

# Stories of Oxford

## A collection of stories from the Oxford community

### David Lloyd George

*'I had their money, I'd buy an island and sit on it all day!'*

David Lloyd George, beloved amongst Oriel joggers, sits on a bench in the Christ Church meadows. We ask if he has time for a chat...

Go for it!

**Are you from Oxford?**

Yas, all my life. All of it. Love it! Outside of Oxford, there's a weird world - they don't talk properly! They're thick - no offence! London's got nothing on this.

**What do you love about Oxford so much?**

All of it! Everything. All the pubs are gone now though. You can't get chip shops no more, no proper chips, it's all in frozen packets. The only thing is, the structure itself doesn't change here, it's always the same... I've noticed the students are becoming more... uppity-buppity. See, before, I used to get on really well with all the students, all of them... Naah, see the infrastructure at Oxford stays the same, all the time, just like - they own it, they own everything, they're very, very powerful people. So they think! [Laughs]

**So, you reckon the students are getting less friendly?**

They think they're above the status. I think they're really - "oh I'm... studying here so I'm above you". But I've got more brains than they would know, just don't use it. Just don't need to do anything. I get on well with a lot of them, just some of them are a bit... snobby... unacceptable. We all know Oxford is at the top now as well. So, I don't know what's going on there...

**Do you think that divide's grown in recent years?**

It's been going on for a while... slowly. I'd say over the last... probably over the last, like, four or five years? Students have been getting a bit - seem to be locking themselves into colleges all the time, they don't... See what I look at, I look at it straight, I do: if they don't communicate with people like me, homeless people, who are - we really are poor people - then when they go into the real world, they won't have a clue how to communicate, be stuck on their mobile phones, computers, haven't got a clue how to communicate. So if I was a boss for a company, and one of them came in for a job, he wouldn't have a clue how to talk to me, wouldn't even know I was the boss. So I'd just say - no chance! And there's not a lotta

work for students as there is anyway, *that's* for definite. It's wrong. They give them a shovel, I think, to pick their noses with. So they wouldn't have a clue.

**One thing I've noticed, as a jogger around here-**

-I'm here! I'm here. Always here.

**You're always so great and supportive!**

I think, a lot of people need that. 'Specially students, I mean, cos - that's what I mean! - some of them go jogging round here an' completely ignore me, *completely* blank you, and I think - hang on, I've got more brains than you'll ever have. Take that! Hey, it's good to give encouragement and enthusiasm, because... first it can help you with your studies - definitely can, I know that for a fact. Secondly, you get to meet all sorts of different people an' have a *talk* with them people - a lot of people won't talk to me, they think, "aaah, he's just a homeless drunk, he's *nothing*". They don't give a conversation with you where you really know what you're talking about. An' then they think, aah, that's where they think they're above you, *immediately*. You're still looking at that bar of chocolate, aren't you! [Proffers bar of chocolate on the bench...]

**I'm thinking about it...**

Go for it! It's free! It's free! This is one thing in Oxford that's free - swimming. An' that chocolate. Everything else you've gotta pay for! Pretty much everything, here.

**So, is the meadow one of your favourite spots in Oxford?**

Oh yes! The meadow and the canals. The meadow here, because sometimes a lot of the time - even though there's all the jogging - [Passer-by: Hello Dave!]

Hello, how are you? You're out drinking again, aren't you?

[Are you not!]

I am, got 'em in there, got 'em but I'm... [Points at plastic bag.] cos I'm just having a chat, aren't I?

[Passer-by: And now you have disciples as well?]

Wouldn't go that far!

[Trainees, apprentices.]

That'd be fun!

[Alright, see you later!]

I'll see you crawling back that way when you're drunk!

So, it's this and the canals - the canals, I like boats! Love just watching it drift by... but *here*, you've got everything in the middle o' the city, and *sometimes*, a lot of people go jogging an' that, go walking, a lot of students talk to me, a lot don't, I'm not too bothered 'bout things like that, and you can... well... here we are now, having a chinwag!



Great fun. And there's peace and quiet *sometimes*. Unless you get ten thousand billion tourists. Pretty regular. Pre-tty regular.

**[Talk about moving to Oxford, how we found it]**

I think - I noticed - a lot of students do say that it feels like a bubble here. Outside, there's another world. It's completely different.

