



Newsletter of the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association

Welcome to the Winter Newsletter

– Lucy Zanetti and Judith Perle

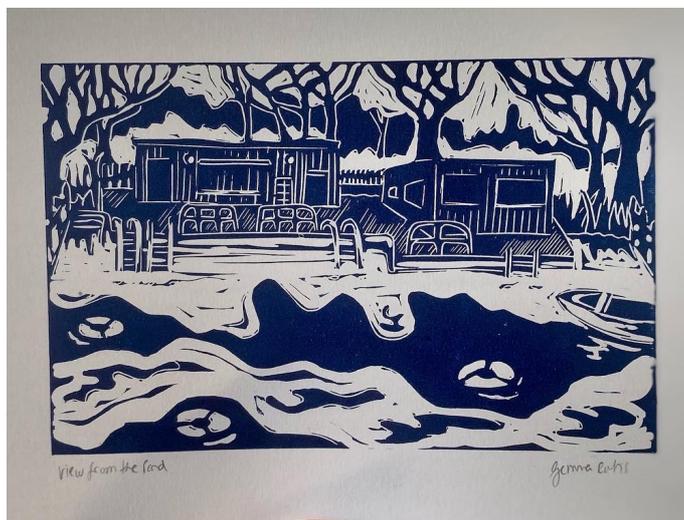
After an Indian Summer, the pond barely reached single figures until early December, then plummeted down to 3°, 2°, icy even. Still, a hardy bunch, almost a crowd, submerge themselves in the waters. I've been away so missed the gradual induction and have been rationing my time in the water, supervised by our vigilant lifeguards discouraging (to my relief) prolonged immersion. Though as we always find, once it's done, never a moment's regret and the world is a better place.

We love to hear of places you've swum lately.



Christmas day swim in the Lyd, Devon

A quick family dip, it was pretty choppy but we stuck to the edge. Over night with the downpour of rain, the river swelled and rose by 2m, not advisable to repeat the performance.



Thank you for including some of my prints in your newsletter.

Thank you Emma for providing these lovely images of your lino cuts. We chose the one to the left here to match the turbulent river above.



Newsletter of the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association

KLPA Chairs' Newsletter Report

Pauline Latchem (Co-Chair) and Beth Feresten (Co-Chair)

Since the last newsletter we have had many more women swimming through the winter, and many have joined KLPA. It's been a much milder and wetter winter than in previous seasons so the upper meadow has been boggy than usual. We have been talking for a long time with the City about improving outdoor changing facilities and there is support for this from the Swimming Facilities Manager Paul Jeal. The City is notoriously slow and have prioritised other essential repairs and works on the Heath. Part of the problem for us is that it is also difficult to source female contractors to do works and repairs at the pond, which means that either it must be closed to swimmers, or that male workers are on site, with advance warning. Recently the pond closed so that surveyors could come in to check what essential works need to be done before the summer season. This includes work in the accessible toilet and shower room, work in the changing room, showers, ventilation, drainage, and repairs to the outdoor shower space which is badly rotted.

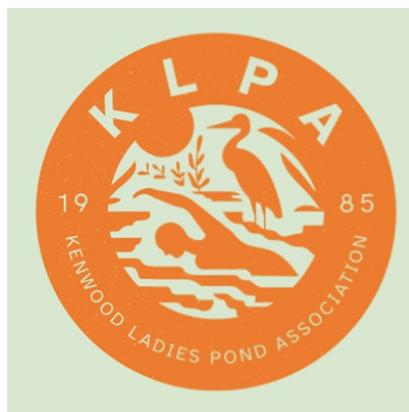
All of this will take time to complete so there are bound to be further closures in the coming months to allow the works to be completed with as minimal disruption as possible. Paul Jeal is generally very good working with us to organise alternative swimming opportunities, and we trust that everyone will be patient with this.

