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**Philip Hind  
pictured at the  
Museum of the  
History of Science,  
Oxford**

**Photograph:  
Marc West**

**Philip Hind pictured after his underwater ordeal at Scapa Flow**



Sylvia Vetta talks to Oxford-based film-maker and photographer Philip Hind, a man with a passion for history and the story of the *SS Titanic*

# Diving for pearls

**T**he sea has played a significant role in web-designer and film-maker Philip Hind's life. He nearly died while exploring a wrecked ship off the coast of Scotland in 1995.

Philip began diving in 1986 and joined the Chichester branch of the British Sub Aqua Club. Then, while studying for a nursing degree at Oxford Brookes, became a member of the university's scuba diving club.

One of the club's expeditions was to Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands, where the German fleet was famously scuttled at the end of the First World War.

Philip recalls his dive. "I ventured inside the upturned wreck of a battleship. I had not gone far when I got stuck. A piece of my equipment had become snagged on something and I could not get out by the way I came in," said Philip.

"I tried to attract the attention of my partner – we always explored in pairs – but he was swimming on ahead outside the wreck unaware of the trouble I was in. For a few moments I thought I would draw my last breath 40 metres under the water in the bowels of a sunken ship.

"Then I decided the only hope was to try to go forward through the ship's coal store which was in front of me. I carefully moved pieces of coal to make an exit and eventually managed to get free of the wreck."

A piece of coal from that German wreck is one of his desert island choices.

"I kept this piece and it helps me appreciate the good things that have happened because I survived," Philip said.

"So it is not just any piece of coal – although I suppose I could burn it if I got cold on the island!"

Philip was born at the Churchill Hospital, Oxford, in 1971.

He said: "At the time, my dad, John, was a student at Cuddesdon Theological College. My mother, Janet, who later became a social worker, was then busy bringing up the family in a cottage in the village. I have two older brothers, Jonathan and Dominic.

"After Cuddesdon, my father became a deacon and curate in Catford, south London. When I was five, we moved to Forest Hill but we left South London for Chichester, West Sussex, in 1982 when I was 11 and my dad was appointed principal of Chichester Theological College.

Philip was not particularly academic – and what really motivated him while attending Bishop Luffa School in Chichester the camera club.

"I learned to develop my own photographs in a dark room," Philip said. "I became aware of the things you could do to an image before and after pressing the button. The process excited

me. I enjoyed learning and teaching myself new things."

Having seen examples of Philip's photography, it is evident that he became very good at it. His photograph of a hand printing press adorned the cover of this magazine's August edition.

"I took history and politics at A-Level and decided to study them at Portsmouth Polytechnic. But the time was not right and I dropped out. I had been unemployed for four months when my parents saw a post advertised at St Christopher's hospice in south London. I think mum thought I was a south London boy at heart. I was 20 when I began working there."

"The hours were long and the work basic but I remember interesting conversations and fascinating stories – sad only because the time to hear and discuss them was limited. In the circumstances it sounds strange but I learned a lot about life.

"I gave me a new direction. I decided to do a degree in psychiatric nursing – and that brought me back to my birthplace."

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**Philip Hind** outside the **Ultimate Picture Palace** in Jeune St, Oxford – the subject of his film, **The Ultimate Survivor**. Inset, **Peggy Seeger** and her desert island pebble



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At Brookes Philip found himself living in Cheney Hall. He had hardly unpacked when the fire alarm rang and the building was evacuated.

“Once outside students huddled together in groups. Most people seemed to know at least one other resident. There were just two of us standing alone, Lorna and I. So it was natural to go over to her and chat while we waited.

“That was it. We married after I graduated in 1996. By that time my father was Bishop of Horsham and he married us.”

After graduating Philip took up a post at the Warneford Hospital in east Oxford.

“I worked for two years on the low secure ward. It housed people who had been sectioned under the Mental Health Act. It was a fascinating place to work but I wasn’t sure what impact I personally was having and decided nursing as a career was not for me after all.”

While Philip was a student at Brookes, the Internet had begun to expand rapidly and it captured his attention.

