

**Watsonian Club President's Report  
presented at  
The Watsonian Club Open Meeting held on Thursday 4 February 2021**

After two interesting and informative years as Vice President, I took over as President, from Rob Heatly, in February 2019, I – and, I am sure, none of you – could ever have imagined what humanity would be faced with 12 months later - a worldwide pandemic. A pandemic that has impacted every aspect of our lives and that was no different for the staff and pupils at George Watson's College; and, of course, it also hugely changed the direction of my second year in office. It did not mean we stopped though. It simply meant that we had to find new and innovative ways to keep the Watsonian community connected to each other and to life on campus. Much of what I and the Watsonian Council have been able to achieve, over these past two years, was only possible thanks to the support of the Principal, Melvyn Roffe; Director of Development, Karen Goodman and the School's Development Office Team. And, of course, the many volunteers who ensure that the Watsonian Club's Branches and Sections continue to thrive.

1. Watsonian Events

During my first year in office, I settled quickly into the role of President, sitting down with the Principal and reviewing the calendar of events for the year ahead and agreeing who would focus on which regions. In that year, I attended events hosted by the Yorkshire Watsonian Club and the Highland and Moray Branch. My partner, Rob, and I were also delighted to be able to catch-up with Hong Kong based Watsonians during a personal holiday to China and Macau. I should, again, extend my thanks to Mario Maciocia (Class of 1968) and Chris Howarth (Class of 1968) who invited us to be their guests at the Hong Kong Sevens and at the very lively Hong Kong Watsonian Dinner. Being present at all these events was so very special. I learned, even more, how special and important being a Watsonian is to people and how much people loved their time at Watsons. All events made me extremely welcome and I felt I had known all these people before, no truer was our School Hymn, Verse 3, 'the common tie that makes us one.' In addition to this we held a Business Breakfast on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2019 in the school and attended by both pupils and Watsonians. Jacqui Low, a member of The Merchant Company shared many experiences especially being one of a handful of women in UK to hold the position of Chairman of a Football Club.

My second year in office was very different, with our regional Watsonian groups unable to come together for events as hoped. However, with the pandemic came new opportunities and new ways to come together, as we all became familiar with - what is perhaps always now going to be a new norm - online Zoom and Google Meets.

I was delighted to be able to join the Principal, Melvyn Roffe, in hosting a number of very successful online meetings with our regional organisers. These meetings provided the first ever opportunity for our volunteers, from all corners of the globe, to come together. And, even when we are able to gather again in person, our plans are to continue with these global online meetings.

Gillian Sandilands, Vice President, and the Development Team have been able to keep the plans for the GWLC 150 on track thanks to the Committee meeting regularly online.

It was a very different Service of Remembrance this year. Only the Principal and I sat, socially distanced and wearing masks at the front of the gallery upstairs in the hall to pay respect to those Watsonians who lost their lives. A small number of pupils were also safely gathered in the hall and many pupils, Watsonians and others able to view proceedings virtually.

It has always been my opinion that this service is the very best and the format superb. I have to say that the service remained as moving and special as ever and I thank all those involved for the work that goes into delivering such a fitting memorial service for those Watsonians we lost. Very special thanks to Catherine Stratford, The Principal's wife for writing and producing the remembrance commemoration this year. I can only imagine the hours of work and dedication that must go into researching Watsonians, their history, their family connections and also what they did and were known for at school and beyond. Catherine's hard work allows us to truly pay our respects to these Watsonians and those who died not just being names but learning and respecting the actual individuals and their families at that time in our history.

Zoom allowed us to connect the Watsonian World again when we held a very successful Business Breakfast on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Former pupil Roz Colthart (Class of 1991) spoke to us from the beautiful and sunny Maldives. The feedback we received was superb, one comment from a Watsonian was "this was the best start to my day for as long as I can remember!" Another comment was - "thank you for so much positivity during cold dark Covid restrictions, I loved it." Thank you again to Roz.

It was with great sadness that I realised that the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, at St Giles Cathedral, was not going to go ahead. An event that starts the Watson's Festive Season. If you were one of the 400 plus who attended the event on the night, or who watched the recording of the Watsonian Christmas online event, then I hope you will agree that the School – against all the odds – managed to bring us all some Christmas cheer in what for many was a very difficult time.

