

WEBBER, Sir ROBERT JOHN (1884-1962), managing director of Western Mail and Echo Limited.

Name: Robert John Webber
Date of birth: 1884
Date of death: 1962
Spouse: Jane Bennet Webber (née Perkins)
Child: Joan Suzanne Prichard (née Webber)
Parent: Hannah Webber
Parent: Charles Webber
Gender: Male
Occupation: managing director of Western Mail and Echo Limited
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Literature and Writing; Printing and Publishing
Author: Clive Betts

Born 14 November 1884, the eldest son of Charles and Hannah Webber of Barry, Glamorganshire. He was educated at Barry County School and Cardiff Science and Art School. His first job was as a clerk in the general manager's office of the Barry Railway from where, in 1908 at the age of 24, he was one of 300 applicants for the post of private secretary in Fleet Street to George Riddell (later Baron Riddell), chairman of the *News of the World* and a major shareholder in the *Western Mail*. He won the post when, in answer to the question of what his recreations were, he replied, 'Work'. When the *Western Mail* needed an assistant manager for both the newspapers and the large printing business, Sir George, then chairman of the company, suggested Robert Webber. In three years, aged 32, he was appointed general manager of the newspapers and of Tudor Printing Works and, within three months, to a seat on the board, and later a director for life and joint-managing director with Sir William Davies (editor 1901-31) a position which he held for 32 years to 1955. In 1937, he was elected to the board of Allied (later Kemsley) Newspapers, owners of the *Western Mail*. Soon after his arrival in Cardiff, he had to cope with the strains of war on the company's two dailies, the *Western Mail* and the *Evening Express*. In 1928, he superintended the merger of Western Mail Ltd. with David Duncan and Sons, publishers of Cardiff's rival newspapers, the *South Wales Daily News* and the *South Wales Echo*, with the intended closure of the loss-makers, the *Express* and the *News*; in the event, the combined company, whose merger was essentially impelled by Lord Rothermere's threat to open a third evening paper in the city, kept the *Express* in existence until 1930. He was closely involved with the decision to keep publishing the *Western Mail* during the general strike, using largely untrained staff. During his years with the *Western Mail*, he was described as a 'fair but hard taskmaster, although he wouldn't expect you to do anything he would not do himself'; he was praised for his encouragement of young journalists. He took a very prominent part in the commercial life of south Wales; he was a founder and president for 39 years, until his death, of Cardiff Business Club. A national figure in the newspaper industry (among other positions, president of the Newspaper Society 1926-27 and chairman of the Press Association in 1932-33), he was also much concerned with trying to breathe new life into south Wales during the Depression. In 1936, he was appointed one of eight directors of the new South Wales Trading Estate Co., Ltd. (which developed Treforest Trading Estate) and, in 1948, a director of Wales and Monmouthshire Estates Ltd. Among his schemes was one in 1937 for an arterial road from south to north Wales to employ workless miners, and stem emigration to England. He was a staunch supporter in the pre-war years of the then fledgling air and motor transport industries. (One of his later cars bore the number ANY 1). He was a Freemason; in 1947 he was elected president of Cardiff Central Conservative Association; and he was knighted in 1934. He married, 30 December 1911, Jane Bennet Perkins, of Chepstow (died 26 June 1963); they had one daughter (Joan Suzanne Prichard; died in Toronto, 1983). He died 18 December 1962.

FRANK EDWARD WEBBER (1893 - 1963), general manager of Western Mail and Echo Ltd.;

Born 8 October 1893, the youngest of Charles and Hannah Webber's three sons. He was educated at Barry School and the University College, Cardiff. He enlisted in the army as a private in August 1914, commissioned in August 1916 a lieutenant in the 2nd Batt. of the South Wales Borderers; he was twice wounded, leaving his left arm partly disabled. After demobilisation, he took his B.A. following study of classics, history and mathematics. In 1926, he became a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries, was appointed general manager of the *Western Mail* and *Echo* in 1940, became a director in 1946, and vice-chairman in 1959. He retired in 1960. Keenly interested in education in Wales, he was a member of the Court of the University of Wales and the Council of University College, Cardiff. He was also very active in the business community and many good causes in south Wales. He was awarded an O.B.E. in 1946 for his work with the Cardiff Savings Committee. His wife Edith Clarissa (died 1984) was a teacher and they had one son, David. He died 21 April 1963.

Author

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Sources

Who was who?

Western Mail and *The Times*, 19 December 1962 and 23 April 1963

Published date: 2001

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