

SHERBET DAB

An Oral History Project of the London Cabbie



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Sherbet Dab is an oral history project focusing on the London Cabbie. Working with arts and education charity digital:works, children from St George the Martyr and Westminster Cathedral primary schools have explored this history, writing about it and also filming interviews with London cabbies for a unique oral history documentary film.

The writing and film the children have been making are included in this booklet but you can read more and listen to all of the full, unedited interviews on the project website...

www.sherbetdab.org.uk





TAKE ME IN A TAXI

A familiar sight on many a London street,
Our favourite ride meeting cabbies, a treat.
They'll take you to places you've never been yet,
Instead of flying with an Easy Jet

And along with your journey...oh the banter you'll get,
But I tell you it's worth it, oh the places, you bet.
Zip through Buckingham Palace, drive through Covent Garden,
BUURRP, oh pardon!

Those miles around sights are exhausting, it's true,
But jump in a black cab and they'll bring them to you.
How much I'd have missed,
Glad I've travelled this way.
So cab drivers I salute you,
Thanks for all that you say!



As part of the project the young people visited the London Transport Museum and Acton Depot; they drove around in vintage taxis; met with older London cabbies; learnt oral history techniques and how to film interviews; and created the writing for this booklet and their online blog. The writing and drawings on the following pages is a mixture of creative pieces, imagined diaries, poems and accounts all inspired by the children's research and meetings with London cabbies.



THE HISTORY OF BLACK CABS

Cabbie: Alright mate, where you off to?

Passenger: Gibson Square, please. Do you know it?

Cabbie: Course I do! Me first route I did in the blue book, wouldn't have my green badge without it.

Passenger: What's the blue book?

Cabbie: It is like a Bible to us cabbies, filled with runs for us old cabbies to memorise in our old clogs. Cor Blimey it was 'ard.

Passenger: Oh, I never knew that! Interesting. How many runs are there?

Cabbie: I reckon there are about 320 runs nowadays, but back in my day I had to learn 504 runs. I had to cycle around London every other day for about 2 years. Me wife wasn't 'appy about it, now you see them on mopeds.

Passenger: Have you always had to do the knowledge?

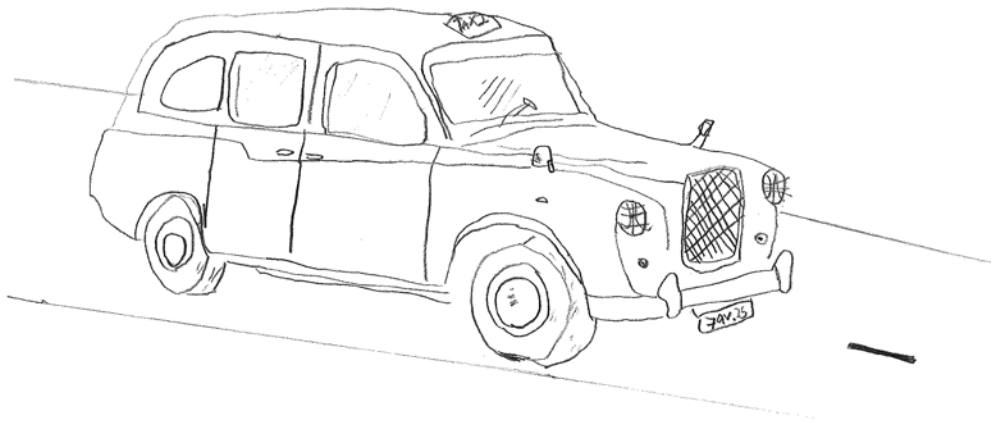
Cabbie: The first sherbet was launched in 1654, in the times of Oliver Cromwell. Hackney Carriages were first introduced in the 17th century.

