

'Time to reflect as our historic stay in King St

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new," is how Tennyson put it and the announcement that after 130 years this newspaper is to move its offices from 14 King Street to the centre of Twickenham is a reminder that this time-honoured workplace has seen both joy and strife.

For nearly a century while the paper was printed there, the previous owners, Dumbleby Newspapers, were viewed as model employers and it was not unusual for staff to join as apprentices at 16 and remain until retirement at 65.

Yet in 1983 it was the focus of the longest running industrial dispute in Britain following a strike over machine makers' redundancies and the building was ringed by pickets for months on end.

This was before Rupert Murdoch had moved his empire to Wapping and when the learning like attitude of the unions was crippling the newspaper industry. New technology was on the horizon and unions militancy led to the closure of the print works and the transfer of production to a non-union company in Nottingham.

During its long and colourful history King Street has witnessed many births, deaths and marriages, figuratively and literally. In the fifties, editor Tommy Bishop died in his chair and in the seventies a commercial printer, Len Wood expired over a bench.

New life was represented by the present longest serving employee Gail Hibbert who 19 years ago used to store her newly born son Harry under her desk while she worked on her Bulletin Page (to be gently rocked with a free first by sub editor Des Kelly, Piers Morgan's former deputy on the Mirror and now a renowned sports columnist).

Several publications were born there - like the Chiswick Times, Hounslow and Egham Times, Putney and Wimbledon Times and the Thameside Tournet - and others were killed off, such as the mid-weekly Thames Valley Times.

Weddings there were a plenty. Richard

Dumbleby met his wife Delys Travers in the newsroom where she was the first female reporter and several employees like David and Carol Allen and Nicola Dobson and Spencer Dove fell in love and married.

It all dates back to 1876 when the lease on King Street was signed three years after the paper was founded by the proprietor Edward King when he was just 26 and his second-in-command David Dumbleby's great grandfather, Frederick was even younger. But they were fine journalists with plenty of business acumen and their early success meant they quickly outgrew their original headquarters in York Place.

Richmond Green proved to be the perfect resting place. Over the coming decades it was possible to expand and enlarge to the rear to accommodate the latest giant rotary press, a composing room, modern linotype setting machines, a bindery, commercial printing section, proofreading offices, loading bays and cars parks - and relics of these times are still littered throughout the premises today.

King, a mercurial figure who campaigned successfully to get a free library in Richmond - one of the first in the country - was proprietor for 20 years but his 'artistic temperament' led to a tragic end when a chronic nervous breakdown resulted in his being incarcerated in a workhouse asylum.

Frederick Dumbleby, by that time an influential figure in the town and a member of the town council, took over and the Dumbleby Dynasty was established.

When his son, another Frederick, inherited the business in the early 1900s he was already a distinguished political correspondent on a national paper and adviser to Lloyd George. His son Richard and grandsons David and Jonathan have continued in that tradition and gone to be among the country's best known and respected political commentators.

The family connection remained until the year 2001 when the paper was acquired by Newsquest.



The Malcolm Richards Column

When Richard Dumbleby took over in 1946 after the death of his father he was already one of the country's best loved broadcasters and he was determined to brighten up the paper and its headquarters, saying: "We may be long established but that is no reason why we should look old fashioned".

He very quickly removed many of the advertisements dominating the front page, which at that time was considered a revolutionary step, and modernised all the facilities at King Street.

The hundreds of printers, journalists and