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# GAY SOC



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## Being gay in Loughborough is not easy Three members of Gaysoc recount their experiences.

### Peter's Story

I first came to Loughborough in 1977, to study in the Chemical Engineering Department. I was 18. I had known I was gay since I was about 15 and had been in a steady relationship since I was 16. Coming to Loughborough was to be a great adventure. At last I was to be free from the self-destructive deception that I had been practising for the previous three years. I had heard about 'gaysocs' from friends, and had read about them in Gay News. The University prospectus listed gaysoc as one of the student societies, so I believed from the start that Loughborough must be a pretty liberal place. Besides, Loughborough was famous for P.E., and you know what they say about P.E. teachers. I would love to meet a member of 'this 'they' one day, just to put them right on a few things. The day came when I was to start this adventure and, having been denied any recognition, let alone sympathy, that I was to be separated from my lover for the first time in two years, I arrived in Loughborough a little emotionally bruised. I only had a week to wait

### 300 gay students

for this thing called a 'Freshers Bazaar', where I would make contact with the Gaysoc. How big would it be? The Kinsey Report had estimated that 1 in 20 of the population is gay, so in a university with about 6,000 students that must mean 300 gay students in Loughborough. Would there be a room big enough to hold the meetings in? With that number of gay students, and the gay people in town, there must be at least a couple of gay pubs, and perhaps a gay nightclub in Loughborough. The first week of lectures kept me occupied until the Bazaar. Having manipulated events so that I didn't have to go with my roommate (perhaps it's a bit too early to tell him yet) I eagerly did a tour of the stalls. I went round for a second time. There was no Gaysoc stall. I was a bit surprised, but eventually found a leaflet entitled

### He was called Mark

'Gay Rights' on the Students' Union stall. At last I had found some way of contacting the Gaysoc. I hastily scribbled a note, put it in the appropriate pigeon-hole and waited. I met the Gaysoc a couple of days later. He was called Mark and was a Management student. My illusions were shattered. There were no gay pubs, no club, and was only later in the year that the membership figures reached the dizzy heights of six. Six wasn't many, but the sheer relief of being in gay company was soon the highlight of the week. That was seven years ago. Things haven't really changed much, if anything they've probably got a

### more police raids

little worse. No Gay News any more - a sad loss. No problems of finding a room big enough, but more of a case of finding a closet small enough. Gay pubs, clubs and bookshops are subject to even more police raids. And what of the 300 gay students in Loughborough? I know that some go to London or Nottingham to be gay and many others are just plain lonely and miserable. What is it about Loughborough (or even Britain) that makes it such a difficult place to be gay? I don't know. You're the ones who make society what it is. Perhaps you know?

### Jude's Story

University - a place where people are encouraged to learn and grow, not just academically but as caring, thinking individuals - or so I thought until I arrived at Loughborough. After two years of living in hall I realized that the qualities engendered by hundreds of students thrown together in a claustrophobic community were those of frantic socializing and of reverence for alcoholic consumption. Women and men, most of whom were away from home for the first time, seemed to be expending most of their energy in discovering and proving their sexual liberation. In a university where the proportion of men to women is so large, men are forced to compete with one another for sexual 'conquests', while women are pressured and trapped into feeling inadequate if they are without a male partner. Women's blocks in halls are under a perpetual state of siege, as young men eager for the cups of coffee and parties, seen as

### stifling sexist assumptions

the first step in the ritualized progression towards proving their virility, queue to gain access. In this atmosphere, sexual liberation becomes a matter of sexual coercion, leaving no room or validity for those who are different, either because they are gay or uncertain about their sexuality, or because they choose to remain outside of the game playing. As a lesbian feminist full of ideals about freedom, personal choice, the need for political commitment and hoping to meet people who challenge stifling sexist assumptions (or indeed who challenge anything!) my first two years on campus often made me feel alternately angry, frustrated and

