

NORMAN FRANCIS BORRETT (S31-36)

Little can be added to what has already been said about this hugely gifted sportsman and teacher.

The following is the obituary that appeared in *The Times* on 30 December 2004

Amateur sportsman who excelled nationally and internationally in hockey, squash and cricket

NORMAN BORRETT was probably Britain's most talented postwar all-round amateur sportsman. Uniquely, he captained his country many times at hockey and squash, while also playing first-class and minor-county cricket. As a schoolmaster he inspired generations of pupils to achievement in work and sport.



Born in Wanstead, Essex, where his father was a farmer, Norman Francis Borrett was educated at Framlingham College in Suffolk from the age of 13. There he revealed an outstanding talent for all athletic pursuits. He ended his school career as captain of hockey, cricket, squash, fives, athletics and swimming, secretary of the debating society and school captain. In the holidays of his last year he managed to fit in matches as fly-half for the Eastern Counties Schools rugby XV as well as winning the Evans Cup Public Schools Squash Handicap, playing cricket for Essex Young Amateurs and scoring 63 at Lord's in the Young Amateurs v Young Professionals match. He went to Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1936, read geography, won two hockey and three squash blues, captained the university in both, and won his first three England hockey caps in his last hockey term, 1939.

After war service in the Army he became a schoolmaster, first at Allhallows School, Devon, from 1945 to 1950, then at Framlingham, from 1950 to 1980, where he eventually became second master.

At hockey Borrett played inside-left 30 times for England and 7 times for Great Britain, in an unbroken run of 15 years, captaining England 23 times and Great Britain 7. He led Great Britain to the silver medal at the 1948 Olympics. His ratio of goals to games played remains the highest by an English player.



Described in the press of the day as "the incomparable Borrett", he was without question the best player of his era, and in the view of many the most naturally gifted and skilful of all British players.



While at Cambridge he played twice for Essex at cricket, but not, strangely, for the university. After the war he was also picked for Essex, against Nottinghamshire in August 1946, his third and last match for the county. Thereafter he played for Devon in the Minor Counties championship each summer holidays, from 1947 to 1959, save for 1951 and 1955 when he was touring South Africa respectively with the British hockey team and the Great Britain squash team. He played 50 matches for Devon, scoring 2,408 runs at an average of over 36, with 4 centuries. He still holds the Devon record for the 4th wicket — an unbroken 262 against Oxfordshire in 1949, of which his share was 134 not out.

It was in squash that Borrett's remarkable talent stood out most starkly. While a virtual unknown, he won the English Amateur Championship in 1946, and again in each of the next four years, winning each final in straight games. He was a racing certainty to have won it in the sixth year but had to withdraw with food poisoning. But the astonishing aspect of his domination is that it was achieved without proper, or indeed any, competitive practice.

Squash was centred entirely on London in those days. Borrett lived in Devon, where there was no one he could play, so he had to use the first two or three rounds of the amateur



championship each year to get his eye in. The other competitors all played regular top-class squash in London.

He captained the England and Great Britain squash teams, playing 12 times for England when hockey and school commitments permitted. Until 1952 he had lost only once to any amateur in the world since the war.



He played golf to a handicap of 4, accumulated enough tournament ranking points to qualify for the Wimbledon tennis championship, but was too busy to enter, and was invited by a friend to be his co-driver in the Le Mans 24-hour race — an invitation he declined. He was president of both the Squash Racquets Association and the Hockey Association as well as chairman of the England hockey selectors, president of the Travellers Hockey Club, a member of MCC, the Tramps, the Gentlemen of Essex, the Jesters and numerous other clubs. He wrote two well-received instructional books on hockey.



The war deprived him of the years between 22 and 29, otherwise his sporting record would have been even more extraordinary. At the age of 35 arthritis was diagnosed in both hips. He continued to play international squash until the age of 38, and Devon county cricket until 42, subsequently undergoing four hip replacements which left him crippled in later years.

He is survived by his wife Mullie, whom he married in 1940, and by their two sons, Anthony and Timothy.

Norman Borrett, amateur sportsman, was born on October 1, 1917. He died on December 10, 2004, aged 87.



Original Article: [The Times - 30 December 2004](#)

Tribute by Richard Sayer (S56-61) at the funeral on 16th December 2004.

