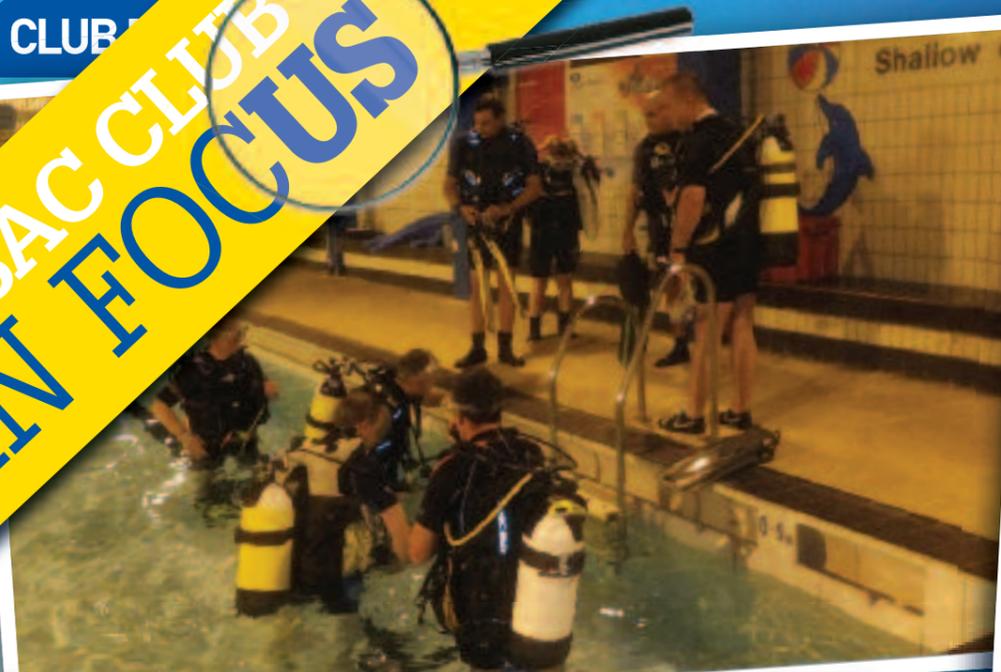


BSAC CLUB
IN FOCUS



BASILDON SUB-AQUA CLUB

There is a little corner of Essex where A-list stars go to be filmed underwater, and Basildon's divers add their own star quality to proceedings. Interview by Kristina Pedder

BASILDON

CLUB NAME
Basildon Sub-Aqua Club

LOCATION
Basildon, Essex

MEMBERSHIP FEES
£70 per year

CONTACT
info@basildonsubaqua.com

ONLINE
www.basildonsubaqua.com

MEET OUR CLUB

IN MARCH 2010, BASILDON IN ESSEX PAID homage to the famous white Hollywood sign by creating its own version. At five feet tall, the new sign is one-tenth of the height of the Hollywood original. This is part of a doubtful rejuvenation plan aimed at bringing the town into the 21st Century and attracting more visitors.

While Basildon Sub-Aqua Club hasn't gone that far, it is doing a great job of re-building the club after losing members and there's even a movie connection! When the wave of recent swimming pool refurbishments set off by the 2012 Olympics reached Basildon and the club realised what was involved, they decided to look for a new underwater home. Fortunately for them, nearby is an underwater film studio where on any working

day you might have half a chance of seeing Laura Marling, Kylie Minogue, or the Port Isaac Fisherman's Friends toggled up in oilskins and singing their hearts out at a record-breaking underwater concert. Some days you might even see a bevy of mermaids au naturel being photographed for The Daily Mail. I wonder why they chose this place for their new home? I spoke to members of the club committee to find out what's been going on.

Two years ago, club membership dropped dramatically. How did you bounce back?

Basildon Sub-Aqua Club recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. It sounds like we've always been around, but the club has undergone many changes in those 40 years, as people come and go. A couple of years ago, a large-ish group of members left the club at the same time, leaving behind a core of established divers. We decided then to make a concerted effort to attract and train new members by putting a lot of effort into our try dives. We increased our conversion rate and this year 75 per cent of try divers have joined the club and gone on to become Ocean Divers. As a result, 65 per cent of our members have joined us within the last two years.

Does the club intend to continue expanding?

Hopefully. The club is instructor rich with five Open Water Instructors and many Assistant Dive Instructors on hand to help out and we want to do more training. So, we are planning to try recruiting something like 10 to 12 new members

a year with the aim of getting membership back to its previous peak of 50 or so divers. Before we targeted doctors' waiting rooms and public places; next time will be different. We are thinking of spreading the word at local workplaces. We are also planning an application for lottery funding to buy the new equipment we need to support our new members. With more club kit we could offer better rates to lower-income trainees who may perceive the sport to be out of their reach financially.

