



Newsletter of the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association

Welcome to the Summer Newsletter

- Lucy Zanetti, Judith Perle and Cathy Peake

Welcome to our new team, Judith, Cathy and Lucy will be producing the KLPA newsletter together with even more vigour and excitement than before! We have some international content from visitors which will stretch your eyes. And get you thinking of all the lovely places you would like to share with us.

A lot has been going on this half year. Let's see what we have in the following pages.



- photo credit to Sybil

This flamboyant fruity hedgehog set the tone for the year celebrating International Women's day.

Celebration time

As you may (or may not) know, we have two anniversaries coming up in the not-too-distant future. Firstly, the KLPA will be 40 years old next year, in 2025. And the following year, 2026, the Ladies Pond will celebrate its centenary.

For more info about the KLPA click [here](#)

The committee has started thinking about ways to celebrate – the KLPA celebrations will be entirely ours, but the City of London will be involved in the Centenary. We would welcome your thoughts, suggestions – and offers of help. The Committee won't be able to organise everything, so we'll need some volunteers.

Some of the ideas already under consideration:

- A party (obviously)
- A photographic exhibition
- Celebratory mugs, towels and other merchandise
- A festival of swimming films
- An art exhibition
- Recipe book

Do get in touch, by emailing [here](#) with the heading 'celebrations' before the end of July.

Dates for your diary

- July 28th – merchandise sale
- August 25th – merchandise sale
- Sept 22nd – merchandise sale + an equinox breakfast
- Oct 27th – merchandise sale
- Nov 24th – merchandise sale
- Dec 22nd – merchandise sale + a solstice breakfast



- photo credit to Ruth Corney

This is such a fabulous photo we had to slip it in, from the races at the lido party on the 15th of June.

KLPA Chairs' Newsletter Report

- Pauline Latchem (Co-Chair) and Ruth Hallgarten (Co-Chair)



- Photomontage credit to Pauline

Summer is in full swing though you would be forgiven for doubting it, given the current cold wet weather. Following the AGM in March the new committee have been busy organising events, attending meetings with the City, revisiting the Archive at Bishopsgate, and gathering ideas for celebrating the Ladies' Pond centenary and the KLPA's 40th birthday.

The International Women's Day, Spring Equinox and Summer Solstice breakfasts were hugely successful and enjoyable – a big thank you to Sybil for overseeing the organisation and for all of those who were involved in cheerfully and efficiently setting up, serving, and clearing up.

The Solstice event also incorporated the official opening of the KLPA shed by Jane Shallice, previous KLPA Chair. Jane gave a wonderful speech about her love of the pond and the challenges faced since she started swimming here in 1962.

Quite a number of Ladies' Pond swimmers attended the very busy breakfast and swim at the Men's pond and also summer evening parties at the Lido. We thank HMPA, the Mixed Pond Association and the PHLUG for their generosity in organising these events.

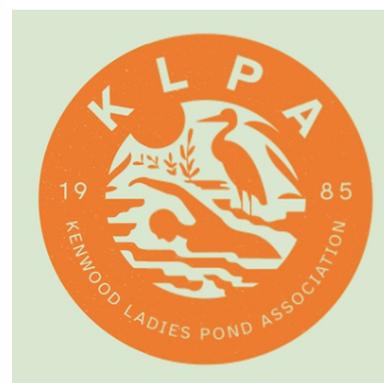
Our monthly pond stalls continue to be successful, though make very small profit - we have fought for some years to keep prices as low as possible, but rising wholesale prices mean we will need to increase the costs of some merchandise. We hope to have a deal where you can buy 4 items for a reduction, and that you will still consider the prices fair.

The Wild Swimming Walks are currently being revisited & reviewed - many thanks to Beth for overseeing this and all those swimmers who have volunteered to walk and update information.

Here is the moment of hand-over, passing the gavel from Beth To Ruth, the new co-chair.



Last but not least, thank you to Lucy, Cathy and Judith for putting together this newsletter - we hope you will find much to enjoy.