Let me first give some dates and events to put a context to Norman's long life. I will then give a few reminiscences about him, garnered from a wide variety of sources, to give something of the character of the man, my brief from Tony and Tim having been to be rude and irreverent – not that I will follow that injunction to the letter. After all I spent 5 years of my life doing what I was told by their father, so a little disobedience is perhaps overdue.

First, family background.

Born on the first of October 1917 in Wanstead Essex, the second of two sons of Walter and Alice, farmers in the Essex countryside that was then Barking and Dagenham.

Both boys went to Framlingham College in Suffolk from the age of 13. Both of them loved and played all games. Charles, a year older than Norman, was a fine sportsman and in particular a rugby player and was captain of rugby at Framlingham for two years. He went to Cambridge, was called to take holy orders, became a fine parish priest and ultimately an archdeacon. He died in 2000 at the age of 84. His son Andrew is reading for us today.

Second, Norman at Framlingham – a very brief review:

The first mention of Norman in the school magazine was, one might be surprised, for his acting ability. Cedric Hardwicke was the judge of the house plays in December 1931 and was impressed by Norman "Made up perfectly as a modern flapper with ginger hair and a hat at a marvellous angle".

His acting talent saw further expression as a sixth-former when he appeared in the role of Casca in Julius

Caesar. Casca is you will recall the one who kills Caesar. Norman's squash-playing wrist had clearly developed already, as the magazine observed that his *"tremendous initial stab would have finished off a lesser man than Caesar."*

At sport, he was outstanding. He also excelled in other areas. I will just say this: He ended his school career as captain of hockey, cricket, squash, fives, athletics and swimming, secretary of the Debating Society and School Captain. In the holidays of his last year he managed to fit in matches for the Eastern Counties Schools rugby XV, winning the Evans Cup Public Schools Squash Handicap, playing cricket for Essex Young Amateurs, and scoring 63 at Lord's in the Young Amateurs v Young Professionals match.

Cambridge

He went to Pembroke College, Cambridge, played for Pembroke at all games, won three squash and two hockey blues, and captained the University at both games. He was a member of the Hawks Club, and enjoyed a busy life. On the academic front, suffice to say, as he put it to me, he devoted most of his energies to sport. He was content with the third he finally obtained.

He planned to become a schoolmaster but the war started a mere two months after he came down from Cambridge, a war in which he had little opportunity in the Army to play any sport.

He married his child-bride Mullie on August 31st 1940. There were two children of this marvellous marriage – in 1942 and 1950 - Tony and Tim, two boys in whom one can see so much of their father, but fortunately for them, (and us!), there is also a lot of their marvellous mother too.

Teaching –Allhallows 1945 to 1950. Framlingham 1950 to 1980.

It was therefore not until late 1945 that he became a schoolmaster, at Allhallows School at Lyme Regis in Devon. Tony Watson was a pupil there in September 1945 and recalls Norman's arrival, accompanied, in his words, *"by a most beautiful wife, and a three year old son who spent time hitting a ball in the squash court with a cut-down racquet Norman had created for him"*.

For Tony, Norman was *"a very fine teacher"*, who in one year dragged Tony's abysmal history up to school cert standard and his geography up to a 96% pass mark. Both Tony and another pupil who arrived at Allhallows in the late 40s, Stuart Macgregor, recall Norman's individualistic classroom disciplinary methods; the wooden backed blackboard dusters and 'the arsenal of chalk' lined up on Norman's desk. *"Norman had the ability, they separately told me, to write on the board with one hand while launching a board-duster over his shoulder with the other with unerring accuracy just over the head of the errant child. He also kept a bucket of water at the front of the class into which one's head was plunged for any extreme folly. No-one complained and he always had our total attention! As Stuart added, somewhat superfluously, 'I don't think these methods would be encouraged today.'*

Those OFs who have contributed to the OF website debate about Norman's hockey stick Willie, and its occasional disciplinary outings, will relate to that.

Sporting Achievement

I am not going to dwell on this, as we can read the detail of his extraordinary multiple career elsewhere. I will simply recite the barest of bones of those achievements. It should be born in mind that Norman lost the years between 22 and 29 to the war. But for that his achievements would have been even more remarkable.

Hockey: Norman played hockey 30 times for England and 7 for GB, in an unbroken run of 15 years, captaining both. He led GB to the silver medal at the 48 Olympics. He enjoyed that but he wasn't so happy about only finishing second. He was, as the inside-left, the constructive, scheming provider of the passes from which the strikers were to score the goals. This role he of course carried out to perfection as the early results show - USA nil - GB 11 (Borrett 6); Afghanistan nil - GB 8 (Borrett 4).