**Is it very strange during the holidays, when all the students are gone?**

It's worse - all the tourists take control. What they do, they rent out the rooms that the students are in, once the students have gone, they rent 'em out to the tourists and all that, for summer schools and all that sort of stuff. They're always making money though they're skint. It's amazing that is. Amazing. All the money that they've got, and they've never got any money! Ahhh... boy, if I had their money, I'd buy an island and sit on it all day! Fire off fireworks all day. I'd open one pub. For me.

**It's the dream. [...] Is there much of a community in Oxford?**

Oh yes! *Local* community? Oh yes. Lots. It's all over the place, but it's... You've got to be Oxford to know 'em, if you get my meaning. If I go to some pubs, I do, Christmas day, I go to a pub and everyone in there knows everybody... you know who they *are*, but you don't say anything about anything, you just have a good ol' chat and a good ol' drink. And relax - everyone knows everybody in there, an' I know that an' all... But it's a very closely knit, very secretive, weirdly... same as the colleges! You know, the colleges, what goes round in the college stays in the college, it's *college stuff*. And here, with Oxford *local* people... not a lot, but some are very - secretive, so it's the same sort of thing, you talk among yourselves, you 'ave a natter, yup. An' a drink!

**What's the general opinion of the Oxford community on the student body?**

They like 'em! They like the students, and the university, they like 'em! There's a mutual understanding between students and locals, it's a mutual thing. Oh, there's a lot of problems that go on, but you get that wherever you go - wherever you go! See, what a lot of us think: we don't want the tourists here. We prefer the students! They're more civilised, more refined, you have a better conversation out of 'em, and [leans in conspiratorially] nearly all of 'em speak English! It's true. It's much, much better.. And the balance is more or less stable - with all the tourists here, you just don't know who's who.

Go on, have a bit of chocolate. Go for it!

...Thanks!

**[After eating chocolate...] Do you mind if we take your picture?**

Which way? [Poses, laughs] Oh my God... so everybody in Oriel College'll know me, and they'll throw me in the river? [General laughter] Great going, great going... I'll be down t' watch the rowing, down to watch the Summer Eights, and they're gonna throw me in the river again! Afternoon, ladies!

[Several people walk past, ignoring that David spoke to them]

I rest my case.

**Let's have that picture!**

Go for it! Oh, yeah, which? - oh, I'll just be myself. I'll be myself. I haven't got a fag - if I had a fag, I'd light it up.

**[Talk about the lighting...] I don't think any picture could be bad with this background**

Not a chance - look at the colour of the trees, they're fantastic!

**Do you have a favourite season for Christ Church meadows? -**

-Yeah. Winter.

**Winter?**

Don't like the rain. Snow is easy, cold weather is easy... the wind an' the rain are a nightmare. With rain, you can't get out of it - you stick here, you're stuck, you've had it. So what've we got planned for the rest o' the day!? Fireworks, fire-

works, or fireworks?

**I think the fireworks are a definite..**

There you go! Fireworks. And then the pub. Then a club!

**Maybe...**

Go for it!

**[Talk about rowing - none of us likes the idea of early get-ups much, prefer to work late and 'wrestle ourselves out of bed in the morning'...]**

That's a bad idea. Stay in bed. Tell the tutors an' that, 'Ah, I'm not going today', go in, stick your feet up on the desk and say: 'I'm just gonna relax,' and go to sleep. They'd probably throw you out.

They did that in Christ Church, a few years ago. I was talking to a few students - I thought they was going to a house party, or party of some sort, so I thought, 'I'll tag along'. Only having a bleedin' lecture, didn't they? Smack, bang into it! I didn't know...

**What was it on?**

The human brain - that sorta stuff. Anyway... the lecturer said, 'Should you be in here?' and I said, 'Well I thought they was goin' to a pub'. Then I went over and I drank, probably a glass of champagne at the end of the lecture with 'em, and then those - he turned round an' he said, 'Those who were *invited*, going to dinner,' as if to say, 'He know you - get out, you!'. How's that!?

Ohh... love it! I haven't been in Oriel College yet, though... should smuggle my way in. When's your next ball?