On the subject of the outdoor accessible changing space, we would ask that able-bodied swimmers do not casually use the benches and gazebo space at the end of the path near the toilets for convenience - otherwise swimmers with mobility or visual impairments cannot get into the space. They should not have to ask for access to this space reserved specifically for their use. If you are bothered by the rain and the ground is wet, please use the covered area behind the Stewards Hut, the indoor changing room, or bring a dry bag to leave your clothes in under a shelter or in the metal cages on the deck. We thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

The monthly merchandise stalls continue to be well supported, as do the pond breakfasts and Lifeguard Jane's enjoyable Chatathon – featured elsewhere in this issue. Her delightful willow sculptures also bring much joy to seasonal celebration days. The men's annual shared swim and breakfast was a lovely warm event, and a huge success. Unfortunately, on this occasion, overwhelmingly so, and the Lifeguards asked that we conduct a risk assessment for future events. We do not want to turn KLPA socials into exclusive or ticketed events, so we now must ask that people do not share pond happenings on Social Media. Some smaller, more spontaneous events, especially those organised by the Lifeguards may be advertised only by a poster at the pond where regular swimmers will see it.

We are looking forward to the Pond Centenary in 2026. The pond offers solace, community, and healing space to many women, and is a source of much creativity, some of which is featured in the newsletters. Who recalls the wonderful Pond scarf so many women contributed to back in 2016? We will this year be starting to gather ideas from you all as how best to celebrate together. We are also looking into how the Pond Archive can continue to be preserved and grow.

In the meantime, we hope you will enjoy this newsletter and continue to love the pond and feel welcome and held. Thanks to committee and everyone who has supported our events, their hard work and contributions are valued and appreciated.



Happy Swimming all!

An Artistic Journey Inspired by The Heron

- Jess Evans

Earlier this year, I discovered an unexpected muse in the tranquil waters of the ponds - the heron. Its magical presence became the catalyst for a new creative spark. Each morning for three weeks, I sketched the heron using oil pastels, experimenting with styles, shapes and colours to capture the essence of the heron. Bold outlines and vibrant hues of blues, oranges, yellows, and reds infuse my drawings with the same energy found at the ponds.

Through drawing daily, I found a way to connect with my changing emotions and the changing of the seasons. Like the resilience needed for winter swims, the act of daily drawing became a metaphor for persistence in my own artistic journey.



Regularly swimming at Hampstead Ladies Ponds has been a transformative experience for me - physically, emotionally and creatively. The closeness to nature, the sanctuary of female-only spaces, the resilience of women, and the harmony found amidst the chaos of the city.

The heron has become a symbol of reassurance, offering a sense of continuity and stillness amidst life's changes. I now believe every sighting is a promise of good days ahead.

Body Positive - Pauline Latchem



Pauline's Gingerbread women

Recently we have heard stories of women feeling body shamed in the changing areas at the pond. We hope these are isolated incidents but would just like to remind everyone that the Ladies' Pond is a safe space where women should feel free to change, swim and shower without feeling watched or judged, where we can bare our bodies in celebration of our shared womanhood and the vast pool of lived experience we hold. Where women of all ages, shapes and sizes, colour, race, and creed, living with chronic pain, disability or illness, anxiety, grief, and loss can come and feel held and healed by the water, its' green and changing natural setting and an open, welcoming and loving pond community.

Happy swimming Ladies – love your body and treat it with compassion – it's a constantly changing miracle of nature and the only one you have, carrying you through whatever life throws at you. Everybody's body deserves respect and to be celebrated, not just on birthdays or International Women's Day but today and every day.



Halcyon by Pauline Latchem

Marigolds and All – *Pauline Latchem*



The KLPA Xmas breakfast and pond sale was a lovely social event, and I spotted two former committee members chatting. One was Ray Long, who had inspired me many years ago with her winter swimming. I recall often seeing her on freezing winter mornings in the old hut, pulling on a pair of Marigolds and sealing them with elastic bands twisted several times round her wrists. Whilst I was telling someone about her wonderful picture in the National Portrait Gallery, something in Ray's stance caught my eye, so I asked if she would pose for a photo which she did willingly. A quick snap, then I used my smartphone to pull up the NPG portrait, and with a bit of modern technical witchery put the two pictures together, facing each other. Both I and Ray were thrilled with the result, which she has agreed to share here.

