

Peter Scoones profile

by Gill McDonald

There is little, if anything, that Peter Scoones did not know about underwater image making. A BAFTA and two Emmys surrounded by numerous other awards were testament to his creative achievements. But it was Peter's dual expertise in both artistic cinematography and technical wizardry which made him both unique and extra-ordinarily accomplished in this challenging field. His creative talent took him many times around the world for a string of unrivalled wildlife documentaries, many for the BBC Natural History Unit in the company of perhaps the greatest and most distinguished wildlife presenter ever known, Sir David Attenborough. However, he also designed, built and maintained all his equipment and remained at the very cutting edge of his field right up to the end of his life after an underwater career spanning nearly five decades.

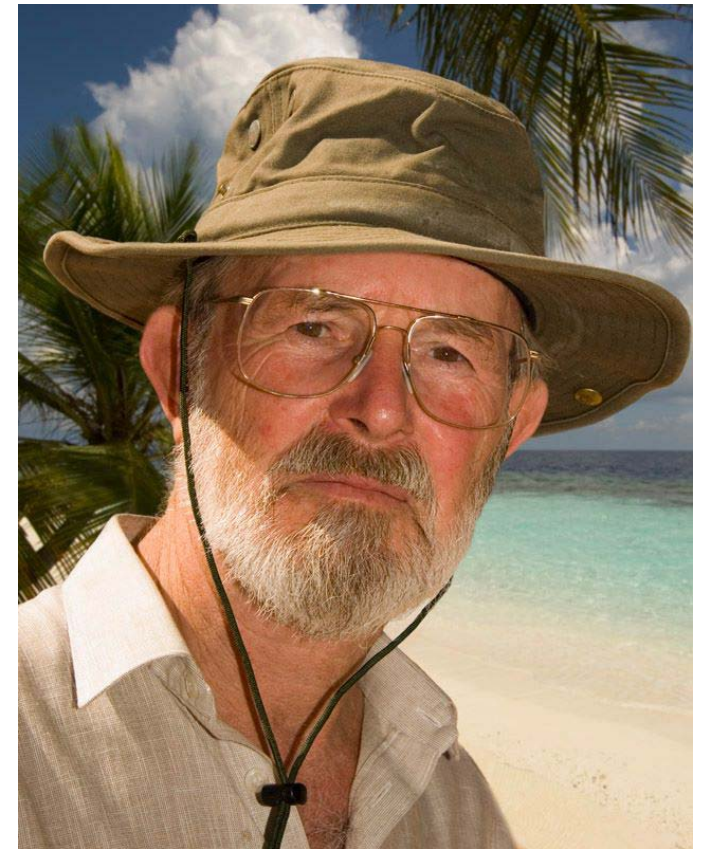
He made his first film with an 8mm camera in a homemade Perspex box in the early 1960's, using only a mask, snorkel and fins. From there he progressed to become one of the leading wildlife natural history underwater cameramen in the world. When I arrived to interview him a few years ago he was in the middle of designing a new viewfinder because the cameras he used had changed their configuration. "Necessity is the mother of invention" he said.

Born in Wanstead, North London in 1937 to a sailing family, a marine career seemed almost inevitable. After school he qualified as a naval architect but on subsequently passing the entrance exam to the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth

for commissioned officer training, his eyesight was tested below standard. So, when National Service loomed, instead of two years as a naval clerk he signed up for nine years in the RAF "to learn something useful". That something was photography.

At the time, Peter was a serious racing sailor "I'm the sort of chap who is 100% involved in whatever activity I am doing, nothing else intrudes" he said. Posted to Singapore, he headed the RAF sailing team. The fast, keeled sailing boats became sluggish when coated in marine algae and hauling them up slipways was time-consuming and cumbersome. Instead, the team borrowed masks and snorkels from the Navy and scrubbed the hulls underwater. Having never previously considered what was under the yachts he raced, Peter observed the shoals of pretty, colourful fish feasting on the debris. Around the same time Hans Hass's boat moored nearby and Peter had a 'eureka' moment. Hass was already his hero and Hass's presence together with the lovely marine life meant the area was probably a prime location for the beautiful images he had seen on TV and in the cinema.

So, after persuading the Navy to teach the basics on their O2 rebreathers they formed a diving club. "The RAF disapproved of diving, considering it a dangerous activity, but we ignored them" Peter grinned. Due to limited equipment they became highly adept at snorkelling and learned to skip breathe. "I could hold my breath underwater for 3-4 minutes. You can't film while breathing it disturbs



you, makes you wobble".

Due to the lack of kit, as a temporary measure using RAF machine shops, recycled aircraft oxygen tanks and various hoses Peter built a couple of aqua lungs. "Demand valves are fairly simple things" he explained, with typical understatement and modesty.

Already hooked on the underwater world through snorkelling, Peter's first ever dive, off Palau Tekukor over 50 years ago, was not without drama. Attached by rope "the tanks were very valuable, we didn't want to lose one" he floated down over the drop-off and with "wow" on his lips as a school of batfish wafted gently by he was completely captivated. With his skip breathing technique he



stayed down far longer than expected for the air in the tank, so the crew began hauling the rope in. As he was being drawn inexorably towards a large cluster of nasty black sea-urchins, the stings of which can be very painful and indeed serious if multiple, he planted his feet firmly on the wall and pulled as hard as he could. Not only did his first ever dive feature beauty, awe and danger, he also incurred the wrath of the Far East boxing champion who he pulled into the water on the other end of the rope.

Peter had been keen on both wildlife and photography since school days, so it wasn't long before his joint passions of image-making, diving and nature came together. Ever inventive, he would



scavenge discarded, scratched aircraft windows returning them to stores and claiming a replacement, thus acquiring pristine sheets of Perspex to model housings from. He made cement from Perspex chips dissolved in chloroform, controls from used hydraulic linkages and created waterproof shafts – this was before o'rings were widely available. Unlike today when you can buy a housing off the shelf, there was nothing for it then but to build his own and in this he was truly a pioneer. "There was the Rolleimarin designed by Hass but that was way outside our budget, Nikonos which evolved out of Cousteau's Calypsophot didn't emerge until 1963, necessity is the mother of invention – if it doesn't exist, build it". There was that signature phrase

again.

Tending towards moving film he housed a Bolex C-8 8mm cine camera and shot his first travel piece. He then moved from Singapore to Aden in the Red Sea and created his first feature film 'Breathless Moments'. This won the gold medal at the first Brighton film festival in 1965 and led to several production companies contacting him wishing to distribute the film. But, with great disappointment it transpired the 8mm media was not production quality and could not be used commercially. Peter immediately rejected 8mm, bought a 16mm camera and explained "I could never afford to film for myself again. The film was so expensive I had to get paid in order to fund it".