In 2019, we also outlined plans for an annual Watsonian President's Dinner. Working with the Development Office and the Parents' Association, the Watsonian Club planned to implement a 2-year cycle of events, with a gala dinner and less formal dinner happening in alternative years. Held in the Assembly Hall, for the first time in a number of years, the 2019 President's Dinner was a lively event attended by over 170 guests – who ranged in age from 17 to 95! Sandy Slater (Class of 1995) flew in from Washington DC to be our guest speaker. Sadly, the gala event planned for 2020 had to be cancelled, but I know that the new President, Gillian Sandilands, will work with the Development Office and Parents' Association to pull off a spectacular event during her tenure in office. I'm very much looking forward to this – the school orchestrates these events so well in my experience.

The future is already looking positive – I can report that our Sydney (NSW) Watsonian Club in Australia held its annual Burns Supper on Saturday 30 January. Attended by 30 Watsonians. Hopefully this is a good omen for what lies ahead for us all.

## 2. Communications and Publications Update

There have been a number of changes to the format and content of the School's key publications, *Caritas* and *The Watsonian*. *Caritas* is now an annual magazine and its key audience is Watsonians – former pupils, current and former staff and current parents. Content related to the Watsonian Club and its sections and branches, as well as class reunions and other event updates which had previously been published in *The Watsonian* are now in *Caritas*. This change was made as *Caritas* has a circulation of over 18,000 Watsonians, whereas less than 1,000 Watsonians subscribed to *The Watsonian*.

From 2020, *The Watsonian* – whose key audience is current parents – will be produced in a digital format. This new format allows embedded video and other interactive and digital content to be included. Parents and others who subscribed to receive this publication were asked if they would like a printed version in future. Only 55 current parents noted interest in receiving a print copy of the 2020 edition and less than ten Watsonians asked to continue to receive a printed copy in future. It is therefore unlikely that the magazine will be made available as a printed publication in future. All Watsonians who have provided an updated email address to the Development Office will receive the digital *Watsonian* in future. This will increase its circulation to over 10,000 Watsonians – a far greater reach than the print version.

As a means to stay connected with Watsonians, the Development Office, with support from the Communications Team, launched [#WatsoniansLinked](#). It was my pleasure to add the first contribution via video from my back garden, an advert welcoming contribution from Watsonians everywhere. This online resource, which can be accessed through the School website, provides a platform for us all to share news, stories, memories and photographs, both about our time at school and our lives beyond the classroom. So far, this has received great feedback. Please go and have a look, it really is a great forum for sharing and reading interesting things all Watsonian.

The Development Office also worked with colleagues in the Junior School on a number of projects to stay in touch with Watsonians who were living alone and are over 70. This included pupils sending over 400 postcards and 185 letters to Watsonians around the world and the pupils receiving hundreds of letters in return. One Watsonian commented that the letter they received “was the best thing that had happened to them in 2020,” which just goes to show that sometimes the simplest of things – in such trying times – can have the greatest impact. Like many new activities started as a result of COVID, the Development Office will continue to encourage pupils to write to Watsonians with updates of life at Colinton Road.

## 3. Watsonian Sections

Much like our regional groups, 2019 and 2020 has been like a game of two halves for the Watsonian Sections, with the 2019/2020 year getting off to a great start. Despite the challenges, sport has continued to flourish and between the lockdowns the School has done all it can to get the Clubs and the pupils back to the pitches as quickly and safely as possible. There was success for both the Clubs and Watsonians.

The Watsonian Football Club was named by the SRU as a Super 6 team from 2019/20. Former pupils, Stuart McNally (Class of 2008) and Adam Hastings (Class of 2014) were named in the Scotland squad for the Rugby World Cup in Japan, and Jake Kerr (Class of 2014) achieved his first cap in the 2019 Six Nations.

Cricket continues to thrive and now has over 100 senior members and an active junior section with 125 members. Kathryn Bryce (Class of 2015) was named Scotland Women's Cricket Captain in April 2018 and her sister Sarah Bryce (Class of 2017) is also part of the Scotland Women's Cricket squad and was named as the rising star of Scotland's squad by the International Cricket Council in July 2018.

The Watsonian Choir, which was our first non-sport section, has continued to flourish since its first concert in May 2018.