Ray asked me to play down the inspiration saying "all I've done is swim for a very long time (62 years) although I've only been winter swimming for about 20 years, when I didn't have to go to an office every day".

On the subject of that portrait, Ray explained how she was approached by a young woman one freezing day, who said she had permission to photograph people for a project she was doing. "I thought she was just a student and said OK, even though I thought the pose was a bit odd. I forgot about it until months later, when Alice sent me an ecstatic email saying that her photo had been accepted in a competition. I was amazed to discover that this was the Taylor Wessing portrait competition, displayed in the National Portrait Gallery! At the preview, I was horrified to see that my portrait was one of the larger ones...no chance of it being overlooked, and I was phoned by friends and relatives from the gallery to say they had seen it."



If you've not seen it already, I hope you'll agree that it's a truly magnificent and memorable portrait, and enjoy the mirror image too.

Swimmers' jargon - *Judith Perle*

Inspired by Natalie's marvellous piece on 'Taking a dip ...in the dictionary' in the Autumn 2021 newsletter, I have been trying to compile a series of pond-specific word definitions. I've only come up with four so far:

- Advanced (aquatic) geometry – the fine art of calculating the angle you need to take in order to avoid colliding with an oncoming swimmer (also see Rebelliousness, below)
- Blind swimming – swimming towards a bright sun with your eyes closed. Absolute heaven
- Kenwood tan – one's skin colour when emerging from a winter swim
- Rebelliousness – swimming anti-clockwise. (Even though Covid restrictions have been lifted, I still get comments. My reply is that looking at faces is nicer than the backs of heads.)

Anybody have some more suggestions?

A Good Place to be – Pauline Latchem

Late in October 2021 the youngest son of one of my oldest and closest friends asked if he might do a three-minute film of me swimming for his degree course in film and photography. Reuben was 23 at the time and like a nephew. What happened next was both fun and a beautiful collaboration. It was wonderful working with Reu both in the planning and creative process and the energy and flow between us was surprisingly easy.

Reuben filmed me swimming in a side stream feeding into the Thames near their home in Iffley. The water was around 10 degrees so I was able to stay in much longer than anticipated and he was able to get plenty of footage. At the end of filming he said he wanted to understand the experience and feeling, so stripped down to shorts and lowered himself into the river. White with shock at first, he commented it was a real head rush, refusing to get out when I said that was quite enough.

Earlier that year I'd taken part in a Visual Medicine Workshop where I'd penned a short poem that sprang naturally from my feelings at the time. Reu asked if I would read the poem to include in the film but I found I couldn't speak and spontaneously started to sign. Unrehearsed it was quite rough but we both felt it should stay as it was: he incorporated it into the film and his brother Sam created a piece of music to accompany it, though I'm unable to hear his contribution. Reuben took the ending words from my poem – a good place to be - as a title for the film.

Just over a year later, Reu told me it had been shortlisted for an award in the category of Women in Adventure at Sheffield Adventure Film Festival. Revisiting it, I realised it was a lovely piece and felt proud of our work together so off we went to the festival with family and friends. The organisers had gone out of their way to make sure all the entries at the screening were captioned and provided two BSL interpreters so I could follow the proceedings. There were eight finalists from a shortlist of 28 and some very interesting films. Being Reu's first film, I thought he might get a commendation for his effort, so imagine our

elation when it was announced as winner. It felt like my gift to him and also his gift to me, a beautiful keepsake of my passion for being in water and in nature. I hope you enjoy looking at it as much as we enjoyed making it.



You can see the film [here](#) .

It's also on You Tube and on the British Mountain Council Website.

