of your maps. Is that one really a map of Canada?' I pointed to one of the bigger maps that was rolled out across a smaller desk in the corner.

'It certainly is.' Sir Edward said. He had that great big grin on his face yet again.

'It seems like a very big place.' I replied. My gaze was still following the lines of the railway tracks across the paper.

'It is a gigantic place.' He nodded.

'You've been there?' I turned to ask him with a little disbelief. Canada was so far away it must be nearly impossible to reach, at least that's what I thought at the time.

'I have been to Canada,' Sir Edward nodded again, 'and Africa and India too.'

'You've got to be teasing me!' I just couldn't believe it.

'I wouldn't tease you or lie to you Jack.' He said. He then got up from his chair and made his way over to the maps.



'When we first met you said you had heard my name before, but do you know what I did as a job?'

'No Sir, I'm afraid I don't know much more than you've told me.' I said, feeling a little bit embarrassed.

'Well I worked on the railways. I built them – not with my own hands of course. There were many hard-working men that laid down the tracks and so on, but I planned the routes and oversaw the construction.'

He continued to tell me about all of the work he had done and I found it incredible. He built the main railway line into London which is used by thousands and thousands of people all the time. His work as a railwayman took him all over the country, to places like Liverpool and Sheffield. He worked in Manchester too of course, and also in Swansea and along the south coast of England. Sir Edward didn't stop there.

His work on the railways took him to many different parts of the world! There is a place called Honduras in Central America, it's quite

close to Mexico on the map of the world he showed to me. He helped to build the railway system there, as well as in Athens in Greece, and even in the Belgian Congo, all the way in Africa! He went to India too to do the same thing with the railways there.

Can you imagine how wonderful it would be to see all of those faraway places? Sometimes I sit and dream of one day seeing the world like Sir Edward did. I don't know if I'll ever get the chance, but if I do I will take it.



His work in Canada is what really impressed me though. There was a railway company over there across the Atlantic Ocean, but it wasn't doing very well at all. They had lost a lot of money and it was looking like they might have had to close down the company. They couldn't let that happen as a lot of people relied on the trains to travel to and from places, as well as moving things like food and materials to different places too. Instead of closing down the company, Sir Edward was sent to rescue them and he soon became their hero.

"He really did make me want to do something useful and exciting with my life - Jack

When he arrived the company was failing, but by the time Sir Edward had finished his job this railway line was the longest one in the entire world! Through all of his hard work and his clever mind Sir Edward had created something spectacular. He hadn't simply saved the day for that Canadian railway company, he had started something that would change the lives of the people of Canada. He had connected them all together

so that they could travel across their huge country a lot easier than ever before.

People used to call him a 'Railway King'! One magazine even printed that he was 'chief of the railway system of the whole world'! I think that's quite a true statement.

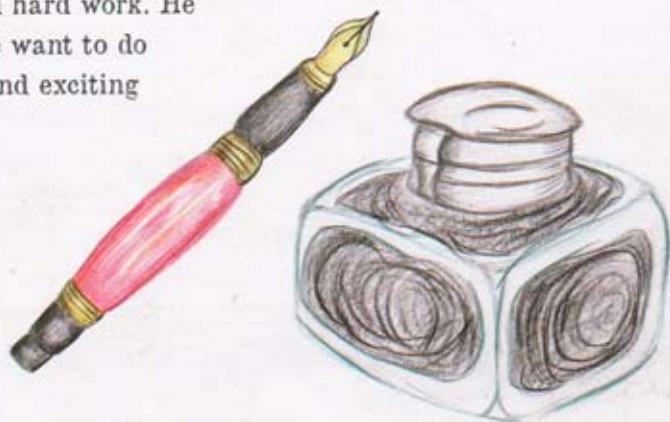
'I always try to be modest, but secretly I quite like being called a King!' Sir Edward said about his nickname, chuckling to himself as he began to put the maps away as he finished sharing another story.

'Really I would have liked to have built a railway from Manchester to India.' Sir Edward remembered his great plan. 'But it never happened sadly.' He put the maps away in a drawer and went back to his desk.

'Well that's a very long way and a very big job too.' I said to him. I'm not surprised it didn't happen.

'That is very true Jack, but wouldn't it have been brilliant? Big ideas are a good thing; they keep society moving onto new discoveries. However, you do need to be willing and able to put in the hard work to make these ideas a reality.' He sat down and returned to his work.

