

PRESS RELEASE

New book celebrates Somerset's very special Somerset treasures!

We are all living longer – and that's official! West Somerset boasts the highest median age in the UK, at 52.4 years and statistics show that Somerset is home to many of the older people who make up an increasing proportion of the UK population.

A new book, titled *"Somerset Centenarians"*, and published by The Somerset Care Group looks at the life stories of 20 of the centenarians it cares for and explores the amazing lives and personal experiences of these people who have become residents of the county as they celebrate their centuries.

The book contains some wonderful contemporary portraits taken by Somerset photographer Anita Corbin and these truly capture the essence of each subject projecting



L-R: Mabel Stuckey, Bessie Barnes and Ivy Springham all feature in Somerset Centenarians

their individual personalities out from the pages. Anita comments, "What really struck me when I photographed each of the 20 centenarians was how incredible it was to have lived so long and what a wealth of different experiences were wrapped up with each character." The portraits together with the subjects' own photographic archives help to tell each person's individual story that is fully revealed in Kalina Newman's skilfully crafted text.

The book was the idea of Somerset Care's Chief Executive Andrew Larpent OBE. His research into storytelling has seen him travel across the world after he was awarded funding by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to examine the practice across the world.

The 20 centenarians featured in the book are not all Somerset born and bred, but by reason of their varying circumstances they have all become residents of the county as they celebrate their centuries. Their stories are vastly different, from the Tiller Girl to the South African Lady to the men and women who have always lived here. Each of their stories contains love and loss, and includes their own personal experiences of the momentous events that shaped the 20th century.

Having travelled the world charting the stories of individuals across the globe, Andrew Larpent, Chief Executive of the Somerset Care Group, wanted to celebrate the people living in his own county and capture their remarkable tales for posterity. He says, “The fact that people are living longer is primarily a cause for celebration and this book is our contribution to celebrating the great social opportunity that this gives to so many of us. Our commitment is to help to enable everyone to enjoy their longevity to the greatest extent possible. 100th Birthday parties in our homes are now common occurrences and each is celebrated in as much style as is possible for the individual concerned. Our Somerset Centenarians are our Somerset treasures and it is they who inspire and motivate all those of us who are privileged to support them.”

The stories and Anita Corbin’s portraits show how Somerset Care offers older people varying levels of independence whether it is in their own home – as in Mabel Stuckey’s case where she is looked after by carers, or Bessie Barnes who stands proudly in the front room of her sheltered housing in front of her centenary birthday cards or Ivy Springham who lives in one of Somerset Care’s nursing homes.

The Somerset Care Group is the largest not-for-profit company in Somerset. Based in Taunton, the Group operates 27 care homes in Somerset and Gloucestershire which provide residential and nursing care for over 1,400 residents, and through its home care services it provides over 40,000 hours of community care every week of the year to people in their own homes in fifteen local authority areas.

The book, priced at £16.99 and available through normal booksellers or at £14.99 if purchased direct from Somerset Care (E/: sue.wilson@somersetcare.co.uk) was written by Kalina Newman, with photographs from the subjects’ own archives and contemporary portraits by Anita Corbin, and is published by Wellington-based Halsgrove Publishing. The Somerset Care Group has been caring for older people in the county and beyond for 20 years now, and “*Somerset Centenarians*” is being published to celebrate its twentieth anniversary.

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