

Pond Postcards Remembered

Gathered as part of the Highgate Festival 2019, these postcards remind us that the pond is such a special and important place for many women from all over London and beyond.

Alicia Pivaro

Name Salli
Area you live in East Finchley
How long have you been swimming? 12 years irregularly, 3 months obsessively

Why do you swim at the Pond?

There is something about swimming in the pond that feels absolutely right. I am supposed to be there! It is energising, grounding, peaceful and perfect.

Name Emma
Area you live in Gospel Oak
How long have you been swimming? 1 year

Why do you swim at the Pond?

It's as close to nature as you can be in London. To swim in the pond gives you an unparalleled sense of wellbeing and serenity. It's a great leveller whatever your background, status or health. Everyone is encouraged and welcomed.

Name Diana
Area you live in Tufnell Park
How long have you been swimming? 39 years! - 40th anniversary in 2020

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Because the whole experience is healing, blissful, deeply replenishing. The buoyant water, willow trees, lilies, bird in the water, blackberries in the meadow, the sky, the peace . . . all bestow a clarity of mind, the buzz of being alive.

Name Maddy Paxman
Area you live in Harringay
How long have you been swimming? 33 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

A sanctuary - although these days it's a bit of an open secret! The thought of over a century of female energy in the water and the land around makes it a unique place in the world.

Name Eleanor
Area you live in Caledonian Road
How long have you been swimming? 3 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

To keep my sanity! It's one of my favourite spots I've visited on planet earth!

Name Bianca Pal
Area you live in Sydenham
How long have you been swimming? 1 day!

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Because it is so beautiful to be in nature in London and I like swimming with my friend Graninne!

Name Ruth
Area you live in The canals and rivers
How long have you been swimming? Since I was a kid but 3 years as a winter all year round swimmer

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Because it lifts my soul and makes everything beautiful again.

Name Mandy Saranbin
Area you live in Finchley
How long have you been swimming? 5 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Restorative, a tonic, a jewel, a gift.

Name Nat
Area you live in East Finchley
How long have you been swimming? Approx. 6 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

It's never been regretted. In all weathers it has given me a sense of wellbeing, both physical and mental, and it's also given me a haven in London after living by the sea.

Name Mary Clare
Area you live in Leighton E10
How long have you been swimming? Since I was 18 (a long time)

Why do you swim at the Pond?

It's heaven! It's the best place in London in summer - (and thanks to the lifeguards).

Name Mary
Area you live in Hackney
How long have you been swimming? Since last summer (a late adopter)

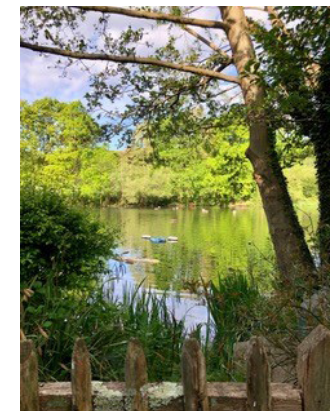
Why do you swim at the Pond?

Because it is amazing - an antidote to everything you come up against. It really refreshes me + is a great women only space.

Name Ava
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming? 3 years (since I was 9)

Why do you swim at the Pond?

It is so peaceful and beautiful. It is really refreshing jumping in and is very calming after school. I like to meet my friends here and the fields are really nice to sit in!



Name Victoria
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming? 29 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

To experience my connection with the natural world. Space – physical, emotional, spiritual. The pond is: my place of worship/spirituality; my gym; my meeting with community; delightful conversation; connection to sanity, reality, meaning: What a GIFT!

Name Grannine
Area you live in Dartmouth Park
How long have you been swimming? 2 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

I love the ritual and feeling of the water at all temperatures – the scenery, flowers, wildlife are so enchanting.

Name Diana
Area you live in Tufnell Park
How long of you been swimming? 35 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

It's just magic. Saw a kingfisher today (17 June) – on a low branch looking at us – then a wonderful flash of turquoise low on the water; all cares of the day gone.

Name Anne
Area you live in Highgate
How long of you been swimming? 50 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Because it restores me every morning in every way. It provides wonderful companionship, beauty, consolation, exhilaration, all in one.

