

JAMES, Sir DAVID JOHN (1887 - 1967), businessman and philanthropist

Name: David John James
Date of birth: 1887
Date of death: 1967
Spouse: Grace Lily James (née Stevens)
Parent: Cathryn James (née Thomas)
Parent: John James
Gender: Male
Occupation: businessman and philanthropist
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Eisteddfod; Philanthropy
Author: Richard Harding Morgan

Born 13 May 1887 in London, one of the two sons of Cathryn (née Thomas) and John James. The family returned to the old home in Pantyfedwen, Pontrhydfendigaid, Cardiganshire when the boys were young. In 1903 David John went to St. John's College, Ystrad Meurig, to prepare for the ministry but remained there for one term only. He returned to London to run the family dairy business and spent the rest of his life there and in Barcombe, Sussex. He married Grace Lily Stevens on 24 April 1924. Although he maintained a business interest in the dairy industry and in buying and selling wheat he is more particularly remembered as the owner of thirteen London cinemas. He built and opened the first London super-cinema in 1920, namely the Palladium, Palmer's Green. In the 1930s he sold them all apart from Studios 1 and 2, a rendezvous for the London Welsh for a period. He had been chairman of three companies before retiring in 1957.

During his life he donated substantial sums to the Nonconformist denominations and to the Church in Wales to improve the stipends and pensions of ministers, to St. David's College, Lampeter, to Pontrhydfendigaid village and to numerous other causes. In 1952 he founded the Pantyfedwen Trust which was administered from London. Its purpose was to promote religious, educational and charitable causes in Wales. This was abolished in 1957 when he founded the Cathryn and Lady Grace James Trust (named after his mother and his wife). In 1967 he founded a second Trust in the name of John (his father) and Rhys Thomas James (his brother who died young). Late in the 1950s Pantyfedwen Eisteddfodau were established in Pontrhydfendigaid (The James Family Eisteddfod), Cardigan (John James Memorial Eisteddfod) and Lampeter (Rhys Thomas James Eisteddfod). Sir D.J. James's main aim was to give individuals an opportunity to compete in *eisteddfodau* intermediate in standard between those of local *eisteddfodau* and the national *eisteddfod*. He participated in transferring the administration of the trusts to Aberystwyth but died before the official opening of the Trusts' offices there in 1968.

He received an hon. LL.D. degree of the University of Wales in 1957, was knighted in 1959, became a member of the Order of the White Robe of the Gorsedd in 1965, and the following year he was granted the freedom of the borough of Aberystwyth.

His wife died 20 February 1963 and he died 7 March 1967 and they were buried in Strata Florida cemetery.

Author

Richard Harding Morgan

Sources

Sir D.J. James papers and reports of his life and work

Further Reading

Richard Morgan, *D J James: Ei Fywyd a'i Ddylanwad* (Aberystwyth 2021)

Additional Links

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