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Review

Waterloo Sunset review – inside an oasis of affordable living

This highly watchable documentary spends time with the residents of an almshouse in central London – cheerfully dispelling misconceptions about ageing

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📷 'Like winning the lottery' ... Waterloo Sunset. Photograph: Bruise Films

Tourists drifting out of London's Tate Modern sometimes find themselves peering through the gates of nearby [Hopton's Almshouses](#), a collection of 20 pretty cottages built around a grass courtyard which looks like a village green. If anyone asks what the place is, one cheeky resident tells them in a low whisper that it's an institution for the criminally insane. Actually, Hopton's is [a little oasis of affordable housing](#) for low-income over-65s, built in the mid 1700s by a philanthropist fishmonger for "the poor and decaying men of the parish". Like many other elite men-only spaces it was slow to adapt to change, only admitting women in 2012.

It's like winning the lottery, getting a flat here, says one resident, a former taxi driver. He lost everything after a divorce in middle age; moving to Hopton's changed his life. This very watchable documentary introduces a handful of other residents too. Jenny, 92, cheerfully talks about a recent

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fall on a bus which left her with a sore back. Did she go to hospital, director Harvey Marcus asks from behind the camera? Jenny looks appalled. “No! I could get up and walk. Why make a fuss?”

[Waterloo Sunset - The Trailer on Vimeo](#)



Waterloo Sunset is not a campaigning film by any stretch, but it dispels a fair few myths and misconceptions about ageing. Residents talk about how they would prefer to be seen by society as an asset, not a drain, and to be valued for their skills. Shamus is a musician, a slip of a lad at 76, still making music, still chasing a record deal. Moaning, he says, is one of the privileges of getting old, but how can he be grouchy living at Hopton’s, he adds. “It’s amazing.”

Hobbit-style, the cottages look tiny against the steel and glass luxury flats of the [Richard Rogers-designed Neo Bankside](#) towering behind them. Rogers’s development became a symbol of how luxury housing is sidelining the needs of ordinary Londoners when it opened in 2013, having failed to live up to its original affordable housing claims. Watching Waterloo Sunset you may be left wondering: where are the philanthropist fishmongers today when we need them?

Waterloo Sunset is at the Forum, Hexham on 22 July, then tours.