

# Twickenham Society Talk – 27 March 2008

## Industrial Heritage of Twickenham

By Cathy Cooper

### Introduction

First of all I want to point out that I am not a historian or expert in industrial heritage. I am just an ordinary local resident who has been fighting to save a group of very special buildings for the last few years. I am not an activist either but the threat of demolition to a part of our history, forced me to become a very active campaigner.

The buildings I refer to are the old Electricity Works at the end of Hamilton Road. I have named them Hamilton Electricity Works or HEW for short and they are an important part of Twickenham's Industrial Heritage.

A large and very important part of the campaign was to not only promote the history of the Works but also to discover what other examples of industries existed in this part of Twickenham and whether examples still survive today.

### Twickenham's forgotten industrial Heritage

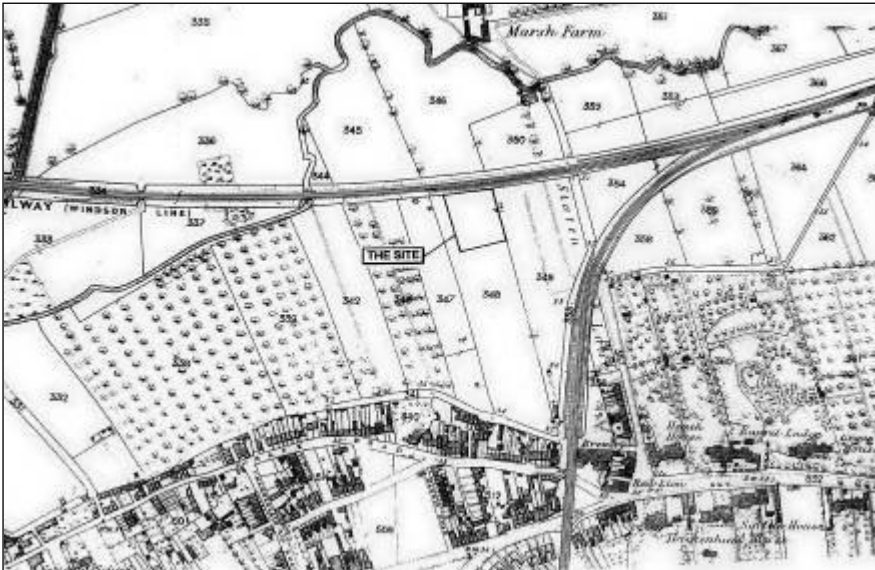
It is very sad to look through all the various local history books and see old photographs of the fine houses which dominated Twickenham, now all gone due to bombing in the war or in the name of progress. Even Marble Hill House was earmarked for demolition once as the land was required for housing.

The first impression of Twickenham in the late 19th early 20th century is that of wealth and prosperity, but this was not the case in all parts of the Borough. The area north of Twickenham Green was predominantly a working class area and it was in West Twickenham that many of the industries were situated.

Industry had begun as early as 1540 with the:

1. The Gun Power Mills – closed in 1927. The Shot Tower is the only surviving building in Crane Park
2. 1635 – Cole Brewery – closed down in 1927
3. Mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century - The River Crane had a thriving fishing industry.
4. 1875, the Poupart family leased several plots of farmland and started a market garden business. The produce from the orchards was distributed all over London and they were especially famous for their jam, eventually opening a Jam Factory in Third Cross Road in 1911.
5. In 1896, the Pouparts opened the Marsh Farm Dairy in Heath Road near the Dip which had up to 80 cows on the premises.
6. Pouparts Electric Laundry – Norcutt Road early 1900
7. Munitions Works (Grenade factory – Gould Road - 1915
8. Craneford Way Sewerage Works – 1876

The extension of the railway line to Windsor in 1848 and the loop line to Kingston in 1863 put the stamp of progress on Twickenham. It made the town much more accessible for pleasure and for business.