Name Roz
Area you live in N6
How long of you been swimming?

Why do you swim at the Pond?

I feel powerful when I swim in the pond. It's so marvellous.

Name Gemma
Area you live in Putney
How long of you been swimming? 4 weeks

Why do you swim at the Pond?

I came earlier this month after reading Waterlog by Roger Deakin. I was curious to discover/share this joy of open water. I now see why he was so enchanted by the lakes, lochs, pools and seas of Great Britain. Open water swimming is a breath of fresh air and truly connects the mind, body and soul to Mother Nature.

Name Pam
Area you live in Vauxhall SW8
How long of you been swimming? 59 years (I'm 72 and I started coming here when I was 13)

Why do you swim at the Pond?

I swim at the pond all the year round because in our great metropolis it's a little haven of natural beauty which engenders feelings of peace and swimming in the pond is incredibly beneficial physically and mentally – I've written a novel!

Name Esme
Area you live in Tufnell Park
How long of you been swimming? 6 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

To calm me down – peace of mind!

Name Naori
Area you live in Belsive Park
How long of you been swimming? Over one year

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Makes me feel good and refreshes the mind.

Name Sally Denati
Area you live in Dartmouth Park
How long of you been swimming? About 20 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Key reasons” refreshing/exhilarating + closeness to nature, also the community of swimmers and lifeguards – mostly year round swimmers. I love the changing seasons, the birds, wildflowers from snow + ice to the warmth of spring into summer. The only time I don't enjoy is when it's hot and there are too many people. I try to come really then.

Name Jac
Area you live in Camden
How long of you been swimming? Years and years!

Why do you swim at the Pond?

I would be dead if I didn't.

Name Pauline
Area you live in N13
How long of you been swimming? 6 years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Reflection, connection, contemplation. The ever changing pond surface, beauty and stillness, changing seasons, feeling at one with myself and with nature in all her glory. It's a mystical and sacred space.



Name Julia
Area you live in Crouch End
How long of you been swimming? 2 ½ years

Why do you swim at the Pond?

Thrill and exhilaration of cold water, beauty of nature, lovely birds, friendship of fellow swimmers.

Name Imogen
Area you live in North Finchley
How long of you been swimming? Summer - 11 years, winter - 1 year

Why do you swim at the Pond?

*To connect with nature
To feel ALIVE!
To be part of an amazing witty group of women!
To put the world to rights with my friend.*

Name Chris
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 6 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

The peace and tranquillity. The buzz of the cold water makes me feel alive.

Name Shane
Area you live in Crouch End
How long have you been swimming 1st swim summer 1978 winter swimming/all year round for 15 years.

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Love water; love swimming; love being outside; love trees; love wildlife; love being in connection with the seasons and nature; love companionship and cannot think of a more special place where all of the above combine. Swimming in the pond makes my life complete!

Name Mencie
Area you live in North Finchley
How long have you been swimming 6 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's a sanctuary, Heaven and just totally wonderful - it feeds the soul! I feel

total freedom whilst being here and swimming!

Name Maggie
Area you live in Newbury Park on the Central Line 1 ½ hours away by public transport
How long have you been swimming about 30 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's a healing space. It's a green semi-wild space with wildlife. It's lovely swimming nose to beak with a duck. Sometimes I see a kingfisher. Good conversations happen - it is a friendly community - the other swimmers and the lifeguards. The cold water takes away the pain from my left leg (a recent development!). The water feels different on different days - silky after rain, cooling and refreshing on a hot day, freezing cold in winter which makes my body feel zingy when I come out. The flowers and plants are lovely too - they are loved and cared for. It is a loved place.

Name Elaine (2nd card!)
Area you live in Palmers Green
How long have you been swimming 4 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because it is peaceful, I feel at one with nature. It is an uplifting experience. I love it. The way the light ripples on the water, the feel and sound of the wind.

Name Kate
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 6 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because I love it! The beauty, wildlife, peace and cold!

Name Jane
Area you live in Crouch End
How long have you been swimming 50 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because it is a pond for women - and there is no other like it.

