CAMPAIGNS, SUPPORT & COURT

LTDA FIGHT ON ALL FRONTS
Welcome to TAXI #476… this issue contains LTDA updates from the General Sec and the Executive team (see pages 3, 6, 8 & 11). Steve Kenton is doing some ‘preaching’ this edition (p.12), Chris Ackrill (p.17) talks celebs, whilst International Correspondent Wim Faber updates us on the state of the German trade and the demise of Uber’s business model (p.18). Rob Lordan, Phil Brown and Al Fresco chronicle London & some trade tales on pages 15, 22 & 24; and updates from both our Cab Dealer and Musher Meg can be found on p.21 & 30 respectively. TAXI Editor catches up with cabbe ‘Phil’ following his tour of Italian battlefields (p.28); your Taxi Mail sent in can be read on page 5, and this editions Puzzler challenges are on page 27, adjacent to the LTDA member application form, for those of you with shiny new green badges wishing to join.

For members missing our resident trade legend, Alf Townsend’s Taxi Talk column, he’s been poorly as many of you may be aware – all of us at both the LTDA & TAXI wish him a speedy recovery. (Ed: Alf, if you’re reading this, I miss our chats and am looking forward to catching up soon.)

Uber Boat Theft – An Uber Thames Clipper was stolen last Saturday. A man reportedly jumped a security gate at Trinity Buoy Wharf around 3am and took the river bus for a four-mile spin with Police marine units in hot pursuit. A 22-year-old man from Chatham was arrested and subsequently charged with the offence, though it did reportedly take a while for the identity of the Uber Boat driver to be established in order to determine if he was an ex-employee or not - no news there then…

With the latest Department for Transport figures demonstrating a gradual rise in vehicle use and a significant trend in decreased cycle use around the country, the tables look to be turning on government and councils alike this week as they continue to promote and attempt to justify their road scheme changes under the guise of ‘emergency measures’. Large sections of the media have begun to focus their attentions toward empty cycle lanes, gridlock, displaced pollution, lack of significant increased city footfall and associated impact on businesses.

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH
TAXIWORLD
CAB AID
Subject: Thousands of cab drivers will not renew their licences

Dear TAXI Editor,

The LTDA need to spell it out to TfL that thousands of cab drivers like myself will not be renewing their licence. TfL need to encourage London cabbies and convince them that they will do all in their power to help and sustain them instead of hammering nails into a large sized coffin at every opportunity.

David Heath

Subject: Tip and a thank you for taxi driver!

Dear TAXI Editor,

A black cab driver brought my pregnant wife to hospital last Monday, and I’d like to give him a tip as a thank you. We ordered the cab through the Gett App so I have his details - but Gett won’t put me in touch for GDPR reasons, which is understandable. I’m not sure if the LTDA might have any suggestions maybe you could reach out through TAXI! I’m happy for you to pass my email address on to him…

Thanks,
Oisin

Ed: So, if you are that taxi driver who took Oisin’s pregnant wife to hospital – get in touch with TAXI Editor! (Don’t all rush at once, I’ll need you to provide the corresponding Gett info to prove it was you!)

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iTunes: We’ll take you there London cabbies

September 2020

Dear TAXI Editor,

Over the last few months so many people have lost their lives, jobs and people have been suffering so much with this very shocking Virus.

Thinking about all this, we have taken the decision to cancel our annual Dinner Dance on the 28th November 2020.

This, like many other charities will be the first time in 49 years that we have had to cancel anything. The saddest part is that we are so sorry we will not be able to donate any money to the five charities we support.

So, looking forward to next year when we hope everyone is well and life gets better for all of us, we will once again be holding our golf day and our 50th Anniversary Dinner Dance.

Anyone that has donated to the charity this year we would like to thank - and do not worry, the money will be added to next year’s event when we will be able to do the dinner and give out the donations once again.

If you wish to contact us, please phone 02089521357

So, save the date:
• Golf Day - Thursday 10th June 2021
• 50th Annual Dinner Dance - Saturday 27th November 2021

Stay Safe and Healthy,
Russell Poluck M.B.E.
Hon Chairman

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editor@ltda.co.uk Mail TAXI Editor today – the best correspondence will be published in future editions’
Please include your full name and badge number.
“Without question, these closures will have a detrimental impact on the way we earn a living and it is exactly the reason why the LTDA in partnership with UTAG is taking TfL & Mayor Khan to court.”

**EVERY JOURNEY MATTERS OR IN TATTERS?**

**STREETS AHEAD**

I have been a cab driver for 23 years, and in that time I have seen many changes and challenges that we have had to face, like e-hailing apps, changing Euro standards, the banking crisis and more recently the Covid-19 pandemic and all the road closures now being forced upon us. These will have a huge impact on our passengers and on our trade with increased fares caused by longer than necessary routes being required to be taken. Without question, these closures will have a detrimental impact on the way we earn a living and it is exactly the reason why the LTDA in partnership with UTAG is taking TfL & Mayor Khan to court.

‘Emergency’ Measures?

All these ludicrous Streetspace plans TfL and some Boroughs are implementing are being carried out in the name of ‘emergency measures.’ Can someone please explain where these emergencies are? Where is the overcrowding? Someone up at Palaestra must have a crystal ball that shows them the future, because I don’t see any emergencies at the moment; general roads are not busy, and I don’t see the pavements overflowing with people. Sure, we’ve made certain roads busy by implementing these schemes and of course the surrounding roads too where displaced traffic is now being forced into these gridlocked areas. But this is a symptom of their schemes - not a reason for it to be implemented.

All London Licence

I would really like to know if the beds at TfL ever had a taxi? I’m guessing NOT, if they did, they might realise the detrimental impact they are having on the people that want or need to use a taxi to get from a main line station to their place of work. It will be a miserable journey for the passenger, especially those who are less able due to age, mobility issues or whom require the use of a wheelchair. Now, because of the schemes, they may well likely be late due to age, mobility issues or whom require the use of a wheelchair. Now, because of the schemes, they may well likely be late due to age, mobility issues or whom require the use of a wheelchair, by applying for the DBS Update Service within 50 days of receiving your new DBS Certificate. We have helped hundreds of members do this and they are feeling reassured that the service will be hassle free when the time comes to renew their licence.

Aldwych & Strand

The proposals to transform the Strand & Aldwych by Westminster City Council should be generally acceptable to us but obviously with the proviso that once the scheme is implemented it will not lead to any increased congestion in the area. Westminster, on the whole works very well with the trade and takes our views and concerns on board during planning. It’s a pity others like Islington refuse to listen to the real experts on London’s roads, that being the 20,000 members of the taxi trade who spent years learning it. Some of these schemes work - for example the two-way working in Gloucester Place and Baker Street, mostly runs smoothly. We do have some areas of concerns to the proposed changes to the Strand & Aldwych scheme and we have made some suggestions to WCC. For example, there is no satisfactory route for eastbound taxis in the Strand to be able to turn right from The Strand into Lancaster Place. Without this provision, it is likely that many taxis will carry out U turns in Aldwych.