In July the film was awarded Silver in the People category in the prestigious AOP Student Awards. It has recently been shown at both Wetherby & Kendal Film Festivals and is in the line-up for the London Mountain Festival in February/March 2024.



Flow painting - Pauline Latchem

A Tale of Two Parties . . .

- Ruthie Petrie

I have been a pond swimmer for more years than I care to remember and an active member of the KLPA for much of that time. I want to thank the committee for arranging a New Year social get-together in January after what seemed an unnecessarily acrimonious gathering for the annual tea party in November.

Frankly, I was horrified by what happened at the November tea party. It didn't seem unreasonable that the KLPA officers should use the opportunity of getting a significant number of members in one place to hold an EGM and vote on some relatively minor revisions to the constitution that would make it fit for purpose in 2024. Documents had been distributed in advance for everyone to read and assess, so I arrived at the meeting prepared to vote swiftly and then enjoy a social gathering with fellow swimmers, many of whom are old friends.

Some readers will know that the social element of the meeting was completely eclipsed by the actions of what appeared to be an organized group of women (they seemed to be known to each other but not to the majority of swimmers, some of their number were handing out an unsigned and unattributed document setting out inaccurate information about the KLPA and aggressive criticism of its officers). All members are, of course, entitled to question and disagree with the committee, but the hostility expressed both verbally and through demeanour and written communication seemed entirely uncalled for. Intentionally or not, the meeting was disrupted to the extent that the constitutional business could not be concluded and there was no time for our guest speaker. It became a memorably unpleasant occasion.

Many of us in the KLPA who were diving into icy water decades before the advent of 'wild' swimming pride ourselves on being 'brave and bold in all weathers'. Over the years we have acquired a reputation for strong and passionate campaigning when our interests are under threat. Even so, I know that some of those same women felt shocked both outside and in the meeting itself.

Subsequent enquiries suggest that the November meeting fell victim to a group of newer members (who may or may not ever swim at the Ladies' Pond), apparently motivated by a desire to protect the Pond from 'men pretending to be women'. Regardless of individual views on gender and biological sex, my own experience and that of the many swimmers and lifeguards I have spoken to is that – aside from the occasional lark attempted by young boys over the nearly 100 years since the Ladies' Pond was first established – there has been NO evidence of men trying to gain access to it as a women-only facility. I'm told that transgender women have swum at the Pond for decades but, quite rightly (it's none of my business), I have never been aware of their presence or of who they are. I have no reason to feel they are a threat either to myself or to younger women and girls.

The January tea party restored my faith in the future of the KLPA and the Pond itself as welcoming all women. I know that those who attended probably hold diverse views on a range of subjects, but we form a vibrant community united by our love of swimming and the freedom experienced at the Ladies' Pond. It was such a pleasure to relax and see Sarah Saunders' photographs of the Pond and the wonderful women (some of whom, sadly, are no longer with us) who have made it so special.

To ensure that all women will continue to be welcome to swim, I hope that KLPA members who love the pond will come to the AGM in March when the new committee will be elected. The committee members and officers are volunteers who work hard for the interests of all swimmers. They deserve our support and gratitude in helping to keep the pond a much-loved resource for all women.

Editor's note: this may well be the first ever competitive election, so if you want your voices heard please RSVP to come to the AGM on the 3rd March, there's a limited capacity of 190, 145 members have already replied.



Duck courtesy of Maggie Jennings

Pat Arrowsmith 1930 -2023 – *Mary Powell*



Photo courtesy of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

The KLPA Committee and many KLPA members were saddened to hear of the death, at the age of 93, of Ladies' Pond stalwart Pat Arrowsmith. Her death was announced in the national press on 29 September 2023.

Pat swam at the Ladies' Pond for many years before failing health prevented her from doing so any longer. She was well known to many of the longstanding pond swimmers, and remembered with affection by the lifeguard team. In 2015, the KLPA Committee made her an honorary life member, one of the first KLPA members to receive this accolade, in recognition of her close association with the Ladies' Pond community, and her wider contribution to the life of the country. We understand that Pat appreciated this gesture, and continued to enjoy receiving postal copies of the KLPA newsletter.