Name Caroline
Area you live in Whitehall Park
How long have you been swimming 20 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

For calm serenity and to spend time with my lovely friend Alicia and my daughter Rachael.

Name Eloise
Area you live in Archway
How long have you been swimming Every summer

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's such an amazing atmosphere, surrounded by women who are welcoming and happy. A quiet spot in the middle of busy north London.

Name Emma
Area you live in NW2
How long have you been swimming 3 ½ years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Sanity, beauty, nature, peace, therapy, challenge when it's freezing, love it xx.

Name Heather
Area you live in Camden Town
How long have you been swimming 10 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because if Heaven exists, it would be like this.

Name Barbara
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 5 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

I swim in the pond and the lido because I love cold water and these are the nearest thing to Heaven.

Name Debbie
Area you live in Stroud Green N4
How long have you been swimming 5 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's a special place where I feel alive and the worries and stresses of life disappear. It is rejuvenating and incredible in winter. If you can swim in 2C you can do anything!

Name Hannah
Area you live in N19 (Islington)
How long have you been swimming 29 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Mental and physical wellbeing. Community of fabulous people. Nothing beats it. One with nature. Uniqueness. To preserve it as a women only space in perpetuity.

Name Madeleine
Area you live in Hackney
How long have you been swimming 2 ½ years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Keeps me SANE! A wonderful camaraderie of women. Love the intimacy with trees/water/ducks. Has converted me to swim everywhere - Scottish lochs/seas/All the time - Keeps one alive! !

Name Kate
Area you live in Camden
How long have you been swimming 2 ½ years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

For peace, exercise, privacy, the natural world and the wonderful community. My 'pond friends' make a huge difference in my life! The water is beautiful and the experience very strengthening.

Name Laria
Area you live in Chelsea
How long have you been swimming 6 weeks

Why do you swim in the Pond?

For the beauty for the place. For clearing my head. To speak to the ducks. To be in a fabulous women only space; something so precious and too too rare.

Name Anne
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 8 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

To gather my thoughts, to connect with myself, to reflect, to clear my head, to enjoy nature, other ladies, to share life with other swimmers.

Name Esme
Area you live in Hackney, Stoke Newington
How long have you been swimming 2 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

I LOVE IT! Makes me feel sane.

Name S H
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 35 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It supports myself of wellbeing, its natural environment, greenery and fresh air as well as the benefit of swimming and meeting others who value this small oasis in the midst of the increasingly busy urban life of the 21st century. It is also a place where we can accept the many, varied female states in the most natural way.

Name Alicia
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 31 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

I come to the Pond to get away from everything - it has been my sanctuary

for many years - a very special, wonderful place.

Name Maria
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming about 20 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

I love everything about it, the coolness, the swimming, the space, the lovely feeling, the life guards, it's unique and I don't know what I would do without it. Thank you.

Name Elaine
Area you live in Palmers Green
How long have you been swimming 5 years

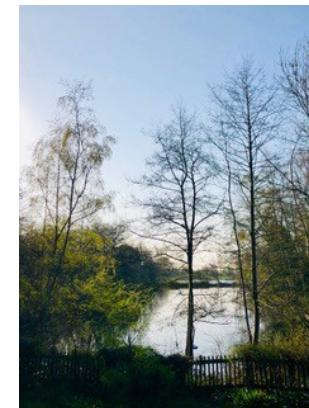
Why do you swim in the Pond?

I love it. Peaceful. Close to nature, wildlife, wind, shimmer on the water of the light. Different seasons. Every day the Pond is different. Nothing else equals this life enhancing experience.

Name Joanna
Area you live in Crouch End
How long have you been swimming 5 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

As a place to pause in a hectic life. It gives a space to breathe. The water's silkiness is enveloping and enclosing.



Name Caroline
Area you live in NW5
How long have you been swimming 6 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

To feel exhilarated, to find space and calm, to experience the seasons and to feel the sun on my face in icy water.

Name Marian
Area you live in Hampstead
How long have you been swimming 4 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

To feel alive, to see friends, because it is beautiful.

Name Susan
Area you live in Parliament Hill
How long have you been swimming 25 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's lovely.

