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THE ARCHER



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Take the plunge in wild and beautiful spots

By Nick Young

Fancy a holiday in Spain that doesn't involve a crowded beach resort, but does involve swimming in somewhere other than a crowded pool? Local man John Weller has the answer, for he has recently had his first book published on this subject.

Wild Swimming Spain, co-authored with Lola Culsan, is not your average guidebook. It contains details of more than 150 wild swimming venues across Spain: rivers, lakes, waterfalls.

It has been three years in the making. John, who did the photography, says: "Most of it was desk research, then photographing them in Spain took most of last summer."

Finchley Lido veteran

A project manager for Camden Council, John is a keen landscape photographer as well as an enthusiastic swimmer. "I've always swum outdoors," says John, who is a year-round user of the men's pond on Hampstead Heath. He has lived in East Finchley for nine years, but his connection with the area goes back much further, for as a child he used to swim in the

open-air pool at Finchley Lido.

He describes his book as being all about "trying to get away from the beaches and discovering beautiful places to swim". It is one of a series of books published by Wild Things Publishing which aims to get people to experience the great outdoors. John got in touch with them when he heard that they were looking for contributors to a book on Spain.

In good company

Wild Swimming Spain has received favourable coverage in *The Guardian*, and was the subject of a recent evening at Stanfords, the famous map and travel bookshop in central London. "It was very successful. We sold out!" John told *The Archer*; "The biggest honour was when I saw, either side of my photo in the window,



Leap of faith: One of John Weller's stunning photos from his new book

George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Laurie Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*... I was really chuffed to be sharing a window with such illustrious and inspiring

writers."

John Weller will hand deliver signed copies of his book to East Finchley residents

for a special price of £11 (RRP is £16). Anyone interested can email him on johnweller67@gmail.com.

Amazing story of the Huntingfield Paintress

By Daphne Chamberlain

You can read all about a lady called the Huntingfield Paintress in a new book by local writer Pamela Holmes, and then go and look at what she painted! Huntingfield is a remote Suffolk village, but it has a church with its entire ceiling painted by this 19th century vicar's wife. It took her seven years, by the end of which she was described as crippled.

Why have we not heard about this before? That was the question bothering Pamela Holmes after she was shown the church by a friend. Virtually nothing else has been recorded beyond the facts that the solitary painter was Mildred Holland, who painted the work in the 1850s and 1860s, and her husband paid for the paint and gold leaf.

Credible fiction

So, as Pamela's book clearly states, it is a novel. It is her interpretation of Mildred's personality and what drove her to climb ladders, and later to be winched up, to lie on her back for hours, creating an amazing 15th-century-style work of art.



Mildred Holland's labour of love. Photo courtesy of Pamela Holmes

Her Mildred is very convincing. Using imagination and extensive research into life and conditions of the time, she tells the story of a lively, imaginative,

but deeply frustrated woman who had admired works of art all over Europe, but had never been allowed to develop her own talent until she seized upon this project.

Pamela Holmes, who won the Jane Austen Short Story Award in 2014, told *THE ARCHER*: "The church is stunning and Mildred should be celebrated."

This is an absorbing book, easy to read, but providing plenty to think about. I hope to see that ceiling for myself this summer. *The Huntingfield Paintress* is published by Urbane Publications, ISBN 978-1-910692-66-0.

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