Swim, Aunty, Swim! - by Vanessa Barker

I was delighted when I saw a play advertised which combined two subjects I'd not seen put together before - African middle-aged women and swimming. Even though it meant leaving my beloved London, and trekking to Coventry, I was determined to go. So, in May, I dragged my dear friend Mary (who first dragged me, an African middle aged woman, to the Ladies' pond over a decade ago) to share the experience. The play was [Swim, Aunty, Swim! at the Belgrade Theatre](#) written by Siana Bangura and directed by Madeleine Kludje.



- (Photo Credit: Belgrade Theatre)

The play is set in a local swimming pool where a group of West African Aunties, church friends of a "certain age", come together for weekly training sessions with their instructor Danny. First Aunty Ama and Aunty Blessing attend the sessions as new, nervous swimmers. Later they are joined, reluctantly, by Aunty Fatu who is the more experienced swimmer. All three women, (respectively from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) are dealing with their own grief, loss and loneliness due to domestic abuse, police brutality and migration. Over many weeks' training sessions, they find joy and friendship in the water and educate Danny in the process.

The other two women don't know it but Aunty Ama has entered them all into an open water swimming relay event. After their initial reluctance (and infuriation with their friend) the other two women agree to take part and work towards this challenge. In a final twist, the open water swimming event nearly turns into a tragedy, but Aunty Fatu comes good and saves her friend Aunty Ama from nearly drowning. The play took us through laughter, grief and exultation as the women found healing in the water. I liked how the play brought in African

spirituality in the guise of Mama Wata, an African spiritual power. She has many characteristics – malevolent and benevolent. Amongst her many roles is protector of mothers - something she does when she brings healing to all three aunties and she uses Aunty Fatu to save Aunty Ama.



- Cast members Karlina Grace-Pasada (Blessing), Anni Domingo (Fatu), Evelyn Duah (Ama), Sam Baker-Jones (Danny) (Photo Credit: Belgrade Theatre)

I thought of my own, initially hesitant, experiences of swimming at the Ladies' Pond over a decade ago, when I was not convinced of the wisdom of being there! As I took the plunge though, I relished the sense of endless water, without boundaries. I could understand Aunty Fatu's instinct to keep swimming at the open water event, and not stop at the end of her lap. I loved the lack of boundaries and parameters at the Ladies' Pond, but knew I had to come back to the deck eventually. Even on the cold days, or perhaps especially on the cold days, I had a sense of stepping outside myself, and of not wanting the experience to end. Perhaps this was Mama Wata working her magic!

Mary and I managed to speak to the playwright after the production and urged her to consider open water swimming, explaining all the expensive kit is unnecessary. Siana explained that the cast had rehearsed in a swimming pool and true to her casting Anni Domingo (Aunty Fatu) was the strongest swimmer of the three women. We also asked when the play would be transferring to London, so that we could see it again and encourage our friends to attend. That is yet to be confirmed... A visit to Coventry could not finish without visiting the old and new Cathedrals, a reminder of war and monuments to peace and reconciliation.

So, if *Swim, Aunty, Swim!* does come to London, do go along and share the journey!

Hold Out Your Hand - by Lisa Phelps

Hold out your hand
Accept the offering of raindrops
They fall one-by-one from the sky
But then cling together in your hand
Making a puddle by cohesion

Hold out your hand
Accept the offering of friendship
Women coming one-by-one to the Pond
But then clasping another's hand
Building a community through connection

The Ladies Pond, supported by many hands
Is renewed by raindrops
Allowing women of all ages
To stick together
Leaving no one to sink, alone



Painting of the Kingfisher by Wenke Reitz

There are these lucky moments: sighting a kingfisher whizzing by in high speed, giving us a blur of blue which then disappears "Did you see it?" "What?"

But one day when I was swimming with my daughter, the kingfisher sat down on a branch overlooking the water and stayed. We admired its beautiful colours; not only the blue, but also its characteristic copper chest. What a magnificent profile; it swung its beak around as if it was looking at us and all the other swimmers. This is one of those special moments, where we can feel the synergy between ourselves and nature. We treasured it. And then it flew away and we continued our swim... enriched...