On the map of 1863, it shows that the railway triangle north of the Twickenham Green still consisted of farm land and orchards but over the next 30 years, we see that Talbot and Marsh Farm Roads have been built.

## Talbot Road

In early 1880 Talbot Road was built to accommodate the working classes many of whom were employed by the railway. The cottages had front and back gardens and some of these were quite large especially those furthest away from the railway. One builder bought two plots, built a house and kept the other plot as a large side garden. It is still here today though little is left of the cottage garden now.



Some of the earlier houses had name plaques – Dusty Cottages and Industry Cottages.

The Sun plaque indicates that this particular house was insured and this was a way of notifying the Fire Brigade

## TALBOT ROAD 1897



43. Talbot Road celebrates Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, 22nd June 1897. The road lies

Copyright: Richmond Local Studios Library

This must have been a very close community and there is a rare photo of Talbot Road residents celebrating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897. There are small flags strung across the road and the children are wearing their Sunday best. Of course this was a few years before Electricity came to town and if you look carefully at the photo, you can see the one gas lamp that lit the end of the road.

Over the railway line, there were fields which were used for playing football and once a year Sanger's circus came to town and set up camp over there after a spectacular procession of animals and performers through the town.

## SANGER'S CIRCUS – DORKING 1898



Sanger's Circus was originally from Newbury. They travelled all over the country from the mid 1880's and the procession of animals and entertainers could be a mile long.

There are no images of when it came to Twickenham but this rare photo taken in Dorking in 1898 shows what it must have been like.

Imagine the excitement of the children of Talbot Road seeing the circus tents set up just over the

The land to the west of Talbot Road was still farmland and orchards. There was however a great need for more working class housing. In 1889 the council was interested in buying this land to build 139 houses to rent out but they were unable to raise a loan for the money.



## **The Coming of Electric Power**

Since 1882, Twickenham council had been approached by various private electricity companies wanting to introduce electricity into the area. Electricity was a new concept and although several boroughs in and around London had now introduced electric power (Kingston had it in 1893), the council continued to reject the proposals feeling it would be a very expensive undertaking and not much was known about the commercial viability of it.

By the end of the century, the council finally agreed to the building of an Electric Power station. The fact that they had received a letter from London United Tramways advising them of their intention to run electric trams through Twickenham may have had something to do with it.

The land to the west of Talbot Road (that had been originally offered to the council for working class houses), was purchased by the Edmondson Electricity Corporation. It was in an ideal situation next to the main railway between London and Windsor. They only needed one acre and offered the council the remaining 4 acres for workman's dwellings. Although the Council spent some time discussing the possible purchase the offer was again turned down. This decision resulted in the resignation of five members of the Housing of Working Class Committee.

