

The David Rhydderch Award.

Two schools in Brynmawr annually present the David Rhydderch Award for progress and achievement in reading. It was started in 1980 after money was invested and the annual interest on the investment would be used to present chosen pupils with an award to show that they had worked diligently throughout the year to improve their reading skills. No doubt many who received the award and their parents were wondering who David Rhydderch was and why this annual award came about.

It all started in 1978 as Edwin L. Jones, the headmaster of Brynmawr Junior School, (always called The Board School) received a phone call. The caller said his name was David Rhydderch and that he was an old pupil of the school when it was the Boys School from 1906 to 1913. He wondered if he could pay a visit to the school and have a look around.

On 31st of October 1978, Mr Rhydderch arrived at the school and he was taken on a tour of the building. He said the school was basically the same as it was when he was a boy and he was able to remember the various rooms in which he had been taught. He recalled various incidents which had taken place and he named some of the teachers who had taught him. A small informal concert was put on for Mr Rhydderch and he was very pleased to be able to record the voices of the children and to take photographs of the school.

After Mr Rhydderch left Edwin Jones thought that the school had satisfied the wishes of a former pupil who would return to his home in Birmingham quite content to be able to stir up memories of his schooldays spent in Brynmawr. But that was not to be the end of the story.

On November 9th 1979 there was another telephone call from Mr Rhydderch to say that he wished to set up some form of annual award for the pupils of the school. The staff of the school were consulted on what form the award should take and Mr Rhydderch was told the school would appreciate a shield to be presented annually to pupils who made the best progress in their work.

On the 25th Of February 1980 the school received a letter from Mr Rhydderch with a cheque for £500 to be invested in a local bank under the title “The David Rhydderch Annual Award Fund”, the annual return from the investment to be used to meet the cost of an yearly presentation to each year group for progress and achievement in reading ability. Mr Rhydderch also informed the school that he had ordered a large shield to be known as “The David Rhydderch Award”.

On the 9th of September in 1981 the school received another cheque for a further £500 to be added to the original £500 to increase the annual award. At the first ceremony the presentation of the awards was made by Mr Rhydderch himself and in his speech he said he was one of a family of fifteen children. They often went hungry but they were always warmly clothed. One thing they were encouraged to do was to read. During the dark evenings they could not afford oil for the lamps so they read by candle light and if there were no candles they read by firelight.

On his 13th birthday David Rhydderch started work as a collier’s boy with his father and uncle at Stone Pit in Blaina. The work was hard in the low seams and frightening for a young lad.

In 1916 at the age of 16 he joined the Royal Navy and served throughout the 1st World War until 1919 when he returned to work in the mines – first at the Lower Deep Pit in Blaina which was referred to as the “White Man’s Grave” because conditions were so terrible with low seams, water, bad ventilation and frequent roof falls. He then worked at Ty Tryst and Pochin Collieries in Tredegar where he became friendly with Aneurin Bevan who later became the Minister for Health and worked to set up the National Health Service.

In 1922 he was elected to the Crickhowell Board of Guardians. David Rhydderch continued to educate himself through his reading. He became involved in local politics and attended the Labour College from 1922 to 1924 and the London School of Economics. He furthered his education by attending the Co Operative College in Manchester from 1924 to 1926. It was in 1926 that David Rhydderch had a real step up the ladder when he started employment at T. A. S. Co Operative Society in Birmingham as an internal

auditor keeping an eye on the financial aspects of purchases and sales. Eventually he became Transport Manager for this large organisation.

During the 1939 – 1945 war David Rhydderch served on many important government committees in the Birmingham area, he was chairman of the Secret Information Committee and Manager of the South West Midlands War Transport Organisation.

Between 1947 and 1973 he became Vice-Chairman and then chairman of Birmingham Health Executive Council, he was also appointed Chairman of No 16 Hospital Group and up to 1962 served on the Management Committee; In 1952 he was appointed a member and later elected Vice-Chairman of Birmingham Regional Hospital Board and in 1953 he was appointed Governor of Birmingham Teaching Hospitals. He was also appointed a Justice of the Peace for Birmingham in 1941. For all his public service in the Birmingham area he was awarded the C.B.E. in 1965.

Sadly on the 7th of December 1981 the sad news came that David Rhydderch had died as a result of a simple accident. He had been a very active man right up to the end of his days The staff of the old Board School will always be grateful to a man who by his own efforts rose high in his own career and served his fellow men in public life, but above all they will remember a man who did not forget his own place of birth, the town of Brynmawr and his old school.

Taken from the notes of Edwin Lewis Jones.
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(At the first presentation on the 16th July 1980 the top four pupils presented were: (year6) Julian Bosley; (year 5) Edward Tansill; (year 4) Llean Jones; (year 3) Emma Pearce. There were also 16 pupils awarded “most improved readers” awards, 4 from each year group.

Some of the Rhydderch family still live in Brynmawr and at the first presentation of the award David Rhydderch was introduced to one of his great nephews who was a pupil at the school).