Around this time he co-founded the British Society of Underwater Photographers (BSoUP) with Colin Doeg. Colin, a former journalist working in PR at the time, has himself contributed significantly to British underwater photography including taking the first picture in British waters ever to win an open international underwater photographic competition. BSoUP is still going strong today boasting membership from many of the foremost underwater photographers in the UK. Despite being quite seriously ill by then, Peter still regularly attended the monthly meetings in London right up until the end of 2013. Colin also still attends. Having recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, this is a testament to the down to earth nature of both these amazing men.

Said Colin "being a superb camera mechanic as well as accomplished photographer helped Peter handle with aplomb the most dreaded event in any underwater photographer's life... a flood. It was an unforgettable experience to see him calmly pour pints of sea water out of his custom-made camera

housing and begin to salvage his expensive video camera anywhere on land or sea. Surrounded by an awe-struck audience and often an ashen producer or client - he could strip his camera down to its carcass, wash and sun-dry all the vital electronic circuit boards and have it working again in as little as a couple of hours”.

Colin continued “Peter was hugely talented and was probably the most self-sufficient wildlife underwater cameraman in the world. He introduced many new ideas, including the use of polecams and cameras slung beneath radio controlled rafts. In the early days in the UK he pioneered the concept of standard sized openings in the body of housings so the ports were interchangeable, something we all take for granted today. He also used to produce correction lens from raw Perspex and blow his own dome ports”.

At the end of his nine year stint he left the RAF and joined a colour laboratory in London. For the next few years he absorbed as much as possible about underwater filming. To supplement his strong technical background and optical knowledge he thoroughly researched and read everything ever written on the subject, teaching himself. “I learnt from anyone who could tell me” he said, “I was a sponge, soaking up everything

that I needed”.

During this time Peter became involved in a production company and continued to push the boundaries of underwater filming. Combining his by now extensive knowledge with an electronics expert colleague, they invented systems for the oil industry. One such project was developing inspection cameras for the BP offshore oil platforms. The only other equipment in existence was inadequate for the low visibility of the North Sea. So, necessity calling again, they developed a camera based on the silicon-intensified technology being used by NASA which functioned in low-light and worked remotely from the platform without the need for divers.

Their reputations spread and one day there was a knock on the door of the workshop in Richmond just outside London. It was David Attenborough (subsequently to become Sir David) and a colleague from the BBC Natural History Unit who wanted to film a live coelacanth in low-light conditions, something that had never been done before. The primitive looking, pre-historic coelacanth, which usually lives around 1,000ft deep, was only re-discovered in the last century after scientists thought it had become extinct along with the dinosaurs, 65 million years earlier. Attenborough



Peter took the first ever shot of a living Coelacanth

was heading to the Comores islands as part of the BBCs ‘Life on Earth’ series to follow up reports of local fishermen hauling coelacanths up from the deep. He had heard about Peter’s camera and wanted to hire it. Peter seized his opportunity. Not only had he read about the coelacanth in school and long harboured an ambition to film it, but he also knew his camera was a completely unique and innovative asset that he was certainly not going to hand over for someone else to use. “I told them they could have my equipment for free” he recalled “as long as they paid for me to go out with them and operate it”.

Thus began Peter’s long standing involvement with the BBC including

‘Reefwatch’, ‘The Trials of Life’, ‘Sea Trek’, ‘Life in the Freezer’, ‘The Blue Planet’ and ‘Planet Earth’ which was the first broadcast in high definition, among many others. ‘Reefwatch’ filmed in the northern Red Sea was the first ever live underwater broadcast. At the time, production quality camera heads were not integrated with any recording device, thus filming was achieved by passing the image back to the surface where it was adjusted and recorded. The BBC technicians in Bristol were developing their own cameras “but their knowledge was limited” Peter recalled “I knew their equipment wasn’t going to suffice, but they were disinclined to listen to a external freelancer. So I made my



own camera. It was less snazzy and elegantly engineered than theirs, but it out-performed them every time”.

During ‘Sea Trek’, Peter enhanced the polecam which he had originally invented for filming killer whales in Norway for an Australian broadcaster. The whales would not approach if there was a diver in the water so Peter put the camera on a pole over the bow of an inflatable boat and drove right up to the creatures. The resulting film, ‘Wolves of the sea’ included the first recording of whales ‘carousel feeding’, herding the herring into balls near the surface then using their tails to stun them before scooping them up. With the

modern proliferation of wildlife films and tourist excursions this kind of behaviour is now observed by a wide audience, but then it was completely innovative. The film went on to win the annual Wildscreen Festival. For ‘Sea Trek’ Peter used the polecam to film dolphins in the Bahamas coming towards the boat rather than going away, this was yet another first.

Peter’s next invention was ‘the dog’. He developed remote capability by buying a broadcast quality recorder and housing it, connecting it to the camera by umbilical wire and ensuring the unit was neutrally buoyant so it would follow him in the water. He developed the camera

control system from scratch, making a colour viewfinder so he could control the image. No longer was he reliant on an onshore technician. This was a revolutionary development and used right up until the BBCs spectacular ‘Life in the Freezer’ displaying life in the Antarctic in 1993, again with David Attenborough. Around this time broadcast quality camcorders became available which Peter housed so everything was finally all in one unit.

The following years brought a great variety of projects including, in 1995, ‘Great White Shark’ portraying the natural behaviour of great whites in California and South Africa. He always considered this to

be the definitive depiction of these magnificent creatures, and as usual expressed this with no arrogance, simply as a fact. Peter was often accompanied on filming projects by his widow Georgette Douwma who is a highly regarded and accomplished photographer in her own right. The couple complimented each other delightfully with the ease and comfort of very good, old friends and also provided support and strength where needed.

The BBC’s blockbuster series ‘The Blue Planet’ came next and Peter’s skills were described by Sir David Attenborough thus: “Peter has a remarkable gift of composition.

He understands fish just as other cameramen understand chimpanzees. He knows fish so well he can sense what they are going to do. You can see it in his footage. He moves as the fish move. We told him to go to his favourite destination and produce the footage for a film,” Attenborough says. “We would construct the story to go with it. He went to Sipadan and the resulting film won a Palm d’Or at the Antibes film festival in France.”