The Taxi ranking arrangements for the Waldorf Hotel are unsatisfactory, we are uncertain whether there is a clear sightline from the feeder rank in Catherine Street to the single space rank outside the Novello Theatre. The rank cannot function without a line of sight and if there isn’t a monitor, one would have to be provided or the rank re-located to a position where it can function. Importantly, a single rank space outside the hotel entrance is insufficient, this is a very busy rank and often there may be more than one taxi required, and this could lead to passing taxis being hailed, particularly if the feeder rank system is not working efficiently. Should this become an ongoing problem then it is possible that taxi drivers may take matters into their own hands and set up informal ranks of their own.

It would also be helpful to the trade if there were to be a right turn for Taxis from Aldwych w/b into Drury Lane.

The rank that serves the Law Courts does not comply with current accessibility requirements because the wheelchair access door is located on the nearside of the vehicle, it would assist if a disabled pick up point could be established on the north side of the carriageway so that people with accessibility issues would not have to cross the road in order to board a cab and wheelchair user access requirements would then be met.

A small rank to serve the area around Somerset House and Kings College would be a welcome addition to the scheme, it could be located in the ‘access only’ part of the Strand and would provide a service at a location that can be very busy at times, particularly when events are taking place at these establishments. A rank here would also make up the number of rank spaces lost pre and post implementation of the scheme.

Returning to Work

Most of our members will be aware that we have moved from Woodfield Road to the new Taxi House premises in Southwark. We will be opening as normal between 9am - 5pm from 7th September, though due to the current social distancing restrictions, it will be by appointment only which can be made by calling 0207 2861046 and speaking to a team member.

All members attending Taxi House must follow the guidelines related to Covid-19 and a mask must be worn when entering the building, if not worn (unless exempt) due to the safety of the staff, your admittance may be refused. Our new address is: Taxi House, 153 Great Suffolk Street, London, SE1 1PF.

Anthony Street is an LTDA Executive Support Officer.

The new six-monthly DBS rules and how it can save you time and money (but more importantly, keep you on the road and the wheels turning), by applying for the DBS Update Service within 50 days of receiving your new DBS Certificate. We have helped hundreds of members do this and they are feeling reassured that the service will be hassle free when the time comes to renew their licence.

Sure, they’ve made certain roads busy by implementing these schemes and of course the surrounding roads too where displaced traffic is now being forced into these gridlocked areas. But this is a symptom of their schemes - not a reason for it to be implemented.”

for an ALL LONDON LICENCE - to have access to all the roads.

As TfL are restricting access to certain roads to taxis, would they consider giving us a reduction in our licensing fee? Dream On. Perhaps these schemes are all part of their ‘Bulldick Department of Canning Plans’ to speed up the Knowledge, after all, if half the roads are closed to us then there’s only half a Knowledge needed, so it will take half the time.

DBS/CRB Update Service

In one of my previous articles I wrote about the new six-monthly DBS rules and how it can save you time and money (but more importantly, keep you on the road and the wheels turning), by applying for the DBS Update Service within 50 days of receiving your new DBS Certificate. We have helped hundreds of members do this and they are feeling reassured that the service will be hassle free when the time comes to renew their licence.

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We do have some areas of concerns to the proposed changes to the Strand & Aldwych scheme and we have made some suggestions to WCC. For example, there is no satisfactory route for eastbound taxis in the Strand to be able to go over Waterloo Bridge. We recommended there should be an investigation of allowing taxis as well as buses to be able to turn right from The Strand into Lancaster Place. Without this provision, it is likely that many taxis will carry out U turns in Aldwych.

The Taxi ranking arrangements for the Waldorf Hotel are unsatisfactory, we are uncertain whether there is a clear sightline from the feeder rank in Catherine Street to the single space rank outside the Novello Theatre. The rank cannot function without a line of sight and if there isn’t a monitor, one would have to be provided or the rank re-located to a position where it can function. Importantly, a single rank space outside the hotel entrance is insufficient, this is a very busy rank and often there may be more than one taxi required, and this could lead to passing taxis being hailed, particularly if the feeder rank system is not working efficiently. Should this become an ongoing problem then it is possible that taxi drivers may take matters into their own hands and set up informal ranks of their own.

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Anthony Street is an LTDA Executive Support Officer.
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“There's a reason we all have a badge and that's because we didn't give up, when the other 90% said ‘I can't do this’, we remained steadfast in our determination…”

Paul Brennan
LTDA Executive

MAGIC BLINCKERS, REFLECTIVE LISTENERS & TRADE RESOLVE

Hedi Alexander said on camera that there is good evidence that schemes like the Streetspace ones currently being rolled out across London lead to traffic just disappearing - is she actually being serious? She certainly had a straight face when she spoke, so she must in her clouded mind and unqualified opinion believe she is right. But how can she be? Where has there been a scale of road closures anything like what we are currently seeing in London? The answer of course is that there is absolutely nowhere and what is more, there is nowhere that even comes close. Even David Copperfield who has made jumbo jets & the Statue of Liberty disappear would never attempt or believe in such a disappearing feat.

Sensible Councillors are Listening...

Sure, you can close one road and traffic will go down the next one with probably no real harm being done, but when you also close down the adjacent road which is the alternative route and then another so it’s not just one alternative but several alternatives, traffic doesn’t just disappear. It clogs up and strangles the road network and when that happens, every business that relies on that road network of which there are thousands, also die. You don’t have to take my word for it, look what’s happening right across London or at least in the places that have yet to fight back against these ridiculous schemes and the number and scale of opposition is certainly growing, all across London residents and businesses are saying enough is enough.

The sensible councillors are listening or what is more probable, seeing the scale of opposition that’s been reported in the mainstream media and reversing the fool hardly schemes. Those that don’t will possibly find themselves out of a job come the next election, hopefully along with Mayor Khan who has been absolutely disastrous for London and I’m not just talking about the Taxi trade. More and more people from all walks of life are criticising Khan and his idiotic schemes, with many claiming he is sabotaging London and doing more damage to London’s economy than Covid-19.

All across this land of hope and glory, schemes are being removed or cancelled, even in the UK’s mecca of all things being green, aka Brighton, sections of a cycle route that were brought in to encourage cycling have been ripped out because of the negative impact caused. Brighton is of course so green that not to be outdone by TfL, who stuck a temporary cycle lane on Park Lane just fifty or so yards from an already existing one in Hyde Park, Brighton decided to place one, well take a look for yourselves (above)…

So it would seems councils with half a brain are seeing their error and putting matters right - pity our own Deputy Mayor for Transport has yet to have the blinkered mist clear from her mind and so continues to make herself look absolutely inept, from her cycling up the empty cycle lane on Park Lane whilst hailing it the eighth wonder of the world, to her recent televised and absolutely ridiculous statement about the Streetspace scheme or as she is rumoured to call it, the ‘abracadabra’ scheme.

Roads Prevent Isolation

Roads are not the ‘devil motorists’ playground, they are a necessary functional element to society, ensuring we can in many ways all connect with each other. Close them and we no longer connect, but instead become ever more isolated.

Supporters of the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods obviously have the mindset of the TFL artists impression team of how things will look (you know the ones that give us a lovely picture of how a proposed scheme will look when complete, but in reality bears no resemblance to the actual result), they have a picture of a gated community with pristine lawns and never ending street parties - the reality will be these areas will become no go zones, but of course not to all. As roads close and no through traffic becomes the norm, this will also have many other knock on effects, like police patrols, they will also stop patrolling and whole neighbourhood’s will potentially become much more attractive to the criminal elements in our society (no nor politicians) and if they think all of a sudden all coppers will start to walk the beat again, they’re very much mistaken, £110 million is due to be cut from the London police budget which means less cops - and as good as a fancy doorbell with a camera is at letting people see when the postman turns up, I’m yet to be swayed by its crime fighting credentials.