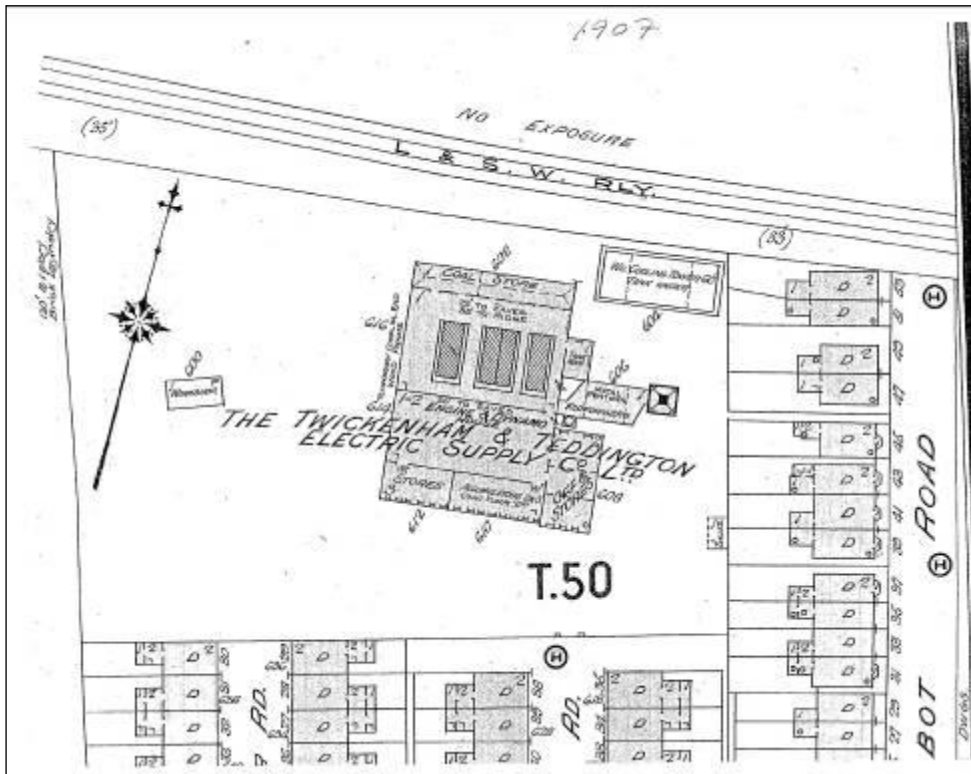
## **Hamilton Electricity Works**



Edmondson's set up the Twickenham and Teddington Electric Supply Company specifically to build the Electricity Works. Building began in November 1901 in the year of Queen Victoria's death and the plant and boilers were delivered the following May. It had chimneys more than 100 feet high and the coal for its boilers was delivered by rail from a spur off the main line.

Electricity was first supplied in July 1902. In the first few days, it was supplying electricity to some 3,000 lights but with an expectation to eventually cope with a quarter of a million lights.

## MAP OF WORKS 1907

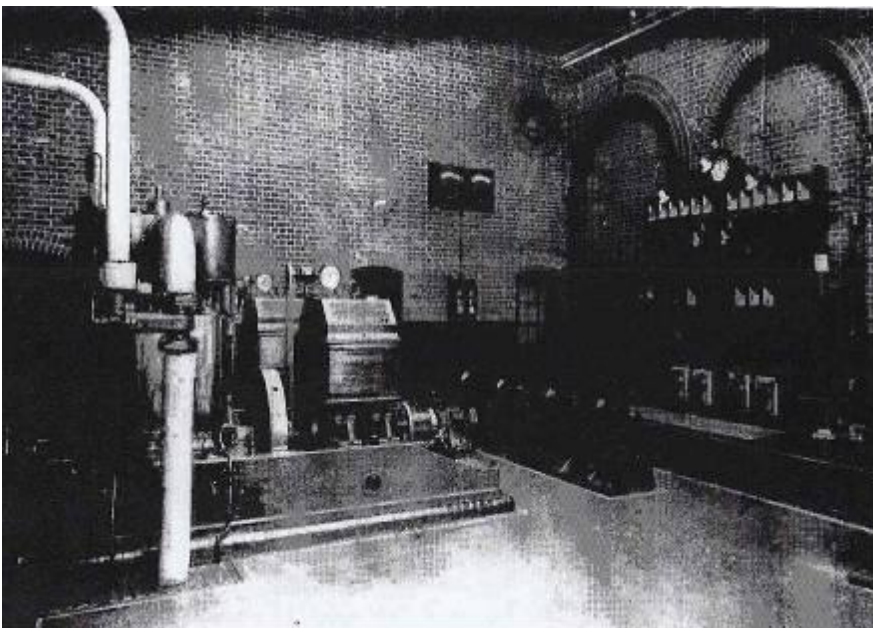


The design of the Works was very plain and frugal compared to many other power stations that had already been built in the London area.

