



THE FALL AND RISE OF THE SEASIDE LIDO

They're back! After years of decline, restored open-air coastal swimming pools are attracting flocks of bathers keen to take an exhilarating summer dip. **Rosee Woodland** celebrates the revival of a retro pleasure

Imagine a swimming pool with a difference. Instead of a shallow chlorinated puddle, the water is deep and crystal clear, with a salty tang. The changing room doors are painted in bright, primary colours and face onto the deck with bravado.

As you step down the art deco terraces, a fountain heralds your arrival, catching the sunlight to throw a rainbow arc over the water.

The pool itself is round, or triangular, or just simply vast. The azure water might be warm, or might feel absolutely freezing, but one thing is certain – the view will be spectacular. Welcome to the British seaside lido.

Once, our glorious coastal pools were squandered, left to crumble after decades of neglect. Happily, the tide is finally turning and this summer there's no excuse to miss an alfresco dip.



ABOVE A 1935 poster celebrates the opening of Jubilee Pool in Penzance, Cornwall

TOP On a sunny day, bathers take a dip in Jubilee Pool, which was restored to its former glory in 1994

At the height of lido culture, Britain had more than 300 outdoor pools. The trend really took off in the 1930s, influenced by Germany's Volksparks, which were dedicated to healthy outdoor pursuits. Lidos gave coastal communities a sociable, open air place to swim, protected from the rigours of the harsh sea.

ART LIDO

Lido architects employed in-vogue reinforced concrete to create clean, ultra-modern facades painted in dazzling white. Many were art deco classics, from **Jubilee Pool**, which stuck out like a ship's prow from the harbour in Penzance, to **Saltdean** near Brighton, with its neon signage and large sundecks. Crowds flocked to swim in outdoor pools peppered along the British coast; at Hayle, Barry, Margate, Plymouth, Hastings, Exmouth, Grange-over-Sands, and even Gourrock and Stonehaven in Scotland.

Hilsea Lido in Portsmouth was practically a resort, replete with putting green, tennis courts, and miniature railway. At the **Super Swimming Stadium** in Morecambe, a queue of people a mile long waited to surge through the gates on opening day in 1936.

However, the heyday was short-lived. After shutting during the Second World War, many pools were slow to reopen, if at all. The advent

of cheap package holidays in the 1960s saw attendance drop off and triggered a downward spiral of under-investment, and closures that continued for 30 years.

By the time the Thirties Society sounded the alarm, publishing *Farewell My Lido* in 1991, the number of lidos and outdoor pools nationwide had plummeted to about 100.

But all was not lost. In 1999, Roger Deakin's *Waterlog*, a chronicle of the wildlife writer's swimming odyssey across Britain, reminded readers of the unique beauty of the lidos.

Deakin argued: "Lidos are to swimming pools as lingerie is to underwear. Their outrageous fountains and curvaceous terraces celebrate the exuberant beauty of the water they frame, so that a special sense of freedom comes over you when you stand poised to plunge in."

Waterlog helped kickstart a national trend for outdoor swimming and sparked renewed interest in preserving the great outdoor pools that remained. Soon there were new success stories. Plymouth's art deco **Tinside Lido** had lain derelict for 10 years in 2003 when, on the heels of a campaign that secured Grade II listing for the pool, the city council pushed through £3.4million plans to restore it.

Councillor Kevin Wiggins said: "The lido was such an important feature, in an inspirational setting, that it wasn't just about how many



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people swam in it. It was about investing in the infrastructure and beauty of the city.”

Further west, retired county architect John Clarke had waged a one-man war to halt plans for a ‘fun park’ at Cornwall’s Jubilee Pool. The planners saw sense and the pool was restored to its former glory, reopening in 1994. When Jubilee suffered huge storm damage in February 2014 and was forced to close, campaigners worked with the local authority to secure £3million for repairs, much coming from the Coastal Communities Lottery Fund.

LOCAL GENE POOL

Martin Nixon, chairman of the Friends of Jubilee, said the pool had a special place in the community: “Generations of local people have met there. Kids play tag, get older and fall in love there. We have had four or five generations of the same family swimming there together.