- Wenke Reitz

Patches of shade & cool - by Olivia Howden

Gone are the invigorating, challenging Spring dips
Replaced with longer swims, jumps, dives and flips
The sun is out, air is warm, summer is finally here at last
Thank goodness for the pond & fields for us to bathe & bask
Constant strong rays of the sun, some days relentless
The lifeguards again protecting us all, commend this
Remember to say thanks, they are watching out for us all
So many bodies swimming in a space we can all be free
While their steely eyes roam the water of 20+ degrees
The queues have begun but worth everyone benefitting
Wait patiently, we'll all get in, thunderstorms not permitting
To then watch the damselflies dance, dragonflies dart
Juvenile ducks seeking feed, becoming savvy & smart
After such a long winter, grey skies, cold swims
To now seek the tree shade and to freshen the skin
So next time while waiting to get in with splashes
You're almost there to bathe, languor and relish cool patches

A Visit from our Friends in the Netherlands - by Brigitte Kant

When we came to visit the Lady's Ponds, we were invited to write a small piece for your newsletter. We feel honored about that!

We are a group of around thirty women from Holland, living in and around the city of Utrecht. *(in the centre of the Netherlands below Amsterdam)*. We all love winter swimming and that is why we came to visit the Pond..

A bit of history about our group. We have a natural pool named De Kikker (English translation: the frog) in Groenekan, a small village near Utrecht. De Kikker is a pool, originally built as an official swimming pool, in a part of the canal around a historic fortress. It looks a bit like the Ladies Pond and is already a hundred years old.



We love swimming there over the summer but unfortunately it is only open from half May until the beginning of September.



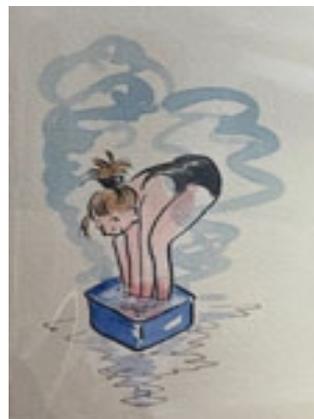
A few years ago, a small group of women thought that it would be nice to continue outdoor swimming during the winter. This is how we started our hobby: in a pool next to the pool. No cabins, no showers, just the wind and rain whenever the weather is bad. But we manage; it's not always raining and windy...

Over the years, more and more women joined in. At the moment we have a WhatsApp-group where we make daily appointments to go

swimming, we mainly decide on the time depending on the weather.

We heard of the documentary about The Ponds, watched it and decided to organize a trip to London to see if it was anything like the fairytale it looked like.

With a group of 13 women we came to visit you in the beginning of March and it was an amazing experience: The Pond is magical! Although it was raining, we walked 45 minutes to get there and this felt like a pilgrimage to us. For four days we enjoyed your lovely pool.

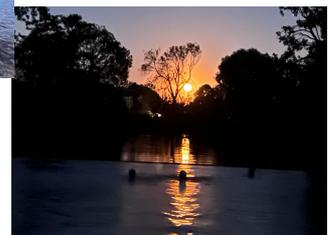


Thank you, to the staff and swimmers, for giving us such a warm and friendly welcome. We have really enjoyed the swimming, your lovely place, the quietness, the cute little ducks, the warm baths for our feet and your kindness.

We want to make this visit a yearly tradition and, in the meantime, we drink our tea from our lovely Ponds-mugs.

We would also love to welcome you to our swimming ponds in the Netherlands. You can stay over at our houses; we can swim with you and show you around. Do feel invited and get in touch!

With love, from the Dutch women.



- Photo credit to Brigitte, thank you, we loved meeting you.

Where Water Lies - by Hilary Tailor

I came across the pond by accident. I am a writer and I made a decision, on impulse, to place a character there in a novel I was writing. Eliza was an isolated woman embarking on middle age. I remember pausing at my laptop, wondering what middle-aged women do in London, and I recalled a friend of mine had begun swimming at the pond and referred to it often. Half an hour later, I had placed Eliza, a thirty-eight-year-old loner, swimming in the Kenwood Ladies' Pond. I thought no more about it until I submitted the manuscript to my editor.

