

VENTURA GEORGE BROMAGE (G24-26)

The following is taken from the Winter 1976 OF Magazine :-

The cold, draughty main corridor of Framlingham College afforded a far from friendly welcome to a little group of bewildered, weebegone boys who had just been abandoned by their parents on a bleak mid-January afternoon in 1924. One of those boys was Ventura George Bromage, a fourteen-year-old from Braintree, who stoically withstood that chilly reception; it is fortunate for Framlingham that he did, for that day marked the start of a career which, in terms of service to Framlingham, has scarcely been equalled.

Brom (one never thought of him by any other name) in those days was a baby-faced youth with a figure of generously rotund proportions; so rotund, indeed, that at his first geography period he was greeted by the legendary "Bruno" Brown with the words: "Once round you, twice round the gasworks!" Uncharitable remarks about his girth, however, were soon silenced when he began to prove himself a worthy performer in every variety of sport. He had a good eye for any ball game and was surprisingly manoeuvrable for one of his build; during his schooldays he won his colours at cricket, hockey and rugby and was captain of swimming. Green House (not yet Garrett) awarded him his house cap and he was a sub-prefect during his last year. Academically he was sound rather than brilliant, but he passed the Lower Certificate and School Certificate examinations at the due times. His friends in later years were often astonished to learn that he had won the French prize and were scarcely less surprised when told that this was awarded for study of the Prayer Book.

He shared with most of his schoolfellows a great and lasting respect for his headmaster, Francis W. Stocks, whose influence was in no small measure responsible for Brom's lifelong devotion to Framlingham and his love of cricket.

After leaving the College, Brom, who by then was living in London, tried his hand at one or two clerical jobs in the City before edging his way into the catering industry in 1932, when he was appointed general and sports secretary to the Aerated Bread Company. In 1936 he married Carmen Neville, whose surname is now familiar as the Christian name of their only son. Brom remained with the A.B.C. until 1941, when he took up full-time duties with the London Fire Brigade, having joined the National Fire Service on a part-time basis in August 1938. He attained the rank of Column Officer and acted as Regional Catering Inspector for the Greater London Fire Brigade Area. He had always shown a great interest in the affairs of the Society of Old Framlinghamians, and had attended most of their functions and played in nearly all their cricket and hockey matches, particularly those played at Framlingham, up to the outbreak of war. In 1942 he was elected a member of the Council of the S.O.F. and in February 1945 he became Honorary Secretary. In 1946 he left the Fire Service to work for Express Dairies in the Strand, leaving in the Spring of 1949 to join Mecca Ltd. as licensee of the Crown, Brewer Street. He and Carmen worked closely together there for the next fifteen and a half years, during which time, for Framlinghamians, Mecca was the operative word—the Crown was their rallying place. To quote from the Winter, 1964, edition of "The Framlinghamian", when that era had come to an end and Brom and Carmen had left the Crown: "In our ones and twos, we would drop in to the bar at lunch-time or in the evening, for a glass of beer and a gossip with Brom. We were almost certain to meet, or to have just missed, one or two fellow Framlinghamians. We would learn who was home from abroad, who had died or got married or divorced, who was ill, who was complaining to whom about what, and who had changed his job or played for his county. We in our turn would give Brom our little snippets of information to supplement his saga".

After leaving the Crown, Brom remained with Mecca as consultant to the Directors until his retirement in October 1974. His work for the Society never flagged. In 1957 he was elected President, and this was appropriately the year when the pavilion on the Back was officially opened by the late Duke of Norfolk. After that ceremony, Brom captained the O.F.XI against the School. He played in all these matches from 1946 until 1964, and then once again, at the age of 61, in 1970! No less remarkable were his hockey appearances year after year, in goal for the O.F.s. against the School until 1962.

As soon as his presidential year was over, he resumed his duties as Secretary. He had continued to live in London after leaving the Crown, but in 1967 he moved to Suffolk and thereafter was a very frequent and welcome visitor to the College. In that year he was elected to the governing body, having been a member of the Corporation since 1962. When he retired from business in 1974 he became Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Governors and was still serving in that capacity when he died with such tragic suddenness on the 20th August, 1976.

Framlingham had to share his attentions with his other absorbing hobby—



BROM
(1924-1976)

cricket. Always a competent performer, he was passionately fond of the game, but he never failed to repay in service the enjoyment he derived from it. Before the war he played first for Sutton (his birthplace) and later for Finchley, for whom he became Honorary Secretary. In the post-war years he played for a number of itinerant clubs, including the Wanderers, the Privateers, the Nondescripts and, most often, for the Stoics whom he also served as Honorary Secretary. He was a member of the M.C.C., but his most memorable attainment in the cricketing world was his membership, for twenty years, of the Committee of the Surrey County Cricket Club, during part of which time he was Chairman of the House and Ground Committee.

How Brom ever found time for all his secretarial and Committee duties was always a mystery. He never seemed to overwork, yet he was always up to date. Notices of meetings were sent out on time, minutes were written up, letters were answered in his familiar long-hand; his administration, in short, was completely reliable. On that account he will be greatly missed. For his achievements he will be long remembered. But it is Brom as a personality who will live on in the hearts and minds of his innumerable friends and acquaintances. Enemies he had none, and he rarely spoke disparagingly of anybody. People of all ages liked him because he was interested in people; he would listen to them and take note of what they had to say and, most important of all, would not forget them. He was serene and unflappable; playful, at times even boisterous; teasing, but never cruel; blessed with a rich, earthy sense of humour from which now the imp, now the clown would come chuckling to the surface.

"Of course, dear boy!" still rings in our ears, and we hear again the quizzical: "What? Hm?" so often appended to his expressions of opinion. It is hard to believe that these are only echoes. To his beloved wife Carmen, who for forty years gave him love, support and encouragement and to their son, Neville, who has succeeded his father as Honorary Secretary of the S.O.F., Framlinghamians all over the world extend their sympathy.

Brom had a favourite Shakesperian quotation, retained among his memories of School Certificate English, when he studied "As You Like It". It make a fitting epitaph for one who served without thought of reward :

*"Oh good old man, how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world,
When service sweat for duty, not for meed !
Thou art not for the fashion of these times,
Where none will sweat but for promotion".*

H.J.S.