Confidence, Positivity & Steadfastness

Over the last few articles and the start of this one, it has been more doom and gloom than I would like, and whilst it’s understandable that this would be the case, I am still very optimistic that things will improve for our trade. I say that with great confidence because I have great confidence in you, the drivers who are reading this. There’s a reason we all have a badge and that’s because we didn’t give up. When the other 90% said, “I can’t do this”, we remained steadfast in our determination to complete the Knowledge, believing in ourselves and adamant it wasn’t getting the better of us. It will be this spirit that will see us bounce back - and bounce back quicker and stronger than the hundreds of other trades that have also been impacted by this very real crisis.

Of course, tough times will be ahead but the ‘games dead’ brigade are just as wrong today as they have been every other day. As we have gone from one perceived crisis to another, we have some in the trade who spout ‘we’re finished, the games dead’; it was said long before I came into the trade but it’s also been said in the 90’s, 00’s and whatever the last decade is called. The strange thing is the same people who always spout it, are all still driving a cab, in the 90’s they continued to drive a cab, in the 00’s they continued, in the teens (?) and today, they continue to drive a cab.

For us to begin to bounce back we need the tourists and the office staff to return, though when the tourists will return, I am not too sure. Air bridges and an ever-changing infection rate across the globe is making that uncertain but they WILL return. What is a bit more certain is that office staff will begin to return for the last quarter of the year but probably not at a level we need. Whilst infection rates are going back up, the death rate is not and we are also getting ever closer to a vaccine, this will give businesses and their staff some reassurance and encouragement to return to work.

If you think the working from home will be a universal normality going forward, you’re wrong. There will be more of it, but people are realising it’s not the ‘have cake and eat it’ utopia they thought, but more of that next time.

Stay safe & stay positive.  

Paul Brennan, 
LTDA Executive
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“One of our members, Terry, explained it as, “Not getting better day by day, or week by week - but small improvements month by month.”

**ON POINT**

Hello everybody, firstly I would like to wish you and your families good health, as this Covid nightmare continues.

**Slow but Iterative Progress...**

From the members I have spoken to lately, the work levels are still nowhere near where we need them to be, but recent reports indicate there seems to be a slight increase in fares of late. One of our members, Terry, explained it as "Not getting better day by day, or week by week - but small improvements month by month." I also spoke with a credit card company today, who said the amount of transactions they were processing were gradually increasing. As I have said before, I am hoping that when London gets back to normal, the public may use us more because of the benefits of travelling in a purpose-built black cab. I have had many reports from members that their fares have told them they feel better protected from catching the virus in our cabs and will be using us more in the future.

I have spoken with lots of members who during lockdown have taken other jobs, mostly in the construction industry or making food deliveries for the big supermarkets. I get a lot of them now saying that although they liked the low stress levels of doing a different job with a low level of responsibility, they all had problems with not being able to work when they pleased and missed the freedom of being a full-time cabbie. A few admitted that they did not like being under orders and felt that middle management at the supermarkets really enjoyed throwing their weight around and that led to some frank conversations that I cannot really relay in this article, but I’m sure you can imagine. I realise that at the moment they are hard to see but there’s still some positives in being a cabbie.

Saying that, it is not surprising over the last few years we have lost sight of the benefits of being a cabbie. In my 20 odd years, I have found the lasts six or seven years the most frustrating. We have had to put up with the invasion of Uber, road closures, the age limit decrease and after only having diesel cabs to buy we are now told all of a sudden, we must think electric.

**Renewing Your Licence**

Understandably members coming up to renewal time are having trouble getting together the £300 cost (plus £52.00 for your DBS check). Please don’t shoot the messenger but TFLs stance is that you have to renew within 3 months of your expiry date or you will have to apply for a new licence, which will mean you will be issued with a new badge number and identifiers. Renewing as a ‘new driver’ can also take longer as you go to the bottom of the queue and are forced to get a new DBS check.

**Hammersmith Bridge**

The bridge has now been closed to all due to safety concerns. That includes cyclists and pedestrians. It may lead to more work from the Hammersmith rank as St Pauls and Harrodnian schools re-open.

**Green Tomato Cars**

I received an Email from our member John, who reported that the private hire company, Green Tomato Cars are advertising themselves as taxis. John led me to the services page on their website, and there it was - a long list of areas where you could order a Green Tomato Taxi. I immediately tried to contact Green Tomato and left a voice message with their Press and Media Department, asking to be contacted and informing them that they were in Breach of the 1998 Private Hire Act. To be honest I did not expect them to reply and they have not let me down. I have however kept a close eye on their website to see if it will be corrected. As this goes to print it has not been changed and I now will take the appropriate steps. I will keep you informed of any progress. If any of you would also like to inform them of their error, it is Section 31 Sub Section 2 that they are in breach of!

**Camden**

The people’s republic of Camden has copied Islington and brought in a ‘Healthy Street Scheme’. Please see below the list of exemptions and associated instructions of which we have been notified. The restrictions will be enforced by ANPR cameras, and exemptions for the following vehicles will be given:

- Blue Disabled Badge holders (BDB) resident in the restricted areas. Please apply for an exemption.
- BDB holders who need to visit a business or residential property within the restricted zone. Please apply for an exemption.
- Emergency Services vehicles responding to an emergency.
- Residents vehicles registered in any of the restricted roads listed in Camden’s restricted zone plan will need to apply for an exemption.
- Residents vehicles registered to properties in any of the restricted roads (as above) that have off street parking, or a ‘crossover’ to their driveway. Please apply for an exemption.
- Children with disabilities that prevent them from walking, scooting or cycling to school – the vehicles which pick them up/drop them off will be exempt. Parents/carers must apply for an exemption.
- Pure Electric Vehicles (not hybrids) – including those used for Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs)
- Zero Emission Capable taxis (“black cabs”)
- Elderly/disabled residents requiring taxis for hospital appointments etc. These will be assessed on a case by case basis. If you require this, please contact via the following e-form: https://www.camden.gov.uk/healthy-school-streets, or via letter or telephone at least 5 days before the exemption is required.

Lloyd Baldwin is an LTDA Executive Support Officer
“Transportation is about co-operation, the driver is a pedestrian, the pedestrian is a cyclist, the cyclist is a tube user, the tube user is a taxi and bus user. All forms of transport are supposed to complement each other…”

PREACHERS, MORONS, STATISTICS & CO-OPERATION

A MAN IN BLACK

I f ever you’ve heard an evangelical minister from the USA preach to his flock, then just imagine these words being spoken in a deep southern drawl:

You’re All Gonna Burn in Satan’s Fiery Pit
“YOU, YES YOU! You are ALL heathens. You are gonna burn, YES BURN in Satan’s fiery pit and you wanna know why, I’ll tell you why - you are ALL DRIVERS. Now the great god of cycling wants you, NAY DEMANDS, that you throw away your ear keys, burn your automobile AND CRUSH THE FOUR WHEELED TRANSPORTATION OF SATAN (can I get a HELL YEAH?). It don’t matter if you’re an old-timer or disabled, you can be perched on a skateboard. It don’t matter if you’re an old-timer or...”

