

# Raymond Ernest Sutcliffe MA, FSA

Marine archaeologist, film-maker, trustee of National Heritage, Council Member and Vice-President of the Society for Nautical Research

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Ray Sutcliffe was that rare human, an expert on his subject who devoted his life to it but who loved nothing more than to share his knowledge with whoever was interested. Many were, his enthusiasm for history and in particular maritime archaeology was infectious.

He was not a family man – he said he took his life's motto from the box of Swan Vesta that went with his omnipresent pipe, "Keep dry and away from children" – and never married, but he had time for everyone in the many different fields he was active in.

His father worked as an accountant for Marrs, the owners of a large fishing fleet. Ray trained as an historian, getting a degree in history from Downing College, Cambridge, where his tutors had to cope with his appalling handwriting. When it came to his finals the dons despaired of making sense of his manuscript and made a special dispensation to allow him to read it to them. It allowed him to make minor adjustments as he spoke, which he believed meant he

got a better a degree than he might have done with a legible paper.

After Cambridge Ray went to work for the London County Council in the Historic Buildings Department, researching visual and archival evidence to preserve important old buildings, but in 1963 the BBC advertised for staff for a new television channel, to be called BBC2. He applied and, aged 23, he began as a researcher and learned his craft as a producer, specialising in historical and archaeological programmes.



It was a 30-year career, which included being a founder member of the *Chronicle* series which ran for over 200 programmes between 1966 and 1990. It was through *Chronicle* that, from 1973 onwards, Ray became involved in the National Heritage's Museum of the Year, working with

founders John Letts and Kenneth Hudson who became close friends.

He produced individual seasons including *Vikings!* with Magnus Magnusson, and it was while filming that he acquired the pendant he always wore, the "Odin's Amulet" starburst. He also worked on *The Gun*, *The Industrial Grand Tour*, *The Triumph of the West* with Dr John Roberts, and the Sutton Hoo series with Professor Martin Carver. But his deep love was marine archaeology, and he was a pioneer in getting the very specialist subject on film. He devised and produced important films on *SS Great Britain*, *The Spanish Armada*, *The Mary Rose*, culminating in the major 1988 series *Discoveries Underwater*.

He went on to be senior producer on the *Timewatch* series, leaving the BBC in 1990.

His enthusiasms went far beyond, and could be considered a little eccentric. He collected vintage cars but could not drive, he was a marine archaeologist who could not swim, he was an expert in the technologies of television and film, but refused to have a mobile telephone or a computer.

Ray was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, a council member and vice-president of the Society for Nautical Research, and former chair and trustee of Council for Nautical Archaeology. As well as being a trustee of National Heritage, which champions the needs of museum users, he was chairman

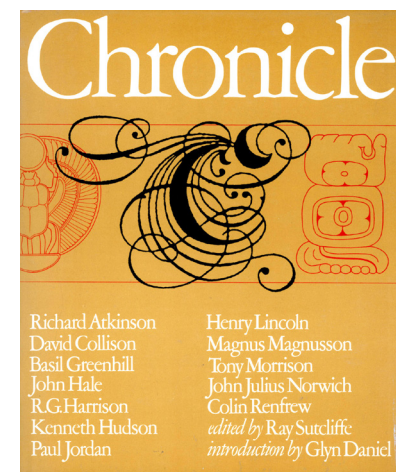


of the Nautical Museums Trust, and a member of the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee.

He was also an inveterate traveller, globe-trotting being an indulgence for a non-family man who loved to make new friends. His coffin, therefore, was covered with luggage labels.

**Ray Sutcliffe BBC Television Producer and Director, was born 18 March 1940 and who died on 3 February 2018, aged 77.**

by Simon Tait



Photos: Left: on Ray's graduation from Cambridge and, far left, a photo from the front cover of the BBC's *Prospero* magazine October 2015 issue when a group of veteran BBC TV crew showed the younger generation "how it is done". Ray always reckoned on shooting a scene in 3 takes – a far cry from the digital world nowadays, when 100 takes can be common. Above right: The hulk of the ship *SS Great Britain* passing under Clifton Suspension Bridge on the day she returned to Bristol in 1970. Over 100,000 people lined the banks of the River Avon to see her. The hulk had been languishing in the Falklands for 37 years. Many of the timbers had rotted, but a group of determined marine architects, historians and archaeologists, with Ray a driving force, managed to salvage the vessel to complete her final voyage home. Above right: The BBC's book of the TV series, *Chronicle*, 1978, edited by Ray.