Pat Arrowsmith's name may be unfamiliar to many younger swimmers at the pond, but her name is closely associated with the anti-nuclear movement of the Cold War era, as well as with many other political causes. She was a co-founder of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), having already been involved in the organisation of the first Aldermaston March in Easter 1958. She was associated with a wide range of causes including protesting against the Vietnam War and opposing the presence of British soldiers in Northern Ireland, and protesting against the Gulf Wars in 1991 and 2003.

In the course of her political activities Pat was arrested many times, and served 11 prison sentences from 1958 onwards. She managed to escape from prison on one occasion too. It is an irony that in her later years when swimming at the Ladies' Pond, Pat had cause to be seen safely home by the Heath Constabulary, which she appeared to accept with good grace.

We understand that there was no formal funeral service, in accordance with her wishes, but a celebration of her life will be arranged in future by her friends at CND.

Since the Ladies' Pond opened in 1926 it has been frequented by many formidable and noteworthy women, who challenged authority and complacency.



Chatathon resumed – Jane Smith
 This event took place on Sunday 1st October

Parliament Hill Lido Steps to Home and Wet



First, a dip and gentle swim in the Lido

then, a walk together to the Mixed Pond for another gentle dip,

finally, stroll together to the Ladies Pond for a swim and shared picnic breakfast.

Please bring your own hot drinks and some finger food and favourite treats to share.

Entry to the Lido and Mixed Pond is free on this occasion - pay or check in as usual with your wristband at the Ladies Pond

No medals or prizes, but a wonderful opportunity to welcome Autumn, meet others, share tips and support for winter swimming and to sample the delights of the Lido and Mixed Pond if you have not already done so. This is the first Chatathon since pre-Covid, and we hope it won't be the last.



A Walk in the Park with Jane - Sunday 1st Oct 2023

Chatathon 2023 *poster plus this ...*

Over a 100 years ago a group of women, not able to swim at the men's pond as the men wanted it for themselves, went in search of their own pond and so began a magical history for women swimmers.

On 1st October 2023 80 wonderful women aged 8 to 80's gathered on the ^{Parliament Hill} lido steps to start a Chatathon - The ladies pond walking version of the Duathlon which happens every September when swimmers swim + run the lido + ponds.

This re-enactment of those early 20th Century women's journey to create a female sanctuary for swimming included ribbons worn on swimming costumes in the colours 'green for give', white for 'women' + violet for 'votes'. Thanks to Paul Ford allowing us to swim free at the lido + mixed pond, 80 women chatted, giggled + splashed their way in the lanes of the lido's stunning stainless steel lined pool. Then a quick coffee in hand we rambled up, passed the stone of free speech to the top of parliament hill to gaze on the incredible city of London from our beautiful green heath.

Next we swamped the mixed pond with laughter and sunned cakes with the life guards before setting our huge crocodile up hill to circle Boadicea's mound (the Tunnus) in honour of this mighty woman who took London by storm. Finally arriving at the ladies pond with wet costumes + hungry bellies we dipped a third time and with chattering teeth shared a fabulous brunch.

Thanks to everyone who took part for making it such a joyous day + here's to the next one ...
 Chatathon 2024 (date to be fixed)

In the meantime ... 14th February 2024



Wild Swimming Tamed – Anne Burghley

[Editor's note: this item was written just after lockdown]

I have been swimming at the Kenwood Ladies' Pond every day for 40 years, excepting only sickness, holidays and a year in Croatia working for the UN. The closure of the swimming ponds on Hampstead Heath because of lockdown in March caused, therefore, a great deprivation to me and my fellow swimmers, although we understood that it was small compared to what many were suffering .