I left the mansion to run my errands, but I'll always remember what he said about big ideas and hard work. He really did make me want to do something useful and exciting with my life.



Chapter Four:

Mr. Grimsby & Mr. Cleethorpes

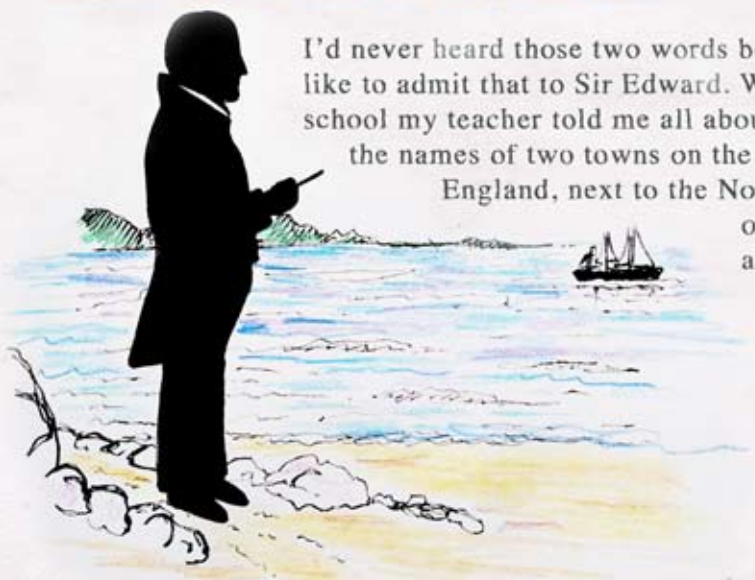
The next time I went to Rose Hill was only a few days after Sir Edward had told me about his amazing work building railways in countries like Canada and India that I'd only heard about in school. I don't suppose I'll ever see them for myself but he made them come alive for me, so that I felt I'd been there. They were still in my mind when I next went to meet him and I soon found out they were in his mind as well.

'Jack, do you remember I told you everyone called me The Railway King?' 'Oh, yes, Sir. And they were right. His eyes always lit up when he was talking about what he had done, and he was a young man again, at least to me he was. 'Well, you know, in a way, two of my little railways in Britain have become just as important as some of those abroad. Would you like me to tell you about them?'

We were in his wonderful library, with hundreds of books all around that his father had collected and left to him when he died. Being allowed into Sir Edward's library is one of the reasons why I love books. It's the smell of the pages and the feel.

I went to sit down on the carpet at his feet, like we did at school when it was story time. 'Well, I'm going to tell you why I had two other nicknames: Mr Grimsby and Mr Cleethorpes.'

I'd never heard those two words before but I didn't like to admit that to Sir Edward. When I was next in school my teacher told me all about them. They are the names of two towns on the other side of England, next to the North Sea. The first one sounded almost frightening. Grim.



'But you'll have to wait to find out what I mean. First, I need you to run a special errand for me down to the village. I have an important visitor staying with me tonight and I need you to get some fish from the shop near the Post Office. People in Northenden don't realise that their fish shop is only there because of me. When you get back, I'll tell you why.'

The Railway King loved telling stories and he was almost hugging himself at the puzzled look on my face. What had a fish shop in Northenden to do with railways and Sir Edward Watkin?

Sir Edward smiled. 'When you get back, you'd better go straight to Ellen with the fish and eat your bread and jam while you're in the kitchen. I don't want any sticky fingers near my father's books!'

I ran all the way down to the fish shop pretending to be a train and all the way back uphill and as I came through the big gates I couldn't help remembering the first time I met Sir Edward, when I was running away from the policeman. It was all different now. His kindness and his stories and Ellen's bread and jam, with best butter on it, meant that Rose Hill had become like a second home to me.

I really wanted to find out about Sir Edward's little railways and Northenden's fish shop so I gobbled down my bread and jam and was still chewing it when I got to the library. I wiped my hands on my trousers and knocked. Sir Edward was sitting on the edge of his big armchair next to a roaring fire, ready to start telling me his new story so I sat down on the carpet and he began straightaway.

'When I first went there, Grimsby was just a little port facing out to the North Sea. It only had a few boats and one small dock but one of the captains told me that the sea was a gold mine, brimming with tasty fish that people would love to eat. I knew then what I wanted to do. The land next to the sea was marshy. Nobody lived there. I thought, why don't I drain the swamp and build another dock but a bigger one? And this is the point, Jack. Grimsby already had its own railway station. I decided to build miles of railways in the docks so that the fish could be unloaded straight onto the trains to take them to everywhere in Britain that had a station.'