Name Veronica
Area you live in N6
How long have you been swimming Since I became pregnant with my first daughter.

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's a beautiful safe haven - when I step through the gates I can be myself, all the layers fall away and it is a beautiful place to connect with . . . myself, the wonderful ladies of the pond . . . and the WILD!

Name Gillian
Area you live in Hackney
How long have you been swimming 45 years!

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because it is an oasis of calm, beautiful wildness in the middle of the city which is good for my soul - and I meet lovely friends here.

Name Polly

Area you live in Holloway
How long have you been swimming 30 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

To reset.

Name Christina
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 3 years (1 year as a winter swimmer)

Why do you swim in the Pond?

*A haiku:
To the pond I say
Thank you for rescuing me
All over again*

Name Patricie
Area you live in Willesden
How long have you been swimming 2 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Best place to swim in London. Because the pond feels like a sacred place to me. Like a sanctuary. Be close to my sisters from different places of the world, different ages, backgrounds. Surrounded by nature and freedom is so revitalising. I love it!

Name Jo
Area you live in N19
How long have you been swimming I have not swam there since 1962 (!) but keep meaning to return.

Why do you swim in the Pond?

I last swam there revising for 'A' levels but the memory has stayed with me. Maybe I shall return soon . . .

Name Naomi
Area you live in Tufnell Park
How long have you been swimming 17 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It is the closest thing I have to church, temple, sanctuary. It resets me - I check with myself, with the seasons, with whoever I meet up there. It's like a lucky dip - I'm always a 'winner' and

I'm lucky to have it so close by.

Name Julia
Area you live in Gospel Oak
How long have you been swimming 16 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

To be in contact with the sublime.

Name Maria
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 20 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Swimming in the ponds is the most life affirming experience, invigorating all the senses, the smell of the water, the silky feel, reflections . . . all problems fade away and one is baptised with nature.

Name Tessa
Area you live in Stoke Newington
How long have you been swimming 30 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because it is a safe WOMEN-ONLY (and should stay that way!) space. It restores me completely after hard days at work. It's outdoors and great to observe the seasons and duckling families. Great life-saver team. Great to meet and swim alone or with friends.

Name Wenke
Area you live in Highgate
How long have you been swimming 3 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

To reboot, it feels like a baptism again and again.

Name Ruth
Area you live in Muswell Hill
How long have you been swimming 54 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It is my most important reason for having continued to live in London all these years. Every day I swim at the opening time, I know it will be a good day. It's restorative to the soul and helps me feel at one with the changing seasons and the wildlife - it's heaven!

Name Jane
Area you live in Stroud Green
How long have you been swimming 14 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It is my sanctuary, a quiet, cool, green silk puddle for floating heaven, damsel flying, duckling watching play. I feel 9 years old in it and can rule the world after swimming. It deletes all, reboots, let's sorrow sink and bliss sing. I found my tribe amongst the awesome women and live for my daily injection of the best legal high.

Name Emmelie
Area you live in Leyton
How long have you been swimming 5 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

For fun, friendships and fulfilment! For mental health, physical health and to get outdoors! For relaxation in the warm and the challenge in the cold. To be free.

Name Louise
Area you live in
How long have you been swimming Over 2 years (second year as all year round swimmer)

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Connecting to nature/the weather. Swimming in the silky water under the trees, noticing the wildlife, reflections,

flowers. Even in the rain. Changing outside in the cold winter sunshine. I feel alive!

Name Sarah
Area you live in Islington
How long have you been swimming forever

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Beautiful, peaceful, happy place, cooling in summer, sunbathing in the meadow, invigorating in the winter, breaking the ice, seeing the heron/ ducks etc.

Name Julia
Area you live in Westbourne Park
How long have you been swimming 2 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

For my soul!

Name Emily
Area you live in Chiswick
How long have you been swimming 2 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's an escape from London, like a mini trip to the country.

Name Sally
Area you live in Peckham, Southward
How long have you been swimming 1 Year

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Natural environment, soft water, women only atmosphere, challenge of the cold water, the ducks, wish it wasn't so far to travel but it is totally worth it!

