

A recent invite to an event commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the founding of the **Suzy Lamplugh Trust** is a good opportunity for me to inform everyone about the current work of the Trust and the Lamplugh family's legacy to us all.

It is also an opportunity to tell the story of how Minicabs and Private Hire Cars finally came to be regulated in London and the significant part that Diana Lamplugh and The Suzy Lamplugh Trust played in the process.

July 28th 1986 was a day that was to change the lives of many people and have a far reaching impact on the Taxi and Private Hire Car industry in London that nobody could have envisaged.

On a summer's day in Fulham, South West London, a young female Estate Agent did what she had done many, many times before and arranged to see a client for a property showing.

That young woman was Suzy Lamplugh and quite bizarrely she disappeared during a routine property showing. Like most of the adult population of the country I was one of many who asked myself how could a pretty young woman just disappear in a bustling and vibrant area near the centre of London in the middle of a normal working day?



Suzy Lamplugh

*... alter the Private Hire Industry  
in London forever ...*

The story of Suzy's disappearance was to become as big a mystery as it was a tragedy. I did not know it at the time but the Lamplugh family's terrible plight was going to do two major things.

It would demonstrate how one family's tragic misfortune could be channelled into one of the most amazing and humbling crusades that unfortunately would not make the world a safer place, but would show others how to be safer in the world in which we now live. It was also going to alter the Private Hire Industry in London forever for the better.

In 1991, I was just another Private Hire Operator who was a member of the re-established LPHCA. Like many others in the audience at one of our members' meetings, I had been campaigning for the licensing of minicabs in London since I joined the industry in the early 70's. I had seen all previous efforts to regulate the Private Hire Industry come and go as potential regulation always collapsed as soon as it became likely. This, much to their discredit always happened because of very powerful lobbying and an unbelievable demonstration of self interest by certain sections the London Taxi Industry.

I generally avoid criticising the 'World Renowned' London Taxi Industry (Black Cabs) but they had cynically blocked regulation of Private Hire in London at every opportunity for all the wrong reasons, for many, many years.

The Taxi Industry had wrongly and naively believed that the number of Minicabs would grow if they became licensed.

Rather ironically the lack of regulation that the Taxi Industry did so much to prevent, actually enabled the Private Hire Industry to grow at a rate that could have not been achieved under strict regulation.

Gideon Fiegal, who was the founder of all the major London's Private Hire Car Associations, had invited Diana Lamplugh, a unique and wonderfully dynamic lady, to one of our members' meetings. Diana spoke and you could hear a pin drop as she told of Suzy's misfortune and her quest to find out what had happened to her.



Diana Lamplugh

Most unbelievable was the way she spoke so calmly whilst her beautiful daughter was missing and presumed dead. Many of us would hardly have been able to face the world, let alone speak so passionately about what had happened and dedicate the rest of our working days to finding out how we could prevent this and similar tragedies happening to others.

Diana was determined to make something positive happen after such terrible tragedy; equally determined was Paul Lamplugh, who was the rock behind the incredible fighter, Diana.



Paul Lamplugh

Diana feared nothing and nobody and it was a great sight to see her diminutive figure engaging the many six foot plus politicians and bureaucrats who stood in her way.

So what brought Diana into the world of regulating Private Hire? It took me several years to pluck up the courage to ask her what exactly was the link between Suzy's disappearance and minicabs (Private Hire Vehicles). Diana explained that about six months after Suzy's disappearance, over the Christmas period, more tragic news headlines were upon us. Another young woman had disappeared and it was possible she had been abducted in a bogus or even a legal Private Hire Vehicle just outside London.

Diana told me that a line of enquiry that the police had taken and ruled out was that Suzy had been spirited away in this manner. Diana emphasised to me that this was quickly discounted but as it was put forward as a possibility for the other missing girl, it became something that Diana was determined to look at closely.