**Next year? (We think...)**

I gatecrashed - got kicked out *twice*, in Christ Church. Got through the gate - I was already in the gate. 'No way, David,' took me out. So I went back round, climbed over the wall and went in! But he went and spotted me again, so I said, 'how'd you spot me?', and he was in a state, he said, 'look at the way *they're* dressed, compared to you!'. [Jogger comes by.] Hello, there! Good luck!

...An' after he threw me out again. I didn't try again, cos I knew I wouldn't get in. Didn't even get a *drink*! No booze? Oh, never mind - that's what we're up to today! Are you going jogging tomorrow?

**Maybe... a bit cold now. [...] If you don't mind us asking, how old are you?**

Ah. My birthday, it's in - next week! Fifty, fifty... fifty-three! I know, it's an old age...

**What day next week?**

I can't remember. One of 'em!

**Have a good birth-week, then!**

Aw, I get the whole week drinking! Cooool.

**Thanks so much for talking with us.■**

### Darren Potter

*'They're horrible people, where I come from...'*

There's a man playing an electric keyboard on Cornmarket Street. He introduces himself: 'Darren Potter, as in Harry Potter'. Music is Darren's life. He bought

his keyboard in a charity shop, and has been teaching himself to play; we can see the note names inked onto the keys. We heard him playing 'Swan Lake' as we were walking up Cornmarket Street, but he's not much of a Tchaikovsky fan - his favourite tune to play is 'Greensleeves'.

But Darren really wants to play New Wave music, the music he grew up to - his favourites artists are Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, The Human League, Gary Newman and Depeche Mode. He has three Yamaha synths, but can't yet play them - he's still saving up for an amp. He wants to make his own music eventually. Darren's been in Oxford for nine years now, he tells us. No, wait - it's seven; he remembers arriving in 2009. Originally from Chelten-

ham, he ended up here by chance. On his regular journey from Evesham to London, his Westie dog urgently needed the toilet, forcing him to stop at Oxford. He's been here ever since.

He likes it here, though. 'They're horrible people, where I come from,' he tells us. In Oxford, people are 'well-spoken, decent... civilised'. He likes the community spirit, and says that the students are generally friendly. He tells us he was shocked by the number of

bikes in Oxford after Cheltenham - Oxford's 'gotta be bike city'. His favourite place? Christ Church - it's so historic.

Aside from music, Darren is also super-keen on airplanes - he has a model airplane, two model helicopters, and a jeep. 'I prefer to be by myself,' he says.■

*To find out more about homelessness in Oxford, you can visit [www.oxhop.org.uk](http://www.oxhop.org.uk)*



# Angelis

*I'm trying to get accommodation, but as a single male I've got no chance in hell...*

*We meet Angelis in North Oxford. He lets us interrupt his reading to tell us about his experiences...*

## Are from Oxford?

No. Liverpool and Italy. But I've been down here, sixteen years now.

## Why did you come sixteen years ago?

I woke up drunk in this doorway... Eighteen years ago I lost my wife and son to a drunk driver. He came up onto the pavement and pinned us to a wall. My son died instantly and then my wife died an hour later, internal bleeding. I couldn't cope, so I drank. And I drank and I drank. I've been sober now for a 3 years and 7 months. Bloody hard staying sober, I don't mix with anyone anymore, keep myself to myself. I talk to a lot of students, they help me out a lot, they're nice people. That's about it usually, that's what I talk about. But, like, I'm trying to get work again, but it's hard. Trying to get accommodation, but as a single male I've got no chance in hell, and that's wrong.

## What resources are available in Oxford?

There used to be a *lot* of resources at one time, but there's not anymore. A lot of them have been cut down. There's a night shelter with 39 rooms, but you have to have a connec-

tion with Oxford or be exempt from a connection. In other words, you've got to be born in Oxford. But this is where the stigma comes, what I say now, I'm not being racist by saying this, what they do is, they put Polish men and stuff on the streets first - hello sir, hello travel bruv, good to see ya!

[A friend of his stops and chats]

He's one of my best friends, he is. He was out here four years ago. He ended up on the street, he didn't know anything about the street. And I showed him how to live, where to make his money, how to *beg*. Even though it's against the *law*. Because we don't get benefits a lot of us anymore, because, we're being like, when you don't turn up to job interviews or an appointment, they cut your benefits. I don't get any benefits at all now, it takes the piss. So what I get it, I don't ask for change anymore, if they're prepared to buy me a coffee or some food, or even giving money towards a bed at night, I am grateful. But the police say it's illegal so they'll arrest you and you get fined for it.

