

Retirement

Single residents in sociable villages are discovering unexpected romance

Love never retires

by Jane Slade

GREAT British Bake Off star Prue Leith never expected to find love after her husband died. But this year she is not only celebrating the tenth anniversary of meeting John Playfair but marking their fifth wedding anniversary.

'I'd been single for 14 years — and thought that was it,' said Prue, now aged 80. 'At my age, you don't expect to fall in love again, so I've been really lucky.'

Had they been living in a retirement development, they may well have met sooner.

Retirement communities are ideal hotspots for nurturing romance. That's what Spencer McCarthy, the CEO of Churchill Retirement, believes (churchillretirement.co.uk). And it seems too churlish to argue.

'We're not a dating service, but our lodges create a warm and welcoming environment that offers community, companionship, fun and friendship for those who want it,' says Mr McCarthy. 'If some of our owners find romance, too, then that's a bonus. Many of our customers are widowed and suddenly find themselves alone, perhaps for the first time in their adult life.'

Janet and David Hewitt found romance after meeting a year ago in the lounge of Anchor Hanover's Silverwood Court in Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham. 'I



Couple: Ray Taylor and Celia Forsberg met at Rothesay Lodge in Dorset

wasn't looking for love, but David was special, and we soon became a couple,' says Janet, 68, who is widowed with one son.

The couple were renting separate studio apartments and because there weren't any larger ones available they moved to the retirement operator's Oakwood Court in Middlesbrough so they could live together.

'When I retired eight years ago, I never thought I'd find love again,' adds Janet.

'I mean, where do you even begin at our age? But my life and opinion has completely changed since then.' Indeed, it

has. The pair were married in September (anchorhanover.org.uk).

Baby boomers — those aged around 57 to 75 — are becoming so loved up that they are more likely to take the marital plunge than youngsters. In England and Wales between 2007 and 2017, the number of marriages increased more among the over-65s than any other age group.

But not all who find love in later life want to tie the knot and live together.

Ray Taylor and Celia Forsberg first met when Ray came to view Churchill Retirement's

Rothesay Lodge in Highcliffe, near Bournemouth, two years ago.

Romance blossomed after Ray, a former practice manager for a group of solicitors, moved into an apartment on the floor below Celia.

'We have a lot of fun together,' says Celia, 78. 'Ray loves birds so we go to Stanpit Marsh and the New Forest. We also love going on picnics and walking on the beach.'

The couple enjoy cooking for each other but have no plans to move in together.

'I do Chinese, Italian and Greek and Celia cooks lobster, scallops,' says Ray, 75.

Women tend to outnumber men in retirement communities. And such is the high number of single women at Castle View retirement village in Windsor that the chief executive has put a call out for more chaps.

'Everyone is welcome here,' says Robin Hughes, 'but on behalf of our lovely ladies it would be great if we could attract a couple of single men to join this wonderful community' (castleviewwindsor.co.uk).

Inspired Villages, which is launching its sixth community, Ledian Gardens near Maidstone, Kent, is sponsoring a friendship initiative which is open to older members of the local community.

'Inspired Friendships is designed to connect people with others so that friendships can blossom within the wider community,' says chief operating officer Tom Lord.

It has already sparked one romance — between retired local policeman Eric Roberts, 82, and Val Lidington, the widow of Kent's former deputy fire chief (inspiredvillages.co.uk). That should be a law-abiding and safe union.