



As the Bookfest is set to return to SW19 in October, Will Gore meets Wimbledon resident and acclaimed author **Michelle Paver**

**M**ichelle Paver is a name that keen young readers won't be slow to recognise. The Wimbledon author has spawned a literary phenomenon in the shape of her *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* saga.

More than 2.5 million copies of the books have been sold worldwide and the six-part series has been translated into 30 different languages. The final Chronicle, *Ghost Hunter*, was released last year and it capped things off nicely for Paver by winning her the prestigious *Guardian* Children's Prize for Fiction.

Amid this success, she also found the time to write *Dark Matter*, a ghost story that found favour with an adult audience last year.

Paver will be discussing this book in an appearance at October's Wimbledon Bookfest – a literature festival that is not only on her home patch, but also close to her heart.

"I've been involved in Bookfest from the start," she tells me over coffee.

"The festival seems like it has been around for ages but in fact this is only its sixth year. It has gone from strength to strength because it is really well organised.

"Authors talk to each other and if something isn't organised properly word gets around. This festival is one of the best and the audience always have great questions."

Paver, 50, was born in Nyasaland, central Africa (now Malawi), but moved with her family to England at the age of three. By the time she was eight the Pavers had moved from Essex to Wimbledon Village, where they lived in a house near St Mary's Church.

The youngster found plenty in the area to feed her imagination – indeed Paver reveals that the inspiration

for the central characters in the *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness*, a young boy and a wolf, were inspired by the memory of her walks on Wimbledon Common.

She explains: "When I was 11 I used to take the dog for a walk on the Common and into Canizaro Park and imagine he was a wolf.

"The walled garden in Canizaro wasn't developed beautifully as it is now. It was in ruins and, as I was keen on *The Lord of the Rings*, I pretended we were at the gates of Isengard."

She went to school at The Study until the age of 15, before moving to Wimbledon High.

From there she went on to study bio-chemistry at Oxford and then spent more than a decade working as a barrister, an experience she hated.

After 13 years,

Paver threw in the towel in order to try and crack the literary world and, thankfully, was given a timely boost just before she left her job: "While I was working as a barrister I realised I really wanted to give writing a go. I used to write on weekends and in the evenings and got lots of rejections. It was only after I handed my notice in that I got a call from a publisher saying they wanted to offer me a deal – it was the best day of my life."

She went on to write a number of historical novels before she struck gold with *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* and *Dark Matter*.

Apart from her early years and a short period when she lived in central London as a lawyer, Wimbledon has always been Paver's home and she has recently moved into a house overlooking her beloved Common. While she loves living and working here, she is also a keen traveller and uses her trips as research opportunities.

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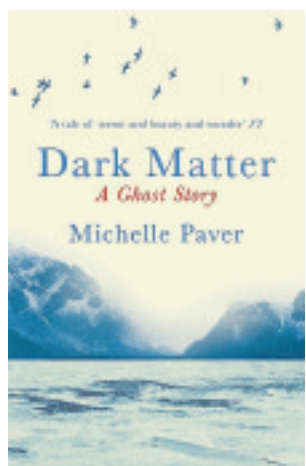
A journey to Spitsbergen, in Norway, helped her create *Dark Matter* – a ghost story that gives a new meaning to the term ‘spine-chilling’ thanks to its Arctic setting.

Set in the 1930s, the book tells the story of Jack Miller, a communications expert invited to join a research expedition to the fictional outpost of Gruhuken. One by one Jack’s companions leave him to face the perennial dark of the Arctic winter alone – or as alone as you can be when there is a hideous ghost stalking your every move.

Paver says she timed her visit to Spitsbergen to coincide with the beginning of the Polar Night and that the trip was vital in helping her capture the atmosphere of the setting. She also studied famous ghost stories, including the Victorian classic, *The Open Door* by Margaret Oliphant (who herself lived in a house overlooking Wimbledon Common), in order to ensure she achieved her aim of “scaring the hell out of the readers”.

She will be spending the next five years working on *Gods and Warriors*, a new series for kids. However, Paver says she is also keen to write another ghost story at some point, thus ensuring there is plenty for her fans of all ages to look forward to.

**Michelle Paver will appear at Southside House as part of Wimbledon Bookfest on October 1 at 8pm. Recommended for ages 14 plus. For further information visit [wimbledonbookfest.org](http://wimbledonbookfest.org) and [michellepaver.com](http://michellepaver.com)**



## WIMBLEDON BOOKFEST 2011

For the sixth year running Bookfest is bringing a host of celebrities and star writers to Wimbledon, with Maureen Lipman, Robert Harris and Terry Jones among the big names set to appear.

On October 8 *Monty Python* star Jones will have kids and grown-ups rolling in the aisles in The Big Tent, on Wimbledon Common, as he reads from his *Animal Tales* collection and on the following day Lipman and Harris, author of *Fatherland and The Ghost*, will take part in consecutive events at the same venue to bring the festival to a close.

The Big Tent will also host a number of other Bookfest highlights including appearances from former chancellor Alistair Darling, who will be discussing his memoir, *Back from the Brink: 1000 Days at No. 10* (October 5), and the Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy (October 6), who will be reading from her new collection, *The Bees*.

**The festival runs from October 1 -9 and other venues include Kings College, Wimbledon Library and St Mark’s Church.**