This was to be my second novel. My first, *The Vanishing Tide*, was loosely set on the Wirral Peninsula, where I grew up. I knew the coast intimately, and it felt natural to put my characters there. When my editor returned my draft to me, she asked me where the water had gone. My audience liked reading what I had to say about water, she explained. I was good at describing it.

This paragraph, halfway through the manuscript, when Eliza's in the pond. You need to expand on that, my editor said. And by that, I mean right the way through the book.

Meanwhile, my friend was swimming through her third winter. I interviewed her. I sent her a questionnaire. She told me I should join her. I declined because it wasn't really my thing. I didn't like being cold. In December 2021, I went with her to take notes as she swam, and I began to talk to the group of women she swam with.

Just come, they said. It's amazing. I shook my head.

In the spring of 2022, I had written most of a second draft. The pond now featured heavily throughout the novel. I had read every available book and watched every documentary I could, but I began to feel like a fraud for writing about something I hadn't experienced first-hand.

The rope came down and the water warmed, slowly. I firmed up my draft and I knew it wasn't good enough.

I went for my first swim in May, 2022. The water was sixteen degrees. I had to swim almost to the end of the pond before I got my breath under control, something that stayed with me for months. Until one day, the water stopped feeling cold, and I stopped feeling nervous.

I told myself I would stop swimming when the book was finished. I swam through my first winter and began to absorb all of those unknowable details. The way that the ice sung on the surface of the water; that sometimes, you climbed out with a muddy line around your chin. That I could witness the beauty of nature, and also its cruelty in the space of a minute. I wrote a third draft, then a fourth, and I swam through my second winter. I finished my novel last year. *Where Water Lies* was published in June. And I am still swimming.



Hilary has left copies of her book with the lifeguards. Several women at the KLPA helped her with interviews and general knowledge of the pond and swimming there year long, she would like them to know they can see the book if they go to the lifeguards' hut.



- Photo credit to Ruth Corney

Found: A Diarist - by *Fiona Willis*

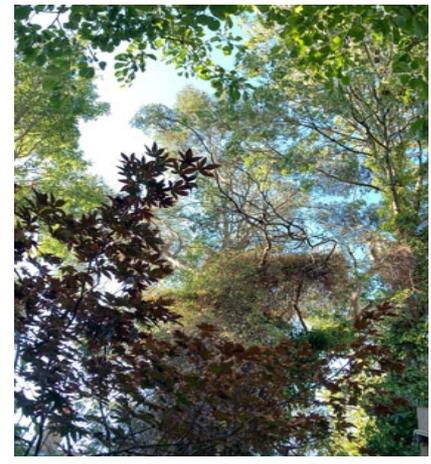
Whilst browsing through a catalogue of writers and artists Fiona came across this extract about the pond by Anna Sebastian, a diary entry from 1942. She thought it might be something to include in the newsletter.

"This afternoon I went swimming. I took a long walk across the heath and as I walked across the fields, for the first time - I think since Grinzing - I had that feeling of boundless space again - that you can go wherever you want, that you can wander wherever you feel like. The bath is a small pond, completely surrounded by trees, a bath only for women and they lie almost naked in the grass and on the wooden beams, it was hot and the water was cool. [...] I was lying in the grass looking up at the sky and reading and all around me were the other women, most of them had their swimming costumes rolled down to their waists, old and young women, some had lovely and already quite tanned skin. The pond is a little winding and one by one they sank into it, so that only their heads looked out, and when they came ashore again they would shake themselves and the drops of water would hang from their arms. I fell asleep quite easily, I heard the hum of voices, and I felt their movements when someone came out of the water, on the way to their place they splashed the others, and the drops fell on my legs and on my shoulders, and the sky shone with sunshine. We lay there like one giant woman's body and the heat blurred the figures, the sky and the water, the trees and the silence gave us tenderness for each other as well as the lazy nonchalance of sheep in the pasture, only the elderly spoke much and smiled enviously at the young. [...] how beautiful life can be, full of heat, sky and water!"