He was described in the press of the day as *"the incomparable Borrett"*, and was without question the best player of his era. In the recently expressed view of at least one player who played against him at the end of his career he was *"the most naturally gifted and skilful British player I have ever seen"*.

Cricket: Whilst at Cambridge he played twice for Essex, but not, strangely, for the University, particularly when in the Seniors' trial in his last summer he "sensationally" performed the hat trick

Post-war he was also picked for Essex, against Nottinghamshire in August 1946. It was his third and last match for the county. Thereafter he played for Devon in the Minor Counties championship, each summer holidays, from 1947 to 1958, save for 1951 and 1955 when he was touring South Africa respectively with the British hockey team and the Great Britain squash team. He played 50 matches, scoring 2,408 runs at an average of over 36, with 4 centuries. He still holds the record for the 4th wicket – an unbroken 262 against Oxfordshire in 1949, of which his share was 134 not out.

It is in relation to his **squash** that Norman's remarkable talent stands out most starkly. In the immediate post-war years he won the English Amateur Championship in five consecutive years, winning each final in straight games, and was a racing certainty to have won it in the sixth year before he withdrew with food poisoning. But the astonishing thing, the stuff of legend, is that he achieved this dominance without proper, or indeed any, competitive practice. Squash was centred entirely on London in those days. He lived in Devon. He often bemoaned to Mullie the fact that he could find no-one to play against (there were only two SRA affiliated clubs in Devon). As the SRA records, Norman had to use the first two or three rounds of the Amateur each year to get his eye in. The other competitors all played regular top-class Bath Club squash in London. Norman captained both the England and GB squash teams, playing 12 times for England when hockey and school commitments permitted. One last measure of his dominance – until 1952 he had only lost once to any amateur in the world since the war.

He played **golf** to a handicap of 4, he accumulated enough tournament ranking points to qualify for the Wimbledon **tennis** championship - but was too busy to enter, and was invited by a friend to be his co-driver at **Le Mans** – an invitation he declined. He was President of both the SRA and the HA, President of the Old Framlinghamians, President of the Travellers Hockey Club, a member of MCC, The Tramps, the Gentlemen of Essex, the Jesters and numerous other clubs. Much to the surprise of a 16 year old Tim on a quiet visit to the College chapel with his father, Norman could play the organ, and piano.

Comparisons are odious, and difficult. It has often been said however that Norman was Britain's most talented all-round sportsman of his time, and arguably, beyond that.

So enough of statistics and accolades. What of the man? I am going to start with what seems to me to be a very perceptive insight from a close friend of Norman, John Cockett, capped 37 times by England and 18 by GB, and a master at Felsted. *"I first came across him when he was captain of England hockey and I wondered who this forthright, stern, commanding figure was, who liked to hog the ball at inside left (my cross-pass from right half was popular if he was in position!). A daunting experience for the first game or two. He did not suffer fools gladly and could present a forbidding face until one got to know him- thereafter he was great fun with a strong sense of humour. He was quite a different person with those who were a bit nervous of him as against those who knew him well enough to pull his leg, which he enjoyed enormously.*

He loved to pull a leg, and humour was an essential part of him. A few examples:

Martin Irving, the French master at Framlingham, operating from classroom 4, sometimes got his class to sing in French. Hearing this, Norman in classroom 2 would get his own class to strike up in reply, thus bathing the whole block in a discordant continuum of noise. Presumably says John Maulden, an OF and College master, the provider of this tale, Winstanley, in room 3 got the full benefit of both.

Norman told of the times he and Martin Irving had cycle races down the main staircase – sounds interesting but dangerous.

Norman of course took his serious sport seriously. But even then there was room for levity; Derek Cole played cricket with Norman for Devon. *Norman had a strong sense of humour and enjoyed his cricket with us, as we enjoyed his presence. He was a tough competitor and wanted to win – with his level of achievement is that any surprise? As an outstandingly agile cover-point, if playing against a batsman who did not know him, he would throw in right-handed to the wicket-keeper until there was a chance of a run-out, when he would revert to his more powerful left-handed throw.*

This ambi-dextrousness caused some concern to Stuart Mountford when he kept wicket to Norman's bowling for the first time for Devon. *In a county match he warned me as we crossed between overs to watch out for the fourth ball of his next over. I had no idea what was going to happen. He bowled the first three with his usual left-arm spin and then without telling the batsman, or the umpire, or me, delivered the fourth as a medium pace right-arm seamer.*

Mountford ended his letter by saying Norman was a wonderful person. So it is safe to assume that Norman's quip to his Devon team-mates, when he returned to the pavilion after scoring a breezy 103 minute century, was not taken too seriously, *if any of you lot could bat I would have made a lot more.*

Norman's famous impartiality when "his boys" were playing.