Diana struggled to understand how it could be so easy to pretend to be a taxi or a minicab. She also questioned why signage was so inconsistent across the country and in some places not even allowed. She was particularly horrified to

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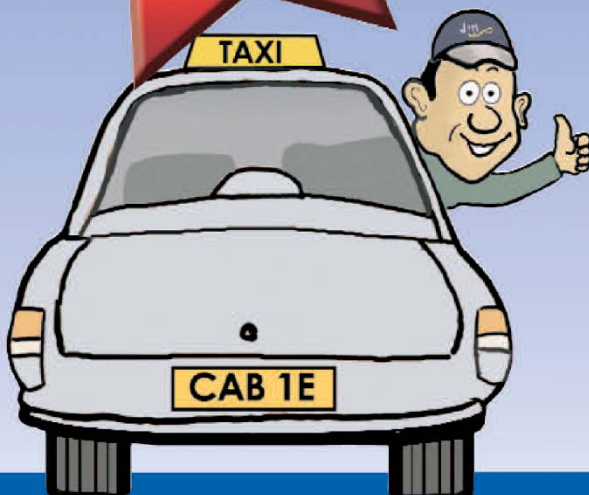


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discover that there were no regulations in London to cover Minicabs and Private Hire Vehicles.

Diana's attendance at our meeting was going to change my life and the Private Hire Industry in London for ever. The world of rogue operators, drivers and touts was about to encounter the most determined person I have ever been privileged to meet.

### ... to get Minicabs and Private Hire Vehicles in London licensed ...

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust was founded at the end of 1986 and one of its first major initiatives was to get Minicabs and Private Hire Vehicles in London licensed.

I made a commitment to help both the Trust and Diana and before long I found myself in the world of high powered politicians and a mire of bureaucracy and red tape, having been convinced by Gideon Fiegal to take over as LPHCA Chairman.

The journey I was about to undertake remains ongoing and was littered with frustrations and disappointments along the way. Steven Norris (London's Transport Minister in the mid nineties) broke the news to Private Hire Board Chairman Eddie Townson and me a few days before Christmas 1996 that the Government was, yet again, not going to regulate Minicabs in London.



Steven Norris

The then Secretary of State for Transport, Sir George Young and Steve Norris as his London Minister had clearly wanted to regulate, but it was considered to be too difficult a task with a General Election round the corner.

### ... won the right to introduce a Private Member's Bill ...

Diana, like all of us was incredibly disappointed but, as always, she became even more determined to make something happen. MP John Marshall had won the right to introduce a Private Member's Bill into Parliament but in spite of considerable lobbying by The LPHCA, The Private Hire Board and The Suzy Lamplugh Trust, he failed to opt to do it.

Then as more years of despair loomed a golden moment came when Sir George Young, (by this time in opposition), also won the right to introduce a Private Member's Bill into Parliament. Our luck was finally changing.



Sir George Young

The LPHCA and The Private Hire Board, strongly supported by The Suzy Lamplugh Trust had finally found someone highly respected in Parliament who had the will and political 'know how' to privately bring a Bill to Parliament.

Sir George, as a former Secretary of State for Transport also knew the subject as Diana had been on his case in her inimitable manner when he was in office. He did not need to be convinced of the need to regulate as he already knew it desperately needed to be done.



Glenda Jackson

Our luck got better as a new London Minister, Glenda Jackson, was appointed to the then Department of Transport and the Regions. Whilst still a junior Labour Shadow Transport spokesperson Glenda had attended a conference that we were hosting to enlighten local authorities on potential licensing.

With a former Secretary of State in Sir George introducing what was a bill from the government's opposition, we had a lot of work to do but with a fully briefed new London Minister in Glenda Jackson backing us and support from the Liberal's Dr Jenny Tongue MP, we were able to secure the desperately needed 'all party support' for the Bill.



Dr Jenny Tongue

### ... Bills can be easily be scuppered ...

Private Member's Bills can be easily be scuppered and no sooner than we really believed it was all going to happen than a bolt from the blue arrived in the form of the recently deceased former MP and Thatcher Government Minister, Eric Forth.

Mr Forth hated Private Member's Bills and after a successful reading in Parliament he started to kill the Bill. This could be done by simply saying the word 'object' three times in Parliament as the Bill was being debated.



Eric Forth

Eric Forth objected once and everyone sprung to action. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust launched a major offensive and successfully gained the support of the Green lobby that sent out hundreds of thousands of flyers in Eric Forth's constituency.

I spoke to Sir George who said he was speaking to Eric Forth. I also spoke to Steven Norris to see if any help was possible from the Conservatives. Steve Norris called back to say he had spoken to him at length but he seemed to be a man on a mission, he was unmovable.