Photo credit: the Pond Archive

The Austrian-born writer Anna Sebastian (1916 – 1953 lived at several addresses in Hampstead during and after the Second World War. She often wandered through Hampstead Heath, the extensive park with several bathing ponds, long walks and extensive heather meadows whose colours reminded her of her native Vienna Woods.



Wild Swimming Walks - by *Beth Feresten*

KLPA members have been helping with the update of the Wild Swim Walks book. We've enjoyed the company of women from the pond on interesting walks and refreshing swims. There have been a number of corrections found that will be part of the updated edition due out in November. Thanks to all who have contributed by leading or joining a walk.



Margaret Dickenson is working on a completely new Wild Swimming Walks book – Thames and West of London. She'd welcome any volunteers to help verify walks and swims. If interested, please contact Margaret - [here](#)

Winter Swimming in Finland

- by Heini Heideman

What a lovely place, Kenwood Ladies' Bathing Pond! I visited your beautiful swimming pond in mid-April. The water temperature was 12°C, which felt so nice after having swum since October in water which varied from 0-3°C.

One of the many winter swimming places close to Helsinki is located in Haukilahti (Pike Bay), Espoo; it is my local "pond". From our pier we have, apart from a few islands, an open view to the Gulf of Finland.

The winter swimming season runs from October till the end of April. The water temperature during that period is normally below 10°C, and the sea freezes most winters. In the winter just past, during our swim we waved to cross-country skiers just 10m away! Skiing on the ice is very popular, so long as there is a layer of snow covering the ice.

We keep a hole in the ice open with underwater pumps that run day and night most of the winter. Sometimes the sea is rough but it is rare for us not to be able to at least take a dip into the hole, holding on to the steps. Swimmers are warned to beware of blocks of ice which have broken off the ice; they can be heavy and sharp and you have to be careful not to cut yourself. Also large waves can push you towards the steps.

Our swimming club turns 60 years this year, and we have many members who have been coming since it started. Approximately 60 people sign in each day - very many come every single day, others once or twice a week. In the changing rooms there are no showers or toilets, no sauna either. And we don't have a life guard, so everyone knows that they swim at their own risk. The City of Espoo owns the building and is responsible for safety issues. Our club administers the keys (one-off cost of 25€) and cleans the changing rooms. After the swim many of us enjoy coffee and cakes in Café Mellstén in the same building.

Winter swimming has become very popular. In the past, it was only "grannies" but lately more and more young women and men have started .

One reason for the popularity, we guess, is the brown fat that is activated in the cold. It increases energy consumption (you lose weight!) and improves the sugar metabolism. However, most of us just enjoy the sea view, and the hormone rush.

Heini Heideman (Ms.)
Chairperson, "Pike Bay" Winter Swimmers,
Espoo, Finland

Note from KLPA: There are few (if any) 'summer swimming clubs in Finland – everybody swims in their nearest lake, or in the sea near where they live.



The Shed - erected by Maia



As mentioned in the Chairs' report the Summer Solstice event incorporated the official opening of our KLPA shed by Jane Shallice, previous KLPA Chair, who also gave a wonderful impassioned speech about the pond, where she has swum for nearly 60 years. We now have a place for the KLPA events paraphernalia. The shed was erected, over a day, by the amazing Maia who is now a pond convert.



- photo credit to Ruth Corney

The Opening 24.6.2024 - by Susan Hellard

Having come to the opening, by Jane, of the KLPA shed yesterday, I thought I would send you photos of a maquette of the Pond depicting: Jane Shallice's statue 'rising triumphant', from the waters.



- 'Spirit of the Pond'

I made it last year in my ceramics class I was envisaging a giant statue of Jane arising from the waters, giving the 'finger' to the City of London. Obviously, if you look at the proportions of the piece, she would take up most of the Pond and be about 200' high!

I was inspired to make it because I consider Jane to be the saviour of the Ladies' Pond [truly].

I have given it to Jane. It can be filled with water [as you can see from one of the photos]

I am secretly hoping she fills it with good red wine and drinks from it. Probably using a straw and with several friends.

I think, that if the proposal goes through, she should be cast in bronze, at a cost of about £2,000,000. Better get the 'merch' desk going!

[Sue is the artist designing our mugs and other illustrations]