You wouldn't believe what my great idea did for Grimsby. Thousands of people came from down south, even from London, to live and work there. The population of the town doubled and doubled again and doubled again. Did you know the size of boats is measured in tons? When I arrived in 1855 the total tonnage in Grimsby was 188; last year it was 64,000. My railway company built its own ships. I even made sure that one of them told people where I came from. I called it the SS Northenden.

And talking of tons, do you know how many tons of fish were landed in Grimsby the year I came to the town?" He was so enjoying telling his story that he didn't even wait for me to answer.

"1514 tons. A few years ago it was 34881 tons. But we haven't finished yet. The docks could cope with a lot more. My dream, Jack, is that one day, when I am no longer here, Grimsby will be the biggest fishing port in the whole world.

Somebody told me that one of skippers said: "Aye, the Grimsby docks are big but not big enough for Sir Edward yonder. If truth were known, he'd like to make a dock of the North Sea and put a goods warehouse on the Dogger." That's a good idea. But I'm too old to try it now.' He suddenly looked so sad that I didn't like to ask him what the Dogger was. My teacher told me that it's an enormous sandbank sticking up in the North Sea.



'Jack, I love to travel. I'm so proud that my railways have given ordinary people the chance to get to places they used to just read about. Sometimes I would stand at the waters' edge in Grimsby and look out to the horizon and breathe in the wonderful sea air. I always want to know what is just round the next corner on land and just over the horizon at sea. People think I was only interested in fish. But I brought great passenger ships to Grimsby so that people could travel to places like Hamburg and Rotterdam on the other side of the North Sea and meet foreign people and see they are just like us, even if they can't speak English.'

He went over to a special glass case and took out a lovely silver box. 'This is what the people of Grimsby gave me as a thank you for everything I did for the town. Sometimes, when I'm feeling lonely and nobody comes to visit me any more, I look at this and remember. They used to call me "Mr Grimsby".

My trains took Grimsby fish to every corner of Britain. Even to a little shop in Northenden.'

He had a sad look again so to cheer him up I said: 'Sir Edward, what was your other nickname, Mr Clean Ports?' He laughed. 'You mean "Cleethorpes"'. I don't think anyone ever actually called me "Mr Cleethorpes" but I was proud of what I did two miles along the coast from Grimsby. Cleethorpes was a little village and one day I went there on a visit. I stood on the sand and I saw some children and their parents paddling in the shallow sea. That's when I had another of my great ideas, just like the Grimsby docks. It was simple really. Build my railway right to where I was standing. Whole families could come here for their holidays. And not just from Grimsby. My trains came from great towns like Sheffield and Nottingham.

So I built my Cleethorpes station right next to the sand and the sea. The children could be out of the train, run straight onto the sands, get their shoes and socks off and start paddling.

The new Cleethorpes has been a wonderful success. I built a pier for people to go out to sea and breathe the fresh air. Parts of the town were crumbling into the sea so I built a big sea wall and a promenade behind it so that the visitors and all the hotels and the fish and chip shops were safe. Do you know what they sometimes call Cleethorpes now, when everyone arrives on a Saturday in the summer? "Sheffield-on-Sea."

That was when I realised what a great man Sir Edward was. He not only had amazing ideas but he carried them through. He once said to me: 'Lots of people talk big but never do anything. And you don't always win, you know. But when you have failed, that's when you have to pick yourself up, look at what went wrong and move on. There's always something waiting round the next corner or just over the horizon. Never stop looking, Jack.'



Chapter Five:

Sir Edward's Secret

As you can probably tell from the stories I have shared with you so far, Sir Edward was a clever man with many great ideas. His work building railways made him quite famous, but there was an even more grand railway line Sir Edward Watkin had been planning.

Do you remember that the railway he built in Canada was the longest one in the world? I want to tell you about what would have been the world's longest tunnel. I don't know how good your geography is, but on the south side of England is a sea known as the English Channel. It was under all of that dark water that Sir Edward wanted to build a tunnel for trains that would run from England all the way to France. Can you imagine that? How much quicker and easier it would have been to travel to Europe? It's such a shame that this tunnel was never finished.

I had come to see Sir Edward at his house yet again. He hadn't asked me to come this time, but I wanted to see him so I went pretending to ask for some work. He was still happy to see me even though he had no work for me to do. We were back in his study again when I discovered his plans for the Channel Tunnel.