### **Electric Power Stations**

1. Phase 1 – the Experimental Phase (1831-1878)
2. Phase 2 – Early Generation Power Stations (1879-1888)
3. Phase 3 – Growth of Industry (1889 – 1918)

### **INTERIOR PHOTO – ENGINE ROOM**



A reporter from the Richmond & Twickenham Times, who visited them noted that “the rest of the available space was occupied by offices and whilst it cannot be said that money had been wasted on a lavish scheme in this direction, there was a pleasing business-like air about the whole place which plainly showed the class of men who had in hand the task of supplying electricity to Twickenham, and further betokened that they would acquit themselves well of their task”.

He goes on to say *"The building which, extensive though it is now, is nothing near the size the company hopes it will eventually assume is being built by Mr T J Messom"*.



## Thomas Joseph Messom

Thomas Joseph Messom had a builder's yard and undertaker business in Grosvenor Road, Twickenham and a timber yard in Amyand Park Road.

1. He was responsible for carrying out the renovation work on the Twining property Dial House when it was converted into a vicarage in the 1890s.
2. In 1891, he was contracted to build a very fine house in fashionable Mayfair known as 31 Green Street for Viscount Chelsea, son of the 5th Earl of Cadogan.
3. A member of the governing body of the town from 22 May 1873 to 14 April 1907.
4. Chairman of Highways Works.
5. Served on the Fire Brigade Committee until 1890.
6. Chairman of the council twice – 1899 & 1904

He retired from office in May 1907 after 34 years of active public life. A dinner was held to commemorate his service in the Town Hall on Wednesday 15 May 1907.

Thomas Messom died in April 1916 aged 75. Next to his family plot in Twickenham Cemetery, stand the headstones of the Poupart family who were one of the most famous names in our local history. William Poupart also served on the local council for many years and was Chairman in 1906-1913.

## Hamilton and Warwick Roads

The Electric Company sold the surplus land to a local builder and in 1901/2; the first houses were built to form Athelstan and Algar Roads though for some reason the names were changed in 1907 to Hamilton and Warwick.

The same reporter for the Richmond and Twickenham Times wrote that at the time the works began generating, *'it is a noteworthy fact that the whole of the new cottages near the works...are to be wired, this proving that the light can be brought within the reach of the poor man's pocket'*.



