David Lloyd George

I had my money. I'd buy an island and sit on it all day!

David Lloyd George, beloved amongst Violin juggling 40th bench in the Church Meadow. We ask if he has time for a chat.

Go for it?

Are you from Oxford?

Yes, 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! Lon-church! What do you love about Oxford so much?

A company of everything. All the pubs are gone now though. You can't get chip shops no more, no proper chippies, it's all fish and chips. 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... Nah, see the infrastructure at Oxford stays the same, all the time, just like - they own it, they own it all, everything they're - very, very powerful people. So they think! [Laughter]

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 lots of them, some of them are a bit... snobby... unacceptable. We all know Oxford is at the core 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... don't you say over the last... probably over the last, like, four or five years? Students have been getting a bit... not be friendly towards each other. Sometimes I used to go into colleges all the time, they don't... See what I look at, I look at it the way I am. If I go into Oxford, I don't - they don't seem to communicate with people like me, homeless people, who are - real-ly 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, comp-u-ters, 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 what to say... no chance! And there's not a lot of work for students as there is anyway, that's for definite. It's wrong. They give them a shavel, I think, to pick their hair. So they wouldn't have a clue.

One thing I've noticed, as a jog-ging around here...

I'm here, I'm here. Always here. You're always so great and sup-portive!

I think, a lot of people need that. 'Special students, I mean, cos -

So, is the mould - one of your favourite spots in Oxford?

Oh yes! The meadow and the castle -

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

[Aren't you?] I am, got 'em in there, got 'em in, they're good!

[Points at plastic bag] cos I'm just having a chat, aren't I?

[Passer-by: And now you have a drink?]No, it's not that...

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 done.

So, it's this and the canals - the ca-nals, I like boats! Love just watch-ing it drift by... but, you go, you have everything in the middle ‘o the city, and sometimes, a lot of people go that, too. I think, a lot of students talk to me, a lot don't... I'm not too bothered 'bout things like that... you know... well, we are now, having a chinvag Great fun. And there's peace and order in Oxford, as well, not a get but thousand billion tourists. Pretty reg-ular. Pre-ty regular.

Is it very strange during the hols, 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 skimp. It's another amazing! 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 is-land 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?

Oxford is an Oxford locality, not a... no... Lots. It's all over the place, but it's... You've got to be Oxford to know Oxford. You gotta have a meaning. If I go to some pubs, I do, Christ-mas day, I go to a pub and everyone, everyone says "Great going, great going"...

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

If I had a fag, I

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

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

Which way? [Pokes, laughs] Oh my God... everybody in Oriel Col-lege’ll know me, and they’ll throw me in the river! [General laughter] Great going, great going... I'll be down the river watching the Summer Eighties, and they're all going "it's all over the river again!"

A whole week pass walk, ignoring that David [passer-by] to them...

Rest me case.

Let's have that picture!

Go for it! Go for it! Oh, I'll just be myself. I'll be myself. We haven't got a fag - I had a fag, I'd light it...

[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... the wind an' the rain. With rain, you can't get out of it - you stick here, you're stuck, you've had it...

What's we got our, for the rest o' the day? Fireworks, fires-

works, or fireworks? I think the fireworks are a defi-nite... There you go! Fireworks. And then the pub. Then a club! Mmm...

Go for it!

[Talk about rowing - none of us like it. I know, if 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-" You don't get up to get up on the desk and say: "I'm just gonna relax," and go to sleep. They'd throw you out. Only having a bleeds' lecture, didn't they? Smack, bang into it! I don'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 going" to a pub. Then, I went over and I drank, probably a glass of champagne at the end of the lecture with 'em, and..." But Darren really wants to play new wave music, the music he

But Darren really wants to play New Wave music, the music he grew up to - his favourite artists are Orchestre Manoeuvres in the Dark, The Human League, Gary Newman and Depeche Mode. He has three Yamaha synths, but he can't 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 Every-sham to London, his Westie dog urgently needed the toilet, forcing him to stop at Oxford. He's been here ever since.

It's... His favourite place? Christ Church - it's so historic.

But Darren's more of a local, Darren is also super-kleen on airplanes - he has a model airplane, two model heli-copters, "I like to prefer to be by myself," he says.

To find out more about finding homelessness in Oxford, you can visit www.oxsho.org.uk

Darren Potter

There's a man playing an electric keyboard on Commarket 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; he has an extensive collection of music notes, inked onto the keys. We heard him playing Swan Lake as we were walking up Commarket Street, but he's not much of a Tchaikovsky fan - his favourite tune to play is 'Greensleeves'.

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Stories of Oxford
A collection of stories from the Oxford community

FRIDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2016
ISSUE 15 | UTOPIA
We meet Angelis in North Oxford. He lets us interrupt his routine to tell us about his experiences.