“The pool provides safe sea water swimming for young and old. And it is a listed building of great importance – the best example of art deco modernism, in terms of architectural merit, in the country.” A new section heated by geothermal energy is set to open next year.

Saltdean Lido teetered on the brink for decades. When investors revealed plans to build flats on the site, the Save Saltdean Lido campaign lobbied English Heritage to upgrade



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
Saltdean Lido thronged in 1964; it later fell into disrepair; the restoration of **Tinside Lido** has been a success; a 1941 poster for **Dovercourt Bay Lido** (now closed); the art deco **Tinside Lido**

its listed status to Grade II* and the council took back control. Local residents created a business plan and secured £2.5 million from the Coastal Communities Fund and £4.7 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to restore it. Saltdean reopens this summer and is to be heated for the first time.

Saltdean Community Interest Company chairwoman Rebecca Crook said: “We’re completely dedicated to the lido’s success and not letting anything get in our way to do that. The community are really behind us.”

Portishead, Hilsea and Stonehaven pools were also all threatened but pulled through thanks to vocal community campaigners and volunteers who now help out with staffing and maintenance. Barbara Thatcher from **Portishead Open Air Pool** said: “Swimming outdoors is a really special experience. And there is safety here because swimming in the Bristol Channel is really dangerous. We love it. It’s absolutely packed out on a sunny day.”



LEFT & BELOW Locals are campaigning to restore Tynemouth Outdoor Pool **ABOVE** Stonehaven's lido in Aberdeenshire uses heated water from the North Sea

But not all lidos had a happy ending. Along with Morecambe's Super Swimming Stadium, the South Bathing Pools at Scarborough and Open Air Baths in Blackpool are gone. Exmouth Seaside Bathing Pool was replaced with an indoor facility and the Bathing Pool at St Leonards is now just a grassy field.

Elsewhere, the battle continues. Tynemouth campaigners have raised £150,000 towards reopening their pool but the project is expected to cost £5 million. Spokesman Barry Bell said: "Tynemouth is responsible for thousands of memories, from visitors spending their summer holidays by the pool to locals



making the weekly pilgrimage for school swimming lessons. It's incredibly important to make sure those stories live on."

The fate of many other pools remains uncertain. Some are little more than a shell, others are fenced off but still filled with water, and used illicitly. Thankfully, the number of success stories is on the rise. At **Stonehaven Outdoor Pool**, the most northern lido in the UK, volunteers have been scrubbing and painting to get it shipshape for the summer season. This month sees the pool's annual Aqua Kaylee, held during Stonehaven Folk Festival, with swimmers dancing the 'Drip the



NOW SWIM IN A SEASIDE LIDO

Most pools are open seasonally so check their timings

HAYLE SWIMMING POOL CORNWALL

Sitting next to Hayle's sub-tropical gardens, the pool makes a refreshing stop on a day out, with Hayle Estuary Nature Reserve nearby. The pool has a new solar cover to help raise its temperature. **01736 752568, bit.ly/2rJ298s**

HILSEA POOL PORTSMOUTH, HAMPSHIRE

Britain's best swimmers trained at Hilsea for the 1936 Berlin Olympics. At 67m long and 4.5m (the deepest pool in the UK), it's still popular with serious swimmers. There is also a splash pool for children. **07903 823347, hilsea-lido.org.uk**

JUBILEE POOL PENZANCE, CORNWALL

Jubilee's triangular shape helps it withstand the wind and wave power from the surrounding seas. There is a shallow children's section, café and terraces. It is unheated, so prepare for a bracing saltwater dip. **01736 369224, jubileepool.co.uk**

LYMINGTON SEAWATER BATHS HAMPSHIRE

A 110m seawater pool with the focus on fun. Activities include inflatable obstacle courses, aqua jousting, stand-up paddle boarding, kayaking and water zorbing. There is a sandpit and children's splash pool. **01590 678882, lymingtonseawaterbaths.org.uk**

PORTISHEAD OPEN AIR POOL NORTH SOMERSET

Families in Portishead won a 99-year lease to run their pool and the whole community pitched in to

restore it. There is now a stylish café on site, and an impressive queue outside on sunny days. There is also a toddler pool. **01275 843454, portisheadopenairpool.org.uk**

SALTDEAN LIDO EAST SUSSEX

With a pop-up cafe and sunbathing terraces, Saltdean is on its way back to its glorious heyday. There will be a full programme of events this summer, including live music. It was due to reopen as we went to press. **saltdeanlido.co.uk/ info@saltdeanlido.co.uk**

STONEHAVEN HEATED OPEN AIR SWIMMING POOL ABERDEENSHIRE

The heart of the community, the pool even holds in-pool Scottish dancing during the Stonehaven Folk Festival. The seawater is heated to a cosy 29°C, making it beautifully

Willow' and the 'Splashing White Sergeant'.

