LTDA TO LAUNCH NEW RADIO CAMPAIGN
■ London retail finally re-opens (see p5), and with it the opportunity for increased trade, however a certain Man in Black, would prefer you stayed home and BBQ’d a squirrel (p15). Our guest article this week features Derek Myers and his concerns about the state of the industry (p23), and Wim Faber, TAXI’s international correspondent looks at the transformation of cities outside the UK in response to the pandemic (p17). LTDA chairman, Richard Massett has election related information and details of all the phase two City updates going through approval (p6 & 7), whilst LTDA Exec, Lloyd Baldwin raises his partition concerns, in relation to the minicab trade (p8).

■ In Westminster, plans to finally address the menace of rickshaws have been progressing. For too long, pedicabs have been clogging up London’s roads, endangering the safety of passengers, pedestrians and other road users whilst charging ridiculous fares. The LTDA have been at the forefront of the fight against rickshaws for nearly 20 years, we commissioned safety reports and crash tests from MIRA, successfully stopped the rickshaw industries attempt to be ‘registered’ and we have now been working with Nickie Aiken, the MP for Cities of London and Westminster (former Leader of Westminster Council) who last week brought forward a Ten-Minute Rule Bill in the House of Commons. This is the first step towards the much-needed regulation of rickshaws.

The Bill would bring rickshaws into line with taxis and private hire vehicles, requiring drivers to obtain DBS checks, and a licence from Transport for London in order to operate. TfL would also be given the power to regulate the prices charged by pedicabs and to ensure that the vehicles used are of a safe standard and non-motorised. The LTDA fully backs the Bill and Nickie noted our support during her speech in Parliament which can be seen on our website along with the crash tests, reports and a link to sign the petition to demonstrate your support: https://www.ltda.co.uk/media-centre/campaigns/rickshaws/ The Bill also has the support of City Hall and many London MPs, including key APPG for Taxis members.

■ Electric vehicle enthusiasts, Dr. Alex Howard and Janosch Oppermann met through a neighbour at a party and they got talking. Around eighteen months ago, they bought a seventeen-year-old taxi for a grand and began working on it one day a week. After taking out the old diesel engine and dropping in an engine from a Nissan LEAF van - plus an extra forty-eight battery cells, a prototype began to take shape at a cost of around £12K. The current prototype is a hybrid. The pair have already reportedly approached taxi licensing authorities in a bid to get the vehicle on the road in order to see how it ‘fares’ and are of the opinion they could make a new build electric taxi for considerably less cost than the current market price. The duo plan to launch as Clipper Automotive in the coming months and have their sights set on building their own electric taxis in the future… Watch this space.

■ A Mystery Shopper Taxi Scheme has been extended and hailed as a success. The scheme consisted of a series of journeys made by volunteers in both Hackney Carriages and private hire vehicles by wheelchair users, people with mobility difficulties and blind or partially sighted passengers with guide dogs. During two of the journeys made by Hackney Carriages involving wheelchair users, the drivers failed to secure the wheelchair properly – as a result, the drivers were asked to attend a review hearing and a wheelchair training and assessment course. The scheme took place in Wolverhampton and was organised by Wolverhampton Council. Other authorities may follow suit…

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“The Knowledge really paid off, as I explained the ludicrous routes that we would be forced to take – creating congestion and bottle necks, undermining accessibility and increasing fares for passengers...”

STREETSPACE, AGITATORS & NEW LTDA CAMPAIGN

TOP TRADE STORY

The world is in chaos, the vast majority of cabbies are not working or earning and at a time when 100% of the LTDA's efforts should be concentrated on getting the trade access to the Mayors Streetspace project, promoting and advertising the trade and assisting hundreds of members with problems - once again we are having to waste time responding to a tiny group of disgruntled members who are putting lies, distortions and dross on social media. If you are interested in the 'in's and out's' of what amounts to petty politics and would like to read the actual truth of the matter, please do read Richard's column on page 6.

Promoting the Trade

Back in the real world, there seems to be some light at the end of the tunnel this week. By the end of the month, we should see the return of football and pubs and restaurants opening (in some form). People are also gradually starting to venture out of their homes more – visiting certain friends and family in 'support bubbles', meeting in outdoor spaces or returning to work. There is still a long way to go, but hopefully we will see trade beginning to pick up. Now is the time to start promoting and advertising our trade and ensuring that as many people as possible are aware of the benefits of our services. To this end, the LTDA are funding a major radio advertisement campaign. The ad’s will be pushing our key messages:

- That it is possible to self-distance in a Taxi
- We have a partition
- Contractless payments
- Our cabs are purpose designed to be, and will be, cleaned regularly - we are the safe and clean option!

LTDA Funded Radio Campaign

We thought long and hard about the best medium to use, TV is massively expensive and with so many channels its almost impossible to target our key London and home counties audience. The free press, such as the Metro is picked up at tube stations and bus stops and with less capacity on buses and tubes the potential audience is reduced, with the same applying to adverts on the tube itself. Initially, we will be concentrating our campaign on LBC for the whole of July, with nearly 6,000 slots split between two ad’s which are variations on the same theme. We will be reviewing this going forward and depending on the numbers returning to work, we may switch to a digital billboard campaign for August and return to radio (possibly spread over more stations in September), as London hopefully returns more and more to normal.

TIL's Knowledge Appearance...

With getting cabbies back to work in mind, I met with Deputy Mayor for Transport, Heidi Alexander and TIL last week to discuss the Streetspace proposals and the devastating impact they would have on the, already suffering, cab trade. Whilst they wouldn’t shed any more light on the specifics in terms of which roads would be included and the scale of the plans, I was able to demonstrate the impact that even just closing London and Waterloo Bridges to cabs would have. The Knowledge really paid off, as I explained the ludicrous routes that we would be forced to take – creating congestion and bottle necks, undermining accessibility and increasing fares for passengers. This seemed to hit home, plus no one can take on a cabbie discussing London's geography and win!

They referred to Streetspace as only affecting 1% of the road network and were genuinely surprised when I explained that this area which they are talking about potentially excluding us from, was also a massive percentage of our working area and where we do the bulk of our trade. This seemed to make them think twice.

Overall, I made it clear what’s at stake and that they would be crazy to introduce plans that shut us out, particularly when for so many, walking and cycling is just not an option and we are the only safe, socially distanced form of transport out there. It would be bad for cabbies and bad for London.

Continuing the Pressure

I am told we will know more as soon as there is something to know. Over the next few weeks, we will be keeping the pressure up, pushing for universal taxis access and ensuring we can get back to work and get the capital moving.

Steve McNamara is the LTDA's General Secretary
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LTDA, New West End Company & London Taxi PR Team Up in Promoting West End Retail Re-opening

TRADE

✦ London’s West End stores begin to open their doors, in line with Government guidance.
✦ Selfridges, Hamleys and British jewellers Boodles, are among the 90% of the world-famous Oxford Street, Regent Street & Bond Street retailers opening this week.

New West End Company, which represents 600 members across the district’s retail and leisure businesses, has been working closely with Westminster City Council, Transport for London and its member businesses, to ensure a safe and sustainable reopening of London’s West End. To prepare for the phased return of workers and shoppers, the West End has put a number of measures in place to ensure the public’s safety. These include:
✦ Expanded Clean Teams on hand to ensure that the West End maintains excellent hygiene standards.
✦ Hand sanitisation and washing points in place to provide visitors with convenient facilities.
✦ Widespread signage and queuing aids have been installed to ensure social distancing.
✦ Smart payments are being encouraged to minimise contact and health risks.
✦ Safe spaces and Social Distancing Ambassadors are in place to ease any safety concerns or enquiries that visitors may have.

NWEC, teaming up with the LTDA (who also employed the services of London Taxi PR), organised a film and photoshoot campaign in order to promote the re-opening.

Jace Tyrrell, Chief Executive at New West End Company made the following announcement: “This week, we start to welcome Londoners back to the West End, and through our work with both Westminster City Council and Transport for London we have ensured that the West End is in the best possible position to safely and sustainably reopen to colleagues and customers.”