### The apathetic majority

isolated. The support and encouragement of individual friends at this time was no substitute for the self-affirmation, strength and confidence that I needed to gain from meeting other lesbians and gay men. The women's group became the central focus of my life, as here I was free to express my Self, my sexuality and to make connections with other women beyond the superficiality of everyday campus life. Nevertheless, I lacked the courage to seek out and join the gaysoc until the end of my second year. The thought of phoning Gayline



and attending meetings was terrifying. My fear of 'discovery' and humiliation by the apathetic majority at Loughborough paralysed my ability to act for myself and my sense of the importance of self-assertion and integrity. Eventually I found a women's disco in Nottingham and started attending it regularly. The strongminded and selfconfident women who welcomed me into their

**In through the back door**

group with understanding and support gave me the impetus to return to Loughborough and start to move out of the proverbial closet into a stimulating world of gay awareness, both political and personal. My initial foray into the gaysoc was really through the back door. The women's group was invited to a gaysoc cheese and wine party. I entered surreptitiously as a supporter, and after friendly conversations with the people there, I remained as a member. Since then I have discovered that thinking and caring people do exist on campus and that university can be

**never complacent**

enjoyable and a time of personal growth, communication and interaction. Becoming part of a large group of lesbian and feminist women in the town has made life comfortable, though never complacent. I continue to support gaysoc and the campus women's group because I am aware and constantly reminded of the pressure to conform to, and confirm, the prejudices, assumptions and restrictions that underly society. In an isolated microcosm such as a university these traits are greatly emphasized. The women's group and gaysoc by their existence question the power of revailing apathy and will welcome and support those who venture to do the same.

**Martin's Story**

I was born and brought up in Cheltenham, which on the surface seems an extremely conservative town; but in spite or maybe because of the high population of Fashionable and Wealthy, gay life is terribly easy. There is a greater leniency to the many British eccentrics that being gay seems of little or no significance. Also in this fashionable town, "Gay" has spates of being the "in thing". From this safe and womb-like atmosphere I prepared to launch myself on the unsuspecting outside world and Loughborough College of Art and Design.

**forsaken corner of purgatory**

The first thing I experienced was a culture shock. Where were the book shops and wine bars ? This was before even Casablanca existed. The second thing was the barrage of blank faces that surrounded me. What was the norm or acceptable at home (in dress-sense, let alone lifestyle) was extremely way-out and eccentric in this forsaken corner of purgatory. Even at the Art College there was more than a little reticence from a lot of my fellow students at first, but I was determined not to change by closing myself to the outside world, so I told one of the students I was gay (she had guessed as much) and the news spread within the week.

The fact that Loughborough had a gaysoc, coupled with a good course in Textile Design, were the only reasons I had come here in the first place.

I had no preconceived idea of what a gaysoc was and so wasn't disappointed to find six people huddled in a small room anxiously waiting for the phone to ring. I later found out that this was a suprisingly low number for gaysocs, particularly with no other place to go.

**Blue Peter**

Gaysoc was an ideal place to relax and be myself whilst the people decided how they felt about accommodating me into their lives. I found this period rather strenuous in the non-gay community, fighting to be acknowledged as gay without ramming it down people's throats is hard work. I also learnt a great deal from the other gaysoc members by listening or discussing society, politics, religion and how it affects gay people, each of us putting forward relevent information and experiences. They were also the ideal people to talk to about personal problems, as outside, few secrets remain secrets very long. On the lighter side, there is always gossip. Do you know which ex-Blue Peter presenter is Gay ?

It has taken about two years of patient struggle, but now in my final year the majority of people in and out of College accept me as myself (maybe I have become a little more subtle with age) and after all this time those that don't accept my gayness aren't worth bothering with , are they ?

We hope that these articles may help to reassure you that you are not alone.

Being lesbian, gay or bisexual in Loughborough may not be easy, but the support of a few sympathetic people may make your time here less difficult.

Gaysoc recognises the right of everyone to choose their own lifestyle. If you think that we can help you to make that choice, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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