

## A Southerner Ventures North



by **Georgina Sykes**, an undergraduate student at Leeds Beckett University

Standing outside the library in the cold air and slight drizzle of rain I was approached by a friendly face asking if I had a lighter they could borrow. I did, so I gave them my lighter and was then asked if I was having a nice day. The friendly stranger then thanked me very much for the use of my lighter as I walked back inside. This kind of behaviour seems normal now after 3 years of studying in Leeds, but thinking back to the way of life in my town, which sits just south of London, it couldn't be more different. Before I arrived at university I thought that anything above Watford was northern; Birmingham was WAY up north, and I had never crossed the border from London to the rest of the country above. I had always fancied the north for my university choice, as I thought the north brought a more 'fun' way of life.

As I sat in the car full of all my possessions I was as nervous and excited as any fresher would be, but after 6 hours in the car, the novelty had worn off slightly. As I entered my flat of five people, I quickly realised I was the only southerner by a long way, and the mixture of accents and nerves was really rather confusing. The first thing my new flatmate asked me was whether I wanted a brew. I sat there and racked my brain about what this 'brew' could be, as I had never heard this term before, until finally responding that I didn't drink beer. After a long laugh I was told that a brew was not a beer but in fact a cup of tea, and feeling rather embarrassed, I happily accepted. This was my first experience of confusing northern terminology, and certainly not my last; what is a barm cake?!

My extremely noticeable southern accent seems to stand out like a sore thumb and it didn't take long for everyone I had a conversation with to mention this; there were a lot of comments like: "eugh, a southerner, what are you doing up here?". However I didn't let this deter me, as it didn't take long to notice that most northerners were extremely friendly, and the remarks were meant in good humour.

The student night life was like nothing I had ever seen. This comes as no surprise as the only night club in my small town back home was the kind that people never return to. With the walls dripping with alcohol and every single person you have ever met being in there, it wasn't hard for Leeds to top this. However, what did take me by surprise was the amazingly cheap prices of the drinks. In the first night club I frequented up here, I decided to order a tequila shot, the women

serving me said this would cost me 80 pence. I assumed I had misheard but when she confirmed this price I just couldn't believe it, which then encouraged me to order 8 shots there and then, which obviously ended up being a mistake.

In fact it wasn't just the price of alcohol that surprised me but also the amazing price of taxis, a black cab in London has always been a no go, as you end up spending the equivalent of half your rent on the journey, whereas taxis in Leeds, not only being very affordable but also the drivers are very friendly. Sitting on public transport is also a very different experience once you pass the border of London. When you are on the tube there is a silent agreement between the passengers that no one talks, everyone keeps themselves to themselves, and even if you are travelling with someone you know, you can feel the glare on the back of your head if you are talking. No one helps

you out in London, it is a fight to try and get on and off a train or tube, and if someone is struggling with bags there is rarely anyone who offers to help; I noticed this particularly when I was attempting to cart three suitcases home through rush hour. The general kindness of the city is something which I love and struggle to leave behind when I return home; the conversations with shop assistants, the smiles from strangers and the cheery "hiya love" that I'm greeted with on a daily basis. Even with the mostly horrible northern weather, where the wind knocks me sideways and the bitter cold which turns my hand blue, the kindness from strangers always seems to brighten my day.



My decision to move up north for university is one that I certainly do not regret and the fun that I have had in my three years here could not be compared to anything else. Luckily the majority of the people that I have met while being here have been northern, which will give me a constant excuse to keep coming back to this wonderful place once I have graduated. With any luck I will be returning to live up here, as the thought of living and working in a place where people find you weird if you talk to them, and everyone is such a rush with their day does not fill me with joy.

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**About the author:** *Georgie's main sociological interests are around feminism and gender studies, particularly how society affects young people's views on sex and relationships. This post was written in response to 'A Northerner Ventures South'*

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