Andy Scott of London Taxi PR commented: “With a world-class reputation as the no.1 Taxi service, we hope that together with the LTDA and the New West End Company, we are delivering the message that not only is the West End back and open for business, but that the London Taxi profession is also ready and waiting to safely transport customers providing the reassurances they need, now more than ever.”

LOTTO WINNER!

Henry Leach has been an LTDA member for 42 years and was delighted when Chairman, Richard Massett caught up with him to present his cheque for £5,000! Henry said, “Thank you, the win could not have come at a better time as I’ve been unable to work for a while due to the pandemic.”

LTDA LOTTERY

The first prize in our lottery is £5000 - every month! But you won’t win it if you’re not in it.

Tickets cost £5 each per month.
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“It is the firm intention of myself and other members of the Council to reform the Association on the firm basis of ‘one member one vote’ through postal ballots overseen by independent electoral scrutineers.”

‘COUNCIL OF MANAGEMENT’ ELECTIONS

**THE MASSETT FILE**

In the midst of the LTDA Council of Management (COM) elections, we were very surprised to get a call from a journalist who had received a press notice from Anthony Collins Solicitors, who represent a small but highly organised group of members of the LTDA.

**Unverified Petition**
The group had previously organised a petition of one hundred signatures, which incidentally has yet to be verified, calling for the previous LTDA COM election to be set aside and for a special meeting to take place where their objective was that the democratically elected Council members would be cast aside and be replaced with their self-selected members.

**Undertaking not to Publicise**
The reason we were so surprised to hear from the journalist was because following receipt of the petition, the FCA had called a meeting of both sides, together with their respective lawyers. At the end of the meeting, which took place last September, there was no conclusion but the other groups solicitors asked the LTDA to agree to an undertaking not to publicise or make any comments to the media, on social media, or to members about them or their objectives. We found the request, from a group that purports to want democracy and openness, incongruous - but agreed.

**Attempt to Disrupt Election Process**
So why did the undertaking come to a sudden end, not just by the solicitors but also by their clients - the driver organisation which started once again to peddle its usual lines on social media? There can be only one answer why it was timed as it was, which is clearly to attempt to disrupt the current COM election process, where each and every member has the right to vote, whilst knowing that we could not respond publicly during this period.

**False Claims**
Amidst a host of false claims that the drivers’ organisation has fabricated, is that the COM took away their branch. The truth of this matter is that during the run up to the branch election in 2018, one of the candidates, who had actually been one of their number, complained to me that some of his supporters were reluctant to go to the election meeting to support him, fearing some kind of reprisals and it was therefore unable to be a fair election. I first took steps to verify what he had said was correct, which I found to be the case. The LTDA General Secretary then suggested that instead of the usual show of hands at the election meeting there could be a secret ballot, unfortunately, this suggestion for some reason went down like a lead balloon and seemed to greatly anger the mob - even though secret ballots are the cornerstone of democracy in this country. In fact, they insisted there had to be a show of hands to agree to a secret ballot!

**Fair & Open Elections**
The COM ordered the suspension of the election pending a full inquiry by the Executive. A full and thorough inquiry was indeed conducted where all the candidates were interviewed and statements taken; as were the members that had indicated their concerns; there was an in-depth look at some of the material that had been posted on social media; and evidence was also found that indicated the involvement of members of other trade organisations and from other social media interests.

After considering the report, the Council decided to continue the suspension of the Branch until fair and open elections could be held. Unfortunately, nothing really changed as the Council then wrote to the FCA and the other sides’ solicitors suggesting that we reconvene the branch with an agreement to hold branch elections with a postal vote. The other side were silent on this offer, clearly because the last thing that they want is elections under the one member one vote system. They want to stick with the outdated and discredited process of having a hands up vote at a meeting held at night in a pub where they reckon to get enough of their mates along to vote. It is worth noting that only 0.7% of the Association’s membership have attended branch meetings and a recent survey showed that the other 99% have no interest in doing so.

**Physical Attacks on Council Members**
The Council has come in for much criticism from the organisation due to a rule change that was introduced at the 2018 AGM. This was a clear, uncomplicated change which would have the effect of putting all future rule changes to a postal vote of the entire membership and not just a vote of branch delegates as under the existing rules, in other words - one member one vote. For those that were not at the 2018 AGM (which is more than 99% of our members), there was a riot following the introduction of the rule change, where I and other members of the Council were physically attacked and eventually had to be led to safety by the venue’s security guards. It was a terrifying and disgraceful episode.

**One Member One Vote**
So, do not be taken in by any of the nonsense or lies they circulate on social media, it is the firm intention of myself and other members of the Council to reform the Association on the firm basis of ‘one member one vote’ through postal ballots overseen by independent electoral scrutineers.”
The City of London is currently implementing phase 1 of its COVID-19 Street Changes and phase 2 is also now going through committee approval processes. Phase 2 is likely to be much more restrictive than phase one and the City is intent on completing its introduction by the end of the month.

In our discussions with the City, it has confirmed that Taxis carrying disabled passengers, will be able to enter the streets which are to be signed ‘Access Only’ and also that it will provide some gaps in barriers where ‘disabled people’ and those with ‘limited mobility’ will be able to be picked up or set down. We are seeking more clarity on these arrangements, in particular what their exact definition of ‘disabled’ and ‘limited mobility’ might be. We will also be strongly questioning why Taxis have not been given access through the ‘Bus Only’ closures and are prepared to take these matters further if need be. The City is requesting feedback on the scheme which can be made via its website.

Richard Massett, LTDA Chairman, and Chairman of the London Cab Ranks Committee

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Location | Covid-19 Street Changes - Phase Two
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Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, St Paul’s Churchyard, Cannon Street (between New Change and Queen Victoria St) Queen Victoria Street, East Cheap and Great Tower Street | • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling • Review parking and loading • Bank junction restriction at Queen Victoria Street retained
Holborn Viaduct | • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling
Newgate Street | • Introduce a closure for all vehicles except buses and cycles • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling (to be co-ordinated with the gas works)
Chancery Lane | • Introduce a road closure (except cycles) • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling • Install pedestrian priority signage
London Wall, South Place, Eldon Street, Broad Street Place and Blomfield Street | • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling • Review waiting and loading
Eldon Street, Broad Street Place and Blomfield Street. | • Introduce a 7am–7pm no access except to off-street premises, buses and cycles • Install pedestrian priority signage
Moorgate (north of London Wall) | • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling • Introduce one-way northbound for all vehicles except buses and cycles • Reallocate space for walking and review loading • Install pedestrian priority signage
Old Jewry | • Introduce a closure except cycles at the southern end and convert the northern section to two-way operation • Review parking bays and loading and reallocate space for walking • Install pedestrian priority signage
Cheapside and Poultry | • Introduce a 7am–7pm closure except access to off-street premises, buses and cycles • Reallocate space for walking and cycling • Review waiting and loading
King Street, Queen Street, Gresham Street, Lothbury and Bartholomew Lane. | • Introduce a one-way system towards Moorgate for all vehicles except cycles • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking • Review waiting and loading
Dukes Place, Bevis Marks, Camomile Street, Houndsditch and Outwich Street. | • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling • Review waiting, loading and parking bays
Houndsditch between Bishopsgate and Outwich Street. | • Introduce a 7am–7pm no access except to off-street premises and cycles. (subject to redevelopment progress)
Aldgate, Aldgate High Street and Fenchurch Street | • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling • Review waiting and loading
Jewry Street, Crutched Friars | • Review parking bays, waiting and loading and reallocate carriageway to space for walking • Improve cycling where possible
Cooper’s Row and Trinity Square | • Introduce an advisory 3mph speed limit • Pedestrian priority signs
King William Street | • Introduce a 7am–7pm no access except to off-street premises, buses, loading and cycles • Reallocate space for walking where possible • Bank junction restriction retained
Cornhill | • Review waiting and loading • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and cycling • Bank restriction retained
Moorfields | • Introduce a 7am–7pm no access except to off-street premises, loading and cycles • Review parking bays and loading • Reallocate space for walking. Install pedestrian priority signage
Liverpool Street | • Introduce a 7am–7pm no access except to off-street premises, taxis and cycles • Reallocate carriageway for space for walking and cycling
Devonshire Row, Devonshire Square, Carlier Street and White Kennet Street | • Introduce a closure on White Kennet Street • Review waiting, loading and parking • Reallocate space for walking and cycling where possible • Introduce pedestrian priority signage
Lime Street and Gullum Street | • Introduce a 7am – 7pm no access except to off-street premises and cycles • Install pedestrian priority signage
Charterhouse Street and Carthusian Street | • Retain temporary one way eastbound but introduce contra-flow cycling • Reallocate carriageway to space for walking
“Wouldn’t any partition fitted to a car have to meet government requirements and have undergone health and safety testing?”