Name Sarah
Area you live in Barnsbury
How long have you been swimming year round, 3 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It's beautiful, a way to escape the city. In the colder months it alleviates my

grief. My son died of cancer. I came here more regularly after diagnosis and treatment. Swimming helped me, for a moment, leave everything behind.

Name Louise
Area you live in Tufnell Park
How long have you been swimming 40 years?

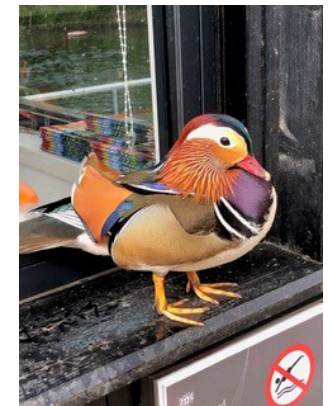
Why do you swim in the Pond?

Refreshing, like the pond, plants and bird. No chemicals, friendly, beauty of the surroundings, ability to lie on the grass, run into friends, bring child, part of my swimming routine, all women.

Name Betty
Area you live in Stamford Hill, N16
How long have you been swimming 18 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because it is a tonic for the body, mind and spirit, One of my life's most cherished gifts, my enchanted secret haven and instant holiday!



Name Fiona
Area you live in Gospel Oak
How long have you been swimming 38 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

Safe, calming place. I like swimming in the fresh(ish) water with ducks and coots. They don't seem to mind. The area is beautiful, flower + trees, life-guards are great. It's Heaven.

Name Shirley
Area you live in Muswell Hill
How long have you been swimming 20 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

It is beautiful and life-affirming. It give me confidence and strength. I have made many friends and it has opened up new contacts and opportunities.

Name Sarah
Area you live in NW5
How long have you been swimming 48 years

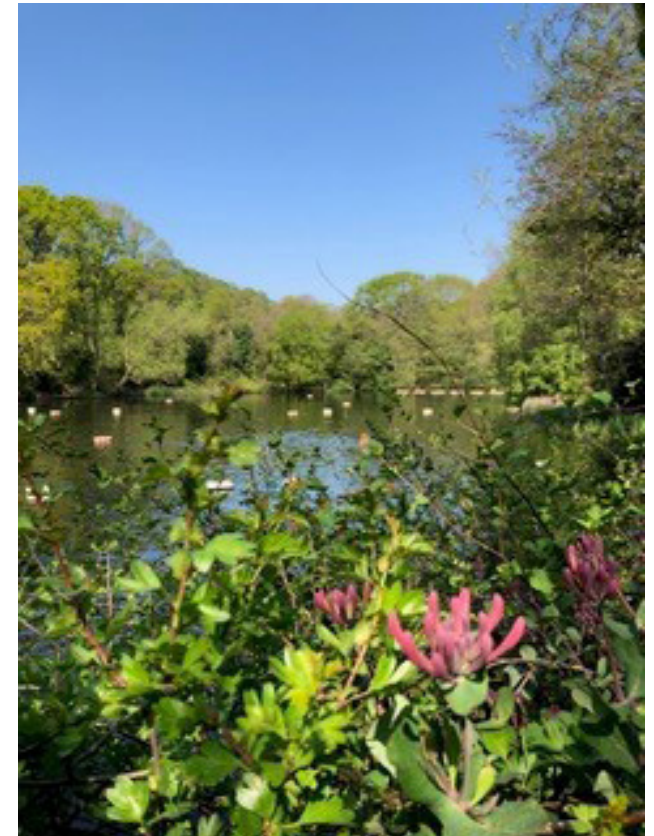
Why do you swim in the Pond?

Because I'm in touch with nature - ducks, heron, kingfisher, dragonfly, bullrushes, yellow flags, willows. Because it feels good.

Name Catherine
Area you live in NW5
How long have you been swimming 33 years

Why do you swim in the Pond?

*For relaxation.
Being in nature.
Pleasure.*



Pond Postcards Remembered is a project by Alicia Pivaro 2020. All photos artists own. With many thanks to the KLPA and all the swimmers who shared their thoughts.