'It would have been marvellous, Jack. I'm still annoyed they didn't let me build it even all these years later'

Sir Edward ran his hands over the plans for his fantastic project. I couldn't understand why they wouldn't let him build the tunnel when it was such a good idea.

"Maybe it was wrong of me to keep it a secret, but I worried that they would never let me carry on building it" - Sir Edward Watkin

According to Sir Edward the government had allowed him to begin to build the tunnel, but only to test whether or not it could be possible. They had never agreed to let him build the whole tunnel though and Sir Edward decided to carry on building it in secret.

'Maybe it was wrong of me to keep it a secret, but I worried that they would never let me carry on building it,' he explained. "I had to try because that tunnel would have changed things so much for our country." Sir Edward took a sip of his tea and shook his head at the memory of the tunnel that never was.

The reason the government had not wanted him to actually build the tunnel was because they were worried about France invading England through it. Sir Edward thought this was a silly worry to have which is why he continued to build it. I think he was right.



Now, you might be wondering how on earth a railway could be built under the sea, I know I certainly did before he told me how.

They used a great big thing called a boring machine that dug up all the earth, much quicker than a group of men could do. The machine would keep digging deeper into the earth, so deep that it would go all the way underneath the sea bed. The space the machine left behind is what became the tunnel.



Sir Edward had wanted to have 250 trains running through the Channel Tunnel every day, carrying passengers and goods back and forth between France and England. When he had built the entrance to the tunnel (the part of it he was allowed to build) he had a few parties there to celebrate the success. Each time they drank champagne and he even had people like the future King and Queen, the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury there!

'When I look back now, Jack, those parties feel a little strange. It was as though we were celebrating the beginning of nothing. I really was so disappointed I couldn't finish what I had started.' Sir Edward sighed as he took a seat behind his desk and shrugged his shoulders in defeat.

'You never know, Sir; they might build a tunnel in the future. They might even ask you to start your plans again before long!' I tried to cheer him up.

'It's a lovely thought Jack, maybe you're right and one day a tunnel will be under the Channel, but I am too old now to be the one to build it I'm afraid.' He smiled at my attempt to make him feel better.

Even now, years after hearing about the Channel Tunnel plans, I think it really is a big shame they never allowed him to carry on building it. Maybe they were worried about the French invading Britain but I think the tunnel would have done more good than bad if Sir Edward had been allowed to finish it. Learning what I have about Sir Edward Watkin I really do wish people would have believed in him a bit more. I wish they had allowed him to show them what he could really do. But I'm just a fourteen-year-old boy from Northenden, I don't suppose anyone minds about my wishes.



Chapter Six: The Tower



The last thing I'm going to tell you about Sir Edward Watkin is known as his greatest failure. Have you ever heard of the Eiffel Tower in Paris? It is a tall, iron tower that looms over the city and was built for a world fair in 1889. I have never seen it myself except in pictures, but it does look rather special. Well, this great big tower is in France and Sir Edward wanted London to have a tower too. In fact, Sir Edward wanted London to have an even bigger and better tower.

He held a competition asking people to send in their designs for the tower. He showed me some of them, some of which were really ugly, others just didn't look like they were possible to build! If he had built this tower, it would have been the tallest thing to have been made by men in history.

'In the time that we have known each other, Jack, I have told you a lot about the work I have done, but if I'm honest I'm not sure I want to tell you about this!'

Sir Edward had begun to pack up the designs of towers he had got out to show me. At first he seemed happy, laughing along with me at some of the worst designs he had received; then he became sad.

'Well, why not? I would like to know why it didn't happen.' I pressed Sir Edward to tell me about the tower.

'People thought I was a fool to try to build it and in the end I fear they may have been right. The first part of it still stands there in London now, a constant reminder to everybody about my failure. I would just hate for you to think I was a fool too.'

I really didn't like Sir Edward feeling as though I would think he was foolish. After all he had told me about his life I actually looked up to him. I decided not to let him get away with not telling me one last story from his life before he left.

'People may have thought it was stupid, Sir, but that doesn't mean I will. You always have a plan, so tell me what was your plan?'

I sat down on a chair and crossed my arms to let him know I wasn't going anywhere until he told me about that tower. He just laughed at first but then he agreed to tell me one last story.