Pete Hill, chairman of Friends of Stonehaven said: "It's a day when we get everybody in there, from kids to grannies. There is a lot of love for the pool. Some of the volunteers I work with remember it from when they were kids. At least one of them actually helped build the thing."

Volunteering is one thing, but does he actually swim there? "Yes, it's wonderful. We get lots of people in there but it doesn't seem to feel crowded just because it's so big! When you are in there, all your troubles just float away."

That sounds like a swimming experience too glorious to resist. Let's dive in! ☺

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Many outdoor pools rely on volunteers and donations so why not contact your nearest one to see how you can help. Portishead Open Air Pool's Janet Wilkinson and Emma Pusill are creating the *Lido Guide*, to gather information about all the UK's outdoor pools in one place. Find its crowd-funding scheme at unbound.com/books/lidoguide



Rosee Woodland is a freelance writer and swim coach with a penchant for freediving and fast-running rivers. She loves cold water but isn't quite ready to let go of her wetsuit.

warm, despite its position as the most northerly outdoor pool in the British Isles. **01569 762134**, stonehavenopenairpool.co.uk

TEIGNMOUTH DEVON

Built in the 1970s, Teignmouth is a newer facility than most of the UK's outdoor pools and is heated. It runs fun sessions with inflatables, and holds club training most evenings. **01626 779063**, bit.ly/2rJ7b4F

TINSIDE LIDO PLYMOUTH, DEVON

A stunning semi-circular saltwater pool, 50m in diameter, with three fountains to play in, this commands a spectacular view over Plymouth Hoe. **01752 261915**, everyoneactive.com/centre/tinside-lido/ Plymouth's second coastal pool, Mount Wise offers free entry. **01752 306265**, everyoneactive.com/centre/mount-wise-swimming-pools



TIDAL POOLS

If you fancy a wilder swim, there are some glorious tidal pools around the UK...

- Clevedon Marine Lake, North Somerset
- Walpole Bay Pool, Margate
- The Trinkie, Wick, Caithness
- Priest's Cove Pool, Cape Cornwall, Cornwall
- Bude, Summerleaze Beach, Cornwall
- The Rock Pool, Westward Ho! Bideford, Devon
- Dancing Ledge, Swanage
- Shoalstone Pool, Brixham, Devon

BEE-LICIOUS

Tom Hart Dyke waxes lyrical about honey varieties, inspired by his work in the 'World Garden and Sunbites' tasty new Honey Glazed Barbecue Flavour

Where are all the bees without bees? As far as we know, they are everywhere. They are still pollinating, pollinating 70% of the 100 most popular crops and 90% of the other 100 most popular. In a world where other bees are still 2,000 bees a bush, and for every pound of honey produced, around 10,000 bees die as a result - not to mention the environmental impact of the planet.

When he only in the World Garden of Sunbites collection - Chilli, you know these bees have been containing 200,000 bees in total. The honey gets delicious things - you can really taste the flowers of the different continents.

These plants in particular will be used to help to get a little bit of honey, which introduces to all sorts of different honey varieties - flowers, which adds light and dry honey tones, and it's bringing a variety of different to the profile. The fly is involved in some of these honey varieties, and it's good to understand the different varieties.

In the meantime, top specialist of Beehive's still have Honey - Glass of Barbecue Flavour. Full of all sorts of ingredients and natural flavours, they're ideal for grilling in the sunbites.



Tom Hart Dyke

SUNBITES
Honey Glazed Barbecue Flavour

100% NATURAL
THE ORIGINAL BARBECUE FLAVOUR
WITH NO ADDED SUGAR
100% BEEHIVE