## You mentioned before about night shelters?

There's one night shelter. There used to be a couple of places but they closed two of them down now, this is what I mean. Two of them had a hundred rooms in them, but they've been closed down. They've turned one into an immigration house and one for students, sorry to say that. But they made it for students. And that's wrong.

I do one afternoon at the OxFam bookshop. I get free books. I do work for the- yeah, he's a brilliant guy. I do things

like clearing books, stacking them up inside the shop. I don't go into the shop or work behind the till, because, people don't like it, you know what I mean, they don't think it's right that I'm the only person in there. But the owner is wonderful. He lets me use it as an address so I can get mail sent there, and he gets students to write to me from all over the world. I've had emails, because I don't know how to use a computer so, he comes in and gives me a list of emails. He's pretty good. I only learned to read fifteen years ago - he taught me how to read. The morning he woke me up, when I woke up here, I didn't know where I'd been for two years, I'd drank that much. My mind was blank. And he helped me go to rehab, he got me into a rehab, got me clean and sober. But, the reason I don't use the shelter? Is because they're out drinking from nine in the morning to ten at night down there, and it's not a good place for me. If I've had a bad day, I don't want to be around people like that, it's not nice, it's hard.

Like I said, the shelters, if you haven't a connection you can't use the shelters. But the guy, I went to tidy up and he opens the doors for when I go for all nighters, and that helps. Because a lot of places, put up gates, metal gates, on the places where the homeless sleep, like on the Cornmarket, you know where you see them sleep? They're going to put gates there, well that floor's heated. So when they close them gates up and you can't get there, what's going to happen to the homeless? I've had pneumonia three time out here and because of it, I'm waiting for a triple bypass. Because of that,

it's caused problems of my heart. I've got a leaky heart valve, my heart valve is leaking inwards.

## On an unrelated note, what book are you reading?

I'm reading Terry Pratchett Equal Rites. I just started it. I've read it about four times, I like him, he's a good writer. It's a shame he died, he was bloody brilliant author.

## Do you have a favourite book?

I do, Darren Shan The Vampire Apprentice. I love them. I think they're brilliant. They're in the kids' section but a good story is a good story.

Other than that, I do bikes up for students, I do them up. I buy bikes from students, I sell bikes to students. It's the only way I can make a bit of extra money. But a lot of people don't like buying stuff from homeless people because they think parts are stolen. But that's my selling point - the bikes are stolen. All my bikes I buy are from the police station, from Bumblebee Auctions, and all the bikes are stolen. So I buy them from the police and do them up, so they are stolen in a way. But not by me. When I say to them "the bikes are stolen", they're all "no, I don't want them" and when I explain they're like "oh". I always give receipts, I've got a little book that I give to the police sometimes so that they can go check the bikes are running alright. I like that the police do that thought, because it makes me look good as well.

## Where do you sell the bikes from?

I'm always here. They usually get locked at night as well, the bikes. They're anywhere from 50-150. I've got a nice one round there that I ride myself,

it's TT, carbon-fibre. Very nice, I like it. Keeps me going. When a student is worried about the money being spent on a bed, I always bring the receipt back the next day. It stops the student worrying. That's the way I like to do it. It's getting harder now for homeless people to get into Bed and Breakfasts' because the owners don't want to see homeless people. And that's wrong. It's happening quite a lot. And accommodation is so hard to come by. Can I give you some advice? Barges, boats on the river. People go "oh, it's on the river, it's going to be cold". Some of the barges are bloody beautiful inside. And its 139 for a week rent and 30 a month for gas, electricity and petrol. Thirty pound a month - that's cheaper than any landlord in Oxford. I had one about three years ago, that's what I'm saving up for now. Every bit of money I get goes in the bank to save up for that. As a single male, I have 7-12 years to wait for a flat, and I've already been waiting 15 years. So doesn't that say something?