John Maulden recalls Norman's Monday morning report to the Common Room of Saturday's match at Gresham's:

Norman: We were all over them.

Curious member of Common Room: What was the score Norman?

Norman: 4-1 to them.

Other side's posh umpire, with blazer and badge, at other end blows his whistle for a foul in Norman's circle in favour of the opposition. Norman, incandescent, afterwards in the Common Room: *"and the ruddy man had white gloves into the bargain.....!"*

John Cockett recalls a needle match between his team from Felsted and Framlingham, umpired by a neutral umpire hired by John Cockett at one end, and by Norman at the other:

"The Framlingham right wing lost control of the ball, nudged it forward obviously with his foot and continued on his way right under Norman's nose, with me standing on the touchline immediately behind him. No whistle. I challenged Norman after the game about this incident - to which he replied 'advantage, old boy, advantage'."

"We were also opposing masters in charge of squash, and gave a demonstration (or he did) after the hockey match, which consisted of me running like the proverbial blue-bottomed fly and him standing in the middle shouting 'run, boy, run!' Long after his retirement from the game he was still a phenomenon. No wonder he could hardly walk in later life."

If you feel that this is getting too reverential, and that I am forgetting my brief to be irreverent, here is a story to restore the balance:

On 26th February 1950 Norman had been selected to play hockey in Bournemouth that day and drove to the game with the heavily pregnant Mullie, and with 7 year-old Tony. Mullie realized, as Norman drove them from Lyme Regis to Bournemouth, that she was about to give birth. She had made all the arrangements for the birth to take place at Lyme Regis Cottage Hospital. Norman told her not to worry, giving birth was as easy as shelling peas (he obviously being an expert in the topic), and he could easily drop her off at a hospital, in Bournemouth, near to the hockey ground. Mullie, whose 64 years of saintly support for her husband was then only in its tenth year, put her foot down, figuratively. She had booked Lyme Regis and that was where she was going to give birth. Norman at this point realized that this was a matter of some importance to his wife and duly altered course for the designated destination. Once Mullie was safely ensconced Norman affectionately kissed her and, you have guessed it, set off for his hockey match, returning later to greet the newly-born Tim..

A talented person can be annoying to ordinary mortals:

In 1959 a new boarding house, Moreau House, was opened. Bob Gillett, the new housemaster, proudly unveiled a small croquet lawn alongside the new building. He held Norman's sporting prowess in great regard. He invited Norman to strike the first ball to mark the opening of the lawn. Norman, claiming he had never picked up a croquet mallet before, took aim and struck the ball clean through not just the first hoop but the second as well. Bob Gillett's reaction of praise and disgust in equal measure will evoke sympathy in those of us who have experienced the frustration felt by ordinary mortals when they find their honest toil eclipsed by casual genius.

Mullie knows that feeling. She recalls a badminton doubles game in which she was playing. Norman arrived and insisted on *"just trying a few shots"* with her racket. He proceeded to strike winners from all over the court until Mullie in desperation demanded the return of her racket and the resumption of normal service.

Talking of annoyance, I wonder what other members of staff felt at the fact that Norman had his own trademark grace when he was on duty at mealtimes. When 'Benedicus benedicat' would ring out across a crowded dining room we all knew who was in charge.

Single-mindedness. This probably fits with the will to win, tenacity, and sheer bloody-minded determination which drove Norman. He would not rest until he had achieved what he had set his sights on. If he was trying to get fit he would not stop until he was super-fit. If he was playing he would give everything he had to win. He always gave a good account of himself – there could be no half-way house, and second best would not do. One or two examples:

First about fitness. Ian Foster, an OF of the late 40s and early 50s: "*We devised a bet that after first eleven hockey practices on the Back, Norman could not beat us running around the perimeter of the pitch. His handicap was that as he finished each lap another of us, fresh, would start against him. We put our best runner as last man, in the hope that Norman would have tired by then and would lose the bet. We were of course all pretty fit, but we never won the bet.*"

Mullie recalls Norman running 20 times round the hockey pitch at Allhallows – if there was no-one he could play squash with he might as well get fit. He hardly drank, smoked only an occasional pipe and weighed a slight 9stone 8 lbs for his 5 feet 10 and a half frame.