“I taught myself how to build a website. I had a passion for history and the story of the Titanic – this led me to create my Encyclopedia Titanica website,” he said.

In 1997, following the release of James Cameron’s epic movie *Titanic*, starring Leonardo di Caprio and Kate Winslet, Philip’s website was receiving half-a-million hits a day.

When Philip quit nursing, in 1999, he looked for a post where he could use his skills in web design.

The Diocese of Oxford was looking for someone to design and manage its websites.

Philip said: “It was a surprise to discover that the Church of England did not have a simple way for people to discover details about churches near them.

“One of the projects I led was the *A Church Near You* website which hopefully has resolved that problem since it was launched in 2003. It presented a technical challenge, but that is something I enjoy.”

It was so successful that it was rolled out nationally and there are now 16,000 churches featured on the site.

Philip is still employed part time by the diocese and also works freelance as a web designer. But he had another ambition.

“The diocese asked me to make some DVDs for them and that really interested me. It offered me the opportunity to bring together my interests in history, photography, the Internet and film.”

When Philip had honed his film-making skills, he wanted to make a local movie. He thought the centenary of *The Penultimate Picture Palace* could make a good subject.

The little cinema in Jeune Street, Oxford, closed in 1917 when its owner was called up for war service. But after 59 years of neglect, the near derelict building was reopened in 1976 by Bill Heine and Pablo Butcher.

Those of you who have seen Philip’s film, *The Ultimate Survivor*, will be surprised to learn that it was made on a tiny budget, helped by small grants from The Oxford Preservation Trust and Oxford City Council.

Philip said: “The cinema gained a reputation for challenging censorship and showing controversial and unusual films, a stance that led to much legal wrangling and which, in 1988, brought the cinema to the brink of disaster when its managers clashed with mercurial director Stanley Kubrick over a planned screening of *A Clockwork Orange*.”

Ian Hislop, the editor of *Private Eye* and Mark Thompson, former director general of the BBC, were regulars at the cinema when they were students in Oxford, and agreed to take part in the film. More recently Philip made a campaigning video for folk singer Peggy Seeger, who is a keen user of the threatened Temple Cowley swimming pool.

Philip has also established a networking group for film-makers based in Oxford.

He said: “In Oxford there was nowhere to meet with others involved in the industry at any level. Film Oxford – in Catherine Street

– runs film making courses so it was the obvious location for a networking group.

“Documentary maker, Zoe Broughton and I organise the 10x10 film-makers networking evening which meets on the first Thursday of each month. It is open to anyone and is a free event. We invite people to come with footage, new equipment, ideas and their film-making dilemmas to discuss.”

Currently he is making plans for a joint project with *Oxfordshire Limited Edition* columnist Richard O Smith about James Sadler the first Englishman to fly in a hot air balloon. Philip said: “James Sadler was unusual in that he lived to a ripe old age, unlike most 18th-century aeronauts.”

Sadler made his ascent on October 4, 1784, from Christ Church Meadow. The balloon rose to about 3,600 ft and came back to earth near Woodeaton.

Celebrated cartoonist James Gilray made a satirical print of the occasion, which was another option for our desert island.

But neither the piece of coal from the German wreck or the Gilray print will be following Philip to the island.

“Frank Hurley (an Australian photographer and adventurer) took photographs on the Shackleton expedition to Antarctica. One of the most poignant is of figures on an island waving to the departing boat attempting to row to South Georgia. If I could take my camera I can do the same thing on the island. I could take photographs of the other castaways. I would love to take one of Peggy Seeger on the beach with the smooth pebble she chose to take.”

■ Philip is planning a documentary about refugees. If you have a story to tell or if you know of anyone whose story you think should be told, Philip would love to hear from you. Visit his website at: [www.philiphind.com](http://www.philiphind.com) or e-mail [philip@hind.org.uk](mailto:philip@hind.org.uk)  
 ■ If you want to know more about the 10x10 film-makers networking evenings, e-mail [zoe@urchin.info](mailto:zoe@urchin.info).