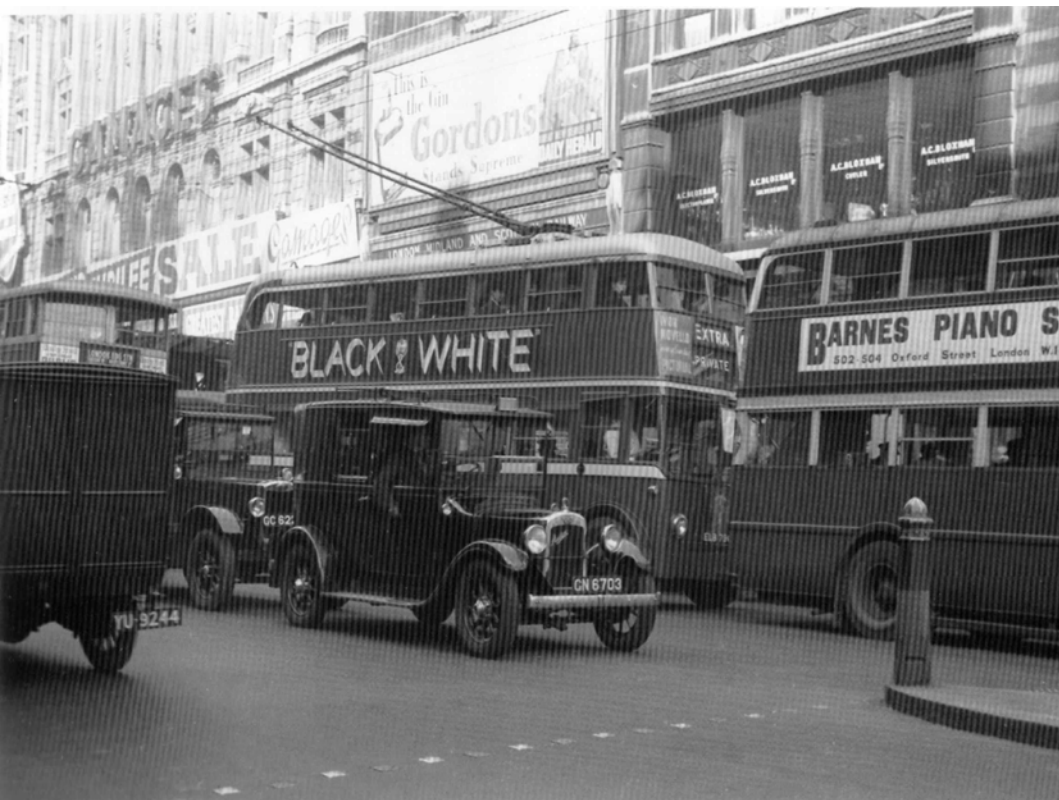


The name comes from the French word Haquenee meaning ambling nag. So our kind is pretty old. But they didn't do the knowledge back then, that only started in 1865. But if they did, they only did 6 miles squared (not much).

Passenger: Oh my gosh! How has the taxi style changed so far?

Cabbie: My first sherbet was the grand old FX3, branded by Austen, which I bought in 1947, followed by the FX4 in 1958. The next one was the Metrocab in 1972 and the Mercedes in 1995. Then, in 1997, the TX1 hit the roads. If you asked me about my favourite model, my immediate answer would be the TX2.





THE KNOWLEDGE

Before becoming a cab driver people need to do something called the knowledge. Typically this takes 3-4 years to do and many people crack under the pressure.

Many people want to become a cab driver so they can receive a green badge which allows them to work the streets of London. But in order to get this they must master no less than 320 routes around London's whopping 25,000 streets and over 100,000 places of interest. These will be scattered in a 6-mile radius from Charing Cross.

While they are learning these 'runs' they will all be tested on a route from one place to another, for example, Kings Cross to the Savoy Hotel and drivers must call every street and every turn correctly using the most direct route. During this test you are put in front of an examiner and asked to call runs from memory. They must do this so cab drivers will know the quickest routes around London's busy roads. When cab drivers pass their first test they get points and move on to the next stage. Eventually they pass the knowledge and do a driving test before receiving their green badge.



SAVOY

214 GUC

THE APPEARANCE

I was shaking; I don't think I was the only one - the person opposite me was practically jumping. There was one thing we were all petrified of. The moment our names would be called. Suddenly, a woman stepped out of an office and said in a high pitched voice, "Charles Smith!" Oh no. That's me. I stood up and looked towards where the woman stood, but she wasn't there anymore! The corridor was filled with wooden doors, but which one was she in? Was this to trick me? I'll try this door. A squat woman with a large bow on top of her dark hair sat on a chair and smiled wickedly at me. "So," she whispered, "tell me how to get from Queen's Park to Queen Charlotte's Hospital." After a deep breath and a loud involuntary splutter, I was off. "Left on Millman Road, right Kempe Road, left Chamberlayne Road, forward Kilburn Lane..." I could envisage myself zooming through the winding streets I knew like the back of my hand.

All of a sudden, a round object hit my sodden forehead. What? Tennis balls don't launch themselves randomly at people! As I looked up, I saw the examiner holding a tennis ball and smiling horribly at me. I could feel myself flaring up and I wish I could've stopped myself but it felt like an impossible task! Perhaps this is a test for me. Ten in, ten out, come on Charles, calm down. "Forward Ladbroke Grove, comply roundabout, left

Knowledge Point

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ FIVE STAR BLUE BOOK RUNS

No. 427

1st 24/1 QUEEN'S GATE to PORCHESTER SQUARE

John Howard Hotel WS
Crofton Hotel WS
Bangladesh High Commission WS
38 Thai Embassy WS
Mineralogical Society
Army Benevolent Fund
Bulgarian Embassy
Iraqi Embassy

Embassy House Hotel WS
Baden Powell House WS
Regency Hotel WS
Royal Entomological Society WS
Gore Hotel
Eden Plaza Hotel WS
Alexandra Court WS

L/By PRINCE CONSORT ROAD

L EXHIBITION ROAD

F ALEXANDRA GATE

F SERPENTINE ROAD

F SERPENTINE BRIDGE

F THE RING

L/By VICTORIA GATE

L BAYSWATER ROAD

R LANCASTER TERRACE

L GLOUCESTER TERRACE

PORCHESTER SQUARE on L

Royal Oak Station
'The Colonnades'
Westbourne Gardens
Westbourne Park Villas
Orsett Terrace

Lord Hill's Bridge
Peters Court
Westbourne Park Road
Porchester Hall

into Barlby Road..." I continued to the end of the route. Yes, all correct. "Wrong! All completely wrong!" The examiner sneered. The tears were burning in my eyes, all wrong? I don't understand, I knew the route so well. "Go and collect your badge from the desk." She said glumly.