The Wembley Tower, as it was to be called, was meant to be the main attraction in the huge Wembley Park that is just outside of London. Sir Edward had planned for there to be a lot of things going on inside the tower itself, rather than just being able to go up and down to enjoy the view. Inside this great big tower there were going to be restaurants and shops for the visitors but it didn't stop there... Sir Edward wanted to include a theatre, baths, a science laboratory and an observatory right at the top too!

'If we had an observatory that high Jack, we could take extremely clear photographs of the stars. Wouldn't that be splendid?'

Sir Edward beamed at the thought.

Can you imagine all of those things in just one tower? Wembley Park itself has a lot to do with its lakes and plenty of places for sports, but if it had the tower too it would really be something. I'd like to go to the park one day if I ever get the chance.

'So what happened? Nothing about that sounds foolish to me Sir.' I couldn't understand why Sir Edward was embarrassed by his plan for the tower, it sounded magnificent to me.

'Well Jack, I began to build the tower and spent a great deal of money on the start of it too, but I never made it past the first level. I ran out of money and couldn't build any higher and no one wanted to help me. In the end it was a waste of a lot of people's time and money. This is why people think I'm foolish. I had begun to build something that I couldn't finish.'

He shook his head and sighed. I could tell that even now, when he thought about his tower and how it never was, he could still feel shame and embarrassment take over him. I did feel sorry for him. Maybe he should have just waited a little while longer before he built it and saved up some money.



'I don't think you're a fool, Sir. I think if people can't see how good something can be or don't understand why it could be a good thing, they can be mean about it.' I smiled at him but he just nodded a little in response.

We sat there for a little while not saying much to each other.

Eventually the conversation moved onto other things and Sir Edward seemed to cheer up a little more. It had grown late in the day and it was time for me to leave Rose Hill Mansion for the last time. I was sad to go as I had enjoyed getting to know Sir Edward so much in those few weeks. Before I left he said something to me that I'll always remember.

It is important to always remember who you are. Try not to let people make you feel bad about yourself, even when you do make a mistake.

'Jack, I have told you a lot about my life and you know who I am now and who I was. I have made mistakes and done things that I am proud of, as everyone who has ever lived before me has done and those after me will too. It is important to always remember who you are. Try not to let people make you feel bad about yourself, even when you do make a mistake. Work hard and don't be scared to take a risk every now and again, you never know it might take you somewhere marvellous in the end.'

His glowing grin spread across his face so grandly it is impossible for me to forget. I left Rose Hill Mansion that day a little sad as I didn't know when I would see him again after that; and as it turned out I never did.

I walked home thinking about what he had said to me and it was on that journey back to my little house in Northenden that I decided I would take his advice about taking a risk. I'd try to make something of myself so that when I was older I would have fantastic stories to tell my children and grandchildren.

EPILOGUE

I have told you all that I know about Sir Edward Watkin and I hope that after reading about him you will think he is amazing. At the beginning I said that there were a lot of people at his funeral. It is true that I have never seen so many people as that, but in fact it was a very small number for Sir Edward. In his life he had met so many people: politicians, kings and queens, rich men and poor men... even Charles Dickens! But out of all of these people, hundreds and hundreds of them, not very many of them came. The whole of Northenden was there which was lovely to see, but I still think it was sad that more of those people he knew did not come to say goodbye.

"In his life he had met so many people; politicians, kings and queens, rich men and poor men... even Charles Dickens!"

"I promise that you will always be remembered" - Jack

People might not want to remember Sir Edward or care that he's died, but I do. I will remember him for the rest of my days and I will always think of him as a special man. He is a hero of mine; in fact it is because of Sir Edward I no longer work as an errand boy. Last week I started my new job working at Northenden Railway Station where I'm learning how to look after the trains. I wanted to be a part of something Sir Edward had helped to build and make better.

So, rest in peace Sir Edward Watkin.
I promise you will always be remembered.

Jack William Leigh





Wembley Tower



Canada

USA

Honduras

Belgium
Britain
France

Britain



Sir Edward's
Railways
in Britain

Blackpool
Chester
Cleethorpes
Dover
Grimsby
Leicester
Liverpool
London
Manchester
Nottingham
Rugby
Sheffield
Southport
Wigan
Wrexham

Sir Edward Watkin
travelled all over the world



The Watkin Society



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The World Of Watkin



Romania

Athens
(Greece)

India

The Belgian Congo
(Africa)

Wembley Park

Philip's Park



Sir Edward Watkin