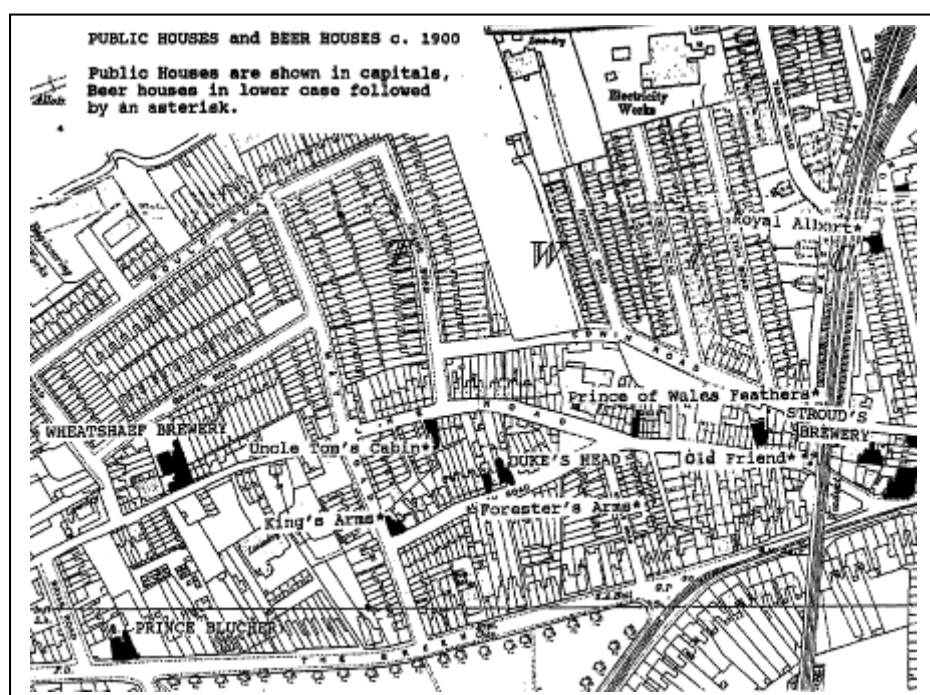


So the Hamilton and Warwick Road cottages were the first houses to be built with an electricity supply whereas Talbot Road and most other roads at that time were still using gas lamps. Hamilton and Warwick Roads are perhaps the only real examples of industrial working class housing in this area. The terraces are austere with no front garden and every house the same.

Some residents in Talbot Road were now working for the Electricity Company and there used to be an entry next to 47 Talbot Road, which led straight into the factory. The foreman owned No 45, which was a detached house, and he used to clock the workers in and out.

In the early 20th century Hamilton Road in particular was to acquire a very un-savoury reputation being referred to locally as 'Hamilton Smacks' and an area known to the police, who would not patrol other than in pairs. Working class housing had increased dramatically over the space of a few years.

## BEER HOUSE MAP 1900

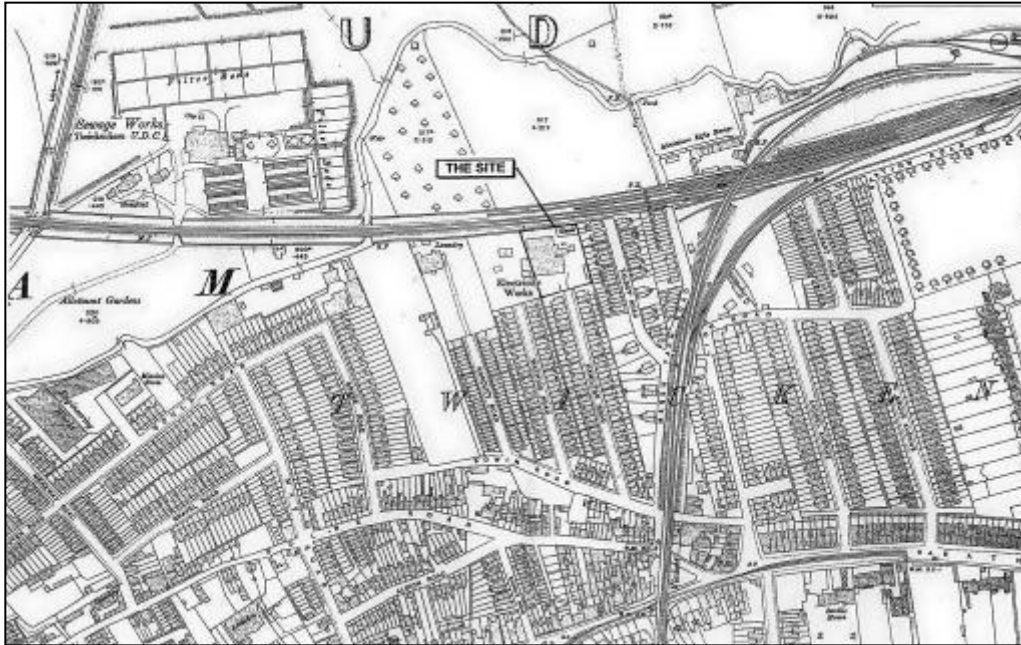


There were public laundries and a big sewerage works on the other side of the railway line. Dotted all around were beer houses, public houses and small breweries. It was a colourful place to live.

