

Guildford Sub Aqua Club

Guildford Sub Aqua Club is BSAC branch number 53, so you can tell it is long established. But age hasn't slowed it down. Interview by **Kristina Pedder**

LOCATION: Guildford, Surrey

MEMBERSHIP FEES: £186

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📘 Guildford Sub Aqua Club



Alex Day enjoying a dive in South Cornwall

Practically all Guildford's diving takes place from two large rigid-hulled inflatable boats (RIBs). It's usually a hive of activity and with nearly 20 trips in the 2020 calendar, you can tell that members love going diving. However 2020 is going to be a different year for all divers across the world. When I spoke to the club in early March, I wanted to hear about the club's recent successes and it wasn't yet clear exactly how the novel coronavirus known as Covid-19 was going to affect us all.

Where are you based?

We meet on Tuesday evenings at the Guildford Waterside Centre beside the River Wey in the historic Surrey town of Guildford. Pool sessions take place at Guildford Spectrum Leisure Complex on the edge of the town. Many members are from the surrounding Surrey and Hampshire area. We also have distant members in France, Denmark and Malta who regularly join us for our events and diving.

How many members do you have?

At the start of 2020 we had 101 members, topping 100 for the first time in five years. Eighty per cent are diving members, the rest are social, dual club or life members. We have five junior members aged between 15 and 17; the majority fall into the 35 to 65 age range.

What kind of divers are they?

Our latest stats show: six First Class Divers; 20 Advanced Divers; 22 Dive Leaders; 24 Sports Divers; 12 Ocean Divers; and 15 OD trainees. We have 10 more divers doing Dive Leader training and four prepping for First Class Diver.

That is a fairly unusual distribution of diver grades...

Yes, we have a lot of First Class Divers, Advanced Divers, Dive Leaders and Instructors. We are lucky to have a strong core group of members who are always making things happen. We have recently had a large influx of Ocean Divers, which is fantastic news, and we also have a

number of tech divers so the area of interest we cater for is broad. We are keen to attract divers from all ages and levels. It's non-stop at Guildford BSAC.

How do you keep in touch with members?

A weekly 'Diving Officer's Shout' takes place by email every Tuesday to give current news, updates and reminders. WhatsApp is used for coordinating training groups and trips. We also have a social media presence, with public and private Facebook pages.

What training do you offer?

We have access to a shallow pool and a deeper four-metre pool too: ideal for all types of training. We run diver-grade training over the winter and then do the associated open-water training as soon as possible after that. At present we encourage all our Ocean Divers to do Sports Diver training automatically. Also our instructors continually run Skill Development Courses, such



Members loading the RIBs at Porthkerris



A sunny day and a RIB full of happy divers – what more do you want?

as mixed-gas blending, advanced decompression procedures, chartwork and navigation. We also do training for maintaining our trailers (not a BSAC course but very popular).

What does your instructor team look like?

We have: two National Instructors; six Advanced Instructors (and four assistant AIs); 13 Open Water Instructors (and two assistant OWIs); three Theory Instructors; 10 Assistant Diving Instructors. Our NIs also work in regional teams and a group of instructors, including our Training Officer, work on the national Instructor Training Scheme. Snorkelling is something we are working on at the moment: some members have recently qualified as Snorkel Instructors and we wish to build the membership.

Where do you go for open-water diver training?

We visit quarries, such as Vobster Quay, Wraysbury Dive Centre and Cromhall Diving Centre, but on most of our sea dive trips someone is receiving training, especially at the higher grades.

What has the club achieved in the past year?

It's been an exciting year for Guildford BSAC. We completed numerous training courses over the winter months, with lots of members achieving Sports Diver and Dive Leader grades. And we were a hive of activity all year round. We ran a full and active social calendar, as we love to have fun in and out of the water. We have quiz nights and race nights that help to raise money for new kit and more recently a brand new engine. We regularly invite

visiting speakers to give talks: last year we had a brilliant presentation by Mark Paisley about his incredible expedition to find the Highball bouncing bomb, and one of our members who raced in the Clipper Round the World Race shared his pain and pleasure in a presentation.

What do you do in the wider community?

Guildford BSAC supports local charities by entering the Guildford Lions Raft Race every July. The past two years we have won a prize; it's a great family day out and is very popular, although the crew get soaked with water bombs. We also organise an annual RNLI day, when we take the boats into the middle of Guildford High Street for fundraising and to raise awareness. The public always gives very kindly to this great charity that



Training at Guildford's Spectrum diving pool



Members practising rope work at the clubhouse

is so important to divers, and the boats are a huge source of interest for budding scuba divers. It's also a great way to raise awareness of the diving club within Guildford.

How frequently do you dive?

Our year planner for 2020 shows at least two dive trips a month throughout the season. In 2019, we achieved 893 dives, and we had 60 individuals diving.

What does your diving calendar look like?

We dive all year round, but the bulk of the diving takes place from April to October. We visit the South Coast, from Porthkerris in Cornwall to Selsey in Sussex. But we also venture out to Lundy Island off the north Devon coast, plus St Abbs and Seahouses in the North East. The majority of the diving within the club is recreational, but we do have a growing number of members doing technical diving with a handful of them on rebreathers. Most club diving is from the club RIBs.



Sarah and Lizzie raising money for the RNLI in Guildford High Street



A view of Dartmouth while out with Falcon Diving Charters

Do you book any charter boats?

In 2020, we only have four hard boat charters booked. Last year, for example, the club took part in Normandy 75 aboard Skin Deeper. This was an ambitious BSAC diving event that aimed to bring together clubs and divers over the space of a week in the summer to dive some of the war wrecks lying off Normandy's beaches to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings. Members also took part in Scapa 100 on a trip to Scapa Flow to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the scuttling of the German High Seas fleet.

Tell us about the club boats...

We have two RIBs a 6.5m Humber and a 7.5m Tornado, one with a single engine and one twin-engined. We manage our resources carefully, there is always some kit or something that needs to be bought for one of the boats, and our equipment team works tirelessly in the boat shed mending and fixing things. We had planned to take a boat on the inaugural Thames Boat Run on the 18 April, which would have been a fun day out, but coronavirus put a stop to that.

Coronavirus has disrupted club activities all over the world

We are all thinking differently now, but what were you planning for the future?

Our aim as a club is to increase our membership for all ages, to train more instructors, to have even more dive

trips. We are fortunate to have everything a club could wish for and with committed members, a great venue to meet in, and two boats to dive from, we are ideally placed to achieve it.

Since the coronavirus struck, we have been active in safeguarding our members; our Diving Officer cancelled training shortly before BSAC sent out the advice to cancel pool training. We are, however, going to carry on and do all the lectures for our students using online facilities. Once we are allowed to, we'll fit in the pool sessions and practical lessons. We know some our trips have been cancelled, but when we can, we want to go diving again and support the industries that enable us to enjoy our seas. 📍



Chris Rickard and Philippa Elliott on the way to Normandy



Brothers James and Cian Hughes at Vobster



Lorna Nye swaps cylinders in Pembrokeshire