

PROFESSOR GEOFFREY HAWARD MARTIN, CBE

by THE PRESIDENT

GEOFFREY MARTIN'S remarkably wide-ranging scholarship was illuminated by his prevalent wit, which made his intelligence readily available among his colleagues, his students and his friends. He was born in 1928 and his home town, Colchester, provided him with an excellent education in its Royal Grammer School. He repaid his town amply, not least in 1959 with *The Story of Colchester from Roman times to the present day*, first published in 1959 by Benham with good endpaper maps, and 28 black and white photographic illustrations. It is one of the most memorably readable of town histories, a subject he made generally his.

In the Preface to Geoffrey's calendar of *The Ipswich Recognizance Rolls, 1294-1327* (Suffolk Records Society, 1973) he noted that he began his own studies in Ipswich 'at the suggestion of the late K B McFarlane in 1950'. Bruce McFarlane was my tutor at Magdalen, Oxford, who encouraged my own interests in Suffolk's history. These were the circumstances in which Geoffrey and I resolved to found the Suffolk Records Society instead of trying to continue for Suffolk the two rather stereotyped, ponderous volumes of the Victoria County History published back in 1907 and 1911. The unfailing regular annual production of the Suffolk Records Society's volumes seems to justify our decision; indeed it is further supported by the successful founding in 1979 of the *Suffolk Charters* series, principally at the instance of the late-lamented R Allen Brown.

In 30 years at Leicester, Geoffrey rose to be Pro-Vice-Chancellor, and in 1982 boldly switched to become Keeper of the Public Records in Chancery Lane. In 1985 he led the first official delegation of British archivists to China, and next year was appointed CBE. In 1988 he turned to biographies for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. He wrote 51 entries, only one fewer than my Ipswich friend Dr J M Blatchly, though both were apparently outstripped by the formiddable John Baker, who contributed the amazing total of 125.

Geoffrey's eyesight barred him from military service, and he was anyway only seventeen when the war ended in 1945; but as someone whose first book, *Assault Division*, described the landing I'd taken part in on Sword beach early on 6 June 1944, and who for years regularly reviewed the war histories for the *Birmingham Post*, I was often ashamed to find that he was more familiar with World War II than I was. Indeed on his retirement, when he was appointed to a Research Chair at Essex University, he taught the story of that war to the great inspiration of his students.

I was proud to be his Best Man on his marriage to Janet Hamer in Oxford in 1953. She and their daughter Sophie were a wonderful mainstay as he put up a truly heroic fight against leukaemia. How deeply he must be missed by Janet and their four children, as indeed he is by all his friends.