We Are All Going to Die

Now for some people, cycling has become the new religion, but for many it has become nothing more than an evangelical nightmare, driven by dubious statistics, rhetoric and ad-hominem. It is assumed by some of those who’s unwavering support of cycling and walking over all other forms of transportation that drivers hate cyclists and pedestrians. This belief is of course complete nonsense, usually expounded by some narcissistic entity suffering from a nihilistic delusion that we are all going to die unless we ditch the car and return to the dark ages where the horse and cart roamed free. It is these individuals who have divided communities, put neighbour up against neighbour and street up against street.

Moronic

One of the more amusing incidents that I can recall was a nameless Islington councillor, pontificating on the virtues of ditching motorised transport and using a cycle. When LBC presenter Nick Ferrari asked the councillor how a gas engineer would transport their equipment, such as a boiler for example, the aforementioned councillor stated that the engineer should use ‘a cargo bike’. So, the engineer cycles several miles, carrying a 100lb boiler, plus ancillaries and equipment, which may also likely include mortar, may have to take the equipment up to the 5th floor of a tower block, fit the boiler - and then cycle home. I don’t use the word moron very often - but the councillor’s response was certainly moronic.

The Swooping Vulture of Spurious Statistics

Spurious statistics have also been expounded by these same entries, but these figures, in many cases, seem to be either woefully manipulated, or plucked from the air like a vulture swooping in to remove the flesh off of a rotting carcass (obviously without John Wayne standing in the foreground, chewing on a matchstick whilst tumbleweed drifts across a plain in Texas). So here’s a statistic: according to several ambulance service staff, it is now taking an extra 8 minutes on average to attend an emergency, this was actually acknowledged by one London council and deemed as acceptable, I’m not sure that the spokesperson involved in stating that would be too happy if it was one of their loved ones who had suffered a stroke or cardiac arrest. I have also witnessed video footage of members of the police service trapped by bollards erected in the middle of any given road (yes this is you Islington). What seems to be even more curious is that the only people who hold keys to remove bollards are the fire service. According to the British Lung Foundation approximately 210,000 people in the UK were living with bronchiectasis in 2012. This is at least four times higher than the estimate commonly used by the NHS of around 50,000. Other research published this year suggests bronchiectasis prevalence could be in excess of 300,000.

Now here’s the anecdotal bit (YAWWWN); I was diagnosed with Bronchiectasis a number of years ago due to another medical issue. Now, despite my case not being related pollution it is still potentially used to help create ‘zombie statistics’. Interestingly, among the 1 to 4-year-old age group, sadly there were 561 deaths, of which 11% were attributed to respiratory disorders. There were no figures available for any group between the ages of 5 to 18. Yet anti-car lobbyists will tell you our kids are dying because of pollution levels, which is rather disingenuous when you consider that vehicles are being diverted onto main roads where the less well-off live, and where, in many cases, large BAME communities reside. This seems to be the lowest form of NIMBYism - I do like an acronym.

Coming Over All Frankie Howerd

Now here’s the intriguing bit, many local councils are buying into the road closure schemes which are popping up all over creation, driving motorists and emergency services insane, but why? Could it be the £250m pot being made available by Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps? Surely not! NAY, NAY and thrice NAY (I came over all Frankie Howerd there). Incidentally, Mr Shapps’ constituency reversed their roll-out of a Low Traffic Neighbourhood Scheme, I can’t imagine why…

Co-operation

Transportation is about co-operation, the driver is a pedestrian, the pedestrian is a cyclist, the cyclist is a tube user, the tube user is a taxi and bus user. All forms of transport are supposed to complement each other, in the taxi industry’s case it is a ‘last mile’ service and the only fully wheelchair accessible fleet across London.

Let’s have a bit of honesty here (something many a council isn’t really familiar with). On one hand this is an ideological cult dictating to any given borough council, with that same council rubbing its hands at the thought of getting hold of Grant Shapps’ small change. In turn it could also be argued that this is a cunning Conservative plan to turn London’s Labour boroughs from Red to Blue by getting the council to p**s enough people off and therefore vote them out. In short, this is nothing more than political over-reach with the Coronavirus Act 2020 used as leverage.

Anyway, I’m off. I’ve got three ton of bricks that I’m towing on the back of my Raleigh Grifter which need to be in Grimsby by dawn - and I’m devoid of a saddle.

Steve Kenton is a Licensed Taxi driver of 30 years

Steve Kenton is a Licensed Taxi driver of 30 years

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LONDON CHURCH RUNS

ROBERT LORDAN

ROB’S HISTORY TIPS

Whilst on the Knowledge I became fascinated by the hidden stories associated with London’s countless streets and points. I’ve been passionate about the city’s history ever since - and have discovered that sharing these tales with the public often results in a nice tip!

Cathedrals and churches are the hardiest results in a nice tip! sharing these tales with the public often ever since - and have discovered that been passionate about the city’s history ever since - and have discovered that

Westminster Abbey (the official name of which is the rather wordy ‘Collegiate Church of St Peter at Westminster’) can trace its routes back to 960AD when it was founded as a monastery.

80 years later, in the 1060s, Edward the Confessor decided to expand and improve the site, a task which was completed with the Abbey’s consecration on 28 December 1065 - just one week before Edward died.

The following year, in 1066, the Abbey hosted the coronation of William the Conqueror and since then every monarch has been crowned here - with two exceptions: Edward V - who disappeared aged 12, believed murdered - and Edward VIII, who abdicated in 1936.

Run it from Westminster Abbey to St Mary Abbots Kensington Church Street. This church dates back to the 12th century, although the current building was built in 1872. Its architect was George Gilbert Scott – who specialised in designing workhouses. Sir Isaac Newton, William Wilberforce and Beatrix Potter all worshipped at St Mary’s.

Next let’s head to the Dutch Church on Austin Friars. Again, this place of worship dates back to the 12th century. In the 1500s use of the church was granted to London's large community of ‘Germans and other strangers’, with the population of some 5000 Dutch residents eventually becoming the largest group associated with the church. The original church was destroyed in the Blitz; the current building dates from the 1950s.

How would you get from the Dutch Church to St Peter’s Italian Church, Clerkenwell? This opened in 1865 to serve, as the name suggests, the area then known as ‘Little Italy.’ St Peter’s could’ve featured in my last article about TV locations… in 1979 it appeared in the very first scene in the very first episode of Minder!

An overlooked feature of Christ Church on Westminster Bridge Road (opposite Lambeth North tube station) is its spire - look closely, and you’ll see its decorated with stars and stripes. This was done in honour of Abraham Lincoln, hence its official name - the Lincoln Memorial Tower. The tower survived the war, although the rest of the church was destroyed, hence its more modern additions which make for an interesting architectural mixture.

What route would you take from the Lincoln Memorial to St Bride’s, Fleet Street? The spire of this church, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, is famously said to have inspired 18th century baker’s apprentice, Thomas Rich to invent the tiered wedding cake.