## Expansion and Closure

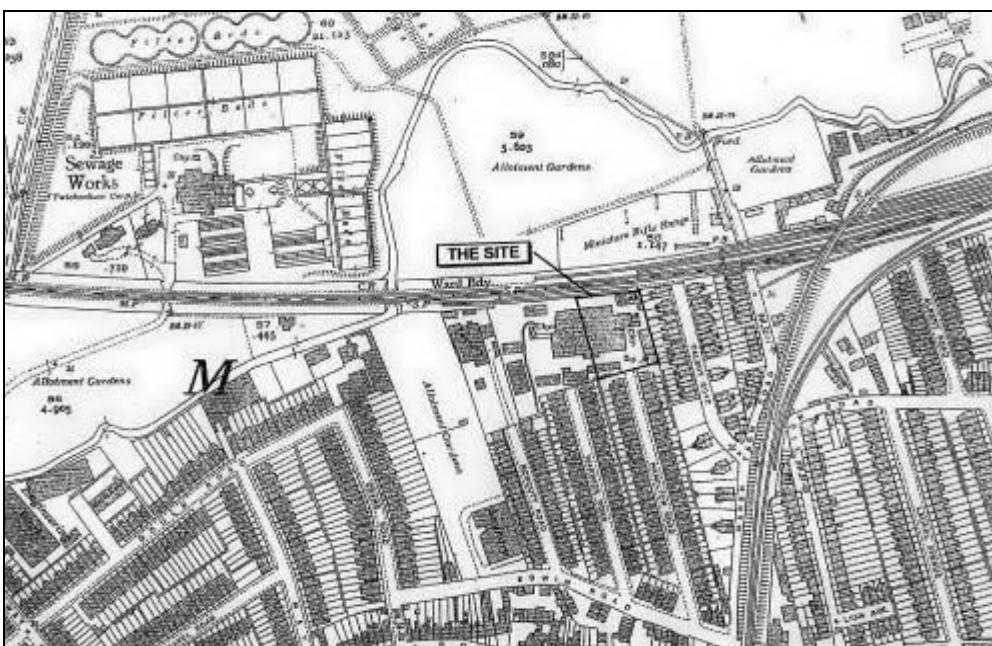
In 1931 the council declared that all the remaining gas lamps in the borough should be converted to electricity.

### MAP OF 1915



As the Electricity supply reached a much wider area including Hampton, Hampton Wick and Teddington the buildings were expanded as they had been designed to do. The increase in the buildings is evident by comparing the OS maps of 1915 and 1934.

### MAP OF 1934



They were later reduced in size when demand decreased and closed when the Sub Station was built in the 1960s.



## Townscape Merit

In 1983 the buildings were awarded a Townscape Merit by Richmond Council.

### Quote from the Council



*This area is focused on, and dominated by, the important former electricity works buildings of no.37 Hamilton Road. This is a robust utilitarian group of industrial buildings. The group is made up of distinct two and three storey office and works parts, with larger units with pitched roofs to the rear overlooking the open space of the Crane River valley. **This is a key landmark building for the surrounding area.***

*This is a distinctive and well-defined townscape of historic industrial buildings and associated housing, dating from the early 20th century.*

*The works are of brown stock brick with red brick dressings, and retain both traditional timber sliding sash windows and characteristic metal-framed windows, which differentiate the separate elements of the group. The group of buildings is a key landmark, which forms the termination of the view north along Hamilton Road.*

### HAMILTON ROAD DOORS



***There is a strong spatial and historic relationship between the buildings and the streets of terraced houses directly to their south.** Hamilton, Warwick and Edwin Roads form a cohesive group of uniform terraced houses opening directly onto the street. These are simple and consistent two storey houses of stock brick dressed with red brick. These houses have distinctive round arched porch recesses and pitched slate roofs with brick chimneys.*

***This is an exceptional example of industrial archaeology in the Borough. These buildings illustrate an important chapter in the historic development of modern Twickenham.***

There are scant references to the old Electricity works and few photos to date. Yet they are as important to Twickenham as many of the elegant listed houses are. Those works provided the borough with power. They gave something to the community - a valuable service.

## HEW in Later Years

1960 – 2005

Small industrial units occupied the site including kitchen designer, piano workshop, upholsterer, motorbike repair shop, printer; and a music rehearsal room.