Yes! I could sing! I am a cabbie! Better go home and learn my cockney slang.





THE CHARITY RUN TO SOUTHEND

Dear Diary,

Today was possibly the most fun and stressful day of me life! Boy, I can't wait to be in the warm cabbie shelter havin' a cuppa.

From the moment I saw them kids all piled under the Weddin' Cake (Victoria), I knew we were in for a tough day. About 200 of 'em overall! Poor us! We're gonna be real squashed in our cabs.

I saw old Joe closin' the door on around 8 of them! I only had 5. Two of the lads were in wheelchairs an' the little girl couldn't speak. I am so lucky to be able to do this! Honestly, the queue for the charity drive was as long as me life! It really was a highlight of the year being able to take such brave and inspiring children for a real treat.

As we started down the motorway, I saw Joe again. He was wearing a pink tiara on his bald head! Ha! He looked really grumpy. I had a lion on me head but I didn't care! I was havin' the time of me life.

In the distance, we saw the glistening sea rolling over to the horizon before us. This was it. The part everyone says is the best. Southend on Sea. When the kids got out, the little girl tugged my sleeve and beckoned



for me to follow. Bless her!

They dragged me into the freezing sea, mind you old Joe was smug about it, smoking his pipe, dry as a towel. Still, I was dead chuffed. I will certainly do it next year. Mark my words. Can't imagine the cold journey home!

CHRISTMAS IN A CAB

Ridiculous! Absolutely bonkers! I mean, who needs a tree that big? He was a small bloke too, the last thing he needed was a tree the size of ruddy Big Ben! It was blocking the wind-screen for goodness sake! And telling me to speed up? It's Christmas for me too you know! All I've done is drive over 80 people around London today, and what do I get? A mouth full of tinsel and bauble sparkles on my cheeks! Finally, it's all over now.

My dab. My poor old sherbet dab. It's been scratched, dented, and glitterised beyond repair.

Okay, I better go. I need to serve this – wait ,what? Oh no!
Not another Christmas tree!



A CABBIE'S PERSPECTIVE

Dear Diary,

Rude. Plain old rude. 'E gave me the real camel. As soon as you step into my property, I'm the gov'nor. 'E's at the back yellin' at me 'bout 'ow to get from Holborn to Seven Sisters?! As if I don't know - I was the one with the green badge! I was the one who 'ad read the blue book! Cor' blimey, tellin me 'ow to run me own cab, who does 'e think 'e is? Thank goodness for the Appearance! It taught me 'ow to keep calm in difficult situations. If it weren't for that, I'd 'ave been kickin 'im out me old Sherbet Dab. That thing cost me £23,000 quid ya know! I 'ad to go through all that rudeness, all that disrespect for a nicker?! G'me a break. 'Ow I wish I was drivin' a martini.

Today, I was asked to go from the Rocking Horse to The Loo. This was a treasured run because I 'ad to do it for The Knowledge and memorise it for me Appearance. I remember it like it was yesterday. Thankfully, this passenger wasn't so rude!



The Sherbet Dab Project was developed and produced by digital:works [Sav Kyriacou & Matthew Rosenberg] and funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Unite.

This booklet, the project blog and website was researched and written by Year 6 Children from **St George the Martyr Primary School**: Diego Bautista, Jonas Florell, Moss Heatherwick, Milena Kerac, Hana Mala, Randa Nour, Aditi Priya, Raheem Rahimy Raheem, Delilah Taylor and Abeer Uddin and **Westminster Cathedral Primary School**: Ornella Bukasa-Muteba, Riley Sparks, Jessica Brazona, Lily Rose Tuttle, Janais Dela Cuesta, Thomas Mulugeta, Houshou Okobo, Justin Prado Caicedo, Giuseppe Meaney, Natnael Danel, Louie Yorke, Nnebuogo Aniamaka and Fionn Murphy.

The film consists of interviews developed, conducted and shot by Year 6 Children from **St George the Martyr Primary School**: Mariha Ahmed, Razak Bah-Conteh, Antoine Bourdin, Bethlehem Demissie, Damian Domanski, Elena Fusha, Neisha Harding Barns, Vera Heatherwick, Tahir Hussain, Adnan Islam Khan, Alice Kamara, Taherah Khan, Raya Marshall-Flower, Madiha Mozid, Yunus Rahman and Ibrahim Yusuf and **Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School**: Yukana Correia, Anabela Marques, Nicole Severino Jendrysiak, Jean Paul Lopez Castano, Nicole Trujillo Celis, Olivier Stepinski, Caden Yaw Cambron-Achegani, Alexa Wedesch, Sanchaya Simon, Dylan O'Shea Zoppola, Kofi Oppong, Mia Bella Ojeda-Gee, Yeva Aleksyeyenko, Summer Lagan, Mia Pike and Olaoluwa Omobolaji.

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