ARE MINI-CAB PARTITIONS COMPLIANT?

LLOYD BALDWIN

ON POINT

Like every other cabbie out there, I was outraged last month when the mini cab trade whined in a desperate attempt to look more like us in that they wanted to have partitions fitted in their cars. Not having purpose-built vehicles, I guess the clamour for partitions is presumably an attempt to promote the appearance of vehicles being safer than they arguably are for both passengers and drivers who are not wishing to contract COVID-19 (and don’t get me started on the interior fabrics...).

Now, for obvious reasons, the mini cab industry know they have a problem moving forward as people travelling around London wish to stay safe and thus employ social distancing measures. And they of course know, that safe social distancing in a Prius, is pretty much impossible...

Testing, Testing...

I then waited with bated breath for TfL’s reply to this pathetic attempt from the mini cab industry and was relieved to see TfL notice 07/20:

‘If drivers wish to install a partition or safety screen, vehicles will need to comply to government and industry regulations and TfL’s requirements as the licensing authority.’

It was quite clear to me, that any partition fitted to a car would have to meet the government requirements and would have had to gone through a series of Health and Safety testing. There would surely have to be a crash test assessment, that would have to be carried out at a government test site such as Millbrook?

“There would surely have to be a crash test assessment, that would have to be carried out at a government test site such as Millbrook?”

Even if the above had been met (it hasn’t), the mini cab would then have had to be checked at an NSL Licensing Test Centre to make sure it meets the above requirements as set out in the TfL notice. The question is, how would TfL have made these checks as the test centres have been closed during Lockdown and only started re-opening very recently?

Lack of Compliance... Officers?

After all the above, you can imagine my surprise when I received a call from a member of ours, Eddie who was sitting outside the ITV studios on the Southbank. He reported a line of Addison Lee mini cabs with partition screens in them. Apparently, they have an account with ITV. We can only assume Addison Lee have taken this upon themselves to have these screens fitted and have stuck up two fingers at TfL and Government regulations regardless. It’s possible that they’re taking advantage of the lack of Compliance Officers out there at the moment.

Stop Notices

I was once pulled by a compliance officer at Kings Cross Station and made to take down a sign I had made and stuck on my partition regarding U***. I was told that any signage had to be approved by TfL and my sign wasn’t. He enjoyed telling me how many regulations had to be met before anything would be given permission to be there, and he particularly enjoyed telling me that technically my cab was not legal, and if I didn’t remove it, he would issue a stop notice on my cab. I also remember a few years ago when cabbies positioned a copy of TAXI newspaper with an anti U*** headline in the rear window and I was called by lots of members who were threatened with a stop notice if it was not removed immediately. I am sure you have seen and heard this from Compliance Officers before and if they are like this over a small information sign you must imagine that the Addison Lee partition fitment leaves them with a major issue.

Action

I have written to ITV informing them of this and asked for their view on putting staff in a vehicle that does not comply to industry, government or Licensing Authority Standards and which may also potentially nullify a driver’s insurance.

I’ve also written to TfL asking for their view, indicating what their Notice directs and the moves that Addison Lee have taken.

Stay safe 🚗

Lloyd Baldwin is an LTDA Executive Support Officer
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“As a nurse who has just worked 85 hours this week a ride home in a black cab with a fantastic driver has been such a wonderful treat. Thank you to all the cabbies doing this for NHS workers. I actually don’t have words enough to thank you all. You are amazing!”

Ciara, London

Gett
The Black Cab App
Illyas Karim, (52), collapsed at home with a fatal heart attack whilst mowing his lawn, at noon, Thursday 28th May 2020. Thankfully his suffering was not prolonged.

In accordance with Islamic ritual, Illyas was buried on the following day. Coincidentally his brother died 11 years previously, on exactly the same date. Illyas had suffered with hypertension for the last five years.

Cabbies will remember Illyas from over a quarter of a century back, when he started to appear on Central London station ranks, selling receipt pads, bulbs and any other spares he could carry.

Back then he struggled, as we all did during the recession of the early 90’s. By 2000 he named his enterprise ‘Fever Cab Spares & Accessories’ and pitched his stall inside of the Heathrow taxi feeder park canteen block.

Sam Houston, LTDA airport rep spoke fondly of ‘a man who will be sorely missed’, “Illyas was a lifesaver for drivers urgently in need of spares and was much loved and appreciated. Illyas even attended trade demonstrations.”

Cabbie Marc Turner commented, “My personal memory of Illyas is of a quietly spoken, contemplative man who conveyed warmth and serenity. A joy to know.”

Illyas Karim is survived by his wife and three children.

Raymond John Wheble, (63) affectionately known as ‘Little Ray’, sadly passed away on Friday 15th May.

Although small in stature, Ray was big of heart and accomplishments. He was a Taxi driver for 35 years, had previously served the Met Police as a motor mechanic and resided in Grove Park SE9.

Whilst in the trade, Ray acquitted himself to various short-lived ventures, such as in the early days, running a cafe by Kings Cross Station and also tried his hand renting a small fleet of cabs.

A decade ago, Ray spent a year running the St George’s Square (Pimlico) green shelter. Ray steadfastly worked his cab through the peaks and troughs of all of these projects.

Ray was a man of varied interests and challenges. He qualified as a deep-sea diver, as well as a London bus driver. Many knew Ray from boxing at Kings Cross German Gymnasium, and Krav Maga/Box-fit at Wapping.

Some will have been fortunate enough to have had opportunity to marvel at Ray’s ability to spar and tell jokes… simultaneously!

Four years ago, Ray underwent surgery which later placed him in the ‘at risk’ category in relation to coronavirus. Tragically, he contracted the disease in March, and admitted to Lewisham Hospital, where he lay in a coma for seven weeks. Ray was then transferred to Guy’s Hospital where his condition initially improved, though later Ray sadly lost his valiant battle against the virus.

Ray was cremated at Falconwood Cemetery on Monday 1st June. Despite Lockdown, thirty plus Taxis honoured Ray, by accompanying the funeral cortege.

Bereft mourners described Ray as “jovial”; ‘jolly’; ‘a chirpy-chappy’; ‘loveable little fella’ and ‘above all, trusting’.

Ray is survived by his son, daughter-in-law and five grandchildren.

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Let’s begin there and run it to Victoria, so Part one ended with main railway terminals. Based upon the history of London’s.

‘The hard drinking navvies would often get into punch ups, so it’s said this collection of boozers were built with the purpose of segregating men by nationality.”

When constructed, the line into St Pancras required the exhumation of many graves from St Pancras Old Church. The bodies were placed in a mass burial pit dug elsewhere in the churchyard and marked with all the headstones which were clustered around a tree. This curiosity can still be seen today and is called ‘Hardy’s Tree’ - for it was the author, Thomas Hardy (then a trainee architect), who was tasked with their removal.

It’s believed this inspired his later poem, ‘The Levelled Churchyard’ which contains the lines:

“O passenger, pray list and catch our sighs and piteous groans,
Half stifled in this jumbled patch
Of wretched memorial stones!”

Now let’s take it from St Pancras to Fenchurch Street. This terminal was once the site of a Roman fort, hastily built to protect Londinium following Boudicca’s revolt. As such, a number of Roman artefacts have been discovered in the area, including coins, evidence of workshops and, in 2008, a long-forgotten cellar.

Now run it back from where we came, but this time rather than St Pancras we’ll go to its neighbour, King’s Cross. The name comes from a statue of George IV which once stood on the junction of Pentonville, Gray’s Inn and Euston Road. However, so despised was this obnoxious King that his statue only remained in place for seven years before being removed. Despite this, the name stuck.