Second determination: Stuart Mountford the Devon wicket-keeper recalls Devon following on in a hopeless situation. Norman told him he was going to score a century. I don't need to tell you the end of the tale.

Third the ruthlessness with which he would set out to win. Ian Foster and Humphrey Truman saw Norman play in the first round of the Amateur. He was beating his opponent 9-0, 9-0, 8-0 when the opponent claimed a let. Norman argued long and hard with the marker about the unfairness of this claim for a let. He didn't want to give anything away.

Leadership

Norman was a natural, a born, leader. The easy manner with which he handled this role was difficult to take by those less-gifted. Perhaps that is why he never became headmaster when he dwarfed much of the landscape around him. Ben Barringer, an OF from the late 50s sent me this last night:

"He had that impenetrable aura of supreme self confidence and the genuine, effortless charisma of a man who knew that he was extraordinary in the true meaning of the word – a man who knew that he had few equals and even fewer masters in what he excelled at. And if that wasn't enough, he seemed to exude a peculiar magnetism irresistible to schoolboys – a subtle irreverence which took nothing, including himself, particularly seriously. He had that casual attitude to discipline and good behaviour possessed only by those rare men who could produce instant obedience just by their presence. He never shouted – except perhaps to raise that sharp, clear voice by just a fraction which was always more than enough to achieve the desired effect. He never bothered to rebuke or cajole because he assumed that we all knew what was expected of us and if we weren't prepared to apply the necessary effort then we were of no use to him."

That leads me to Beliefs

Norman had clear, simple, old-fashioned, Christian beliefs.

He instilled in all of us, even those who didn't encounter him in the classroom but only on the sports pitch, the virtues of discipline, respect, courtesy, and good manners. To be properly turned out, for class or for sport was as important as how well one played. And yet, there was the relaxed attitude referred to.

It was certainly not easy to get him to talk about himself. He was self-assured, confident, almost always in the right, but also modest. He was far too straightforward and blunt for those who failed to spot the twinkle in the eye. He disliked pomposity. He had great charm, and however hard a man he was on the sports field or squash court, he was great company off it. He and Mullie gave generous hospitality at their home to many generations of pupils – see again the website for examples.

Norman played top-class squash until the age of 38, when he was in severe pain from arthritis in the hips, which he tried to combat by attaching a small device around his right thigh and groin which emitted an electronic pulse, which seemed to be of some help in keeping the hip joint mobile. Mullie remembers : *"When Norman arrived home late in the evening after playing squash he hooted the car horn. I opened the garage door, and Norman drove in. He opened the car door, but was rooted, as stiff as a board, to the seat. I had to drag him out of the driver's seat on to the floor, and he was then able to crawl on hands and knees into the house."*

He had four hip replacements, one on the right and three on the left. He used to say that the right one came from a woman, as he had to walk funny on that side.

He was a wreck for many years. He didn't complain, that was not what he believed in. He loved Mullie, knowing he was a *ruddy nuisance* to her, and he loved his boys, his daughters in law and his grandchildren. We all thank you Mullie, the centre, the essence, of Norman's life for those 64 years, for your calm and gentle kindness to all your family, and your utter devotion to Norman.

