

JOHN PRINGLE, OJ, CBE  
BIOGRAPHY AND TRIBUTE  
By Shawn Towers, John Pringle's daughter

John Kenneth McKenzie Pringle, OJ, CBE, was born to Kenneth Pringle and Carmen DeLisser in the Parish of St. Ann's, Jamaica, on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1925. His early years were spent at Crescent Park, one of the farms on what was then known as "the Pringle Estates". These comprised over 100,000 acres of sugar, banana, citrus and cattle lands throughout the Parishes of St. Ann's, St. Mary's and Portland, all assembled in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by his grandfather, Sir John Pringle.

John attended the Jamaican schools Munro College and DeCarteret – with some resistance it should be said – and following a period abroad at Upper Canada College he was privately tutored by Henry Fowler, a Rhodes Scholar living in Kingston. In 1943, having reached the age of eighteen, he then joined the British Army and was subsequently commissioned as ADC to Sir John Adams Hunter, KCMG, Governor of British Honduras (now Belize). He also served for a short period in the Bahamas as Equerry to HRH The Duke of Windsor.

In 1945, at the age of twenty, John went to work as a junior employee for Elizabeth Arden in New York City. This was a formative time and, three years later, having found inspiration in Arden's combination of business and aesthetics, John left the company to open his own men's fashion boutique in New York. That same year, at twenty three, he married Liz, nee Isobel Ann Benn, a very successful and well-known Canadian fashion model who was also working in New York City.

When in 1951 their daughter, Shawn, was born, John began dreaming up a new business plan; one which would take him and his family back to Jamaica as well as one that would use his aesthetic talents and take the 'boutique' concept both onto another level and into a new domain. The plan comprised the design and development of a luxury cottage complex in Montego Bay, Jamaica – a latter day 'boutique' hotel – which, based on John's own revolutionary business model, would offer those who purchased a cottage a share in hotel profits. In other words, he had the idea of creating a resort that would appeal to the very rich who wanted to have a cottage in the West Indies without the problem of absentee ownership. As John was dedicated to his dreams and worked tirelessly to turn them into reality, in 1953 the ever-renowned and celebrated 'Round Hill' was to open its doors to the world of fame, wealth and creative talent with Noel Coward as its first shareholder. The 'cottage colony' model which John had devised at twenty six years old has since been widely copied by others all over the world. And, fifty eight years on in 2011, Round Hill still maintains its special allure due to the inspired capacities of its long-term manager, Josef Forstmayr, who has been able to preserve the past without compromising on the present.

Back at the time John had poured so much purpose and passion into his Round Hill designs as well as other responsibilities – in early Round Hill days he had been also elected as the youngest member of the Legislative Council in Jamaican Parliament – that in 1961 on 'doctors orders' he decided to renounce his involvements with Round Hill and take some time off to consider his life in Switzerland. In advance of this move John had sold all his Jamaican holdings with the exception of the Gray's Inn Estates which at that time consisted of 1500 acres of sugar lands and one of Jamaica's most beautiful Great Houses. John was however to remain only a short time in Switzerland for, in

1962, he accepted the Jamaican government's invitation to return home with his family and to become Jamaica's Director of Tourism.

From 1963 to 1967 John's appointment to this post was to bring a new vigour to the Jamaican tourist industry resulting in a trebling of its revenue. Under his charge the Jamaica Tourist Board developed for instance the 'Fashion Export Guild' which cemented Jamaican design abroad. At the same time John continued to initiate and involve himself closely with the design of building developments such as Pineapple Place: the first Jamaican shopping plaza for tourists. John had by now been at the centre of several housing developments in Jamaica including those on the Tryall and Rose Hall Estates.

Motivated, as always, by his personal interest in aesthetics he had become as Director of Tourism a keen promoter of the Jamaican Arts helping to bring recognition to the country's many creative talents – as evidenced by the 1960's Jamaican advertising campaign with which he had been himself creatively involved.

Two years later the American advertising agency 'Doyle Dane and Bernbach' that had produced the ads for Jamaica invited him to become Chairman of their English subsidiary. The company was flagging and they had been impressed by his energy and talent. John enjoyed challenge and thus once again drawn by his interests in both business and aesthetics he decided to leave Jamaica and take up the appointment in London. It was the summer of 1967 so with his usual uncanny gift for aesthetic timing John had arrived in the U.K. at the height of the 'swinging' sixties when there was a revolution in fashion.

During the years of advertising work, John continued his services for Jamaica. In 1969 he had been requested by the Jamaican Government to become Chairman of JAMCO, an external trade organisation of the Government of Jamaica. On accepting this position he had been also appointed Deputy High Commissioner for Trade in the UK. Many of his involvements with Jamaican Trade were in the Banana Industry and between 1969 and 1989 John managed to secure a price increase from £70 to £540 per metric tonne.

In 1972 he was given the title of Ambassador at Large, Special Envoy, by the PNP Prime Minister, Michael Manley. He was later to hold the same post again having been reappointed in 1989 by the then serving JLP Prime Minister, Edward Seaga. John was pleased to work for different party leaders because he felt more faithful to what he felt was right for Jamaica – his own personal vision – than to aligning himself with a particular political ideology or party.

Whilst serving Jamaica over the years John had been granted special permission by the Jamaican Foreign Office to continue with his commercial involvements. Thus in 1978, after leaving the advertising industry, he turned his interests to British film production, having co-created and been appointed Chairman of 'Consolidated Productions', a London-based television film company. The company went on to produce several successful programs including 'Early Days' with Ralph Richardson and Dr Fisher in Geneva': a Graham Green story starring James Mason and Alan Bates. Two of the company's productions, Dr Fisher and 'The Flame Trees of Thika' – produced in association with its writer John Hawkesworth, were nominated for BAFTA awards.

John spread his business interests also outside of the U.K. Back in Jamaica in the mid 1980's he initiated the 'Busha Browne' range of food products with Maurice Facey and

Winston Stona, the name of which put into historical perspective its 300 year old recipes and whose design won many awards. Later, between 1994-1997, John also worked closely with his cousin and close friend, Chris Blackwell, in transforming 'The Tides', a period hotel in Miami which attracted, like Round Hill had done so many years before, the wealthy and famous. In this case John was the driving force in creating its design as Director of Renovation and Operations.

John was a highly unusual and charismatic personality who brought excitement, energy, enthusiasm and inspiration to all his endeavours and to the people with whom he was involved. Always a maverick, yet deeply committed to everything he did, he left an indelible mark on Jamaican development.

In recognition of John's worthwhile contributions to the nation and its people he was presented by the Queen with a CBE as a 'Commander of the British Empire' in 1965. Thirty years later in 1995, at seventy years old, John was also honoured with the Order of Jamaica, 'O.J.' for a lifetime of his services to Jamaica.