Robin Hulf (our political advisor) and I went to Westminster to lobby Mr Forth in Parliament. He was considerate but refused to change his mind. We suspected he had been 'got at' and we were fairly sure who by. It was not anyone in the Taxi Industry but ironically from within our own, by people who purported to be representing the Private Hire sector that wanted Local Authority Controls. Right then we thought!

With the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and others, we launched a massive attack on Eric Forth. Founder member and a fantastic man and personal friend, the late Terry Bevis of Handicars, took out a full page advert in Mr Forth's local paper, lambasting the MP and the lunacy of his misguided crusade. By this time, we were hanging on by our fingertips and Mr Forth objected yet again.

Robin Hulf contacted Eric Forth and demanded a private meeting at his Westminster offices and, in fairness to him, he granted us that vital second meeting. This was our last chance and it worked - we knew who had got at him, their motives and their previous track record. Eric Forth was

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mortified that he had apparently been led up the garden path. However he still had reservations and produced a massive list of objections to us.

Having been on the case for licensing for 25 years we were able to answer all his fears. Most importantly we were able to brief Diana Lamplugh, Sir George Young, Glenda Jackson and Dr Jenny Tongue, as well as all the key government officials.

The survival of the Bill now depended on its vital passage through its committee stage, where Mr Forth would have the opportunity to kill it forever.

Everyone who was anyone in our sector seemed to be there in Parliament, with the notable exception of the 'Judases' from Private Hire. Diana Lamplugh sat alongside Robin Hulf, Eddie Townson and me, as the committee, which was packed with many very senior politicians as the debate began.

Eric Forth reeled questions at Sir George and Glenda Jackson but each time they had appropriate answers having previously received the list of his objections from us. Our tactics worked as Mr Forth did not object and the Bill passed its final readings and into the House of Lords.

There was still work to do here but with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust at our side we met many of the Lords and Ladies concerned in the House of Lords and elsewhere on the final journey before the Bill finally became an Act in July 1998.

The licensing of Private Hire vehicles would have not happened when it did without Diana Lamplugh. It remains a terrible thought that it would also not have happened when it did without the tragic disappearance of Suzy Lamplugh.

**LIVE LIFE SAFE**  
suzy lamplugh  
trust

### ... launch of a new brand identity ...

Diana, Paul, the Lamplugh family and The Suzy Lamplugh Trust have turned a tragedy into something truly remarkable. The work of the Trust continues to expand and this year they marked their 20th anniversary with the launch of a new brand identity and a special event attended by many of the organisations and charities they have worked with over the years. I attended the event with mixed feelings as I knew that Diana would not be there. Sadly, she suffered a stroke in 2003 and has since been diagnosed with Alzheimer's resulting in her needing full time care.

However, my feelings of sadness were soon removed when I saw Paul and all the other fantastic members of the Trust doing what they have done throughout – helping others.

The least I can do for the Trust and my dear friend Diana is to let the world know what the Trust are now doing and implore people in the industry to support it. So here is an update.

### ... cover a huge range of personal safety issues ...

Since it was established in 1986, the Trust has grown considerably and its work has broadened out to cover a huge range of personal safety issues. At their head is their Chief Executive, Julie Bentley who leads a team of 17 staff, backed by volunteers, plus a nation-wide network of Training Consultants. This year, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust moved into The National Centre for Personal Safety in central London and launched their new brand identity.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust's mission is to raise awareness of the importance of personal safety and to provide solutions that effect change in order to help people to avoid violence and aggression and live safer, more confident lives. They work with people of all ages and from all sections of the community, at home, at work and out and about.

Much more about this charity can be found on their website at [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

Steve Wright

## Join us

We are very pleased to say that after a period of time when membership numbers were on the decline, (mainly due to members buying each other), that we are now attracting a considerable number of new members.

As well as this we are delighted to say that we are attracting quite a few former members back who realised what they were missing.

If you wish to join a very strong group of Private Hire Operators and receive all these benefits and much more, please either contact me personally on **07956 329288** or fill in and faxback or post the form on page 45.

Steve Wright Chairman LPHCA



The Association now offers a great deal of help and services to members, check out the **Member's Information** page overleaf to find out more.