

Town's oldest taxi firm folds



Mr Charles, making his last journey as a Roytax taxi driver, after the firm went bust on Monday. ("Chronicle" photo. 1052a/12).

By Rachel Naylor

Congleton's oldest taxi firm has closed after 32 years in business, making eight people redundant.

Roytax Private Hire, based at Bridge Mill Garage, Royle Street, shut on Monday, putting three full-time drivers, three part-time drivers and two office staff out of work.

Co-manager Paul Charles, (40), of Knypersley, blamed rising fuel costs and the recession forcing people to travel less by taxi as the two main reasons for the "general grind down in business".

He said: "That business has been my life for the last few years. We were the biggest taxi company in Congleton, but we weren't making as much profit as we used to."

Mr Charles, who admitted that he had not had time to think about his future, said: "It's been tough for the last 18 months. I never believed it would come to this."

Roytax had 45 regular customers who were picked up as part of fixed bookings every week. Mr Charles said he broke the news to them at the weekend and helped them find alternative transport, adding: "Some of them had been with us for 30 years."

He also cited the "Con-Dem Government" and Cheshire East Council for raising the taxi licensing fees for

contributing to the downfall of his business.

Mr Charles said: "Last year, it went up to £22. The whole of Cheshire East are still receiving set minimum fares. People can't afford to pay them. It's now £2.90 for the first mile and time and a half after 9pm."

He added: "We'd like to say thank you to all our customers and our drivers, old and new."

Drivers at the Congleton taxi rank, Market Street, gave their views on the news.

Darren Carter, of Mytax, said: "It's very sad. They were the main firm so it shows we're all at risk. They were the first firm in Congleton, then came Fareways and A and J. Roytax was a really well established firm, so when it shut it was a worry."

He added the recession had hit the industry hard, saying: "I think it's only one-car firms with very few overheads that are coping. Fuel is expensive."

The driver went on to criticise the council's hike on hackney carriage tariffs, saying: "Cheshire East have put our fares up in line with Crewe and are pushing trade away. We don't want more money, we want more customers. It is bittersweet news."

John Hancock, of Riverside Taxis, agreed saying: "I'm sorry for the people who work for them, but we will pick up their trade."

He said: "I've been a taxi driver for 13-14 years and the last 12 months have been the worst. There's a lot of sitting waiting for trade."

Theft charges

Two men have been charged with burglary with intent to steal following an incident at a disused factory on Bridge Row Industrial Estate in Congleton last October.

A 46-year-old man from Manchester and a 47-year-old man from Congleton will appear at Crewe Magistrates Court on 20th March.

As a result of the incident, two men suffered burns and there was a power cut in the town.

Out of hours chemists' rota

Congleton chemists: out of hours opening, for urgent medicines and prescriptions only.

Sunday, 10am to 4pm: Tesco Pharmacy, Barn Road, Congleton.

Congleton doctors: Congleton GPs' out of hours service operates over the weekend and during the week from 6.30pm to 8am. The telephone number for the service is 01625 502999.

Patients should not attend the out of hours centre without having telephoned first: it is not a drop-in clinic and is for emergencies only.

Other numbers: NSPCC Child Protection help-line, 0800 800 5000 (free); Healthwise (confidential advice on all health matters), 0800 66 55 44 (free); teenagers under stress or with problems? Call Visyon, 01260 290000; Childline North West (free call), 0800 11 11 (number does not appear on any itemised telephone bill); Meningitis Research Foundation, free 24-hour help and advice line, 0800 8800 3344; NHS smoking help (free advice and support on stopping smoking), 0800 169 0169; NHS Direct, 0845 4647; advice on solvent abuse from Re-solv, telephone 0808 8002345, helpline @re-solv.org

Weekend emergency dental service: Weston Clinic, Earlsay, Macclesfield, SK11 8SR, 01625 669039.

Treatment for pain relief is offered, but routine dental treatment will not be available. Severe injuries to mouth, face or jaw from accidents should attend accident and emergency.

To find an NHS dentist, or in an emergency, contact the Dental Helpline on 01270 275678 or 0800 328 9865. Information for the hard of hearing is at dental.texting@nhs.net

Police: to report less urgent crime or disorder, to contact the police with general enquiries or to speak to a local officer, call the non-emergency number — 101. Calls from landlines and mobile networks cost 15p no matter what time of day or how long the call lasts. Alternatively, email congleton.npt@cheshire.pnn.police.uk

In emergencies (danger to life, threat or use of violence, serious crimes in progress, road accident causing injury or danger, etc), ring 999.

Normal opening hours for Congleton Police Station are Tuesday to Saturday 9am to 5pm subject to operational police requirements.

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Dad wins 'justice not vengeance' for son's death

• —From front page.