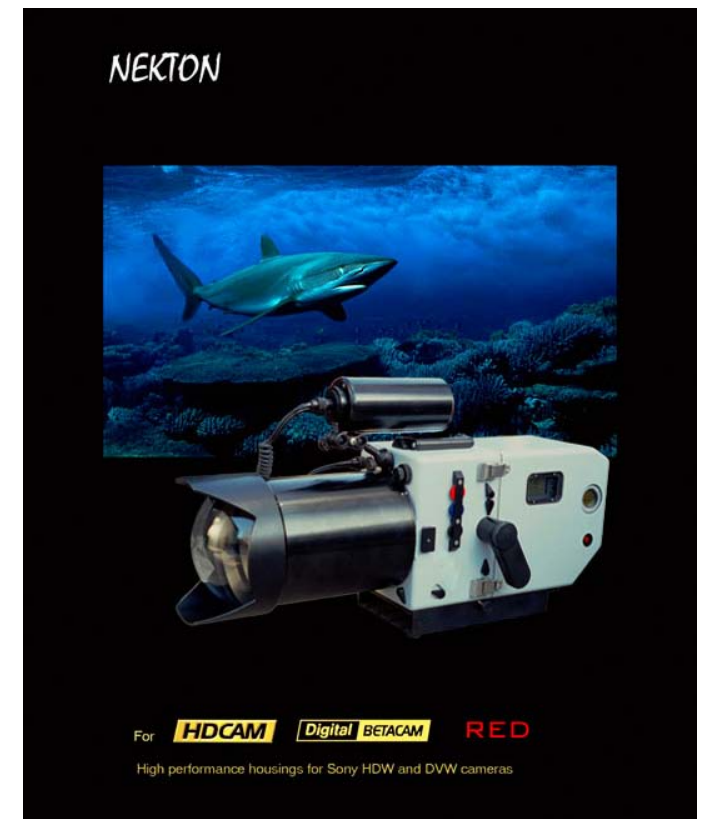
Peter’s next, major involvement was with yet another BBC/ Attenborough landmark ‘Planet Earth’. This was right at the forefront of technological advancement using High Definition (HD) technology for the first time. Aware of technical limitations on ‘The Blue Planet’ the series producer Alastair Fothergill approached Peter a year before filming and asked him to build the HD housings. Peter feared he would invest much time and effort creating high quality, top-end equipment only to see it hired out to other cameramen rather than filming himself, a prospect he was distinctly uncomfortable with. On assurance he would be fully involved he went ahead with the build, only to find some of his fears were realised with less involvement than expected. Apart from the frustration, this had a very real effect on his income. To balance this, after ‘Planet Earth’ wrapped up, rather than the equipment remaining with the BBC as is usual Peter insisted it be returned to his ownership and he subsequently hired it out himself, maintained it, continually developed it and still shot footage himself whenever possible. His last big involvement was with the BBC’s recent great wildlife epic entitled simply ‘Life’.

Peter’s long and prolific career was not without hazard, like the time he was speared by an elephant trunk in the murky waters of the Okavanga



Delta while filming for Planet Earth leading to extensive dental work. His life was at risk from wildlife too many times to mention here, but he approached these natural dangers with a typical relaxed philosophy. However, there is something he admitted to being frightened of. “Ropes and regulations can kill you” he explained. “Once when filming a cable burying device the HSE advisor insisted I was attached by rope which I could not independently release. I blankly refused and eventually he compromised so I could release it myself. Sure enough, the rope became trapped under the bulldozer-like vehicle and I was drawn inexorably towards the burying device. If I had not been able to release it I would be dead, without question. When I surfaced, he angrily declared he would rather have a dead diver in the water than someone surfacing unexpectedly. I have been terribly anti- HSE, not to mention ropes, ever since”.

Peter was intensely environmentally aware. He ate fish, but not reef fish “it seems a bit of a nonsense to go filming them then come back and eat them”. He also invested clean-up time on a reef before filming, clearing discarded fishing lines and ropes “it’s amazing how much rubbish comes from boats, often operated by ex-fishermen who regard the sea as somewhere to dump rubbish. They don’t have an understanding of the reef or what we want



to see on it, because they don’t see it”.

It would be forgivable if this uniquely talented man had had a sense of arrogance or conceit about his many pioneering achievements. Not so. Peter was a true genius, but still more than happy to share his knowledge and discuss any topic with openness and generosity. “I’m just a chap who is learning how to take excellent pictures underwater” he stated. It could sound falsely modest, but he really meant it.

Gill McDonald

Peter Scoones' medium format and offshore inspection housings

by Peter Rowlands

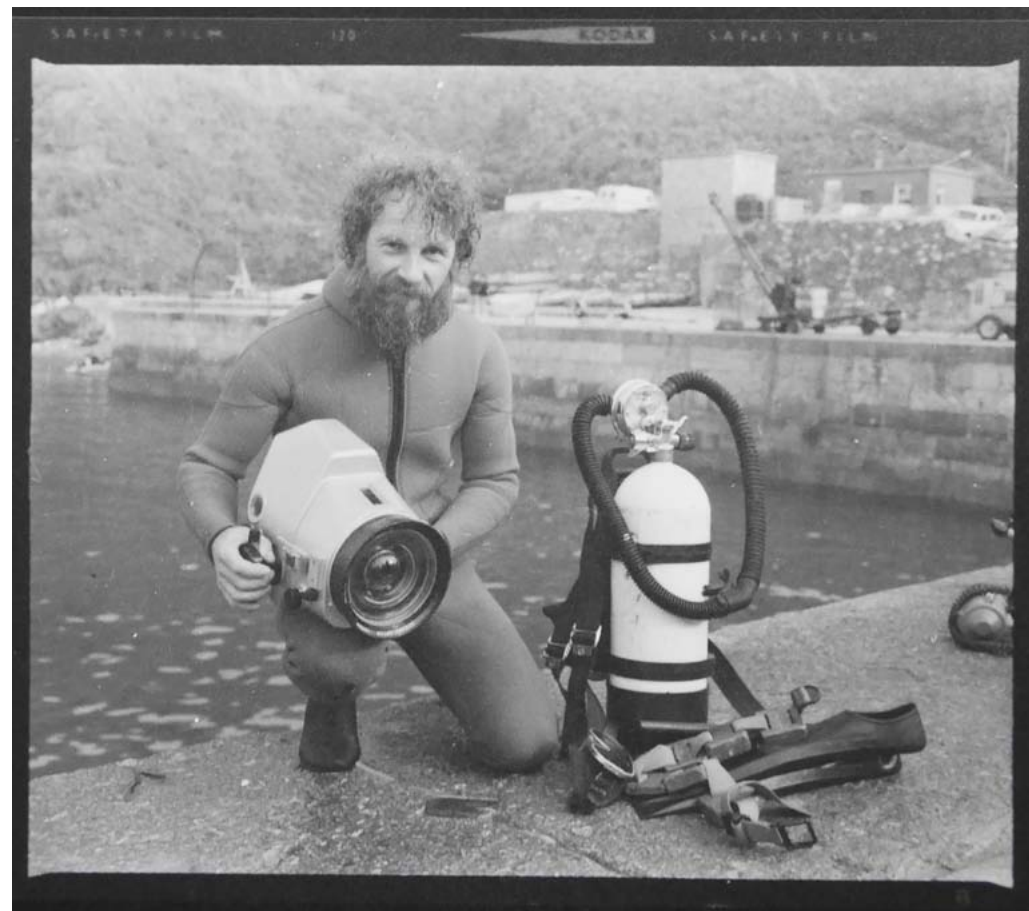
I first met Peter at a BSoUP meeting in the mid 70's. He was working at Marine Unit Technology and I had just been appointed as the UK distributor for Oceanic Products; some of the first commercially available underwater photography equipment manufactured in the USA.