My first swim in the Ladies' Pond was in 1960, the summer after my arrival in London from New Zealand, via Australia, in 1959. After that I swam from time to time, rarely when I had small children, but when my two sons were old enough to swim in the Mixed or Men's Ponds by themselves I swam regularly in the summer. I arrived home from the Ladies' Pond one sunny Saturday to learn that my younger son was at the Royal Free Hospital, having had an accident at the Mixed Pond. He was operated on that night and had his spleen removed. He survived and continued to swim at the Men's Pond.

I moved from Hampstead to Highgate in November 1979 and the following summer began swimming at the Ladies' Pond every day, cycling there and afterwards on to my work at Amnesty International. I joined what was then a small community of women who swam regularly and when winter came I was encouraged to continue swimming by the few who swam all the year round. This was, of course, in the glorious days of free swimming under the GLC. We had few comforts: if we were lucky one of the lifeguards, Vera or Pat, would give us a bucket of warm water to share between us to unthaw hands and feet. What we did have was the warmth of companionship: the changing room was a place for the exchange of joys and sorrows and comfort when that was required.

Over the years the Ladies' Pond became better known and the numbers of swimmers increased, those of winter swimmers more slowly. The Corporation of the City of London took over the running of the ponds, along with the rest of the Heath. Health and Safety regulations required an increase in the number of lifeguards and charges were introduced, at first voluntary. Some swimmers refused to pay on principle, feeling that swimming in the pond

should remain open to all women free of charge, as it had always been.

For me swimming in the Ladies' Pond every morning became a very important part of my life: not just the swimming, but the whole experience of being in such a beautiful and peaceful place and enjoying the camaraderie of the pond, which continued in spite of the increase in numbers. The months of not being able to swim were hard to bear for many of us, although not of course to be compared to the suffering of those with Covid-19, or those who have lost friends and relatives. The heroic efforts of NHS staff and the effects of this period on them and their families make our deprivation very minor, but for some women the pond is essential to their mental, as well as physical, well-being.

The relaxation of lockdown and the reopening of the swimming ponds on the Heath caused great joy, but also great frustration. The numbers who could swim was limited by the need for swimmers to maintain two meters distance from each other. Swims had to be booked and paid for in advance and as places were limited, many people did not manage to get a swim. Places were released each day a week in advance at 12 noon. If one couldn't be at the computer then, the chances of getting a swim were nil. It might be that this is the new normal. I am grateful that I have enjoyed so many years of blissful swimming and companionship.



KLPA Annual General Meeting
Sunday 3rd March 2024
From 3pm to 5pm
Parliament Hill School
(Highgate Road, London NW5 1RL)



Business will include:
Chair's Report – questions and vote
Accounts 2023 – questions and vote
Update to Constitution – questions and vote
Election of KLPA Committee
AGM business will be followed by shared buffet
Please bring sweet or savoury contributions to share
KLPA will provide hot and cold drinks

Dear members,

As a relatively new Membership Secretary, I want to clarify a few points about how the membership system works. Not so long ago we moved to a completely online and automated membership system called MemberMojo – which I am hoping will gradually make my role almost redundant!

The membership year runs from April 1st to 31st March, and costs just £5. No change there – what is new is that membership is now renewed by credit or debit card, not standing orders, cheques or £5 notes. An automated reminder is sent out in March, reminding existing members to renew, giving a link and (hopefully) straightforward instructions. So please, all of you who have paid by standing order, please cancel them and wait for your renewal reminder next month.

If you don't have a credit or debit card, or feel strongly about not using them, please email me at klpamailbox@gmail.com. I will manually update the online database once you have paid. As you can imagine, though, with many hundreds of members, we are keen to automate things as much as possible. That way we'll have more time and energy to devote to productive activities.

Thanks, and happy swimming.

Judith Perle

KLPA Membership Renewal at the end of March

It is now time to renew your membership online, if you pay annually. The easiest way to renew is our new online application "[MemberMojo](#)". The link is also on the [KLPA website](#), homepage and [membership](#) pages.



Annual membership is still just £5

You can also pay for life membership here for £125 (or just £80 for age 65+)
Your membership matters, thank you for your continued support.