## You mentioned earlier there are fines for homeless people when they've been arrested?

That comes out of people's benefits. That's why I've got no benefits left. I was supposed to be getting 220 pounds a fortnight, by the end I was getting 47 pound a fortnight and after the last fine that left me 13 pound a fortnight to live on. How can you live on that? I just leave it in the bank now. I've left it there for six months now and eventually I'll just go take it all and that will get me a bed.■

# Carol

*Carol works on Cornmarket Street selling hats, scarves and her artwork. It's a busy Saturday afternoon and the streets are full, but she says she has time to talk to us.*

## You've got some great artwork you're doing here.

It's what I do. Some crochet, some knitting. That's a hat, scarf. This is my best one. So I keep it for myself. [Shows us the scarf she's wearing] I make a lot of textiles stuff. [Points to a crochet landscape piece] This is my biggest one I've done. That took me a year to do. Because it fell apart halfway through it. Yeah, that's a year's worth.

## How did you learn how to do this?

Just did it myself. I had a breakdown, said a few prayers, messed up all my money got messed up so... What else could I do? Can't go to work because I'm struggling anyway, got a lot of problems so I thought, 'What else could I do?'. And then I started drawing first. Then I got fed up of drawing, and I don't want to paint

because paint gets everywhere. I tried sewing. Not my best idea. But I've been doing this for five years now. Been fighting my rights to sit where I'm sat just at the bottom of Cornmarket. Been in trouble a couple of times. I'm in a grey area.

## Is that a big issue for you?

Well, the council tell me off. But I've got rights to do this. It's my job, part of my inheritance as well. What they say is, that I can't sit on the floor. They try and give me an Anti-Social Behaviour Order, didn't work. Then they actually threatened action... But I'm just sat on the floor. It's 'antisocial behaviour' but what's antisocial about this? It is a bit *weird* but... First, I've taught the other homeless people to draw on paper, not on the pavement, to do their artwork. I told them that's what they should do: draw. I say, if I can sit here and do it, then you can sit here and do it as well. There's nothing wrong with you, just keep on doing what you're doing. They produce some lovely artwork. All they need is some encouragement, and that's why I'm here. I sit here and talk to everybody about anything. That's what I'm here for - to show people what to do so they can go and do it

for themselves. It's easy. If I can do it, *anyone* can do it. It's easy. All you need is a piece of sheet, picture frame to tie it to, draw your picture, colour it in and then you sew it. That's all you've got to do. Doesn't matter how you do, just stick a needle in and pull it out the other end. [Laughs]

## Are you from Oxford?

Yes, just about Barton and all that. But I show my streetwork here. I'm out in all sorts, rain and shine. The people of Oxford are very kind to me. And the homeless community is full of kind and nice people, they help me out every now and then and I'm there for them. I tell them to stop drinking - been there, done that. Not my fault you're homeless - that's half your fault. Not my fault you put drugs up your arm - been there, done that. I also say to some, 'don't beg in front of me,' because I am actually working here, I'm not like you, I'm actually working. They say, 'you call that work?' and I say, 'you try it'. But many are nice and they'll walk past and put a few pence in my box, even though I know they need it themselves, and they'll say 'this is for you'. And I'll say 'don't be silly' but they'll say "no, you've done it for us, we'll do it for you."



That's how it works. We look out for one another. I have no trouble with my work. I can leave my work here to go to the toilet, no one touches it. I had a couple of occasions where someone did touch my work and I had a few words with that person. But then I told someone what happened and then they sorted it out and the person came back and said, 'sorry - they told me off'. And they will do! People will be looking for someone to talk to and I'm here. They know I'm here, you know: someone on their terms that they can talk to. They can come to me, they're not challenged by me. I'm just one of them. We've all got our problems, some of us can kick them, some of us can't. I'm one of the lucky ones, been there done that. Now I just get on. Do what I've got

to do and hope for the best. That's all I can say to you. Just look in the mirror everyday and tell yourself 'I'm better than that - do what you've gotta do'. [We break as someone buys a hat]

## What inspires the scenes you make?

It's just the stuff in my head. If it's in my head, I draw it. They're all quite similar, but different. I don't really know what I'm doing, it's all just experimenting. Every morning I wake up and do some art. Boredom motivates me really. But every morning, you start from fresh and you've just got to work with it. I realised that when I went to the Ashmolean. I was in the Ashmolean in 2012, I had some of my work in there.■