During my time as VP and President of The Watsonian Club, I have noticed that George Watson's College is nowadays a school highly regarded for its inclusivity. The school prides itself on being a safe place to explore, it has achieved Gold standard as a Rights respecting school, it holds anti-racism workshops, it has been awarded a Gold LGBT charter for the positive changes it has made, being inclusive and sharing compassion and understanding for all. Watson's mantra is to be kind, respect all, care for others and to join in. I am especially proud that during my time as President of The Watsonian Club, we introduced and incorporated two new Watsonian sections, both of which will be open to current school pupils and Watsonians, the LGBTQ Section and the BAME Section. It is so important that our Watsonian Club reflects our school and is always an inclusive safe place for our community. Our plans for Myreside Pavilion follow these objectives to ensure everyone is included and part of our special community.

I'm delighted to have seen a continued growth in broad interest sections and feel sure that this will help to widen the reach and, in turn, grow participation in Watsonian Club activities.

For those interested, a copy of the detailed annual report from each section can be found on the Watsonian Club webpages, or by contacting the Development Office.

#### 4. The Myreside Pavilion Fire

For the Watsonian Council, the pandemic was not the first disaster to be faced in 2020. On Wednesday 5 February, fire swept through the upper bar and roof of Myreside Pavilion. This much loved and important landmark on the School's estate was left in a pretty sorry state.

The School took the opportunity, ahead of any reinstatement works starting, to ask the Watsonian Council to reach out to members and gather their views on the future of the Pavilion. A Sub-Committee of the Council, under the Chairmanship of Ben Di Rollo, was formed to support the School, review the feedback and to help shape its plans for the

future. Over 250 individuals and groups, from across Scotland, completed the survey and the information collated from that feedback and other meetings with the Watsonian Sections, the School has launched an ambitious £600,000 fundraising campaign. The funds will be used to reinstate the Pavilion as a hub for Watsonians, staff, senior pupils and our neighbours during the day, while continuing to be the lively home for Watsonian Sports Clubs and other events in the evening and at weekends. The campaign includes £180,000 for the complete refurbishment of the squash courts within the Watsonian Squash Hub.

The Development Office is working with individual Watsonians and the Watsonian Sections on this ambitious project. For more information and a copy of the fundraising brochures, please contact the Development Office.

## 5. Watsonian Council

The work started by Rob Heatley and the Committee to incorporate the Watsonian Club was completed in 2020 and since then the Principal and Development Office have been providing support to sections who also want to incorporate. The Service Level Agreement between the School, The Watsonian Club and Heart of Midlothian FC (the third-party provider at Myreside Pavilion) was also finalised and signed by all three parties.

In 2020 work also began on reviewing the constitutions of individual Sections, to make sure they were compliant with new legislation, including GDPR, child protection, relevant health and safety requirements and that the Sections had any relevant insurance cover.

As well as updating the constitutions, the School would also be putting in place individual Service Level Agreements with each Section, as appropriate. Focussing initially on Sections who use School facilities.

As Chair of The Watsonian Council, I would like to extend thanks to Kathleen Wood (Class of 1989), Tim Bunker (Class of 1974), David Ferguson (Class of 1981) and Douglas McCallum (Class of 2009) who stepped down as members of the Council during the year. I would also like to formally welcome two new members John Robertson (Class of 2006) and Tracy Black (Class of 1990). My personal thanks also go to the continuing members for their time and commitment and for all the support, help and advice they have provided to me personally during my tenure as Vice President and President. It is also important that I thank the Principal and the school staff for their help and huge guidance in all that we do to ensure The Watsonian Council makes the correct decisions that secure The Watsonian Club for today and in the future.

## 6. Fundraising

Fundraising is not normally included in the President's report, but I felt one project launched this year truly reflected the School motto *ex corde caritas*.

The pandemic impacted many families financially and that was no different for Watson's families. Soon after the first lockdown was announced, the School received requests for

financial support from 61 families and the Development Office quickly issued an urgent bursary appeal. Thanks to the generosity of Watsonians, the appeal raised over £113,000 in just two months. Donations that ensured that 103 pupils were able to continue their Watson's education.

## 7. Past Presidents Deaths

I report, with sadness, the death of three Past Presidents.