The station and surrounding area can be spotted in films such as classic Ealing comedy, The Ladykillers, Mona Lisa (starring Bob Hoskins and Sir Michael Caine) and of course, the Harry Potter series.

Next call, King’s Cross to Charing Cross. In 1906, the mighty glass roof at Charing Cross station collapsed, killing six people and injuring many more - a now forgotten London disaster.

How would you call the route from Charing Cross to Euston? After London Bridge, Euston is London’s second oldest railway terminal - it opened in 1837. Euston Square was here first and the station followed shortly after. Both take their name from a small village in Suffolk - Euston Hall having being home to the Dukes of Grafton for many centuries. It’s also thanks to Euston that you’ll find pubs in Camden named ‘The Edinboro Castle’, ‘The Pembroke Castle’ and the ‘Dublin Castle’.

When the line was being built, the hard drinking navvies would often get into punch ups, so it’s said that this collection of boozers were built with the purpose of segregating the men by nationality. For the English workers, there was a Windsor Castle which stood on Parkway, but this has since been converted into a ‘Cote’ restaurant.

Finally, from Euston, a nice easy run to finish (current road closures aside) - let’s head to Waterloo. Waterloo is Britain’s largest station. It opened in 1848 and was once famous for its ‘Necropolis Railway’ - a private funeral service in which trains transported coffins and mourners to Brookwood Cemetery. In true Victorian fashion, the dead were placed in 1st, 2nd and 3rd class. In 1961, director John Schlesinger made a short fly on the wall’ style documentary at Waterloo called ‘Terminus’. With no commentary, a beautiful jazz soundtrack and all of human nature on display, this film is a real joy to watch and is freely available online. ◆
The TfL delicensing fund is available for taxi drivers who want to delicense their Euro 3, 4 or 5 vehicles. For more details on scheme eligibility please refer to https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/taxis-and-private-hire/taxi-delicensing-scheme. Inflated offer prices are typically available on late Euro 5 and Euro 6 TX4 models in good condition and with full service history. All used vehicle offers are made at the discretion of the LEVC Brewery Road team. Terms and conditions apply.

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A Man in Black is hoping Anneka Rice & a W2 personal services plan can steer him away from financial abyss

GO HOME & BBQ A SQUIRREL...

Well, following on from a fortnight ago, it’s ‘deeeaaaaaaaayyy’ eighty on Lockdown Island and I’m still ‘as mad as hell’. This week, we’ve seen the curse of the incredible shrinking street - where roads have become narrower than Danny Dyer’s acting ability (sorry Danny, I do like you really). Traffic lights seem to have been rephased in that the only way they ever change is if the bulbs blow. Social distancing seems to have been reduced to being no wider than a ‘Mars’ bar and masks are to be worn on public transport at all times, despite not necessarily being effective (oh yes they are, oh so they’re not, oh yes they are... and it’s not even pantomime season yet - and at this rate, it never will be). Also, we have the case of the mysterious disappearing taxi ranks which I was initially going to challenge, Anneka Rice (complete with her rather splendid posterior, I mean helicopter) to go on the hunt for these missing ranks, after all she was a whizz on Treasure Hunt and could find the source of the Bermuda Triangle within 30 minutes, so a few missing ranks should be a doddle.

Barbecued Squirrel Anybody?

Now I don’t know about you lot, but I’ve been working since the start of Lockdown Island and initially, I found my income was around 50% down. There was no street-work apart from the occasional pick-up from a supermarket, however I have done a mere 3 street-hails in 30 of the 11 weeks. On week 11 I managed to do 5 street-hails in one week. ‘WE’RE BACK!’ or so I thought, as of writing this I am now around 70% down - the reason? You’re all coming from a supermarket, however I have done 11 street-hails in 30 of the 11 weeks. Anyway, the drivers I spoke to were in the main very similar to myself, rather than main very similar to myself, rather than... anyway, they’re all coming back to work... stay away, go home, enjoy barbecuing a squirrel or something.

The Economic Abyss

So, here’s the thing, since we fell into this economic abyss, the only work which has been available has been app or radio circuit based. There’s been an element of altruism from our industry, where we have been supporting the NHS by giving those within the health service free or low-cost rides, but we have also been supporting other services such as TFL workers and those within the media by continuing to operate. Obviously, we are getting paid for that service and rightly so, however that is all account work and not street work. One of the things which has occurred to me whilst writing this is given that Gert have announced that they are upping their commission to 20%, how many of the drivers who serviced the app last month during lockdown will be servicing the app next month now that are out of lockdown and would they survive without it? Anyway, mine not to reason why, mine just to crack on with work.

Personal Services

Obviously, there’s nothing worse than driving round and round looking for work and eventually disappearing up your own exhaust pipe, so being the social media beauty that I am, I asked a few other drivers about their working habits during the current crisis. After being told about Tinder, Grindr and Gumtree, I had to explain that the question wasn’t in reference to their ‘personal services’ but their taxi driving practices. (Please note I’m available in Sussex Gardens from 11pm - and I’m cheap... well, even I have to drum up some business.)

Madness

Anyway, the drivers I spoke to were in the main very similar to myself, rather than sitting on a station rank, waiting for a train that never comes (wasn’t that in a song by Madness?) They were thinking outside of the box, going to the suburbs, waiting on a supermarket rank or waiting for an app to ping whilst sitting at home. This however has now started to change, with drivers now going onto their usual working ranks, but there is a problem:

- Cheapside rank - gone
- Camden Station rank - gone
- Selfridges rank - gone
- John Lewis rank - gone

These ranks have been temporarily moved or removed due to The Coronavirus Act 2020, emergency measures put in place which over-ride any current legislation in the name of public protection. So, where the pavements have been widened so as to enable social distancing, road-space decreases and loading bays, parking spaces along with taxi ranks end up getting shifted or taken away.

Strange Times

Now to expect the orgs, whether it be the LTDA, LCDC, UCG, GMB, CIA, MPI or DFS to be able to do anything about this is a bit unrealistic. We are in the middle of a pandemic, we have multiple issues surrounding the handling of the crisis and we are edging towards 50,000 deaths, a bit of perspective and a bit of slack is required (legal or otherwise). These are strange times indeed, but notions around the handling of the crisis and the orgs fighting together on the same side - so we need to ‘help them to help us’. The best way to do that is to keep maintaining a top-quality level of service, which we have always done. We know we are the safest form of public transport (yes Mr Mayor we ARE public transport despite what you may think). We also know we are the only fully partitioned form of transport which is able to be cleaned after every customer, and I believe the public are now aware of that.

We are currently up in the air as to what roads and bridges we can use but we have the orgs fighting together on the same side to attempt to ensure we have access to those routes - so we need to ‘help them to help us’. The best way to do that is to keep maintaining a top-quality level of service, which we have always done. We know we are the safest form of public transport (yes Mr Mayor we ARE public transport despite what you may think). We also know we are the only fully partitioned form of transport which is able to be cleaned after every customer, and I believe the public are now realising how important we are and how vital it is that we can maintain a service.

Anyway, I’m off now, to watch ‘London Has Fallen’ – I’m not entirely sure if that is an amusing life, but we shall see…

Steve Kenton is a Licensed Taxi driver of 30 years

A Man in Black

Strange Times

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With the coronavirus, cities from Amsterdam to Sydney have unveiled measures to improve sustainability, food security and mobility, with more green spaces, wider pavements, bicycle lanes and new technologies to ensure social distancing,” wrote Rina Chandran a week ago in an insightful Reuters-piece about the way cities change as a result of corona-measures.

If any one of you were wondering whether the sudden closure of roads and the opening of pedestrian areas and cycle lanes was a ‘bright’ London idea, think again: “In the aftermath of COVID-19, the cityscape may see changes as people and organisations embrace a new way of life,” commented Ethan Hsu, head of real estate firm Knight Frank Singapore.

“There could be radical shifts in the way cities and business districts are designed for a modified norm, which could include a reduced physical office footprint…” he wrote in the same article.