### Used as a film location for TV advertising and film shoots:

1. The Electricity Works was used as a film location in the mid eighties by a company advertising bread. The bread was only sold in the North of England and therefore the 'ad' would not be shown 'down South'. The action consisted of half a dozen men coming out of one of the upper doors at the front of the building and marching down the steps - as if they were factory workers coming out of work and going home for their tea.
2. The site was also used for an episode of the 'Bill' and I have been told by residents that the crew and actors spent most of the day in Hamilton Road while scenes were being filmed.
3. Hamilton Road was used as a location for a McCann oven chips advert which involved a man parking his Rolls-Royce and going into one of the houses to visit his mum.

## Campaign

### HEW FROM TALBOT ROAD

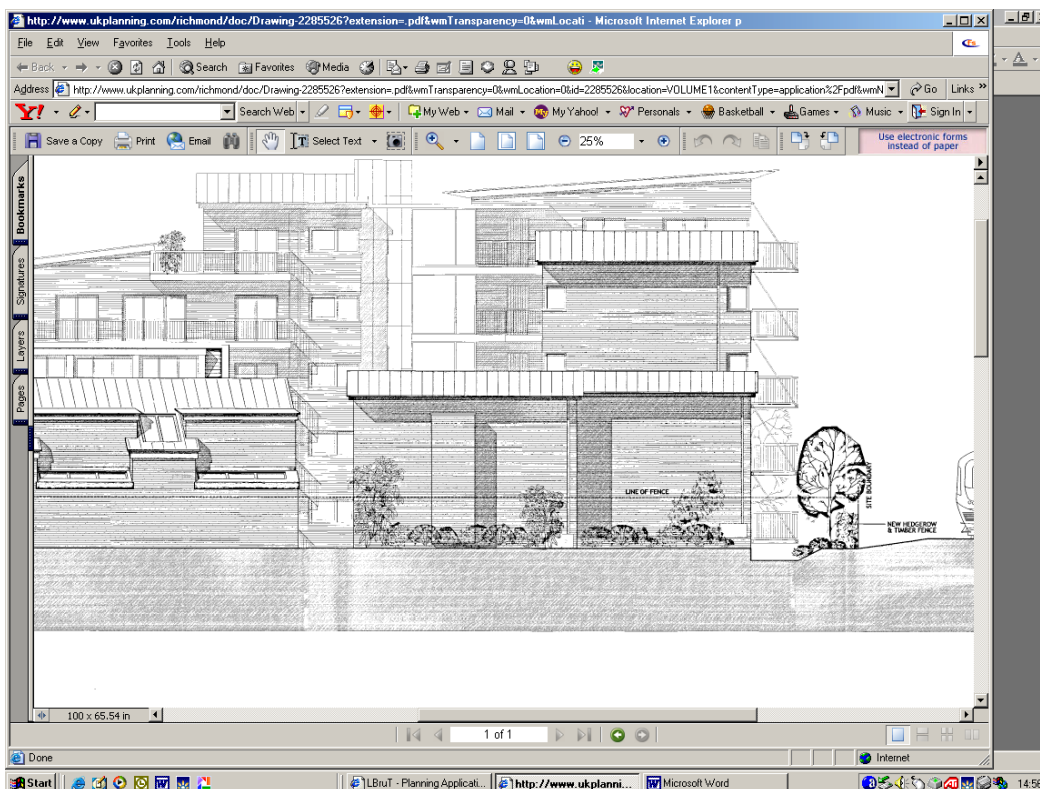


I have lived with this view of the buildings at the back of my house since I moved here in 1981 but knew little about them. Over the years, I often heard music drifting across and I remember my milkman telling

me that the big warehouses were used as a rehearsal studio. I also heard the constant stapling of an upholstery firm, which I used to cover a suite for me, and the start up noises of motorbikes. It was a site of little industries and one day they all moved out and the place went quiet. I didn't suspect what was about to happen.

