

Once a year Sanger's circus came to Twickenham with a spectacular procession as long as a mile

Cathy Cooper is researching the area of Hamilton Road, as part of a campaign to secure sensitive development of the old electricity works. The site has been described as part of Twickenham's 'secret' industrial heritage.

Last week she described the development of the electricity works in the early 20th century. This time, she outlines local housing provision.

The Hamilton Road Electricity Works group has set up a website, www.hew.org.uk. Old photographs and information would be welcomed by Cathy at 49 Talbot Road, Twickenham. 07951 363 880, Cooperc@gm.net

Hamilton and Warwick Roads, or to give them their original names Athelstan and Algar respectively, were built with one end adjoining the electricity site. There is no clear indication why the names of the roads were changed but it appears to have happened in 1907/08.

Part of this site is currently an electricity sub-station and the other butting on to Hamilton Road is the area destined for redevelopment.

Three bedroomed houses were built in the row-style with every sixth house detached. It would not have been unusual for two families to share the house, with the family upstairs using the fireplace for cooking.

It is recorded that numbers 18 - 23 Hamilton Road were built between 1901-02 and were owned by the same people - local builders John James Driver and Harry Albert Ladd of 50 Orchard Road St Margarets. They were trading at this address until 1908.

In the early 20th century Hamilton Road in particular was to acquire a very unsavoury reputation being referred to locally as 'Hamilton Smacks' and an area known to the police, who would not patrol other than in pairs.

The cottages in Talbot Road and Marsh Farm Road were built in the 1880s to accommodate the railway workers when the line was extended. Some of the cottages have the original wall plaques on them with names; Charlotte Cottages, Industry Cottages, Dusty Cottages, and the date and initials of builder.

The land to the west of Talbot Road

was farmland and market gardens owned by the Pouparts of Marsh Farm. They provided the rest of London with fresh fruit and vegetables and were also famous jam makers.

The fields where Hamilton and Warwick Road now stand were used for playing football and once a year a very famous circus came to town. This circus was called Sanger's and had a spectacular procession of animals and performers, which was as long as a mile.

In the archives of the Richmond and Twickenham Times it is mentioned that in 1902 they set up camp on the Old Deer Park. This must have been due to the fact that the electricity works, which started production that same year, had taken their pitch.

Can you imagine how wonderful it must have been for the children of Talbot Road to see this circus coming to town and camping right behind their cottages?

The electric company had bought more land than they needed so they sold the surplus to a local builder and subsequently Hamilton and Edwin Roads were built.

A 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 Road cottages were built with an electricity supply whereas Talbot Road and most other roads at that time were still using gas lamps. Some houses in Talbot Road still have the original gas lamp fittings.

The works were now supplying a much wider area including Hampton, Hampton Wick and Teddington and needed to expand their buildings. They had been designed so that they could be added onto if the need should arise. The increase in the buildings is evident by comparing the OS maps of 1915 and 1934. There was at least one large chimney rising to 110 feet and possibly another one.

Residents in Talbot Road were now working for the Electricity Company and there used to be an entry next to 47 Talbot, 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 1931 the council declared that all the remaining gas lamps in the borough should be converted to electricity.

Over the years as science and industry progressed, there was no need for the works to be so large and the main buildings were in effect cut off across their back and bricked up using whatever was cheap at the time - breeze blocks and corrugated steel. Their present size however is pleasing and they make an attractive cluster, completely complementing not only each other but also the cottages and terraces in the surrounding area.

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

Hamilton Road and the electricity works have been used as a film location over the years. This is probably due to the fact that many of the cottages still have the same appearance as when they were built despite the modern touches of double-glazing etc. There are nooks and crannies everywhere that are still original.