"We just hoped that at least Karl's death would be treated as it should be according to the evidence of Mr Bray's carelessness, and that he should face up to it in the more imposing atmosphere of a crown court with a judge presiding. Whatever sentence he would have faced there would be nothing compared to ours."

Mr Austin said he was "delighted" with the district judge's decision, and had felt vindicated, adding: "This is where it should have gone all along."

"The reason I was seething after the last hearing was because we felt the Crown Prosecution Service had not made an adequate case for the prosecution."

"We met with them on Friday and before the hearing today and they agreed with us that things should have been done differently and that there were aggravating factors that could push the offence into the higher sentencing bracket."

During the hearing, District Judge Andrew Davison said: "The evidence is that the prosecution themselves had changed their position."

"Having carefully looked at all the guidelines, I have assessed this case is outside my powers."

"Whatever the outcome may be this ought to be at a higher court."

He warned: "Do not take anything I have said as an indication of what the sentence will be."

He found that the offence did not fall in the lower bracket that could be dealt with immediately but in the higher bracket that had a starting point of 36 weeks' imprisonment, up to a maximum of two years.

The maximum custodial sentence the magistrates can impose for the offence is six months.

Previously magistrates indicated that they felt they had jurisdiction, as the last prosecutor said there were no aggravating factors to push the offence into the more serious category.

It was only due to Keith Austin's persistence and strongly worded letter that was sent to the CPS that the prosecutor was changed.

After hearing the arguments from the CPS and the defence,

Boy natted head teacher in school

• —From front page.

He replied: "I didn't really cope at the school I went to. I'm learning trade skills like brickwork three days a week."

His mother, who accompanied him in court, said: "He's doing really good stuff. He's well liked at all the things he does."

His father told the court: "As soon as he went into high school, the problems came out. They couldn't cope with him. He doesn't smoke or drink, which you might expect at his age, but he just has this thing where sometimes he might want to hit someone if they wind him up."

Mrs Pachl told the defendant: "We're not going to send you to prison on this occasion. You were very close."

The 15-year-old was sentenced to a 12-month youth rehabilitation order with intensive supervision and surveillance.

He was also given a three-month curfew.

The defendant was also ordered to pay £384 to replace the door and £50 compensation to Coun Williams, and £100 compensation to Mr Hermitt.

District Judge Davison said he disagreed with their original finding, and that there were aggravating factors in this case.

He said: "The vehicle was being driven at an inappropriate speed, albeit to a small degree."

The vehicle's tachograph showed the 26 tonne lorry being driven at 56mph and did not brake until after the collision.

Lorries are legally restricted to 50mph on dual carriageways; 56mph was the maximum speed Bray's lorry could reach.

District Judge Davison said: "The speed was inappropriate in the prevailing weather conditions, the sun was a hindrance, it was bright and low summer sun."

"The defence said that the defendant had thought about stopping and putting on his sunglasses and that he had already been adjusting his visor."

"Another aggravating factor is the presence of vulnerable road users. He had overtaken at least one other cyclist by his own admission, he may have overtaken more than one."

"He was, or therefore should have been, taking more notice of cyclists. He knows the road and is an experienced driver who drove the route two or three times a week."

The judge said that Bray would have had a maximum of 1,131 metres to see the cyclist, taking 45.2 seconds for a light goods vehicle at 56mph.

He continued: "I think this is probably unrealistic. I do not for a moment in my mind think he had visibility for that amount of time."

"However, in my view he had sufficient time. By his own admission at the scene he never saw Karl Austin, the first he was aware of him was when he saw a blur to his side."

"I believe he had ample time to see him and avoid this tragic accident."

He said that he would have found the sunlight to be in mitigation, however as Bray did not adjust his speed or put on sunglasses, this aggravated the offence."

He added: "The avoidable death of Karl Austin has caused misery and heartache to his family and friends."

"Their statements moved me, but it is important that in my role as judge that I maintain objectivity."

"I hope this dispassionate approach does not come across as cold."

Keith Austin was accompanied by his daughter-in-law Linda and granddaughter, Katy.

When their victim statements were read out by the prosecution, Bray covered his face with his hands.

Katy Austin's statement said: "I was a happy, bubbly and confident person. I no longer laugh or smile without my dad."

"Since his death I am struggling to function at work and have halted my studying. I'm now unable to make decisions and have lost all my enthusiasm."

"2012 has been extremely hard. I spent my 21st birthday without my dad. Life goes on, but nothing seems to matter any more."

Her mum, Linda, said she struggled to go back to work as she had previously run her own business with her husband.

She said: "I don't feel I will ever get over this, if it were not for my children I would be better off dead. I've never felt this low inside."

The family were supported in court by the South Pennine Road Club whose time trial Karl Austin was participating in, a police officer from the investigation team, a representative from Road Peace and Bob Norton, chairman of Congleton Cycling Club.

Sentencing will take place at Derby Crown Court on Thursday, 12th April at 9.30am.

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