

THE OLD OAK

UK (2023) 90 minutes

Director: Ken Loach

Cast: Dave Turner (TJ Ballantyne)
Debbie Honeywood (Tania)
Ebla Mari (Yara)



Screening 4th September 2024 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

A pub landlord in a previously thriving mining community struggles to hold onto his pub. Meanwhile, tensions rise in the town when Syrian refugees are placed in the empty houses in the community.

Reviews



Loach has also sought out the painful and unfashionable subjects, marching to where the gunfire has been loudest. With *I, Daniel Blake* it was the vivisectional experiment of austerity; with *Sorry We Missed You* it was the serfdom of the gig economy. Now, in *The Old Oak*, it is that ugly phenomenon from which London's liberal classes have turned away in sorrowing distaste: refugees housed in hostels all over the UK who are being abused and attacked by local people radicalised by social media. But Loach does not attack the "deplorables" of the white working class; on the contrary. Thinking globally, acting locally, he treats them sympathetically; they are the same as their victims. Market forces and geopolitical interests have put them in the same position as the wretched Syrian incomers whom they have been encouraged to hate to feel good about themselves.

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

Eighty-seven-year-old filmmaker Ken Loach's *The Old Oak* is about how changing demographics in a struggling English town called Durham manifest in a crumbling old pub, the last public space that everyone claims as their own. This is Loach's latest and (according to Loach) final motion picture, and it feels like a summation. It's as engrossing, thoughtful, heartfelt, angry, hopeful, and altogether valuable as his best work. If it is indeed Loach's farewell, it's one hell of a fine note to go out on.

There are almost always scenes in Loach's films where a group of locals gather in a shared space to argue about issues that affect all of them. The space here is the bar of the title, owned and operated by TJ Ballantyne. TJ assists a local charity spearheaded by Laura (Claire Rodgerson) that gives donated furniture and other household items to Syrian war refugees. TJ is a goodhearted and tough but depressed man who lost his wife and son many years ago and dotes on his little dog. He has grown increasingly disenchanted with his core group of patrons, a bunch of men his age who blame immigrants for a decline in living standards that predates the newcomers' arrival by decades. There's even a gallery of photos in a shuttered back room of the bar commemorating local labour struggles back when TJ was a teenager and Durham was still built around coal mining.

Matt Zoller Seitz, *RogerEbert.com*

Film Facts

- Ken Loach's multiple films include *Poor Cow* (1967), *Cathy Come Home* (1966), *Kes* (1969), *Riff-Raff* (1991), *The Wind the Shakes the Barley* (2006), *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) and *Sorry We Missed You* (2019).
- Dave Turner is a former fire-fighter and Fire Brigades Union Executive Council officer. This is the reason the FBU attends the pub in one scene dropping off supplies for the kitchen.
- The Producers of *The Old Oak* are Rebecca O'Brien and Pascal Caucheteux

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