

PROFESSOR J.W.S. PRINGLE, FRS (1912-1982)

Professor Pringle died on 2nd November 1982 after a long illness. He had been both an enthusiastic advocate and constructive critic of the *Journal* since its conception. We will miss him. Richard Tregear writes at greater length below.

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John Pringle worked on the contractile process in muscle for the best part of thirty years, and he had a large impact on the subject. This was due to the fact that he remained throughout that time a true biologist, committed to a belief in the force and wonder of evolution, but not to particular disciplines or techniques; he used them as he needed them, and passed on to others as required. He began as a physiologist, concerned with the engineering analogue to the flight process in insects, and how it was structurally achieved at the gross level. He ended as a student of enzymology and macromolecular structure, trying to comprehend how the intermediate states of ATP hydrolysis by myosin generate crossbridge force.

Others have followed the same sort of path: what was special about John Pringle? Primarily it was his conviction of the importance of his work. He was a generalist who thought, wrote and lectured about the large issues which face us as a species. But he believed that the way through these problems was to know more, that knowledge was the key to the species' success. He was therefore sure that original study was vitally important, and not just a career game to be personally won or lost.

That was his first quality. His second was the zoologist's ability to pick the one suitable preparation out of some corner of the animal kingdom. Large waterbugs are found only in tropical swamps, but they have the best muscles to study the oscillatory quality possessed by insect flight muscle and perhaps by all muscle. The design of an exquisite preparation, the discovery of an odd function, its elucidation and ultimate generalization are the hallmarks of the great experimental biologist.

His third quality was his ability to adapt fast and thoroughly to a change in the philosophical basis of his work and produce original ideas in the new field. Most scientists, like most people, are conservative; we stick to our trade and when we are forced to change we do so reluctantly. On the contrary he liked the challenge of the fresh ambit and relished the novel form of argument. Thus in all his time in muscle he was in there fighting, arguing over the current data, resynthesizing the ideas, suggesting fresh experiments. In a way, he never aged.