

My Life so Far - Lionel Pringle



I was born in late February 1948 when the NHS was an infant of only two months standing, consequently my entry into the world owed more to the old order of things than the new. I saw the light of day at The Briars nursing home in Old Roar Road, St Leonards and

ultimately failed to stray very far. My brother Bryan was born 2½ years later in 1950 at the Buchanan Hospital fully under the auspices of the NHS.



Less than three years after the end of World War II, Hastings and St Leonards was not the most affluent place to begin life's journey. It had suffered greatly from bombing as German bombers emptied their bomb bays after bombing London and air fields in Kent. The area in which I was to spend the next twenty three years was characterised by the bombed out shells of large Victorian buildings, most of which were not rebuilt until the 1960's.

Warrior Square Gardens, and the bomb sites which existed on every side, were my playground for the first twelve years of life. They were ideal for playing hide and seek, Cowboys and Indians and war games. They were also great for conducting expeditions of exploration and discovery, especially the odd one or two that were empty but not quite so badly knocked about. To a small boy a large Victorian building with five storeys and cellars was an amazing place to be, I remember some quite spectacular staircases. It is important to realise that we were not supposed to be able to access these sites, they were dangerous places. Authorities today would be apoplectic had they been around to see the things that we got up to, but apart from the odd broken bone, myself and all my mates, survived the experience.



Two views of bomb damage on the western side of Warrior Square Gardens near my home

For the first year or so of my life we lived in a flat in Royal Terrace, the predecessor of the block that carries the name today. At the rear of this block were the remains of the 'Elite' cinema which was probably the most unfortunate cinema in the town. Having been

bombed early on in the war it was reopened in 1947 only to succumb to a fire on its opening day. It never opened again and remained derelict until the 1970's.



The Elite cinema well ablaze

Across the road from the 'Elite' were the remains of 'St Columba's Church' another casualty of the bombing, this was never rebuilt and in 1953 became the premises of 'Coombs Motors' the local Vauxhall dealer. The area where the altar would have been was still recognisable as such until 'Coombs' were taken over by 'St Leonards Motors' and vacated the site in the late 1980's. The whole area is now part of the Hastings storm water / flood prevention scheme.



St Columba's Church, shortly after it was bombed

From Royal Terrace we moved into a terraced mews flat at 18c Western Road which was owned by 'Skinner's Motors', my father worked for them for a number of years as a petrol pump attendant. I lived here until I got married in 1971. Directly opposite us was another building that had been damaged by the same bomb that flattened 'St Columba's'.

My earliest recollection of school, St Leonards Church of England Junior School, generally known as 'Mercatoria' school, was of being handed a souvenir book of the Queen's coronation in 1953. Those first teachers must have been very strong characters, or I had an impressionable mind, as I can remember their names to this day, which is no mean feat as these days I can't always remember the names of some people I met a week ago. The headmaster was Mr Starling, (succeeded by Mr Hollingbury), and then there were the staff, Miss Smith, Miss Biker, Mrs Marchant, Mr Rhoden and Mr Russell.

As a C of E church school 'Mercatoria' was allied to the St Leonards parish church, which was another victim of wartime bombing, and it was during my time at the school that the

church was being rebuilt. We had regular visits from the incumbent vicar, Canon Griffiths, who enthralled us all with his tales of trips to the 'Holy Land'; very exotic. It was during one of these trips that he commissioned the churches pulpit, fashioned as the bow section of a Galilean fishing boat.



My period at junior school ended with two events of note, the first was that eventually a period of playing in places where I shouldn't caught up with me and resulted in a broken arm and six weeks in plaster. The second, and of far greater impact was the discovery that I was short sighted, there was a good reason for my not always getting my sums right at school. Here began a lifetime's association with spectacles in one way or another.

In September 1959 I moved onto the Grove Secondary School for Boys, only single sex education in those days. I failed my 11+ and so the grammar school was not to be for me, however there was some consolation for my disappointed mother, I was allocated to the top stream of my year, and remained in the top stream for the duration of my time at school. I don't think I was ever an exceptional scholar, being fairly average at most things. I did OK in English, History and Geography and was frequently top of my class in Woodwork, but I was always absolutely useless at Maths.



PE and games were complete anathema to me too, the summer was the only period of relief as I was quite good at running and the long jump, but even so had there been an O-level in wheedling my way out of sports, I may have done quite well. In the 5th year I managed to avoid PE and games almost entirely as, given my 'prowess' at woodwork I was seconded into scenery building for the annual school play.

School came to an end for me in 1965 and I left with six O-levels, Maths was not one of them. In common with a lot of my contemporaries I left school with absolutely no idea what I wanted to do with my life, but I was certain that I didn't want any more to do with education. I had toyed briefly with the idea of becoming a cabinet maker, and actually had an interview for an apprenticeship with 'Heals of London', but the thought of living and working in London was not something I was keen on, so that didn't materialise.

The Youth Employment Service found me a job as a Trainee Estimator with a local firm of builders, but the guy I worked under had just moved back from working in the Near East and was used to treating workers like serfs, so he and I didn't get on at all well and eventually in early 1965 we parted company. So it was back to the Youth Employment people for me and after a few unsuccessful interviews, including one at the Land Registry in Tunbridge Wells, I answered an advertisement in the Hastings & St Leonards Observer and found my first job in the optical trade, with the manufacturing division of 'F.A Batemans - Opticians' in Bexhill.

