**In at the Deep End**

**By Leon Horton**

When I’m adrift in the backstreets of Chorlton, often dredging my mind for the title for an article, I sometimes notice things for the first time. What? There’s a road called Robert Shaw Avenue? Anyone who’s a fan of *Jaws* (and we are legion) knows why that name has me reaching for my camera. I, for one, am still afraid to go into the water.

But if you’re not afraid of the water (or even if you are) then you might be interested to learn of another aquatic-related landmark on our dry shores - the Manchester Diving Group. Moored alongside Chorlton bus station, this mock Tudor building has long held a fascination for me: What goes on in there? Is it a pool or something?

Well, thanks to a recent visit, I can now reveal all. And the short answer is: no, it’s not a pool. What it is, though, is a clubhouse and licensed bar, walls adorned with marine life and maritime booty (much of which has been reclaimed from the sea by their own members); and what they offer is the opportunity to learn how to scuba dive.

The history of the club, formerly known as The Sunlight House Divers, is a long and fascinating one reaching back to World War II. After the war, servicemen who had been trained to dive by the military continued to pursue the activity in civilian life, and in 1950 - with interest from the public growing - the first incarnation of MDG was set up.

However, with rationing still affecting all aspects of everyday life, there was so little money available that members had to make their own wetsuits, and even fashioned oxygen tanks from old gas cylinders. Thankfully, that’s all in the past and these days the club provides all the latest gear (bar the wetsuit) and training for any budding Jacques Cousteaus out there.

The training schedule, which was adopted by the British Sub Aqua Club, starts with basic underwater skills at Chorlton Baths - before moving on to inland ‘quarry diving’ at Eccleston Delph, a five star diving facility in Lancashire. After that, the seabed is your oyster as you head out into open waters and visit some of the most famous diving sites available.

Did you know that the Titanic’s sister ship, the Oceanic, lies two miles off the coast of Scotland? Or that the forerunner to the Cutty Sark, the Normancourt, sank in less than three metres off Anglesey? The Manchester Diving Group do. They’ve been to both.

And if you start training now, you could be down there with them on one of their next excursions, both here and abroad. All they ask is that you’re over 18 (16 with parental consent) and that you’re in reasonably good health. Who knows? You might even find some treasure.

If you’d like to become a member of MDG and learn how to scuba dive or simply join as a non-diving associate, you can contact the club on 0161 881 9050 or visit their website at: manchesterdiving.org.uk