

Len, 100, (almost) our newest Aussie



RENATO CASTELLO

WHEN his wife of almost 60 years died, Len Rayner knew he didn't want to be alone.

He had no family in England and, despite his age, he yearned for a new adventure.

So, 18 months ago, at 98, the former World War II mechanic and women's hairdresser from Torquay, in Devon, took a business class flight to start a brand new life in Australia.

"I was on my own and my daughter got me by my hair and dragged me to Australia," said Mr Rayner, who has just celebrated his 100th birthday.

"It didn't worry me (coming to Australia) – I just took it as it comes; it was something new. It's quite good; one thing I do notice are the cold nights and the hot days."

Mr Rayner – who is living with his daughter Susan at her Aldinga Beach home – is on a bridging visa and probably Australia's oldest migrant waiting for permanent residency.

Although, at his age, he has no expectations that it will be granted in his lifetime.

"By the time that comes, I will be pushing up daisies – there's more chance of winning the lottery," he said.

Mr Rayner was born and raised in Essex and left school at 14. He was apprenticed to Cohen's Wigmakers,



NEW HOME: War veteran Len Rayner with daughter Sue Rayner and her husband Chris Hurley. Picture: CALUM ROBERTSON

in London, where internationally renowned hairdresser and businessman Vidal Sassoon also trained.

He joined the British Army in 1940, at the age of 24, and was posted to Northern Ireland, where he served with the engineers for five years. He met and married

his first wife, Eileen, in 1940 in London, and they worked as hairdressers on his return from war.

Eileen died in 1952 after a long battle with cancer, leaving behind Mr Rayner and Susan, who was aged just two.

He wed Myra two years later, a marriage that endured

until December 2013 when she died, aged 97, from illness related to dementia.

In Australia, Mr Rayner enjoys walking on the beach, helping out with the housework and attending the ACH Group Social Links Club, at Aldinga, on Thursday and Friday. He only recently gave

up swimming and was a swim coach and played water polo.

"I never smoked and I never drank that much; I never liked being drunk," Mr Rayner said.

"I've been very lucky in my life. I never worry about things too much. I've always kept busy."