Now we’ll go south to the Metropolitan Tabernacle at Elephant and Castle. This was established in 1690 after Parliament banned independent Christian organisations from congregating. As such those who attended the Tabernacle risked being persecuted for many years. It’s believed the Tabernacle stands on the site where the ‘Southwark Martyrs’ - a group who defied Henry VIII - were burnt at the stake…

Take it from the Metropolitan Tabernacle to the Notting Hill Tabernacle. Due to its distinctive appearance, this was nicknamed the ‘Taj Mahal of North Kensington’ when it first opened in 1869. It’s now a community centre.

Many churches were destroyed or damaged during W.WII. One survivor - despite being almost obliterated in May 1941 - was St Clement Danes; damage from that fateful night can still be seen pitted around the stonework outside. The church was restored and reconsecrated in 1958 as the RAF Church. As a mark of friendship, the new organ was donated by the United States Air Force.

Another great survivor of the war was of course St Paul’s Cathedral. The RAF Church to St Paul’s is far too easy; so, run it imagining that Fleet Street is blocked.

The previous incarnation, which was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, was made of wood and had a spire even taller than the one which stands today.

The present St Paul’s is Sir Christopher Wren’s masterpiece and was completed in 1710 during the reign of Queen Anne; hence her statue standing outside.

On the night of 29th December 1940, London was bombarded in the worst air-raid of the Blitz and thousands of incendiaries threatened to destroy the Cathedral. The order was given, by Winston Churchill himself, that St Paul’s had to be protected at all costs. This was achieved by the bravery of firefighters, and watchers in the cathedral itself who removed incendiaries before they had chance to set fire to the great dome.

It was on that night that, from the roof of the Daily Mail building on Tudor Street, one of the most iconic images of the war was taken; St Paul’s standing defiant amongst the smoke and flames…

Robert Lordan has been a Licensed Taxi driver and Qualified London Taxi Guide for over a decade.
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“They say you should never meet your heroes. With a celebrity you admire, you don’t want them to be anything other than the person you imagine them to be...”

CELEBRITY PASSENGERS

ON THE ROAD

On category of person that I didn’t talk about in my discussion of taxi passengers last time was the celebrity. Every cab driver will pick up a celebrity eventually; it’s one of the perks of the job. Friends, family and strangers are always fascinated hearing about the famous people we pick up, and it’s always nice to have a story to tell about a celebrity encounter. Today then, I’ll talk a bit about a select few of the celebs I’ve come into contact with.

They say you should never meet your heroes. With a celebrity you admire, you don’t want them to be anything other than the person you imagine them to be.

Football

They need to remain someone to admire. On two occasions in around 1990, I picked up Manchester United and Northern Ireland footballing legend, George Best, in Curzon Street. He was a well-known figure to drivers working evenings in Mayfair. I found him a quiet, charming, man, happy to exchange a few words.

Film

Also in Mayfair, I picked up veteran actor, Stewart Grainger. This guy had presence in spades, a real character. Bound for Fulham, he wouldn’t stop talking and referred to Fulham Broadway as a “shit hole” and speculated about the punch-ups that occur at Chelsea Football Club. Irish actor, Richard Harris was another big name from around the same time.

Rock

I was particularly excited to pick up a musical hero of mine at the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington: Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin.

He was a really nice, laid-back, guy who wanted to talk about the previous night’s television programmes on the way home to Primrose Hill.

Royalty

Saturday June 2nd 2012. It’s the day before the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations and I accepted an account job picking up at a hairdresser’s in Knightsbridge. My passenger turned out to be the Duchess of Kent and she was going to Kensington Palace. She came over as posh and confident; but also polite. Rather than order me round to a nearby shop, she asks if I “wouldn’t mind”. When she returned with an umbrella, she said it was “for tomorrow.”

I’m not sure how one addresses the Queen’s cousin, so I kept it neutral and treated her like anyone else. She seemed a character, and I felt she might be up for a chat over a pint sometime. Incidentally, I’ve never picked the Queen up in my cab, but I’ve seen her driven around London from time to time. You hear the whistles from the police motorcyclists first; then the traffic parts to allow the royal limousine to glide through. She never gets caught in traffic jams and probably doesn’t realise London’s ugly traffic system of cones, concrete blocks and huge metal barriers that have sat outside Buckingham Palace for the past few years.

Boxing

One Saturday in 2013, former boxer, Chris Eubanks chased my cab down Baker Street (Patsy Kensit also chased my cab down Baker Street once). He seemed a nice guy. Unlike most celebrities, Chris doesn’t try to blend into the background. The next time I saw him he was in the middle of Berkerley Square waving his arms around like an enigmatic comedian trying to flag a cab down.

Too Hot to Handle

It was a busy Saturday, that one. My next job straight after Chris Eubanks was an account pick-up at Scott’s Restaurant. Bound for Chelsea, I was startled to find we were being chased by the paparazzi on motorbikes. I learned later that my customers were Charles Saatchi and his new girlfriend. Saatchi had been all over the media recently following his messy divorce from celebrity chef, Nigella Lawson. From the photo of the pair in my cab made the Sun on Sunday.

Wizards

The actor, Michael Gambon was a very polite fellow. I’d just been watching him on TV after buying the DVD boxed set of The Singing Detective, a Dennis Potter work from the 1990s. More recently, he’d also starred in a Harry Potter film. That didn’t mean anything to me. I should have told him I recognised him as The Singing Detective, but I let the moment go.

Remembering how I’d let the moment pass with Michael Gambon a couple of years earlier I knew that in matters of celebrity encounter, regret weighs more than fear. At the end of the journey I overcame my nerves and we exchanged a few words. Michael was exactly how I imagined: like an old-style university professor, and as approachable and self-effacing as he is on his TV travel programmes. I’m glad to say that my image of Michael remained intact.

Kinky Politicians?

Many Lords and Ladies have ridden in my cab. I was intrigued about the Conservative Party Chief Whip I picked up. Imagine going to a party and saying you are the Chief Whip! That’s got to be the coolest job title ever. Or is that just me?

Chris Ackrill is a Licensed Taxi driver and former Knowledge examiner

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

EASY RUN

Indian YMCA to French Ordinary Court

HARD RUN

Royal Circus to East Putney Station
Brian Merchant wrote: “The biggest startups in modern history were built on old-fashioned worker exploitation.” He wrote this in The Guardian: “The secretary’s proposals were all detrimental to the taxi trade and unilaterally positive for Uber & Co,” said the president of the German Taxi and Private Hire Association, Michael Müller. The existence of the trade is directly threatened. “Secretary Scheuer dreams of platform-based and digital mobility models in a legally safe environment; flexible transport options in rural areas; environmentally-friendly mobility in cities; on-demand services like innovative pooling systems and a fair basis for competition by keeping the obligation to return to base for PHV’s. The obligation to return for PHV’s is retained in name only,” says Michael Oppermann, Managing Director of the taxi association. “The existing plans even undermine and weaken the obligation to return. The back door for Uber & Co is wide open - at the expense of the honest taxi companies that pay taxes and social security contributions in this country.”

Whilst the secretary is remodeling the 1961 law, the German taxi trade is preparing for battle, keeping in mind what a German politician, clearly fearing the sharp-tongued voice of the trade, once said: “The taxi trade is a dangerous opinion machine – you ignore it at your peril.”