Oceanic Products produced a range of accessories for Nikonos cameras including wide lenses, strobes and mounting arms and extension tubes for close up photography underwater. I can admit this now some 40 years later but the equipment, especially the strobes, was far from reliable and I pestered Peter to help me solve some of the problems. He was graciously patient with this young whippersnapper but I suspect he recognised his own early enthusiasm and he couldn't help but help a fellow enthusiast. Peter was a very generous man.

At this stage I would go round to Marine Unit's premises in Richmond after work where Peter would still be working. He had spent his day as part of a small team developing state of the art low light SIT (silicon

intensified target) video cameras for offshore inspections and his evenings working on his own housings for stills cameras. The first one I saw was a perspex housing for the Bronica S2A; a 6cm x6cm format camera with interchangeable wide and close up lenses. The quality of images he was producing with that camera and housing would still compete favourably with today's images but he was constantly improving his housings with minor tweaks until the time came to start again from scratch and build a new design incorporating all of Peter's new thinking. It was at this stage that I had a lightbulb moment and eagerly bought his old housing (for a very reasonable price, I seem to remember) thinking that the images would continue for me but the sad reality was that equipment alone is not enough!

I well remember the day that Peter told me of his shift of attention towards the newly introduced Mamiya RB67 - a 6cm x 7cm format as the name implies but with an amazing bellows front which produced a hitherto unheard of focus range



Circa 1979 at Bovisand harbour with the prototype Mamiya RB67 cast aluminium housing.

which would be ideal for underwater photography. Perspex was machined and glued at an alarming rate, gears were interlinked and dome ports were blown. Very soon the completed housing was given a sea trial and found to be almost perfect. And that is the point which needs to be emphasised here. By this stage Peter's thinking process, design knowledge

and experience was producing housings which were very right, first time.

Now I will skip forward a year or too for housing continuity but then I will rewind to what I believe was Peter's and Marine Unit's finest product so please bear with me.

Peter was very pleased with his RB67 housing and I was eager to

produce a commercially available one so we embarked on the production of a cast aluminium housing which incorporated one of this first “right way up, right way round” prisms for viewing the image underwater together with precision plano concave optics to correct the lenses for underwater use. The result was the amazingly beautiful Ocean Optics Mamiya RB67 Marine housing (pics attached). Ten housings were made in all and all sold to top underwater photographers at the time and one was actually bought by the Mamiya Camera Co themselves for their historical archives!

OK. Let’s rewind now a few years to Peter’s day job at Marine Unit Technology where his combined knowledge of photography, optics and electronics was producing the previously mentioned low light video cameras. Inspection photography of the condition of the North Sea oil rigs was a legal/insurance requirement and video cameras were needed to show the surface operators what the diver was seeing. Marine Unit’s cameras were market leaders and sales were buoyant. A small production line was meeting demand leaving Peter and his small team to develop a ground breaking and iconic remotely operated vehicle (ROV) which incorporated Peter’s state of the art video cameras with a thinking out



Ocean Optics Mamiya RB67 Marine

of the box propulsion system. Now I this stage I don’t know which came first - the name or the acronym - but the romantic in me would like to think that initially the physical appearance gave way to the name Smartie - the flying saucer shaped yellow candy coated sweets but such a cool name needed an acronym of technical justification and the great minds at Marine Unit came up with SubMarine Automatic Remote Television Inspection Equipment. SMARTIE. How cool it that! A star had been born.

Please allow me to get a bit technically nerdy here but it is justifiable! It goes without saying that any ROV which Marine Unit built would have industry leading video cameras on board and there was a



SMARTIE (SubMarine Automatic Remote Television Inspection Equipment) was way ahead of its time and was featured on the BBC Tomorrows World programme in 1978.

combination of four (as I recall, there were 3 cameras, set at 120 degree offsets). Low Light silicon intensified target (SIT) cameras and high resolution vidicon colour cameras at 90 degree intervals. If the operator needed to switch from one camera to another all he had to do was rotate the ROV 90 degrees at the push of a

button; rather like the turret of lenses on very early broadcast cameras!

To compliment such optically superior firepower Peter and his team produced a propulsion system which had many significant advantages and incorporated some ground breaking designs. First and foremost was the decision to use water propulsion



SMARTIE could be deployed from the back of a Volvo Estate.

using 3 phase high power submersible pumps. Propellor propulsion had been up until now been the thrust of choice but water propulsion meant a much smoother, snag free design. In addition to the new choice of propulsion format there was another significant difference in how that power was deployed. Peter and the team decided that, rather than have a traditional “stop/start” system where a propellor is turned on or off, their water propulsion would be constantly “on” and controlled by remotely operated butterfly valves. The result was very smooth propulsion and control.

As if this alone wasn't enough, the electronics engineers at Marine Unit programmed state of the art microprocessors - so commonplace nowadays but space age back then - which could input data from the sub's magnetic compass and gyro and project an artificial navigation “target” which the operator could follow on his video screen even though the craft may be passing through an area of zero visibility. Finally there was the amazing ability to press a button which would make SMARTIE



The MD600 became an industry standard in the North Sea

maintain its current position of depth and heading. Quite amazing considering this was nearly 40 years ago. I really believe that SMARTIE was akin to Concorde; way ahead of its time yet they existed but were restricted by those who feared this new technical dominance.

I was not party to the corporate activity at the time but my understanding was that the threat of SMARTIE to another major video camera company led to a bid to buy out Marine Unit Technology to take capitalise on their video camera technology but to sideline SMARTIE. My saddest thought is of SMARTIE being consigned to an industrial skip somewhere in the melting pot of Aberdeen in the late 1970s simply because it was too good and ahead of its time. Unfortunately its brilliance was its demise.

To end this article on a high note the very sad demise of Marine Unit and SMARTIE meant that Peter was without a job so I could persuade him to work for me to develop a foolproof camera housing to enable detailed photos to be taken of defects or



The MC70 stereo camera

otherwise in North Sea offshore oil rig support legs. The result was the MD600; an amazingly simple design, easy to manufacture yet almost foolproof for an industrial diver to use which would become the industry standard for several years.