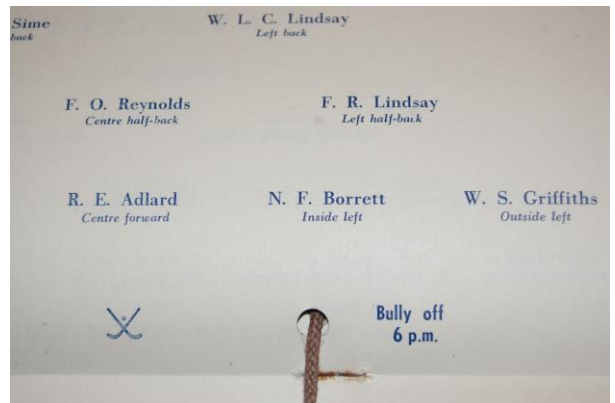
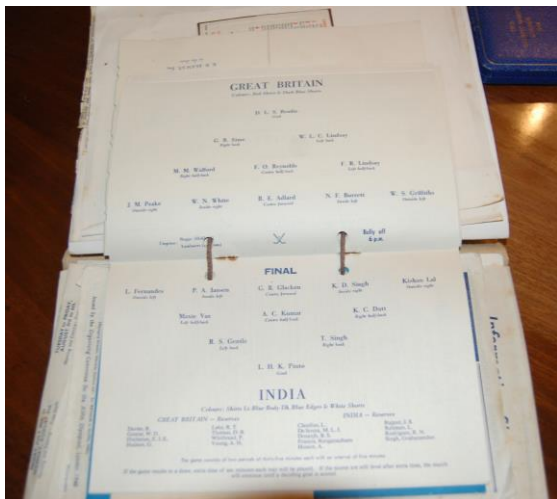
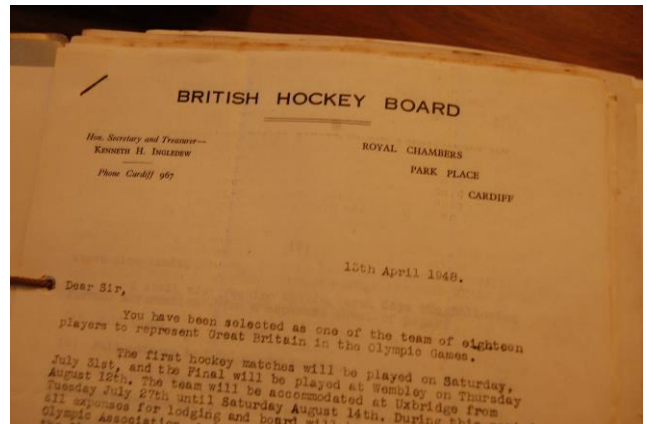
God broke the mould when he made this man. We won't see his like again.

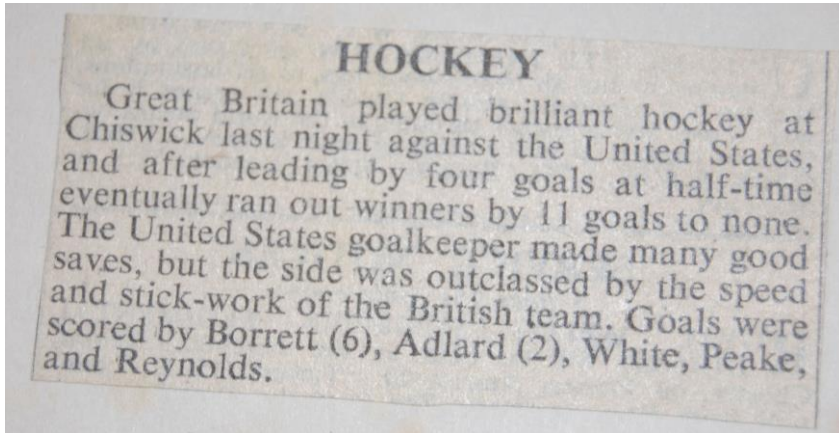
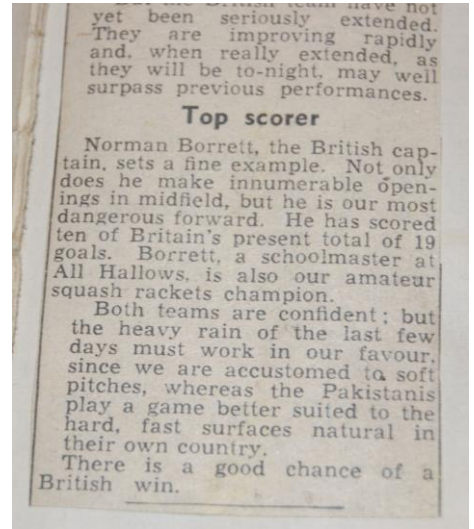
This is a link to the story on the SOF website at the time of his death
<http://www.oldframlinghamian.com/article.php?story=20041212025740616>

Just before Christmas 2008 BBC Essex interviewed Mullie about Norman's career. You can see an article on this at http://www.bbc.co.uk:80/essex/content/articles/2008/12/18/hockey_olympics_feature.shtml You can listen to the interview, which also includes reflections from Norman Porter here http://www.bbc.co.uk/essex/realmedia/2008/12/23/hockey_1948.ram

See below a great selection of additional photos

OLYMPIC GAMES 1948





SQUASH



NORMAN & MULLIE

