

THE NATION may have been celebrating the birthday of Her Majesty the Queen, but at Springdene we have had our very own queen for the day in the person of Gladys Gathergood, who notched up a marvellous 108 years on the Queen's birthday last week.



Gladys, who is our oldest resident, is a very special person, not least because in her long life she has survived two world wars and two pandemics. She was 13 years old when the Queen was born and, according to the Office for National Statistics, she is one of the 75 oldest people in the country.

Just imagine – when Gladys came into the world King George V was on the throne and women didn't have the vote. It was the year when the crossword, the bra and stainless steel were all invented, and modern things we take for granted, such as mobile phones, television and the internet were the stuff of fantasy.

Gladys, who relishes every minute of life, had a wonderful day at Springview, with a splendid cake and celebratory tea, with the Salvation Army brass band coming to play for her. Characteristically, she looked as elegant as ever, with a twinkle in her eye and a crown on her head as she greeted well-wishers, who sang a rousing Happy Birthday. She was thrilled to receive a telegram from the Queen.

And her wisdom has spread around the world since she gave an interview to the BBC's World Service, in which she talked about her philosophy of life and some of her memories. She was just five when the Spanish flu pandemic swept the world. Gladys told the BBC: "I remember about the shortage of coffins, and the great potato shortage.

"I also remember the wartime rationing. We were young marrieds. If there was queue, we got on the end of it. We didn't bother to see what it was. Sometimes it was just an orange. Make do and mend – that was our motto! We crocheted and knitted and patchworked. I remember being given a neighbour's old shirt – it made a lovely dress."

"So how would you compare the impact," the BBC asked, "of the present virus with the other events of your lifetime?" Gladys replied: "Now look, I lived through the world wars, which were dreadful. And at the end of my life, I have come into this home and people talk about the old days – 'our generation'. But when it comes to it, I'm truly proud to have lived through the modern generation!"

And what advice would Gladys give to those of us feeling miserable during lockdown? "Love one another. Love your neighbour. Just be as kind as you can to one another. It does help!" Bless you, Gladys. Many happy returns!

And we wish the same, too, to Beryl Goodwin, also at Springview, whose 92nd this week was marked by a giant cake. And while on the subject of

cakes, residents and our activities teams have been busy baking Victoria Sponges for “royal week” (the sponge was named after Queen Victoria), and as entries to the latest round of the great Springdene Bake Off.

The challenge was to make the classic sponge, and contestants were instructed to do whatever they wished for the recipe, with different flavours and decorations. But they had to make a cake fit to serve at the Queen’s tea. The results were eclectic indeed.

One home kept it simple, with an homage to the cake’s name displayed in the presentation. Another went for a Union Jack theme, colouring the sponge mix and using fresh berries to top the cake. At Spring Lane, Magda and her team of bakers spent an entire morning turning their raspberry Bakewell-inspired sponge into a teacup. (So, we had a cup of tea made from cake! See below.)



The delicious cakes were scoffed so quickly that there was hardly a morsel left over. The result was a tie between Spring Grove and Spring Lane. But our chief tasting judge Theodore, pronounced the teacup cake to be the winner, giving the team "Star Baker" status. It was "a showstopper", he announced.

In another gesture for "royal week" Spring Grove residents made a lovely card for the Queen and selected a charity to donate to in honour of her birthday. This is the Reedham Children's Trust, which supports the most vulnerable children around the country – of which Her Majesty is patron. As part of our community engagement programme, residents will be making and selling items on the theme of nature in aid of the charity.

Everyone has been enjoying the recent warm weather, (Malwina reports from Springview that folk have actually been sunbathing) and there's plenty of merry-making in prospect as we prepare for VE Day celebrations on May 8. There will be a street-party-style lunch, lots of our favourite 1940s classics, history talks – and plenty of union jacks. Those who recall our VE Day jamborees of yore will know how much fun everyone will have!

And while we're in the mood for celebration, let's hear it for our lovely residents of the week, who are pampered with flowers and chocolates. Suham Gareh at Spring Grove was born in Baghdad and her father worked in the import-export business. Suham enjoyed working with her father, but really loved her time on the shop floor at Harrods. She misses Iraqi meals, but adores eating fresh-fruit salads.

At Springview, Sylvia Narine is so bubbly and bright. Hailing from Trinidad, she has a big family and adores them all – their pictures adorn the walls of her room. She trained as a nurse and a teacher and enjoys dancing and sitting in the garden, soaking up the sun and sharing naughty jokes with her friend Joan from the same floor.

A kind and caring person, Madge Ewart at Spring Lane is from Yorkshire, but met her husband in London, where she has lived ever since. She enjoys baking, reading and is especially partial to a nice glass of wine. Congratulations to all three!

Lastly, it's the time of year again when we have to review our pricing, and shortly families will be receiving a letter to announce that our room rates will increase by 5 per cent from June 1.

The past twelve months have been difficult for everyone and not least for care homes. While the government has given some financial support, all providers are suffering financially from the impact of the pandemic.

Occupancy remains a challenge across the sector and many commentators have forecast that it could take up to three years for demand to return to pre-Covid-19 levels. At the same time, our homes are facing spiralling costs, exemplified by a 70 per cent insurance premium increase due to Covid-19. In addition, the government has just increased the National Minimum Wage, which has a knock-on effect on all our wage rates.

We understand that no-one likes to pay more. However, our rise is below that of almost all our major competitors (the average is 5.5 per cent across the board). And we hope you will recall that last year, because of the pandemic, we gave you a substantial "holiday" from a rate rise over the summer months.

We trust you will bear with us. But if you wish to comment on the rise, please get in touch with our chairman Michael Williams at mwilliams@springdene.co.uk.