Are from Oxford? No. Liverpool and Italy. But I’ve been down here, sixteen years ago.

Why did you come sixteen years ago? I woke up drunk in this door-

way... 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... I don’t know where I ended up and then my wife died an hour later, internal bleeding. I couldn’t cope, so I drank. And I drank and dranke out down here now for a 3 years and 7 months. Bloody hard staying sober, I don’t mix with anyone alcohol. Keep myself to my self. I talk to a lot of students, they help me out a lot, they’re not all bad people. That’s about usually, that’s what I talk about. But, like, I’m trying to get work again, but it’s hard. That’s the problem with getting money, 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 res-

sibilities here, but it’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. I stay now, I’m not being racist by saying this, what they do is, they put Pointless people in the streets first - hurt big, hello sir, travel bruv, good to see you? [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, to where his money goes. Even though it’s against the law. Be-

cause 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, I don’t ask for change anymore, if people offer me a coffee or some food, or even giving money towards a bed at night, I am grateful. But the problem with a lot of us, 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 them down here, but now of them down now, this is what I mean. Two of them had a hun-

dred rooms in them, but it all got cut down. They’re turned one into an im-

migration 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 want to be seen doing that. But then they don’t think it’s right that I’m the only person in there. But anyway they just let me do it.

Lastly, I’m not allowed to get any money from there. I’ve had emails, because I don’t know to use a computer so, he comes in and gives me a guide. I’ve tried to learn it a lot. I only learned to read fifteen years ago - he taught me how to read. When I wake 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 get off to rehab, he got me into a rehab, got me clean and sober. But the reason I don’t use the shelter? Is be-

cause they’re out drinking from nine in the morning to ten at night. It is a nice place, I think it’s 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 good for me.

Like I said, the shelters, if you haven’t a connection you can’t use the shelters. But the guy, I was talking to the other day, he uses the doors for when I go for all nighters, and that helps. Be-

cause the shelters, they’ve got gates, metal gates, on the plac-

es where the homeless sleep, like on the Cornmarket, you just go to the gates to get in to sleep? They’re going to put gates there, well that floor’s stinking with people who they close them gates up and you can’t get there, what’s going to happen to the homeless? I’ve had pneu-

monia three times in my life, 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. 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.

Then another thing what I do. Some crochet, a crochet landscape piece a lot of textiles stuff. I make a scarf she

wants. This is my best one. So I

just got it. Do what I 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 lighting myself on fire, doing it 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. Here for go show put down the thing, it’s my job, part of my inheri-

tance as well. What they say is, that I can’t sit on the floor. They say I’m just sitting in a Social Behaviour Order, didn’t work. Then they actually threatened action... But I’m just sat on the floor. It’s not antisocial behaviour’ but what’s antisocial about this? It is a bit weird but... First, I’ve taught myself how to write. I can do it. I can write it. Then I sit here and do it, then you can sit here and do it as well. There’s nothing wrong with you, just that’s what you want to do. They produce some lovely artwork. All the people who are better, and that’s why I’m here. I sit here and talk to everybody about anything. That’s what I’m here for, go show put do what do they can 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 to tie it to, to get your message across, colour it in and then you sew it. That’s all you’ve got to do. Doesn’t mat-

ter how you do it, just stick a need-

le in and pull it out the other end. [Laughs]

Are you from Oxford?

I’ve got 220 pounds a month for that. But I show my streetwork

here. I’m out in all sorts, rain and shine. The people of Oxford are bloody brilliant. Not our 

homeless community is full of kind and nice people, they help me out every now and then and things like that. I can’t stop drinking - been there, done that. Not my fault you’re home-

less. I’ve been time out here, not my fault you put drugs up your arm - been there, done that. I also say to some, ‘don’t beg in the streets’. It’s not fair. Not every person is like that. If that’s what happened and then they sorted it out and the person came back and said, ‘sorry - they told me off’. And they will say to people, ‘will you be prepared to talk to this’. That’s all they do! I’m just 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. If I’ve got a leaky heart valve, I just look in the mirror everyday and tell yourself ‘I’m better than that’ - do what you’ve gotta do.

[laughs 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 just all just

perceiving. Every morning I wake up and do some art. Bore-

dom motivates me really. But you know, I’m just happy and 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.\n
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 no time to make art.

You’ve got some great art-

work you’re doing here.

It’s what I do. Some crochet, some painting, some inspiration, and then when my son died instantly and then my wife died an hour later and then my son died instantly and then my wife died an hour later and then my son died instantly and then my wife died an hour later, I just left it in the bank now. I’ve left it there for six months now and eventually I’ll just go and get it out and that will get me a bed.