I am not ashamed to admit that this was a very profitable period in my business life and I hope Peter would agree that the regular royalty checks I sent him were very much appreciated!

The success of the MD600 and the increasing need for more photographic detail led to a demand for “stereo” images. Two images would be taken at the same time but with a physical spacing similar to the human eye so that a sense of depth could give much more information to the inspectors eye.

I financed and Peter developed the MC70 6cm x 7cm underwater stereo camera which was so amazingly simple yet so accurately capable. Unfortunately we never got round to maximising the potential of this camera because, as is so typically endearing of Peter, he was, quite rightly, being lured in a much more exciting direction.



In 1995 I had the pleasure of assisting Peter on a week filming “The last voyage of the Thistlegorm” for Director Caroline Hawkins.

The BBC, and legend has it David Attenborough in particular, had seen the potential of Peter’s low light video camera equipment and his individual photographic capability. So started a long and productive partnership of image acquisition and video camera development which would see the BBC Natural History Unit produce some of its most groundbreaking underwater images and I truly believe that I am right in saying that, without Peter and his input and performance, it would not have happened when it did.

That concludes my description of my time when I was closely involved

with Peter. After that it became limited to meals at the Pizza Express in High Holborn in between his BBC assignments. I would eat my Four Seasons with side salad deliberately slowly and savour the detail of his latest exploits and achievements.

I look back on it as the most productive and exciting period of my life and it has been a real pleasure to commit this to writing.

Peter Rowlands
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Peter Scoones

by BBC cameraman
 Doug Anderson

Peter Scoones changed underwater wildlife film-making forever. In a career spanning 4 decades he was the corner stone of the BBC NHU’s underwater wildlife film-making effort. Series like Life in the Freezer, Blue Planet, Planet Earth and Life would not have happened were it not for his technical genius, beautiful eye for an image, detective like approach to gathering behaviour and down right stubborn tenacity.

When it comes to my approach to underwater behavioural acquisition I owe practically everything to Peter. Of course I knew his work before but it was my time in the field with Peter, as second camera in Planet Earth shoots, that I learned how to be an underwater cameraman – and perhaps more importantly what sort of underwater cameraman I wanted to try and be. Simply, I wanted to be just like Peter.

Continually, day after day, whether in the Panatanal or central Africa or on a reef somewhere, Peter kicked my ass in the water. I can’t say it was easy watching his beautiful rushes night after night before putting on my slightly substandard work up



on the monitor, but at these times Peter was at his softest. There is no doubt Peter can be hard on people – time in the field can be tough – but watching my rushes with Peter and having him gently cajole me into working towards cleaner, more rounded and complete underwater sequences are some of the fondest memories of my life.

Peter Scoones was a one off. A perfect blend of engineer and artist. Although we (the underwater cameramen) may not like to admit it often he was, quite simply, the finest of our kind.

Doug Anderson

Peter Scoones

by Keith Scholey

Former BBC Producer

Peter has been the greatest pioneer of underwater filmmaking over the last forty years.

I first met Peter in the early 1980's at the start of my career. He was already a legend in the underwater community being arguably Britain's top underwater stills photographer.

Peter was firstly a man of the sea, narrowly missing the Olympic sailing team and then became a photographer with the RAF in the early 1960's. There he learnt his technical skills that gave him the basis to become one of the great diving pioneers. Stationed in Singapore, he built his own diving equipment (SCUBA was yet to be commercially available) and some of the first ever underwater housings. From those early days, Peter built every one of his own housings for the rest of his career, modifying them with the changes in camera technology.

In the 1970's he built a business with colleges making housings for the burgeoning North Sea oilrig business. They were 'bomb proof' so that any North Sea Diver would not flood or destroy them!

However his first love was always underwater natural history and when I met him his course was set to break into NHU camerawork. Ironically, people then viewed Peter as a 'technical guy' but I discovered on my first ever film in 1982, making a film with Peter about offshore oilrigs in Borneo, that his technical ability was just a very small part of Peter's skill set. He was a superb diver with total control and phenomenal speed when required. He



People will always remember him for his groundbreaking filming but, in the 1980's, he was arguably Britain's top underwater stills photographer.

'read the sea' and always new the best place to enter the water. However it was his photographic eye that was exquisite, and leaps and bounds ahead of the other underwater cameramen of his time. In my view, few have matched him since.

From then, as my career took shape, Peter was the only underwater cameraman I would use. As any budding producer needs to learn fast,



Peter was a solutions man.

choosing the best cameramen always makes you look good! And Peter really did. Making the BBC series The Great Rift we filmed in the Red Sea and Lake Tanganyika where another key skill of Peter's became apparent; his ability to spot underwater animal behaviour and create sequences like they were being shot on the surface. This now does not sound special, but that time, little animal behaviour

was shot in the wild underwater and producers resorted to filming in aquarium tanks. I believe it was Peter who changed this and now very little is shot in tanks.

Up until the late 80's everything was shot on film. Then Peter worked on a bold live show, Reef Watch, using electronic cameras. His experiences on this and the subsequent Sea Trek series changed his thinking and he abandoned film... an amazing thing to do in the early 90s! However, Peter saw a huge opportunity as he had worked out how he could rebalance the electronic camera's colours underwater to give a 'natural light look' at some depth. Now he had no need for artificial lights and the images he could produce were startlingly colourful.

I was one of the first to benefit from Peter's genius here as together we made two Wildlife On Ones, Malice in Wonderland and Reef Encounter. The striking look and detailed animal behaviour in these two little films had a dramatic impact on natural history underwater filming, and I must stress purely due to Peter's genius rather than my own contribution! It was now clear that a new standard had been set and that electronic cameras were the way forward. But there was a problem... only Peter knew how to make the cameras work and drive them!

My colleague, Alastair Fothergill, was at this point developing his landmark Blue Planet and he realised that all the underwater needed to be shot this way and Peter became a key member of his team. I was now the Head of the natural History Unit and I took great pleasure seeing this remarkable series come to completion with its stand out underwater cinematography that simply would not have happened without Peter.

My career took me into more administration and so I never had the chance to work with this remarkable man again, something I very much regret. Peter continued to pioneer, taking underwater filming into HD with Planet Earth.

Peter can only be described as a genius. Most of us are good at a couple of things but Peter combined an incredible visual eye with huge technical ability, consummate diving skills and an incredible understanding of the sea (that saved my bacon on at least one occasion!) and above



all, great powers of observation and understanding and an outstanding naturalist.

There is no doubt that Peter Scoones has had more impact on underwater natural history filmmaking than anyone since the 50's legend Hans Hass. Peter needs to be remembered in the same light.

