The Origins of the Award

The question is frequently asked: How did it all start? Peter Carpenter, one of the original Honorary Award Liaison Officers for the UK and now for the International Secretariat as well, writes from personal experience.

It is difficult to see how we would have an Award today but for two men - Prince Philip and Kurt Hahn. Hahn believed that modern society was not in a healthy state and identified four (note the number) "declines" of: (1) physical fitness, owing to modern forms of transport, etc; (2) initiative and enterprise which the mass media of entertainment stifle; (3) care and skill, because mass production makes craftsmanship unnecessary; and (4) the willingness and ability to be of service, as less and less demand is made on them. To combat these "declines", as he saw them, Hahn drew up a programme of challenging character-developing activities.

Gordonstoun

Hahn was founder and headmaster of Gordonstoun School in Scotland from 1934 to 1953. Previously he had run a school (Salem) in Germany until forced to leave the country when Hitler came to power. Taking for granted the value of the traditional academic subjects, he concentrated on the extracurricular side of the school. He laid particular emphasis on (1) Athletics and Swimming and (2) Expeditions on land or sea. (1) because progress led to all-round physical fitness and that, in turn, to self-confidence. (2) because the demands they made encouraged such qualities as initiative and resourcefulness.

The Moray Badge

What the above lacked was an objective. So Hahn instituted an award in the form of a badge. To obtain it, his pupils had to pass standards in each of the activities. Hahn was a hard taskmaster. He would not allow you to get away with your strengths without trying to overcome your weaknesses. In other words, he was looking for all-rounders. He was intent that his educational programmes should not be restricted to those who enjoyed the privileges of a boarding school. Hence he threw the badge open to any boy in the County, and as that was Moray, the Gordonstoun Badge became the Moray Badge. The standards were graded according to age, in three brackets. In each age bracket there were two levels: "Standard" and "Silver". At about that time my father lost his job, for much the same reason as Hahn had done. He was an authority on the German Sports Badge, which was prototype for what Hahn had in mind, and he invited my father over to help develop the Moray Badge. Prince Philip gained the Senior Silver in 1938 (and I the following year).

The County Badge

The next step was to make the Moray Badge more widely available, and in 1940 a "County Badge Experimental Committee" was formed. The County Badge added two further requirements to Athletics/Swimming and Expeditions as outlined above: (3) Projects and (4) Service. Both had played an integral part in the life of the school at Gordonstoun. (3) because Hahn was convinced that pursuits like bookbinding or studying the biology of a pond led to the acquisition of new interests and skills and on to self-discovery. (4) because community service, to give one example, taught young people to help those in need and aroused the spirit of compassion.

Outward Bound

Owing to the exigencies of the Second World War the County Badge scheme had to be shelved. Gordonstoun was evacuated to Wales and set up an outpost on the coast, so as to be able to continue with its seamanship activities. Lawrence Holt, of the Blue Funnel Line, was concerned about the lack of preparedness among entries to the Merchant Navy for wartime survival at sea. Thus, the Outward Bound School at Aberdovery was born. This provided courses of four weeks duration; the successful completion of which led to a badge, which was modelled on the County Badge. My father was placed in charge of the Physical Education Department at Aberdovery, which included Expeditions as well, and for three years I served as his assistant. The courses were attended by boys from all walks of life - from schools, industry, the Merchant Navy, etc... who responded just as readily to Hahn's challenge.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

In what followed I had no hand. In 1954 Hahn approached his former pupil with a view to getting a nationwide award established at last. Prince Philip, in turn, agreed to chair a representative committee, which Hahn called together. The committee was much concerned with the unsettling period in which boys found themselves after leaving school. Hence the new award, though its programme was similar to that of the Moray/County Badge, was to be less school age oriented. I doubt very much whether the objections encountered would have been overcome had it not been for the skill with which Prince Philip conducted the negotiations and the fact that he allowed himself to be persuaded to give his name to the award. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award was launched in 1956, under the direction of Sir John (now Lord) Hunt who had been a member of the Originating Committee. The girls came in two years later. Little did people realise in those early days how far the Award was to expand, not just in the UK, but also in so many countries overseas.

Prince Philip, right, was keen on sailing while at Gordonstoun School. Seamanship counted towards the Moray Badge, forerunner of the Award today.