“Old-fashioned Worker Exploitation”

That’s why I found the following headline in the US publication, ‘Medium’ so amusing: “Uber and Lyft’s Business Model May Be Dead - Good.” The writer, Brian Merchant wrote: “The biggest startups in modern history were built on old-fashioned worker exploitation.” He describes how “the companies promised a new model of work, one that would give rise to a network of part-time drivers who were free to come and go as their schedules demanded in between pursuing their true dreams and ambitions.” Research has shown that while a majority of drivers do log part-time shifts, most of the work is actually done by dedicated full-time drivers.

Scheuer’s Cornerstones

Most of last year the German taxi trade spent fighting ‘Scheuer’s Eckpunkte’ demonstrating against the ‘cornerstones’ transport secretary Scheuer had thought out, to deregulate the taxi sector. Scheuer’s main cornerstone: to end the obligation for private hire vehicles – mostly used by Uber – to return to their base before accepting a new trip. Under existing German law, private hire vehicles cannot receive new jobs en route to their base, by phone or by app. Private hire vehicles must be booked through the company’s base. For the taxi trade this rule is a great barrier against the spread of Uber (now serving Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt and Dusseldorf).

The ministry says, in quite a vague statement, that it will enable “new digital mobility options, like vehicle pooling, in a legally safe environment, so that we can make people in cities and in rural areas more mobile. Yet, we insist on fair competition and good standards.” It’s a shame that the minister didn’t notice he was about to remove age-old standards, like the taxi operator’s duty to accept any trip (except long ones – they’re negotiable), to apply the official local tariff and to offer a 24-hour service. “The secretary’s proposals are all detrimental to the taxi trade and unilaterally positive for Uber & Co,” said the president of the German Taxi and Private Hire Association, Michael Müller. The existence of the trade is directly threatened.

“The biggest startups in modern history were built on old-fashioned worker exploitation.”

Last year, FreeNow dropped its original name myTaxi together with Uber and Lyft’s business plans. "There is simply no world in which paying drivers a living wage would become part of Uber and Lyft’s business plans."
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I desperately try not to be like one of the ‘doom and gloom’ merchants that have blighted the trade, and my life, for the past 40 years, but it’s not getting any better out here.

There are more people on the streets, tubes and trains, and talking to individual drivers and the fleets, it is picking up, but from a totally flat point. Fares wise, on a day to day basis, it seems a bit of a lottery. Last week a cabbie told me that he’d had three fares on the bounce, the first off Cheapside rank to Paddington and then picked up a hail on Crawford St to Russell Square and then another off Theobalds Rd going to Tower Hill! The next fella I spoke with the same day had one job in four hours and decided to knock it on the head and go and get a brew at Great Suffolk Street Café. I reckon the balance between people at work and cabbies on the streets is key to it - every time it picks up a bit, more drivers, on hearing this through the grapevine, venture out, and the work and earnings level plateau.

On the vehicle front, delicensing has seen hundreds of older cabs, many of them belonging to fleets, disappear at a rate of 150 per week to the stage where we now only have just over 17,000 cabs licensed...
London Historian and Taxi Driver Phil Brown, takes a closer look at London’s diverse communities...

**THE SOUL OF THE CITY**

**FOOTPRINTS & FOUNDATIONS**

I have been a cab driver for over 35 years. The profession that I chose to represent is one that I am extremely proud of. Driving through the capital has inspired me to understand its history, traditions and customs. Reading extensively about its heritage encouraged me to become a London tourist guide and lecturer. Combining my two passions has led me to a much clearer perception of London’s unique social history.

**Integrated Assets**

It has always amazed me that the capitals cultural diversity, has brought a plethora of customary attributes. The English language and its culinary palate have integrated many assets from diverse nations. My working day in the cab will take me through varied areas of London. These domains will have cultural diversities, in which a cosmopolitan influence will be apparent. Many districts in the capital have become homogenised from people who have diversified from the four corners of the globe. Perhaps, ghettos, colony and hood are a vernacular that dictates an insalubrious area. A place where visitors are unwelcome, and tensions can easily rise if you meander into the wrong neighbourhood. The indigenous population might feel that the capital is submerged with foreigners, whose traditions and customs are contemptible. Life has taught me, ‘that knowledge is power’ and once you begin to understand that human beings are diverse, your fears fade away and your tolerance emerges. This sentiment will enrich your soul as you cross previously fixed boundaries and into new territories.

London is a city where over three hundred languages are spoken. As a cab driver, our working days will likely encompass passengers from many different countries, some will be visitors from overseas - others from differing ethnicities and residents of London. As a fledgling cab driver in the 1980s, I found the taxi trade traditionally incorporated mostly white males from the native population, although a contingent of Jewish and West Indian drivers also plied for hire on the streets of London. The present-day cab trade has absorbed many different first and second-generation immigrants into its ranks. All of these individuals have passed the stern test of The Knowledge of London and have become part of this iconic profession.

**Growing Up in the East End**

Multiculturalism is an expression which reflects the presence of several different ethnic groups in a society and as an adolescent growing up in London’s East End in the 1960s, I was immersed in many different cultures. The playground of my youth was a tenement block off the Commercial Road, whose residents formed many nationalities. West Indian, Irish, Jewish, Maltese, Indian and Pakistani, all were inclusive in my neighbourhood. The children on my estate had one common denominator, ‘football’. The beautiful game helped the children of the East End erase any thoughts of prejudice. From the makeshift playgrounds, many friendships were cemented for perpetuity. Parents expected their offspring to abide by religious instruction and observe the Sabbath and holy days. Children of different faiths had an understanding of each other’s spiritual beliefs. Even if racist overtones reared their ugly head, my little world remained a place of acceptance. I consider myself lucky to have embraced the concept of multiculturalism from an early age.

The popular television programme, ‘Who Do You Think You Are?’ makes us realise that we all have foreign blood in our veins. Family trees can be so unpredictable, ancestors will always bring a host of surprises. Perhaps, families can trace their roots back to 1066, the time of the Norman Conquest. However, many of us are more recent arrivals to this country. My own experience of family origins is on eastern European soil. Being of the Jewish faith, I am a second-generation immigrant, whose ancestors migrated from Russia and Romania in the early 1900s. As with most refugees of the 20th-century, my descendants were fleeing persecution. My courageous grandparents were seeking a better life and providing an opportunity for future generations to live a peaceful life. Here, in London they felt secure in the knowledge that their oppressors were a distant dream.

**Gentrification**

The analogy of diasporas seeking a better life in England and particularly London, is one that has been replicated through the passage of time. The capital is certainly, ‘a melting pot of nations’ Today, there are familiar environs where cultures are dominant and a feeling of living amongst your own is evident. These attitudes may be true, however, the millennials have a new idealism. They are relocating into neighbourhoods that established a prominent ethnicity. Spitalfields, Tottenham and Brixton are being gentrified. Al fresco-dining and coffee shops are now situated next door to curry houses and jerk chicken takeaways. This may be to the detriment of these localities whose long-term residents may feel acrimonious towards the newcomers. The impact of these new residents will change the landscape and offer a different perspective. I applaud the young who are breaking down barriers and reaffirming that most people are tolerant.