My hometown, Brussels, only a few years ago a classic ‘car city’, even in the centre of towns such as most other cities had already pedestrianised, a few weeks ago proudly unveiled 40 km’s of cycle lanes. And with uncharacteristic speed, the Brussels Region chopped one lane off of a major three-lane car route into the city centre and happily handed it over to the cyclists, eagerly awaiting more breathing space, as Brussels is no Amsterdam, where cycles remain to be seen.

In Singapore, most employees wanted to work from home again: “In the aftermath of COVID-19, the cityscape may see changes as people and organisations embrace a new way of life,” commented Rina Chandran a week ago in an insightful Reuters-piece about the way cities change as a result of corona-measures.

Most Taxi Drivers Fearful of Working

Of the surveyed drivers 72% stopped because there was no work or because they felt unsafe. Drivers who continued to work did so out of necessity, to pay their fixed costs. The survey also showed that only 10% of taxi drivers managed to create a financial reserve. One platform driver wrote: “My outgoings continue, I need to pay £1,115 a month in lease and insurance. Uber arranges nothing in support and the measures for our safety, such as a good protective screen, came very late.” Surprising: over 70% of drivers had not made any arrangements with their insurance or leasing company. For now, independent drivers receive 87% government funded income support.

Platform taxi drivers, in particular (35%), say they received little or no support from Uber during the corona crisis. Self-employed drivers (30%) were more self-reliant and also received support from the company they work with.

In a fact sheet, the union provides an interesting comparison of turnover between 2019 and April/May 2020. Uber drivers earned £1,160 gross per week in 2019, in April/May this amount dropped to a surprising £50. Self-employed taxi drivers earned £1,704 a week in 2019 and £175 in April/May. Fixed operating costs were £1,064 a month for Uber drivers, and £3,442 for self-employed taxi drivers. One fear was shared between all drivers: they were very concerned about their health, with a third of taxi drivers being in the corona risk group.

From car cities to cycle cities… And where do cabs go?

Dutch drivers, particularly Uber drivers, share one fear: they are very concerned about health.

Dutch cabbies fear for Trade
“Fortunately, the wife was asleep when I flooded the kitchen floor with sticky beer.”

A DISTINCT LACK OF PRACTICAL SKILLS...

ON THE ROAD

Many of us have enjoyed a forced holiday recently, and this has presented the opportunity to catch up on tasks that we’ve put off for months, or even years. I made a fair stab at painting some walls, a ceiling and did a ‘just-about-acceptable’ job on the front door with sticky black gloss paint. Thankfully, the cat’s half-black anyway. I’m painfully aware of my lack of practical skills though - particularly after experimenting with different employment… I hate working in the run-up to Christmas, so I left my cab at home and signed on at a local temp agency. A stint in an office or warehouse would excise me from working the cab in December and hopefully take me through the cab trade’s ‘flat-as-a-kipper season’ after New Year.

A Humbling Experience

After just a few days I was offered the position of Assistant Caretaker at a local secondary school. On arrival I was given a map of the school site. It was a big school. The caretaker said he’s known people take five years to learn it. It was like learning the Knowledge of London.

I thought a caretaker would sit in a shed all day drinking tea before changing a couple of light bulbs and perhaps move a TV set in a classroom into a classroom. Taking down the Christmas tree would provide a bit of extra work in January, but I was prepared for that. The poor chap was rushed off his feet, and this is where I came in as an extra pair of hands (he told me changing light bulbs takes a full two days). When he left me on my own, I just hoped the boiler lights didn’t turn red, or there was an outbreak of Legionnaires disease (such eventualities have five years to learn it. It was like learning the Knowledge of London.

I was surprised to learn how involved a caretaker’s job is. I’ve always been in awe of people who can do stuff, and not just write about it. Even unlocking the school gates looked complicated. I can’t even dress for practical work. The caretaker had to lend me his waterproof coat. I only have clothes suitable for beach holidays, sitting in a cab with the heater on, or going out on the town. It was a humbling experience.

In the end I only worked 8 days at school, either side of Christmas. It was intense physical work and I wouldn’t want to do it again. It was a good experience though. As I was sweeping leaves, digging up moss, stacking chairs, and carting bit of wood and metal on a trolley to a skip, I knew I was doing useful – nay, ‘essential work’ - but it wasn’t really me.

The Invisible Work Force

I realised that I didn’t know how practical things work. I’m not from that world. It’s alien to me. I’m more comfortable with a pen than a drill. I’m more into ideas than practices. Hard work to me is agonising over sentence structure. I don’t know how to use a drill properly, or how to arrange the collection of a skip load of metal. I did a lot of soul-searching while at school. Is it just me who doesn’t know how to put a shelf up?

One interesting thing I learned was that no-one notices the cooks, cleaners and caretakers. For 8 days I was part of the invisible workforce. I came away knowing more about myself, but with a respect for the invisible people. Back on the Goldman Sachs rank I’d watch someone sweeping the street and I wonder what story he had to tell. I’m sure many of us have thought about doing different work recently. You might find you were happier where you were, but it’s a valuable exercise in self-awareness.

The Good Life

Since the Covid-19 lockdown, I’ve vowed to support local businesses wherever possible. In the area around Leighton Buzzard I can buy milk direct from the dairy and beer direct from the brewery. Self-sufficiency is the logical next step… I’m not going to start keeping chickens in my garden like the Good family from the 1970’s comedy series, The Good Life, but I have retrieved my old home-brewing equipment from the loft. I wasn’t expecting much from my first brew in several years, as I’m still practising my skills. My brew is based on a kit from ‘Wilko’s’. The kit method is easy - it’s just sterilising the equipment that’s a bit of a chore. Everything needs to be scrupulously clean. Bacteria that can taint beer needs to be eradicated.

Fermenting Taxis

There are three main beer-brewing methods: kit, extract, or full mash. With a kit, the malt comes mixed with hops and pre-boiled. You basically just bang a can of malty guge into a bucket with water, sugar and yeast. You keep it somewhere warm for a few weeks to ferment, then put it somewhere cooler to allow the beer to clear. If you have a taxi that you’re not using for a couple of weeks, park it somewhere warm and it’ll make an excellent site for your fermenting bucket.

Bottling it…

When the beer has cleared, it can be served from a pressurised keg or a collapsible polypin. The beer goes off quickly, so unless you’re a hard user you might want to bottle some of it. This takes a bit of work and it can be messy, especially if you lose control of the syphon and flood the kitchen floor with sticky beer. Thankfully the wife was asleep when I disinfected twelve swing-top bottles in the bath and went to work with my syphon in the kitchen.

Fish Batter & Remaining Upbeat

I bottled twelve litres and added a teaspoon of sugar to each in order to help secondary fermentation. I sampled it after the recommended time. The resulting brew wasn’t quite the apex. It was drinkable, but not something I’d like to be served in a pub. I’m not drinking it neat - but mixed with lemonade it makes a decent shandy. My cheap beer will also be used to make fish batter. As to the stuff left in the barrel/fermenter, it’s little better than vinegar. I’m not sure if this is recommended by gardening experts but I treated my sunflower sprouts to a gallon of beer, and they seem to be thriving.

It was a useful experiment and I remain upbeat. My next step will be to buy a boiler and brew malt extract and fresh hops to my own specification, but I need to get rid of several litres of dodgy ale first to free up the bottles…

Chris Ackrill is a taxi driver and former Knowledge examiner

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CHRIS ACKRILL

Remained upbeat. My next step will be to buy a boiler and brew malt extract and fresh hops to my own specification, but I need to get rid of several litres of dodgy ale first to free up the bottles…

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London Cabbie, Daren Parr, member of ‘Cabbies Do Kilimanjaro’, relays to TAXI his experience of the first, post lockdown group training session…

Best Laid Plans
Wow! How much the world has changed over 12 weeks with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Cabbies Do Kilimanjaro team knew it was going to be a tough year - but not this tough… We had planned four training weekends for the team of fundraising cabbies. The weekends were scheduled to get progressively harder, each designed to teach the team some basic techniques, ranging from understanding how important it is to put the right kit in your rucksack to team building.