Rod Slater passed away in August. Rod joined Watsons in 1983 as Head of Modern Languages, retiring in 2008. He served as President of the Watsonian Club from 2010 to 2011.

Former Pupil Lawson McKill (Class of 1944), passed away on 21 January. Lawson served as President of the Watsonian Club from 1986 to 1987.

Dorothy Thomson (Class of 1952), passed away on 17 February 2019. She served as President of the Watsonian Club from 1985 to 1986.

It is always sad to hear of the passing of any of our members, some of whom will have been well known to many of us.

## 8. Watsonian Club Finances

The funds currently stand at: £40,948.04.

## 9. The Watsonian Benevolent Fund

The Fund continues to provide help to Watsonians through one-off and monthly financial allowances and grants to purchase equipment. Further details are available on the Watsonian website and through the Development Office.

## 10. Introducing the New President and Vice President

I am delighted to be handing over the Presidential Chain of Office to Gillian Sandilands. Gillian joined GWLC in P3 at St Alban's Road, moving to George Square and Colinton Road, before graduating in the Class of 1978. She had a varied career in science and medical fields. She is a Past Assistant and Member of the Royal Company of Merchants of the City of Edinburgh and is currently Chair of the GWLC 150 Committee, who are organising the commemorative celebrations for the 150th anniversary, this year.

As Gillian steps into the role of President, Ben Di Rollo will take up the reins as Vice President. Ben joined GWC in nursery and graduated in the Class of 2002. After studying Estate Management, he went on to co-found a solicitor estate agency in Edinburgh. On Monday next week, Ben starts a new position as Head of Residential Sales & Development at Savills. Congratulations Ben and very best wishes with your

new role. Ben was a keen rugby player with success in the School's 1st XV and the Watsonian Football Club, so brings strong sporting credentials to the Watsonian Council.

I know that both Gillian and Ben will continue to grow and improve our Club for current and future members. And, I look forward to enjoying the many opportunities they open up for members over the coming years.

### 11. My Personal Thanks

I would like to express my personal thanks to the School - especially the Principal, Melvyn Roffe, Karen Goodman and the staff in the Development Office. Huge thanks to members and Directors of the Watsonian Council and The Watsonian Club Ltd. The help and support given to me by our Office Bearers has been hugely appreciated during my tenure as Vice President and President. I will remain on The Watsonian Council for one more year as per our constitution.

My thanks go to my Vice President Gillian for her help and support and for Chairing the Committee who are working so hard at planning things for the GWLC150 celebrations next year. Gillian and I are both hugely grateful for the huge amount of work and dedication by Catherine Stratford who has dedicated full time hours for literally weeks, researching and investigating so much detail and information to enhance the GWLC events and communications for next year. The hours of work, interest and enthusiasm from Catherine is such a compliment to all the Watsonian community and we're very grateful for it. This is also a good time for me to thank Catherine for helping me understand more about Stewart Lockhart and his collection than most other people at The Hong Kong Dinner! I was able to have some knowledge of this great Watsonian and the wonderful things he achieved in Hong Kong and how popular he was, he was true to Ex Corde Caritas. Catherine is a regular at all our Watsonian events and a huge supporter of our Club and community – it's clear that she can never say no to an appeal for help or seeking knowledge on all things Watsonian!

I also thank my husband Rob for all his support and feedback during my time in Office. It's such a compliment to hear how special Watsons is from those people who did not attend the school and even more special when partners and friends feel such an inclusive part in our community due to the family feel and welcome, they receive from the school and the Watsonian community.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in office and although I was disappointed not to have been out meeting Watsonians face-to-face in 2020, or able to be part of the much-anticipated visit by HRH The Princess Royal, when she officially opened the John Martin Building; when I reflect on how well the Council and School have managed to stay engaged with all, I am proud to have been able to play my part. I so look forward to seeing Myreside Pavilion open later this year as a much improved and much used destination for all Watsonians.

It is both with a heavy heart and pleasure that I'm handing over the chain of office to Gillian Sandilands (Class of 1978), in this special year of celebration for the GWLC and I look forward to seeing her continue to develop and grow our Club with the support of Ben Di Rollo (Class of 2002), who will take over the office of Vice President.

Thank you. **Johnny Bacigalupo, President (Class of 1995)**