I started life with 'Eyemode Ltd', as the company was called, in a detached building at 3 Sutherland Avenue, which has now reverted to a private residence. Initially I was on the clerical side of things but after a while it was suggested that I might like to train as a Dispensing Optician, an idea which I agreed to. The one drawback to this was that Maths

O-level was needed in order to undertake the course, and so it was off to night school to endeavour to remedy this defect in my education. Adopting a belt and braces approach I actually took the exam with two examining boards and amazingly passed both of them, but only just!

The Dispensing Course that I signed up to was essentially a correspondence course with the addition of two week long face to face sessions at the 'City College', in the City of London.

But at the end of the day, although the studying was not particularly difficult, I decided that working with the general public day after day was not something that filled me with enthusiasm. So I moved sideways in the company and concentrated on the more practical aspect of making up the spectacles that the Opticians had ordered for their patients. During this period I actually made the spectacle frames as well as glazing them with the appropriate lenses.



It was whilst working at 'Eyemode' that I met my first wife Dorothy, (aka Dodo or Dor), the mother of my son Ian. We married in September of 1971 and I changed jobs shortly afterwards. I took a position with 'Barracough & Stiles' in St Leonards, in sole charge of their in-house workshop where I glazed spectacle frames bought in from other companies.

Whilst my first marriage was not ultimately a success it did provide a couple of major benefits that enhanced my life for the rest of time. Most important of all it produced my son Ian and I am extremely grateful for that. The second benefit was that association with Dor and her farming family allowed me to appreciate the countryside and what it had to offer. Long walks with the family dog 'Spot' were the pre-cursor of hundreds of walks with the 'Ramblers' that were to come in the 21st century.

Dor and I started our married life in a very small cottage at 5 Skinners Lane in Catsfield.

My father died in August 1972, at the early age of 62, the inevitable outcome of a life spent smoking high tar content cigarettes.

In the late spring of 1973 Dor and I acquired our Basset Hound, Henry, and Ian came into the world in August 1976. In 1977 we got our feet on the property ladder and bought our first house, a small terraced cottage in Sandy Cross at Heathfield.

In 1980 Dor and I ascended a couple more rungs up the housing ladder and moved to a semi-detached property in Mountfield, where I at least was to remain for the rest of the 20th century. I really enjoyed living in Mountfield, it was essentially on a road to nowhere so it was quiet and delightfully rural, and I spent many an enjoyable time walking Henry around the surrounding woods and fields.

Ian went to the local schools, Mountfield & Whatlington Junior School and Robertsbridge Secondary.

The late 1980's were quite significant years for the Pringle family. Our marriage began to get a bit rocky, and Dor and I finally admitted defeat with the marriage. Dor moved out of the matrimonial home and went to live with Derek, who she eventually married.

We gave a lot of thought as to how to manage things with regard to Ian and decided that he would live with both of us alternately for two week stints. It seems to have worked alright because he has always been very even handed in his dealings with both parents.

My mother died in 1986 at the age of 77, so neither parent lived to a ripe old age, I sincerely hope that I shall be able to kick that habit.

Later on that year I met the girl who was to become wife number two. Melina came from a large Irish family, and I really don't think that any one of them was in any way what you could describe as normal, they certainly didn't reckon much to me, as I wasn't a 'professional' bloke, and I wasn't rolling in money. Mother in law in particular was a complete one off; she never spoke one word to me from the beginning to the end of our relationship, some thirteen years!

I met Melina when she came to work as a pre-registration optometrist at 'Barraclough & Stiles'. We were married in 1990 and in 1992 set up what would eventually become 'Melina Joy Opticians Ltd' in Heathfield. I finally left 'Barraclough's' later the same year and worked full time in various capacities at the practice in Heathfield. Our relationship broke up at the end of 1999 and although I continued to work for Melina as an employee we eventually split on a domestic level in 2000. I finally severed all connections with Melina and the practice at the end of May 2010 and became a full time retiree, bringing to an end almost 45 years in the optical business. Wow what a relief.

At the beginning of the 21st century I joined 'Rother Ramblers', and it was under their auspices that I met the lady who has enhanced the latter part of my life, Rita Prior. We moved in together in November 2004 and in 2005 began the task of enlarging the house to accommodate me adequately; I have never been a compact human being.





Lionel Pringle

1948–

BIRTH 1948

DEATH Living

Facts

Age 0 – **Birth**
1948

Age 2 – **Birth of brother Bryan William Pringle (1950–)**
23 August 1950 • St Leonard on Sea, Hastings, Sussex, England

Age 23 – **Marriage**
18 Sep 1971 • Ashburnham, Sussex, United Kingdom

Dorothy E Akehurst

Age 24 – **Death of father William Pringle (1910–1972)**
1972 • Hastings, Sussex, England

Age 28 – **Birth of son Ian Pringle (1976–)**
25 Aug 1976 • Hastings

Age 38 – **Death of mother Winifred Hughes (1909–1986)**
1986 • St Leonard on Sea, Hastings, Sussex, England

Age 40 – **Divorce**
17 May 1988 • Hastings
First marriage ended in divorce

Dorothy E Akehurst

Age 42 – **Marriage**
8 Dec 1990 • Hastings

Melina Mary Joy
(1964–)

Age 55 – **Divorce**
16 Jul 2003 • Eastbourne, Sussex, England
Divorce from second wife

Melina Mary Joy
(1964–)

Family

Parents

William Pringle
1910–1972

Winifred Hughes
1909–1986

Spouse and children

Dorothy E Akehurst

Ian Pringle
1976–

Spouse

Melina Mary Joy
1964–

Sources

Ancestry sources

England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005