Also, the club is discussing whether to reduce its junior intake age from 14 to 12 years of age, in line with the BSAC's minimum age to learn scuba diving. This would help the club offer a more family-oriented experience. Members are in two minds; we will debate the question at our next AGM in April.

We have also encouraged, and now have, more women instructors, which has enabled us to partner people of the same gender together for their training. This removes some of the pressures that can exist otherwise.

Open-water dives used to be well attended, but with the current financial situation we find that sometimes it's difficult to fill the boat. Training days are always well attended though. On average we have a training day once a month and two open-water dives a month. A club diver may clock up 100+ hours a year underwater, including training.

But you only have one Advanced Diver and no Advanced Instructors, so what are your Dive Leaders doing?

Well, some of us have nearly completed our Advanced Diver training but we could do with

some help. We need to contact our regional coach to see what's on offer.

Could BSAC help your club more?

Advertising! Perhaps BSAC could provide somewhere in this magazine or on the website to publicise individual clubs' try dive sessions.

You had to change your pool training venue?

We decided to relocate after the local council redeveloped our old base Gloucester Park Pool as part of a sporting village for the Olympics and it looked like we were going to get worse value for money from the new deal on offer. We found a slot at another local pool, Pitsea Swimming Pool, but it's quite small with a maximum depth of 1.7m. This wasn't quite enough for us so we looked around for something deeper. We now have an unusual set-up with access every other week to a 6m deep pool at the nearby Underwater Film Studio. So every Friday night we have a one-hour dry session and an hour's pool time and we alternate between the two venues. This enables us to offer depths of water to suit all our students.

And you have an unusual visitor?

Since January 2011, we have gladly supported local freediver Chris Holmes in his breath-hold training by giving him access to our pool sessions. He is already a winning freediver and we hope to help him progress even further this year to achieve greater and greater depths. We have had some local news coverage for this and recently Chris came along to our meeting and explained about freediving and the techniques he uses. Our members enjoyed hearing about it.

**BSAC CLUB
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BASILDON FACTFILE

The club has 36 diving members, including five BSAC Open Water Instructors. The diving membership comprises nine trainees, four Ocean

Divers, eight Sport Divers, 14 Dive Leaders and one Advanced Diver.

The club regularly runs Ocean Diver, Sports Diver and Dive Leader courses, tailored to its new members. There is a weekly social/theory training meeting for an hour before each pool session on Friday evenings. The pool training alternates between shallow water training at 8.30pm at Pitsea Swimming Pool and deep water training at 9pm at the Underwater Film Studios, in Basildon.

The club runs in-house Skill Development Courses, including all the boat-related ones. A member-owned and run compressor, and a RIB, is available for members' use.

E-mail the club at info@basildonsubaqua.com or call secretary Paul Kirkum on 07802 643734 or training officer Terry Tarling on 07887 997620.



How do you keep in touch with members?

☛ We send 'well-dones' to everyone who has completed a lesson, an exam or completed training that week. The update, by email and on our Facebook page, also tells all trainees what training they will get at the next session including the time, the place and who will be instructing them. This weekly update makes sure that everyone knows about open-water training trips, social events and also dive trips.

We also have 'equipment evenings', which our new trainees and longer-standing members find very useful. Divers bring in different types of kit and an experienced instructor talks about how to look after the equipment. Although this is touched on in books and lectures it has been really useful to get everyone involved in this during a designated evening. It helps protect club-owned equipment too.

We don't send our trainees out into the cold for their equipment shopping either. Two local dive shops, Kent Diving and Mike's at Upminster, are fantastic at helping us out here. Club instructors accompany our novice divers on fact-finding sessions where the shop staff explain what equipment is out there. When they are ready to buy their first kit, our trainees can make a much more informed choice.

Have the last few years' work paid off?

When out and about on dive trips, both here and aboard, we are often told how competent our club divers are. We all take that as a huge compliment. We believe in helping people to become not just scuba divers but very capable ones. Safety and ability go together. We pride ourselves on a friendly relaxed atmosphere, encouraging people all the time to climb up the experience ladder. Combined with a now healthy social life, we have a club full of members who join in our diving as well as the more sociable BBQs, bowling nights and much more. We need to thank all the members on the committee for their hard work as there is a lot of organising and planning that goes on behind the scenes that the members just don't see. ●



5 REASONS TO JOIN US

BSAC has 1,000+ dive and snorkelling clubs around the UK and overseas. Get in touch with your local club today and...

- 1 Train with the best via our internationally-recognised Diver Training Programme
- 2 Keep diving – we welcome all divers, whichever agency you trained with
- 3 Have fun! With a BSAC club you can dive, train and socialise with friends
- 4 Widen your diving horizons with our Skill Development Courses
- 5 Enjoy all the benefits of belonging to Britain's biggest dive club!

Check out your local BSAC club at www.bsac.com/findaclub or call 0500 947202



☛ Left: smile 'n' wave – Basildon club on tour in Newhaven
 ☛ Far left: diving the Imperial Eagle, St. Paul's Bay Malta