At the end of October in 2005, I received a letter from the council, informing me of a planning application they had received. My world fell apart. The old buildings behind my house were to be demolished and replaced by ugly modern blocks of flats. I looked at the plans on the council planning website and knew that I had to do something.

## HAMILTON LOFTS PLANS



Together with my neighbours, I started an action group and attended an area consultation meeting for the first time. I didn't even know who my Ward Councillors were. I had never been interested in politics, national or local, but I needed help and advice. The three Ward Councillors were very supportive and each had their own strengths and fields of expertise. I will always remember the words that one of them said to me 'Leave No Stone Unturned'.

I started looking at the site with different eyes and realised that what I had taken for granted all these years, was actually quite unusual in this setting. The cluster of stock brick buildings was hidden from most views and I was definitely in the Dress Circle. I knew that this had been an Electricity Works and was built around the turn of the last century. The local history books showed photos of beautiful old houses that had been lost near to central Twickenham. The Electricity Power Station had been saved because of its hidden location - between the end of Hamilton Road and the main Reading line. They have since been referred to as a 'Hidden Treasure'.



I studied the English Heritage listings for the Borough and saw that there were hardly any examples of Industrial architecture. I realised that the Power Station was very special and unusual in this Borough and more so because the houses in Warwick and Hamilton Road complimented it. The council had already given it Townscape Merit listing but now I wanted to put it safely in a Conservation Area. I invited Cllr David Marlow, to come on a walkabout of the area and put in an application to the Department of the Environment. The case was heard at a Cabinet meeting in York House and was passed in January 2006. We now had brand new Conservation Area No 72.

## HAMILTON ELECTRICITY WORKS

### 1901- 1960s

- Built in 1901 to provide the Borough with electric lights.
- Works expanded during the war years when demand was greater.
- The Electricity Works closed in the 1960's when a modern sub-station was built.

### 1960s – 2005

- In 1983 Richmond Council designated the group of buildings as BTMs.
- Small industrial units occupied the site including kitchen designer, piano workshop, upholsterer, motorbike repair shop, printer, music rehearsal room known as 'The Factory'.
- Used as a film location for TV advertising and film shoots.

### 2005

- Developer buys site from EDF and puts in planning application for 29 housing units / 6 live/workshops + 34 parking spaces.

### 2006

- Jan - Electricity Works, Hamilton and Warwick Roads granted Conservation Area status.
- Apr - Application refused under delegated powers.
- Sep - Residents meet developer to view and discuss new plans.
- Dec - New planning application submitted for 31 housing units /1 office building + 32 parking spaces.

### 2007

- Mar – Application refused by delegated powers.
- Apr - Developer appeals to Planning Inspectorate.
- Jun – Inspectorate requests Public Inquiry.
- Sept –26, 27 & 28<sup>th</sup> - Public Appeal.
- Nov – Appeal dismissed

There are very few early industrial buildings still standing:

1. The Shot Tower, Crane Park



2. Chimney in Poupart's Yard, Third Cross Rd



3. Poupart's Jam Factory (only the facade)



NB: This was demolished in 2008 and the site is currently being developed into Housing.

4. Munitions Factory in Gould Road (being renovated for office space)



This has now been developed into attractive office space and is known as Crane Mews.

5. The Sewerage Works building in Craneford Depot



6. Transformer Shed at Twickenham Station





## 7. Hamilton Electricity Works



My journey of research has led me to meet many interesting people and involved me in other societies and campaigns. I am still learning but now when I walk around these streets, I notice little things that would have passed me by before - a builder's plaque on a cottage, an old wall or roof, a faded sign.

I have fought against the development and won every step of the way so far. It goes to prove that you can fight for what you believe in. And I believe in keeping as much history as possible before it is all destroyed and Twickenham totally loses its identity.