**New Arrivals**

Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans have all left their footprint on the capital. Strangers from different lands have been arriving in London for two millennia. However, these marauding armies came to rule and conquer new kingdoms. These strangers that I want to put under future spotlights in this column, are those who were forced to leave their birthplaces under duress. When these refugees arrived in London, they located mostly to rockeries, which offered a basic existence in dilapidated habitats. The lives of a majority of refugees was one of hardship, where employment, a roof over one’s head and having enough food to sustain themselves were not easily achievable feats.

The language was always an obstacle as most foreigners lived in tight communities, where the use of English was not a prerequisite. With all these obstacles the newcomers would often seek the hand of charity in times of wanton need. Most incoming migrants were fleeing persecution and famine and arrived in London with expectation of new beginnings. The timeline of immigration into the capital has a longevity that continues to the present day. London has and will always be a point of arrival. The French Huguenots settled in Spitalfields and Soho, the Jewish Community Red to the Whitechapel’s East End and the Italians took the route to Clerkenwell. Many other migrants formed their own environs in the capital.

In future articles, it’s my intention to explore the various quarters that were synonymous with each community. The first wave of immigrants to arrive on mass into London were the French Huguenots. Their presence still echoes through the cobblestone streets of Spitalfields…
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the devil, they say, finds work for idle hands. Thanks to ennui brought about by lockdown, the telly hijacked by my grandson, and with nothing better to do, I attacked my wardrobe. Bent double, shirt-sleeves flapping in my face and buttons and zips poking into my skull, I rummaged through a pile of old trainers and dusty boxes. Totally unexpectedly, I discovered a cache of ancient Taxi Trade newspapers and magazines – circa 1970/80. Picking through the pages, I was literally ‘transported’ to a previous life. Apart from the current mayhem being caused through the Covid-19 pandemic, the articles were, strangely, almost exact replicas of the problems faced by the taxi trade today. Pollution, expensive running costs, inadequate legislation, roadworks and permanent street closures in Camden – resulting in subsequent traffic jams. No change there then. In fact, Camden’s closure of Lambs Conduit Street led to mass picketing of Euston, St Pancras and Kings Cross stations. But what really grabbed my attention, were the advertisements in the trade press for sales and services. In June 1978, you could still hire a cab ‘on the clock’ – 45% commission days, 50% nights. You could hire one of London’s 12,400 fleet cabs for £47 a week; a Dunlop radial tyre was £22.50, and a Lucas cab battery was thirty-five quid. Flag fall was 30p and a gallon of derv (April 1978) was 84p a gallon. What also surprised, and saddened me, was the number of cab garages alive and well in 1982, that have disappeared off the planet.

Cab Garages
I had been amazed, when I first entered the cab trade, at the number and assortment of garages – from dusty, grimy, dog turd ridden holes and assortment of garages – from the remains of World War Two dusty, grimy, dog turd ridden holes and dust ridden dog holes – from the remains of World War Two to purpose-built state-of-the-art garage facilities that you had to take off your shoes to enter. The ambience of the establishment reflected in the saying, ‘you get what you pay for’. A prime example of ‘clothes being cut according to means’ was my introduction to ‘back street’ cab maintenance. After having my brand-new cab serviced and cosseted at point of sale by certified cab engineers, I knowingly resorted to tip toing around the prolific mounds of Alsatian excrement, to cut the running costs of AGP 397G and opt for the grimy, cut price version by streetwise ‘mechanics.’ Even better than having my cab tended to in one of those makeshift garages – that looked like they’d been designed and erected by the same architect who built the ramshackle shacks that rise up in locations ravaged by natural disasters. AGP had its first overhaul carried out in the street outside my mum’s council flat in Southwark. It passed first time.

The biggest concentration of cab garages seemed to centre around Hackney and the old East End. I discovered garages, long since gone, situated in the strangest of places. In a vast chamber carved under a block of buildings in a Whitstable side street, hundreds of cabs poured in and out, day and night. Over the years the staff at my regular garage became good friends. Swallowed up in the subterranean gloom of a network of railway arches, the busy line out of Liverpool Street Station, was home to a score of mechanics and bodyworkers who could strip and rebuild a cab’s engine and gearbox in hours and repair ‘irreparable’ crushed body parts like magicians re-assembling newspapers torn to shreds in front of your eyes. Yet, to the day the garage closed, and greasy hands shaken for the last time, I still couldn’t converse with half the multicultural workforce. But things got done. One garage I regularly frequented in Dunbridge Street, Bethnal Green, was run by Reg, a turbaned Indian with a coarse, cockney accent who, could assess repairs ranging from a scratched taxi to a write-off, with an unerring instantaneous accuracy.

‘Wiff Waff’ Spanners
Incidentally somehow, back in the early seventies, I’d managed to amass a fleet of fifteen FX4’s and a score of day and night drivers. Not being a mechanic of any shape, form or inclination, I decided to ‘cut my costs’ by not having my drivers shlep for repairs from one garage to another, by opening a garage of my own. Guess what? I found an empty railway arch in Leytonstone (without a front), leased a Bradbury WheelFree Ramp (like they had at the Carriage Office... ‘rock the steering’), a thing like a toy gun that you connected to the compressor (I found in the back of the arch) that blew brake dust off the drums, and a ‘Wiff Waff’ spanner. The ‘Wiff Waff’ spanner, recommended by my Caribbean fitter friend as essential, was proving to be extremely elusive, even after scanning through numerous spanner catalogues, until a I told a mechanic from the same part of the Caribbean as my mate what I was looking for. He went into mild hysterics when I told him that I was looking for a ‘Wiff Waff’ spanner. When he’d stopped laughing and dried his eyes, he told me that what I was looking for was actually called a ‘Whitworth Spanner’ – ‘Wiff Waff’ was just my mate’s Caribbean translation. The only other thing I needed now – was a mechanic. That’s how I discovered Arnold, and an engineer to erect the Bradbury WheelFree. That’s also when I met a short, tubby American guy who talked like Lou Costello and whose name was Robin Hood. But that as they say, is another story...
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PUZZLER
CROSSWORD

ACROSS:
1 Looming (over) (8)
5 Stitched join (4)
9 Light purple (5)
10 Describing, recounting (7)
11 Arise (from) (4)
12 Afternoon snack (5,3)
14 Teachings of Christ (6)
15 Charge exorbitantly (6)
18 Error, fallacy (8)
20 Exploited (4)
23 Matted, knotted (7)
24 Bestow (5)
25 Seed-case (4)
26 Play’s opening night (8)

DOWN:
1 Rings (church bells) (5)
2 Hikers (7)
3 Large stone (4)
4 Character, disposition (6)
6 Order issued by a king (5)
7 Powerful tycoon (7)
8 Tractable (7)
13 Inhuman (7)
14 Pay for yourself (2,5)
16 Trap (7)
17 Ask oneself (6)
19 Respiratory organs (5)
21 Elude (5)
22 Pacify (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.

ALL ANSWERS TO PUZZLER ON P30
Taxi Editor: Sebastian, tell us a bit about you…
Seb: I live in Shoreditch and have been a cab driver in London for 18 years. Because I love military history and especially WWII, I volunteer for the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans and attend events with the veterans I meet with the charity and know so much about what happened in France and the Netherlands from the trips we take the veterans on each year, but I knew very little about the campaign in Italy. So, this summer I decided that it was time I found out more about my own family’s history and I took a trip to Italy to discover more about the Italian campaign where my Grandfather, Henry “Harry” Philp had done his bit for the war effort.

