



Andy Torbet hosts a Q&A with the RNLI



Lieutenant Jen Smith

Safety at sea

After the coffee break, Andy Torbet hosted a lively Q&A session with three operational members of RNLI crews. Saving lives at sea relies on finding lost persons and the questions revealed three key messages. First, you need to make yourself visible: wear bright colours, carry a flag, or use your surface-marker buoy to be as tall as you can on the surface. Ultimately carrying a personal locator beacon is ideal, and the RNLI is happy to advise on the technicalities. Second, the sooner you call in the coastguard the better; the search area will be smaller and no one's minds being stood down. Finally, drifting with the tide rather than fighting it gives the crew the best chance of predicting where to find you.

Due respect

Next up, Royal Navy liaison officer Lieutenant Jen Smith. Jen was part of

the team that surveyed HMS Royal Oak, in the 80th year since its sinking by a German U-boat in the Navy's safest wartime harbour in Scapa Flow, during the Second World War. Protected as a war grave, the 30,000-tonne ship (bigger than the nearby SMS Markgraf) lies at 32m. You need a licence to dive it, and as a result of infrequent diving it is in extraordinary condition.

In visibility of two to 20 metres, divers recorded the wreck in photos, video and photogrammetry, generating terabytes of data to analyse. Jen showed the audience how close examination of the original plans led to identification of objects large and small, from the ship's armament to personal effects of the sailors onboard. The images were truly stunning. The aim of the work is to document and raise the profile of the Royal Oak, now that the last survivor has passed away. "You can't remember what you can't see," Jen said.

TV eye

James Honeyborne was the Executive Producer of *Blue Planet II* and led a presentation on the so-called 'Blue Planet effect' of increased interest in conservation. He talked about the challenges of different types of underwater filmmaking, and won the Conference's attention with a clip of immense sixgill sharks bumping a submersible that was trying to film them. He was joined on the stage by three colleagues, one of whom was SCUBA's regular columnist Sarah Conner. Sarah spoke about her origins as an ice diver, which brought her into contact with like-minded divers such as Andy Torbet. She managed to disgust everyone with some Halloween-appropriate footage of a bobbit worm attacking fish. James and Sarah are both involved in a new *Oceans* series currently being produced for Netflix, as *Blue Planet II* had generated an increased public demand for blue chip natural history series.



Post-Conference drinks courtesy of blue o two

Post-Conference fun

After the Conference, all attendees were treated to a free drink courtesy of sponsors blue o two (see left), and had time to admire the sunset from the venue's panoramic windows.

The fun didn't stop there, as a wine-tasting event at the nearby Hilton was then hosted by Sea Change, a new range of ethically-sourced, environmentally-conscious wines that support ocean conservation. Then it was time for the dinner and the BSAC Awards – see pages 24-25. ●



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