

Robert Brian Pringle

Born: 1905
President: 1963-1966
Died: 1987

Robert Pringle, physician and occupational health reformer, was born on 4 June 1905 at the family residence at 2 Herbert Street, Dublin. He was the second of three sons of Robert William Pringle, a barrister, and Alberta Pringle (née Henshaw). He went to Castle Park Preparatory School in Dalkey, County Dublin and then attended Haileybury College in Hertfordshire, followed by Cambridge University (Gonville and Caius College) which he entered through a classical scholarship, and pursued studies in medicine. He graduated and was appointed Clinical Assistant at St Thomas's Hospital, London. Pringle then became a House Surgeon at South Devon and East Cornwall Hospital. He came back to Dublin in 1931 and commenced work as Assistant Medical Officer at Arthur Guinness & Sons Brewery, and thus commenced his lifetime interest in industrial health, later to become occupational health.

Following this he was appointed Chief Medical Officer at Guinness's Brewery where he developed a new medical department, replacing the old medical unit in Robert Street. The new department was a state of the art purpose built centre for occupational and primary care medical services for the employees and pensioners of Guinness, containing physiotherapy, X-ray, dental facilities and more. He had a particular interest in occupational lung disease and was instrumental in introducing the 'Adult Orphans Scheme'. This arose when Guinness pensioners became incapacitated and were looked after by an adult member of the family, often at great personal expense to that minder. After the pensioner died, the company paid a pension to the family carer. There are very few examples in any country or industry that demonstrates this generosity towards the family of a deceased pensioner and Pringle was a key instigator of the scheme.

In 1934, he passed the Membership examination of the College and was conferred with Fellowship in 1937. He was elected President of the College in 1963, and was the first of three successive Presidents to engage with the UK Royal Colleges on a process of amalgamation of Part 1 MRCP. This came to pass in 1971 with MRCPI Part 1 being a multiple-choice question examination, set in conjunction with the Royal Colleges of Physicians of London, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

In 1947, he and others set about forming the Association of Industrial Medical Officers of Ireland, becoming its first President from 1947 to 1949. The Association changed its name to the Irish Society of Occupational Medicine in 1976, the same year that the Faculty of Occupational Medicine was founded within the College. Pringle was among the first Honorary Fellows of the Faculty, along with Professor Tom Murphy, President of University College Dublin. Pringle was a



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lecturer in occupational medicine at Trinity College and published papers on occupational health. He was medical advisor to the Commissioners of Irish Lights and to the Provincial Bank of Ireland which later, through bank mergers, become the Allied Irish Bank.

Pringle was an Assistant Physician at Mercer's Hospital, Dublin (1933- 1939) and later a Consultant Physician. He resigned in 1945 on a matter of principle as the hospital refused to admit patients with tuberculosis. Subsequently he became a senior Physician at Dr Steevens' Hospital. He was also a member of the Irish Cardiac Society.

Pringle had a strong social consciousness and became involved in several charitable organisations including joining the St John Ambulance Brigade in 1936. He was a member for 50 years becoming Chief Surgeon, President and Chairman of its Council. In 1961, he was a Founder and a Trustee of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland. Also, he was Vice President of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund and was a committee member, and sometimes Trustee, of a wide range of organisations including the Forces Help Society of the Republic of Ireland and the British Red Cross Society. He was conferred with the Knighthood of the Order of St John in 1982.

Pringle was accomplished at tennis and squash and won the Fitzwilliam Plate in 1932 (tennis) and represented Ireland in squash in 1936. He was also a keen fisherman and sailor and played golf at Portmarnock Golf Club. He married Jane (Inez) Hope Travers, daughter of Captain A H Travers of the Grenadier Guards in 1971 and had two daughters, Amanda and Gemma. His older brother, Denis, was an esteemed High Court Judge who became President of the Special Criminal Court, 1974-76. Brian Pringle lived most of his married life in Balgriffin, North County Dublin, beside the medieval St Doolagh's Church. He died on 15 April 1987.

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