Keith Scholey



Peter Scoones

by Martha Holmes

Former BBC Producer & Director

There is nothing that Peter didn't know about cameras, underwater optics, electronics, housings and, if you got him going, batteries. He was also a great underwater naturalist; he could spot interesting behaviour where others simply saw colourful fish. His contribution to natural history filmmaking is immeasurable and not just underwater: by producing the most beautiful images of coral reefs imaginable and grading the shots underwater as he filmed, he influenced the trend for saturated, sumptuous images that we now take for granted across natural history output.

Underwater, Peter was the visionary who, ahead of the game, recognised that the advent of video cameras would revolutionise underwater filming. Peter forged ahead deconstructing and rebuilding cameras to fit into his personalised, self-built underwater housings. He would do this for months on end in his own workshop, but you might also find him at one in the morning, in the bowels of a rolling ship, machining parts to perfect the design. Perfection was the name of Peter's game.

I worked with Peter on numerous

productions first as a presenter and later as a producer. On Reefwatch and Sea Trek when Mike de Gruy and I were wearing 'bubble helmets' and were tethered to the boat (a floating studio) by our sound cables, Peter was the mobile cameraman, swimming off to film our subjects. He was independent and happy to be so, but he was a vital part of the team. Peter's ability to keep the cameras working during the 6-week shoots was essential and every evening he would be stripping down a camera or repairing a battery pack.

On Life in the Freezer my role had changed to director and it took some time for us to find a way to work together. It must have been hard for him; I was a young, ambitious director wanting to push the boundaries. Peter didn't like being pushed. Once I had worked out how to appeal to his better nature we rubbed along pretty well. Peter loved solving difficulties, and if I presented a sequence that I wanted to film as a challenge, either creative or technical, he would rise to the challenge and overcome it... without fail.

We worked on land together too



when Peter helped me film hippos at night and underwater for a Wildlife on One. Again, both sequences were technical challenges and Peter was right for the job.

One important part of the equation was his partner Georgette. Peter was always happier when Georgette was with him and as she was such an accomplished assistant having her on location was a bonus on all fronts.

On Blue Planet Peter was pretty much the sole cameraman for the Coral Seas programme. He was in his element, because it was coral reefs where he was truly at home. He and Georgette made a brilliant

and productive team working from the Great Barrier Reef, Thailand and the Maldives to the Red Sea on all manner of boats. And it was on this programme that I think he truly excelled.

Martha Holmes



Personal Reflections on Peter Scoones

by Dr Alex Mustard

It is June 1988, I am thirteen years old and sitting in the back of the car en route to my grandmother's house in Leamington Spa. I am not happy. I am looking forward to seeing Grandma, but all week I have been counting down the days, waiting for a program to come on the TV. Now it is the weekend and it seems I am going to miss it.

A tantrum or two later and a deal is struck. Her TV is small, but I am allowed to watch the installments as the show was broadcast at intervals during the day. I sit just a couple of feet from the screen, transfixed.

The program was a BBC production called Reefwatch. Beamed live(-ish) from underwater in the Red Sea it introduced me to names such as the Red Sea and Ras Mohammed. But one stood out above these. I was already taking underwater photographs myself and was keen to glean all I could from the show. Waiting for the credits I saw "Photography – Peter Scoones". He was the first underwater photographer I knew the name of. I became a fan,

www.uwpmag.com



Peter in his beloved Red Sea

instantly.

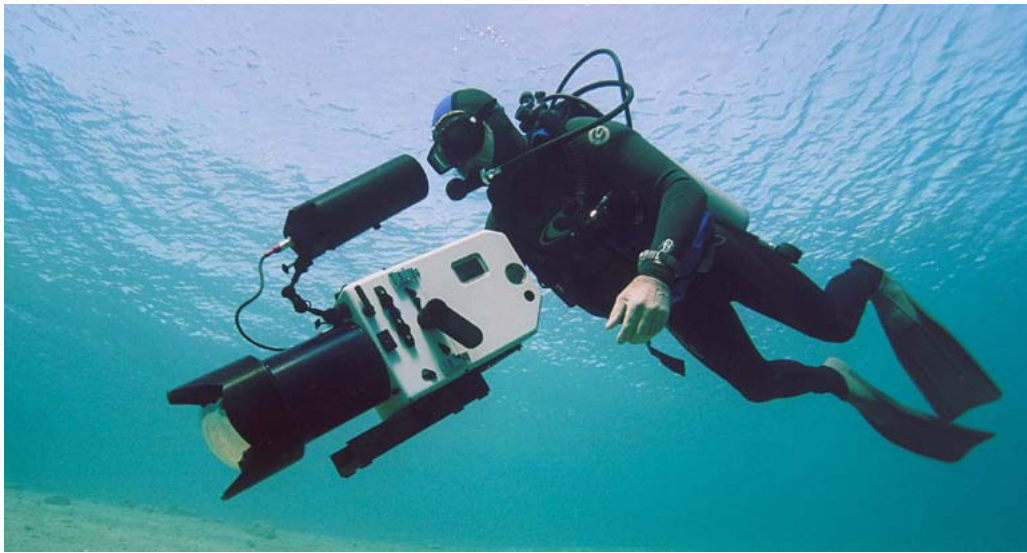
Throughout my school days I followed the adventures of Scoones in TV credits and diving magazines. I never dreamt I would meet him.

Spin on ten years to June 1998. I am now 23 and a marine biology PhD student, getting increasingly serious about my underwater photography. I

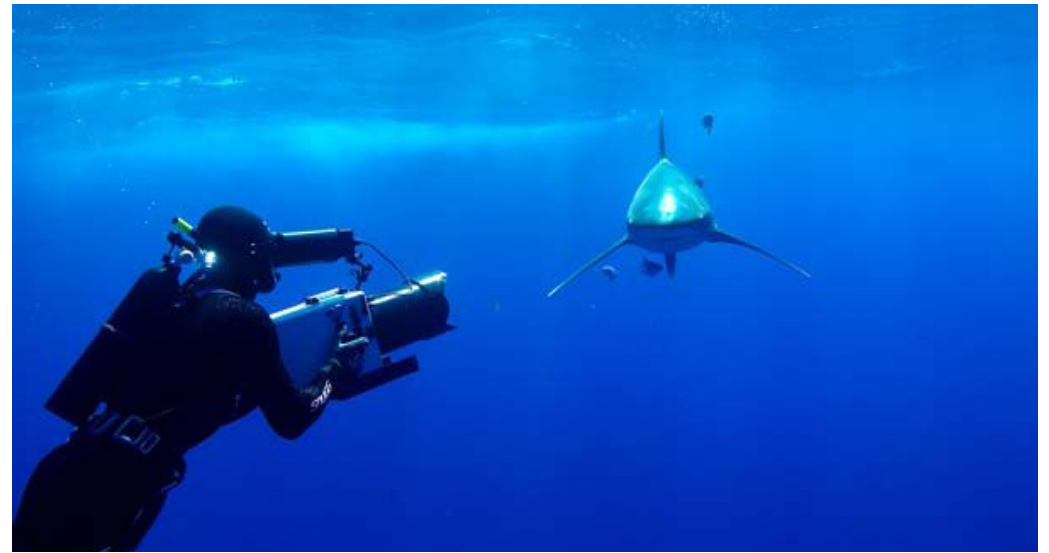
have begun to win some competitions and this had led to my invite for a special Red Sea trip. It is a big step up for me and my excitement is mixed with nerves. It is my first time in Sharm El Sheikh and my first time on a liveaboard. But this was no ordinary safari. This charter had been organised by Peter Scoones to film for the coral

reefs episode of a new BBC series that is going to be called Blue Planet. I am onboard for a week.

