

# Angels and lumens

Hello boys and girls, and its time for another in our occasional series of “What’s that all about, then?” This month, straight from the inbox, we have: “Why are Light Taxis called Angels? What’s that all about, then?” And what a great question this is, because it goes right to the heart of the history of our beautiful language, and how important is that?

This all goes back to the Great Experiment of 2010 when, because no political party got a decent majority in the May elections, Parliament declared a Government of National Austerity. It was called The Great Experiment because things were being tried for the very first time and no one knew if it would work.

These days, of course, we’re so used to Light Taxis that we rarely give them a second thought, but back in the early years of the TwenTeens there was nothing like them anywhere – they were something that would have defied the imagination of the time.

You have to remember that a hundred years ago it was a common thing to have electric light in our streets – sometimes going right out into the countryside, even though no one actually lived there. In fact, there was so much energy around that people even threw light at the outside of buildings, just for the fun of it. Imagine if you tried that these days.

Anyway, the Government of National Austerity announced that all street lighting would be switched off and the money saved paid in ransom to the Investment Bankers – a gang of desperadoes who blackmailed the country by threatening to leave if they weren’t paid billions of pounds of our money. Now why they weren’t simply asked to go is another question. But these were shockingly dangerous times, and it probably made sense to those concerned.

The very first Light Taxis were a bit of a cobbled-together affair, but that’s where the ‘Angels’ name originally came from. Because it was so very dark (don’t forget that all the shops had to turn off their lights as well), it wasn’t long before local urchins offered a ‘light your way’ service to townspeople. It was

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all quite a palaver because of the old-fashioned technology. You have to remember that, at the time, LEDs were still being manufactured in what were called factories, not like the organic LEDs that we grow on our window-sills today. Most of the LEDs came from a faraway place called China – and I’m sure your parents have told you the story of what happened there! Brrrrrr.

To begin with, the Angels would use a couple of cheap LEDs wired to rechargeable solar batteries. Of course, the batteries didn’t last long, so someone came up with the idea of using an old fishing rod with an LED light on the top and the cannibalised remains of a redundant wind-up radio on the handle. The wind-up mechanism was turned constantly to maintain the light output, an action just like fishing, of course, and very soon these youngsters became known as The Anglers. And it was a simple enough leap of linguistics when the Archbishop of the day, one Robbie Williams, said, after a particularly fraught journey from Canterbury to Lambeth Palace: “These are not Anglers, but Angels!”

Anyway, it wasn’t too long before the trade became licensed, and all because of a few unscrupulous Angels who led their passengers into blind alleys and relieved them of their Oyster cards. And so the official Light Taxi service was created. And that, my friends, is why Light Taxis are known as Angels.

**John Bullock**

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