

The British Sub-Aqua Club

21st Anniversary Banquet



Guildhall, City of London
Monday, November 18, 1974

President

His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, KG

Chairman

Derek F. M. Cockbill

Guests of Honour

The Earl Mountbatten of Burma, KG, PC

Lord Richie-Calder of Balmashannar

Lord Wakefield of Kendall

Denis Howell, MP, Minister for Sport and Recreation

Dr Roger Bannister, CBE, Chairman of the Sports Council

Walter Winterbottom, CBE, Director of the Sports Council

Captain G. D. Trist, RN, Captain, HMS Vernon

Captain N. Dixon, RN, Director RNLI

Commander J. A. Douglas, MBE RN Retd, Chief Inspector, HM Coastguards

and

Harry Secombe, CBE

To celebrate the 21st anniversary of formation of The British Sub Aqua Club members were invited to The Guild Hall, City of London, on the 18th November 1974. Tony Aylmer, then Chairman of Torbay Branch informed us he would be attending. We asked around our friends in ECSAC and there was no interest. Ann and I had been members for 10 years at this time I held joint membership with Torbay. We were both fascinated with club national activities, having attended several AGM meetings and conferences around the UK. These were all well attended and to a very high standard, and this sounded like a Must Attend party, so we paid our dues and joined Tony at The Guild Hall.

Guildhall



Then a problem Occurred! The Guild Hall reception area was damaged by an IRA explosive device and repairs were incomplete for the evening reception. A separate reception was arranged at the Mansion House, this was a bonus as far as we were concerned, we enjoyed drinks and meeting friends then moved to dinner and more friends at The Guild Hall.

The atmosphere was wonderful, enhanced by the humour of Harry Secombe who proposed a Toast to The British Sub Aqua Club. At the end of the formal speeches Prince Charles informed us that a new BSAC anthem had been arranged and would be performed for the first time by Mr. Secombe accompanied by the trumpeters and musicians of The Band of the Grenadier Guards. With great ceremony and a fanfare of trumpets Harry Secombe sang "We're forever blowing bubbles". It brought the house down.



HARRY SECOMBE.

The BSAC annual general meetings prior to the anniversary banquet were held in various towns around the UK. They were combined with weekend conference and equipment

exhibitions. Attendance was very high, and they became “Must Attend” for Ann, Me, Stewart and Gwen Davidson. The first we attended was at Blackpool, followed by a number of visits to Brighton. Brighton AGM’s were quickly incorporated into “The Brighton Conference. Famous diver visitors Worldwide attended these functions, including Hans Hass, Ron and Valerie Taylor, Rodney Fox and many others.

After the “Jaws” film Ron and Valerie Taylor became infamous for their ruthless massacre of hundreds of sharks and many film clips were shown with them using Bang Sticks, (a shot gun cartridge and firing pin on the end of a pole, the explosion killed the sharks instantly) Public opinion soon turned to anger at this killing and the pair turned gamekeeper and produced some excellent shark films, many of which were shown at the BSAC conferences. They dressed Valerie in a chain mail suit and attracted sharks with fish tied to her arms to measure the jaw pressure of a shark bite. This went wrong when without the suit a White Tip Shark took a bite out of her calf muscle on film.

Rodney Fox survived a Great White Shark attack whilst spear fishing. He told us of his series of miracles that saved his life, complete with graphic descriptions of the attacks which left him with a wound across his back which required 462 stitches to fit him together. He harpooned a fish and fixed it to a line attached to a belt with quick release buckle. He was aiming at another fish, left arm raised and spear gun aimed in his right hand when the shark attacked his left rib cage below his arm. After the attack the shark released him and came back for another attack. He surfaced and understandably screamed, this attracted the attention of the occupants of a nearby speedboat. The second attack was head on and he hit the shark in it’s eye, his other arm entered the sharks mouth, this was released after the blow to the eye. The shark then took the fish he had attached to his belt and towed him underwater. The quick release buckle was pulled to the rear and he was unable to reach it, then fortunately he managed to reach the buckle and surfaced.

Then his three miracles started. The speed boat was alongside, and he was lifted aboard and laid on the deck. The boat drove up the adjoining beach at high speed and stopped next to a Land Rover. He was lifted aboard the Land Rover and driven at high speed to a local hospital. A specialist surgeon was in the hospital, off duty and visiting a sick friend. He immediately took control and repaired all the damage Rod had received. He was discharged from hospital within a week and within weeks had recovered sufficiently to carry on his business as an Abalone Diver. I asked him if he had seen any more, Great Whites! He had, he said he quietly swam back to the boat, drove home and had a drink or ten! He went on to build the first usable shark cage and organizes shark viewing expeditions. His boat and shark cage were used in the filming of the live shark scenes in the Jaws Film. They used a small man, a jockey and qualified diver, to film the shark cage scene and give the impression of a bigger shark. The shark became entangled with the cage which broke loose and sank to the sea bed. When Fox arrived on deck he found red liquid all around. Fortunately, the Mini Diver was still in the cage and the “Blood” turned out to be red hydraulic fluid from the winch hoses severed when the cage broke free. The resultant film of this accident was so dramatic it was left in the film.

The most memorable AGM and conference weekend we attended was held in Edinburgh. As usual the Heywood – Davidson team attended, this time joined by other ECSAC members. The AGM completed, discussions on future BSAC training and equipment developments were discussed. The Chairman, Derek Cockbill, presented a proposal for the club to buy a live aboard boat, to be made available at branch level for more advanced diving opportunities. The boat proposed was an MFV with accommodation for 12 divers plus crew. I opposed the proposal, suggesting that a beach and launching facilities could be bought on the south coast for a similar price and would accommodate many more divers. The proposal was adjourned for further discussion. The further discussion resulted in the purchase of “British Diver”.