We arrive late at night and I collapse into my bunk. The next morning I am woken as the engines start as we leave the Travco marina and I stagger out into the bright light on the dive deck. Scoones is there,



Bouyancy control, ergonomics and trim were under total control



Peter was fearless

foot on bench, elbow on knee, hand on chin, staring out over the water at the cliffs of Shark Observatory. “Have you heard about Ras Mohammed?” he asks. I stumbled a reply.

That trip totally changed my approach to underwater photography. The way I dived, prepared for dives, looked after my camera, thought about my photography. I soaked up as much as I could.

Over the years I got to know Peter much better and took every occasion we met on trips, at BSoUP or at diveshows to pick his brain for ideas. His advice influenced my own photography in so many ways, from destinations I visited, to specific shots I produced and even to my general approach to underwater photography.

Peter was an innovator, never content to merely produce excellent images, he always wanted to push boundaries and thrill his audience with visuals they had never seen before. It is an approach I have tried to adopt with my own photography, challenging myself to create new types of images to keep people continually engaged with my work.

Underwater photography is a technically challenging genre and Peter’s engineering prowess was instrumental in driving his creativity. It is not simply about being able to build the equipment you need to get the shot. It starts with having the imagination to conjure a fresh artistic vision and then, by truly understanding the nature of light

underwater and the underwater photographic process, you can then work out how existing equipment needs to be modified to bend and sometimes break the rules that constrain everyone else.

Peter’s other trump card was field craft. Sadly, underwater photographers speak about this much less than wildlife photographers on land: it is simply having the experience in nature to know where and when to find animals and behaviours and how to approach them photographically. There is no shortcut to field craft, it is earned, not awarded. It is often the fundamental difference between average and exceptional images and Scoones was the master.

Peter was often frustrated by

BBC researchers, who wrote his shoot lists from academic papers, rather than field knowledge! And he encouraged me to get underwater, get away from people and really watch the reef. To not just rely on what I learned in books.

In short, if you were designing an underwater image maker from scratch, these are exactly the attributes you’d choose. And with them it is no surprise that Scoones dominated underwater photography and film for so many decades. I am also certain the Scoones mindset will infect my photography always, and my pictures will be all the better for it.

Dr Alex Mustard

Peter Scoones

Obituary

by Colin Doeg

Peter Scoones, one of the world's legendary wildlife underwater cameramen, has died after a defiant battle against cancer. He was 76.

Co-founder of the British Society of Underwater Photographers (BSoUP), he learned photography while serving in the RAF in Singapore in 1959. He was so captivated by the colourful tropical fish he saw while snorkelling to clean the hull of his sailing dinghy that his passion switched immediately from boats to recording the life and scenery he saw in the warm tropical water.

Unofficially, Royal Navy divers trained him to dive using oxygen rebreather equipment but subsequently he changed to air and housed his first cameras in boxes made from bits of Perspex from aircraft windows.

Returning to civilian life, he became increasingly involved in the development of equipment for the off-shore oil industry. He was technical director of a company providing sonar, photographic and television inspection equipment for use in the North Sea and also designed a

remotely operated vehicle which was groundbreaking at the time.

However, by 1979 underwater photography took over as his main commercial activity. He became involved in the filming of TV commercials and features, but his heart was always in the natural history and documentary fields.

His break came when the BBC Natural History Unit mounted an expedition to the Comoros Islands to search for coelacanths, a fish once thought to have been extinct for millions of years.

Word had reached the Unit of a special low-light camera that Peter had developed. They wanted to hire it but he said it was only available if he could come along to operate it.

That was the first time he met Sir David Attenborough, the familiar face and voice of so many natural history films and documentaries.

In those early days the only way to film in the depths of the Mozambique Channel was to suspend the camera from a 320m-long cable but after many unsuccessful days of searching it jammed in the cleft of a



reef and was lost.

However, as the crew were packing up to return home, Peter learned a fisherman had caught a specimen and it was tied to his canoe in the local harbour.

He persuaded the fisherman to let him photograph the fish. It made a few swimming movements while Peter filmed it and took still pictures. They were the first in the world of a living coelacanth.

Scoones went on to become one of the Unit's core underwater cameramen. He played a major part in many ground-breaking series including the first live outside broadcasts from underwater in the

Red Sea.

Peter was renowned for his self-sufficiency and resourcefulness in the field. Martha Holmes, one of the original bubble-helmeted presenters in that series who went on to be the producer on many of Scoones' expeditions remarked: "Peter's contribution to the underwater wildlife making community is immeasurable. He was a visionary who, ahead of the game, recognised that the advent of video cameras would revolutionise underwater filming.

"Others were slow to adapt, but Peter forged ahead modifying cameras to fit into his own underwater housings. Not only would he do this

in the comfort of his workshop, he would be doing it on a rolling boat in the middle of the Southern Ocean, or minutes before an annual marine event that would not wait for him or his perfections.

“For 30 years Peter was at the forefront of underwater filming technology. For Reefwatch, the first live broadcast from underwater, he advised on the adaptation of studio cameras for the equivalent of an underwater studio in the Red Sea.

“He led the way with his technical expertise and kept the cameras alive and well throughout Sea Trek, Life in the Freezer and Blue Planet. Peter always saw a problem as a challenge to be overcome, and overcome them he did.”

This ability enabled him to make special items to obtain unique footage such as operating a housed camera on a pole from the surface - the ‘pole-cam’ is now widely used - to obtain the first shots of a great white shark swimming naturally in the sea rather than gnawing at the bars of a safety cage or at hunks of meat suspended over the side of a boat.

Talking about his talents, Sir David said that Peter had a remarkable gift for composition and understood fish as other cameramen understood chimpanzees or spiders. “He knew fish so well he could sense what they were going to do. You could see it in his footage. He moved as the fish moved.”

