

RORKES DRIFT *by Derek Leone*

Approximately 3 years ago The London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled arranged for a remembrance wreath to be laid at the memorial on the anniversary of the battle at Rorkes Drift in South Africa. Sandie Goodwin, editor of Taxi Globe, recently informed me that a person by the name of Anthony Coleman had seen the wreath at Rorkes Drift and would like to contact the charity. This he duly did and informed us that he was a war guide in South Africa and would be arriving in England for conference in November 2009 and would like to meet us.



So on Thursday 27th November 2009, The Chairman, Richard Hudd, Terry Ward, Richard Goodwin and Derek Leone met with Anthony at Charing Cross Station and conveyed him in a taxi to 62 Cranbrook Road, Chiswick. This is the house where Frederick Hitch lived. It was then on to St. Nicholas Churchyard, Old Chiswick to the resting place of Frederick Hitch, who was born on 29th November 1856 at Chaseside Southgate. He enlisted in the army 7th March 1877 and died at Cranbrook Road on 6th January 1913. We then went to The Royal Hospital Chelsea where we had lunch in the dining hall with the Chelsea Pensioners. After the lunch, Jim McGovern one of the In Pensioners escorted us around the Royal Hospital explaining the role of the hospital and its functions.

In the evening at The Royal Hospital Chelsea about 40 people attended a talk by Anthony Coleman who explained that after the defeat of the British troops at Isandlwana in the early hours of 22nd January 1879, the Zulu army led by Prince Dabulamanzi, the younger brother of the Chief Cetshwayo, advanced on the mission at Rorkes Drift.

The mission was defended by 140 soldiers of B Company 2nd Battalion 24th Foot later South Wales Borderers, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Army Service Corps and Commissariat, Medical Corps; the Zulu army consisted of between four to five

thousand warriors, most armed with assegis and shields and also rifles which had been taken at Isandlwana. Anthony Coleman then went onto explain Frederick Hitch's part in the battle in which, although seriously wounded, he assisted in supplying ammunition to the rest of the defenders. On the 23rd January the Zulu Army retired from the battle leaving many dead and wounded. Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded at the end of this battle, one of them to Frederick Hitch.

On leaving the army, Frederick Hitch became a commissionaire and wore his Victoria Cross on his jacket,

Unfortunately his jacket was stolen, along with the medal. His son later appealed to the authorities for a replacement and this is the only time that one was issued, the original medal has never been found. Frederick Hitch then went onto become a London Taxi Driver. The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers annually present an award called The Hitch Award to a deserving person, this year's award was won by Robert Taylor a London Taxi Driver and we were pleased that Alan Parker from the Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers was amongst those present at the talk.

The London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled hope that everybody that attended this talk enjoyed it.

(Editor's note: I was delighted to be able meet with Anthony at the Royal Hospital. When he first contacted me to find contact details of the charity who had sent the wreath his enthusiasm shone through. He gave a fascinating talk with slides he has taken at the site of Rorkes Drift. Afterwards he said that it had been one of the best days of his life and that the visit to the house where Frederick Hitch had lived and the churchyard had been wonderful and that he really appreciated the time he had enjoyed with Richard Hudd, Terry Ward, Richard Goodwin and Derek Leone.

M&O LAUNCH NEW AND IMPROVED WEBSITE

Mann and Overton, LTI Vehicles owned dealer network, has unveiled its new and improved website. You can log on at www.mannandoverton.com where all the M&O retailers in the country are brought together to deliver a unique online experience for taxi drivers looking to buy new or used vehicles.

Within the site, two new 'used vehicle' propositions have been introduced to improve the buying process.

LTI's Approved Taxis, previously known as Quality Assured Vehicles, and Value Cabs, which are sold as seen, gives taxi drivers the opportunity to view their chosen taxi online before they approach the dealer to buy. Used cab traders are also able to download national trade price lists for the first time.

Rob Laidler, Sales Director at LTI Vehicles said: "This website has been designed with the user firmly in mind.

It focuses heavily on convenience and makes it easier to search for a used taxi from our national stock. One such feature is to provide the customer with instant access to photographs and details about the vehicle. This is made possible through the supply of mobile technology to each retailer, which uploads photographs within seconds. We hope that by making these improvements drivers will find it a lot easier to buy a used taxi."

COMCAB KNOWLEDGE SCHOOL CELEBRATES 4TH ANNIVERSARY

The Computer Cab Knowledge School has just marked its fourth year of operation, and is continuing to grow. The school was started in 2005 when the number of new Knowledge applicants had fallen into a decline and the school was the first to offer its services free of charge. Since then hundreds of students have been through the doors, attracted by being part of London's largest taxi circuit.

Tony Norris, the tutor who runs the Computer Cab Knowledge School, commented: "It's amazing to think it has already been four years of running the school, it's a success story that has all happened so quickly. When we started the school 4 years ago it was a bit of a punt, we had no idea whether it would take off or not but I am delighted it has. Myself and Malcolm Paice of Computer Cab always thought that by offering the school free of charge we would attract a good number of knowledge students and the numbers coming through the doors now speak for themselves."

Rather than paying tuition fees or entrance fees, Knowledge students sign up to a contract which sees them joining the radio circuit for a minimum period once they have their licence. Students simply pay their radio subscriptions to Computer Cab as normal, thus 'paying back' for the free use of the school. The school operates out of Computer Cab's award winning driver facility, Advantage House, based close to White City in West London. Tony added: "When we moved to Advantage House two years ago it was just in time as we were fast outgrowing the previous building. This facility is excellent and it gives students a great introduction to the licensed taxi trade."

The school also boasts around 24% of students as either women or from varied ethnic backgrounds, proving that you do not need any 'special schools' or publicly funded initiatives to bring in more diverse students. Tony added: "I have always maintained

that there are no barriers for anyone, from any background, to do the Knowledge. Whatever your race, sex or orientation, if you have the commitment, energy and drive you can do the Knowledge."

John Mason, Director of Taxi and Private Hire at TFL, recently met Tony Norris and visited Advantage House to find out more about ComCab and its successful Knowledge School. Tony commented: "John is already very well versed in the taxi trade and the problems it has faced in the past and faces in the future. He has impressed me with his common sense approach to the issues we face and his 'can do' attitude. I feel he will be a good force for the cab trade and I was happy to be able to explain to him how our school works."

