

# Epsom woman celebrates remarkable 100th birthday

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An Epsom woman has celebrated her 100th birthday surrounded by three generations of her family and dozens of friends.

Helen Blackman, née Aldridge, was born in Richmond upon Thames on 22 August 1926. She later married Epsom resident Derek Blackman and has lived in the borough ever since.

Mrs Blackman was widowed when her husband died in his 50s, leaving her with three children. She never remarried and has remained closely involved in the local community, where friends describe her as a public-spirited woman who is always willing to help anyone in need, without waiting to be asked or expecting anything in return.

A committed monarchist, Mrs Blackman joined the crowds on The Mall for the coronation of the late Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. She has amassed a treasured collection of royal memorabilia marking coronations and other important anniversaries, to which she can now add a centenary message from King Charles III.

A keen traveller and sightseer, she has enjoyed numerous coach holidays across Europe and the United States. Her other interests include crosswords and the arts, particularly theatre, ballet, opera and classical music.

She continues to attend Glyndebourne Opera each year, courtesy of a nephew who is a conductor and countertenor.

Although her sight is now badly impaired, her speech, hearing and memory remain strong, and she continues to walk with no more assistance than a walking stick.

Mrs Blackman marked her milestone birthday at a celebration organised by her three children at her eldest daughter's home and garden in Tadworth.

Around 60 guests attended the gathering, including many of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The festivities took place in near-perfect weather and came as a surprise to the centenarian, who had known she was visiting her daughter but had little idea of the large gathering awaiting her.

Friends and family describe her as "a very exceptional and remarkable lady".

A special correspondent.

[Despite sharing a surname, the late Derek Blackman is not believed to have been related to Epsom & Ewell Times director Lionel Blackman.]