The late Rob Palmer, a noted cave diver, used



to relish recounting how Peter ran out of air while far into the labyrinth depths of Jamaica’s Blue Holes. Calmly Peter spat out one mouthpiece, fished about with one hand, found that for his reserve air supply and switched it on. When viewed later the slow pan from one side of the vast chamber to the other was rock steady.

In 1999, for his significant contributions to underwater photography he was included in Scuba



Schools International’s directory of the “world’s most elite divers” by becoming a Platinum Pro 5000 diver, joining the ranks of such pioneers as Hans Hass, Jacques Cousteau and many others.

Said Joss Woolf, BSoUP’s chairman: “Peter was a legend in his own lifetime. As well as a pioneer and innovator, he was a perfectionist who always wanted to improve his footage. He was an inspiration to underwater photographers throughout

the world.”

Said the Society’s co-founder Colin Doeg: “He was a driving force in the creation and progress of BSoUP, which was formed in 1967 and continues to thrive. He originated or was involved in the development of many features of underwater camera housings that today are commonplace and available off the shelf.

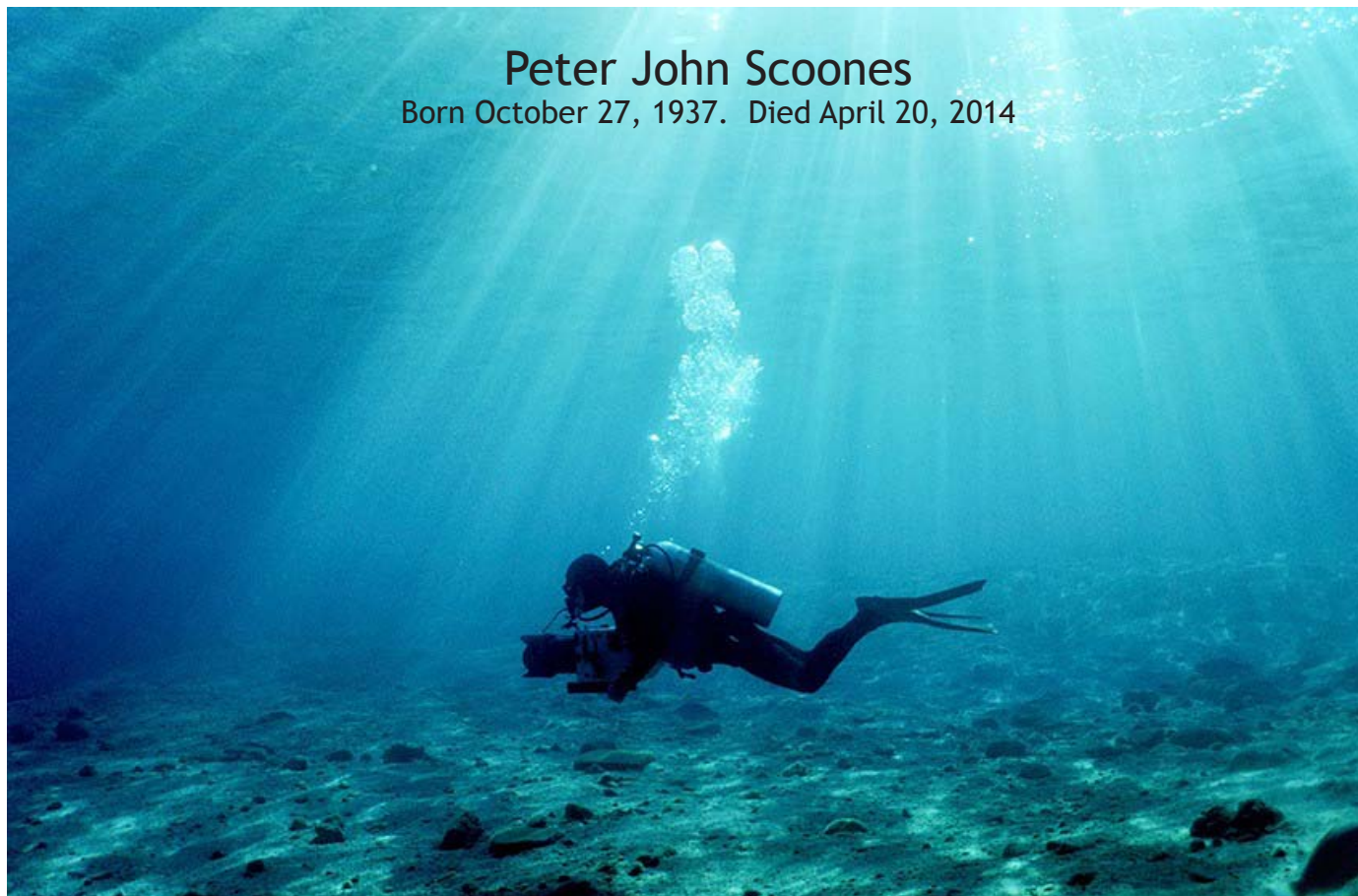
“At first we used to meet in the front room of his house. He knocked down a wall so we had more space and could project our underwater images at a larger size.

“Even in the world of early underwater photographers he was unique. He was a fearless cameraman, taking everything in his stride from piranhas and killer whales to alligators and elephants as well as from diving under ice and deep underground but his trademark footage was shot on coral reefs. He always refused to eat reef fish, they were his subjects.”

Typical of the regard in which he was held by other underwater photographers and cameramen were the reflections of photo-journalist Alex Mustard. He said: “Peter was an innovator, never content merely to produce excellent images. He always wanted to push back the boundaries and thrill his audiences with visuals they had never seen before.

“His engineering prowess was instrumental in driving his creativity. His other trump card was his field craft. He knew where to find his subjects and how to approach them photographically.”

Over the years Scoones won many awards for his pictures and films. He won an Emmy and a Bafta for technical achievement for his work on both Great White Shark and Reefwatch. In addition, he was twice awarded a Palme d’Or at the Antibes



Peter John Scoones

Born October 27, 1937. Died April 20, 2014

Film Festival in France for his work. In 1993 he was named Diver of the Year by the British Sub-Aqua Club for his significant contribution to the diving industry.

He was twice British Underwater Photographer of the Year and recently BSoUP, the Society he co-founded, awarded him its first lifetime achievement award for his exceptional contribution to underwater photography.

Unlike other cameramen, he did not attach lights to his cameras. Instead, the lighting was

handled by his wife Georgette Douwma, herself a talented underwater photographer and artist. His buddy for a major part of his career, both underwater and in life, she instinctively knew how he wanted his subjects to be lit.

As well as Georgette he leaves two children by his first marriage, Fiona and Robin.

Colin Doeg

<https://www.facebook.com/peterjscoones>