Having climbed Kilimanjaro last year, we learnt how important being part of a team is, to an expedition like this. We just managed to get the first training trip to the Peak District in before the world went into lockdown, but then we had to quickly change our approach to keep the team focused. We met over Zoom and discussed finding a way to replace our planned training weekends whilst staying within the social distancing rules.

8 Miles - Well, sort of...
We decided that the ‘Box Hill Hike’, a tough eight-miler with plenty of steep hills and steps might work well in replicating a day on Kili. The rules were relaxed enough for us to be able to do this recently, so we arranged a date and kept our fingers crossed…

For some reason I was very anxious, worried about how many would turn up and what sort of fitness and amount of training they had done in the 10 weeks or so since we had last seen them. Team members had all said they had been ‘keeping the training up’, but as they say, ‘in them there hills, there isn’t anywhere to hide’… So, my wife Jackie and I jumped in the car and drove the 45 mins to Box Hill Café - there were butterflies in my stomach all the way.

To my absolute delight, ten team members were waiting there, all like ‘Tigger’ from ‘Winnie the Pooh’, bouncing and raring to go. Filled with renewed enthusiasm, I gave them a team talk, it was great to be back and feel the team spirit again.

The hike was tough, as expected and I took a wrong turn at some point taking the team four miles off the route. Our photographer Tim King, got us back on course, thank goodness. After a bit of stick from cabbie, Lyndsey Lockhart we remained in good spirits and trudged on. We managed 13.2 miles of tough terrain and I could not have been more pleased with the team.

The group had listened, learnt, and kept their word. Not only did they complete the task, but all displayed a bit of light-hearted banter and good spirit on the way. I am so pleased and proud of them all.

Injuries
We have a few members who are currently injured, but these things happen when you are a middle-aged taxi driver attempting to get ready to climb the world’s highest freestanding mountain. We wish them a speedy recovery and hope to see even more in our new monthly training walks on Box Hill.

With Tanzanian airspace being reopened, the pandemic being kept under control and great safety measures being put in place, our trip to Tanzania in October is looking possible.

Credit
Credit should be given to these cabbies who have already overcome real obstacles and barriers to have the positive determination to take this challenge on to raise money for such a deserving cause as The London Taxi Drivers Charity for Children and a Tanzanian Children’s Community Project.

I am so proud of the commitment being shown by my fellow London Taxi drivers.

Well done team.

- Daren Parr
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LTDA Plus is managed and run on behalf of LTDA by Parliament Hill Ltd.
A few days ago, in the midst of several months of solitary confinement, I was rushed into hospital with pneumonia, failed kidneys and, after years of good health, seemed to have turned into a 70-year-old train wreck. Thankfully, with some great skill and more care, considering the current strain on the NHS, than I should be entitled to; I’ve emerged a hell of a lot fitter than I was.

Plumbing
There’s still quite a way to go before I’m back to full fitness and, hopefully, losing the Gucci bag that’s strapped to my leg at one end and my unmentionable at the other. And, while there’s not a lot of upside to this current situation, I have managed to find one!

I’m from a generation that spent many weekend nights especially through the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s taking on copious amounts of liquid followed by anything from 10-14 hrs of uninterrupted sleep. The millennium brought huge changes and more recently a small cup of tea is bound to ensure at least two visits to the loo interrupting the 6 hrs that I feel ever grateful for, which brings me to the upside.

Since having the bag fitted the plumbing works in automatic mode so I can currently do the entire 6 hrs uninterrupted - and that’s a great!

The only other upside was pointed out by one of the few cab driving mates that were still out there, prior to lockdown...‘Well, at least you’re not losing much at the moment.’ Which says everything about the current work situation and, perhaps, our future prospects.

Driver Demographics
Leaving aside the impact of a private hire sector that’s been allowed to grow to 3 times larger than it ever needed to be and is focusing on the black cab industry where around 6,000 of the already decreasing number of 22,000 drivers are over the age of 60. Add to this a further 9,000 who are 50+ and you must conclude that we haven’t exactly got a young industry and yet there’s a lunatic who thinks, amongst all the uncertainty, we’re all going to go out and spend between 50-60k, or take out expensive long leases, on a new electric taxi.

Now I believe the original LEVC target number for these (including vans which are built on the same underpinnings) was in the region of 20,000. They haven’t quite hit the target - in fact with 3,500 on the road out of around 18,000 licensed taxis they haven’t got anywhere near it and one wouldn’t be too shocked if Geely pulled the plug before too long - or at least until they can come up with a different, and perhaps more realistic, game plan.

I would suspect that, other than a few more mature early adopters, the LEVC cabs are predominantly driven/owned by drivers from the remaining 7,000 who are under the age of 50. For many of the others, including myself, our plans were based around the shelf life and values of a vehicle with a 15 year life cycle and the move to 12 years - and a huge number of older fleet cabs coming off the road via the mayor’s compensatory schemes - had, prior to lockdown, already brought about huge uncertainty and unplanned retirements.

Competition & Support
Over the years, the taxi industry’s minicab opposition went from operating a loophole within the law to a much lower but nevertheless regulated sector licensed by the same people who license us; and numbers grew and grew - and grew! But on an individual basis our main day to day opposition for the work we do still have is each other. So why should I expect any support for keeping my cab on the road for 15 years from any of the 3,500 who’ve made the brave financial move within an increasingly uncertain future?

There are very few, if any, recruits now coming through at the starting end, and the future of The Knowledge as we ‘know or knew’ it, must look more and more uncertain. So, with drivers being shoehorned into leaving at one end and not being replaced at the other, numbers will simply continue to go down. But if you were one of the 3,500 wouldn’t you view that as your saving grace - even though it might be at the expense of all the plans and schemes of many of the older drivers? If I was one of their number, I think I would.

Rats in a Barrel
So we’ve gone from being the pride of London and an integral component within London’s transport infrastructure to rats in a barrel at 22,000 drivers reduce to 16,000 (minus the current over 60’s) and then, taking it a decade further and include the current over 50’s and you’re down to 7,000. But they’ll all be driving some sort of electric taxis and one of the very few of the current mayor’s objectives for London will have been achieved; by bringing us ever closer to the death of what was, undeniably, the greatest taxi service on the planet.

The greatest taxi service on the planet also served the greatest city on the planet with a financial services sector that was the envy of the world. But while the message still seems to be ‘open for business’ the reality appears to be very different. Working from home will probably be the new norm for 50-80% of ‘city’ workers who emerge with jobs. Many companies will surely be reducing their corporate square footage and the prospects of commercial property aren’t looking good - to say the least. Warren Buffett, the number one business guru and investor has dumped all airline stocks saying, ‘The world has changed’ and it’s highly unlikely that business travel as we knew it will ever be the same. A third runway? Forget it, will we ever need a third airport? How will they fill our hotel rooms? Savoy, Claridges, Connaught, Ritz to name but a few at the top end. Unless they alter their business model - to what? Can they all survive?

Where will the work come from? Well at the moment the focus within the ‘open for business’ message appears to be on road closures and inaccessibility. It’ll be a wonderful thing if we can emerge from lockdown with a cleaner, healthier environment but, unless there’s some real focus on how we align this to getting back to being the number one business city in the world, that’ll take care of itself anyway.

Less of Everything
Less flights, less deliveries with less people in offices, less tourists needing less hotel rooms and less of those bloody tourist buses. Less new building projects and all the large lorry traffic that’s associated with that sector - they’ll probably end up converting chunks of commercial to rental residential! Less people shopping with less shops to shop in and less taxis as numbers significantly reduce year on year. I have always been an eternal optimist and would ask you to forgive my pessimism in the hope that I’m able to read this rant in a few years’ time and say that I got it all wrong. But unless there are major changes, just like water, it’ll find its own levels and taxi driver numbers in London will probably have reduced to circa 7,000 within 12-15 years but, as long as you’re amongst that 7,000, perhaps that’s the upside.

Stay safe.
Best.
Derek Myers.

Derek Myers is fast approaching his 50th year as a licensed taxi driver having completed his Knowledge in 1971. He spent several years as Head of Corporate Affairs for Computer Cab and qualified as a member of The Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the policies or position of the LTDA.
“The ragged skyline emphasised the extent of endless air raids. Rebuilding had begun, but hardly a main road or residential street failed to acknowledge the scars of war.”

