

CELEBRATING OVER 500 YEARS OF TAXI DRIVING

As a taxi driver, being summoned to the PCO can be enough to strike fear into your heart. But for one group of drivers recently asked to make an “appearance” at Penton Street, the afternoon was a celebratory event, marking their many years of service as a licensed taxi driver. The drivers had each now handed back their badge and bill with more than forty years each of plying for hire on the streets of London behind them, a total of over 500 years! Those present, along with their wives and families,



Gerry Raphael used to work for the Royal Air Service as an wireless operator for the air sea rescue launch. He enjoyed the outdoors so he decided he wanted to be a cab driver out and about around London. He has 51 years as a cab driver behind him, recalling the time when in 1959 he drove the Duchess of Kent. At the time she was heavily pregnant and as they drove over a temporary made bridge in Park Lane on their way to Kensington Palace, the Duchess said: “Please drive slow - I don’t want to have my baby in your cab.” Gerry replied: “If you did have the baby could I get a royalty sign on my cab?” which made the Duchess laugh out loud!



Pictured here are Dennis Norris (left and John Wallis with Ed Thompson. Dennis said that he had been a cab driver for 44 years and he loved the freedom of the job. He loved the fact he could work as many hours as he liked! During his years of driving he carried famous passengers such as Paul McCartney, Celia Black, Lulu, Fiona Phillips, Paul O’Grady, Kenneth Moor, Lord Burleigh, Jimmy Edwards. John Wallis told Ed Thompson he had enjoyed meeting people, driving around London and seeing the sights. Now 85 years old, he had been a cab driver for 57 years, having passed the KoL in just nine months. His love of the job has passed on to his son, who is also a cab driver of 39 years standing.



enjoyed an afternoon of tea, cakes and reminiscences. Ed Thompson, Director of Taxis and Private Hire at the PCO, welcomed everyone to the event and then opened the proceedings asking the drivers for any amusing incidents that had happened to them during their working lives. These were forthcoming, but so too were some tough questions for Ed. Once a cab driver, always a cab driver and strong opinions were soon voiced as to what TfL should be doing about minicabs and pedicabs. Once these thoughts had been discussed the drivers then told of the time when they went to Lambeth Road for their appearances on the KoL and how they felt when they passed. They also told of the old vehicles they drove and some of the passengers they had had in the back of their cabs over the years.

The afternoon was a great success and the PCO is hoping this will be the first of many, marking the service these long serving taxi drivers have given to passengers.

CAN YOU HELP?

The police at Merton are appealing for a witness to come forward who may be able to help with a sexual assault investigation. On Saturday 21st March at approximately 4:00am, the 17 year old female victim got into a black cab on the Broadway, Wimbledon. She was accompanied by a white man in his early to mid thirties, who is described as approximately six foot tall and short fair hair. This man is believed to have sexually assaulted the victim in Hamilton Road Mews later that morning.

Were you the black cab driver who did a “u turn” to pick up the victim and the suspect? Were they travelling in your cab towards South Wimbledon, when the girl requested that the cab stop on Merton High Road? Did the girl pay you the £3.90 fare?

Do you remember the orange flower garland the victim was wearing?

If you are that black cab driver or you know how we can contact him, please call DC’s Heidi Jones or Teresa Jimenez at the Wimbledon Sapphire Unit on 020 8649 4006 or in confidence to Crime Stoppers on 0800 555111.