Taxi Editor: What made you go to Italy?
Seb: I cycled from Calais to the French Alps where I picked up my campervan to continue my journey across the border into Italy. I think it was a bit too far to go in the cab! The cycling was great fun and took me about four and a half days. The campaign began in Sicily and ended in Anzio, but I visited the main areas in reverse, starting in Monte Cassino, then Anzio, moving to Salerno and finally Sicily. I knew very little about my Grandfather’s part in the war, as he never really talked about it other than to tell us he was a transporter and that he had a rough time and had seen a young kid pick up a grenade and get blown apart in front of him. I do remember when I was young and on holiday in the French Alps that my Grandfather told me that he had come down the Alps on a donkey during the war, so I thought this was a fitting place to start my trip.

Taxi Editor: Did you not take the cab?
Seb: I cycled from Calais to the French Alps where I picked up my campervan to continue my journey across the border into Italy. I think it was a bit too far to go in the cab! The cycling was great fun and took me about four and a half days. The campaign began in Sicily and ended in Anzio, but I visited the main areas in reverse, starting in Monte Cassino, then Anzio, moving to Salerno and finally Sicily. I knew very little about my Grandfather’s part in the war, as he never really talked about it other than to tell us he was a transporter and that he had a rough time and had seen a young kid pick up a grenade and get blown apart in front of him. I do remember when I was young and on holiday in the French Alps that my Grandfather told me that he had come down the Alps on a donkey during the war, so I thought this was a fitting place to start my trip.

Taxi Editor: Tell us a bit about the trip?
Seb: It was very different to trips in France where all the WWII sites in Normandy are marked with huge signs. In Italy areas of significance aren’t signposted and you have to rely on guidebooks to find the places you want to investigate. I started in Monte Cassino where the battle for Cassino, resulted in 55,000 Allied casualties. In Anzio I visited the two landing beaches, Peter and X-ray, where the Americans landed. The British and Americans stayed there for two months, allowing the Germans to move down the country towards the allied troops giving them a huge advantage. Another veteran I have met through the charity is John King. John was on HMS Janus near Anzio when the boat was torpedoed with the loss of over 200 lives, John was one of the just 62 who survived.

Taxi Editor: You then moved on to Salerno and Sicily?
Seb: The main invasion force landed around Salerno on 9 September 1943 on the western coast in Operation Avalanche. There were three landing zones. One was Paestum, where the brother of Bill Gladden, one of the veterans, that I have met through the Taxi Charity landed. After my day in Salerno I got the night ferry from Naples to Sicily where I learnt so much about Operation Husky. The battle in Sicily was one of the first operations involving the Paras and I know 100-year-old veteran, Raymond Whitwell, through the Taxi Charity who was in this operation. Ray was in the first wave of troops to land in a Waco glider at a bridge near to a town called Stracusa, where their job was to secure the bridge for the troops coming in from the sea.

Taxi Editor: I understand you laid flowers on a grave?
Seb: Yes, I did. Another Taxi Charity volunteer, cabbie Danny Shelton has a Great Uncle, J E Cook, buried in Italy, so I went to the Minturno war cemetery on my way to Salerno and laid flowers on his grave and brought home videos and pictures for the family.

Taxi Editor: Do you have any plans for more visits to key WWII sites?
Seb: I hope to visit Crete to learn more about the Cretan Resistance and the battle of Crete which began in 1941 when Nazi Germany began an airborne invasion of the island.

Taxi Editor: What events are you going on next with the charity?
Seb: The pandemic means that all our plans are currently on hold but I certainly hope that next year we are able to take our amazing WWII veterans back to Normandy and The Netherlands to pay their respects and remember those who didn’t make it home.

About the Taxi Charity
The Taxi Charity for Military Veterans was formed in Fulham in 1948, to work for the benefit, comfort and enjoyment of military veterans and arranges many trips every year for veterans from all conflicts.

The charity offers international trips to The Netherlands, Belgium and France, UK day trips to concerts or museums, transport to attend fundraising events, as well as special days out to catch up with friends and comrades.

To fund and facilitate these outings, the charity is wholly reliant on generous donations from members of the public, businesses and trusts and the amazing group of London licensed taxi drivers who offer their time and vehicles free.

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CABS WANTED

- All de-commissioned good quality
y husband has a special name for QVC, the shopping channel. He calls it WTF. This is because that’s what he shouts when the postie delivers my purchases and he claps eyes on them. Coronavirus, lockdown and post lockdown have chopped my income drastically, so these days I watch QVC, and the other shopping channels, just to browse and remind me of days gone by when I was flush enough to buy on impulse. I’ll be back spending as soon as the tourists, the office workers and the Oxford Street shoppers are out in force again.

Meanwhile, to keep my memories warm, here are my Top 4 Shopping Channel Moments:

1. Once, at 2am and after a hen night and lashings of Sangria I bought a sundress, tote bag and sunhat. I thought they would elevate my IKEA Pax into a luxurious Beverly Hills style closet. Mr Meg eyed them in force again.

2. Another copy was 2 pairs of stick-on battery-operated lights for the inside of my wardrobe. I thought they would elevate my IKEA Pax into a luxurious Beverly Hills style closet. Mr Meg eyed them when I opened the box and warned “They’ll never stick”. Less than a week before I’d seen the TV presenter put the lights onto the inside wall of his cupboard and lean back with all his weight to prove they wouldn’t budge. I put the first light onto the ceiling part of my cupboard and before I had time to stick up the second one, the first one dropped down onto my head. After several tries sticking and then catching the lights as they fell, I honed and returned them. “No biggy, I got a full refund” I told Mr Meg breezily. “Did you pay postage?” he asked me. “Of course not!” I lied.

3. Next came the £24.99 set of 5 ‘magic cloths’. The cloths that apparently make cleaning so much fun, and so fast, that you will laugh hysterialy as you wipe your worktops, your microwave, your TV and your mirrors. No detergent, no elbow grease, no sweat required. The woman waxing lyrical about these cloths said they gave her more ‘me’ time so her hair, her skin and her figure have never looked better. I gave that woman some feedback via email and told her she should use some of her ‘me’ time to get an eye check because the big woolly cloths smeared every surface in Meg Towers. Looking in the mirror that I had just wiped with the super cloth, it was so foggy that I thought the house was on fire and filling with smoke behind me.

4. The shopping channel powered water feature angel upset Ben, my neighbour. A few years ago, I mentioned to Mr Meg that I would like to hear the sound of water in the garden. He sprang into action and assembled a pile of junk he’s ‘reclaimed’ from various skips and bins in the locality. He stuck a water pump up the middle of a plastic skull, some antlers, a bicycle wheel and a decapitated stone cherub. I ordered a fountain from WTF to replace Mr Meg’s feeble effort. This one had a jet of water so strong that, on first try, it shot over the garden fence and landed in the cup of tea my neighbour was enjoying in his deckchair.

Despite all the fails, there have been lots of successes too. None of them spring to mind right now but like The Terminator, ‘I’ll be back’ shopping from my sofa soon!  

"No biggy, I got a full refund! I told Mr Meg breezily. “Did you pay postage?” he asked me. “Of course not!” I lied."
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