ETHNOCABBIOLOGY - A FRESCO CHRONICLE

CABBIE CHRONICLES

What did I think was going to happen when I turned right out of the Taxi Garage? I’d passed The Knowledge, The Drive and The Suburbs and I’d pinned my green badge onto my lapel...

First Impressions

It was early evening on Wednesday 5th October 1966. I had just left the cab garage in Richmond Road, Hackney, and I was on my way to work in London for the very first time. As I drove down Mare Street towards Bethnal Green, I could see myself reflected in the bodywork of cars and grumpy shop windows - a skinny, nervous looking twenty-two-year old who’d made his way to Nelson’s Taxi Garage on the 106 bus from his home in Mile End. It was gonna be the first of many such journeys, as I ‘worked off’ my six months - in lieu of using the garage facilities, whilst learning the routes and rudiments of ‘The Knowledge.’ Little did I realise that possessing ‘The Knowledge,’ and the much vaunted, ‘Green Badge,’ was merely the tip of the streetwise iceberg.

Garage Fleet Drivers

And speaking of icebergs (excuse the incoming pun), my introduction into cabbaging, via the garage and its drivers, brought me face-to-face with enough ‘bergs’ to sink a flotilla of floating icebergs. Ginsbergs, ‘bergs’ to sink a flotilla of floating icebergs. Ginsbergs, Greenbergs and simple Hackney Carriages. Ginsbergs, Ginsbergs, Ginsbergs, Ginsbergs, laid anglicised Greens (or Bergs), laid anglicised Greens (or Bergs), laid... And the much vaunted, ‘Green Badge,’ brought me face-to-face with enough cabbing, via the garage and its drivers, to sink a flotilla of floating icebergs. Ginsbergs, ‘bergs’ to sink a flotilla of floating icebergs. Ginsbergs, Greenbergs and simple Hackney Carriages. Ginsbergs, Ginsbergs, Ginsbergs, Ginsbergs, laid anglicised Greens (or Bergs), laid anglicised Greens (or Bergs), laid...

The ragged skyline emphasised the extent of endless air raids. Rebuilding had begun, but hardly a main road or residential street failed to acknowledge the scars of war. And the ‘air’ had changed too. Politics was a hot potato. Communists and Fascists still stood facing each other on Sunday street corners, hurling threats and accusations at each other. The rout of Fascism in pre-war Cable Street had not dampened the ‘Far Right’s’ predilection for marches and banner waving. Rationing had gone, but there was still austerity and plenty of scagepots to point the finger at.

The ‘Flat & Half’ 80’s

But by 1980, London was changing and so was the trade. There were more cabs than ever on the roads. There were new faces on the ranks and new names behind the badges. London Docks had closed. Hundreds of men had been made redundant. They did what London men had always done to claw back some dignity - they became cabbies. And the Lennys, Bennys, Sollys and Hymys welcomed an influx of ‘Knowledge ‘students’ was headed, not by the traditional itinerant Londoners, but by a wave of immigrants from a well of European countries new to our culture, drawn by the booming economy and keen to be a part of it. They took to ‘The Knowledge’ with an unparalleled enthusiasm. Bright young men and women, looking for an independence to define their own futures. When I used to see and meet up with the new faces driving cabs, it made me smile and think about my own beginnings, some three decades earlier in the old East End days.

Ethnic Mix of Cabbie Mates

One of the fondest memories I have of the beautiful ethnic cabbie mix, is in the ‘switz’; the good old-fashioned Turkish baths I used to go to. On regular days, that ethnic mix of mates would turn up and we’d make a day of it with a ‘shimesis’ (a rubdown) followed by a cold-water dousing and a relaxing snooze under a huge warm towel - the whole procedure experienced over and over again, depending on time. And when there was a hiatus in proceedings? Time to tuck into a heart-stopping smorgasbord of salt beef and lutkas, shmatz lerring and chopped liver, to a smorgasbord of salt beef and lutkas, shmatz lerring and chopped liver, to...
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Do you currently have points on your DVLA driving license? (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes how many points do you have: ____________________________

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After smashing the ‘Taxi Driver of the Year’ field with his detailed personal knowledge of Police Stations, Alf prepared himself for Blankety-Blank stardom...

PROMOTING THE TRADE!

(AND MYSELF...)

During my 56-year tenure of being a London Cabbie, I’ve always attempted to promote our trade when the opportunity has afforded itself. And because of my long-term involvement as a trade journo and published author, I was often invited to chat on radio and TV - as well as filming a couple of documentaries.

The Pinnacle

In 1978, I reached the pinnacle of promoting the trade (and myself) when I won the ‘Taxi-Driver of the Year’ Competition. I had entered every year to give me something to write about in my TAXI-TALK columns - but I was always rubbish, knocking down all the bollards on the obstacle course. But in 1978, I did quite well, and the other guys did quite badly. The final test was all the contestants lining up at the exit on a stop-clock where you were given a sheet of paper with about six different points. You were checked at each point by a Marshall and the winner was the guy with the least amount of time on the clock! Again, I got lucky because all the points were Police Stations and I was very familiar with some of them (but that’s another story), and suddenly it was announced that I was the winner!

Dealing with Fame

This led to various appearances on radio and TV which not only meant earning a nice few quid in ‘appearance money’ but also being invited to take part in the popular game show ‘Blankety-Blank’, hosted by the late-lamented Terry Wogan, where I won the star prize (a nice little ‘Ghetto Blaster’ as we referred to them then) as well as the ‘Blankety-Blank Chequebook and Pen!’

Clever Dick

Again, the opportunity arose to promote our trade when I was working Heathrow regularly and on ‘point’ - first cab on Terminal Four in the nineties. A very friendly American couple approached me clutching a map and said they wanted to go to a village they think is in Norfolk or Suffolk. I wasn’t going to lose a job like this, so I told them to hop in. After we left the airport, I switched on the intercom and asked them the name of the village. When the guy pronounced it slowly as ‘Bass-ing/bourne’, I couldn’t believe my luck, because for most of my National Service in the mid-fifties I had been stationed at RAF Bassingbourne, just across the road!

I pretended to go deep into thought, because I certainly wasn’t going to tell them that the pub in Bassingbourne had been like home for me and my mates. I can promote the trade, make myself look a clever dick and maybe book them for future tours all over London - and farther afield! I finally broke the silence by saying, “I think I know it, find Royston on the map then head slightly north-east up the road heading for Cambridge and Bassingbourne should be half way along”. It went quiet in the back before the guy suddenly shouted out in his excitement, “By Jove, man, I know you cabbies know most of London, but this guy knows most of England!”

I took the opportunity to give him my card, telling him I was an ‘expert’ on Windsor Castle and many other historical places in Southern England!

They were staying at the aforementioned village pub, so after they had paid me, I didn’t get out of the cab in case the same guy was still running it and recognised me! Instead, I went back home with a nice few quid in my pocket after promoting the trade, and myself - big time!

The Winchester Granny!

Many moons ago I left home bright and early heading for The George Rank in Havestock Hill. In those far-off days it had a phone which rang continually every morning. For sure the rank stretched around the corner into Pond Street, but you could reckon getting off in about fifteen minutes and the jobs weren’t ‘locals’ - I’ve had many an airport job off the rank.

But as I drove through Hampstead Village a lady flagged me down. She was probably in her eighties, was smartly dressed and carrying a small suitcase. ‘Good morning Cabbie’, she said to me in a quite refined voice, “I’d like to go to Winchester”. “No problem”, I replied “I’ll just drop you in Winchester Road, Swiss Cottage”. She looked at me as if I was some sort of idiot, “No Cabbie”, she said, “I want Winchester in Hampshire”. This was serious stuff and we’re talking big bucks here.

Until she said, “In all honesty I haven’t got any money, but my son and his family have a big house in Winchester with servants.”

Now I needed to think this through. I would have knocked the job back if it was a greeter, or even if it was a younger woman, but this granny was unlikely to be an octogenarian con artist, so I decided to take my chances.

