

ROBERT JAMES “JIM” BLYTHE (K48-54) died peacefully, at home in Suffolk on 19th December 2024 aged 86 years. Jim wrote up his life in January 2008, for “Distinguished OFs.” That item has been edited as the basis for this Obituary.

Jim was born on January 9th 1938 in Southwold, the youngest of three boys. His early childhood was dictated by WW2, with evacuation, the billeting of soldiers in the Blythe home and memories of local bombing. His father, James William Blythe, also went to the College.

In 1948 Jim gained a County Scholarship and was duly shipped off to Brandeston for its first term. He was the second boy to arrive, P. M. G. Stewart (K48-53) being the first. Having experienced evacuation, being away from home now presented no problem. He remembered his mother trading family sweet coupons for clothing coupons, just to get the Cash’s name-tags! Jim loved Brandeston, with the excitement of the exploration of the Hall and grounds, and all those army “treasures” left behind after the war-time requisition of the Hall. Added to that, there were spiral staircases, secret passages, hollow trees and ponds with the most beautiful dragonflies. There were also properly organised games and swimming in the river, and the man whom Jim called the “amazing loco parentis” in the figure of Headmaster, D.D. Kittermaster, who understood that boys will be boys, and that was something to be encouraged. He also exercised firm discipline, as required, meted out with the back of the billiard table brush, or the eighteen-inch ruler. He remembered also, with affection, “Doodie” Day, a grandfather figure, and Peter Arbon, the gardener’s boy, who kept him in fresh fruit, as available. Reading the mags of the time, Jim recalled that he seemed to do well at chess, billiards and table tennis, but he came to find that difficult to believe. Three years later, in 1951, he moved up to the College - a shock to the system! Rather too many prefectorial beatings for minor offences and multiple log(arithm)s. He over-produced these, and sold on the surplus! In 1952 he played “Peasebottom” in Bob Gillett’s production of A Midsummer’s Night Dream in the Castle, but was shamed to find that the programme listed him simply as ‘Other Fairy!’

He sat O levels in 1953/4, and then followed his brother into the Merchant Navy. In 1956 he was in the last convoy to clear the Suez Canal before the invasion of Egypt. The next convoy was stuck in the canal for 4 ½ months. After three years he was promoted to Third Officer at £70 per month and in 1958 he gained his 2nd Mates Certificate and joined the Union-Castle Line. There followed six years sailing mostly to South Africa, carrying the Royal Mail both ways in those pre-Air Mail days. There were also passengers, including masses of beautiful women, with many of whom Jim fell in love, and vice versa – maybe because of the beautiful uniforms. His autobiographical write-up may (or may not) be tinged with hyperbole, but he claimed to have been engaged seven times. By 1963 he was exhausted, and retired from the Merchant Navy, swapping it for three months in Benidorm.

Jim then joined animal feed compounders, Richard Silcocks. He also met his wife, June, who was running the family Nursery, but she also had 500 hens. They married in 1965. Jim was promoted to a position in Norfolk, married and bought a bungalow in Blofield. He soon joined his wife’s family business, Potash Nursery, the beginning of a whole new chapter in his life. He took it over when his father-in-law died in 1966. Within the space of a few years, there were three children: Wendy, Fiona and then James (K79-86). He found that being a nurseryman was very much to his taste, and thrived, tutored by June, well steeped in the long-established family business. June was enjoying much success showing plants, and that was the route they decided jointly to follow, exhibiting nationally with much success, and selling young plants of new varieties. They started locally, then County Agricultural shows and finally the RHS shows. They specialised in fuchsias, ending up with 400 good varieties, having trialled over 4,000. Jim learned how to display the plants en masse, and they started winning awards. Invitations to exhibit flowed and in 1982

they showed at Chelsea for the first time. Jim was now attending 40 shows a year. June grew the plants. Jim showed and sold them. By the mid-1980s he was getting invitations to RHS Committees and ended up on the Panels for Westminster, Chelsea and Hampton Court as well as the General Show Committee.



Accompanying HM Queen Elizabeth II at the Chelsea Flower Show. This appeared in Hello Magazine in 1993

At the turn-of-the-Millennium OF Ball, Jim offered as an auction prize the right to name a new fuchsia, an offshoot of their success in breeding new varieties.* In 1984 they sold the retail side of the nursery, and concentrated more on the shows. They set up a purpose-built nursery in Bacton, and found they had to expand to stay still. Ten years later they sold up and retired. They moved to Stowmarket in 1998 and after four further years it was back to Reydon, Southwold – a stone's throw from where Jim was born.

In retirement he helped the RHS at the Chelsea and Hampton Court shows, and the BBC Gardeners World Live. In addition, he qualified as a Judge (horticultural). Jim was a supportive and an ever-present, larger-than-life character at the Suffolk Show, often to be found in the Flower Show, floral marquee, possibly still exhibiting, probably more likely to be judging..



With former President, Brian Smith and joking about the twine belt.

Retirement brought a little golf at the Southwold Club that he had joined sixty years previously, sailing model boats, helping out at the Alfred Corry museum and attending Here4u Dementia Group which he loved. He could also now indulge his main love outside the family: The SOF and the College. To be invited to Armistice Sunday at the Chapel was very special for Jim. He found that it stirred the soul and continually reminded us all of the debt that we owe to so many who laid down their lives for us – including so many OFs.

Jim, in his early days, became secretary of the OFGS, held this post for some time, graduated to Council and was then OF President 1983/85. On moving back to Suffolk he was invited to join the Governors and thus started a further 17 years of fulfilment and challenge, including being a representative on the Health and Safety Sub-Committee. For Jim these were thrilling times of development at both the College and his beloved Brandeston.



Jim in full flow, delivering a wonderful tribute/ reflection on his own schooldays at BH, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary Tea, on the Terrace in 2018.

He retired as a Governor in 2005, but continued to watch developments with pride and to glory in the success of the pupils. He was also an SOF Trustee.

Ex-President, Andrew Wright, on hearing of Jim's passing wrote: *Jim was unique, a walking history book of Framlingham, a great servant of the college and the SOF and a really kind and caring man. We have lost a legend. For the writer of this Obituary Jim Blythe was Framlingham (together with Brandeston) incarnate.*

- *Does anyone remember who won that prize, or what was the name chosen for the new plant? We think the picture below gives a clue – so very appropriate.*

