

RETIREMENT

**WEDDING BELLS**  
Geoffrey Morton and June Smith, right, met at Blagdon Village in Somerset, left



# Down(size) with love...

*There is no better place to find romance in later life than in a retirement village, says Jane Slade*

**O**n Wednesday, 98-year-old Oz Cottam Moss will receive three Valentine's cards from her partner Morgan Kenny: one at breakfast, one at lunch and another at supper. "The effect of one card disappears quickly," explains Kenny, 91, a retired university lecturer and poet. "Reminders rekindle the special warmth deep inside."

The couple were both widowed when they met at Danny House, a rental retirement village in Sussex, 14 years ago. "Danny House is a lovely place to conduct a romance," adds Kenny, who enjoys gentle walks and theatre trips with Cottam Moss, often travelling by train from Hurstpierpoint to Brighton. "You drive down two miles of tree-decorated road, past grassy hills and duck-spotted lakes to arrive at the Elizabethan splendour of the house nestling against sky-reaching hills," he waxes.

Even though Danny House has sprinkled its romantic dust on the couple - they share a two-bedroom apart-

ment with a huge sitting room, costing £4,000 a month including utility bills and meals - Canadian-born Cottam Moss has no wish to marry her beau. "I am happy to live in sin with my toy-boy," she says. To be sure, she has been married three times - to a diplomat, an admiral, and a businessman - and been widowed twice.

This is not the first love affair to take place at Danny House. It was the country home of Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who lived there with his wife Margaret as well as his secretary-turned-mistress Frances Stevenson - all sleeping under the same roof.

In 1908, Mary Campion, whose family owned Danny House, described it as a romance-laden country house, hardly touched by time or change. She wondered what stories its mellow bricks might tell "were they endowed with speech by some wizard spirit" - and concluded that they would not be tales of "heated voice and hasty duel" but rather those from "the gay days of Stuarts, when plumed and splendid cavaliers ruffled in its halls, whilst fair ladies sighed and loved".

The estate was also where, on Oct 13

1918, Lloyd George chaired a conference attended by Winston Churchill in the Great Hall that brought an end to the First World War. In 1957 it was converted into a retirement community of 20 properties.

"Danny is more of a country club than retirement village," says its owner, Richard Burrows, who bought the Grade I listed Elizabethan house for £3 million in 2005.

"Everyone is very sociable and there are lots of opportunities for friendships to flourish." There are currently two one-bedroom flats available to rent, costing £3,000 a month for a couple or £2,800 for a single person.

Brenda Faulkner, 76, was not looking for romance when she moved into a rented studio in St Clements Court, a development for the over-55s in Weston-super-Mare, north Somerset. She had spent most of her married life caring for her sick husband, Ian, who died in 2012, and moved to the Anchor scheme to be near her daughter.

"I met John the day I moved in," she



**'HAPPY TO LIVE IN SIN'**  
Morgan Kenny and Oz Cottam Moss, below, met at Danny House, left



says. "I thought he was just being neighbourly when he invited me to lunch at the local supermarket." Retired coach driver John Robertson, 71, pursued Brenda, who has four children and 22 grandchildren, but happily the feeling was mutual. On Valentine's Day 2016, she proposed. "Well, it was a leap year," she says.

The couple married in November and moved into a one-bedroom apartment at the development. "I feel so lucky to have found John. He gives me strength," Faulkner says. "The children idolise him and even

call him dad. I never imagined this would happen to me. It is wonderful having him in my life. I would never have met him had I not moved here."

St Clements Court is two miles from the seafront and has 32 studio apartments, five one-bedroom flats and one two-bedroom flat. Monthly rents start at £512.

"A full schedule of social events - including coffee mornings, quizzes and themed dinner-and-drinks events at our developments with on-site restaurants - help residents to get to know one another," says Howard Nankivell, Anchor's housing operations director. "As a result, new friendships quickly blossom and in some cases, develop into something more."

This was certainly the case with Geoffrey Morton, 81, and June Smith, 76, who moved to Blagdon Village in Taunton, Somerset, in 2007 with their respective spouses.

Smith's husband, Tom, died seven months after they had settled into their two-bedroom apartment, and Morton's wife, Freda, died in 2012.

"I got to know June as we were on the residents committee and had similar interests," says Morton, a retired publisher. In 2014, he took the plunge and proposed to Smith at the top of the Eiffel Tower, then announced to the other residents their plans to marry.

Smith, a former legal secretary, sold her apartment and moved into Morton's roomy two-bedroom chalet bungalow. "We had a real job trying to squeeze all our belongings into one home," he recalls. "But we managed it and on our first day I made sure I carried June over the threshold."

Blagdon Village, a Retirement Villages development, has 85 apartments, bungalows and cottages and is not far from Exmoor National Park. Two-bedroom flats start from £240,000 and facilities include a restaurant, bar, library, hairdressers and guest suite.

"Love, friendship and relationships do blossom and are a natural part of village life," says Paul Walsh, Retirement Villages' care and operations manager. But as at all ages, finding that special person - especially right on your doorstep - is rare. "Over the years we have only seen a handful of actual marriages between two existing residents," he adds.

Morton says he and Smith feel "blessed" to have met each other. "But we never forget our previous spouses," he adds. "June was married for 42 years and I for 53, and we have their photos on display."

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