Nob in a Smoking Jacket

About seventy miles down the M3 and some hour and a half later we approached Winchester. She directed me down some very elegant roads and then left into a drive with a massive property at the end. The house had marble steps and marble pillars it certainly was a fantastic, and as my Granny walked towards it, a guy appeared wearing a full-length, soft, dark red jacket with black collar and cuffs. I think the nobs call them Smoking Jackets.

Then there was all the kissing and cuddling before the guy, I reckon he was in his forties, walked over to my cab with a big smile on his face. He wished me a pleasant ‘Good day’, but the smile soon disappeared when he saw how much was on the clock!

“Oh my God”, he said, “Mummy”, he shouted out, while she was looking at the roses and chatting to the old gardener. “When I phoned you last week, I told you to get a train from Waterloo and then get a taxi”. His old Mum didn’t seem in the least bit concerned that it was going to cost her son an ‘arm and a leg’!

“You know I’m a bit deaf darling and I just heard you say get a taxi’. Now the son has got a problem. In the early seventies there were no debit cards (ATMs – Automated Teller Machines) – didn’t appear outside every bank until the late 70’s) and the credit cards that were launched in the States in the 50’s never got popular until the banks changed their excessive repayments at the end of the century. He asked me to wait a minute while he disappeared into the huge house. He came back with an assortment of notes that added up thirty quid short of the fare. So, he hit the butler for a score and the old gardener for a tenner!

The money didn’t really worry him because he was loaded. It was just the initial shock. He smiled and thanked me for being so helpful and patient, while I replied with a cheeky grin on my face, “Let me know if your Mum wants a cab back to Hampstead!”
PUZZLER
CROSSWORD

ACROSS:
1 Pocket bottle for spirits (3,5)
5 Stuck-up person (4)
9 UK peers (5)
10 Prepare, brew (7)
11 Caustic (4)
12 Over an extended period of time (4-4)
14 Scottish foodstuff (6)
15 Think it appropriate (to) (3,3)
18 Having much free time (8)
20 Exclusively (4)
23 Commercial goods (7)
24 Air bed (4)
26 Large-flowered climbing plant (8)

DOWN:
1 ‘Laughing’ carnivore (5)
2 Leave-taking, quitting (7)
3 Went missing (4)
4 Area, division (6)
5 Over ‘everybody’ (2-3)
6 Small rug by the tub (4,3)
7 Half-suppressed laugh (7)
8 Church service (7)
9 Of assistance (7)
10 Aesthetic creativity (4,3)
11 Tooth-related (6)
12 Standard of perfection (5)
13 Units of length (5)
14 Swindle (4)

FUTOSHIKI

Fill in the blank squares so that each row and column contains all the numbers 1 - 5. Use any given numbers and the symbols that tell you if the number in the square is larger (>) or smaller (<) than the number next to it.

SUDOKU

Have a go at this medium level Sudoku puzzle. Fill the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 just once.

PREDICTIVE TEXT

Starting in the highlighted box, try to make a word adding one word part from each layer as you go. Then return to the second layer and use the letters in the unused box to start another word and so on, until you've used all the boxes and created six words of decreasing length.

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Mr Meg hasn’t boiled an egg in 30 years but thinks he’s Gordon Ramsey when it comes to barbecuing

CARCINOGENS WITH COLESLAW

looks like barbecues are going to be the preferred way for us to safely get together with our loved ones this summer. Cook-ins bad, cook-outs better to barter this virus. Even the Queen said so. In her stay calm and carry on broadcast to the nation during lockdown she told us, “We’ll Meat Again”.

Carrier Bags Dripping Meat Blood
When my cab was on the road and there were fares to pick up (remember those good old days?), I was always wary of the lads heading off to a barbeque. I could spot them a way off, even from the other side of the road. They’d be stood there in their neon print parrot and palm tree shirts, with a tower of beer boxes and a couple of carrier bags dripping meat blood. Yum.

And on their way home these BBQ boys would be so sunburnt that I should have been dropping them off at A&E, not home to bed. Often, I couldn’t tell where the tomato ketchup stains on their face ended and the sunburn started.

Care in the Culinary Community
Here at Meg Towers ‘barbeque’ is a swear word. I cannot count the ways a barbie, ‘piddles me right off.’

Mr Meg is an equal opportunity sort of bloke. He has always played fair on who does what around the house. That said, cooking is his kryptonite. He hates it. Won’t go near it. Steers clear. Until the sun shines and the barbeque cover comes off.

Guess who is chief sausage sizzler here at Meg Towers? I’ll give you a clue, it’s not me. Mr Meg hasn’t as much as boiled an egg in 30 years but thinks he is Gordon Ramsey when it comes to cooking on coals.

It’s an evolutionary male instinct to burn meat on the land. Harvard University Professor Richard Wrangham claims that cooking meat on an open fire, which began 1.6 million years ago, made its proteins easier to digest. This enabled the human brain to grow bigger. So, barbeques have made us all cleverer.

With one exception. Mr Meg. He lords it around the garden in summer wearing his barbeque apron that reads, ‘Mr Good-lookin’ is Cookin’ and incinerates everything he touches - black on the outside and red raw on the inside.

As well as scorching the dinner, he just cannot organise his cooking space in advance. Which is why he calls my name a hundred thousand times while his is stationed at the barbie. It’s "Fetch the plates Meg, take the tongs Meg and sort the skewers would you, Meg?"

The shopping for a BBQ is epic. Dinner usually involves a chop or a chicken or a casserole. A barbeque meal involves a supermarket sweep of the meat section shelves. And after all that, what ends up on my plate looks and tastes like lumps of coal. With coleslaw. He may as well burn £20 notes out there on the patio.

Singe-alonga with Crap Calypso
The drinking of beer, which is I believe is the law when a fella is flipping burgers on the barbie, doesn’t improve Mr Meg’s incineration skills one bit, but it does make him singe-alonga. He likes to belt out ‘Feeling Hot Hot Hot’ and break out a few ‘calypso moves’ whilst he cremates random and expensive cuts of meat.

I always counter that with a couple of verses of ‘Burn Baby Burn’...
“I bought it under a railway arch in a dodgy area of Small Heath in Birmingham. It was immaculate...”

A PEAKY ‘CUT-AND-SHUT’ BLINDER...

WORD ON THE STREET

Despite most NSL stations being closed for the entirety of May, there were actually 6 new TXE's joining the fleet - that's the fleet where 90% plus is already being sold. The TXI's left at the exact opposite end of the spectrum. What's seen as the Metrocab's London may start coming to life again. There were fetching amazing money in London at the time. It was a possible business model and I was blinded at the prospect and getting the first cab to trial and convert. I bought it under a railway arch in a dodgy area of Small Heath in Birmingham. It was immaculate and it was cheap. I checked the paperwork, chassis and engine numbers, counted out the cash and drove back down the M40. It drove as well as it looked, although it shuddered under braking, which I put down to warped discs or glazed pads.

The next morning as we put it on the ramp in Berthnal Green, it still looked good - too good in fact. It was as clean underneath as it was up top and recently painted, which was the clue that got me and the mechanics looking. ‘Gurded’ does not adequately describe how I felt when we realised it was two cabs or rather two chassis’ welded together. They had been cut and inside it, had steel inserts holding both halves which were then welded together, filled and sprayed. It was a fantastic job, until there was any load in the cab - like one driver, and it all started to sag, hence the shuddering. I managed to sell it for spares. At that time, body panels for a TXI were only available from M&Os and they were expensive. The interior and engine went into other cabs and I even sold all the glass, but I still lost a lot of money, time, effort and had to suffer the humiliation of every garage in E2 making jokes for years to come as word spread like wildfire.

It was only years later, watching Peaky Blinders, which is set in Small Heath, I realised it could have been worse! "

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POLICY CONDITIONS: Claims for Back/Depression related illnesses have a reduced benefit of £90 per week. 14 day deferment period before claim payments start. Maximum period for which weekly benefit is payable to 26 weeks. The age limit for joining Platinum is 49 years and for the Gold is 54 years. You are covered up to your 65th Birthday. (subject to terms & conditions).
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